the Burning Wheel

Adventure Burner

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Dedicated to Aom Isabelle. Wherever you are, you started this.

Contents

Rules Bloody Rules

The Way This Wheel Burns

Looking From on High

Welcome to the Adventure Burner. This is the fifth book in our series of Burning Wheel core books. Its purpose is twofold: It is meant to be used by new players to jump quickly into the system; for veteran players, the Adventure Burner provides insight into the inner workings of the game. This is not a book of rules, rather it contains commentary, advice, explanation and examples.

This book is divided into a number of sections: The Way This Wheel Burns, the Adventure Burner itself, the Crucible, Commentary and the appendix, Rules Bloody Rules. These sections provide you, the player of Burning Wheel, with insight into the system's application to your game.

In the section The Way This Wheel Burns, we look at the philosophy behind the Burning Wheel system. The introduction presents a perspective for both players and game masters.

The Adventure Burner section contains three sample adventures: The Sword, Trouble in Hochen and Thelon's Rift. In addition, we give you a procedure for creating adventures and campaigns of your own.

In the Crucible, we provide 32 character templates, ready to play, and all illustrated, too! These aren't NPCs! They're intended for use as PCs in quick-start Burning Wheel games. We've done all the number crunching. You just add Beliefs and Instincts and go. But wait, there's more! We also provide nine campaign concepts for you to run with in the Crucible.

The Commentary section is the meat of this book. In it we delve into the system's various mechanisms and offer our insight as to how we think each piece can be best used. We also have some practical advice for each system—when and how to apply the rules.

Lastly, Rules Bloody Rules provides a few additional rules tweaks not contained in any of the other Burning Wheel books.

Three Things

We hope that the Adventure Burner provides you with three things: rules mastery, ways to establish player buy-in and explanations of ideas we found lacking in the Burning Wheel proper.

Rules Mastery

Burning Wheel is very much a game. It's meant to be played skillfully, mastered over time. To gain maximum enjoyment from a session of Burning Wheel, it is important to have some facility with the rules. The rules are deep enough that one is rewarded for exploring them and invoking them. The more you play, the more you learn about the game and how the various pieces fit together. The better you play, the richer the results.

This book is a naked attempt to promote rules mastery in Burning Wheel. We provided every insight that we could imagine: from sample adventures and characters to philosophy and tactical advice. We hope these elements enhance your enjoyment of the game. And we hope they encourage you to master the rules for the best results.

Buy-In

Burning Wheel is not your standard fantasy RPG. It is more character-focused and player-driven than your traditional fantasy fare, while it uses more intense rules than the nontraditional, "lighter" fantasy RPG alternatives. Some folks grok Burning Wheel at a glance—it is the game they always hoped for.

For everyone else, Burning Wheel asks only for an open, honest desire to try it out and see how it works. Sometimes, a player will be reluctant to try a new game. Or he'll be skeptical of a new style of play. That's perfectly natural, but for Burning Wheel to have a hope of working with your group, everyone at the table—including the doubters—has to say, "Let's give this a fair shot."

How do you create this basic level of buy-in? That's a tough question. We've found that it's best to place some limits on the game the first time you play. Burning Wheel is a deep game, meant for long-term play. It's not possible to take it all in at once. You'll be overwhelmed. To have the best chance of convincing skeptical or wary players to give it a shot, we recommend playing one of the demonstration scenarios—The Sword,

for example. Don't modify it or hack it to suit your group's needs. Make your group step up and come to Burning Wheel as it is. Ask them to give it their best shot. Ask them to really get in there and play the game. Ask them to use the mechanics and try out stuff they wouldn't normally try otherwise. It is a test, after all.

Afterwards, if it didn't work, you gave it your best shot. But if you had a reasonably good experience, you can talk about starting a more involved game.

How Long Does It Take?

Burning Wheel can be run as a single session, an adventure or a campaign. In a single session, you resolve one problem in the course of play—usually about four to six hours.

An adventure is a term we use for a cycle of play lasting two to six sessions. An adventure contains an overarching goal, a subordinate goal or two and an unexpected twist.

A campaign is a series of interconnected adventures.

We talk about the differences between each type of game in the Running the Game chapter in the Commentary section. For now, it's enough for you to know that Burning Wheel plays slightly differently—using different mechanics—depending on how long you play it.

Burning Philosophy

This chapter attempts to spell out some of the philosophy behind Burning Wheel. If you don't want to read my poetical musings, just skip this section and head right to the adventures. If you want to see my thoughts about what goes on behind the rules, read on.

Fight for What You Believe

Burning Wheel is about fighting for what you believe. You take up the fight both as a player of the game and as a character in play. The game of Burning Wheel is about undertaking the role of a persona who is in crisis.

You fight with steel, words and magic. All of the other rules are incidental to those fights. They help you prepare for, survive and recover from them.

Your Beliefs announce to the group what you're willing to fight for. We provide rules for conflict, but more important, we provide a framework of consequences for your actions. This framework—success, failure, injury, compromise—makes your decisions in the game meaningful. You know that when you step up, your struggle is going to affect you and the game, even if you don't get what you want in the end.

The Big Wheel

Burning Wheel is an odd duck of a game. It's a mess of contradictions. It doesn't have a setting, but the lifepaths are tightly focused and impose a culture and perspective on the characters. Play is open-ended—there's no narrative premise like *Inspectres* or *Dogs in the Vineyard*—but the game is about fighting for what you believe. And the system itself is modular—chunks can be added or replaced with ease—but if you tweak the core mechanics, it falls apart.

We often hear questions like "Why are there so many fiddly bits? Why so many skills? So many traits?" The short answer is: because the game needs it. The long answer is: Setting in Burning Wheel is primarily presented to the players in the form of skills and traits. It's not enough for us to say a culture has a particular feel. The game needs to represent that culture mechanically. New settings and cultures therefore require new system elements because the system is what enforces meaningful decisions in play.

But there's more to it than that. The range of options in the game creates the spaces in which we play. Skills can be used creatively. Advancement requires dedication and focus. Fight!, Range and Cover and Duel of Wits allow the player to make important decisions on multiple levels. These decisions bring the player deeper into the game and open up new perspectives that can be further explored through the mechanics.
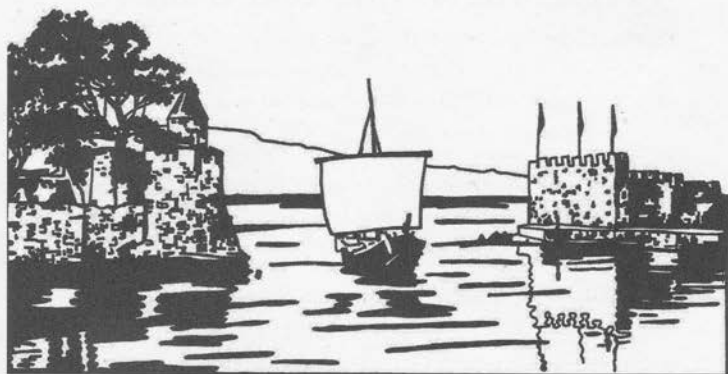
We Think Life Should Be Hard

You know those little bits of the game that don't make sense, are a pain in the ass or seem broken? Those are hooks that we built into the game. Sure, it's a pain in the ass to be a poor sorcerer with B0 Resources. So now you have to earn your bread by summoning up someone's dead loved one, banishing an angry spirit or going on ridiculously dangerous quests. Fight! is difficult and scary on purpose. You're supposed to prepare for it, be smart about it. Tools and shoes seem like mundane, pointless details. But in this game, they are a chance to get into trouble over something innocuous—and elements that ground us in the "reality" of the fiction. And because nearly every character starts lacking

something or burdened with something he doesn't want, the characters are in motion, not static. They have energy that propels them right into the story.

Burning Currency Cycle

The currency cycle of a game encompasses a player's operation of the system, the feedback the system produces and the reward presented to the player as a result of the operation.

Burning Wheel has a long, complex and downright baroque currency cycle. In its most basic form, the currency cycle is "Belief, Action, Reward." Let's break that down.

You're a player in the game; you state a Belief for your character. The GM presents an obstacle or challenge to that Belief. You state an intent for overcoming that obstacle. You and the GM determine the appropriate action for the intent to overcome the obstacle: The task is determined—appropriate stat, skill or attribute. You test against the obstacle, gathering help, spending artha and using other advantages. The test earns you, and those who helped, advancement regardless of success (in most cases). If successful, your intent is fulfilled in the manner you described. If the test is failed, the GM controls the outcome and can have the task fail outright or he can twist your intent into unforeseen consequences. This process also produces a result in the shared fiction of the game—something happens in the story. This result—a vivid description, a thrilling performance—provides context for new Beliefs.

Successful tests lead to fulfilled Beliefs—accomplishing goals and earning artha. Failed attempts lead to more, unexpected challenges to Beliefs, which engage the cycle anew—allowing the player to earn more advancements. Failed attempts earn artha as well.

Advancements increase the size of the dice pool. This means you can take greater and greater risks while attempting to act on your Belief. Trait votes reflect how the other players view your portrayal of your character. Artha invested in your stats and skills can cause a heroic shift in power for your character. But it all comes back to testing to try to fulfill a Belief.

Collaboration and Sportsmanship

Burning Wheel is not a collaborative game. Not all opinions have equal weight. Not every suggestion should be considered and included.

Burning Wheel is a game of strong opinion, vision and zeal. To excel, we must advocate our position. However, it is also a sportsmanlike and gentlemanly game. We are expected to play at our absolute best within the scope of the written rules and the unwritten spirit of the game. But to be good sportsmen or gentlemen we must be courteous to one another. We must ensure that the other players understand the rules as well as we do. If they don't, we explain what is unclear so they can make the best decision possible at the time. We do not cheat, grief or spam.

Some Advice for the Players

Some advice for players of Burning Wheel: Dare the GM to hurt you. Hurl your character into danger. You must take risks with your character while maintaining the gentlemanly attitude described above.

Why take risks? Why not sit back and be safe? The answer: risk-taking is dramatic and exciting. You push your limits and lay everything on the line for your Beliefs.

This is a new way to play roleplaying games. You set out your own priorities. The GM challenges them. You plunge into the challenge wholeheartedly, no matter the danger. You don't hide or evade.

Don't Be a Wet Blanket

When another player wants to do something dangerous or risky, don't smother him with suggestions about "the right way to do it." Play dumb and pretend you don't understand the risks. Or play along and encourage the bad behavior.

Of course, you still need to be considerate and thoughtful in your actions. Too often I see players use so much caution and care that they smother good, energetic ideas. Don't do that. Make bad decisions and enjoy the fallout and encourage good risk taking in fellow players.

Inherent Dramatic Irony

Burning Wheel demands a deep investment in your character. To make a good character for this game, you must commit yourself—commit to your gamesmanship in the numbers and your sense of drama in the Beliefs and Instincts. The more you throw yourself into this enterprise, the more engrossing and exciting the results will be.

Conversely, Burning Wheel acknowledges an immutable divide between player and character. The character is a fictional element only alive in our imaginations. He is only in action when we all sit around the gaming table. He is not the player; he has no life of his own. The player is not the character, but the character cannot exist without the player.

Thus the system provides a safe space and many opportunities for the player to set his character up to fail. Not because the player wishes his character ill, or even because he is incompetent, but because failure is interesting. It shows frailty, vulnerability, courage and heart in the character. It lets us sympathize with him. Failure creates narrative tension—he fails now, but one day he will overcome.

Are these failures purely mechanical? Are we suggesting that you gimp yourself for a test to deliberately fail? Not at all. Numbers-wise, it's always possible to place your character at risk—you know how many dice you roll, you know the obstacle. The math isn't that hard. But I am suggesting a different kind of failure.

You can set your character up to fall with clever use of Beliefs, Instincts and traits. You can make him believe in something that's *wrong*. You know it's wrong, but he doesn't. He pursues this goal with all of the vigor we expect of the righteous, but ultimately, we know he's not doing the right thing. Or he's doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

Or he is at war with his heart. One Belief tells him to go in one direction, another pushes him down the opposite path. Which will he choose? The decision is engaging for you as a player, but it is also engrossing for the audience—the other players—to see the internal conflict played out before their eyes. Certainly, you might want your character to do the right thing, to go where you would, but that's the easy answer. Choose the wrong direction. Do the misguided, selfish, unrighteous thing. Let your experiences at the table, not your own personal beliefs, shape your transformation.

Burning Wheel is a character-driven game. When we set out on the wrong path, we set up a tense and exciting opportunity to do the right thing. This sounds backwards, but remember that the premise of this game is to fight for what you believe. So if you believe in the right thing, then the GM must challenge or oppose that belief with the wrong thing. That means if your character changes, he'll fall—he'll fight for the wrong thing. It's a good choice, but a hard one! If you believe passionately in the wrong thing, then the GM has a chance to challenge and oppose you with the right thing. If your character changes under these circumstances, then he rises—he can learn from his mistakes and turn to the right path. And this is the stuff that heroes are made of.

Directing your character toward this kind of transformation needs a cleverly worded Belief or two, to acknowledge that what you and your character want might be different. Explore that conflict of interest; show the rest of us the internal struggle. It makes for a satisfying game.

Some Advice for the GM

Being the GM in Burning Wheel is different from being a player. We don't have to worry about tracking advancement, artha, epiphanies or trait votes. We have an overall vision of a world, a handful of problems in that world, and a host of characters to embody those problems. We balance our vision and our will to persevere with an accommodating, cooperative attitude.

We are never rude. We never react out of anger. Our role is to present unexpected challenges to the players that make perfect sense in the context of the setting and the action.

Secrecy Impulse

Try not to hide or protect your ideas. Try your best to place them in harm's way—in the path of the players. When the players want to know something, test them. When the players want to confront and change something, test them. When they want to fight something, test them.

When you feel that tightening in your gut, "No, I can't let them…" that's a sign that you need to set an obstacle and call for a test. Give the players a shot at your villains, your organizations, your tricks and traps. Let them try to succeed. Let them risk failure. This staccato rhythm of challenges—some overcome and others failed—is what creates the story in Burning Wheel.

Emergent Properties

Burning Wheel has many moving parts. It is unlikely that one can interpret the entire range of possible results by looking at the moving parts. In the course of operation, it is very likely that this system of interlocking, moving parts produces unexpected results. Properties of the game emerge only through exploration. No amount of study or presumption will illuminate all of the possibilities.

This phenomenon is due in part to the complexity of the currency cycle and in part due to the nature of a roleplaying game.

Let's look at some emergent play involving one Belief. Let's say you have a Belief that states "I will liberate Dro from his burdens." You're going to steal Dro's stuff because you think he's a bastard, and you need to eat and pay rent. So you use Circles and wises to get close to him. Later, you meet him and realize that he's got troubles, too. You sympathize. You use Persuasion and Falsehood to tease his problems out of him. But as you're getting to know him, you discover that he's a terrible person. One of his burdens is, in fact, that he was the one who had your family killed. He feels deeply guilty about it, but it doesn't change the fact that your mom, dad and little sister are gone—dispatched on the execution block for being seditionists. You've still got that Belief about him: "I will liberate Dro from his burdens." But something has shifted. Now you use your wises and Circles to learn about his shadowy past. You begin to marshal allies against him. Then you decide to use your Persuasion and Falsehood to lure him out alone.

And at the last, you, a peaceful person at heart, decide to assassinate Dro with your own hand. You play your Belief to its final iteration: You will remove his ultimate burden—his cold, dead soul. Everything has changed now for you. You began simply wanting to survive, even if it meant stealing from another. But you're not who you once were. When you pick up the dice, survival is the furthest thing from your mind. Only revenge weighs cold in your heart and your hand as you roll the dice to finish what you started.

You used the system to accomplish a very different aim than that with which you started.

Now imagine this in three layers. You have three Beliefs. All of them create a context like this. Each Belief colors how and why you engage the system. And in a virtuous cycle, each engagement casts new light on your Beliefs.

Thus, what seems straightforward to start—player priorities, skill tests, advancements, rewards—grows around you in rich, complex and unpredictable patterns of your own fabrication.

Dive Into a Demo

That's enough philosophizing. Before you head for the Commentary section, I recommend you crack open the The Sword demo game in the next section and run it for some friends. Make the game fresh in your mind as you read and our further ramblings will make much more sense.
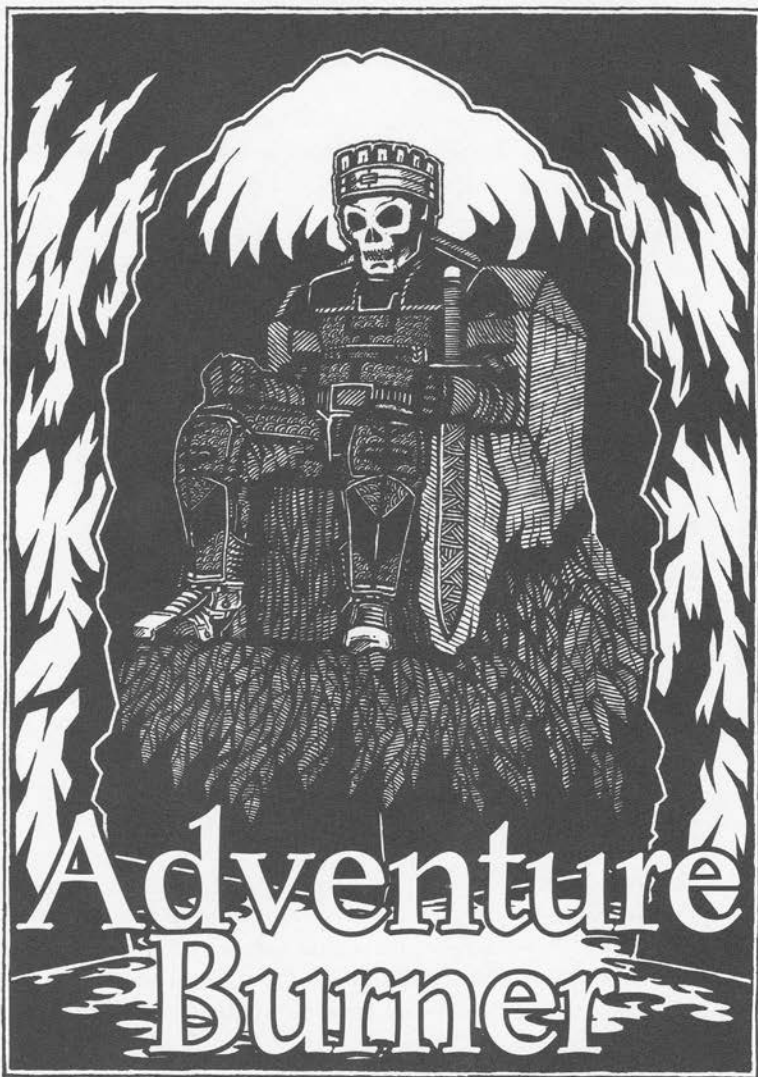
Adventure Burner

Burning Adventures

The Adventure Burner section gives you three example scenarios, sample characters and guidelines for creating your own scenarios and campaigns.

We hope that after playing through these adventures with our sample characters, you'll have a better understanding of how to use the Burning Wheel system to play engaging sessions.

Three Adventures

The Sword

The Sword is our classic starter scenario. It is meant to be used by inexperienced players to explore the versus test, Duel of Wits and Fight! rules.

Trouble in Hochen

Trouble in Hochen is a classic but simple scenario in which a party of adventurers has been summoned to aid a remote village. Once they arrive, they find things are not as they seem.

This scenario begins with a Belief and relationship workshop. Each player picks a sample character and then writes two Beliefs for him based on this situation.

Thelon's Rift

Thelon's Rift is a traditional dungeon crawl done up Burning Wheel style. Players take on the roles of sample characters or burn their own. They write Beliefs based on their mission—to recover the Orb of Power—and their relationship to the other players' characters.

Even though Thelon's Rift is a traditional take on fantasy adventure gaming, it is considered the advanced scenario of the three. Thelon's Rift requires the greatest amount of rules mastery to successfully navigate.

Demonstration Games

The three adventures provided in this book are meant to act as demonstration games. When playing Burning Wheel in a demo environment, you have the opportunity to learn the rules without risk.

When running a demo, be clear that the game is, in fact, a demo. While it should be fun and engaging, the players should endeavor to engage and learn the mechanics. The GM's role here is to teach, bit by bit, piece by piece—using the scenarios as examples.

Play the demo scenarios a couple of times. Change the characters around between the players. See how the results are different each time. Engage with different systems each time—Duel of Wits, Range and Cover and Fight!

This play preps you for a campaign with custom-built characters walking into a situation of the GM's design. You'll have a better understanding of how to ensure that your characters are competent. And the GM will have a better understanding of how to challenge you with the system.

Downloads

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Adventure Burner Proper

We follow up those example scenarios with the Adventure Burner proper. In this burner, we attempt to synthesize all of the other burners— character, magic and monster—and use them to create compelling settings and situations for our Burning Wheel play.

The Sword

The Sword is a very simple, one-scene scenario designed to introduce new players to Burning Wheel. To keep play focused on the important aspect of learning the rules, the players are placed in conflict with one another. This isn't the normal mode of play for Burning Wheel. The player-verus-player aspect is used only to facilitate demonstration.

The Sword accommodates a GM and two to four players.

If you want to play with one player and a GM, or play cooperatively, see the Adding Monsters heading in this chapter.

The Sword presents a staple fantasy situation: Who gets the treasure? It shows how such a conflict between players can be used as fuel for a cool scene rather than a roadblock to fun.

Prepping for The Sword

If you'd like to run The Sword, there are a few bits you should look over. Familiarize yourself with the Beliefs, Instincts and skills of the player characters. You don't have to memorize them, but you should know where everyone is coming from so you can jump in and help out.

There's no map and very little descriptive text for the GM to feed the players. This is deliberate. The physical space of the scene is secondary to the conflict between the characters. The GM has no agenda except to facilitate play and demonstrate the game's rules.

As the GM, you're going to need a passing familiarity with some of the game mechanics. The Hub and the Spokes—up to page 54 of the Burning Wheel—are required reading. Pages 55 to 77 are recommended, but not required. Beyond that, a read through of the Duel of Wits and the Fight! systems will help. Weapons, Armor and Injury wouldn't hurt, but you can refer

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to them as you play. Circles is not necessary, nor is Sorcery or Emotional Magic. Resources is only used for one thing, paying the Roden for his services, so you can refer to that in play as well.

The Hook

When players sit down with me to play this demo, I give them the following preamble:

> *You've journeyed long through this crumbling, ancient citadel, down through ruined chambers into muck-filled tubes. You arrive, at last, in the wreckage of this collapsed temple. Laying on the shattered altar, in the chamber before you, is that which you seek: The sword!*

After the preamble, I lay out the characters and describe each one in brief. After the players have chosen their characters, I instruct them to read their Beliefs. Then I simply ask, "Who gets the sword?"

Mayhem ensues, and suddenly we've got game.

The Characters

There are four characters for The Sword scenario: Ssisz, a Roden cultist; Robard, a human gambler; Brechtanz, a Dwarven adventurer; and Fidhean, an Elven bard.

Brechtanz, the Dwarven Adventurer

Brechtanz is a very solid character. He's physically imposing and skilled in a number of areas. He's the perfect foil for the Elf.

Remind the other players, before they decide to stick a knife in the Dwarf, that he's armored head to toe. He's a tough nut to crack.

Lastly, as a Dwarf, this character has access to the Greed attribute. Using Greed isn't necessary for the demo scenario, but it can add a lot if you're comfortable with the mechanics. The sight of the sword can cause Brechtanz to make a Steel test against his Greed. After that, he can spend his sole Persona point to tap his Greed and dump a ton of dice into one roll.

Adventurer's Beliefs

Belief 1: This sword was a treasure of my clan for generations, stolen by foul Roden and abandoned here. I'll restore it to its rightful place among my people.

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Belief 2: Words may be eaten, but blood is forever once spilled. Better a heated exchange than an exchange of blows.

Belief 3: My companions and I have seen much hardship together; I'll get them home safely.

Oath Belief: My Uncle Dvalin is proud but destitute. I will do anything to restore his fortunes.

Found Weapon
Based on Brechtanz's illustration at the end of the chapter, someone is going to want to use the pick (digging tools) as a weapon. It's a Power 4, Unwieldy, VA 1 weapon.

Fidhean, the Elven Bard
Fidhean, the Elven Bard, is a classic adventurer-type. He's handy with a sword, but his tongue is even sharper. He's well-equipped, has high stats and a decent range of skills to back them. If Fidhean's player can play the others against one another, he's going to come out on top every time.

However, Fidhean's songs don't often come into play in this scenario. They are primarily for color, but occasionally a player will use them to cause wonderment (wonderment is bad for everyone else, see page 98 of the Character Burner). The Verse of Friendship is an exception. It can be used as bargaining chip—declaring a character an Elf-friend is very powerful. But this ability is used after a conflict, not during.

Lastly, Fidhean isn't wearing a helmet and he has a glass jaw. One good clip to the head and he's going to rethink fighting out this situation.

Elven Bard's Beliefs
Belief 1: This sword was made by my father. Using its markings, I will demonstrate its origin to my companions so they cannot dispute its ownership.

Belief 2: I must return this lost sword to my father so that he will forgive me and allow me to return from my exile.

Belief 3: True friends and companions are a great treasure, and I will not let mine come to harm.

Robard, the Human Gambler's Beliefs
Robard is a gambling man. Everyone calls Robard a "thief," but his light fingers are just one of his many talents. Using him only to backstab and pick locks is doing him a disservice. He's a cunning, dangerous opponent, but he lacks power for a direct confrontation.

He's decent in the Duel of Wits, but he's weak in the physical department. He's also the only character who doesn't have a Sword skill.

Gambler's Beliefs

Belief 1: Master Kogan of the gambling house is going to break my knees if I don't pay off my debts. I've got to get paid in this venture!

Belief 2: I was the one who figured out where this treasure was; it belongs to me!

Belief 3: That Dwarf is not to be trusted. His greed will be the doom of us all. If he makes a move, I'll have to push someone else into his path.

Ssisz, the Roden Cultist

Ssisz is a Roden cultist. Before the scenario started, he led the other characters through the ruins of the ancient civilization to this collapsed temple. His player used his Below-wise to do it. We imagine that he spent a ton of artha, too! However, since the player didn't actually roll the dice, he does not gain the benefit of Let It Ride in this scenario. If he wants Ssisz to get back out, he needs to test Below-wise.

Ssisz is vulnerable on a lot of levels: he doesn't have any armor, he's got the Broken trait, and his main Duel of Wits skill is a B2 Persuasion. On the other hand, he can definitely come out on top if he is played smart. He fights effectively with a sword and shield, and has a respectable Intimidation skill that can be used to cow the gambler.

If the Roden player is out of ideas, you might suggest one bargaining chip that he has—someone's got to lead the group back to the surface!

Roden Cultist's Beliefs

Belief 1: To enter the Fields of Paradise, I must present my Visionary with this fabled sword.

Belief 2: The Prophet says, "To conquer from weakness, divide the strong." I will encourage the interlopers to argue among themselves.

Belief 3: These squabbling mice hired me to lead them to their treasure. I will now collect what I am owed or else.

Loyal Belief: Fiszzik the Visionary will guide us to seize the Fields of Paradise from Men, as prophesied; I will serve him to my dying breath.

Playing the Scene

The Starting Positions

I've found it useful to start the scene with the whole group in the doorway to the chamber—still in the tunnel, really. The Roden, if he's in play, should always be in the lead.

Versus Tests

Players often attempt to shove aside their companions or make a dash for the sword. Before resolving any single action, allow everyone to state what he or she is doing. If one player shoves another, ask the target player if he wants to be shoved. If he doesn't care one way or another, there's no need to roll the dice. However, as soon as two players want the same thing, or one player doesn't want another player to succeed at what he's doing, you've got conflict. Use versus tests (Burning Wheel, page 28) to resolve these simple conflicts.

Be sure to enforce the Let It Ride rules. If a player failed to shove his compatriot aside, that's it. No amount of shoving is going to work. He's got to find another way around—either by changing the conditions of the test, tricking his friend, engaging in social conflict or escalating to violence!

Social Conflict Resolution

Focus on what the players are saying to each other and encourage them to roleplay (of course!). As soon as the players butt heads on a point, I stop the conversation. Then I ask each in turn, "Are you ready to give in to his demands?" Likely, they'll both say no.

At that point, I use the Duel of Wits system to resolve the social conflict. This scenario works well with these rules as described on pages 95-107 of the Burning Wheel. Occasionally, players aren't familiar with games that allow for serious social conflict. Therefore, before I turn them loose, I let the players know that they can use social conflict resolution to resolve the scene—as opposed to just beating the hell out of each other.

Judd dashed up to grab the sword. He menaces Jeff with it. Jeff tells him that he's not worthy to even touch the sword. Judd responds with a prideful, "How dare you!?" and retorts that he was going to give up the sword, but now he shall claim it as his own. I stop the conversation and ask, "Do you agree with each other? Do you want to try to argue him down? Do you want to prove that you're right?"

They ask me what they can gain from an argument, and I reply, "You can test to convince your opponent of your case. The result is as binding as any other rule in the game." They agree. They want to give this a try.

Judd and Jeff want a social conflict. Jeff wants to convince Judd to hand over the sword because he's not worthy of it. Judd states that he's offended and he's going to lay claim to the sword as his own. The outcome—who's right—will be determined by a Duel of Wits.

Two Sides
Due to the nature of the Duel of Wits, only two players are going to be active and fighting. Other players are not going to choose actions or roll dice during the Duel of Wits.

Help Is Vital
When a player isn't in the primary role of a Duel of Wits, he may still participate. He may grant help to either side on any appropriate
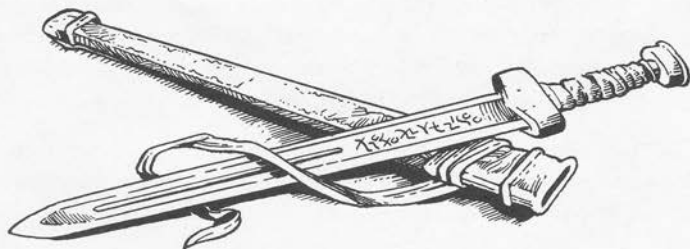
action. In this scenario, a +1D advantage can be the difference between victory and defeat. Thus the role of the helping player is quite significant.

Encourage players to be ready with their helping die. Tell them to roleplay their help and then hand over their helping die.

If players are sitting idle, I encourage the players leading the Duel of Wits to play to them. Rather than just ignoring the other players, they can use their own roleplaying to convince those inactive players to hand over those juicy, powerful helping dice right there.

Violence
The scenario often devolves into violence. Swords will be drawn, blows will be struck. If the players are just tussling or wrestling, use versus tests to resolve the violence. If a player has murder in his eyes, use the Fight! system.

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When using versus tests, be sure to get everyone's intent and task out in the open and clarified before rolling the dice. Don't let players negotiate among each other. Have each player tell you what he's doing and then tell him to zip it if he tries to change in reaction to a clever ploy by his friend.

When using the Fight! rules, remember that this is a demonstration scenario. Start the players off with basic Fight! actions—Strike, Block and Counterstrike. Don't use stance or positioning rules. Once the action interplay is clear, or once positioning becomes important, add it into the conflict on the fly. When is positioning important in this fight? Positioning is important when you want to either keep someone out of striking distance or you want to close to striking distance with an opponent. This arises when opponents are wielding weapons of differing lengths—a sword against a knife or bare fists.

It's worth noting that, aside from the Dwarf, these characters aren't very tough. Warn the players about this. Warn them that one good hit is going to take them out—possibly even get them killed. But it is also perfectly cool to come to blows, realize how dangerous such a path is and then try to resolve the situation with a Duel of Wits.

Also, don't forget to have the players take Steel tests when their characters are wounded. Once a character is hesitating for three or four actions, stop the fight and reassess.

In the name of simplicity and clarity, don't suggest these options. Let the players ask how they can do these things, then tell them what they need to know.

Paying the Rat

According to Ssisz's Beliefs, he must be paid for his services. When play starts, the Roden has fulfilled his part of the deal. He has lead the group down to the sword. He has not yet been paid for this service. The Roden player can begin by demanding payment or he can wait until things unfold to see how he should proceed, but the best insurance for payment is to claim the sword for himself.

Paying the rat requires a Resources test. The "agreed-upon price" is an Ob 2 Resources test.

Ssisz's player can set the price higher if he so desires. If the others want to argue him down, use the Haggling rules on page 88 of the Burning Wheel to negotiate the price. A Duel of Wits can also be played to arrive at terms.

The purpose of the Resources test is to demonstrate that a) the characters are all poor bastards, and b) if they help one another, they can mitigate much of the woes of having a low Resources exponent.

Negotiated Payment

If the players arrange terms to pay some now and some later, they are essentially using the Carefully rules (Burning Wheel page 31). They can roll the dice when the final payment is made. The GM can award them with an advantage die when they make payment, but failure must result in some dastardly twist that can't be wriggled out of—like another cultist appearing from the darkness to check on his brother cultist.

Artha

The characters are all front-loaded with 2 fate points and 1 persona point. Be sure that the players get a chance to spend artha during the game so they can see what it does.

Introducing Artha

When demoing The Sword, I don't describe the uses for artha until there's a need. When a player rolls 6s and could use more successes, I stop play for a moment and have everyone look at their artha. I describe what fate points do.

I describe persona points only when a player needs to make a roll against a high obstacle. Again, I stop play for a moment and demonstrate how to use the point.

Once I've explained, I ask the player if he wants to spend the point or save it for later. It's important that he be allowed to decide.

Awarding Artha

I also recommend the GM not give out artha during play. Don't worry about it right now. But do take note of when the players use their Beliefs and say out loud: "Wow, you just broke his hand to get the sword. That's in your Beliefs, right?" At the end of the demonstration, if you have time, do artha awards. Have each player read his Beliefs and award fate and persona based on the resolution of the action.

The Sword

So what's the big deal with the sword? Use the following stats for the sword: Pow 3, Add 2, VA 1, +1D advantage. Note that it's the only weapon in the scenario with any armor-penetrating capability.

As for the sword's history, that's for you to decide. Let the players use Ballad of History, Elven Artifact-wise, Junk-wise, Stuff-wise and Obscure History tests to establish facts about the sword. You can set obstacles using the criteria for each skill or you can propose versus tests to quickly settle debates. Don't let jostling for the facts replace a good Duel of Wits, though.

The Dwarf and the Elf each have a strong opinion about the provenance of the sword. The Dwarf asserts that his clan was the last to own the sword. The Elf claims that his father forged the blade. Both are correct and can coexist. Neither assertion creates a clear claim of ownership.

Winning

The scenario is over when one player most decidedly has the sword and no one can contest him. This situation could arise from convincing everyone via a Duel of Wits, beating the snot out of everyone in a fight and taking the sword or by making a lucky getaway via a Speed test.

Friendly Agreements

Some groups prefer to talk out the scenario and arrive at a friendly resolution. That's all well and good for a regular game, but this is a demonstration. If your group is particularly agreeable, encourage them to be a bit more argumentative or contrarian than they are normally. Explain that you're not questioning their inestimable roleplaying chops; you merely want to test the mechanics of the game.

If they insist on making peace, it's your job to introduce conflict. Use the Adding Monsters section and confront them for the sword.

Adding Monsters

It's possible to turn this scenario into a slightly more traditional adventure by adding a guardian for the sword. This works for a group of any size. You can even play a one-on-one with the GM (using any character except the Roden). As long as the monster has the sword, the player's going to want to confront him to get it.

When using a monster, be sure to exercise the same options available to the other characters: It can engage in social conflicts, simple conflicts and violence just like everyone else. And of course, it has its own reason to want the sword. You decide what that reason is.

I recommend the spider on page 291 of the Burning Wheel, and the Troll or Hoszrem on page 292. In the Monster Burner, the Hsigo Noble (on page 268) works well. It's his sword after all, right? The Ophidia (Monster Burner, page 278) is my personal favorite. She's tough enough to take on any one of the characters, and she's got great social skills for the Duel of Wits. She's full of nefarious purposes and plots, always looking for something to rebuild her fallen empire.

Continuing The Sword

If you want to continue playing after completing this brief scenario, I suggest that you stop play and end the session once either the sword's owner has been determined or the group has returned to the surface. Do artha awards. Encourage the players to rewrite one or two of their Beliefs to reflect the new situation in the game. For example, if Robard manages to escape with the sword, Fidhean and Brechtanz might change their Beliefs to reflect how unworthy and untrustworthy Men are—thus they must recover this priceless artifact from Robard. The next scene would involve the aggrieved parties trying to stop Robard from selling the heirloom on the black market. Men are such scum!

Once you have new Beliefs, start up the action again.

If the Group Agrees to Reconciliation...

If the group agrees to take the sword to the Elven lands and then to the Dwarves, or vice versa, pick up the action at their first destination. Fidhean's father, Fineath, is glad to have the sword returned, but it is a trinket to him—a trifle that he made in his youth. Its recovery is not enough to exonerate his wayward son in his eyes. However, Fineath will be deeply offended should Brechtanz suggest that the item must now be removed to the care of the Dwarves. Greedy Dwarves! A Duel of Wits can decide the fate of the sword in this circumstance.

If the group takes the sword to the Dwarves, Brechtanz's family rejoices. His uncle hails him as a hero. The sword is taken and put on display in the clan's hall. There is no discussion of removing it. Brechtanz' uncle will not accept a Duel of Wits over the matter. The uncle must be tricked or the sword stolen to fulfill any vows to return it to the Elven lands.

If Robard Recovered the Sword

If the group agrees to sell the sword, or simply goes up into the city—Scarport—to help Robard pay his debts, then Robard's enemies set upon them. One Master Kogan, a criminal himself, attempts to lay claim to the sword as payment for Robard's debt to him. He offers no surety or money. A second-story man will attempt to steal it in the night. Swindlers will attempt to convince the players to keep it safe with them. Finally, a gang of four young turks will attempt to take it by main force and thus earn a reputation and a place in the underworld. These events can trigger an epic campaign—a war for the underworld of Scarport!

If Ssisz Takes the Sword to His Cult

If Ssisz takes the sword to his cult, the Visionary claims the weapon for the cult (and for himself). To prevent this, the players must tangle with a charismatic, insane Roden cult leader! A Duel of Wits is in order.

However, he rewards Ssisz's efforts with a promotion within the organization. The promotion grants no material reward, but Ssisz is now one of the Visionary's *trusted* guardians. In this capacity the Visionary presents Ssisz (and friends) with a dangerous mission to be completed on behalf of the cult. What's a good mission? You decide.

If There Were Deaths

If there were deaths during the scuffle to claim the sword, you have a few options. The players of mortally wounded characters can burn up new characters. We prefer members of Ssisz's cult or of Robard's cohort of thieves. Be sure that these new characters have Beliefs in line with the new situation regarding the sword. Don't use this scenario to play out a reincarnated revenge story. That's just silly.

If only one character made it out alive, then you have to make a decision. Are the other players invested in the fate of that sword? If not, then perhaps it's best not to continue. Burn up new characters for everyone and start a new adventure in your own setting.

If the other players want to give it a shot, burn up three- or four-lifepath characters. Let the surviving player indicate the direction he wants to run. If he's stuck, the GM presents a situation. The players write Beliefs about the survivor, their relationship to him and about resolving the situation.

Possible situations include: Robard's enemies come to collect; another greedy Dwarf artificer hears of the sword's reappearance and tries to claim it; or Ssisz's cult comes in the night seeking revenge for their fallen brother; or a new adventure like Thelon's Rift that has nothing to do with the sword.

Breaking Down The Sword

After playing The Sword, the group should come away with an understanding of how Beliefs drive play. They all played their Beliefs and fought over the sword in one way or another. This type of play leads to rewards. Though the players didn't get to spend those exact rewards, they should have spent a fate point or two. Thus they can clearly see the value of playing a Belief to earn rewards, so those rewards can help them overcome future obstacles.

The group should also have come away with at least a cursory understanding of versus tests, Duel of Wits and Fight! If you didn't engage with one of those systems in play, consider running the scenario again and specifically engaging that mechanic so you can see how it works.

Brechtanz, Adventurer

Beliefs

This sword was a treasure of my clan for generations, stolen by foul Roden and abandoned here. I'll restore it to its rightful place among my people.

Words may be eaten, but blood is forever once spilled. Better a heated exchange than an exchange of blows.

My companions and I have seen much hardship together; I'll get them home safely.

Oath Belief: My Uncle Dvalin is proud but destitute. I will do anything to restore his fortunes.

Instincts

Whenever someone tells a tale, always one-up them.

Always compliment good craftsmanship.

Always keep a knife in my boot.

Lifepaths (Age 81)

Born Clansman, Delver, Tinkerer, Adventurer

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B5, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes

Health B7, Steel B5, Hesitation 5, Reflexes B4, Mortal Wound B11, Greed B3 (Idiom: Riches, Physical Beauty, Craftsmanship), Circles B2, Resources B1

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B8 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Circles

Reputation: Rough and tumble adventurer in the village of Verge, 1D
Affiliation: Kwamish Antiquers, 1D; Thieves' Guild of Scarport, 1D
Relationship: Uncle Dvalin (4 pts)

Common Traits

Accustomed to the Dark [Dt, no penalties for twilight, starlight, candle-light, lamp light or torchlight], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt, Emotional Attribute], Oathsworn [Dt, grants additional belief], Shaped from Earth

and Stone [Dt, grants access to Dwarven Arts], Stout [Dt, Speed Multiplier x3], Tough [Dt, round up when factoring Mortal Wound]

Traits

Deep Sense [Dt, use Perception as Orienteering while underground], Curious [Char], Adventurer [Dt, +1 Ob to Circles tests with all Artificer and Noble-born Dwarves, free 1D affiliation outside the Dwarf hold], Stubborn [Dt, +2D to body of argument in a Duel of Wits that contravenes a belief]

Skills

Tunnel-wise B2, Stuff-wise B2, Survival B3, Mending B3, Scavenging B2, Excavation B3§, Climbing B2, Herbalism B3, Haggling B2, Firebuilding B2, Sword B3, Lockpick B3, Obscure History B2, Persuasion B4

Gear

Shoddy sword, shoddy knife, Dwarven-made plated leather armor (3D, ignores first armor damage), clothes, traveling gear, sturdy shoes, shoddy Herbalism tools, shoddy Excavation tools, shoddy Lockpick tools

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA −, Fast, Shortest
Shoddy Knife—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA −, Fast, Shortest
Shoddy Sword—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA −, Slow, Long,
  May Great Strike

§ This ability is open-ended. 6s explode when rolling. See individual ability descriptions in Character Burner.

Fidhean, Bard

Beliefs

This sword was made by my father. Using its markings, I will demonstrate its origin to my companions so they cannot dispute its ownership.

I must return this lost sword to my father so that he will forgive me and allow me to return from my exile.

True friends and companions are a great treasure, and I will not let mine come to harm.

Instincts

Never accept an insult.

When a friend is hurt, soothe him.

When times are dark, sing to uplift the hearts of those around me.

Lifepaths (Age 130)

Born Citadel, Student, Song Singer, Bard

Stats

Wi: B6, Pe: B6, Po: B3, Fo: B3, Ag: B5, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Health B6, Steel B7, Hesitation 4, Reflexes B5, Mortal Wound B9, Grief B5, Circles B3, Resources B1

PTGS

Su: B2 Li: B4 Mi: B6 Se: B7 Tr: B8 Mo: B9

Circles

Reputation: Traveling Bard, +1D, Exile among the Elves of Amon Kel, +1D (Infamous)
Affiliation: The Exiles of Amon Kel, +1D
Relationship: Fineath, father and althing of the Citadel of Amon Kel (10 pts, discounted to 6 due to immediate family and enmity)

Common Traits

Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt, no need to make Health tests for disease, +1D to Health tests against fatigue or poison], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt, ability to use Elven Songs], Grief [Dt, Emotional Attribute], Keen Sight [Dt, +1D to Perception-based and Observation-based field maneuvers in Range and Cover or any Perception test involving long distances; no Ob penalties for dim (not complete darkness) light]

Traits

Exile [Dt, cannot journey West; +1D to starting Grief; Infamous reputation]

Skills

Elven Script B3, Lyric of Law B3§, Sing B4, Song of Merriment B3§, Ballad of History B3§, Etiquette B4, Oratory B5, Song of Songs B3§, Song of Soothing B3§, Lament of Stars B3§, Verse of Friendship B3§, Conspicuous B3, Flute B2, Sword B4, Man-wise B3, Elven Artifact-wise B3

Gear

Traveling gear, Elven flute, run of the mill plated leather armor (3D), run of the mill sword, Elven clothes, Elven shoes

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B3 S:B4, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Sword—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long,
   May Great Strike

§ This ability is open-ended. 6s explode when rolling. See individual ability descriptions in Character Burner.

Robard, Gambler

Beliefs

Master Kogan of the gambling house is going to break my knees if I don't pay off my debts. I've got to get paid in this venture!

I was the one who figured out where this treasure was; it belongs to me!

That Dwarf is not to be trusted. His greed will be the doom of us all. If he makes a move, I'll have to push someone else into his path.

Instincts

Never throw the first punch.

Always haggle for the price.

Always cheat.

Lifepaths (Age 24)

City Born, Urchin, City Peddler, Criminal

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Health B3, Steel B3, Hesitation 6, Reflexes B4, Mortal Wound B10, Circles B2, Resources B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Circles

Affiliation: 1D Thieves' Guild of Scarport

Traits

Sickly [Dt, -1D Health], The Story [C-O for Falsehood when telling a story to an audience], Cynical [Char], Poker Face [C-O for Falsehood and Gambling when bluffing], Fleet of Foot [C-O for Speed in races or positioning]

Skills

Brawling B2, Climbing B3, Falsehood B2, Haggling B3, Inconspicuous B3, Knives B3, Lockpick B3, Mending B3, Persuasion B4, Stealthy B3, Streetwise B3, Tomb-wise B2

Gear
Run of the mill knife, run of the mill quilted armor (1D), traveling gear, shoes, clothes, Lockpick toolkit

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Knife—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Ssisz, Cultist

Beliefs

To enter the Fields of Paradise, I must present my Visionary with this fabled sword.

The Prophet says, "To conquer from weakness, divide the strong." I will encourage the interlopers to argue among themselves.

These squabbling mice hired me to lead them to their treasure. I will now collect what I am owed or else.

Loyal Belief: Fiszzik the Visionary will guide us to seize the Fields of Paradise from Men, as prophesied; I will serve him to my dying breath.

Instincts

Always demand payment up front.

Never reveal my hand until I'm ready to strike.

Tithe half of what I make to the Visionary and the cult.

Lifepaths (Age 20)

Born Below, Scavenger, Initiate, Guardian

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (5), Po: B3, Fo: B3, Ag: B4, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes

Health B3, Steel B7, Hesitation 6 (7), Reflexes B5, Mortal Wound B9, Circles B2, Resources B0

PTGS

Su: B2 Li: B4 Mi: B6 Se: B7 Tr: B8 Mo: B9

Circles

Affiliation: 1D with Saba's Nest in the Below

Common Traits

Aecer's Likeness [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte related to weather and wet], Communal [Dt, grants affiliation with nest], Enlarged Incisors [Dt, weapon], Quick-Blooded [Dt, old age at 40, x4 Speed Multiplier], Tail [Char], Large Ears [Dt, +1D to Perception rolls], Pack Rat [Char], Skittish [Dt, +1 Hesitation for Steel tests for Fear or Surprise, must choose Run Screaming hesitation if hesitating for more than one action].

Traits

Tunnel Vision [Dt, reduce penalties for dim light (not complete darkness) by one step], Greedy [Char], Broken [Dt, -1 Ob to motivate character by Preaching, Oratory or Suasion], Merciless [Char], Loyal [Dt, adds extra belief], Callous [Char], Hackles [C-O for Intimidation]

Skills

Inconspicuous B4, Doctrine B2, Sword B4, Shield Training, Appraisal B3, Intimidation B4, Brawling B2, Junk-wise B2, Society-wise B2, Haggling B2, Below-wise B2, Persuasion B2

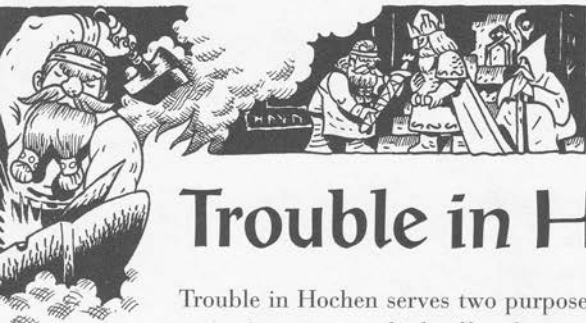## Gear

Sword, wooden shield (2D), traveling gear, blood blossom (+1D to Herbalism or Field Dressing tests), clothes

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B3 S:B4, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Enlarged Incisors— I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Shield Bash—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Short
Sword—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long,
  may Great Strike

Trouble in Hochen

Trouble in Hochen serves two purposes. It is an adventure scenario, meant to kick off a short campaign. And it is a workshop for writing Beliefs and developing relationships. In this chapter, we walk you through setting up the adventure. Then we provide you with the details of the scenario itself.

Getting an Adventure Started

We start like so: Thor says, "Let's play Burning Wheel."

I say, "Let's play an adventure that we can feasibly complete in one session of play but could lead to other scenarios if we like it."

Dro says, "Okay, sounds like you're the GM."

"Okay, as the GM, I have an idea for a game: I want to play some gritty, dark fantasy with an old-school-party-of-adventurers-on-a-mission vibe."

Dro and Thor decide they like this idea. Or rather, they pretend that they need a moment to consider it, but in truth if you say "gritty, dark fantasy" to either Thor or Dro they're already playing that game in their grimdark souls. I know this about them, so I tailor my pitch appropriately.

"We're going to need more than that," says Thor. "Can there be a demon? I crave demon."

"True," I say. "You're dispatched to a remote village that is being plagued by a demon. You have to confront that demon. Some of you are there because it's your duty. Others are there due to obligations of family or friendship."

Setting the Stage

"Fine, but where does this take place?" queries Dro. "We can't make characters without more setting. I imagine hilly countryside, covered in snow."

Pretending that I don't already know the answer, I consider for a moment. "The setting is a fantasy empire of Eastern European flavor—Czech, Hungarian, German and Polish. The village is part of the holdings of a lord who serves a powerful marcher duke. The village lies in the snowy foothills of some jagged mountains that provide a bulwark against ravening hordes of monsters. It's pretty basic stuff."

"Ah, in that case," Thor offers, "I'll play an idealistic young priest, freshly returned from his education at the distant capital."

"I want to play ze poor knight, in search of wealth and glory," responds Dro.

Thor says, "Do you have any names in mind? They'll inspire us in character burning."

I grab some of my foreign language dictionaries and do some quick research. "Sure. The duchy is called Verdorben. Thus the duke is also called Verdorben. His castle is called Lowenholhe. His bailiff is named Büttel."

"The village is called Hochen. It's part of the demesne of a lesser member of the duke's household, Stravit. Hochen itself is managed directly by Wójt Marten Rayla. How's that?"

"Okay! So the wójt is the appointed head of the village?"

"Yes. If you want, you can fill in names for your relationships, too. I'll incorporate them in the setting."

Burn, Baby
In your typical Burning Wheel game, the next step is to burn your characters based on this situation and setting: How will you save this plagued village in the foothills of a forlorn duchy?

But for this example, you're going to use our preburned sample characters. Review the template and briefly discuss the characters. Talk about why you're here on this mission.

Relationship Workshop
The character templates are incomplete. To successfully begin your game, you must flesh them out. Each player must name and describe the relationship indicated by his template. Discuss how the relationships are tied to the situation. Are they in the town? Or did they compel you to undertake this quest?

Do this in turn, one player after another. A savvy player will interconnect his relationship with that of another player.

The GM notes the relationships, their roles and their names.

Demonstration Relationships

Since this is a demo game, the GM should also tell the players that Marten, the wójt, and Angar, the blacksmith, are available as possible relationship characters.

Belief Workshop

To write Beliefs, the players must have an idea of what's going on. They need to know the situation and the opening action.

The Situation for Hochen

Read the following to the players: "You have been sent or called to Hochen. How exactly depends on the nature of your relationship. Hochen is in dire straits—famine in the dead of a hard winter and rumors of infernal influence."

Go around the table and have each player read aloud his prewritten Belief. After that, each player writes two Beliefs for his character: one about the situation and one about his relationship.

Situational Belief

Your situational Belief can answer any of the following questions: How will you interact with the town? Are you here to save them, extort them or damn them? How will you accomplish your mission? Will you confront this demon? Confront the wójt? Confront the townsfolk? How will you interact with the other characters? Will you compete, aid, support or hinder them? These are all options for Beliefs.

Relationship Belief

How is your relationship involved in the situation? Is it a matter of duty, honor, obligation or love, or perhaps something darker like pride, extortion or revenge? This Belief defines the dynamic between the player and the NPC. This Belief is very powerful since the relationship also stands to define a significant portion of the setting. The GM will challenge this Belief, and thus the relationship will be tested.

Be sure to read out each Belief as it is created. Encourage players to take inspiration from one another.

The GM notes each Belief as it is announced.

Not every Belief or relationship will come into play in this short scenario. Therefore, the GM should encourage the players to write simple, direct goals. Loftier and more open-ended Beliefs are tough to address in a single session of play. However, if you're planning to play for more than one session, more remote relationships and longer-term Beliefs are appropriate.

Character Overviews for Hochen

There are six characters available to play in this scenario: a knight, a wizard, a priest, a hunter, a Dwarf and an Elf. Choose two to five of these six characters. If you're only playing with two characters, use the knight and either the wizard or priest. With three players, use the knight, the hunter and the wizard or priest. With four or more players use the knight, the hunter and the wizard plus whatever combination of other characters you'd prefer.

The scenario doesn't run with one or six players.

If you're new to Burning Wheel, share the following character overviews with the players before everyone picks.

Knight

Gunter Kiczold is a bog-standard four-lifepath knight. He's a tank, but his skill exponents are low.

Encourage the player to place the knight's father at court—as an officer, courtier or even just an old knight himself. Doing so provides a good motivation for the character in the adventure and sets him up nicely for the sequel scenarios.

The player can write his Beliefs about proving himself to his father, earning fame or wealth on this mission or even protecting his companions.

Wizard

Brin is a haughty personality. She's a simple three-lifepath wizard, and plenty powerful. Though she doesn't have any killing spells, the combination of Phantasmagoria, Spirit Servant, Binding and Call of Iron make her versatile and potent in the hands of a creative player.

Brin's relationship is fairly well locked in. Her uncle makes an excellent potential villain for the scenario. It's up to the GM if he's the one who's actually behind this madness or if he just holds dark secrets that may aid her.

Encourage her player to write her Beliefs about creating a reputation for herself, overawing the villagers (and her companions) and discovering her uncle's evil works.

Priest

Theoden is a powerful yet delicate character. His faith is mighty, and his will strong, but he lacks any material protection whatsoever. If protected and aided, he's a valuable asset.

Theoden's abbot cousin is an important character in this setting. He's influential at court. Ask the player whose ear he has. Where does his power stem from?

Encourage the player to write his Beliefs about doing a service for his cousin. He can write a zealous Belief about purging Hochen of evil. Alternately, he can write a nurturing Belief about healing this place or protecting his companions with the shield of his faith.

Hunter

Daniel is a local. He has a personal stake in this game.

His mother lives in or near Hochen. Ask his player where she lives and what role she plays.

Encourage his player to write earnest Beliefs about aiding the knight, the priest or the wizard. Encourage emotional Beliefs about the sad state of the village. And, of course, Beliefs about saving his mother are never amiss.

Dwarf

Fureard is a good sort, deep down. He's a treasure-hungry adventurer, certainly, but he's not so greedy as to commit evil acts.

Fureard swore an oath to his uncle when he left his clan. Ask the player to fill in details about his uncle. Why is his clan in need of wealth?

Fureard's player should be encouraged to write Beliefs about winning treasure or other fortunes from this scenario. This Belief is a chance for Fureard to be played as a cutthroat adventurer—seeking to extort the village for his help against the demon. But a Belief like this also sets up

an excellent opportunity for a Moldbreaker moment. Fureard can play the hard-ass, but ultimately relent and act out of compassion rather than greed.

Since he's far from home, encourage his player to write a Belief that binds him to another character in the group. Good Beliefs in this case let him ride on the coattails of the knight or wizard. Or lead him to protect Daniel or Theoden.

Elf

Cerebirn is yet another young Elf on the run from his homeland. He's not an exile, and committed no crime aside from shirking his duties due to ennui.

Cerebirn has a cousin. They have a contentious relationship. Ask the player why they hate each other. Try to imagine a reason that would drive the cousin to pursue Cerebirn into the lands of Men.

Cerebirn's Beliefs must be forceful. He's far from home and can easily just toddle off on another walkabout. It's best if both of his Beliefs are tied to another character in the group. For example: He's going to help Brin purge the evil magic from this place; and he's going to help Fureard find his treasure.

Starting Artha for Trouble in Hochen

All characters start with two fate points and one persona point.

GMing Hochen

The Ugly Truth About Hochen

This scenario takes place in the village of Hochen and the surrounding woodland area. Hochen is in trouble—famine, destitution and all that. The villagers have turned to a pagan goddess—Tawaret—for succor. But now there's a demon stalking the village. It's a chicken/egg problem. Did the god send the demon or was the demon there before they bent knee to this abomination? It's up to the players to find out!

There are three main obstacles in this scenario—Marten, the cultists and a zombie bear. None of these directly or forcefully tweak any of the Beliefs, yet all of the obstacles presented here should tie into the Beliefs written by the players. It's your job as the GM to tighten this scenario. Focus it on your players and their choices.

What will you add to this scenario? How will you change it to suit your needs? What additional characters will you introduce? The best practice is to read the scenario and try to play it straight, but as unexpected turns arise, wing it. Just be sure to thrust obstacles in front of the players that solidly challenge their Beliefs.

Order of Events

In order to run this adventure, you must familiarize yourself with the characters, their Beliefs and the actions described in this section. You must internalize these elements. There is no set order of events to the action in this adventure, except that the group begins meeting Marten Rayla on the bridge. You present the initial action—Marten's greeting—and play off the players' reactions.

We expect you to incorporate Beliefs and relationships into this scenario and make it your own. However, a typical session of Hochen involves the players getting ambushed by the cultists, then all of them getting ambushed by the bear. After the players fight off the infected bear, they interrogate the villagers and either burn the place or look for the cause of this trouble.

Unskilled Tests

You'll note that many of the tests in this scenario call for skills the characters do not have. This is deliberate. This is how you run Burning Wheel. It doesn't matter if the characters have the skill. Certain obstacles call for certain abilities. If the characters don't have those abilities, the players can choose to test using Beginner's Luck (Burning Wheel, page 40) or to try to find another way around.

Night and Ice

Much of this scenario takes place at night in the middle of winter in a snowy village. The GM may impose the following disadvantages at his discretion: dim light +1 Ob, icy ground +1 Ob, candle-light conditions +2 Ob, darkness +3 Ob. Even with the moon out, it is very dark. Not the best conditions for fighting or tracking or whatnot. If the characters provide a decent source of light—more than a lantern or candle—the GM should lift the penalties. Remember that these penalties will apply to friend and foe alike.

The ground is covered with ice and snow. Before any martial conflict, the GM may declare that the footing is very bad due to the snow and impose a +1 Ob to all positioning tests. Any positioning or Speed test failed by more than two successes results in the character slipping and falling prone. Use this for grim, gritty comedy.

Marten's Greeting

Wójt Rayla greets the adventurers at the covered bridge over the Felsbach. Despite the obvious devastation of his village, the wójt assures the investigating group that all is fine now and their services aren't needed. When the characters meet Marten, it's late in the afternoon. Not to be inhospitable, Marten invites the group into his home to talk.

Play Marten as if he is hiding something (he is) and tell the group that he is hiding something. Just don't tell them what he's hiding. Let them make some tests—Ob 4 Intimidation, Persuasion or Falsehood—or engage in a Duel of Wits to get it out of him.

Marten Rayla, Wójt of Hochen

Vitals— 38-year-old, village-born Verdorben male.

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Mlt*
B4	B4	B4	B3	B3	B3	B4	B3	B9	B3	6	B3	B2	*x3.5*

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B6	Se: B7	Tr: B8	Mo: B9

Beliefs— It is my duty to shepherd Hochen through these dark times. Our god has abandoned us; we must do whatever we can to survive these dark times. Tawaret will bring life and prosperity to Hochen.

Instincts— Always listen for village gossip. When I don't know for certain, obfuscate. When trapped, act rashly and without thought.

Traits— Verdorben [Char], Pragmatic [Char], Fixed Smile [Char], Gossip [Char], Cramped Right Hand [Char], Mind for Small Details [Char], Flatterer [Char], Guilty Conscience [Char]

Circles— 1D reputation as Wójt of Hochen. 1D affiliation with villagers of Hochen.

Skills— Rule of Law B2, Persuasion B4, Falsehood B5, Village-wise B5, Bureaucracy B2, Read B2, Write B2, Cooking B2, Mending B1, Accounting B3, Soothing Platitudes B5, Guest-wise B3, Animal Husbandry B2, Riding B2, Horse-wise B3, Road-wise B2

Gear— Clothes, shoes, riding horse (and accoutrement)

Weapons— Bare Fist: I B2, M B3, S B4. VA –, Add 2, Fast, Shortest

Cultists, Reveal Thyselves!

If the players spend the night in Hochen, the village cultists meet in the longhouse in the dead of night. The villagers are muttering to one another, "What are we to do?"

Spotting Shadowy Movement

If any of the characters stay up and keep watch during the night, make a versus test: the character's (unskilled and thus Beginner's Luck) Observation against the cultists' B3 Inconspicuous. If the player wins, his character notices suspicious activity near the longhouse. See the Eavesdropping heading in this section. If the cultists win, the character notices nothing. See the Night Raid heading in this section.

If none of the characters keep watch during the night at Marten's, go to the Night Raid heading in this section.

Eavesdropping on the Cultists

If the players detect the suspicious activity near the longhouse, they can sneak out into the cold night and spy on the cultists. They find them crowded into the longhouse. It's an Ob 2 Perception test to decipher what's being said in the longhouse without getting caught. If the test is failed, the character is spotted by someone within.

As a whole, the cultists believe Marten was wrong to bring the characters ("the interlopers and interferers") to Hochen. They are deeply unhappy with his leadership. They feel that these outsiders will upset their new goddess, Tawaret. They fear she will withhold aid to the villagers. They decide they need to pray to her more strongly and perhaps even offer her a sacrifice! One of their number, Angar Smith, has taken a nominal leadership position in the cult. He is the most outspoken about Marten's incompetence.

If interrupted in their deliberations, the cultists will pounce on the characters and try to murder or capture them. They brandish farm implements, flaming brands and skinning knives. See the Fighting the Cultists heading in this section.

If the cultists' meeting is uninterrupted, they immediately move to capture the characters in their lodging at Marten's home. See the Night Raid heading in this section.

Cultists

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	Mlt
B3	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B10	B4	7	B1	B1	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Beliefs— I don't trust outsiders. Tudom, our god, has abandoned us, we must do whatever we can to survive these dark times. My family and my livelihood are the most important things in my life. Tawaret will bring life and prosperity to Hochen.

Instincts— When questioned by outsiders, clam up. Always give a suspicious glare to foreigners. When my neighbor needs a hand, pitch in.

Traits— Verdorben [Char], Calloused [Char], Prominent Scar [Char], Starved [Char], Hardened [Char], Zealot [Dt], Rabble-Rouser [Char]

Skills— Ditch Digging B4, Mending B3, Sewing B3, Drudgery-wise B4, Cult Doctrine B2, Inconspicuous B3, Falsehood B2, Persuasion B2, Brawling B3

Gear— Clothes, shoes, farm implement or knife, appropriate tools

Weapons— Bare Fist: I B2, M B4, S B6. VA –, Add 2, Fast, Shortest
Farm Implement: I B3, M B6, S B9. VA –, Add 2, Slow, Longer
Skinning Knife: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest

Angar Smith, Blacksmith and Cult Leader

Vitals— 32-year-old, village-born Verdorben male.

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	Mlt
B3	B4	B4	B3	B5	B4	B4	B3	B10	B4	7	B1	B1	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Lifepaths—Village Born, Laborer, Apprentice, Journeyman, Farrier

Beliefs— This village is falling to pieces, I will take charge and do the unsavory, necessary thing. Tudom has abandoned us, only Tawaret can save us. Marten is weak; he must be punished for bringing these interlopers into our affairs.

Instincts— Always check my forge in the morning. Always conceal my secrets. Always do what's best for the village.

Traits— Calloused [Char], Broken In [Dt], Made Man [Dt], A Bit Deaf [Dt], Back Breaking Labor [C-O], Numb [Dt], Hardened [Dt], Suspicious [Char]

Skills— Blacksmith B4, Brawling B2, Cooper B4, Cult Doctrine B2, Ditch Digging B4, Haggling B4, Horse-wise B2, Mending B3, Oratory B1, Tanning B2

Affiliations— 1D Cult of Tawaret in Hochen, 1D Local Journeymen Craftsmen

Reputations— 1D Blacksmith of Hochen

Gear— Blacksmith's Workshop, Clothes, Shoes

Weapons— Bare Fist I:B3 M:B5 S:B7 Add 2 VA – Fast Shortest
Mallet I:B4 M:B7 S:B10 Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long, *may Great Strike*

Fighting the Cultists

There are two entrances to the longhouse, one along the road and one in the back by the stacks of firewood. If the characters rush in (with weapons drawn and all that), they can only fit through the door one at a time. To gain entry through the door, they must win a positioning test in Fight! The cultists gain a +1D advantage for controlling the entrances and up to three of them may help each other defend the door. It's an ugly situation. They will fight on until about half of their number are dead, injured or run off—that's about 12 cultists. Of course, they're only armed with knives and flaming brands, so how hard can it be? Well, it's a gory, grinding fight. Be ready for horror in Hochen.

In Fight!, the cultists will make judicious use of their numbers (about two dozen ready and willing to fight) and the Charge and Lock actions. They will start cautiously with Avoid and Block actions. On the second volley, have two cultists Charge/Close one character and try to bring him down. They help one another. On the third volley, they'll use Lock, again helping one another. If they can pin a character down, draw knives (two actions) and start cutting. After a few cuts, give the character a chance to surrender and then drag him back deeper into the longhouse. Vicious little cultists!

The cultists believe they are between the devil and the deep blue sea. They've angered their goddess and she has showered them with disfavor. They must win her favor back (with ever more drastic actions). But their pagan cult has been discovered, and they'll surely be tried and burned for this crime by the religious authorities. So this fight is all or nothing for the cultists.

If the cultists are defeated, they will sink to their knees and beg for mercy. See the Interrogating the Cultists heading in this section.

If the player characters break and run from the fight, Hochen will divide into armed camps: those siding with the cultists and those siding with the characters. The cultists will participate in hostage exchanges. See the Captured by Cultists heading in this section.

Night Raid (on Marten's house)

If the players do not spot the cultists heading to their meeting, the cultists confer in the longhouse and Angar convinces them to capture these interlopers before their cultish ways can be discovered. Thus, the cultists surround Marten's home and send a handful of their number into the house to capture the players.

Test the cultist's B4 Speed (unskilled Stealthy) against each character's Perception (unskilled Observation). Sleeping characters suffer a +1 Ob disadvantage because they're asleep. Do not allow the group to help one another for this test. It doesn't make sense in the fiction to have sleeping characters actively helping one another.

If the whole group fails, the cultists politely wake them. Skinning knives are pressed to the characters' throats. The characters are asked to come along quietly. It's likely that the players will want to resist and force their way to freedom. Make a versus Power test in this case. Each cultist has 1D of help from a companion. If successful, the character breaks free unharmed. If unsuccessful, the character does not escape and furthermore he suffers a Light wound. There is no time to cast spells or utter prayers in this situation.

If one of the characters is successful but the others are not, he's overlooked as the rest are taken hostage. It's his chance to rescue them!

If half of the group fail the test but half pass, a hostage situation arises. The successful characters are on their feet and ready, but not before their companions are grabbed and held.

Try to use versus tests to resolve any altercations at this point in the scenario. Do not go to Range and Cover or Fight! yet.

Captured by Cultists

If the entire group is captured, they are tied down in an icy field. The cultists build a bonfire, produce the grotesque idol of Tawaret and begin to pray. They pray to Tawaret for abatement of their miseries—the player characters are offered as sacrifice to her demons. The characters may attempt to loose their bonds with an unskilled Ob 2 Escape Artist test (Beginner's Luck Ob 4 Agility) or an Ob 5 Power test. Theoden can use a Minor Miracle to loosen his bonds and those of his allies. Brin can cast Spirit Servant and command it to untie her. The Spirit Servant doesn't need to test to untie her. However, to prevent themselves from being noticed while casting, Brin and Theoden need to pass an unskilled Inconspicuous (Beginner's Luck Will) versus the Cultists' B4 Perception (not Observation so these successes aren't doubled).

If the characters escape, the bear bursts onto the scene as they make their break.

If they fail to escape, I'd keep them tied down as the bear comes. Have them watch helplessly as the cultists are mauled and devoured by the bear. When the butcher's work is done, the bear shambles over and

sniffs at them, dripping ichor. He leaves them to their fate and staggers off into the night. By morning light, dazed and frozen, the characters manage to work free of their bonds. They all must pass an Ob 4 Forte test. The margin of failure is an obstacle penalty to all physical actions until the character gets food and rest.

If only some of the characters are captured, the cultists will attempt to use the characters as hostages and bargain for clemency. Use the Duel of Wits to negotiate a settlement.

Interrogating the Cultists

If the players manage to capture a cultist, you can use a simple Interrogation test against Ob 4, the cultist's Will. Or, if you have time, I recommend using the Duel of Wits to resolve his interrogation. The GM, playing the cultist, can attempt to extract all sorts of promises as his Statement of Purpose, such as, "You'll let me live" or "You are sympathetic to my plight!" or "It was all the wójt's idea!"

If successfully interrogated, the cultist will reveal that he and his people are devout Tudomians, but they also pay homage to the fertility goddess, Tawaret. The fields have been fallow for years, and desperate measures had to be taken. The idols of the goddess depict a plump woman with voluptuous curves, eight breasts and the head of a hippopotamus. No one knows where they originally came from. The cultist will reveal a hidden altar to the goddess in the root cellar of his home.

That's One Angry Bear

The "demon" that is plaguing Hochen is a great bear infected with a necrotic, enchanted, black oil. You should use the bear to attack the village whenever it's inconvenient for the players or when the action hits a lull.

It can interrupt the brawl in the longhouse—roaring through the outer village and smashing right into the fight in the longhouse. The cultists will drop whomever and whatever they're doing and flee for their lives. They believe the bear is a manifestation of Tawaret's anger toward them. And really, who wouldn't?

The bear itself is enraged and aggressive. It will charge and maul anyone who takes a remotely aggressive posture against it. This includes launching missiles at it or charging it. It is also a cunning creature. If it can't move into close range with its raw Speed, it will withdraw and use

its Stealthy skill. It will even flee into the night and return at another time and place to exact revenge.

The bear is also incredibly tough. It can be killed by a lucky heavy crossbow or great bow shot, but it can also handily deal death and destruction. The player characters do not want to get into a Fight! with this thing. It is much more preferable to take it down at range with missiles, spells and prayers.

The Corrupted Bear

Vitals— A supernatural, enraged great bear

Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Mlt*
B4	B4	B4	B6	B8	B8	B6	B4	B14	B7	6	—	—	x5

PTGS	Su: B5	Li: B9	Mi: B11	Se: B12	Tr: B13	Mo: B14

Skills— Savage Mauling B5, Intimidation B6, Hunting B4, Foraging B6, Stealthy B4, Tracking B3

Traits— Massive Stature [Dt], Tough [Dt], Omnivore [Char], Sweet-Tooth [Char], Keen Smell [Dt], Fanged [Dt], Loner [Char], Infected by the Black Oil [Dt], Devastator [Dt]

Weapons— Head butt: I B4, M B8, S B12. VA 1, Add 2, Slow, Short.
Claws: I B5, M B9, S B13. VA 2, Add 2, Slow, Short.
Powerful Bite: I B5, M B10, S B15, VA 3, Add 2, Slow, Short

Tracking the Bear

If the players want to track the demon bear, it's an Ob 3 Tracking test. This will lead the characters on a wandering track through the surrounding woodlands. The bear's been on a merry rampage, tearing up trees and toppling nearly anything that gets in its way. It has mangled a beaver dam, encountered and slaughtered a wolf pack and shattered a hunter's lodge. After that, the trail is old and cold and leads up into the foothills of the Ironback Mountains.

The bear's den is a remote, shallow cave. It has been painted with arcane symbols and curses. An Ob 3 Symbology test identifies the symbols as necromantic in origin. They are supplications to the dark powers begging for favor and certainly weren't painted on the walls by the bear! It's up to you, game master, to decide who marked this cave.

Surprise, I'm a Zombie Bear!

Use this advice for a more challenging encounter with the bear: When the bear bursts onto the scene, it is a good opportunity for the GM to call for Steel tests. The bear can then exploit hesitation to grab cowering characters or swat down anyone still standing.

If you'd like to legitimately set up the ambush, test the bear's B4 Stealthy against the player's unskilled Observation. If the bear wins, it can attack from ambush at any time. Attacking from ambush forces a Steel test as described above.

These rules are likely to get characters killed, so only use them if you think your players up to the challenge. If you're new to Burning Wheel or just aren't feeling particularly mean, don't ambush the characters and don't call for Steel tests when the bear makes its entrance.

Fighting the Demon Bear

The bear is a formidable opponent. He will try to close with the characters quickly. Note that his Speed multiplier gives him an advantage over anyone but the mounted knight. Once within striking distance, he'll swing his bulk around using the Push action to scatter and knock down characters. Once characters are sprawled, he'll pick an annoying target and Tackle it. Once on top, he'll either rip it up with his

claws or Lock it with his jaws. It's fun to watch the look of horror on the other players' faces as the bear is dragging around one of their number in its mouth, while swatting at the rest of them with its massive paws.

The bear will also cleverly defend itself with Avoids, Blocks and Counterstrikes. Enraged though it may be, it is a smart bastard.

The bear doesn't have armor or Ironskin. It'll bleed if it's cut. So it should attempt to retreat if it's injured by more than 1D. If the bear is cornered and unable to retreat, it will go into Aggressive Stance and try to take down a few of its attackers.

Also, note the bear possesses the Devastator trait (Monster Burner, page 322). If his attacks cause armor damage or breaches, they count twice for this effect—two points of armor lost, two breaches made.

Dissecting the Bear

If the bear is slain, some information can be gained from its carcass. An Ob 1 Animal Husbandry test will confirm that the demon bear was sick. An Ob 3 Animal Husbandry test will reveal that the bear had some type of internal infection, of a type previously unknown. An Ob 3 Taxidermy, Hunting or Butchery test will produce the bear's heart, which is corrupted and infected. It is full of a black bile. In addition, a successful Taxidermy, Hunting or Butchery test will reveal that the bear's brain is also veined with the bile. No skill but Death Art or Alchemy can reveal anything about the bile.

If that Ob 3 test is failed, the dissecting/inspecting character becomes infected with the black oil! Definitely announce this consequence to the player before the roll is made. See the Black Oil heading at the end of this section.

Exploring Hochen
and the Surrounds

The action of this adventure takes place primarily in the village, but may move off into the wilds if the players track the bear.

The village of Hochen is a field of wreckage. The wójt's residence, the shrine to Tudom and the village's meeting hall are all intact, but nearly every other building has been damaged by the demonic rampage. Some have collapsed completely, some have claw marks across them, some have chunks taken out of them. It's an Ob 3 Tracking test to determine

that these marks were left by a bear. Successes over the obstacle spent on working patiently can be used to note dark stains that look like dried blood in the marks.

The Villagers

About half of the villagers of Hochen are not cultists. However, note their Beliefs and Instincts. They will not get involved in these dark deeds unless forced.

They will not speak unless persuaded. They will not help unless both bribed and reassured. They will not aid in a fight unless rallied—Ob 4 Oratory to win them over, followed by an Ob 4 Command to lead them into battle.

Villagers													
Wi	Pe	Ag	Sp	Po	Fo	Hea	Ref	MW	Ste	Hes	Res	Cir	*Mlt*
B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B4	B10	B4	6	B1	B2	x3.5

PTGS	Su: B3	Li: B5	Mi: B7	Se: B8	Tr: B9	Mo: B10

Beliefs— My family and my livelihood are the most important things in my life. My neighbors are up to strange things, but it's none of my business what they do.

Instincts— When questioned by outsiders, clam up. Always give a suspicious glare to foreigners. When my neighbor needs a hand, pitch in.

Traits— Verdorben [Char], Calloused [Char], Prominent Scar [Char], Starved [Char], Hardened [Char]

Skills— Choose appropriate skills from the following selection: Ditch Digging B3, Mending B3, Sewing B3, Cobbler B3, Blacksmith B3, Butchery B3, Drudgery-wise B4

Gear— Clothes, shoes, appropriate tools

Weapons— Bare Fist: I B2, M B4, S B6. VA –, Add 2, Fast, Shortest.
Farm Implement: I B3, M B6, S B9. VA –, Add 2, Slow, Long.
Skinning Knife: I B3, M B5, S B7. VA –, Add 1, Fast, Shortest.

Village of Hochen-wise

Here are the suggested obstacles for Village of Hochen-wise: Ob 1, Hochen produces wheat, barley and goats. Ob 2, Hochen is a village in Lord Hochen's demesne. The Lord of Hochen is a Stravit. Ob 3, Hochen is so small there is no practicing priest or judge in the village. Itinerants come seasonally. Ob 4, the village is in a terrible state of disrepair beyond the destruction caused by the demon.

Tudom and Tawaret

Most devout and faithful peoples of this duchy, Verdorben, pay homage to a just and holy god, Tudom. He keeps evil at bay, locked behind the heavenly vault. (Though the vault is cracked, due to a cosmic betrayal, and from this crack come demons and all the evil that men do.)

Tawaret is an obscure, ancient fertility goddess from the far south. Her statues were introduced into this village by the infamous necromancer Götrung. He used to pass through these lands disguised as a simple peddler, spreading his seeds of corruption.

In truth, though her rituals are bizarre and require great sacrifice, Tawaret is no demoness. She brings fertility to those who properly pay her homage. But here, in this frozen waste, worshipped by benighted fools, she is as powerless as the night is cold.

The End of Hochen

There are a few ways to end this scenario. The players can overcome the bear and rout the cult from the town. From there, they can attempt to track down the evil necromancer who created this plague or they can report to higher authorities for assistance.

However, I recommend you use our sequel scenario, Dinner for One, which is available as a PDF download on our website.

Trouble in Hochen Leads to Dinner for One

As soon as the bear is overcome and any immediate aftermath involving the villagers is dealt with, a sleigh arrives, driven by the forester of Lord Stravit, the Seigneur of Hochen. The forester informs the characters that his lord would like to see them promptly at his manor so he can properly reward them for their efforts.

This revelation is best delivered after the players have burned the heretics at the stake and torched their houses for good measure.

Oil Amok

It's also possible that your group succumbs to the black oil. If that's the case, I encourage you to use the Black Oil and Black Rod rules contained in this chapter as the basis for your own fantasy apocalypse campaign. Our published scenarios are going in another direction—assuming more cautious players—so you're on your own here. If you end up running this way, let us know about it on our forums.

Artha and Hochen

Be sure to review Beliefs and award artha after concluding the action of the scenario.

The Black Oil

This scenario introduces a foul necrotic liquid called simply the "black oil." This evil, magical fluid transforms the living into thralls for those practitioners of the dark arts who know how to command them.

If a character comes into contact with the oil, he risks infection. See the new trait, Infected by the Black Oil, for details.

Exposure and Infection

The mysterious black oil possesses a number of peculiar qualities. First and foremost, it is toxic and infectious. It will spread from one living creature to another by touch—the oil will stick to flesh, leather and wood. It infects a creature by crawling into open wounds or orifices. Once inside of a creature, the oil will make its way to the creature's heart. Once in the heart muscle, it begins to reproduce. Soon after, the oil attempts to gain control of the creature's heart. Thereafter, it transforms the creature's blood to oil.

To resist the effects of the oil and prevent infection, the character must pass an Ob 5 Forte test. If the character washes in clean water soon after contact, grant two advantage dice. If the character is injured when he comes into contact with the oil, add +1 Ob for Superficial or Light wounds, +2 Ob for Midi or greater wounds.

If the Forte test is passed, the character suffers no ill effects.

If the Forte test is failed by one, the character enters a slow stage of infection. For the first day, he shows no outward sign. On the second day, his pallor becomes ashen. He loses sensitivity in his nerves and emotions—the world seems remote to him, a thing to be watched with disdain. On the third day, he becomes violently ill and cold to the touch. If he is not saved by the third day, he becomes infected and gains the Infected by the Black Oil trait.

If the Forte test is failed by more than one, the character enters a fast stage of infection. He grows steadily more pale. When he sleeps and awakes the next morning, he is sick and ashen. If he is not saved that day, he is infected and earns the Infected by the Black Oil trait.

Only two things can save a character who is in the early stages of the infection: a Minor Miracle or an Ob 4 Bloodletting test. The Faith test miraculously restores the character, as is appropriate. A successful Bloodletting test leaves the character drained and weak, but cleansed. A failed Bloodletting test does not stop the infection, and furthermore, the erstwhile bloodletter must pass an Ob 5 Forte test lest he be infected by the oil!

After the Infected trait is earned, a Purification miracle can be used, but this destroys the host and the oil at once—since they are one and the same now.

Properties of the Oil

As noted above, the oil is contagious by touch. But it has some other, equally nasty properties. If burned, the oil turns into a corrosive toxin in the form of a sticky tar. Anyone who comes into contact with the tar or breathes the fumes must pass an Ob 5 Health test. Margin of failure is permanently subtracted from Health. This loss may be recovered by advancement, but the attribute maximum is now set at 10 minus the margin of failure.

If Health is reduced to exponent 0 by the fumes, the character is reduced to a comatose state. He will rise on the morrow as a revenant possessing the Infected by the Black Oil trait. He loses all character traits as noted in the infection rules.

Death Art or Alchemy* can be used to discern the oil's properties, but not stop its effects. This is a standard independent test, not an open test. The player must set his obstacle before rolling the dice and he only gets the information for that obstacle result. What's more, his test rides unless conditions change. Obstacles for investigating the oil: Ob 1, It is not naturally occurring; it is a necromantic substance. Ob 2, It seems to have a mind of its own; it can be washed off the skin, but it keeps its cohesion in water. Ob 3, The oil itself infects through open wounds or orifices; if burned, it turns to an evil toxin. Ob 4, It only takes about two or three days before the victim is fully corrupted. Ob 5, It cannot be destroyed, only changed.

Nota Bene: Both of these skills are of the sorcerous type. Therefore, they cannot be tested using Beginner's Luck until the character has received instruction from another skilled character.

Infected by the Black Oil   *Dt*

A character who is infected oozes black oil from his pores. He is aggressive and delirious. In addition, this trait confers the benefits of the Brute and Thousand-Yard Stare traits. The infected is also subject to the summons and controls of a Black Rod. The character loses all other character traits. Lastly, he himself is contagious. Any living creature standing near him is at risk. He sprays the foul ichor from his mouth as he moves about. See the rules in this chapter for Infection.

Black Rod

A black rod is a special device constructed from a distillation of the black oil. This is done through enchanted alchemical processes under guidance of a death artist. A rod allows its bearer to command infected creatures in his presence. The creatures may be given simple commands as per the Death Art rules. The bearer of the rod may command a number of creatures equal to his Will exponent. If the creatures leave his presence, they will continue to execute the last command issued to them. Once the command is completed, they revert to their own native impulses.

The black rod also confers +1D to Forte and Health. It will slowly dissolve in water, reverting to essential oil. If burned, it has the same properties as the black oil described previously. You also gain the character trait Cold to the Touch, as the rod taps into your soul to fuel its evil magics.

Black rods are bound to their makers. To use one you did not create yourself, you must bond with it. To bond with it, you must make a Will test versus the Will of its previous owner. If successful, you gain mastery over the device. If the test is failed, you become infected with the oil and under the sway of the rod. You gain mystical knowledge of the rod's owner's location and must immediately return the rod to him.

Gunter Kiczold

Concept
Poor, Low-Born Knight

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about the knight's mission to Hochen, to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's father or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: I have sworn to my duke and my baron to serve as a loyal and honorable vassal. I shall uphold their word and law in this land.

Instincts
Always bow properly to my superiors (as is their right).

Always make sure I am in full harness for battle!

Always look out for a good candidate to be my page or squire.

Lifepaths (Age 25)
Born Noble, Page, Squire, Knight

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B5, MW: B11, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B8 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Traits
Mark of Privilege [Dt CB, pg. 155], Sworn Homage [Dt CB, pg. 158], Gloryhound [Dt CB, pg. 277]

Skills
Ancient History B3, Axe B4, Brawling B3, Conspicuous B3, Crossbow B3, Etiquette B3, Knives B3, Lance B3, Oratory B3, Poetry B2, Riding B4, Sword B3, Armor Training, Shield Training, Mounted Combat Training

Circles
Affiliation: 2D affiliation with his lord's household
Reputation: 1D a poor knight of no means but great promise
Relationship: father (minor, immediate family)

Gear

Arms (axe, sword, knife and lance), armor (plated mail 5D), riding horse, courser, clothes, shoes, traveling gear, crossbow, dog

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Light Axe—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long,
  may Great Strike

Sword—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long,
  may Great Strike

Knife—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9 Add 1 VA –, Fast, Shortest

Lance—I:B5 M:B9 S:B13, Add 2, VA 2, Unwieldy, Longest,
  may Great Strike, must be mounted

Crossbow—I:B4 M:B8 S:B11, Reload 17 act, VA 2
  DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 2D opt, 3D ext/125 paces

Brin

Concept
Inscrutable Young Sorceress

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about Hochen to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's uncle or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: I will attain wealth and power by any means, arcane or mundane. But the surest way is to build a famous reputation as a powerful hero!

Instincts
When danger looms, protect myself with Touch Not Sublime Flesh.

When darkness falls, cast Wyrd Light into my staff.

Never let them forget I am a noble.

Lifepaths (Age 24)
Born Noble, Arcane Devotee, Lead to Noble Court, Court Sorceress

Stats
Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B3, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 5, Hea: B5, MW: B10, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Mark of Privilege [Dt CB, pg. 155], Base Humility [Char], Inscrutable [Char], Gifted [Dt CB, pg. 161]

Skills
Alchemy B2, Astrology B2, Calligraphy B2, Etiquette B3, Falsehood B2, Family Secret-wise B3, Read B2, Research B3, Rhetoric B3, Sorcery B4, Symbology B3, Write B2

Circles
Relationship: My uncle, the evil necromancer (minor, other family, forbidden)

Gear

Finery, shoes, wizard's staff (sustains Wyrd Light)

Spells

Phantasmagoria (Ob 3^, 56 actions), Spirit Servant (Ob 3, 50 actions), Binding (Ob 2, 2 actions), Call of Iron (Ob 3, 2 actions), Wyrd Light (Ob 2, 9 actions), Touch Not Sublime Flesh (see below for stats of new spell)

Touch Not Sublime Flesh (Ob 3, 3 actions. Anima/Earth, Control, Personal origin, Caster area of effect, Sustained duration. 6 rps): Ignoble, aggressive creatures (and persons) suffer a +2 Ob to attack or lay hands on this sublime flesh.

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Staff—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Long
  Two-Handed, may Great Strike

Theoden Vridel

Concept
Idealistic Young Priest

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about Hochen to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's cousin or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: Tudom is the light; Tudom is justice. I am an instrument of His Will and shall serve Him until my dying breath.

Instincts
Always punish the wicked in kind for their evil deeds.

Never take up arms.

Always pray for the souls of the dead when at service.

Lifepaths (Age 20)
Born Noble, Lead to Religious, Temple Acolyte, Priest

Stats
Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 5, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Faith: B5, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Mark of Privilege [Dt CB, pg. 155], Tonsured [Dt CB, pg. 158], Vested [Dt CB, pg. 159], Faithful [Dt CB, pg. 161]

Skills
Oratory B3, Suasion B5, Doctrine B4, Read B3, Write B4, Etiquette B4, Religious History B2

Circles
Affiliation: 2D affiliation with the temple
Reputation: 1D an idealistic young priest
Relationship: cousin, an abbot (significant, other family)

Gear
Finery (vestments and courtly attire), riding horse, Writing kit, shoes

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Daniel Wigel

Concept
Vengeful Peasant Hunter

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about Hochen to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's mother, brother or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: This village is symbolic of all the other villages in the duchy. If it falls to evil, the whole duchy will fall as well.

Instincts
Practice Taxidermy when not on the hunt.

Always bag something extra for mom.

Always look for animal tracks.

Lifepaths (Age 23)
Born Peasant, Trapper, Woodcutter, Hunter

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B5, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B3, Hes: 6, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Quiet [C-O for Speed CB, pg. 284], Fortitude [C-O for Forte CB, pg. 277]

Skills
Firebuilding B2, Hunting B3, Trapper B3, Mending B2, Foraging B2, Orienteering B3, Tree-wise B2, Tree Cutting B2, Tracking B4, Stealthy B4, Javelin B4, Haggling B2, Taxidermy B2

Circles
Relationship: beloved mother (minor, immediate family), brother who moved to city and abandoned mother (minor, immediate family, hateful/rival)

Gear
Hunting javelins, Trapper kit, traveling gear, clothes and shoes

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Hunting Javelins—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, VA 1,
   1D opt/ 1D ext, DoF: I:1-2, M:3-4 M, S:5-6, 50 paces

Cerebirn

Concept
Elven Wanderer with a shady past

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about Hochen to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's cousin or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: I have been a wanderer, student and soldier in my short life. It is time now to journey into the human lands and learn what I can from my younger brothers.

Instincts
The roads are dangerous. Always keep my bow at hand.

When waiting, practice Bowcraft.

When passing quietly by a door, sing the Air of Gates.

Lifepaths (Age 136)
Citadel Born, Wanderer, Student, Lead to Protector, Bowyer

Stats
Wi: B5, Pe: B6, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B6, Hes: 5, Hea: B6, MW: B10, Grief: B6, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt CB, pg. 82], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt CB, pg. 83], Grief [Dt CB, pg. 83], Keen Sight [Dt CB, pg. 83], Lost [Dt CB, pg. 280]

Skills
Air of Gates B4, Ballad of History B3, Bow B4, Bow-wise B3, Bowcraft B2, Elven Script B3, Etiquette B2, Lyric of Law B3, Mending B3, Oratory B3, Scavenging B3, Song of Paths and Ways B4

Circles
Relationship: cousin (minor, other family, hateful/rival)

Gear

Elven clothes, Elven shoes, traveling gear, mirrorwine, Elven bread, hunting bow

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Reload 5 act, VA 1
  DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Fureard

Concept
Dwarven Adventurer

Beliefs
Belief 1: [A belief about Hochen to be added by the player]

Belief 2: [A belief about the character's uncle or another player character to be added by the player]

Belief 3: A fair price can never be won without haggling. To fail to haggle is to show a disrespect for the quality of the goods!

Oath Belief: I swore to my uncle that I would bring back great wealth and fortune for our clan.

Instincts
Never boast or brag about my great deeds.

Never give up.

Always be on the lookout for a dragon hoard!

Lifepaths (Age 55)
Born Clansman, Lead to Dwarven Guilder, Hawker, Lead to Dwarven Host, Arbalester, Lead to Dwarven Outcast, Adventurer

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B6, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B3, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B7, Hes: 6/5, Hea: B5, MW: B11, Greed: B4, Circles: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B8 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Traits
Accustomed to the Dark [Dt CB, pg. 49], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt CB, pg. 49], Oathsworn [Dt CB, pg. 49], Shaped from Earth and Stone [Dt CB, pg. 50], Stout [Dt CB, pg. 50], Tough [Dt CB, pg. 50], Squinty [Char], Adventurer [Dt CB, pg. 51], Cool-Headed [Dt CB, pg. 273]

Skills

Appraisal B3, Artillery Hand B2, Brawling B3, Climbing B2, Conspicuous B2, Crossbow B3, Firebuilding B3, Haggling B3, Herbalism B3, Inconspicuous B2, Knives B2, Lockpick B2, Lost Treasure-wise B3, Man-wise B3, Obscure History B3, Persuasion B3, Streetwise B3, Survival B2, Sword B3, Symbology B3

Circles

Affiliation: 1D affiliation with Antiquer's Guild
Relationship: Artificer uncle (minor, other family)

Gear

Dwarven plated leather (3D, ignores first armor damage), shoddy arms, shoddy crossbow, Dwarven clothes, sturdy shoes, traveling gear, Dwarven Lockpick toolkit, shoddy Herbalism kit, shoddy Mending kit

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Shoddy Sword—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 2, Slow, Long
Shoddy Crossbow—I:B4 M:B8 S:B11, Reload 17 act, VA 2
   DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 2D opt , 3D ext/125 paces

Thelon's Rift

Thelon's Rift is a microdungeon drawn by Tony Dowler. A microdungeon is an illustration of a dungeon map that contains only the barest of detail. It doesn't include distances, stats or anything mechanical. It's a sketch of an idea meant to inspire an evening of classic dungeon-crawl play.

To demonstrate how you might use one of these dungeons, I'll run through the process and give the numbers for what I did.

Thelon's Rift at the Table

Grab four players. Sit them down for a session of Burning Wheel. Tell them that you're going to do an old-school dungeon crawl. Tell them the name, "Thelon's Rift," in your best wizard voice. Do not show them the map.

Also, once the characters enter Thelon's Rift, there's no retreat. There's no resting beyond spending a few minutes binding wounds. You either conquer the Rift or die trying!

Thelon's Rift looks like a straightforward exercise, but some expertise in using Burning Wheel is required for a successful run, moreso than for The Sword or Trouble in Hochen. If you haven't run the The Sword, do that first. You've been warned!

Thelon's Rift Situation

To effectively play this scenario, we must all buy in to the situation. "An old-school dungeon crawl" is not enough. There has to be more motivation.

Looking at the map, the two routes lead to one final chamber. The chamber appears to have an orb-like object in it. Thus, I tell the players in my best wizard voice, "You are questing for the Orb of Power."

If the players ask questions about the Orb of Power, I try to say yes to everything. "Is it valuable?" or "Can we wield its power?" or "Is it dangerous?" Yes, yes and yes. If I absolutely don't want to say yes to something, I say "Maybe. You'll have to recover it in Thelon's Rift and discover it's true nature!"

Thelon's Rift Characters

You can burn your own characters, you can use the four friends from The Sword or you can choose characters from the templates in this book.

The characters should have only three or four lifepaths and no skill exponents higher than four or five. Characters may not have any bodyguards or assistants for this adventure. Give new characters two fate and one persona each.

Thelon's Rift is meant to be played with three or four player characters. Using only two characters makes the scenario very challenging. I wouldn't even bother trying to make it through with one character.

Thelon's Rift Beliefs

Players should write Beliefs for this situation based on one of three criteria: recovering the Orb; helping or hindering another player character; or a purpose or motivation from an external source like an enemy, a relative or religion.

Describing Thelon's Rift

One of the features of the microdungeon is that it lacks any "boxed text" and canned description. These little maps are intended to inspire you. So pour on the overwrought descriptions for this scenario. Describe the mold on the walls, the features of the stone face, the runes, etc. Really dig into it. Revel in the description. Go overboard. Trill your Rs. Make your players roll their eyes—with delight, of course.

Thelon's Rift Obstacles

Each detail of the map is an obstacle. The following section offers a description of how I chose to handle the obstacles. There are many more options. You can use these or use your own. If you choose to use your own, it's important that you don't do any prep work. Try to think of the obstacles on the fly.
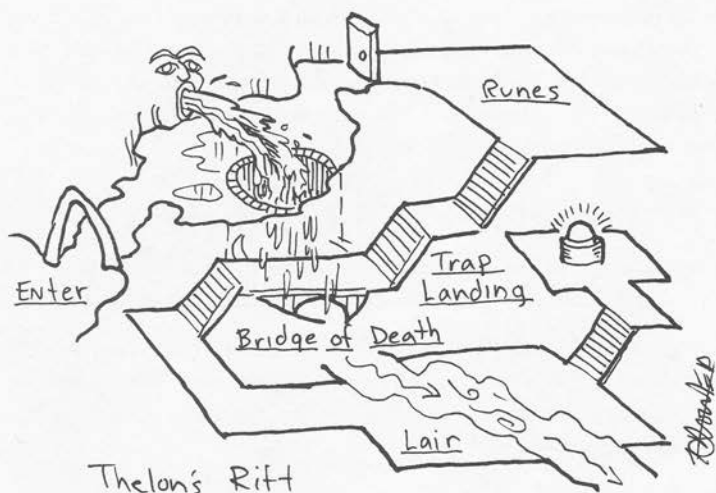
Thelon's Rift

Assessing the Obstacles

Except for the Lair and the Orb room itself, it's dark in Thelon's Rift. The characters will have to provide light, most likely in the form of candles from their traveling gear. This means dim light for humans— +1 Ob to physical actions like fighting and climbing.

If the players have their characters stop to look around, give them vivid descriptions of what they can see and smell. Don't just describe what's right in front of them. Use your description to hint at what's to come. Tell them what they can hear in the distance.

Entry

The entry is a peaked arch. It opens into a natural cave. It's only wide enough for one person at a time, but it appears to widen out ahead of you. You can hear the sound of rushing water. The walls are very damp.

Spout

A giant face vomits forth a torrent of water across the passage. To cross the stream requires an Ob 4 Speed test.

Failure to pass the Speed test throws the character down the well, wounding him. Give him a Light wound.

The face is a brilliant detail. It deserves attention during play. The players may search the face for a mechanism with which they can stop the flow of water. An Ob 2 Below-wise test will confirm that it is, indeed, a trap. It's an Ob 3 Trapper or Trap-wise test—maybe Ob 4 Tomb-wise—to successfully stop the flow of water. Failing this test causes the eyes to roll slowly back and even more water to pour out of the face, rapidly filling the well. This can complicate finding and traversing the tunnel.

Well

The water from the spout pours down into a 20-foot deep well. The water flows out from the bottom of the well through a tunnel that leads under the Bridge of Death.

Climbing out of the well is an Ob 3 Climbing test. Hauling a character out with rope is an Ob 4 Power test. Safely climbing down the well is an Ob 2 Climbing test. Failure results in the falling water sweeping gear away down the tunnel.

Traversing the tunnel beneath the Bridge of Death requires an Ob 3 Agility test to grasp handholds at the far end. Success indicates the character can pull himself from the water to safety on the left side of the lair. Failure indicates he is swept into the lair. He must make an Ob 3 Power test to grab hold of the lip of the channel and hold fast. Success indicates that he pulls himself up, but on the right-hand side of the lair. Failure indicates he is swept away and lost.

Door

The door is just a door. It works fine. It's not trapped or rigged or stuck. You can toy with the players a little bit, but don't waste too much time here.
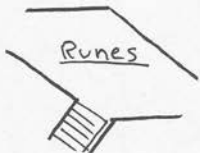
Runes

This room is covered with strange runes. A character must pass an Ob 3 Symbology test (common arcane symbols) to read them. If successfully read, the runes speak of Thelon the Wizard. Apparently, this place is his tomb. The runes also contain dire warnings about the Bridge of Death (but not the trap landing) and the Orb of Power.

If the runes are read incorrectly, the characters learn that this place contains the great Thelon's mightiest work, the Orb of Power. To gain the Orb, one must cross the bridge.

Trap Landing

The trap landing falls away when a character steps onto it. To leap to safety requires an Ob 4 Speed test. To grasp hands and catch a character is an Ob 3 Agility test. To hold a character back by main force is an Ob 4 Power test.

If a character falls down the trap landing, he is hurled onto the Bridge of Death. If another character fails in an attempt to grasp or hold a falling character, he falls too.

If the GM is feeling generous, or if the players have an Instinct or just ask to examine the landing, it is an Ob 3 Observation test to discover the trap. It's an Ob 2 Trapper test to jam the mechanism so that it does not trigger when stepped on. Don't give this info out unless asked!

Bridge of Death

The Bridge of Death is covered by an evil enchantment. It radiates poisonous power. Touching or stepping onto the bridge triggers an Ob 6 Forte test. Failure causes Tax to the character's Forte by the margin of failure. If the Tax knocks a character unconscious, he falls into the stream of water below. He must be rescued before he drowns. It's an Ob 3 Speed test to race into the Lair to the aid of a drowning character.

If not rescued, a drowning character is swept away by the current and lost.

If a character's Forte drops below zero, he takes a B6 wound for the first die below and a B12 for the second die. That should be sufficient damage for the bridge to live up to its name.
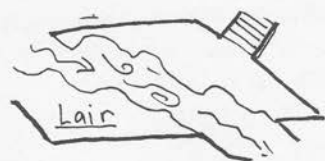
Lair

Silvery light pours down the stairs from the Orb chamber. The Lair is just that, a lair of the guardian of the Orb of Power. I used the aptly named Formian Guardian (Monster Burner,

pages 260-261). Just one of these creatures is enough to give a group of adventurers a scare. The creature rests on the right-hand side of the lair, across the water. If any hapless explorers wash up on his side of the channel, it'll put their heads betwixt its mandibles and rattle their brains.

If the adventurers emerge on the left-hand side of the channel, the Formian will become agitated and pace the channel before it leaps and charges them. Give them a moment to plan before you launch into them.

I have also used an Ophidia (Monster Burner, pages 278-279) as the guardian of the Orb. She's not as tough as the Formian Guardian, but she's more versatile. She has decent fighting capability; she can engage in a Duel of Wits, and she has sorcery.

If time permits, I highly recommend using the Fight! system for this encounter.

If you're playing with skilled Burning Wheel players, use the Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide rules provided in this book to spice up the positioning for this combat.

Orb of Power

Once the guardian is defeated, there is nothing left to bar the way to the Orb. The Orb is a perfect, crystalline sphere resting atop a short pedestal specially built to cradle it. It glows brightly with a silvery light.

The first person to touch the sphere is possessed by the wizard, Thelon. The character earns the Possessed trait and the Spooky trait. Thelon has a B6 Will, which he will use liberally to control the character—especially to prevent him giving away the Orb. His Beliefs are: I must seek my brother, High Priest Thonel, and have him free me from this prison. My wife Noleth imprisoned me herein; when I am free I shall wreak a terrible vengeance upon her. I shall strike any bargain at any price with the first fool who grasps the Orb so that I might be free.

Despite his third Belief, Thelon is supremely stingy is sharing his knowledge and power. He tries to restrict his help to his B5 Sorcery-wise.

If the players devise a plan to dislodge the orb and carry it without touching it, assign an appropriate Agility obstacle based on how dangerous their plan is.

A Duel of Wits over who gets the Orb or what should be done with the Orb is not only acceptable, it's encouraged. In fact, it's tradition!

If the players manage to grab the Orb without getting possessed, it can be sold off for ten cash dice of Resources.

Crawling Back Out

If the players took the water-filled tunnel route, they skipped the Runes, the Trapped Landing and the Bridge of Death. If you're feeling particularly cruel, you can play out those obstacles in reverse. The bridge will likely do them in. And then the Trap Landing will dump them back on the bridge…and the runes will belatedly warn them they shouldn't have gone this way. It'll be dark comedy.

However, you don't have to play this out. If you're satisfied with the events after the Orb was recovered, call it a night there. Just smile beatifically and close your books. Award artha before the players start to ask questions.

Let It Ride in the Rift

Thelon's Rift is an excellent scenario in which to apply Let It Ride. If the players tested to successfully bypass an obstacle on the way down, they don't need to retest to cross it on the way out. They would only need to test if they crossed the obstacle with help or tools that they no longer possess. Or, in the case of the well, if going back up isn't the same as coming down. Swimming against the flow to get back into the well isn't the same as catching a handhold as the stream carries you past. Thus, Let It Ride doesn't apply there.

Creative Thinking in Thelon's Rift

The obstacles described in this short adventure are difficult and unforgiving. Encourage the players to come up with creative solutions. At the very least, the players should help one another and use linked tests to overcome obstacles.

For situations in which the players are trying to mitigate a disastrous failure, give them one chance or test to make things right if they come up with a creative plan. The responsibility is on them to come up with the inspiration for such a plan. If that plan fails, their fate is sealed!

Microdungeoneering

If you enjoyed romping through Thelon's Rift, grab another microdungeon and do it again. Try to use the same characters. Set up a new situation. Cut right to the dungeon. Don't do any intervening roleplay. If a character was wounded, roll randomly to determine how much time has passed. Don't do any prep work. Come up with obstacles on the fly. Keep the Monster Burner handy so you can bring in some appropriate opposition. And have fun!

Adventure Burner

This section takes you through a detailed approach for creating a Burning Wheel game. I don't recommend you use this text word for word every time you want to start a game. I recommend you adopt the spirit of the process and forget the rest. Use the ideas here to get you excited about starting games, then go off and use these mystical techniques to create your own scenarios, adventures and campaigns.

At Burning Wheel Headquarters, we're fans of sketching and brainstorming. We think those are vital parts of the creative process, so the chapter starts with an exhortation to brainstorm. Then we walk through setting up a situation and setting. I feel that only after you have situation and setting can you develop characters. You might feel differently and want to start with characters first and then plug them into a setting. That's perfectly acceptable. This isn't a process per se. It's more like a punch list.

The chapter also briefly discusses how to kick off your game or session with action. This discussion is followed by a breakdown of how to challenge Beliefs. Again, this is a chicken/egg situation. You want to write strong Beliefs, but how do you know what to write them about? If you write a strong situation, how do you induce players to care about it?

Lastly, the chapter rounds out with some rules variations that we like to consider when fleshing out our settings.

This chapter is not a specific campaign burner like the Clan Burner or the World Burner. We didn't want to limit you to creating one type of story, thus we chose to attack these ideas from a higher level. The Adventure Burner gives you the tools to create your own individual campaign burners.

Definition of Terms

There are some terms that we're going to lean on in the Adventure Burner chapter. Since this the first time you're encountering them in this book, we're going to stop and define them.

Characters

In this chapter we talk about characters that the players have burned up, relationship characters that the players have named during character burning and straight-up GM-controlled NPCs.

Setting

The setting is the overarching container of play—the place, the age, the atmosphere. But setting in Burning Wheel is represented primarily by stocks, traits, skills and gear. It's more than just geography. It's culture and people. The geographical aspect—the places—are just sketched out.

Situation

Situation is a problem in the setting to which the characters are inextricably bound. In Burning Wheel, characters must fight their way through these problems. There's no other option.

Action

Action is the thing that's happening right now. It's the immediate, in-your-face problem that is merely a part of a bigger problem as represented by the situation.

Chicken or Egg

To play this game effectively, you must create a situation. To have a situation, you must have setting and characters. But setting doesn't matter unless you have a compelling situation. And characters must be firmly entwined with both setting and situation. So which comes first? Chicken? Egg? Setting? Situation?

Sketching and Brainstorming

To set up a game of Burning Wheel and create compelling setting, situation and characters, you and your group must toss around some ideas to narrow your options and find a general aspect of the fantasy genre that interests everyone.

We usually spend a session to set up a game and create characters. Though we also sometimes do prep in email, we find it much more productive to make time to do it all face-to-face.

Draw on any source of inspiration at your disposal. If you recently read Greg Keyes' *The Water Born* and were inspired by the gods and mythology, don't hesitate to propose pulling those gods into your game. If you recently watched Peter Jackson's film of *The Return of the King* and were inspired by Theoden's speech at Pelennor Fields, tell your friends why you love it and why you want cataclysmic wars between the forces of light and darkness in your game. If you just finished Mark Smylie's *Artesia* comics and love the flavor of his world—the intrigue, the politics, the culture—you should propose using similar ideas in your game.

Find a land, a place or a time that interests everyone in the group. Work with it a bit—adding or adopting ideas. Get everyone involved.

GM's Big Picture

To begin a game of Burning Wheel, one of the players has to have a strong opinion, a vision. That player takes on the role of the game master.

As the game master, your job is to approach the game with the fire of inspiration in your gut. You have an idea that excites you. You want to share it. I call that idea the Big Picture.

When you present that Big Picture to the players, you weave their feedback into it. You want them to interact with this idea. You want them to have a stake in the fate of this nascent thing. So we bend and stretch it as best we can to accommodate the players' needs. Some ideas don't fit and are discarded from the start. Some will wash out during play. While the process is not an equitable collaboration, there is give and take.

However, as you brainstorm remember this dictum: Limitations make things interesting. Don't try to include everything in your Big Picture. Limit it; pare it down. When you decide not to include an element, devise a reason or logic behind the decision. Likewise, when you expand the Big Picture to include input from a player, share the logic of your decision. Why do these things exist (or not) in your schema?

The Big Picture is your world, but the term "world" is too big. World makes you think you need to design an ecology and economy right off the bat. You don't. You need only sketch rough lines. Create a loose

Building a situation is tricky business. Note its many qualifications:

- A well-wrought situation is interesting to everyone at the table.

- It is a conflict that encompasses many fictional people, making it easy for the players to burn characters that are central to this long-term conflict.

- It gives players room for input and interpretation through their Beliefs, Instincts, reputations, affiliations and relationships.

- And perhaps most important, a situation is not easily solved, nor is it solved through any one straightforward path. In fact, there is no correct solution, only exciting action.

All that is certain is that the situation must be confronted through adventure and conflict. When the situation stops burning, when players can no longer find conflicts to which they can attach Beliefs and Instincts, you know your game has come to a rest.

How Does One Create a Well-Wrought Situation?

Creating a situation requires a measure of passion, a slice of inspiration, a helping of determination and a good amount of patience.

- *Think*. Come to the table with an idea of something that excites you about Burning Wheel or fantasy gaming or fantasy literature—it could be a character or even a situation borrowed from another story.

- *Brainstorm*. Everyone has an idea they're excited about. Get it all out on the table. I like to have everyone pop off an idea, and I write them down in a list as they come.

- *Be inspired.* Get excited about other people's ideas. Repeat each idea aloud as it's announced. Roll it around on your tongue.

- *Be merciless.* The other side of this friendly collaboration is to be merciless and honest. Cut out ideas that don't interest you.

- *Compromise*. After you've all brainstormed about ideas that excite you and hacked off the ones that don't, compromise. Merge what you have. How can it all fit together? The GM is the main player in this role. It's primarily his job to take the ideas and build them into a coherent whole. Be imaginative. Create a warped internal logic. Each connection between two elements creates a reason or paradigm. Explain this logic to the group.

An ancient kingdom in which a prophesied king ruled justly, leaving it all to his son upon his death.

The last Elven citadel, still a shining example of all that the First Folk can accomplish, a place of wisdom and grace.

A broken land to which the Orcs were exiled after their dark lord was defeated.

An arachnid empire that has spread its web over half a dozen continents, unifying different spider species into a deadly nation.

The primordial forest that links to all forests.

A land walked by gods who do not have the best interests of Men and beasts at heart.

Burning Situation

Burning Wheel doesn't care about topography, population, climate, cosmology or creation myths of your world—unless—unless it matters. What matters in Burning Wheel? Stuff that challenges the players' Beliefs.

How Do You Challenge a Belief?

To successfully challenge a Belief, you first need to create believable context. You need to draw the player into the world so that he cares about his character and this challenge. *Then* you confront him.

"Bloodshed in the name of violence is irreligious." A Belief like that speaks of pacifism. You cannot challenge it simply by saying, "You're in a fight!" Or even, "Some guy picks a fight with you. What do you do?"

You need to create a situation in which the player can make a choice about how he will engage that Belief.

A situation is something that contains choices. What are these choices? They are potential actions a player can take with his character. It's not enough to have the option to refuse or to walk away. In the context of the game, you must have the option to cut your own path.

These choices lead to actions. Actions are tests or conflicts of the character's abilities. Resolution of an action produces a result that changes the situation, even just slightly.

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Use the following questions to get you started and talking. Again, the GM should take a strong role in this, but he needs to honor reasonable requests, especially for including character types. Try not to break the setting, but rather flesh it out.

- *What's the conflict?* What are the characters involved in? What are the sides? What problem do they face?

    — *Who opposes the goals of the characters?* Who are these antagonists? What is the relationship between the antagonists and the characters?

    — *What are the antagonists' goals?* Why are the characters in their way?

- *Imagine a scene in which all of the characters are standing in a room with the antagonists or their minions.* What do the antagonists want from that meeting? What do the characters want? Parley, redress, slaughter?

- *Alternately, imagine the characters standing at the scene of some great disaster or calamity clearly caused by one of the antagonists.* What's the disaster? How did it happen? What are the characters going to do about it right now?

- And lastly, what's the *raison d'etre*: Why are the characters together as an inseparable group? What is the glue that binds them? Are they family, neighbors, friends or fellow employees?

The situation for our recent campaign was as follows: The Ice Age comes because Death has gained control of Fire's Lantern. The Lantern gutters in Death's care. Mysteriously, you are dispatched on a journey by Death to find the Lantern and decide whether or not to rekindle it.

The conflict was two-fold. First, the players had to successfully complete their journey. And second, they would have to convince Death in regard to the fate of the Lantern.

Their opposition was frightening. When I considered the setting of walking gods, I realized that their enemies were the gods who wished to see light and fire extinguished eternally—Night and Cold. Those are two powerful enemies.

From the outset I planned to have the God of Cold pursuing them, turning all in their path to ice. The God of Night would then offer to aid them in their quest...if they would only perform a small service for him.

Those were my big setting villains. More immediately, I planned to oppose them with tribesmen who believed themselves to be the Chosen (not the players), goblins who sought to cause mischief and lesser gods who simply wanted to get their way despite the end times!

This was a rather esoteric but high-stakes game. The last element of the situation was the most important by far. Why are the characters together? What's the glue that binds them? We decided that they all ardently believed they were Chosen of Death. Each had their own reason, but essentially they were zealots for the god. I'll talk more about the characters in the Characters section.

Burning Setting

When creating a setting for Burning Wheel, it's important to acknowledge the game's limits. Though versatile, you cannot "do whatever you want" in this game.

Burning Wheel doesn't provide you with a map, geography or other setting details, but there is a setting to this game. The lifepaths, traits and game rules themselves create the setting. The atmosphere of this setting is passionate and violent. It's fraught with volatile emotions like faith, greed, grief and hatred. The people of this setting are trying to escape the grind of their daily life, looking for something better. They are a colorful, quirky people—but often scarred or crippled by their experiences.

Look over the lifepaths and traits. Try to fit these ideas into your setting. If you can make it work, your game will go smoothly. If you can't make your ideas fit with our intrinsic setting, you need to rethink your game.

Technologically, Burning Wheel favors thirteenth-century France and twelfth-century China. The poor are very poor but surviving. The wealthy are very wealthy but also teetering on the edge of ruin. Magic is extremely potent, armor is effective and injury from a sword or bow is calamitous for the victim.

By default, there are peasants, villagers and townsfolk. There is a noble ruling class and an elite class of magicians and priests. The age of the professional soldier—mercenaries—has just dawned. Slavery and bondage are not uncommon, and society casts out those who don't fit or obey tradition—criminals, vagabonds, insurrectionists and sorcerers.

In addition to Men, there are all manner of fantastic peoples. The most robust are Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, Trolls, Great Wolves, Great Spiders and Roden. Each people has its own distinct culture that governs its abilities and outlook. These peoples are heterogeneous—their cultures exist separately within the setting.

All of these elements exist in the default Burning Wheel setting. You can and should remove or omit elements that do not appeal to you. Pare the default settings down to what's absolutely necessary to get your setting off the ground.

Use the following questions for inspiration. Let the world builders in your group go to town—the GM should take an especially strong role—but be sure to accept input from all interested players. Try to answer these questions as succinctly as possible and don't spend more than a half hour or so on this part!

- *What's the Big Picture?* What's going on in this setting that makes it ripe for adventure? What's changing, evolving, declining?

- *What's the culture?* What are the cultural analogs? Analogs can be taken from historical earth, current events or fantasy works.

- *What is the environment or atmosphere like?*

- *What's the name of the most important place in this setting?* Not the capital per se, but the place where all the action goes down.

- *What's the name of a faraway place?* A place that folks talk about, dream about or mutter about under their breath.

- *What type of magic exists in this setting?* How is it viewed by the various cultures?

- *Which character stocks are in play in this setting?* Which are restricted and why?

- *Who are the monsters of this setting?* Are they outcasts, or are they a part of everyday life?

- *What's the monetary currency, if any?* Who collects the taxes? What do people do for work? What's the major economy?

I'm going to run down the answers for these questions for our most recent campaign:

Big Picture: We played in this world in a previous game. We wanted to explore more of it, but we didn't want to rehash what we'd done. On the other hand, the results of our last campaign were rather catastrophic: Fox God tricked Forest God, Mountain God and Fire God to war with one another. This resulted in Fire God's Lantern being doused and stolen. We decided that in the aftermath of that divine cataclysm, Death had come into possession of the Lantern and an Ice Age had set in. The question overhanging this world now was: Will Death extinguish the Lantern for good and plunge the world into eternal darkness or would she rekindle it and bring an age of rebirth?

Culture: We decided that some time had passed since Death had gained the Lantern. In that time, an Ice Age crept down from the north. Mannish civilization crumbled into itinerant tribes, slowly fleeing before the inexorable cold. But in addition to the tribes of Men, Trolls now walked the earth, protected from the sun by the pall of gloom that preceded the ice.

Environment: The Ice Age wasn't complete. I decided that the campaign would start on the ice and move south and west, finding verdant, still-living lands. But if the group delayed, the weather would turn cold and the clouds would blot out the sun.

The Most Important Place: This campaign didn't necessarily have a central location. It was a journey, a quest that traversed the world. In fact, I made certain that the location of each session was markedly different than the last: a great cave, a rushing river, a hidden glade, a goblin grotto, a mountain town, a rotting valley and the windswept plains.

Faraway place: There were two faraway places in this world: the Land of Death and home. One was at the end of their journey and the other was the beginning.

Magic: Thor decided he wanted to play a summoner, so the world had Summoning. Danny decided that his brother was a spirit binder, thus there was also Spirit Binding. And, despite the fact that gods trod the earth in many forms, there was no Faith magic present in the world. If you wished to entreat a god, either you bound him with Summoning or encountered him through your Circles.

Burning Characters

Character Concepts

When you're burning up your characters, tie into the details you've created for your game. Review questions. Tie character into setting and situation.

Continuing my example from the Setting and Situation headings, we had four characters joined together by a love of Death—the power, not the practice.

Thor decided that he wanted to play a medicine man who treated with the dead. He claimed that he had received his powers when he died and was thrust back into life by Death herself.

Dro decided that he wanted to play a simple hunter who wished to guide his companions safely to the Land of the Dead.

Group Burning

When you make characters, try to make them together as a group. There's a certain energy and camaraderie that only comes when all heads are bent to rule books and pencils can be heard scritching on worksheets.

If you don't have enough Character Burner books for everyone, download the lifepaths from our site and print them out. The books can be shared, but it does slow down the process.

Making characters together is pretty straightforward. Everyone announces his concept in turn—as a last check to make sure everyone is still on the same page—and then tucks into the Burner. Choose your lifepaths. Divide stat, trait, resource and skill points. Buy your gear. Write Instincts. Read off the Steel, Health, Grief, Greed and Hatred questions. Hold off on relationships and Beliefs for a moment.

Hacking Lifepaths

If you're stuck on finding the right lifepath to represent your setting, you may use the following options. However, the modifications must be approved by the other players first and then the GM gets final say. He can make suggestions to modify or tailor your changes to the setting. This is his job: to ensure the setting creates adequate adversity for your little guy.

Change the Names First

This method is by far the simplest, best option for modifying lifepaths to suit your setting. Change a "knight" to "janissary," for example. Sometimes that's the difference you need to make something fit. If that's not enough, add a Wise or skill to the path. Don't change anything else. If that's still not enough, change one skill to something more appropriate to your setting. For example, if playing in a Renaissance setting, you might need to change Bow or Crossbow to Firearms or something similar.

Sometimes the culture of your setting just doesn't fit the lifepaths. To accommodate the setting culture, consider changing *one* of the lifepath's requirements—trait or skill.

Traits are a major part of the Burning Wheel setting. It's tempting to toss them out in favor of your new awesome setting. I urge you not to. Believe it or not, behind each lifepath trait is a careful decision about game balance. So, it's cool to change the names of traits to suit the flavor of your game, but try not to change their substance.

New Lifepaths

Sometimes your setting will include inventive twists that aren't included in our lifepaths. Use the Monster Burner to create a new lifepath that suits your requirements. Try to look in the various settings—Monster Burner, Blossoms or even Jihad—for an analogous lifepath. Base your new path on that.

Use this option sparingly.

Of Men and Monsters

Sometimes, a player is going to devise a character concept that simply cannot be burned up using the existing lifepaths. For example, my friend once wanted to play a half-lizard man. As discussed in the Monster Burner, there are a couple of ways to go about this. You can do a straight, complete monster burn for the guy or you can burn him like a stock character and then just toss on some additional stock traits to make him into a monster. You can also just pick a monster from one of the various bestiaries and modify it to suit your needs.

Chris and Danny chose more problematic characters. They didn't want to play Men. They wanted to play Trolls. Chris made a manhunter who claimed to be in love with Death herself, but who also claimed to be a personal friend of Fire God.

Danny decided to be difficult. There's always one, right? He wanted to play a half-troll, half-yeti. We used the Troll lifepaths to create the skeleton of the character. The we replaced some of his Trollish traits with traits from the Grayman in the Monster Burner. So rather than being scaly, he was hairy. He replaced his Claws and Fangs with the Aura of Fear, and his Night Eyes with Keen Senses.

Cultural Traits

What cultural traits apply to the characters of this game world? Pick one to three character traits for each culture (See the Character Burner, page 149).

Material World

Take a look at your material world. Can you make your setting more interesting by imposing limits or restrictions? What weapons and armor are available? Are some weapons and armor restricted to certain cultures or character stocks? What property is available? Are resources and gear otherwise restricted?

Burning Action

You've got a setting, a situation and characters, so you're good to go, right? Almost, but not quite. You need an immediate problem in the setting to kick you off. You need action. To create action, the GM makes a strong statement about how the antagonists or their minions or the general forces of the setting are out to make the lives of the characters difficult.

These forces can attack the characters directly, attack their relationships or property or even try to destabilize the setting itself. The GM sets up a scenario and lays it out for the players.

Alternately, the action can consist of a mission for the player characters—an act they must undertake. The direction for the mission comes from one of their relationships. The goal of the mission entangles them with their enemies. It shouldn't topple or directly confront the enemy. Build up to that.

*Two tribes—one of Trolls, one of Men—meet at the prophesied place—
the mouth of a great cave. Both claim to be Chosen of Death to undertake
this quest. You are members of both tribes. You must strike an accord so
that the tribes do not slaughter each other and fail to complete Death's
quest before it is begun.*

*In our game, a contest between the champions of each tribe was declared.
The winners would go on the quest.*

*Once the contests were decided, the group of Chosen were led into the
caves by Bat God. He led them to a chasm from which they had to leap in
darkness into River God and be swept away. Forte tests to stay conscious
once they hit the freezing, rushing river...and they were away on their quest.*

Burning Beliefs and Relationships

Now that you have setting, situation, characters and action on the table,
the players finalize any relationships their characters have and write
Beliefs.

The action as described by the GM should grab you by the throat. If
your enemies are acting against you, you should be narrowing your
eyes, saying "No way," after hearing the description of their actions.
If you've been sent on a mission, you should be staring at the GM with
conviction, saying "Nothing can stop me!"

• Write a Belief about the action. This Belief must be goal oriented.

• Write a goal-oriented Belief about helping, hindering or learning
about another player's character.

• Write a non-goal-oriented ethical statement about the situation—
you oppose the situation on moral grounds; you'll do the right thing
no matter what; you'll follow your code despite the situation.

• Write a goal-oriented Belief about one of your relationships.

• Write an ethical statement about something you want to explore in
the setting.

Chris wrote the following Beliefs for his Troll who loved Death:

• *I must find a guide to aid me on this journey (or I will get lost).*

• *I must rescue the Lantern and keep it burning.*

• *I love Death. I will prove to her my potency and serve at her side.*

The action of our first session was a direct challenge to his first Belief: to prove his love for Death and win his place on this quest at all cost.

Burning Mechanical Details

There are a handful of mechanical details that the GM and interested players can noodle with to better customize the game for the setting.

- What optional rules from this book are you using? Make sure all of the players are aware that these rules are in play.

- What's your Resources cycle? One month, seasonal, six months, annual?

- If traditional Sorcery is used, what's its idiom? Does it require speech? Gestures?

- If traditional Sorcery is used, what spells are available? Which spells are inappropriate to the game world? If Summoning is used, which orders are in play? If Art Magic, what schools? If Death Art, which creatures are appropriate? If Spirit Binding, which domains?

- If Faith is used, what is the Faith idiom? What are the religions? Is Faith universal or does it only affect believers?

Resources Hacks

Are there special conditions on your world that necessitate characters beginning with certain resources, gear or relationships? If necessary, distribute 5, 10 or 15 resource points to each character so they may begin the game in line with the vision of your world. Don't take this one lightly. It can break the game. Err on the conservative side.

Does your world necessitate certain traits for survival? An apocalyptic wasteland, an undersea kingdom, sky realms, etc.? If so, assign appropriate traits to the characters so that everything fits and makes sense. These traits should mostly be character traits, but low-end die traits are acceptable, too.

Burning Starting Artha

For games with a more heroic feel, start your players with a larger pool of artha—up to three fate and three persona. To encourage your players to really dive into their Beliefs, start them with the bare minimum of one fate and one persona.

Wrapping Up

The questions and bullet points in this chapter should have you primed to develop a functional situation and setting for a Burning Wheel game. This chapter is little more than a sketch. For a more in-depth look at the individual mechanics and how to use them in your games, check out the rather extensive Commentary section. Beliefs, setting and situation all have individual Commentary chapters; building a long-running game is discussed in the Running the Game chapter; collaborating and being a good, supportive player is discussed in the Table Behavior chapter.

The Crucible
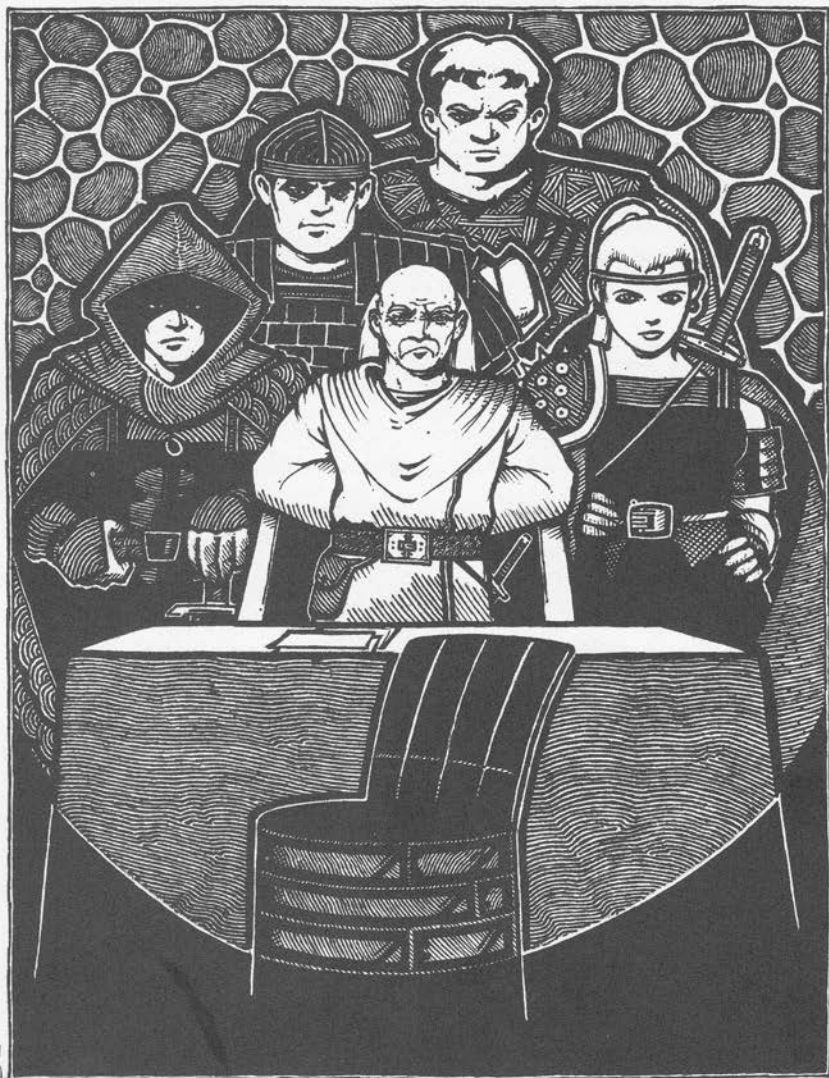
Adventurers Wanted

This section contains lots of characters—not antagonists, but well-rounded starting characters with three or four lifepaths each. You can use them for NPCs, but they are intended to be used as quick-start templates for players.

Grab a Template

Grab one of the templates and jump right in. It's a great way to start a game of Burning Wheel. You can make a few modifications to the starting templates if you feel the need. You shouldn't change more than two of the following categories. If you do, you're probably taking too long for a quick-start character!

Lifepaths—if you're going to change a lifepath, you might as well just burn a fresh character. If you add a lifepath to one of the templates, be sure to recalculate skill roots if the stats change.

Age—you can add or subtract a year or two from the age if you really need to. If you change a lifepath, change the age accordingly.

Stats—you may shift a point between Will and Perception. You may shift a point or two between your physical stats. Modifying stats will change your roots. You'll have to refactor all of your skill exponents accordingly. Not terribly fun!

Attributes—you may not modify attributes unless the stat from which it is derived is changed.

PTGS—PTGS is only modified if Power and/or Forte are changed.

Traits—you may trade out traits for traits of a similar cost.

Skills—you may shuffle a few points between your skills, but you may not lower a skill below its root value.

Circles—you may change the descriptions for affiliations, reputations and relationships but you may not change their values.

Gear—you may swap out gear for items of a similar or lesser cost.

Spells—You may trade spells for items of a similar or lesser cost. You may also change the type of magic—traditional Sorcery to Art Sorcery, for example—if it is appropriate. This is a significant change. Rather than rework the whole character, trade your old spells, gear, orders and such for the new breed of magic that you need.

Weapons—You may change out your weapons for items of similar or lesser resource cost. But note your skills. You don't want to take weapons in which you're untrained unless you really know what you're doing or have a strong reason based on your character concept.

Grab a Campaign

Here are eight quick-start ideas you can use to spark your imagination for a Burning Wheel campaign.

Human Stock

Knight, Brash Young Sorceress, Idealistic Young Priest, Peasant Hunter

The situation: A stalwart duke has given you all a writ, demanding the arrest of the prince for a crime he perpetrated when he came through your village. The heir to the throne is back in the capital city by now, nestled in the court of the most tremendous metropolis humanity has ever built.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about what you want from the prince and what you are willing to do to those who bar your path. Write a Belief about life in the city. Write a Belief about one of your comrades and how you feel about them going with you on this quest.

Things to make up: Name the prince. Name the village. Name the empire and its capital.

Nota Bene: If you want the first arc of this game to be about the journey to the city, and the second arc to be about the city and the heir's crimes, Beliefs will have to be changed accordingly.

Elven Stock

Elven Ranger, Elven Wanderer, Elven Sword Singer, Elven Bard

The situation: The Age of Elves is over and the Age of Humanity has begun. You are among of the last Elves to venture across the continent, making a final pilgrimage through these lands, singing to the forests and giving the humans their last lessons.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about something left by the Elves that the humans do not deserve. Write a Belief about something dangerous: a relic or monster from the past age that should be dealt with before sailing on to the West. Write a Belief about something so beautiful that it could seduce you into staying in these lands, causing you to eschew your immortal existence.

Things to make up: Historical points along the way (ruined citadels and watchtowers, groves of historical importance, the lands where the Evil One blossomed and was struck down, etc.). The name of the western port from which Elves sail.

Dwarven Stock

Dwarven Adventurer, Young Axe-Bearer, Dwarven Rune Caster, Dwarven Tinkerer

The Situation: A two-front war, with Elves to the west and Orcs to the east, is tearing the Dwarven hold apart.

Beliefs: Make a Belief about one of the fronts and why it is the more important of the two. Make a Belief about peace and how it should be achieved. Make a Belief about the prince and how the hold can best be supported.

Things to make up: The most pivotal battles so far. Someone who is held up as a war hero and someone else who is held up as a coward and a traitor by the Dwarves. Where do veterans hang out in the hold? How do those who are against the war protest it?

Orc Stock

Goblin Nightseeker, Orc Warrior, Orc Sorcerer, Orc Head-Taker

The situation: The Orcs are being torn apart by factions: the wolf-riders, their spider minions, and the Servants of Blood and Night. Each wants the hordes to unite under its banner and march against a different enemy. These internal pressures will tear this horde apart.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about how you survived the cruelty and hatred rampant in the wastelands. One of the faction's leaders has done you wrong—write a Belief about how you will get revenge on him. Write a Belief about something you will do for a faction to gain its trust.

Things to make up: What are the philosophies held by each faction? Where is the nearest human outpost, Elven citadel and Dwarven hold? Each faction holds a geographical area in the horde's lands. Describe each area and any monuments there.

Troll Stock

Young Bridge Troll, Legion Battle-Troll, Horrible Monstrous Troll-Mother, Charmingly Oafish Bull Troll

The situation: Orcs have claimed an ancient bridge that was built by the Trolls.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about what you will do to the human knights, Elf sword singers and Dwarf axe-bearers who will undoubtedly bar your paths to the Troll-Bridge Keep. Write a Belief about how you will deal with the Orcs who are squatting in your ancestral birthright, turning this bridge cathedral into a charnel house. Write a Belief about how you feel about other Trolls and the dream of finally having a homeland to call your own.

Things to make up: Names, banners and some background for the humans, Elves and Dwarves whose lands stand between the Trolls and the bridge. Three Orcs in the horde who occupy the bridge. The bridge's origins.

Roden Stock

Albino Spirit-Binder, Roden Cultist, Roden Adventurer, Roden Thief

The situation: Bodoni's Nest in the Field and Savk's Nest Below are gearing up for war with each other. You can either stop the war or profit from the bloodshed.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about your inclinations toward war or peace. Write a Belief about a goal that would be made far easier if war were to break out. Write a Belief about a loved one who might come to harm should war occur.

Things to make up: Name three movers and shakers in each nest; write a Belief for each. Something lurks outside the nests and could threaten them both if they should become weak; name this threat. Draw a crude and ugly map of both nests and the areas where they overlap.

Great Wolf Stock

Dominant Wolf, Legion Wolf, Spirit-Chaser, Lone Wolf

The situation: A dark power threatens the hunting grounds. It devours all prey. Your pups will go hungry unless you confront it. Other packs go mad and attack their own kin. Can you rally them before it's too late?

Beliefs: Write a Belief about another wolf pack. Write a Belief about the source of the dark power—even if you're wrong. Write a Belief about your place in the pack or how you feel about one of your fellow pack members.

Things to make up: Make up three landmarks that mark the borders of the pack's hunting grounds. Decide what the dark power truly is. Assign the dark power voracious minions.

Spider Stock

Wolf Hunter, Hunter-Seeker, Wyrd Weaver, Wandering Star

The situation: You have been delegated to broker a peace between the Army of the Mother Spider and the tribes of this human land. Your forces need rest and sustenance to continue their campaign of conquest. The agreement need only be temporary.

Beliefs: Write a Belief about why humans are so puzzling and difficult to understand. Write a Belief about one "fact" that you are sure you know about humans. Write a Belief about your mission and how you intend to help carry it out.

Things to make up: Write a rough map of the human land's details. There is a human cult that worships a spider goddess. They will see the player characters as harbingers of their fell goddess. Create a few cultists. Decide where they are hidden throughout the human lands. One faction of the humans will capitulate to the spiders' demands; one faction will fight them to the death rather than make a pact with these abominations. Sketch out these two factions.

Mobu City

All stocks, all lifepaths

Mobu City is a Burning Wheel urban setting inspired by China Mieville's Bas Lag books, *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar* and *Iron Council*. This process is meant to take the familiar stocks of Burning Wheel and put them into a new context, one in which the standard fantasy world is turned upside down and the medieval social structures

are breaking apart. The past centuries of conflict and war are boiling to the surface, all contained in one sprawling, cyclopean metropolis built upon a foundation of grief, faith, greed, hate and spite.

This city is not a Tolkien-inspired fantasy campaign. The modern age is upon us and the center of this modern world is Mobu City.

Situations: You are part of a wave of newly arrived refugees from a distant war, just arrived in Mobu City. The others are resorting to selling drugs and their own bodies to survive. Will you follow in their steps? Will you try to preserve the dignity of your people?

You are members of a proud military caste. Your corpulent superiors are selling your banners and heirlooms to pay for their crumbling, decadent estates. Your corps is now disbanded at last. You must enter civilian life. How will you make a living? How will you get by without use of your sword? Or will you turn to murder for pay?

You have just gotten out of prison and must struggle to reclaim what remains of your life in the city's cruel streets.

Beliefs: Your first Belief should be about something in the city that needs to change and what your character is willing to do to make that change happen. Your second Belief must be about someone your character loves or hates in the city. Is it a romantic entanglement, a cross-borough rivalry or loyalty to a troubled friend? Your third Belief must be about doing your job and what you are willing to do to make money.

Stuff to make up: Who's buying the drugs? What are the merchants selling and to whom? What put the players in prison? Who holds power over the city? What does the architecture look like? What are the different neighborhoods, districts and quarters? Which stocks tend to live in each? What does the criminal class look like? Which stocks are newly arrived immigrants and which have been there the longest?

Knight

Lifepaths (Age 25)
Born Noble, Page, Squire, Knight

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B5, MW: B11, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B6, Mi: B8, Se: B9, Tr: B10, Mo: B11

Traits
Mark of Privilege [Dt CB, pg. 155], Sworn Homage [Dt CB, pg. 158], Gloryhound [Dt CB, pg. 277]

Skills
Ancient History B3, Axe B4, Brawling B3, Conspicuous B3, Crossbow B3, Etiquette B3, Knives B3, Lance B3, Oratory B3, Poetry B2, Riding B4, Sword B3, Armor Training, Shield Training, Mounted Combat Training

Circles
Affiliation: 2D affiliation with the peers of the realm
Reputation: 1D A poor knight of no means but great promise
Relationship: father (minor, immediate family)

Gear
Arms (axe, sword, knife and lance), armor (plated mail 5D), riding horse, courser, clothes, shoes, traveling gear, crossbow, dog

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Axe—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long,
   may Great Strike
Sword—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long,
   may Great Strike
Knife—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Lance—I:B5 M:B9 S:B13, Add 2, VA 2, Unwieldy, Longest,
   may Great Strike
Crossbow—I:B4 M:B8 S:B11, Reload 17 act, VA 2
   DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 2D opt, 3D ext, 125 paces

Brash Young Sorceress

Lifepaths (Age 24)

City Born, Neophyte Sorcerer, Sorcerer

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B5, Hes: 5, Hea: B5, MW: B10, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits

Brash [Char], Extremely Respectful of One's Betters [Char], Gifted [Dt CB, pg. 161]

Skills

Arcane Tome-wise B2, Calligraphy B2, Enchanting B3, Read B2, Research B3, Rhetoric B3, Sorcerer-wise B2, Sorcery B4, Symbology B3, Write B2

Circles:

Relationship: aunt, uncle or cousin (minor, other family, hateful/ rival)

Gear

Finery, shoes, Enchanting kit

Spells

Emperor's Hand (Ob 3^, 4 actions), Eldritch Shield (Ob 3^, 9 actions), Wallwalker (Ob 3, 3 actions), Voice Caster (Ob 4, 5 actions)

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Idealistic Young Priest

Lifepaths (Age 20)
Born Noble, Lead to Religious, Temple Acolyte, Priest

Stats
Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 5, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Faith: B3, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Mark of Privilege [Dt CB, pg. 155], Tonsured [Dt CB, pg. 158], Vested [Dt CB, pg. 159], Faithful [Dt CB, pg. 161]

Skills
Doctrine B3, Oratory B3, Read B2, Religious History B3, Ritual B4, Suasion B4, Symbology B2, Temple-wise B2, Write B2

Circles
Affiliation: 2D Affiliation with the temple
Reputation: 1D An idealistic young priest
Relationship: cousin (significant, other family)

Gear
Finery (vestments and courtly attire), riding horse, Writing kit, shoes

Property
Small cottage

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Peasant Hunter

Lifepaths (Age 23)
Born Peasant, Trapper, Woodcutter, Hunter

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B5, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B3, Hes: 6, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Traits
Quiet [Call-on Speed CB, pg. 284], Fortitude [Call-on Forte CB, pg. 277]

Skills
Bow B3, Butchery B2, Cooking B2, Firebuilding B2, Foraging B2, Haggling B3, Hunting B3, Mending B2, Orienteering B3, Paths-wise B2, Stealthy B3, Tracking B3, Trapper B3, Tree Cutting B2, Tree-wise B2

Circles
Relationships: beloved mother (minor, immediate family), brother who moved to city and abandoned mother (minor, immediate family, hateful/rival)

Gear
Hunting bow, barbed arrows, bodkin-tipped arrows, traveling gear, clothes, shoes, Trapper toolkit

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Reload 5 act, VA 1
   DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Elven Ranger

Lifepaths (Age 131)

Born Wilder Elf, Huntsman, Lead to Protector, Bowyer, Ranger

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B6, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x4.5

Attributes

Ref: B5, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B6, MW: B10, Grief: B5, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits

Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt CB, pg. 82], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt CB, pg. 83], Grief [Dt CB, pg. 83], Keen Sight [Dt CB, pg. 83]

Traits

Suspicious [Char]

Skills

Bow B3, Bow-wise B3, Bowcraft B2, Call of the Wild B2, Elven Script B3, Foraging B3, Lyric of Healing B3, Mending B2, Observation B3, Persuasion B2, Rhyme of the Pathfinder B3, Sing B2, Song of Soothing B3, Stealthy B3, Threne of the Chameleon B3, Tracking B3, Sprinting Training

Circles

Affiliation: 1D Gray Mantles of the Elven Fences
Relationship: Half-Elven cousin (minor, other family)

Gear

Hunting bow, traveling gear, Elven shoes, Elven clothes, Song of Soothing skill kit

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Reload 5 act, VA 1
   DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Elven Wanderer

Lifepaths (Age 171)

Citadel Born, Seafarer, Song Singer, Lead to Wilderlands, Wanderer

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B6, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B5, Ste: B5, Hes: 5, Hea: B8, MW: B10, Grief: B2, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits

Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt CB, pg. 82], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt CB, pg. 83], Grief [Dt CB, pg. 83], Keen Sight [Dt CB, pg. 83]

Traits

Familiar Face [Call-on for Circles CB, pg. 276]

Skills

Air of Gates B3, Elven Script B3, Foraging B3, Lament of Stars B3, Persuasion B3, Pilot B3, Rope Chant B3, Sing B2, Song of Paths and Ways B3, Song of Songs B3, Soothing Platitudes B3, Weathersong B3, Lost Places-wise B3

Gear

Elven shoes, Elven traveling gear, Elven clothes, Elven rope, Elven bread

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Elven Sword Singer

Lifepaths (Age 62)

Born Etharch, Lead to Citadel, Soldier-Protector, Lead to Protector, Sword Singer

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B4, Hes: 5, Hea: B5, MW: B10, Grief: B3, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits

Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt CB, pg. 82], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt CB, pg. 83], Grief [Dt CB, pg. 83], Keen Sight [Dt CB, pg. 83]

Traits

Etharchal [Dt CB, pg. 84], Sword of the White Towers [Dt CB, pg. 86], Ambidextrous [Char]

Skills

Alarm B3, Armor Training, Brawling B3, Climbing B2, Desperate Battle-wise B3, Elven Script B2, Knives B3, Mending B2, Oratory B3, Shield Training, Song of the Sword B4, Sword B4

Circles

Affiliation: 1D affiliation with the Elven Etharchs
Relationship: estranged father and mother (minor, family, hateful)

Gear

Elven clothes, Elven shoes, Elven arms, run of the mill chainmail (4D)

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Elven Knife—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA 1, Fast, Shortest
Elven Sword—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long,
   may Great Strike
Elven Mace—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 2, Fast, Short,
   may Great Strike
Elven Great Mace—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 3, Slow, Long,
   two-handed, may Great Strike

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Elven Bard

Lifepaths (Age 130)
Citadel Born, Student, Song Singer, Bard

Stats
Wi: B6, Pe: B6, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B7, Hes: 4, Hea: B7, MW: B10, Grief: B4, Cir: B3, Res: B1

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits
Born Under the Silver Stars [Char], Essence of the Earth [Dt CB, pg. 82], Fair and Statuesque [Char], First Born [Dt CB, pg. 83], Grief [Dt CB, pg. 83], Keen Sight [Dt CB, pg. 83]

Traits
Charismatic [Call-on Oratory CB, pg. 272]

Skills
Ballad of History B3, Battle Song-wise B3, Conspicuous B4, Elven Script B3, Etiquette B3, Flute B3, Lament of Stars B3, Love Song-wise B3, Lyric of Law B3, Oratory B3, Road Song-wise B3, Sing B3, Song of Merriment B4, Song of Songs B4, Song of Soothing B3, Tract of Enmity B3, Verse of Friendship B3

Circles
Affiliation: 1D Singers, Wanderers and Bards
Reputation: 1D Fairest sunrise among the students of her school
Relationship: spurned lover (minor, romantic love, hateful/rival)

Gear
Elven clothes, Elven shoes, Elven traveling gear, Elven flute, Song of Soothing tool kit, Elven mirrorwine

Weapons
Bare Fist— I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Dwarven Adventurer

Lifepaths (Age 68)

Born Artificer, Ardent, Tyro Artificer, Lead to Dwarven Outcast, Adventurer

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 5, Hea: B6, MW: B11, Greed: B6, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3, Li: B6, Mi: B8, Se: B9, Tr: B10, Mo: B11

Common Traits

Accustomed to the Dark [Dt CB, pg. 49], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt CB, pg. 49], Oathsworn [Dt CB, pg. 49], Shaped from Earth and Stone [Dt CB, pg. 50], Stout [Dt CB, pg. 50], Tough [Dt CB, pg. 50]

Traits

Humility [Char], Determined [Char], Adventurer [Dt CB, pg. 51], Driven [C-O, player chooses skill attached to Belief CB, pg. 274], Arrogant [Char]

Skills

Appraisal B3, Black Metal Artifice B3, Brawling B3, Climbing B3, Dwarven Rune Script B2, Firebuilding B2, Haggling B3, Herbalism B3, Knives B2, Lockpick B3, Obscure History B2, Persuasion B2, Survival B2, Sword B3, Symbology B3, Lost Dwarven Treasure-wise B2

Circles

Affiliation: 1D affiliation with loose cadre of Dwarven thieves, gamblers and scoundrels
Relationship: angry artificer master (minor, hateful/rival)

Gear

Dwarven Arms, Dwarven Blackmetal Artifice kit, Dwarven clothes, sturdy shoes, traveling gear, Dwarven-made plated leather (3D, ignores first armor damage), Dwarven Climbing kit, Shoddy Lockpicks kit
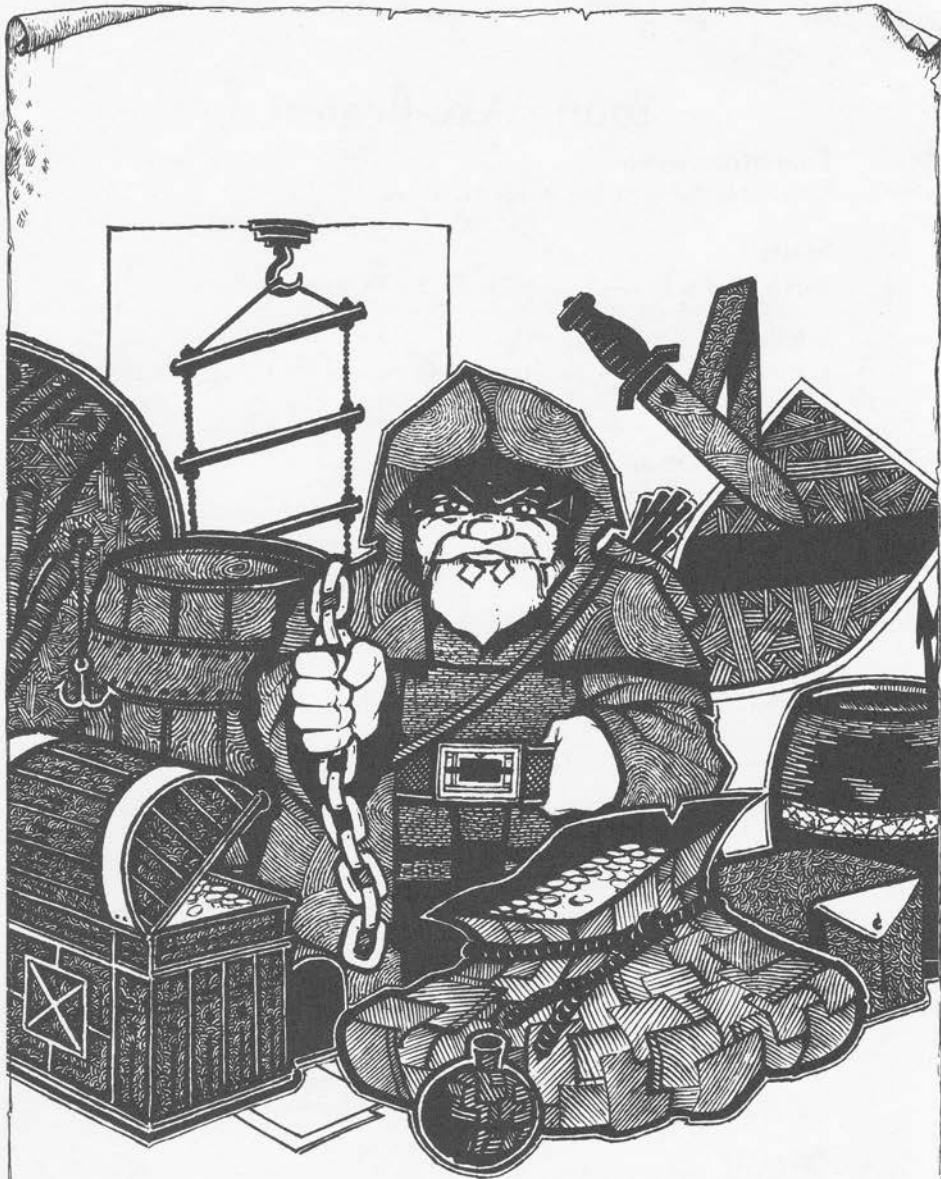
Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Dwarven Sword I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Long,
    may Great Strike, *+1D advantage to Sword skill*
Dwarven Knives I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest,
    +1D advantage to Knives skill

Young Axe-Bearer

Lifepaths (Age 66)

Born Noble, Noble Ardent, Noble Axe-Bearer

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B5, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B6, MW: B11, Greed: B3, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Common Traits

Accustomed to the Dark [Dt CB, pg. 49], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt CB, pg. 49], Oathsworn [Dt CB, pg. 49], Shaped from Earth and Stone [Dt CB, pg. 50], Stout [Dt CB, pg. 50], Tough [Dt CB, pg. 50]

Traits

Humility in the Face of Your Betters [Char], Inspirational [Call-on for Oratory CB, pg. 278]

Skills

Armor Training, Axe B4, Brawling B2, Dwarven Lineage-wise B2, Dwarven Rune Script B3, Oratory B3, Shield Training, Sing B2, Soothing Platitudes B3, Throwing B3

Circles

Relationship: widowed mother (minor, immediate family)

Gear

Sturdy shoes, Dwarven clothes, Dwarven finery, Dwarven-made chainmail (4D, ignores first armor damage), Dwarven arms

Property

Small house in mother's hold
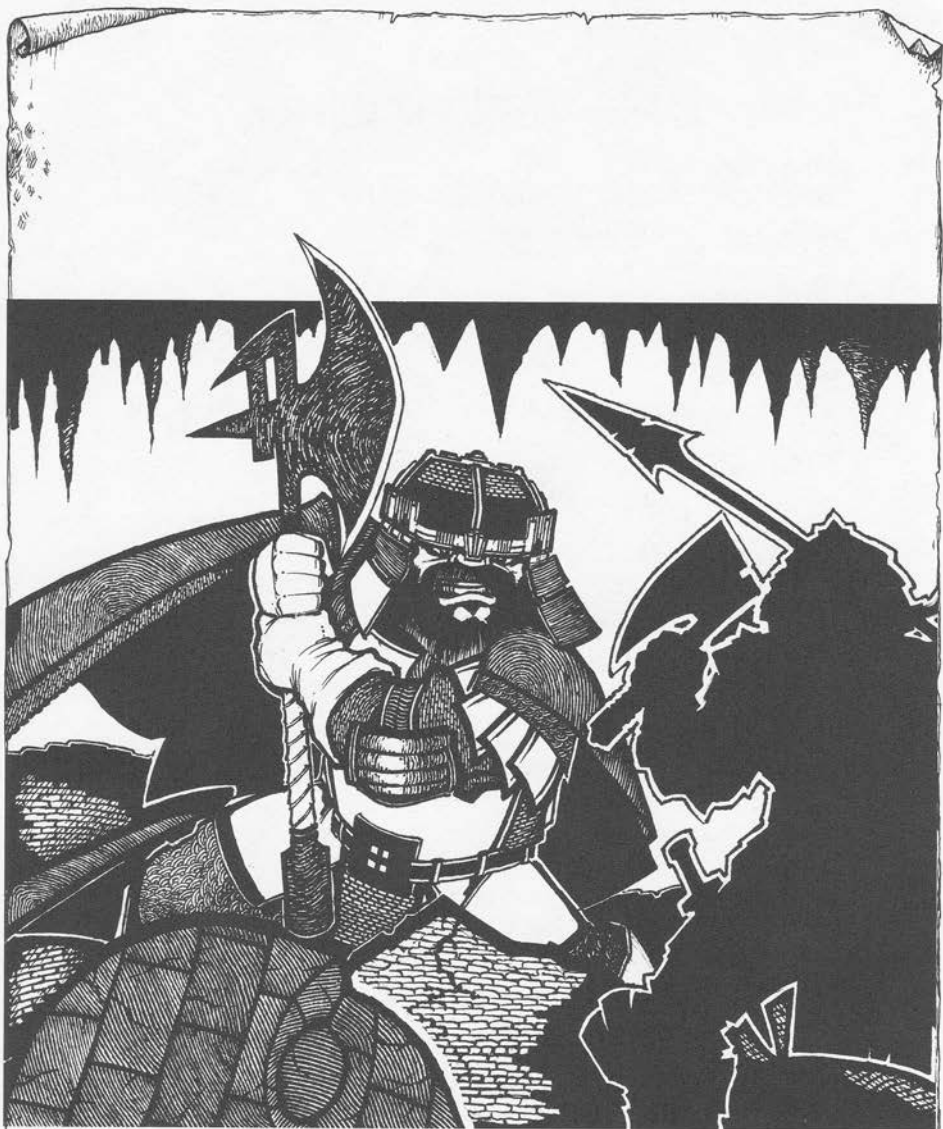
Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7 Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Light Axe I:B4 M:B8 S:B12 Add 2, VA 2, Slow, Long,
    may Great Strike, +1D advantage to Axe skill
Sweet Axe—I:B5 M:B9 S:B13 Add 2, VA 2, Slow, Long,
    two Handed, may Great Strike, +1D advantage to Axe skill
Dwarven Dagger—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9 Add 1, VA 1, Fast, Shortest,
    +1D advantage to Knives skill
Shield—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10 Add 2, VA –, Slow, Shortest

Dwarven Rune Caster

Lifepaths (Age 139)

Born Artificer, Lead to Dwarven Clansman, Delver, Longbeard, Lead to Dwarven Outcast, Rune Caster

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B6, Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B4, Hes: 5, Hea: B5, MW: B11, Greed: B1, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B8 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Common Traits

Accustomed to the Dark [Dt CB, pg. 49], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt CB, pg. 49], Oathsworn [Dt CB, pg. 49], Shaped from Earth and Stone [Dt CB, pg. 50], Stout [Dt CB, pg. 50], Tough [Dt CB, pg. 50]

Traits

Deep Sense [Dt CB, pg. 52], Folksy Wisdom [Char], Slave to Fate [Char], Oathswearer [Dt CB, pg. 53], Scavenger [Call-on for Scavenging CB, pg. 285]

Skills

Artificer-wise B3, Coarse Persuasion B4, Dwarven Noble-wise B3, Dwarven Rune Script B3, Excavation B3, Foraging B3, Guilder-wise B3, Host-wise B3, Rune Casting B4, Scavenging B3, Tunnel-wise B3, Ugly Truth B4

Circles

Affiliation: 1D sons of the Longbeard

Reputation: 1D Longbeard driven mad by the runes

Relationships: estranged artificer father (significant, immediate family), sympathetic cousin (minor, other family)

Gear

Dwarven rune stones, Dwarven clothes, sturdy shoes, keg o' nog

Weapons

Bare Fist— I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Dwarven Tinkerer

Lifepaths (Age 87)
Born Guilder, Wordbearer, Hawker, Lead to Dwarven Clansman, Tinkerer

Stats
Wi: B6, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B5, Hes: 4, Hea: B6, MW: B11, Greed: B3, Cir: B3, Res: B1

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B6 Mi: B8 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Common Traits
Accustomed to the Dark [Dt CB, pg. 49], Bearded [Char], Greed [Dt CB, pg. 49], Oathsworn [Dt CB, pg. 49], Shaped from Earth and Stone [Dt CB, pg. 50], Stout [Dt CB, pg. 50], Tough [Dt CB, pg. 50]

Traits
Quirky [Char], Curious [Char], Quickstep [Dt CB, pg. 53], Tinkerer [Call-on for Mending and Blackmetal Artifice CB, pg. 54]

Skills
Brawling B2, Clan History B2, Conspicuous B4, Haggling B4, Hold-wise B2, Inconspicuous B3, Mending B3, Oratory B4, Rumor-wise B3, Sleight of Hand B3, Streetwise B2, Stuff-wise B3

Circles
Affiliation: 1D Dwarven traders' society
Reputation: 1D An amiable, clever tinkerer
Relationship: brother, a trader (minor, immediate family)

Gear
Shoddy arms, Dwarven Mending tools, pack mule, Dwarven clothes, sturdy shoes

Weapons
Bare Fist— I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Cudgel— I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Short
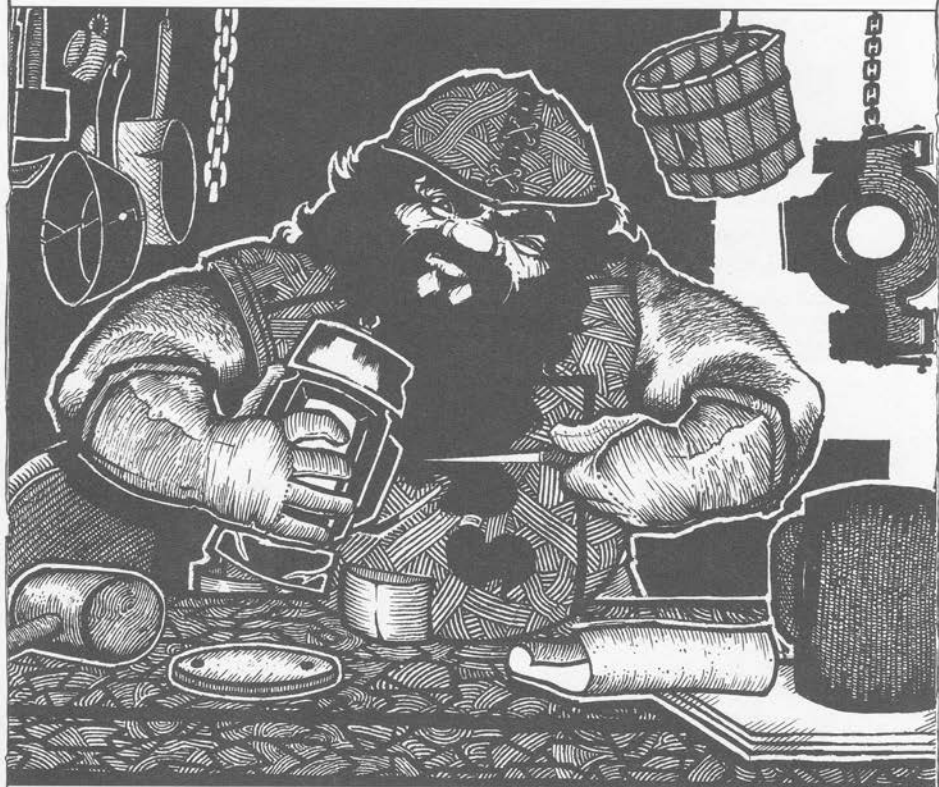
Goblin Nightseeker

Lifepaths (Age 18)
Born Chattel, Ravager, Lead to Black Legion, Nightseeker

Stats
Wi: B2, Pe: B4, Po: B3, Fo: B3, Ag: B4, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B5, Hes: 8/6, Hea: B1, MW: B9, Hatred: B5, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B2 Li: B4 Mi: B6 Se: B7 Tr: B8 Mo: B9

Common Traits
Breeder [Char], Cannibal [Char], Cold Black Blood [Dt CB, pg. 200], Fanged and Clawed [Dt CB, pg. 200], Loathsome and Twisted [Dt CB, pg. 201], Lynx-Eyed Like Burning Coals [Dt CB, pg. 201], Vile Language [Char]

Traits
Pack Hunter [Dt CB, pg. 204], Tasting the Lash [Dt CB, pg. 205], Alert [Dt CB, pg. 269]

Skills
Bow B3, Brawling B3, Climbing B2, Garrote B2, Orienteering B2, Stealthy B3, Tracking B3

Circles
Relationship: black wolf (minor)

Gear
Hunting bow, hides, rags, traveling gear

Weapons
Claws and Fangs—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10 Reload 5 act VA 1
   DoF: I:1-2, M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Orc Warrior

Lifepaths (Age 19)
Born Chattel, Lead to Black Legion, Goblin, Legioner, Hatred-Bearer

Stats
Wi: B2, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B5, Hes: 8/6, Hea: B2, MW: B10, Hatred: B5, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits
Breeder [Char], Cannibal [Char], Cold Black Blood [Dt CB, pg. 200], Fanged and Clawed [Dt CB, pg. 200], Loathsome and Twisted [Dt CB, pg. 201], Lynx-Eyed Like Burning Coals [Dt CB, pg. 201], Vile Language [Char]

Traits
Tasting the Lash [Dt CB, pg. 205], Psychotic [Char], Resigned to Death [C-O for Steel CB, pg. 285], Charging Blindly [Dt CB, pg. 202]

Skills
Axe B3, Black Legion-wise B3, Brawling B3, Conspicuous B1, Foraging B2, Shield Training, Spear B2

Circles
Relationship: Bears the Lash (minor, hateful/rival)

Gear
Black iron helmet, black iron shield, axe, spear, plated leather armor, rags, hobnailed boots

Weapons
Claws and Fangs—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Black Iron Shield—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Short
Spear—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 1, Fast, Longest,
    two-handed, may Great Strike
Axe—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long,
    may Great Strike

Orc Sorcerer

Lifepaths (Age 31)

Born Great, The Rites, Lead to Servant of the Dark Blood, Slave to the Dark, Drinker of the Dark, Knower of Secrets.

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B4, Po: B3, Fo: B6, Ag: B4, Sp: B3, Speed Multi.: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B3, Ste: B6, Hes: 5/1, Hea: B3, MW: B10, Hatred: B7, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B4, Li: B6, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits

Breeder [Char], Cannibal [Char], Cold Black Blood [Dt CB, pg. 200], Fanged and Clawed [Dt CB, pg. 200], Loathsome and Twisted [Dt CB, pg. 201], Lynx-Eyed Like Burning Coals [Dt CB, pg. 201], Vile Language [Char]

Traits

Born to Rule Them All [Dt CB, pg. 202], Life Is Death [Dt CB, pg. 203], Fearful Respect of the Servants [Char], Stark Madness [Char], Blasphemous Hatred [Dt CB, pg. 202], Fortitude [C-O for Forte CB, pg. 277], Compulsive Liar [Char], Missing Digits [Char]

Skills

Black Wolf-wise B2, Brawling B2, Dark Deception-wise B2, Doctrine Of Night's Blood B3, Intimidation B3, Knives B2, Rituals of Night B4, Servant-wise B2, Torture B2, Vile Poisoner B3, Void Embrace

Circles

Affiliation: 1D affiliation with the Great and Black
Reputation: 1D infamous reputation among chattel as a torturer
Relationship: Slave to the Dark (servant) (minor, hateful/rival)

Gear

Black robes, leather apron

Spells
Black Rust (Ob 2^), His Creeping Hand (Ob 4), *Presence* Area of Effect
Facet (+2 Ob)

Weapons
Claws and Fangs— I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Orc Head-Taker

Lifepaths (Age 26)
Born Great, The Rites, Lead to Black Legion, Bears the Lash, Head-Taker

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B3, Speed Multi.: x4.5

Attributes
Ref: B3, Ste: B7, Hes: 6/3, Hea: B3, MW: B10, Hatred: B8, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits
Breeder [Char], Cannibal [Char], Cold Black Blood [Dt CB, pg. 200], Fanged and Clawed [Dt CB, pg. 200], Loathsome and Twisted [Dt CB, pg. 201], Lynx-Eyed Like Burning Coals [Dt CB, pg. 201], Vile Language [Char]

Traits
Born to Rule Them All [Dt CB, pg. 202], Life Is Death [Dt CB, pg. 203], Where There's a Whip, There's a Way [Dt CB, pg. 205], Unrelenting Savagery [Dt CB, pg. 205], Fleet of Foot [C-O for Speed CB, pg. 276]

Skills
Axe B4, Betrayal-wise B2, Brawling B4, Brutal Intimidation B4, Command B3, Cowardly Goblin-wise B2, Craven Men-wise B2, Intimidation B2, Sprinting Training, Torture B2

Circles
Affiliation: 1D Affiliation with the Great and Black
Reputation: 1D Infamous reputation as a savvy leader in the Legion
Relationship: brother, a follower (hateful, minor)

Gear
Rags, black iron helmet, plated leather armor, spoils of war (superior quality arms), whip, hobnailed boots

Weapons:

Claws and Fangs—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Sweet Axe—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 2, Slow, Long,
   two-handed, may Great Strike

Dagger—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA 1, Slow, Shortest

Sword—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long

Young Bridge Troll

Lifepaths (Age 22)

Born Wild, Bogey, Bridge-Haunt

Stats

Wi: B2, Pe: B2, Po: B7, Fo: B7, Ag: B4, Sp: B3, Speed Multi: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B3, Ste: B5, Hes: 8, Hea: B5, MW: B13, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B4, Li: B8, Mi: B10, Se: B11, Tr: B12, Mo: B13

Common Traits

Clawed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Eyed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Massive Stature [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Stone's Age [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Tough [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Troll Skin [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Voracious Carnivore [Char]

Traits

Scaly Skin [Dt MoB, pg. 197], Stubborn [Char], Webbed Hands and Feet [Dt MoB, pg. 197]

Skills

Brawling B3, Stealthy B1, Intimidation B2, Bridge-wise B1, Forest-wise B1

Gear

Reeking, muddy sack; pile of mossy rocks (for sitting on); pile of smooth rocks (to weigh down the sack)

Weapons:

Bare Fist—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Fast, Short

Claws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA X, –, –

for Damaging Locks only; no VA, no weapon speed, no length

Fangs—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Short

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Legion Battle-Troll

Lifepaths (Age 28)
Born to Dark Caves, Lead to the Pit, Ox, Battering Ram, Mattock

Stats
Wi: B2, Pe: B2, Po: B7, Fo: B6, Ag: B5, Sp: B7, Speed Multi: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 8, Hea: B4, MW: B13, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B4, Li: B7, Mi: B10, Se: B11, Tr: B12, Mo: B13

Common Traits
Clawed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Eyed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Massive Stature [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Stone's Age [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Tough [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Troll Skin [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Voracious Carnivore [Char]

Traits
Mind-Numbing Work [Char], Heaving [C-O for Power MoB, pg. 191], Brutal [C-O for Intimidation MoB, pg. 320]

Skills
Brawling B2, Hammer B5, Throwing B3, Knocking Things Down-wise B1, Skulls of My Enemies-wise B1

Gear
Rags, mattock (aka "Mine!")

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Fast, Short
Claws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA X, –, –
   for Damaging Locks only; no VA, no weapon speed, no length
Fangs—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Short
Mattock—I:B6 M:B11 S: B16 Add 2 VA 3 , Slow, Long,
   two-handed, may Great Strike

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Horrible Monstrous Trollmother

Lifepaths (Age 51)

Born to Dark Caves, Dweller, Mine-Haunt, Dread Stone

Stats

Wi: B2, Pe: B3, Po: B7, Fo: B8, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi: x3.5

Attributes

Ref: B3, Ste: B6, Hes: 8, Hea: B5, MW: B14, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B4, Li: B8, Mi: B11, Se: B12, Tr: B13, Mo: B14

Common Traits

Clawed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Eyed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Massive Stature [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Stone's Age [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Tough [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Troll Skin [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Voracious Carnivore [Char]

Traits

Hook Hand [Dt MoB, pg. 196], Horns [Dt MoB, pg. 196], Vestigial Wings [Char], Malformed [Char], Cunning [Char]

Skills

Climbing B2, Mine-wise B1, Camouflage B2, Rock-wise B1, Brawling B3, Riddle-wise B1, Ungrateful Sons-wise B1

Circles

Relationships: ungrateful son #1, ungrateful son #2

Gear

Dusty rags

Property

Troll hole

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Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 1, Fast, Short

Claws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA X, –, –
for Damaging Locks only; no VA, no weapon speed, no length

Fangs—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Short

Hook Hand—I:B5 M:B9 S:B13, Add 2, VA 2, Slow, Short,
may Great Strike

Horns—I:B5 M:B9 S:B13, Add 2, VA 3, Unwieldy, Short,
only used as part of the Charge action

Charmingly Oafish Bull Troll

Lifepaths (Age 72)
Born Wild, Manhunter, Brute, Bull

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B2, Po: B6, Fo: B6, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi: x3.5

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste : B5, Hes: 6, Hea: B5, MW: B12, Cir: B2 , Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B4, Li: B7, Mi: B9, Se: B10, Tr: B11, Mo: B12

Common Traits
Clawed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Night Eyed [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Massive Stature [Dt MoB, pg. 189], Stone's Age [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Tough [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Troll Skin [Dt MoB, pg. 190], Voracious Carnivore [Char]

Traits
Boor [Char], Brute [Dt MoB, pg. 194], Oafishly Charming [Char], Troll Savant [Char], A Thing for Blondes [Char]

Skills
Man-wise B1, Intimidation B2, Torture B1, Brawling B3, Extortion B2, Flax-Haired Maiden-wise B1, Seduction B2

Gear
Surprisingly neat rags (tiny hat included), improbably shiny shoes, extra-thick leather sack, flax-haired-maiden-sized iron footlocker

Property
Troll cave (that smells better than you might expect, but worse than you might wish)

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Short
Claws—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA X, –, –
  for Damaging Locks only; no VA, no weapon speed, no length
Fangs—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Short

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Albino Spirit-Binder

Lifepaths (Age 29)
Born to the Fields, Brother, Carnivore, Albino

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B6 (7), Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B7, Hes 6/7, Hea: B5, MW: B10, Cir B2, Res B0

PTGS
Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B8 Tr: B9 Mo: B10

Common Traits
Aecer's Likeness [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte MoB, pg. 117], Communal [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Enlarged Incisors [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Quick-Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Tail [Char], Large Ears [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Pack Rat [Char], Skittish [Dt MoB, pg. 118]

Traits
Albino [Char], Gnawing Hunger [Char], Humble [Char], Vegetarian [Char], Second Sight [Dt MaB, pg. 230]

Skills
Astrology B4, Aura Reading B2, Bow B4, Circination B3, Doctrine B3, Forest-wise B4, Hunting B4, Read B4, Spear B3, Spirit-Binding B4, Tracking B4, Write B3

Circles
Affiliation: +1D with Bodoni's Nest in the Field
Relationship: sister (family, hateful)

Domains
1D Sworn to the Forest, 1D Sworn to the Below, Bound to the Field, Bound to the Hillocks, Bound to the Riverbeds

Spirit Marks
1D Touched by the Ghosts of Trees

Gear
Bow, clothes, shoes, traveling gear, Circination kit

Weapons

Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Enlarged Incisors—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Spear—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 1, Fast, Longest
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10 Reload 5 act, VA 1
 DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Roden Cultist

Lifepaths (Age 20)

Born Below, Initiate, Cultist, Shadow

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B5 (6), Po: B3, Fo: B3, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes

Ref: B5, Ste B4, Hes: 6/7, Hea: B3, MW: B9, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B2 Li: B4 Mi: B6 Se: B7 Tr: B8 Mo: B9

Common Traits

Aecer's Likeness [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte MoB, pg. 117], Communal [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Enlarged Incisors [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Quick-Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Tail [Char], Large Ears [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Pack Rat [Char], Skittish [Dt MoB, pg. 118]

Traits

Tunnel Vision [Dt MoB, pg. 121], Broken [Dt MoB, pg. 119], Zealot [Dt CB, pg. 160], Cautious [Char], Clawed [Dt MoB, pg. 122]

Skills

Brawling B3, Doctrine B3, Inconspicuous B3, Observation B3, Rhetoric B4, Society-wise B4, Stealthy B3, Tail-wise B2

Circles

Affiliation: +1D with Savk's Nest Below
Relationship: Zidst the Perverter (sister)

Gear

Cudgel, knives, clothes, traveling gear

Property

Rats' nest: hideout for one Roden

Weapons

Claws—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Enlarged Incisors— I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Cudgel— I:B3 M:B5 S: B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Long
Knives— I:B2 M:B4 S: B6, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Roden Adventurer

Lifepaths (Age 23)
Born to the Fields, Apprentice, Lead to Exile, Bushwhacker, Corsair

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (5), Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B5, Hes: 6/7, Hea: B5, MW: B11, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B6, Mi: B8, Se: B9, Tr: B10, Mo: B11

Common Traits
Aecer's Likeness [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte MoB, pg. 117], Communal [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Enlarged Incisors [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Quick-Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Tail [Char], Large Ears [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Pack Rat [Char], Skittish [Dt MoB, pg. 118]

Traits
Desperate [Char], Gopher [Char], Ruthless [Char], Sea Legs [C-O for Speed CB, pg. 285], Vegetarian [Char], Worldly [Char]

Skills
Ambush-wise B2, Axe B4, Bow B3, Carpenter B3, Intimidation B3, Knots B3, Mending B2, Navigation B3, Rigging B3, Ship-wise B3

Circles
Affiliation: +1D with Bodoni's Nest in the Field
Relationship: brother (family, hateful)

Gear
Knives, axe, bow, Carpentry toolkit, clothes, wooden shield (2D), traveling gear, honeyed oatcakes

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Enlarged Incisors— I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Knives— I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Light Axe— I:B5 M:B7 S:B9, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Long
Shield Bash—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Short
Hunting Bow—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10 Reload 5 act, VA 1
   DoF: I:1-2 , M:3-4, S:5-6, 1D opt, 2D ext, 100 paces

Roden Thief

Lifepaths (Age 20)
Born Below, Scratcher, The Gauntlet, Sneak-Thief

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (5), Po: B4, Fo: B3, Ag B4, Sp: B6, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B4, Hes: 6/7, Hea: B3, MW: B9, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B2, Li: B4, Mi: B6, Se: B7, Tr: B8, Mo: B9

Common Traits
Aecer's Likeness [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte MoB, pg. 117], Communal [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Enlarged Incisors [Dt MoB, pg. 117], Quick-Blooded [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Tail [Char], Large Ears [Dt MoB, pg. 118], Pack Rat [Char], Skittish [Dt MoB, pg. 118]

Traits
Abused [Char], Cool-Headed [Dt CB, pg. 273], Deep Sense [Dt CB, pg. 52], Hacking Cough [Char], Skulking [Char], Soft Step [C-O for Climbing and Stealthy MoB, pg. 121]

Skills
Brawling B3, Knives B3, Lockpick B4, Mending B3, Persuasion B3, Roof-wise B2, Stealthy B4, Tunneling B3, Tunnel-wise B3

Circles
Affiliation: +1D with Savk's Nest Below

Gear
Lockpick toolkit, knives

Weapons
Bare Fist—I:B2 M:B4 S:B6, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Enlarged Incisors— I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Fast, Shortest
Knives— I:B3 M:B5 S:B7, Add 1, VA –, Fast, Shortest

Dominant Wolf

Lifepaths (Age 4)

Born to the Pack, Yearling, Hunter, Dominant

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (6), Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x7

Attributes

Ref: B5, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B4, MW: B11, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Common Traits

Crushing Jaws [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Deep Fur [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Great Lupine Form (Dt MoB, pg. 213], Lupine Intellect [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Long-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Eyes [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Snout [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Woodland Ear [Dt MoB, pg. 214]

Traits

Submissive [Dt MoB, pg. 216], Dominant [Dt MoB, pg. 214], Formidable Bark [Dt MoB, pg. 218], Arrogant (Char)

Skills

Howling B3, Pack Etiquette B4, Hunting B3(5), Intimidation B4, Brawling B3, Stealth B3, Tracking B3(5), Scent-wise B3, Command B3, Nursing B3, Foolish Young Pup-wise B3

Circles

Affiliation: 2D with Red Pelt pack

Reputation: 1D as dominant female

Relationships: wolf pup, Nips at Heels (minor, family); partner, Jagged Tooth (minor, love)

Property

Barren lands

Weapons

Crushing Jaws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 2, Fast, Short,
  can perform Lock and Strike in one action

Legion Wolf

Lifepaths (Age 5)

Born to the Legion, Shadow-Chaser, Howling Beast, Black Destroyer

Stats

Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (6), Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x7

Attributes

Ref: B5, Ste: B6, Hes: 6/5, Hea: B4, MW: B11, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3 Li: B5 Mi: B7 Se: B9 Tr: B10 Mo: B11

Common Traits

Crushing Jaws [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Deep Fur [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Great Lupine Form (Dt MoB, pg. 213], Lupine Intellect [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Long-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Eyes [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Snout [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Woodland Ear [Dt MoB, pg. 214]

Traits

Vile Language [Char], Submissive [Dt MoB, pg. 216], Howl of Doom [Dt MoB, pg. 215], Intense Hatred [Char], Cold Blooded [Dt CB, pg. 273]

Skills

Howling B3, Stealth B4, Rider Training, Mounted Combat, Savage Attack B4, Intimidation B4, Tracking B3(5), Trail-wise B3, Scavenging B3, Bone-wise B3

Circles

Relationship: He Who Sits Astride the Howling Black Beast

Gear

Plated leather chanfron (3D head), leather cuissart (1D forelegs)

Weapons

Crushing Jaws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 2, Fast, Short,
  can perform Lock and Strike in one action

Spirit Chaser

Lifepaths (Age 4)
Born to the Pack, Yearling, Lone Wolf, Spirit-Chaser

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4 (6), Po: B5, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x7

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B5, Hes: 6, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits
Crushing Jaws [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Deep Fur [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Great Lupine Form (Dt MoB, pg. 213], Lupine Intellect [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Long-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Eyes [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Snout [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Woodland Ear [Dt MoB, pg. 214]

Traits
Chosen One [Dt MoB, pg. 218], Wanderlust [Char], Grim [Char]

Skills
Howling B3, Pack Etiquette B3, Stealthy B3, Brawling B3, Hunting B3(5), Tracking B3(5), Territory-wise B3, Primal Bark B3, The Way of the First Hunter B3, Winds-wise B3

Circles
Affiliation: 1D with Spirit Hunters
Reputation: 1D as cunning hunter
Relationship: uncle (minor, family, hateful)

Weapons
Crushing Jaws—I:B4 M:B8 S:B12, Add 2, VA 2, Fast, Short,
   can perform Lock and Strike in one action

Lone Wolf

Lifepaths (Age 3.5)
Born to the Pack, Last Wolf, Lone Wolf, Scavenger

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B5 (7), Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x7

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B4, Hes: 6, Hea: B3, MW B10, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits
Crushing Jaws [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Deep Fur [Dt MoB, pg. 212], Great Lupine Form [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Lupine Intellect [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Long-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Eyes [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Wolf's Snout [Dt MoB, pg. 213], Woodland Ear [Dt MoB, pg. 214]

Traits
Submissive [Dt MoB, pg. 216], Stained [Dt MoB, pg. 216], Wanderlust [Char], Scavenger [C-O for Scavenge and Foraging MoB, pg. 215], Mangy Coat [Char], Raven Friend [Dt MoB, pg. 218]

Skills
Howling B3, Begging B3, Pack Etiquette B3, Scavenger B3, Territory-wise B3, Pack-wise B2, Scent-wise B3, Carrion-wise B3

Circles
Affiliation: 1D with Pine River pack, 1D with Conspiracy of Ravens
Reputation: 1D as Last Wolf
Relationships: raven (minor); sire (minor, family, hateful)

Weapons
Crushing Jaws—I:B4 M:B7 S:B10, Add 2, VA 2, Fast, Short,
   can perform Lock and Strike in one action
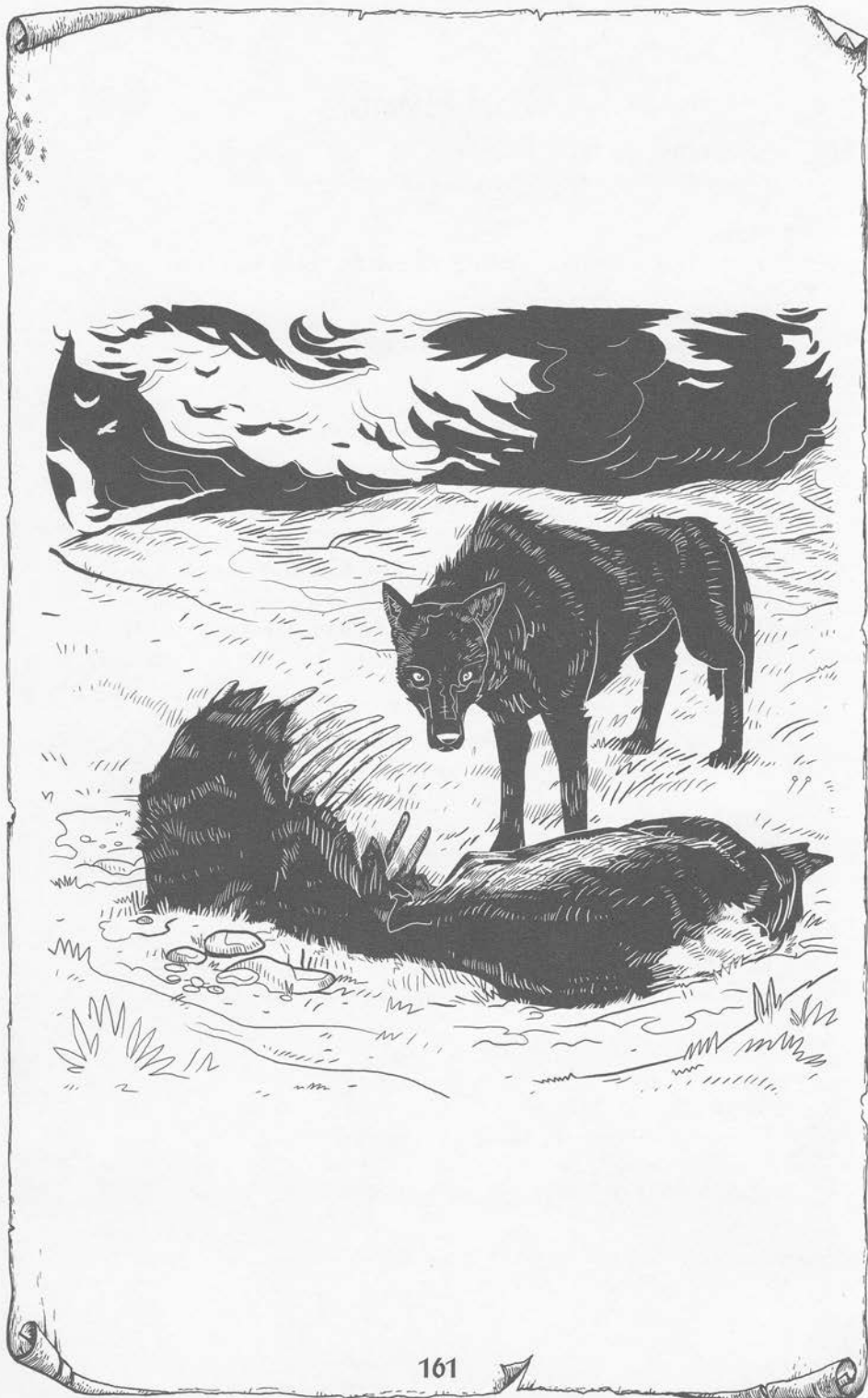
Wolf Hunter

Lifepaths (Age 18)
Burrow Hatched, Clinger, Stalker, Wolf

Stats
Wi: B3, Pe: B5, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B5, Speed Multi.: x4.

Attributes
Ref: B5, Ste: B6, Hes: 7, Hea: B4, MW B10, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits
Alien [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Arachnid Body [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Eight-Eyed [Char], Eight-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Exoskeleton [Char], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Keen Sense of Balance [C-O for Climbing, Speed, and Forte when climbing MoB, pg. 148], Low Speech [Char], Silk Spinner [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Spider Sense [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Virulent Venom [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Wall-Crawler [Dt MoB, pg. 149]

Traits
Middling Stature [Char], Memories of Mother [Char], Bladed Tarsi [Dt MoB, pg. 153], Mother Killer [Dt MoB, pg. 155]

Skills
Prey-wise B4, Spider-wise B2, Snares B2, Stealthy B2, Brawling B3, Observation B2, Hunting B3, Burrowing B2, Silken Construct B3, Intimidation B1, Orienteering B1, Deadfall-wise B2

Circles
Reputation: +1D Mother Killer (infamous), +1D Knows the Best Trails to Hunt
Relationship: offspring (family, hateful)

Weapons
Fangs—I:B2 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Shortest,
  must be on the Inside
Tarsi—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA 1, Slow, Short
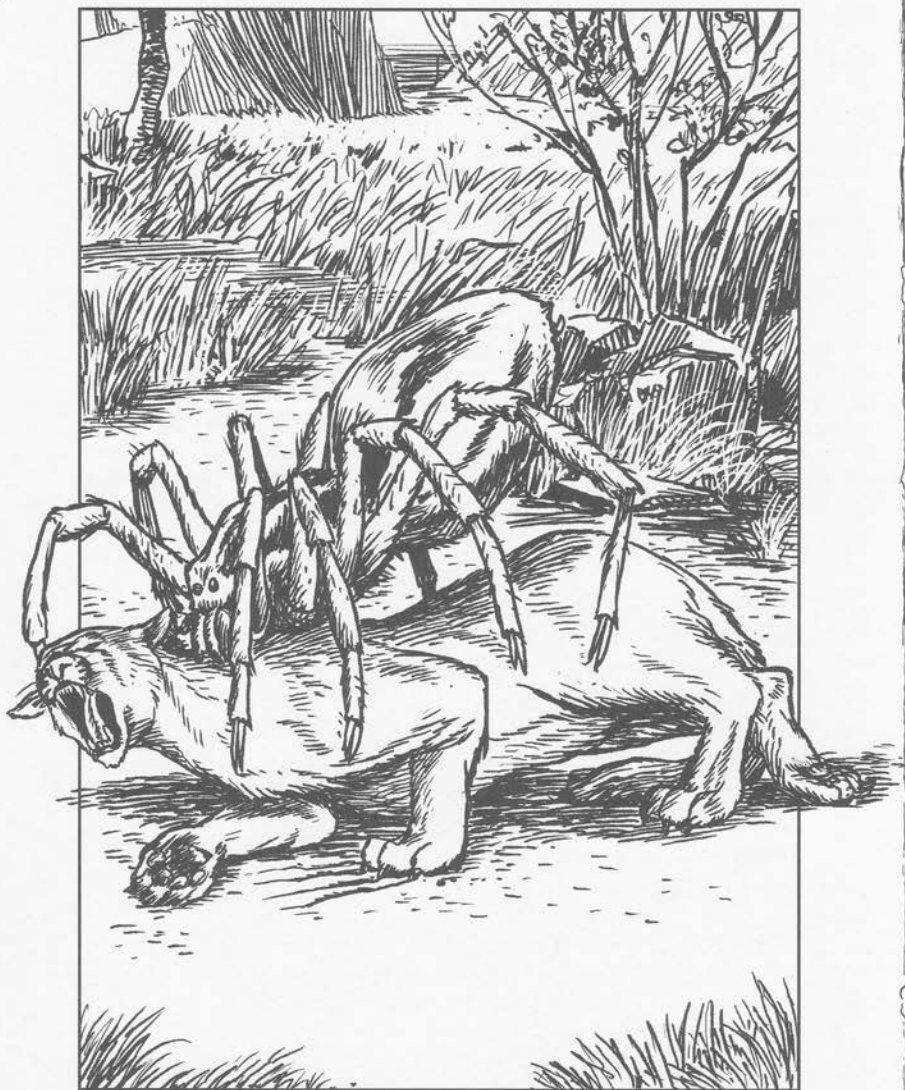
Hunter-Seeker

Lifepaths (Age 17)
Hatched to the Sea, Skimmer, Lead to the Great Undernest, Lurker, Hunter-Seeker

Stats
Wi: B4, Pe: B4, Po: B5, Fo: B5, Ag: B4, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes
Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 6, Hea: B5, MW B11, Cir: B2, Res: B0

PTGS
Su: B3, Li: B6, Mi: B8, Se: B9, Tr: B10, Mo: B11

Common Traits
Alien [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Arachnid Body [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Eight-Eyed [Char], Eight-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Exoskeleton [Char], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Keen Sense of Balance [C-O for Climbing, Speed, and Forte when climbing MoB, pg. 148], Low Speech [Char], Silk Spinner [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Spider Sense [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Virulent Venom [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Wall-Crawler [Dt MoB, pg. 149]

Traits
Diminutive Stature [Char], Coat of Fur [C-O for Health and Forte MoB, pg. 154], Salt Burned [Char], Single-Minded [C-O for Steel MoB, pg. 151], Lunatic [Dt CB, pg. 281]

Skills
Water-wise B2, Sea-wise B2, Water-Walking B3, Bubble-Breather, Snares B2, Camouflage B2, Male-wise B2, Spider-wise B2, Tracking B4, Brawling B3, Intimidation B2, Interrogation B2, Tide-wise B2

Circles
Reputation: +1D Loyal to Mother of the Broken Sea
Relationship: sibling (minor, family, rival)

Weapons
Fangs—I:B3 M:B6 S:B9, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Shortest,
   must be on the Inside

Wyrd Weaver

Lifepaths (Age 19)

Hatched in Air, Webling, Lead to Web-Wyrd, Fate-Spinner, Wyrd Weaver

Stats

Wi: B5, Pe: B3, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B5, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B7, Hes: 5, Hea: B5, MW B10, Circles B2, Res B0

PTGS

Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits

Alien [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Arachnid Body [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Eight-Eyed [Char], Eight-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Exoskeleton [Char], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Keen Sense of Balance [C-O for Climbing, Speed, and Forte when climbing MoB, pg. 148], Low Speech [Char], Silk Spinner [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Spider Sense [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Virulent Venom [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Wall-Crawler [Dt MoB, pg. 149]

Traits

Diminutive Stature [Char], Strand-Runner [Dt MoB, pg. 152], High Speech [Char], Scheming [Dt CB, pg. 285], Fleet of Foot [C-O for Speed CB, pg. 276]

Skills

Climbing B3(5), Silk Sailing B2, Weaving B3, Wyrding Way B2, Wyrd-Weaving , Lost Child-wise B1

Circles

Reputation: +1D Curious about forbidden knowledge
Relationship: master of eight (minor)

Spells

Galvanizing Web (Ob 3), Wyrd Sail (Ob 4^)

Weapons

Fangs—I:B2 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Shortest,
    must be on the Inside
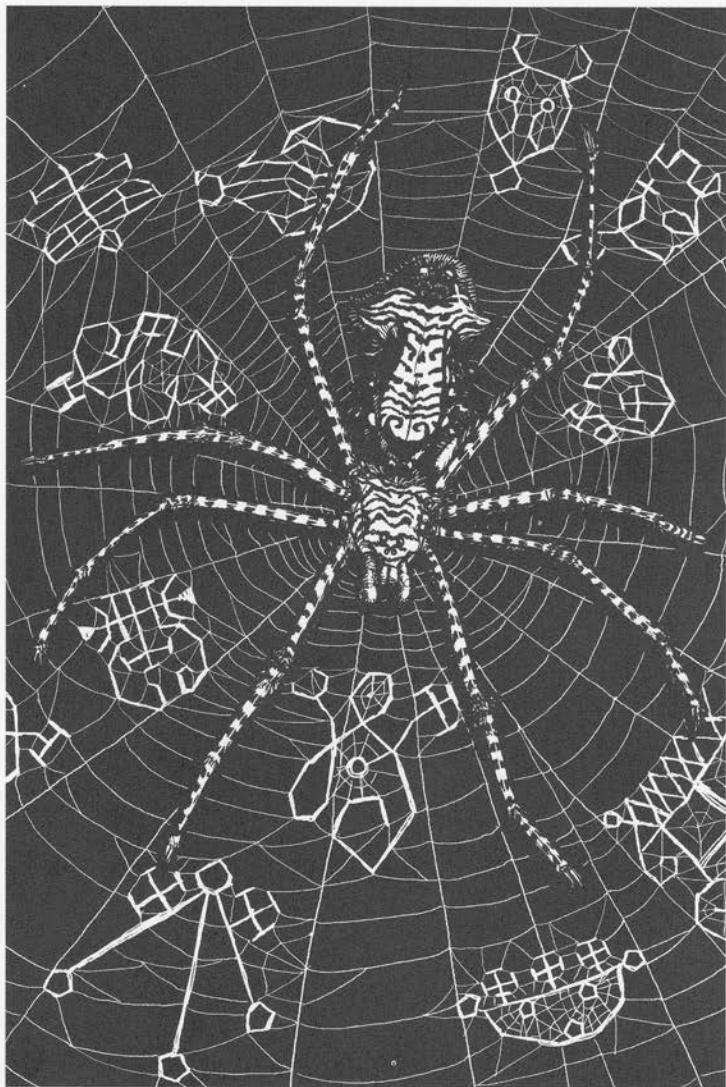
Wandering Star

Lifepaths (Age 18)

Broodling, lead to Sea Lord, Skimmer, Lead to Servant, Blood Drinker, Lead to Outcast, Wandering Star

Stats

Wi: B2, Pe: B4, Po: B4, Fo: B4, Ag: B6, Sp: B4, Speed Multi.: x4

Attributes

Ref: B4, Ste: B6, Hes: 8, Hea: B4, MW: B10, Cir: B1, Res: B0

PTGS

Su: B3, Li: B5, Mi: B7, Se: B8, Tr: B9, Mo: B10

Common Traits

Alien [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Arachnid Body [Dt MoB, pg. 146], Eight-Eyed [Char], Eight-Legged [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Exoskeleton [Char], Fangs [Dt MoB, pg. 147], Keen Sense of Balance [C-O for Climbing, Speed, and Forte when climbing MoB, pg. 148], Low Speech [Char], Silk Spinner [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Spider Sense [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Virulent Venom [Dt MoB, pg. 148], Wall-Crawler [Dt MoB, pg. 149]

Traits

Middling Stature [Char], Salt Burned [Char], War Sense [Dt MoB, pg. 343]

Skills

Water-Walking B3, Bubble-Breather, Brawling B3, Intimidation B1, Rider Training, Orienteering B3, Climbing B2(4), Forest-wise B2, Cave-wise B2, Spider-wise B2, Ship Wreck-wise B2

Circles

Relationships: human partner (minor, forbidden), murderous mate (family, romantic, hateful)

Weapons

Fangs—I:B2 M:B5 S:B7, Add 2, VA –, Slow, Shortest,
  must be on the Inside
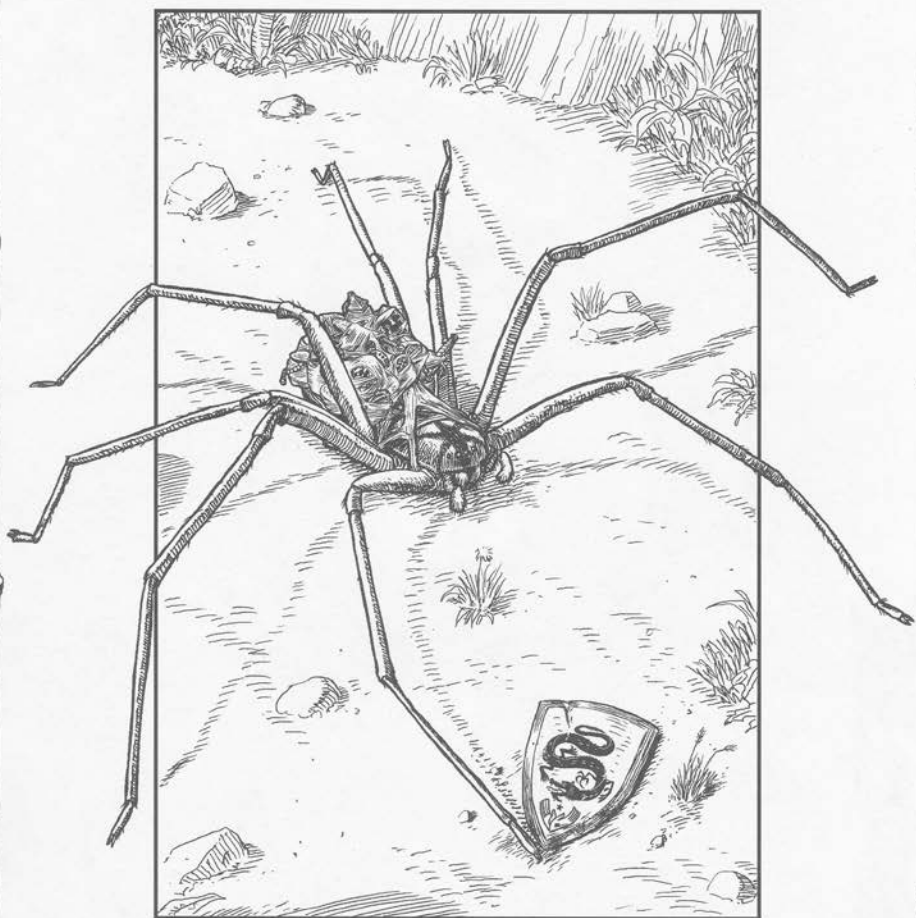
Commentary
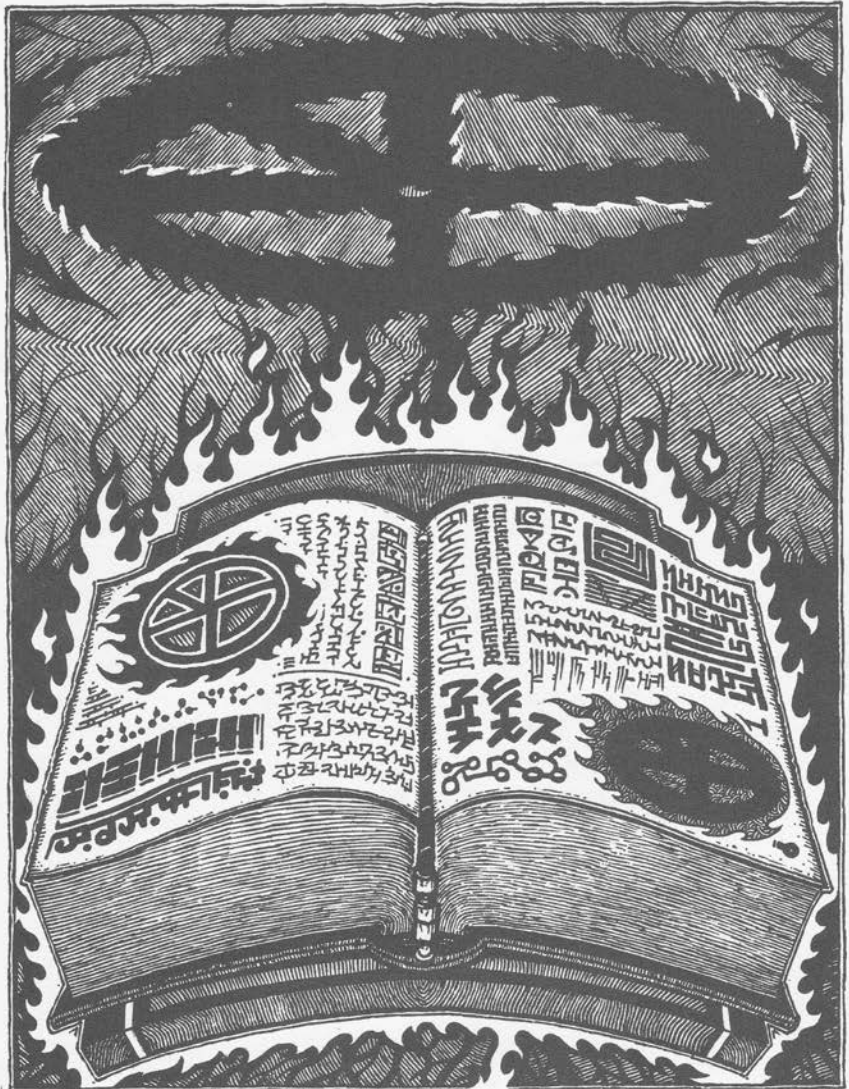
Commenting on Commentary

In this section of the book, we try to pass on all of our observations and insights about Burning Wheel. We break the game down chapter by chapter, rule by rule. We also try to talk about what happens at the table—stuff beyond the rule books.

In each commentary chapter we discuss the rules, how they work and what they mean. We talk about house rules and variations. And then we try to delve into practical applications of the rules at the table. So there's more than just us blabbering about how much we like the Fight! mechanics. There's pointers on how to get more from the rules for your game.

Traditionally in our section introductions, we list each chapter and give a summary. There are too many chapters in this section! You're just going to have to read through and enjoy the process of discovery (or use the Table of Contents).

The first half of this book is intended primarily for new or casual users of Burning Wheel. This section is for expert users who want to get more out of their games.

The Commentary section isn't meant to be read straight through. There's no narrative to it. Each chapter is largely independent of the others. Commentary is meant to be taken in a bit at a time. Read a chapter to clear up confusion about mechanics after one of your games. Or consult a chapter before your game to help sharpen your situation. We feel these essays are all useful, but there's too much information to absorb in one pass.

Table Behavior

Rules give us the procedure for the operation of the system. They tell us how to run the game, but there's more to how we play than mechanics. What do players do at the table when playing Burning Wheel? In this chapter, we highlight some important habits at our table: referencing the rules, logging tests and artha, supporting the other players in pursuit of their goals, passing the spotlight and taking notes.

Referencing the Rules

There's a certain ebb and flow to the intensity of play in a roleplaying game. Sometimes we're all talking in funny voices, deeply engrossed in the situation. Sometimes we're slinging dice and crying victory or howling defeat. Sometimes we're an interested member of the audience. Sometimes we zone out. And sometimes we need to reference the rules.

There is no secret knowledge in the Burning Wheel rules. Everyone is encouraged to know the rules of the game. Some players will have a better handle on the rules than others. That's only natural. But when a rules question arises, we reference the rules: What's that obstacle? What's the practice time? What's the appropriate skill? Sometimes we all go to the rules at the same time. Sometimes the referrer is the GM, but more often it is a player not directly involved in the action who reaches for a book and reads aloud the relevant passage. It helps us all become more familiar with the system. Our memories are subjective, faulty and unreliable. By relying on the rules, we ensure that calls are as fair and consistent as they can be.

It deserves mention that if there's a dispute to be settled or interpretation to be made about the rules, the GM is the lead player in the matter. We cite the rules and leave the final call up to him. It is his role to challenge us, after all.

Master Your Role

Players are responsible for knowing their part. If you're playing a knight, familiarize yourself with Fight! If you're playing a courtier, learn the Duel of Wits chapter. If you're playing a priest, read up on Faith. If you're playing a sorcerer, learn what your spells do and how to cast them.

It's considered very bad form at our table to not know the specialized rules for a character you're playing. You might not have mastered them, but make a reasonable attempt to absorb them. It's the polite thing to do.

One way to learn these specialized rules is to help refer to the rules during play. We don't expect you to memorize everything beforehand. We learn much better by doing and referring in play.

Logging Tests and Artha

The best practice for logging a test for advancement is to wait until the moment has passed, the test is resolved and the performance has ended. The spotlight will inevitably pass to another player or the GM. Use that moment to quickly check off your advancement. If you don't know what the difficulty was, look it up—either on page 42 of the Burning Wheel or on your character sheet.

Do not be rude and interrupt the GM and other players asking for the difficulty. If I could go back and make this a rule, I would: "If you interrupt another player or the GM with a question about advancement, you lose the test for advancement that you are trying to log." The interruptions drive me crazy, especially since they're unnecessary.

When you spend artha, the situation is different. You must announce the expenditure to the group and mark it off your sheet (and mark the progress toward epiphany) as you spend it.

Of course, when you earn artha, you should note that immediately as well, but that's not usually an issue.

Supporting Other Players

Supporting other players in pursuit of their goals is a more nuanced behavior than referring to rules or logging tests. But it is an important habit at the table. It requires measures of sensitivity, humility, fair play and a sense of drama.

Supporting other players goes beyond passing a helping die, but it can start there. If a player is in pursuit of a Belief, don't jump on the test simply because you have a better chance of succeeding. Offer to help the other player accomplish his goal. Roleplay the mentorship and support.

On the other hand, if you're gunning for a goal, but you don't need this test for advancement, take a moment to roleplay your character asking for help. Make an impassioned plea. Let another player step up and share in your moment. Help them help you accomplish your goal.

Another great way to support another player is to include his character in one of your Beliefs. Write a Belief about helping, hindering or convincing another player's character. It's guaranteed to benefit you both and you'll get to share the spotlight to resolve the situation.

Passing the Spotlight

Sometimes you have to take center stage when a Belief is challenged. However, after you've accomplished a goal, think about how you can help your fellow players accomplish theirs. Don't be selfish in the spotlight. They've helped you, now what can you do to help them? We've found that a session of Burning Wheel play often revolves around one or two players driving the action while other players, who aren't as invested, play supporting roles. It's a perfectly natural state, and those roles change from session to session. We can't all be in the spotlight all the time.

As the GM, you must be conscious of this phenomenon as well. It doesn't pay to focus too heavily on one character—challenging only his Beliefs. This will stymie the growth of the group. When I'm running a campaign, I try to pick one Belief from two different characters to challenge in a session. During the session, I set up the challenges for those Beliefs. Everyone else is expected to help or support those players. Hopefully they have Beliefs about doing just that. Next session, I set up challenges for two different Beliefs. This way, in our ongoing games, I work to ensure the spotlight is shared over the long term.

Note-Taking

At BWHQ we like extended campaigns. We like story lines that span sessions, campaigns, characters and even groups! We foster this type of play by keeping notes on our play. Usually a couple of players will

note down the names of characters met, places visited and items found. The GM logs Duel of Wits compromises and winning statements. And sometimes a player will keep an obsessive log of all of his character's accomplishments.

After playing this way for many years, we have a sprawling archive of material from multiple campaigns. Honestly, it's a bit daunting. Since it's all scribbled in notebooks, it can be hard to find a particular piece of information. However, it's incredibly inspiring. I can grab a notebook, flip through it and not only remember some good times, but be inspired for other stories for those characters—stat blocks, scrawled notes, careful plans and lists of names.

There's plenty of downtime in a game when the spotlight is on another player or the GM is in the bathroom. Instead of rewriting your equipment list (again), checking your email or tuning out, take some notes. Jot down what you're thinking about the campaign. Write down your friend's hilarious in-character outburst. Record the name of the fortress you just conquered. The notes will pay dividends in the long run. We use notebooks and a folder full of notes for each campaign. Some folks like to use online documents and wikis, too.

Running a Game

The Burning Wheel books provide procedures for creating a character, enumerating player goals, resolving conflicts and changing characters over time. Yet the text does not provide instructions on how to combine those elements and run a session, adventure or campaign. This chapter contains loose commentary on how to run a game of Burning Wheel. We'll get into specifics in the individual commentary chapters.

One-Off

A complete game of Burning Wheel can be played in one sitting. In this case, the situation must be a one-act story with one goal to push toward. Complications in attaining the goal and the resolution of the goal make up the action for the session. Burning Wheel sessions of this type run from two to six hours.

Here are some of the one-offs I've run: a tribe of Orcs attempts to overthrow its leader; a delegation of Elves comes to congratulate a Dwarven prince upon his coronation, but they forget to bring a gift; four adventurers find a magical sword and debate who keeps the treasure; four Elves journey to a lost island to end their kin who have become Dark Elves; a family gathers to cremate their grandfather and divide his patrimony; and a ragtag group of adventurers must aid a town plagued by a violent demon.

During a one-off session, don't worry about tracking advancement. Don't track artha for epiphanies. Most players will focus on one Belief in a one-off session. Once they've made a statement about that Belief, challenge it. You're not going to get a second chance. If a player is struggling with a Belief, try to push for a climax that threatens or changes that Belief. Otherwise, don't worry about challenging each Belief in a one-off. Drive toward the action with players who are interested and focused. Other players with tangential Beliefs need to dive into the action and participate—encourage them, but don't coddle them.

When starting a one-off session, it's vital that the GM be explicit about the situation. Before characters are chosen or burned, he must tell the players what the goal of the session will be. He's not obligated to reveal any secrets or spell it out, but he must tell the players what's going on. Doing so allows the players to make more directly applicable choices for their characters—Beliefs, skills, wises, gear—and thus get right to the action.

Single-Session Goals

The Sword and Thelon's Rift are both examples of one-off play. The Sword has one main conflict: Who will take the sword? The results of that conflict can spin off into other conflicts—a brutal fight, an impassioned argument, a race for the surface. Regardless, the scenario ends once the ownership of the sword has been indisputably asserted or all parties have agreed to compromise.

Thelon's Rift is another style of single-session play. The players are given a goal, "retrieve the orb," and a series of obstacles are placed in their path. Note that there are about four obstacles that lead to one fight. How the players handle the obstacles determines the state of the fight. They can walk into it fresh and smart, or they can wash up bedraggled and in trouble. The results of the action in Thelon's Rift often lead to a Duel of Wits about the fate of the Orb. And occasionally, we play out a return trip through some of the obstacles.

Thelon's Rift is a good example of a solid, four-hour session. There are about a half-dozen obstacles total and the potential for a Duel of Wits and Fight! That's a standard Burning Wheel session. In this case, the story wraps up neatly at the end of the session.

Short Campaign

To run a short campaign of Burning Wheel, you'll need a setting and a situation with two goals. One goal should be obvious and explicit, similar to a one-off session goal. The second goal should be occluded and emergent. It presents itself after the first goal has been accomplished or failed to be accomplished.

How long is short? We recommend 4-15 sessions. In four sessions, you can accomplish quite a bit, but don't have room to advance many abilities. In 15 sessions, you can usually see one full cycle from a starting character through a trait vote with plenty of advancements.

You have more time to stretch your legs in a short campaign. You can afford to more broadly address individual Beliefs. However, you still need to stay tightly focused on the resolution of the situation at hand.

Plan on confronting the first goal at the end of the second session or the beginning of the third. However, don't start slow. Start off the first session of the short campaign with action—a confrontation, a fight, a dispute, an argument, a ceremony or a mystery revealed. Use this action to engage the players; challenge a Belief or two right out of the gate.

Once you've accomplished that first goal, the players will have new ideas about their Beliefs. Encourage them to change them. Prepare to be taken by surprise. Prepare to have to scramble to challenge them.

Your second goal is a twist or revelation presented at the conclusion of the first. It is not an unconnected surprise. It's a natural outgrowth from the action thus far. This twist is revealed in the action of completing that first goal. You topple the duke, but you learn that your wife is pregnant by him. You gain a pup from an opposing wolf pack, but now you're embroiled in a war with the gods, and so on.

Long-Term Mechanics for Short-Term Play

In a short campaign, it's possible for the players to accomplish micro-goals from session to session—changing a Belief at the top of each session to reflect their immediate goal. This is perfectly acceptable. Also, encourage them to track advancement. You'll probably see advancements in session three or four. Don't worry about tracking epiphany artha—unless you plan to return to these characters in the future. An epiphany typically requires 30-50 sessions of play to accomplish.

Lifestyle maintenance cycles depend on the pace and passage of time in the fiction. If you're playing a taut, thriller-like story that happens over the course of a week, then you won't need the lifestyle maintenance rules. If you're playing a short campaign about a war that spans a year—with significant downtime between the battles—then you'll want to agree on a maintenance cycle.

Also, at the end of a short campaign, take time to perform a trait vote. It is an excellent way to reflect on the game and cement the characters in the group's imagination. It is also a nice reward for all of your hard work.

Long Campaign

Burning Wheel is designed to be run as a long campaign. The system creates growth and change in the character—Beliefs and Instincts change, abilities advance, injuries reduce your abilities, new traits are earned and old ones lost. In a long campaign, these events happen inevitably and repeatedly. Thus the character changes not once, but gradually, constantly, as the story progresses. I find this style of play immensely satisfying.

How long is long? To us, a long campaign is just getting rolling around session 12. At this point, all of the original Beliefs are resolved and now we're really digging into the setting.

For a long game, it's important to have a big, loose setting. The GM and the players need to have an idea of the culture, the customs, the mores and even the prejudices of the people they are playing.

However, the pregnant situation that kicks off a one-shot or short-term game is also vital to the success of a long-term game. You must jump into a long-term game with action and you must move from action to action. When a goal is accomplished, it reveals new information, a new situation that changes the players' perspectives. Players must modify their Beliefs to accommodate this new information. If you reach a point in which the action is resolved and players don't wish to modify their Beliefs, you've reached the end of your game.

In a long-term game, track advancement and log artha expenditures for epiphanies. Keep a practice journal. At least one player should take notes on important NPCs met, compromises reached and other important events. Perform a trait vote every 6-12 sessions.

Reincorporate NPCs. Old characters encountered in the early days of the game return with a new perspective and new goals.

Revisit locations. Recurring locations help create a sense of place in the game. You can indicate progress or change in the setting with descriptions of how certain locations have changed during the course of the story. The players can also directly change these places—buying them, ruling over them, destroying them, liberating them. This in turn creates a sense of ownership, which translates to ownership of the story itself.

Engage with the practice and lifestyle maintenance cycles. When a character absolutely must recover from an injury, use this downtime to allow the other characters to accomplish long-term aims. Their progress is described in terms of practice cycles—intriguing at court? Practice Etiquette. Scouting a city? Practice Streetwise. Imprisoned? Time to do pushups for two hours a day and practice your Power.

When you reach a lull in the game, don't be afraid to set it aside for a while. Talk about the setting, the characters and the events. Find out what parts of the setting interest the group. Pick up the game again and address those interests. Or play from a different perspective. Same setting, but different characters. We've used one of our settings to play out a dozen campaigns from a variety of perspectives. From adventure to adventure, some characters recur, some are new. This practice truly gives the setting a feeling of life and depth.

One-on-One Games

Some of my favorite campaigns have been one-on-one: one player and myself as the GM. These games are intense. You have to be very focused. There's no way to turn aside to another player and get a break while your brain chews on a thorny problem.

In my experience, this intensity makes the sessions shorter than they would be for a larger group. My one-player sessions lasted between two and three hours. Never longer. They're exhausting since you can't pass the spotlight and rest or reflect.

Mechanically, the game works fine in this mode except for three aspects: help, artha and trait votes. Help is a problem since there is only one player—and help is a vital aspect of the system that ties deeply to advancement and learning new skills. To remedy this, play strong NPCs and use them as surrogate PCs. Build close relationships. Let the NPCs help and be helped during play.

The artha awards for MVP, Workhorse and Embodiment are tricky. They are derived from a group vote. It's too easy for the GM and player to lazily agree that all awards are deserved. Or too easy for the player to sit back and let the GM hand out the awards as he sees fit. Neither of these scenarios are acceptable. Both player and GM must be open, honest and critical of the session. They need to both look at the session with dispassion. Be harsh critics. Your play will benefit greatly from it.

Traits votes are difficult in a manner similar to group-determined artha awards. It's too easy to be lazy and just toss on benefits. The player and GM must be critical of the play and look at it with an open mind. Procedurally, the GM plays a dual role in the trait vote. He acts both as the group and as the GM. It's quite a bit of power. He judges the player's performance and determines what trait is appropriate. He determines what traits are valid to be removed. It's a bit stressful, but also very refreshing. It's a tremendous venue for deeply changing a character. A one-on-one game will transform you and the way you play.

A group game is like a little party, but a one-on-one game is more like a date. The intimacy, for lack of a better word, can be intimidating. There's nowhere to hide! Still, the experience is very rewarding. Try it out.

Practical Action

Burning Wheel is a game about action. Characters take action in service of their Beliefs to accomplish their ends.

Options and Questions

To keep action interesting, there can be no set outcome to the situation. Both player and GM must be prepared for a beneficial or harmful outcome, but the GM holds the greater responsibility in this process.

When the GM presents an obstacle for you to overcome, there must be an explicit question about its resolution. Your nemesis, the cardinal, visits your cell. You've been condemned. He represents your only possibility of redress, yet you hate him. Will you treat with him or will you go stoically to your fate? If you treat with him, will you plead, bribe or spell your way out of this situation?

If there's no question, consider Saying Yes to this action and moving on.

Fights and arguments in Burning Wheel have uncertain outcomes. They present their own inherent questions: Will you survive? How much will this cost you? But again, if there's no question—if an opponent is unassailable—don't play out the action. Move the story along to the point at which there is a question with uncertain outcomes. You can't defeat the giant in single combat, you'll be destroyed in a single blow. But can you outwit him? Can you escape his dungeons? Those are questions whose outcomes we don't know. Their resolution will provide us with interesting play.

Practical Situation

Simple Motivations

When devising problems to be solved in fantasy roleplaying games, it's easy to run away with complicated, outsized ideas. The classic example: We must save the world! Why? Because the forces of ancient chaos have arrived to annihilate it! Great. Who cares?

Such situations are tempting because they are full of awe and imply heroic deeds. Burning Wheel is not suited to stuff like that. Burning Wheel operates best with simple, human motivations: greed, jealousy, grief, hatred, zealotry, love, despair, fraternity, etc.

Place these themes at the core of your situation and build out from there. Give your characters motivations based on these simple emotions and Burning Wheel will sing.

Even if you're conducting an old-school dungeon crawl, make your dungeoneer hateful and bigoted or motivate him with loyalty and friendship. The Goblin King at the center of this hellish pit might be motivated by unrequited love for the noble knight's beautiful sister. Motivations like these help the actions make sense. They give structure around which you can easily wrap Beliefs and Instincts. And most important, they allow you to start from a believable center and grow out into the realm of the fantastic.

The key to creating an epic game in Burning Wheel isn't in the shade of the villain's abilities, but his motivations. These motivations must be made comprehensible, even sympathetic. Make the core of the story small and set it against a large backdrop. Your game will take on an epic scope.

Practical Situation in Continuing Games

It's one thing to set up a neat world and have an interesting starting point, but how do you continue that game?

Last Time...

You can pick up right where you left off. Briefly recap the last session. Drop the players right back into the action. This is a basic technique that works well for resolving cliff-hangers and other unfinished action. It's easy for the GM because he doesn't have to do a lot of new work for the next scene.

The GM can and should use the break between sessions to add a new twist or dimension to the situation. Bring in a relationship to help or an enemy to hinder, or use a previous failure result to add a new twist. Be sure to add this new obstacle to the end of the recap of last session.

The players are welcome to modify or change Beliefs to suit developments in this ongoing problem.

Our Intrepid Adventurers Recently Discovered...

You can use a recap method that takes the last bit of action and restates it as a kind of prologue for the coming session. This works well with big revelations. Restate the discovery. Rattle off a number of the players' options for dealing with the situation. Give them a few minutes to discuss. Then hit them with a new twist: a relationship comes to see them with more information; an antagonist makes a move against an ally; or an antagonist makes a move directly against the group.

This technique is most easily used at the top of the session, but it's quite effective during a session, too. If the players lack direction, you can stop the bickering and say, "You recently discovered that the twelfth daughter of the Queen Mother of the city is a sorceress and in love with Ian's character. What are you going to do about it?"

Meanwhile...

If your group is split up, you must switch the spotlight between the two segments. I find it effective to start the session with a Meanwhile, focusing on the group that was inactive at the end of the last session.

Describe the situation of both groups. Let the players write or modify Beliefs. Focus the action on one part of the group. Allow them to overcome or resolve one obstacle. Cut back to the other group and

do the same. Try to keep each cut to five to 10 minutes. Don't make the other group sit so long that they get bored. Try to make the cuts back and forth with die rolls. Sometimes you can even intertwine tests between two separated groups. Set up a test and have one group throw the dice. Cut to the other group before narrating the results. Have the second group roll for their test, but then cut back to the first group and determine their results. And then finally jump back to the second group for their results. It can be a nice tension-building technique.

Once the action is resolved, narrate the groups rejoining. "After your harrowing experiences, you meet again on the far side of the marsh." Or, "Later, back at your apartments in the city, you discuss what happened."

Of course, if one group is in great danger, the other players may have to come to the rescue. If this is the case, don't make the captured or dangling group wait too long. Frame an obstacle to the rescue and resolve it. Dig right into the real action of the situation—players helping one another in a heroic fashion.

You can also use Meanwhile situations to demonstrate what the antagonists are doing or to show off a piece of the Big Picture. Once the players have resolved a situation—especially one that transpired over a long period of game time—hit them with a Meanwhile: "Meanwhile, the Society of Professional Mourners has set up an office in the funerary district. You hear about it from some of your clients." Or, "Meanwhile, while you were out traipsing around the countryside, the Council has passed a law restricting the practice of magic in the city." You can use these to showcase the effects of the players' actions in the setting and foreshadow the next situation.

Born from your setting and situation, such simple statements can galvanize a group and spur them to creative action—especially if they challenge Beliefs.

Later...
The GM controls the pacing of the game. If he feels the game is stalled or dragging, he must reframe the action. He briefly narrates a jump in time and then describes the current, more pressing situation to the players. It's the perfect opportunity to grab one of the player's Beliefs and confront him about it.

Don't say, "You finish that and wait." Put the players right into the throat of a problem they can't ignore. Tell them, "Your hearing goes poorly. You're conducted back your cell to await the verdict. After an interminable, undefinable amount of time, the cardinal—your nemesis—is admitted to your cell to give you absolution." What will you say to the cardinal? Will you try to escape judgement?

This technique is very powerful, but take care in using it. Players will often want to interject some action or detail, "Oh, before that I wanted to go shopping." Say no. Tell them there was no time. This is a GM superpower. You control pacing. You get to set the scenes. Of course, if you honestly forgot a pending request, you should honor it. Don't be a dick but don't let players dither.

When Do You Back Off and Let the Players Take the Reins?

It's important to keep the action moving, to keep the players interested and engaged. After a good, strong run, players will be exhausted and out of ideas. Their characters will be beat up, in need of rest and recuperation.

You do not want to rest up the characters before every dramatic situation. The whole point of being wounded or suffering similar penalties is that these modifications make the next action more dangerous, more challenging. If the players are allowed to gather their strength before every encounter, then the penalties lose their value, which causes success and failure themselves to lose their value.

Thus, you must strike a balance. You must push the players and threaten their characters. You must harry them, work them. But once they have accomplished that great goal in their Beliefs, you must back off. Once the situation has been resolved or substantially changed, you must give the reins to the players. You must frame the action so they can rest and consider their options.

Even so, unless you're ending a campaign, you must constrain their choices. Give them a set amount of time or resources to use. Give them a month to rest and practice, for example. During that time, they can make Resources tests. At the end of the rest period, something happens: An event transpires that challenges their Beliefs in an unexpected way.

Certain savvy players will build rest, recuperation and refitting into their Beliefs. They'll create personal goals that seem to dodge the situation and create room for them to lessen the impact of injury, tax or loss. Don't get flustered by this tactic. It's a beautiful thing and perfectly

valid within scope of Burning Wheel play. Don't forget: Your job, as GM, is to challenge their Beliefs, whatever they may be. So if the players write Beliefs about replenishing lost gear or recovering from wounds, run with it. Challenge them: Pester them as they recover; Tax them as they save; summon them for duty when they practice. The story will spin in unexpected directions with this action. The players will gain a new perspective, you'll generate hooks for future developments and resting won't be quite so easy.

Of course, if they resolve these Beliefs, they should be given time to rest and refit as per their goals. As they recover, hit them with a Meanwhile situation. Or when they're done, frame the action with a Later situation. Keep things moving!

If there's truly no action or situation to be resolved, then don't play out the rest and downtime at all. Simply set a length of time and allow players to log practice, recovery and jobs as appropriate. Don't forget the lifestyle maintenance tests!

Situation
Commentary

I believe stories are best told through the actions of their protagonists and antagonists. However, this statement is simplistic. It's not enough to have protagonists and antagonists. To have drama, we need the seed of a problem that will drive the characters into conflict.

We call this seed "situation." A situation takes a handful of elements from the bigger setting, places them in context and pits them against one another. Many forces are at work, all vying for dominance. The outcome is uncertain.

In this chapter, we offer commentary on creating and playing through situations in Burning Wheel. We discussed the Big Picture in the introduction—a setting fraught with peril and all manner of interesting characters. It seems like that would be all you'd need to get a game rolling. Unfortunately, starting out with only characters and a setting makes playing Burning Wheel harder than it needs to be.

That's where we come in. To play Burning Wheel, we need a Big Picture and this smaller situation. Once we have them, we can design our characters so they are part of this world. They have a role in it, a stake in it. They feel at home. They care about it or, conversely, hate it.

We need to wind your character up and launch him into the situation. You know the forces at play. You know your role. Write Beliefs that thrust you into action. They tell us that you're going to enter this space and do something. We don't know the outcome, but something is going to change. In the course of this action, other unanticipated elements will be revealed and create new situations. New Beliefs will be written to address new situations. Action will spin off into unforeseen directions. Play will be interesting and exciting.

Three General Situations

There are three general types of situation in fantasy roleplaying: the quest, the struggle and intrigue. They are not mutually exclusive to one story, but they exist discretely within a narrative.

For example, a lost artifact must be recovered so that an evil may be confronted. Heroes risk their lives in this quest. Meanwhile, the armies of evil swarm over the land in an overwhelming tide. A small band of men must rally their beleaguered allies and stand against evil at any cost. While in the halls of power, the struggle and the quest have unearthed ugly truths about the ruling class. These revelations must be carefully navigated lest they topple the very order that all now fight to uphold.

That example outlines an epic campaign. However, your game does not need to be nearly so involved, especially at the outset.

It's best to pick one of the archetypes and work from there. Flesh out the situation at hand, and perhaps leave hooks for the other tropes to tie in later if appropriate. In general, a campaign will be mostly of one type, with flourishes from the other two types.

Quest

A quest is a journey to a foreign, lost or exotic place to recover a person, artifact or piece of knowledge. Quests can be epic in scale—to Mt. Doom—or local—to the attic above or to the sewers beneath your home.

Quests contain stories of self-discovery, mastery and coming-of-age.

If we're aiming for a quest story, then one of your Beliefs might be about:

- Seeking the missing thing
- Learning something about the object of the quest, ideally from someone or something unwilling to hand over that information
- Beating others who seek the same thing

Struggle

In a struggle, our protagonists face overwhelming odds against which they must fight. While at first it may seem the protagonists fight for survival or self-interest, ultimately, they fight to change the established order. Revolutions, wars of succession and wars of resistance are all classic struggles.

Struggles often include stories of self-sacrifice, coming of age, justice and other loaded values.

If we're struggling for something, one of your Beliefs should be about:

- An idealistic (perhaps even naive) statement about the politics, religion or philosophy of the setting
- Sacrificing something you care about for an ideal
- A defiant declaration about overthrowing (or safeguarding) the powers that be

Intrigue

Intrigue is perhaps the most subtle and least glamorous of the three archetypes. An intrigue transpires within a social or cultural structure. Protagonists must operate within that structure—playing by its rules, both overt and covert—to achieve their ends. Courts, guilds and clans all make perfect backdrops for intrigues.

Intrigues often contain power, revenge, benign tyranny, despotism and the lofty battle to uphold the rights of protagonists. Protagonists of intrigues are reformers, whistle-blowers, ambitious social climbers and the power hungry. Antagonists include the established order or forces that would turn the order to evil.

To set up an intrigue, establish a strong social order in the setting and then upset the balance: the duke dies without an heir; impoverished nobility desperately tries to retain power in the face of wealthy merchant families; the king has gone mad and is in love with a chambermaid; your guild is being undermined by its former allies. Each of these situations creates many hooks for conflicts about intrigue.

If we're aiming for an intrigue story, then one of your Beliefs might be about:

- Getting information from someone
- Setting someone up for failure or success
- Covering something up
- Establishing an alliance or friendship
- Ruining an enemy

Choosing an Overall Situation

The initial situation is a broad template. It should be easy to insert yourself into it.

Let's play a band of doughty adventurers dispatched to aid a town beset by a demon. Struggle or quest? The GM decides that the demon will possess secrets that will lead to further adventures. So the adventure will be a quest. The GM doesn't have to reveal his secrets to the players, but he should tell them that he's interested in running a quest.

Place yourself in the framework. Can you imagine playing a character in this situation? Are you inspired by it? Do you have ideas for other characters, places or artifacts?

If you're not inspired, ask your fellow players for help. Ask them to pitch you ideas. Keep an open mind. If you absolutely can't be moved to play in this situation, then perhaps you and your friends need to talk about why you're playing this game.

Build Tension

Build up tension. Don't destroy the world in a day. Threaten it. Build toward its eventual demise. In doing so, you provide solid anchors on which players can hook their Beliefs. As the game progresses, those Beliefs will guide you in how to continue to challenge the players.

Relationships, Affiliations, Property and Situation

Once the players have burned up their characters, it is the GM's job to take the relationships, affiliations, property and anything else he can get his hands on and bind it to the situation. Put relationships in power. Put them in jeopardy. Threaten them. Undermine or attack affiliations. Covet property. Work to change the laws of the Big Picture so you can own it.

When setting up the situation, use the game elements provided in character burning as fodder for Beliefs.

Buying Into a Situation

Situation is something that all of the players agree to buy into before the game begins. If everyone isn't excited about immersing themselves in the situation, then there's a problem. The uninterested players are either going to get left behind or, if there's no interest at all, the game is going to grind to a halt.

So right at the beginning, everyone must explicitly agree to the situation. Do not pass from situation generation until you've heard everyone say, "Yes, I want to play that." Tie their characters into this idea using Beliefs, Instincts, traits, relationships and property!

Reincorporate

Reincorporation is a technique for building a situation from parts of a previous scenario. You take characters and places and use them again in a new way. A character the players met in the past has now changed—he's been promoted or perhaps lost everything. He has a new perspective.

Places are powerful tools for reincorporation. It's a simple trick to have action in the game transpire in a set of locations. This trick lends the game a sense of time and space. Players can come to know the places of their world.

Setting

We need a place for our fantasies to inhabit. We need bounds and limits, for these embellish and highlight our characters and their actions. But we don't want to overburden ourselves. We want to use the barest description and minimal details to evoke the greatest range of possibilities.

Burning Wheel's setting is an abstraction, an agglomeration of fantasy tropes represented by lifepaths, traits, skills and gear. It's not a place, but an idea or aesthetic. In this setting, the world is rough, harsh. There is a great divide between wealthy and poor. The poor are downtrodden, sickly and harried. The wealthy are powerful and aloof. People of all types fight for what they believe with words, swords and sorcery.

The cities, the lands, the seas and the people are for you to decide. Those names, qualities and details are for you to design—pulled from your knowledge of the fantasy genre. These places and cultures contain inherent inequities that one must struggle against or quest to overcome.

Devil in the Details

A setting for Burning Wheel is broad, composed of brush strokes and vague pronouncements, punctuated by a handful of details. The items that get listed on each character sheet—traits, skills and gear—are the only setting details that truly matter. They are the most vital elements of any setting. Population, geography and culture are all secondary.

Setting Over Time

Don't fill in your setting all at once. Don't front load. Sketch out the broad lines—some geographical, some political, some cultural—but leave the precise details to be filled in later as needed. Focus on the immediate details. Flesh out the space that's directly in the path of the players' Beliefs and relationships.

Make some notes about possible contingencies, but I strongly urge you to refrain from "world building."

Why? World building can be great fun, an exciting exercise for the imagination. But in Burning Wheel, it is extra effort and an impediment to thoroughly and accurately challenging Beliefs.

This isn't to say that you shouldn't have a deep or compelling setting. Your setting should be amazing and exciting. But it's third in the list of things important to a Burning Wheel game: player priorities, situation and setting, in that order.

So as you test for Circles, note the NPCs found. Build a list of contacts over time. As each new place is explored, give it a culture and a climate. Make it memorable and inspiring. Present fresh ideas. Each new culture encountered should be given traits appropriate to the situation. Don't just make the culture exotic, make it challenging.

Culture

Creating a fantasy culture is a delicate, prolonged process. It cannot be done in a single night. Certainly, fascinating facets can emerge and be explored in a session of play, but a culture is too vast and complex to be exhausted by one single such look.

When introducing a culture into my games, I start with a cultural analog, whether from history or fiction. I modify it to suit my needs—in fact, I strive to make it only barely recognizable.

Using the analog, we can describe a mode of dress, architecture, accent and even climate. I also like to include one element of the culture that is different from ours and offensive to our modern sensibilities—something that jars the modern player. In a recent game, victims of human sacrifice went willingly to the slaughter and, in fact, resisted attempts at rescue.
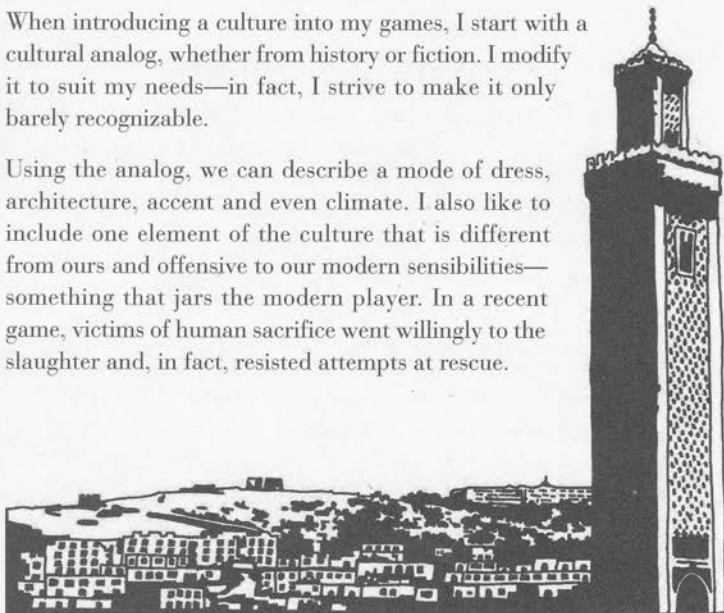
Conversely, I like to include a custom that's different from, but pleasing to our sensibilities. I often like to make the food and diet of the setting different from our own, but perhaps more delicious.

Added to the core of the cultural analog, these two accents are usually enough to create a convincing model. Of course, when you're deciding on the content of the society's customs, you should seek to intersect with and contravene as many Beliefs and Instincts as possible.

Cultural Traits

Page 149 of the Character Burner briefly describes cultural traits. On the surface, it may seem that cultural traits create a one-dimensional or possibly even bigoted view of culture.

Cultural traits do carry this risk. But they are designed to be blended into all of a character's other traits. You carry a piece of your culture with you among all of the other traits you've acquired from your family, your life and your work. We hope this creates a nuanced view of character, rather than a stereotype.

Names

Names are magical. And they are potent tools in your hands. When you name something in a roleplaying game, whether a character, a house or inn, a city or a sword, you make it just a little more real, more substantial, to everyone else. A sword found in a tomb? Big deal. The Sword of Seven Shadows found in the tomb of Aras-Ekbar? That's something special.

When you introduce something new to your group, name it! It will create a connection between the others at the table and the fictional element.

You can do some pretty neat tricks if you get creative with your naming. For instance, you can assign different earthly languages to cultures in a fantasy game. For one of our games, we kept a Mongolian-to-English dictionary at the table. Any time we needed a name for a character, a ship or an island, we dove into the dictionary and pulled one out.

Assigning different cultures to different languages creates auditory differentiation between the two cultures in a recognizable but subtle way.

Or we go to Chris Pound's Name Generation page (http://www.ruf.rice. edu/~pound/), or the super cool Random Name Generator that uses U.S. Census data (http://www.kleimo.com/random/name.cfm), to generate

pages of names that we bring to the game table. Whenever a name is needed, we grab it off the list, and note down the name and who or what is getting named.

Monsters

When choosing monsters for your setting, use folktales and mythology to inspire you. A little research can pay huge dividends. Rather than having a kitchen-sink setting, you can pare down your choices to a few important entities and really focus on how they're a part of the setting.

Gear

Restrict or add gear as appropriate for the setting, having different stuff available in different places. Even better, price Resources differently depending on where the players are.

Antagonists

Burning Wheel is about character-driven drama. The character is the most important element of the game. It's about him, about how he grows and changes. To have engaging, believable change, we must have good villains. Developing a good antagonist in Burning Wheel is tricky and a bit counterintuitive.

There are many types of antagonists. From Big Bads on down to the annoying minion, they come in many shapes and sizes. Their purpose is to give the Big Picture, the situation and the action a face and a voice. The problems that confront the characters can come in many forms, but the most engaging and memorable ones come from other characters—antagonists.

The Source of Antagonism

An antagonist can spring from five sources in Burning Wheel: relationships, the enmity clause, the Big Picture, the setting and the situation.

Relationships

By spending a few resource points, players can create an antagonist for themselves at the beginning of the game. The level of power paid for—minor, important and powerful—determines where this character falls in the GM's scheme. Minor characters will pester the character at a local or tactical level. Important characters are part of the situation. Powerful characters are enmeshed in the Big Picture.

The players create these characters in very sketchy terms—a type of relationship, a relative power level and a name. It is up to the GM to place them in context. He fleshes them out based on the initial sketch. He personifies them and gives them life.

Enmity Clause

Antagonists can be generated extemporaneously from the Enmity Clause rule. Due to the failed roll, the GM can introduce a character who is in opposition to the players' goals. These characters are often minor, but due to the scale of the

Circles rules, they can be as powerful as they come—if you try to use Circles to contact the king and you fail the test, then you've made a powerful enemy.

Keep that in mind. The higher the obstacle for the Circles test, the more the character should be plugged into the situation, the setting and, ultimately, the Big Picture.

The Situation

Situations demand antagonists. To adequately challenge the players' Beliefs, they must be opposed by the actions of other characters.

Important relationships and enemies from failed Circles tests can both emerge as antagonists in the situation—the captain of the guard through which you must fight, the courtier who is jealous of your love, your brother who has turned to evil.

Those examples are tied directly back to the characters. But sometimes the situation demands a villain who stands apart from and in direct opposition to the characters. Sometimes you need a bad-ass Orc summoner who's razing towns and villages. Sometimes you need a rebel leader who's inadvertently undermining the character's machinations. Sometimes you need a staunch conservative minister who opposes the characters purely because they are outsiders.

Where do antagonists like that come from? They are born from the GM. He creates them by intuiting the best way to challenge the players and by personifying that challenge in the form of an engaging character. They aren't created by the players. They are purely the province of the GM in his role as chief adversary.

Situation-based antagonists can also emerge from allies who are turned against the characters by their actions during play—from a Duel of Wits, a failed test or just fallout from play.

The Setting

I like my games to feel like they transpire in a living, breathing world. Therefore, in addition to all of the characters who are tied into and opposed to the characters, I always create characters and groups who exist outside of the immediate action, but who are nevertheless opposed to the players.

These antagonists are tied into the structure of the setting. They are members of important groups with their own agendas. They do not directly or actively oppose the players, but their very nature is inherently opposed.

> *A dragon decimated your people in ancient times. He's not part of the situation; he doesn't care about you or your petty aims. But someday, you might find him and confront him. Or the king: He's not interested in your trials and travails, but he certainly doesn't want you going around killing his men and upsetting the status quo. He doesn't oppose you because he cares about you. He stands in your way because it's his job to keep punks like you in their places.*

Where do these characters come from? Extrapolate them from all of the bits and pieces on the characters' sheets—particularly their lifepaths, reputations, affiliations and relationships.

> *If a player has created a knight, that means there are other knights in the setting. There are probably cadres of them. Who do they work for? How do they get paid? Who's their boss's boss? Who's his boss? What's his name? What's his rank and title? That's a setting-based NPC right there.*

> *If a player buys an affiliation with a group of mages, he's implying a whole ecosystem. First, the group itself. Who leads them? How are the members ranked? Are there rivals in the group? Who are they? What are their names? What do they want? Does the group itself have any rivals? Are the rivals publicly known or do they plot in secret? Who leads the rival group? What's his name? Where is he from? Just a few questions like those can produce a proper antagonist that you can keep in your back pocket until the time is right.*

I am not advocating that you build out every NPC in your setting. The key here is to pluck these guys from the character sheet and then drop them into the background. When the characters start moving in larger, grander circles, you'll be ready with some thoughtful, powerful antagonists.

The Big Picture

Finally, when I run a game, I like to ensure that above the situation and the setting, something Big is happening in the background— something is changing. The players might never directly encounter this thing, but even just mentioning it enriches the game—traders arrive

from heretofore unheard of kingdoms, wars erupt in distant provinces, wizards brood in towers for generations, gods grow angry and throw plagues upon the land.

There are two keys to making these events meaningful. First, they should be scary. If the players were involved, they would certainly be put to the test. So in this way, these rumblings are a way for the GM to indicate that Beliefs are being challenged whether you're there or not. Second, these events need faces. Heroes, gods and wizards whom the players later meet, only to find out, "Oh, you're the one who leveled that city..." These faces are all potential antagonists or allies. They go about their business, but they are not allied or in sync with the players' goals. They are not necessarily directly opposed—at least not to start—but if pressed they will fight for their own goals.

The Face of Antagonism

So how do you successfully antagonize someone? Well, the smaller the power of the antagonist, the more direct his interactions must be. If you're on the outs with your local hostler, he's only going to bug you when you come into his stable.

If you're at odds with the local guard captain, well, that's a slightly different matter. He's going to ride you when he sees you, but he's also going to instruct his men to keep an eye on you. Thus, his reach is extended beyond his immediate presence. He has agents to do his dirty work.

And at the level above that—the evil wizard who controls the wasteland—you never see him until the final confrontation. You are vexed and plagued by his minions, but he is out of reach until the very last.

Finally, there are antagonists whom you might never directly confront— at least in the way that you want. Gods, kings and other powers beyond our ken remain aloof. You defeat their minions and their agents, you ruin their works, but you never strike at them directly. Those antagonists can be frustrating to deal with since the game is so character driven, but when used sparingly, they can add to the tension and create the feeling of a natural order in your world.

An Antagonist Is an Empty Vessel

How many lifepaths do you choose for your villains? Do you write Beliefs for them? What skills and spells do you choose?

An antagonist begins his life as an empty vessel. He is a container that will hold a conflict. The shape of that vessel is determined by his place in the game—his purpose, his name, his power level. Its contents are added only as necessary, but once they're in, they remain.

Thus, if you have an Orc summoner leading a horde, rampaging across the countryside, you'll ultimately need to know his stats, skills, traits, spells and gear. But when you first introduce him, what do you need? If he remains in the background, then you don't need his stats or skills. You want to hold off in creating those stats because you want to ensure the summoner is the right level of challenge for the players. So if you

planned on using a five-lifepath character with a horde of goblins, but your players are ripping through their opponents, then you want to give him a few more lifepaths and some better minions.

This isn't cheating. Your job as GM is to create adversity. If your villains get bowled over without any sort of a fight, then it's no fun for the players.

So keep your villains empty until the time comes when you need hard numbers.

Motivating Antagonists

There are villains who directly oppose you because it is their nature to want what you do not. Our exemplar Orc summoner exists to destroy all that you stand for. Why? Because he is o'erbrimming with hatred. He needs no other motivation to send him into conflict with the group.

And there are villains who believe what you do. They stand for what you stand for, but they achieve their goals in a vile, destructive manner. For example, a despotic king sits on the throne. You want to depose him, as does a rather dark, imposing wizard. You wish to restore justice to the kingdom. The wizard wishes to punish it—its rulers, its ministers and even its people—for allowing itself to be so corrupted.

How do you oppose him? When do you oppose him? Do you work with him to topple the despot and then confront him? Or do you stand up for what you believe in from the outset and make a true enemy of that wizard? He is the best type of villain because your relationship is complex. There is no one way to deal with him. You must, in fact, confront yourself before you can confront him.

As you place your antagonists onto your palette, be sure to create some who are simply opposed, and others who have the same goals, but for different reasons.

Antagonist Beliefs

Small-fry antagonists don't need Beliefs. The thugs and angry shopkeepers don't require that much attention. But all the rest of them do.

Write a Belief that describes this villain's world view.

Villains need a goal-oriented Belief as well. This goal should be to accomplish an act that intersects with as many of the players' Beliefs as possible. If the players all have a Belief about their patron, the villain

must act against him. If the players all have a Belief about an orphanage and its staff, then he's got to burn it down. Write a goal-oriented Belief about what the villain must accomplish.

An antagonist doesn't need to have all of his Belief slots filled. You should fill them as appropriate. Focus on the best way to challenge the players. And you should change them as you need until he finally appears on stage. Until the antagonist actually takes the stage and meets the players, he remains an empty vessel. His contents are determined by necessity.

Additional Beliefs can focus on tying his goals and philosophy together. Or you can write a Belief about another character in the game. Writing Beliefs about characters is tough because you don't necessarily want to focus your main antagonist on just one character. You want him to tie together as many of the players' characters as possible.

Belief Tracking
Typically, a game of Burning Wheel has only one or two real antagonists at a time. These characters are played against and confronted. In the confrontation, they are changed: They are defeated; they are changed from antagonist to ally or they are magnified and elevated. Thus, there's not too much to keep track of, only a handful of Beliefs.

The Evolution of an Antagonist
What follows is an extended example about one of the best and most unlikely villains I've ever created, Wizard Librarian Chu, the Storm King.

Throughout our long-running campaign, a cabal of sorcerers has plagued the characters. For all intents, using a couple of generations of characters, the players have been at war with a group of 20 or so wizards for about 10 years. In the course of play an empire was toppled, cities were destroyed, factions were crushed, demons were summoned, minds broken, lives were lost. It was rather epic.

Now there's only one surviving member of that cabal.

There's also a giant magical storm engulfing the capital city. The storm delivers vicious lightning strikes that either immolate the target or imbue it with magic. Mutants roam the wastes. It's a fantasy apocalypse—caused by Wizard Hunter Yang years ago in a previous campaign.

In his last encounter with our heroes, Wizard Librarian Chu was poisoned and grievously injured. He fled the chaos to the relative safety of the Storm and the now-abandoned capital city. There he recuperated and took command of the place. He became the Storm King.

I explicitly told the players this last bit when I pitched the game to them. It was the Big Picture and the situation coming together for the game. I also told them that their characters had heard rumors of the Storm King in the Tower. Previously, Danny, Chris and I played an abortive short campaign from which they specifically had more knowledge of the situation. They helped me fill in the details about the situation—the Storm, the monsters, the wasteland.

We gathered at the end of the summer to play this continuation of our long-running campaign. Pete had a couple of months in which he could play, so we also knew that the campaign had to be 8-12 sessions.

Rich played the clever, fiery Sijuk.

Pete played his student to the Master Park, Palgi Park, now Toksuri, General of the Center.

Dro reprised his role as General Park's advisor and architect, the venerable Mr. Dö.

Danny played his wandering, vengeful Oakman ranger, Maxahana.

Chris reprised his role as the Wizard Hunter Yang (known by many other names).

And Thor joined us for the first time in this campaign as Hsark, Hozrem missionary.

I presented their mission to them—they were charged by the recently reinstated emperor to go forth and slay the Storm King, thus ending the Storm so that the emperor may return to his rightful throne.

The group wrote strong beliefs about destroying the vile Storm King and all of his works.

That's a lot of preamble. Let's talk about the Storm King.

My initial concept for this game was to have a puissant, despotic villain ruling like Sauron over an army of magically corrupted mutants. I imagined the players would swarm his tower and there would be a giant fight. I envisaged my Storm King in ornate, heirloom armor, wielding

a deadly halberd, shouting spells behind ivory teeth and red lips. I kept that image in my head for the first few sessions, but I didn't detail it any further.

Once the players began their approach to the Storm, I had to know more about this putative Storm King and his mutant army. I thought about him for a bit. Who was he really? He was a product of the cabal. Therefore, he knew "red wizardry" as we call it: fire spells and mind-affecting spells. He also knew a handful of battle spells like Turn Aside the Blade and the Fear. I dug around my old (old) notes. I couldn't remember which of the red wizards he really was. Was he Kwok? Mosu? Fou? Maori? No, they were all slain. Well, if that's the case, then his name was Chu, he was a northerner from a remote port and was a… researcher. Suddenly, my fearsome concept lost a bit of his stature. Well, I could just change him to make him what I want, right? No one really knows what's contained in my voluminous notebooks. I decided against it. It would defile the purity of our ongoing game. He was who he was. I was prepared to work with the concept.

Okay, so he was a powerful, sorcerous researcher. I can use that. Hell, I could set him up with lifepaths and then just have him practice and train to get all of the martial stuff that I wanted. Yeah!

So I burned up a headmaster sorcerer researcher with the Magic Burner College of Magic lifepaths. An eight-lifepath bad-ass! Woohoo. 64 years old. Ouch. Okay, timeline-wise, he'd have two-and-a-half to three years to practice after his last meeting with the players.

I looked over his spell list, his skill list, his resources…three years wasn't enough time for him to become a martial master and do all of the magical research he needed to do at the tower and create player-killing enchantments. Hrm. I could have just fudged it…but my gut told me not to. My gut told me to leave him be. My conscience, on the other hand, was screaming at me: "He's going to die like a sucker!" Well, we would see.

I did give him three (rough) Beliefs to give energy and direction to his nefarious plans:

- All of the secrets of this land [meaning the former empire] must be mine.

- I will found a new [magical] order and city in this tower.

- The Gifted must be protected and instructed.

I did not reveal these Beliefs (until the very last moment of the last session).

During play, I always referred to Chu as the Storm King, implying he was more like my original concept. I never revealed his actual nature. Until, of course, Wizard Hunter Yang passed a brilliant Sorcerer-wise test to discover who he truly was. I informed the group that he wasn't a mass murderer, but a librarian. Still, I tried to present him as a mysterious, remote brooding presence. This came across especially when they interrogated mutants who served him. To them, the Storm King was aloof and powerful.

As the campaign progressed, the group discovered the Storm King was kidnapping children from their parents and taking them to the tower. How ghoulish! Mr. Dö and Max rescued a young girl from the clutches of the Storm King's Storm Riders—a fearsome group of mutants, ex-soldiers and rangers who enforced the Storm King's will in the Storm.

Later, the group was attempting to find a safe place to hide in the Storm King's citadel. They made a Slaver-wise test to find an old, disused slaver safehouse. They failed and instead found one of the Storm King's schools run by ex-slavers. Six children were being trained there, guarded by former slavers and mercenaries. It was obvious then, especially to the wizard hunter, that the Storm King was culling Gifted children from the surrounding wasteland and instructing them on how to use their power. The children were attentive, intelligent and curious. They were not abused, enslaved or manipulated.

This revelation challenged many beliefs about toppling the Storm King. Here was evidence of his good works. Will they still crush him? Is he still a tyrant?

The players debated. These children could be trained to end the Storm. Half of the players were convinced that this was, in fact, what the wizard was doing—training the Gifted to alleviate the apocalypse. I kept silent in the debate.

The group considered their options: They were going to confront the wizard. However, if he was the only hope to end the storm, then he should be aided not killed. The other faction argued that he was evil and must be slaughtered for all of his evil deeds. I considered changing some of the wizard's Beliefs. Would it challenge their Beliefs more if he was truly altruistic? Would it be more engaging if he was, in fact, completely reformed and not the Sauron-like villain I had hinted at?

Ultimately, I judged that a more nuanced view was required. I needed to stick by his original Beliefs and let the players deal with their own reactions among themselves.

When the time came to confront the wizard, the players were deeply divided. One group wanted vengeance, the other wanted reconciliation. I pounced on the divisive atmosphere in the group. I had the Storm King raise a flag of truce so they could discuss the situation. Were they at war or was something else afoot?

Just prior to that scene, my understanding of Chu had crystallized. He was a survivor, not a visionary or a savant. He wanted to ensure that he was protected, fed and could practice his art unopposed. Over a decade ago, he'd been summoned to a war council of wizards and made a soldier. He wanted to return to his roots and study these wondrous secrets. He'd seen all of his friends, colleagues and rivals die. His own secret library was razed in the fighting. The lands that supported him revolted. Every ploy and aim was crushed. He was tired. He didn't want to die like the rest, but neither did he want to fight.

I also decided that he would cop to all of the evil acts he'd committed. But in doing so, I knew that I could destroy some illusions—he didn't create the Storm, he never summoned demons. The players themselves did those things. He merely profited from these events.

In the final moments of the campaign, this villain manifested before me. He was not the swaggering automaton of destruction I had originally envisaged. He was a small, tired man, radiating power. His old battle robes long lost, he dressed in finery. His fingers, ears and neck were laden with enchanted jewelry. He carried no weapon, wore no armor.

He met the players (ostensibly) alone in a wheel-shaped chamber in a vast, abandoned citadel tower—a crossroads literal and metaphorical.

The wizard hunter and the martial master characters could not be disarmed, so I bid all the characters to come armed as they were. What did it matter now?

They demanded Chu come and stand trial for his crimes. He scoffed. They wanted a Duel of Wits, but I declined the stakes. I would accept a Duel, but not under those terms. I made it clear in the ensuing conversation that he was not trying to end the Storm. He even said, "Why would I do that? It protects me." This was a shocking revelation for the players.

However, I also made it clear that I would accept from them a statement of purpose about the Storm rather than about his own fate. In doing so, I was careful that I was challenging Beliefs across every character on the table. Some wanted justice, so I mocked justice. Some wanted the Storm to end, so I embraced the Storm. And due to a previous Duel of Wits among the players, they couldn't just murder the wizard where he stood. They had agreed that he would be either taken to justice or would work to end the Storm.

And so rather than a cataclysmic fight, we ended with a Duel of Wits: Their statement of purpose was "You will work to end the Storm with Wizard Hunter Yang." Mine was, "There is no empire, no justice. The citadel was abandoned and I claim it as mine own."

In short, "End the apocalypse" versus "admit the empire is gone and given over to wizards and mutants." Heavy stuff.

During the Duel of Wits, I was careful to choose actions that reflected his jaded caution. And when I (narrowly) lost, I made sure to compromise rather than escalate to violence. Chu would do as they asked, provided that he could have his order and be protected—thus fulfilling two of his Beliefs.

This villain emerged from these vague notions not as a caricature, but as a vivid, sympathetic personality. It was sweet.

Building Beliefs

In this section, we attempt to distill five years of advice about writing Beliefs. Pray for our immortal souls.

Belief versus Situation

You cannot write Beliefs in a vacuum. Before Beliefs are put to paper, the GM and players agree to the rough action, the situation. Situation includes a bit of the setting, the player characters, antagonists and a problem or two that can't be ignored.

Once you have your situation, the players must bind their characters into it. How are you going to change this situation? What must be done right away? If a player has trouble answering those two questions concretely—including a character, a setting element and a problem—then the situation is lacking. The GM must review the situation and tighten it up. He must make it more threatening, impossible to ignore, but not so pressing that the game is going to end in the first session.

The cost for ignoring situation isn't the end of the road, rather it causes the antagonist's plans to evolve. While the players dawdle, the villain gains. The situation becomes more grim. The idea is that if the players fail to stop the initial problem, the antagonist changes the setting to his benefit. He takes over. He ruins lives. He murders loved ones. He steals ancient artifacts. He rewrites law. He enslaves nations. His work is never finished in the first session. If the situation is ignored (or if challenges are failed), the Big Picture is threatened.

Your first Belief always refers to this situation. It describes your view of it and how you're going to tackle it. Are you opposed? Why? What action will you take to stop it?

Intraparty Beliefs

The other players at the table present other opportunities for Beliefs. During play, you interact with them more than anything else in the game. Each of you has your own opinions and methods. Each player has his perspective on the history, behavior or actions of the other players' characters. And each player is taking action in the situation. You may find those actions compelling and want to help. Or you may find their actions offensive and wish to thwart them.

Write your second Belief about another player character. What intrigues you about him? What offends you? How will you help him? How will you hinder him?

One-on-One Games

In one-on-one games, the GM is the "other player" mentioned above. The GM must present a compelling, recurring allied NPC about whom the player cares.

Ethical or Philosophical Stances

Some of my favorite Beliefs contain no goal or opinion, no action at all. They are philosophical guides. They are the moral underpinning of the character. These are by far the hardest Beliefs to write. Not that you can't come up with a fascinating statement of your philosophy. On the contrary, that's the easy part. The difficulty lays in application. If poorly conceived, these Beliefs are too easy to ignore. And if you're ignoring one of your Beliefs, you're carrying around deadweight.

Make your third Belief an ethical, moral or philosophical statement. For the best effect, write it so that it can be contradicted. It's easy to say that you believe in God or good, but it's not easy to challenge a Belief like that. A slightly more nuanced Belief like "As a faithful man, I should sacrifice myself for the greater good," tells us more about the character and allows for the statement to be tested. Just how much of yourself will you sacrifice? Try not to have more than one of your Beliefs be an ethical statement.

The Fourth Belief

Loyal, Zealot and other similar traits grant characters a fourth Belief. According to the rules, the Belief must tie into the nature of the trait. And the rules for the traits say that if the Belief is changed, the trait is lost.

This might sound contradictory, but you can change the Belief. What I meant to say was that you lose the trait if you use the Belief slot for anything aside from a Belief relating to the trait.

If you're Loyal, but your master is killed, you can take on a new master and write a new Loyal Belief about it.

Often players write two-part Beliefs into these slots: "I believe strongly in this thing, therefore I must…" You can keep the declarative statement and change the action to reflect your current situation.

Give and Take

When you start a Burning Wheel game, the GM presents a situation building on the Big Picture and the characters. You write your Beliefs based on those elements. The GM then presents scenes or actions to challenge those Beliefs.

The game proceeds based on your decisions and the results of the tests—pass or fail. Based on your actions, a new circumstance will arise. The situation will change. You will have a new opinion about this situation. Some Beliefs will be fulfilled by the developments of the ongoing game. Write new ones based on the new circumstance.

Some Beliefs will be engaged but left incomplete. Tweak them so they reflect the current situation. And some Beliefs will lay inactive. Talk to the GM and the other players about these. Is the story headed in that direction? If it is, keep the Belief. If you are clinging to something that the game has moved past, change it.

Belief-Building Tips

Beliefs are a principled to-do list. The most common problem we see with Beliefs is that they either have an ideology but no action, or an action without a driving ideology. Each Belief needs a to-do so it's clear when the character is pursuing his Belief and he can earn artha, and each Belief needs an ideology to back it up so the action has context.

Red Flags

If the players don't know what they're supposed to be doing right now, their Beliefs are broken. The situation and buy-in are probably deficient in this case, too.

If the players aren't earning at least one fate point per session for pursuing their Beliefs, their Beliefs are lacking.

If the players haven't completed a Belief and earned a persona point within a session or two, their Beliefs lack urgency. Not broken, but potentially stagnant. To earn persona points, try to break your goal-oriented Beliefs down into smaller steps.

Inner Conflict

By design, Beliefs provide an opportunity for a player to evoke the inner turmoil of his character. You have three Beliefs rather than one so you can counterpose them. You are supposed to have differing or conflicting opinions about various elements of the game. Your actions in the situation may contravene your philosophy. In play, as the action rises, you get to decide which is more important to you. Play out the turmoil in a dramatic fashion and you'll earn artha for Moldbreaker as well as for playing your other Belief or accomplishing a goal.

Direction

You can use Beliefs to set your character on an arc—transformation from neophyte to master, from worm to hero, from child to adult and even from hero to something more.

Ethical statements are one tool for setting such directions. You play them now, but you plan on growing past them in future play. In fact, you can make ethical statements now and set yourself to move into direct conflict with that stance later. I can say, "I will never raise my hand in violence." I can play a pacifist in the moment. However, my plan can be for this peaceful man to transform in the course of play into a cold-blooded killer.

Of course, there is a danger of playing your character too rigidly—locking him into a predetermined course. To prevent this, stay open to the possibilities that arise in play. Consider the events of the game and how they affect your character's perception. Be prepared for unexpected change.

I recently played a character who I planned to transform from a pacifist to a martial master. But after seeing the woman he loved killed before him—struck down by the curses of an angry god—his goals seemed hollow. It's time to readjust and choose another long-term arc for him. Perhaps he'll devote himself to the faith or to medicine. Perhaps his heart is broken and he determines never to return home again.

Goal-Oriented Beliefs

It is a good habit to shape one Belief so that you can accomplish it in this session. It might not happen, but you should try for it. Shooting for the Personal Goals award keeps you active and engaged.

What's an Appropriate Goal?

Goals are relative things. In game terms, a goal must require action from the player—he must risk for his Belief. At minimum, one test must be made in pursuit of the goal. It is preferable that a series of tests are made, but there is no hard formula.

Remember, our motto is "Fight for what you believe." If a player isn't fighting, then the game isn't delivering on its promise. Therefore, as a GM, you must place a challenge in the path of each Belief: an opponent to overcome, a confidante to be convinced, an artifact to be rescued, a mystery to be solved or even a dangerous cliff to be scaled.

These elements are born from the Big Picture. They are facets of the setting that you pull from the background and place into the foreground.

It should be feasible to accomplish goals in a session or two.

Reconciling Two-Part Beliefs

Two-part Beliefs are very useful because they allow you to maintain your philosophical stance but to change up what you're going to do about it. When the action portion is invalidated or the goal accomplished, you can keep the ideological statement and change the action or goal. "I am loyal to the king, therefore I will…" has huge potential for play. What will you do for the king? Keep your statement of loyalty and as the situation changes, insert new actions into the Belief. Now you get a fresh persona point from it in play!

Ye Olde "fourth Beliefs" from Loyal, Zealot and similar traits are often two-part Beliefs and thus fall into this category.

Practical Beliefs

This section breaks down some issues with Beliefs in Burning Wheel: trouble writing Beliefs, writing Beliefs for a campaign, changing Beliefs during a campaign, what to do when you earn Moldbreaker, what to

do when you've finished with a Belief, how to play a Belief that can't be accomplished and some practical advice on challenging Beliefs in general.

Trouble Writing Beliefs

If one of your players is having trouble writing Beliefs, try to get something down on paper, anything that's even close to the concept. Don't worry about getting it perfect out of the gate. Have him write a Belief that you know will need to change.

During the session, be prepared to confront him with a handful of decisions. Use your own inspiration and ideas for the situation to prod the half-baked Belief. Set up a problem that can't be solved in a single roll. When the player grabs for the dice, stop him. Nail down the intent and task for this test, and ask him what he wants to accomplish by the end of the session. Have him write this statement as a Belief.

At the end of the session, be sure this player gets artha appropriate for the Belief. Break down the reward process. Let the player know why he's earning these strange little points. This will close part of the cycle for him—he should understand now that if he acts on his Beliefs, he'll get rewarded in a way that will allow him to act more effectively next time.

Writing Beliefs for a Campaign

You want to topple the duke, but it's going to take many sessions of play to get there. You can write a Belief that states, "I must overthrow the duke no matter the cost." This is a nice, strong Belief, but it's very hard to earn rewards for it. In the short term, you've got to constantly push against the duke or his works. This will probably get you a handful of fate points. Ultimately, after many sessions of work, you'll accomplish this goal (or die trying). That'll net you one persona point, not an adequate reward for all your effort.

It's best to break that long-term goal into bits that you can accomplish in the short term. "I will rob the duke's treasury of every penny." Or, "I will kidnap the duke's brother, Baron Evil Crown the Bad, and hold him for ransom." Or, "I will embarrass the duke at court when the prince comes." Assume for the sake of argument, that these instances are not long-term, campaign-spanning goals, but scenarios that you can accomplish in a session or two of play.

Writing strong, goal-oriented Beliefs allows you stay on track for your larger aims, earn lots of artha (to be saved for that final confrontation, of course) and have many exciting sessions en route to your goal.

Changing Beliefs During a Campaign

When do you change a Belief? In the rules as written, you can change one at any point as long as the GM approves the timing. However, we rarely change Beliefs during a session. We prefer to let them be challenged in the course of the session. If we can't challenge a Belief in a session, we reexamine it. At BWHQ, we change Beliefs at the start of a session. We review what happened last time we played. We state where we are now and what we plan on doing. If goal-oriented Beliefs were accomplished in the previous session, we change or update them. If ideologies were challenged or crushed, we change them to suit our new outlooks. If we have a Belief that's not being challenged, we try to rework it so it can be more rewarding.

On rare occasions, an earth-shattering event will rock one of the players. Something snaps. He's got to make a change right now. This moment is perhaps one of the most powerful in all of Burning Wheel. By all means, go with inspired changes of Beliefs!

Sometimes, a Belief needs to sit in reserve for a session or two before you can really dig into it. That's perfectly acceptable. It's rare that a single session challenges all of the players' Beliefs. But if a couple of sessions pass without the Belief being touched, then you need to change it.

In campaign play, if you're playing hard with goal-oriented Beliefs, you'll probably also have far-reaching goals that aren't appropriate for a Belief. Or you'll agree to accept a side mission to help a friend—to help accomplish another player's goal. You need to write a Belief about this goal, so what do you do with the Belief that you're replacing? We keep notes on the backs of our character sheets about long-term goals. So if we need to clear a Belief slot for a short-term goal, we can do so without fear of forgetting our big plans.

When the immediate situation is resolved, we refer to the notes, make sure they're still germane and then write new Beliefs for them.

When to Say No to Changing a Belief

It's possible, in the course of a session, for the GM to have an unrevealed obstacle waiting to challenge a Belief. If this is the case, and a player asks to change the Belief that is about to be challenged, the GM can and should advise him to wait. Only delay the change of

the Belief if you can challenge it this session. If you can't get to it this session, let the player change it.

Moldbreaker

The Moldbreaker reward is a powerful tool in long-term play. You can earn this reward in a very self-conscious way. You are in control of when you play into or when you break a Belief. Breaking a Belief isn't the same as disregarding it for convenience's sake. You must dive into the drama, and play against yourself. For your troubles, you earn a nice persona point.

What to do with the Belief after you've broken it? Do you discard it? No. You keep it. Breaking it convincingly shows how much you truly care about that ideal. You return to the Belief and play it earnestly, like a man shamed by his own actions so he resolves stalwartly to do good from now on. Your transgression reaffirms your Belief.

We talk about Moldbreaker a bit more in the Artha chapter. But to briefly repeat what's said there: If you find yourself repeatedly breaking a Belief, then it's time to change it.

Finishing a Belief

When we accomplish a goal related to a Belief in a game, we have a short conversation. The GM asks, "Are you done with that? Do you want to push that further?" Remember, the GM's job is to challenge Beliefs. Even if a situation is resolved, it's possible that the Belief isn't resolved with it. A Belief may take on new meaning in the resolution of the action. It's up the player to decide.

On the other hand, the GM has to be honest. If he has inspiration for more action behind a Belief, then he should say so. And if he doesn't, he should tell the player, "I feel like you're done with that. I don't have anything else. Do you agree?"

If the player and GM don't agree, discuss the problem and work out an appropriate direction. You can modify the situation or create a new one to accommodate the Belief.

Guiding Light Beliefs

A guiding light Belief is one that is not accomplishable by any means. It provides an ethical rule upon which the player can measure his character's actions. At BWHQ, we try to discourage these Beliefs in new players. They're hard to play and hard to challenge. However, for a skilled Burning Wheel player, they're a lot of fun. Guiding light Beliefs

help you "get into character." They encourage you to offer a different perspective on the situation. If you have a Belief like "I must never raise my hand in violence again, since I have been forced to slay mine own brother," how are you going to topple the duke?

Guiding light Beliefs that ascribe to an ideology—"I will abide by the precepts of Nurgle's church," for example—are colorful but difficult to play. Behind these Beliefs lays an ideological system. The player must carry this ideology in his thoughts while he plays and be ready to spout those precepts and abide by them! On the other hand, as the GM, you must also know these principles. You must be ready to offer situations that directly contradict them or present options in which one way contravenes the ideology and the other venerates it. This is quite a challenge to bring out during gameplay.

As the GM, I find that not only do I have to present nuanced situations, but I often have to remind players of their own ideologies! "Really, you're going to do that? I thought that was against your religion." So take care with these Beliefs. It's okay for each player to have one, but no more. When getting started with the game, try to focus on goal-oriented Beliefs. You can develop these deeper, more nuanced Beliefs in play.

Practical Advice on Challenging Beliefs

Here are some practical perspectives on challenging Beliefs. They were presented to us by Michael Prescott on our forums.

A player has the Belief "I must kill that bastard Mordock." Here are a number of ways you can challenge that one Belief using different perspectives on the character Mordock.

- *Validation*. Make Mordock super villainous, mean to children, etc. to validate the worthiness of the Belief.

- *Undermining*. Make Mordock a super nice guy, someone nobody in their right mind would want to kill. The player has a chance to define his character by the unreasonable pursuit of his goal.

- *Flip*. Switch from validating to undermining, or vice versa. Have the villain repent and beg for mercy—now the long-validated player has to risk looking murderous to complete his goal.

- *Opposition*. Make Mordock hard to kill, in logistical terms. He has henchmen, powerful allies, etc. so that once he's dead, it feels like a big accomplishment.

- *Catch-22*. Make gunning for Mordock costly in terms of the player's other Beliefs. For example, if the player has a Belief about curing his sister's terminal illness, Mordock is the only guy who can cure her.

- *Divide and Conquer*. Like Catch-22, but you cause interplayer friction by finding ways to get other players to oppose the player with the belief to bring down Mordock. For example, Mordock is the only person who can teach the players the secrets of Enchanting.

- *Merge*. Create harmony in the group by making Mordock's death a means of accomplishing other goals. Perhaps Mordock also has the Black Chalice, something that another player needs.

Try to imagine your players' Beliefs in this scheme. What's the common goal they share? What are their secondary goals? How can you tie the secondary goals back into the common goal? Can you use the secondary goals as obstacles to accomplishing the common goal?

What's the mood of the table? Do they universally hate one of the antagonists? Can you turn him into a sympathetic villain and thereby challenge all of their Beliefs by causing them to question their goals?

Michael's simple scheme for challenging Beliefs helps frame things into a pattern of easily executed actions. How do your group's goals fit into this scheme?

Instincts

Instincts are a tricky part of the game. A good Instinct is harder to write than a good Belief. And often, a bad Instinct is harder to apply than a bad Belief. To write a good Belief, you need a situation, a character and a sense of drama. To write a good Instinct, you need a character, a sense of drama and a bit of system mastery. Instincts game the system, so to use them best you need to know how the system works.

The rules mention two types of Instincts: those that add characterization and those that grant a mechanical benefit. There's a third type that we describe in this chapter—Instincts born from the situation. We also discuss what makes a good characterization Instinct and how you get the most mechanical benefit from an Instinct.

Characterization Instincts

A characterization Instinct is a reminder to you about how to play your character through a situation. It offers little or no mechanical benefit, but it tells you "what your character would do." It's helpful when overwhelmed by choices to be able to refer to your Instinct list and be nudged in a direction.

The best characterization Instincts remind you to do something with your character that you, the player, are bad at or uncomfortable with. They remind you to push against comfortable behavior. They remind you to be cool when you always blow up; they remind you to lie when you always tell the truth; they remind you to be cold-blooded when you're usually sanguine.

Mechanical Instincts

A mechanical Instinct is one that gains you some mechanical advantage in the game. Typically, you are allowed to make a free roll to cover your ass when trouble arises or to trigger a condition that bypasses a penalty.

Instincts work best in the looser framework of independent and versus tests made in the course of play.

As it says in the Character Burner, Instincts let you make a test when triggered by a situation or obstacle. Essentially, play stops advancing for a moment and you step back in time to allow the player with the appropriate Instinct to make a test. If you have an Instinct like "Always remember to bring a gift when visiting," and you arrive at court in play but you forgot a gift, you get to make a Resources test on the side for an appropriate gift. No questions asked.

Or Instincts can provide the pretext to turn a situation into a versus test—rather than a standard test or an outright declaration by the GM. You have an Instinct to "Always watch out for an ambush." You're assured of getting to test your Observation against an impending ambush no matter how distracted your character is.

Or an Instinct allows you to take an action in the game that alleviates a penalty. This is the "I forgot to say it, but my guy would totally do that" type of Instinct. "Always sleep with a knife under my pillow." You don't have to talk about that knife, ever. It's always under your pillow when you bed down. "Always lock the door when I leave the vault." That vault is always locked when you leave. You don't leave it ajar unless you specifically state you play against your Instinct.

Instincts in Duel of Wits, Range and Cover and Fight!

Contrary to appearances, Instincts don't work in Duel of Wits, Range and Cover and Fight! They work before you engage these systems and after, but not during. Timing is too important in these instances to let people cheat outright. If Instincts could change actions, these conflicts would rapidly devolve into Instinct wars.

You can write Instincts about being prepared for a Fight! or to always escalate to violence in a Duel of Wits or to always gather your arrows after a skirmish in Range and Cover, but you can't write anything that interferes with the action sequence. "Always fight in aggressive stance" will allow you to start a fight in aggressive stance, but once you drop out of stance, you don't automatically pop back in. You have to spend the action required. "If disarmed, draw my knife." This Instinct sounds cool, but it breaks the rules. It costs two actions to draw a knife in Fight. Since there's no way you could have had the knife ready before you were disarmed in the melee, the Instinct can't pay off.

Situational Instincts

Situational Instincts are similar to characterization Instincts, but rather than focusing on the character himself, they relate an action about a specific circumstance in the story.

So rather than, "Always draw my sword at the first sign of trouble," your third Instinct should be something like "When I see my traitorous brother, attack him vigorously!" Or, "When I see the night watch, run." Or, "When Soryu mouths off, try to cover for him."

These Instincts relate to specific circumstances and specific characters you are involved with in the game right now. Using these Instincts will pay off handsomely in artha and create fun chaos in the game.

Practical Instincts

Let me try to give some advice about common problems with Instincts.

Always Win

I see badly written, poorly conceived Instincts all the time. They go something like this: "Always win;" or "Always do the right thing;" or "Always know something seemingly prosaic but actually impossible—exits, the truth, your thoughts."

Of course, no one actually writes those Instincts, but that's the spirit behind many of the bad ones. They're written to shield the character (and player) from danger. That's not what Instincts are for, so don't tolerate Instincts like that.

Make sure Instincts are focused on a physical action that can be accomplished in a single heartbeat or something that you do habitually when you're not under pressure or in danger. Instincts have to make sense in the context of their use! If you have an Instinct "Always assess my opponents for weaknesses," and you get ambushed, there's no time for assessin'!
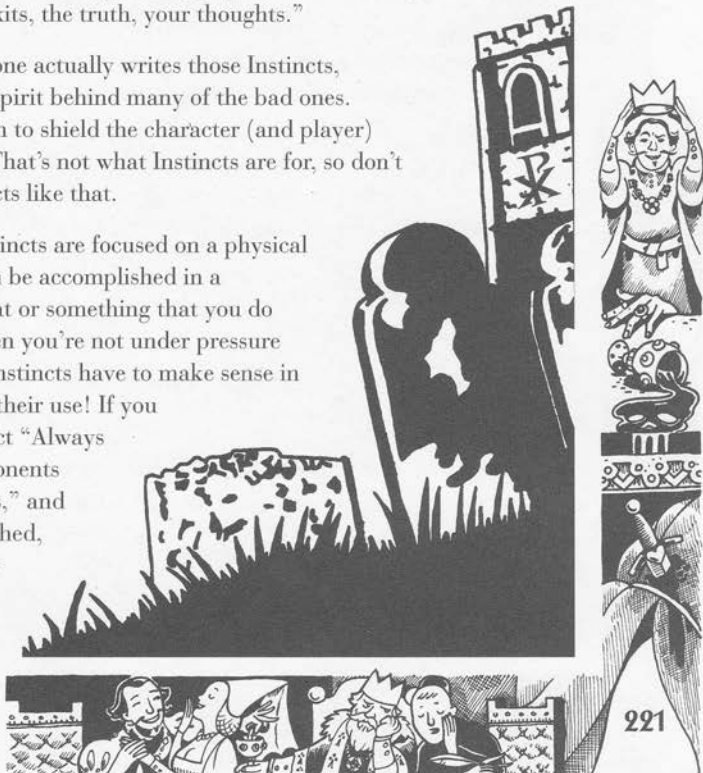
Checking out your opponent seems like such a simple thing, but it's tricky. Weaknesses need to be studied. That Instinct needs to say "Always assess my opponents for weaknesses before a fight." The modified Instinct makes perfect sense in the context of an ambush. No time! But if you were at court and you met your enemy in passing, that'd be a perfect time to assess him for weaknesses—even if you don't say you did it. When you fight him, you can call back to that moment and say, "Weren't we at court together? I totally assessed his weaknesses then! I want to make a Perception test to have noted where he wears the lightest armor."

Picking Three Good Instincts

Players often struggle to choose three good Instincts. They typically have one sweet Instinct in mind, but have no inspiration for the second or third.

Well, let us start off this discussion by removing the pressure. The Character Burner is quite clear, "Characters may have one to three Instincts." You're not required to have all three. So if you've only got one Instinct, you're fine. You can start playing and worry about adding others as play progresses.

We often use this tactic. We'll get stuck with two great Instincts and then draw a blank for the third. However, in the course of play something usually happens that makes us say "My guy would never do that," or "My guy would always do that!" That becomes our missing Instinct!

We also use these guidelines:

Personal Instinct
Make one Instinct about your character's personality.

"Never let them forget that I'm a noble."

"Never let a man insult me."

"Always make a short joke around Dwarves."

Material Instinct
Make one Instinct about something your character does with his gear.

"Always mend my armor before I bed down."

"Always sleep with a knife under my pillow."

"Never wear shoes."

Skill-Based Instinct

Look over your skills. Imagine how they would make your character behave. Write an Instinct about that behavior.

"When I'm in a library, do research."

"Always intimidate people who are shorter than me."

"Always recite a poem for the beautiful girls."

Artha Cycle

Burning Wheel is a game of rewards. It is not enough for a player to claim to want something. It's not enough for that player to fight for what he thinks he wants. The game only begins to work when the player stakes his claim on a Belief and is then rewarded in fate and persona points. That artha creates incentive for further engagement with even tighter, more dramatic Beliefs, but it also fuels other parts of the system.

Artha is meant to be used. It's not hoarded or reserved. You can only benefit from it if you spend it. And generally, you need to use it. You need artha to overcome obstacles so that you can fulfill your Beliefs. And the more you invest in that circuit, the more you're likely to get back. Spend artha and earn it right back. Do more, push harder.

But that's not all, no sir. You need that artha to advance, too. Perception, Faith, Resources—they can't advance without it. You need to invest it in challenges that are too difficult to overcome without it. That investment pays off as your stat, skill and attribute dice pools increase.

One way to advance abilities of exponents 5 and higher is to use artha to pass challenging tests. The only way to garner the artha is to play your Beliefs, Instincts and traits to thoroughly engage with the game.

Furthermore, investing artha in Beliefs helps you earn traits from trait votes. Those traits codify the aspects of your character that you evoked while fighting for your Beliefs. Spending that artha has helped bring your character closer to your vision of who he is right now.

And there's the ultimate investment: epiphany. Fighting for your Beliefs, spending, earning, investing—an epiphany is inevitable. It takes quite a long time, but it's worth it. A gray-shade ability substantially multiplies your character's effectiveness.

This enormous, beautiful cycle is born from working toward fulfilling one Belief.

Awarding Artha in General

At our table, we've drifted the rules for awarding artha a bit. On page 64, the Burning Wheel states that the GM is to award artha on the spot if a Belief is fulfilled. We don't do that anymore. For players newly introduced to the concept of Beliefs and artha, on-the-spot awards are useful. They demonstrate the cycle: Play your Belief, get rewarded.

But that method has two drawbacks. It's disruptive; it requires more record keeping in the moment. And it lessens the value of individual points of artha by allowing players to grub for artha in the moment rather than push themselves while husbanding their resources. I prefer for players to have a finite resource with which they must make difficult resource-management decisions. In the currency cycle, you risk now to earn rewards later—fate for playing Beliefs, persona for accomplishing goals, etc.

At our table, we do artha awards at the end of each session. How do we remember if we played a Belief or Instinct? We developed a method that I feel enriches our games. We wrap up 15 minutes earlier than we used to. Then each player in turn reads his Beliefs, Instincts and traits aloud. The player interjects commentary as he reads—"I played that when I…" or "This one didn't get touched at all…." Other players also offer insights. Often, a player will shrug off a Belief, "I didn't play this at all," and we all shout, "Are you kidding?! What the hell else were you doing when you murdered that dude in cold blood?!" or something similar. If the player agrees, he takes the award. If he disagrees, then he doesn't take the point. It's important that the session is remembered and parsed by the group as a whole. It helps us all keep focused on the game.

This works in the other direction, too. If a player isn't earning artha from a Belief, it's obvious. Therefore, when reviewing Beliefs for artha, we can clearly see what's misfiring and what's working.

The Deeds Point

The Deeds point is the single most powerful type of artha in the game. It can be spent before the roll or after. It can double your dice or reroll your traitors.

The criteria for earning a deeds point is intentionally vague. In fact, deeds points aren't earned, they're given. Unlike fate or persona points, which are earned by fulfilling player-driven criteria, these points are handed out at the sole discretion of the GM.

The deeds point is bound up in the Big Picture of the game. It's for doing remarkable, unexpected things that the GM thinks are exemplary or even frustrating! Deeds points are won when the players sacrifice their petty aims for a grand act. They can't be gunned for—unless the price for failure isn't a setback but a cataclysm.

If you feel like you're cruising toward a deeds point, then you're doing it wrong. If you feel like you've tricked your way into one, then you've done yourself a disservice. If your stomach is in knots and your hands trembling under the intensity of the events that concluded your game, then you might be eligible.

Deeds points can be earned in conjunction with persona points for goals. But in the quest for that goal, the player must risk his character to unanticipated heights or profound depths. If these great deeds are all part of the plan, then it's worth a persona point. If the situation blows up, gets complicated and you have to take a few deep breaths before you dive in, yet you still manage to persevere, then you might be eligible.

The context of play and the challenges therein are paramount. It's all relative. And, ultimately, up to the GM.

As a GM, I recently gave out a deeds point to each member of my group for completing the campaign goal of ending the reign of a powerful wizard.

As a player, I recently earned a deeds point for helping banish a Greater Dæmon who had plagued our party for years. Both events were the result of a lot of hard work, but they both concluded with explosive, unexpected results.

Earning Persona

There are five distinctions for earning persona points: Embodiment, Moldbreaker, Personal Goals, Workhorse and MVP.

Earning Embodiment

For the Embodiment award, one player or the GM nominates another. He cites the scene or scenes and describes why he thinks the player deserves an Embodiment point. Everyone has a chance to chime in,

for or against. We never nominate ourselves, and we tend to make Embodiment awards gradually harder to earn. Repeating your stellar performance from session to session will earn you a few persona points in the early games, but later in the campaign, it's just what we expect as your normal behavior. If you want that award, you have to push into new and interesting ground.

Earning Moldbreaker

Moldbreaker is perhaps my favorite award, but it has its problems. It is earned for dramatically playing against a Belief. You can betray a Belief in situations presented to you by the GM as he challenges you or you can set up your own Moldbreaker by writing conflicting Beliefs. Both are perfectly valid. It's important to note that you don't earn this persona point by *ignoring* a Belief. If a Belief doesn't come into play, or if it's challenged and you take no action, then there is no reward.

To get the Moldbreaker award, you must bring your character's internal struggle into the spotlight. You must show the rest of the group how you are fighting with your own demons. Show us how much this decision costs you.

Sometimes this roleplay results in you serving one Belief while ignoring another. That's perfectly normal. And often, if a great performance or brain-breaking decision doesn't get you Moldbreaker, you are considered for an Embodiment point.

The Moldbreaker Belief Change Warning

As I said above, I love Moldbreaker moments. They're very powerful for me. They are a point at which many parts of the game come together and present the player with a poignant meaningful choice. The Moldbreaker moment is part of the classic Burning Wheel question, "Is that what you believe now? Well, what if this happens? Do you still believe that?"

When I GM and a player undergoes a Moldbreaker moment, I ask him about the Belief at the end of the session. "Do you still believe that? Do you want to change the Belief?" I am comfortable with the player deciding either way, but I want to make sure that there is still interesting conflict to squeeze from the decision.

Sometimes when you break a Belief, you are changed by the moment. Your character has surprised you. You no longer believe. You know it intuitively. You know you have to change. Powerful stuff.

Other times when you break a Belief, you are using that moment to define the very Belief that you played against. By going against it this one time, you are demonstrating just how committed you are to your ideals. You would prefer to do this another way, but circumstances have forced you to compromise your ideals. However, this doesn't make you callow or disingenuous. In fact, it roots you even more firmly in your ideological stance.

So after you earn the Moldbreaker award, reflect a bit on the Belief and the direction of the character. If you no longer believe, change it. If you care even more, leave it alone.

If a player earns Moldbreaker in multiple sessions, I flag the Belief. After three times, I request that the Belief be changed to reflect the character's new ideology. Generally, the players agree with me. On occasion, the situations in the game are so fraught with chest-tightening, fist-clenched struggles of ideology that it's appropriate to keep the Belief even though it's been broken repeatedly. This is a tough call, though, something to be discussed and verified by both player and GM.

Personal Goals

The persona point for the Personal Goals award is straightforward on the surface. Did you accomplish the goal set out in your Belief or not? If yes, you get a persona point. If not, then you either played it to drive the game forward and earned a fate point or didn't touch on it and didn't benefit.

In practice, this award can get a little muddy. Players can have Beliefs whose meanings change in context. "I will destroy the Red Council and all of its evil works." In the campaign, the Red Council is down to one wizard who maintains lots of evil works. Once that wizard is destroyed, is that Belief counted as accomplished? Or what happens if the evil works still exist or the evil works are thwarted but the sole wizard survives? Who decides?

When we read our Beliefs at the end of the session, we'll just ask the player who owns it. "Are you still interested in that Belief? You pretty much fulfilled it, but you could pursue it more if you'd like." If the goal has been nominally accomplished, but contains open-ended possibilities, we let him decide whether he wants to keep the Belief and take a fate point, or change the Belief and take a persona point.

inspire other players to action or play the anchor, supporting the other players with his performance and still earn this reward. This includes passing lots of helping dice while not testing much yourself.

This award is not based entirely on success. You can labor behind the scenes, testing to forage and cook for the group, trying to muster a couple of linked dice, but only accruing failure and penalties. In the mechanics, you've hurt the group, but in the fiction you've fed and clothed the group so that they can carry on the fight—even if you've also made them sick and poor. On occasion, that's also worthy of the Workhorse award!

Earning Fate

Fate is the most common artha currency. It is easiest to earn because there are more conditions for its acquisition than persona or deeds combined.

Earning Fate for Beliefs

The conditions for earning fate for playing a Belief are very loose. The text says, "serves a purpose or drives the game forward." Ideally, I intended that the player make a test in service of his Belief. I want you to bring your statement into the game—make it manifest with a risk of failure. If not that, then at least a strong performance based on or defending a Belief is necessary for the reward.

Merely restating the Belief to the group or silently handing over a few helping dice during the session is not enough to earn this reward. Beliefs must be actively pursued—there must be some risk—if you wish to be rewarded.

Working Toward...

For most Beliefs, you earn fate points on your way to earning a persona point for personal goals. You don't accomplish the goal this session, but you actively worked toward it. That earns a fate point.

Fate Mines

Some Beliefs are not goals. Either the explicit goal is beyond the scope of the campaign or the Belief is an ideological or philosophical statement. "I will spend my every breath to overthrow this empire" is an example of the former (for argument's sake, let's say the scope of the game doesn't include room for me to actually topple anything so grand as an empire). "Fire is my guide and my succor" is an example of the latter type of Belief.

I can work toward both of those Beliefs. I can attack the imperial tax collectors and drive them from my town. I can defame the emperor in public. I can write manifestos about the downfall of the emperor.

For the fire Belief, I can use fire to light my way. I can build fires to keep us warm when it rains. I can boil water. I can sterilize my medical implements. I can speak in mystical terms about the fire within when I make decisions. All of this counts toward playing a Belief, even though there is nothing to ultimately accomplish.

These are acceptable Beliefs. In fact, I recommend writing one for your character. We call them, rather baldly, *fate mines*. You work them into play to provide characterization and are rewarded with fate points.

Earning Fate for Instincts

Instincts are often their own reward. They can grant a mechanical advantage. If that mechanic is invoked, and you benefit from it, you don't get an artha award. If the Instinct mechanic is invoked and you suffer for it, then you're rewarded with a fate point.

No one can trigger your Instincts but you. If you don't invoke the Instinct, you cannot benefit from it. If you don't call for its mechanical aspect to aid you, then the Instinct remains inert. If you don't invoke the Instinct in a problematic circumstance, then you won't be rewarded. This reward is very much dependent on your own behavior at the table.

Good Instinct play requires a proactive player. A GM can certainly remind a player about his Instincts, but playing Instincts is voluntary. A player can choose to ignore his Instincts. Of course we frown upon this type of play. We hope that the two-fold reward for Instinct is enough to encourage their use.

Earning Fate for Traits

Trait awards are very important, but they are less frequent than rewards for Beliefs. The criteria for the reward is that the story must head in an unexpected direction due to the invocation of the trait.

At Burning Wheel HQ we've drifted the conditions of this award slightly. We only give out trait awards for character traits. On a rare occasion, we'll grant the award for another type of trait. Why? We feel that using a die trait or call-on is reward enough.

Using a character trait is purely a way to embellish performance and color decisions. This is a noble thing and it should be rewarded.

At the end of the session, we quickly scan our trait lists and make a case for any character traits that were brought into play in a meaningful way. We try to cite the moment of decision or change. If the group agrees, we take the award. And, in general, you earn one fate per session for playing character traits. Otherwise play becomes trait-bingo rather than meaningful roleplay.

Earning Fate for Your Mom

I earn a fate point every time I answer your mom's questions on our forum.

Earning Fate for Humor

In some of our games, the humor point is a nightly award. In other campaigns, it's rare. Burning Wheel is, by its nature, a rather heavy game. It's an intense experience, fighting for what you believe! But in this context, we value comic relief. If that in-character remark makes us all laugh—from humor, joy or excitement—we want to reward you.

However, comedic moments pass quickly and in the final end-of-session tally, they're easy to forget. To make sure just rewards are distributed, some of us will make a note of what was said if we think it's humor-worthy. My notebooks and character sheets are littered with incongruous quotes that are just bizarre out of context but were spit-take hilarious in the moment.

Earning Fate for Skills

Right Skill, Right Time is the rarest of the fate point awards. It's meant to award clever character builds or diligent practice. It is only disbursed when the group is at an impasse and the GM calls for an obscure or unlikely skill to bypass the obstacle. A player unexpectedly chimes in, "I have that!" The game rolls on and he's rewarded in the end.

The best example I can remember is a group who needed to sneak into a well-guarded citadel tower. One player chimed in, "I have Architecture. I want to use my knowledge to find us a secret entrance." That player was the absolute hero for that session. I think he got MVP and the Right Skill, Right Time award.

You cannot earn this award more than once per skill, ever. Once we know you have that skill, there's no more magic to it. Once we start to rely on your clutch skills, you're in the running for Workhorse, not Right Skill, Right Time.

Artha Bloat

If you play Burning Wheel over a long period of time, you may experience artha bloat. An excess of fate and persona builds up. This happens for a number of reasons.

- If you're too lenient awarding fate for Beliefs, Instincts and traits, it's easy to build up a hefty reserve.

- If you're not challenging players with difficult obstacles, they have less incentive to spend artha. Thus if you see a player with eight or more fate points, you should be sure to hit them with some steep obstacles.

- And if you're not using the extended conflict mechanics enough, players tend to build up a fat reserve.

Conflicts Soak Artha

Duel of Wits, Range and Cover and Fight! require lots of little rolls that all carry significant consequences—in these conflicts you're always pushing for just one more success. Thus a player can easily invest a lot of artha in just one conflict. And, conversely, if you're not using these mechanics, players are missing out on an opportunity to invest in their abilities.

The game awards artha at a rate that is not easily modified. And the rate of awards assumes that the extended conflict mechanics will be used at least once per session. Thus if you rely solely on versus tests in your game, you're skewing the risk/reward balance of the game. In long-term games, the rate of reward and use can balance over time—you might have a mellow session one week, and a hectic one the next. But if you're using versus tests exclusively, then you risk building up ridiculous reservoirs of artha. If players are accumulating stockpiles of artha, that's a red flag it's time to put the spurs to them.

Artha for NPCs

Page 73 of the Burning Wheel recommends starting your antagonists with the same amount of artha as your players: usually one or two fate points and a persona point. This is reasonable for named, important antagonists.

Don't give your mooks any artha, no matter how bad-ass they are. It's just rude.

If you spent time burning up a creature or character to oppose the group and you don't want to see him punked, then give him a fate and a persona. Otherwise, let your bad guys' dice fall as they may.

On the other hand, the Big Bads should start with a nice reserve of three fate and three persona.

Allied NPCs and Artha

I try to deemphasize artha for allied NPCs. The players, not the supporting cast, are the focus of the game. On occasion, however, it is appropriate for these characters to start with, earn and spend artha as per the guidelines presented here and in the Burning Wheel.

NPCs Can Earn Artha

Page 65 of the Burning Wheel states that NPCs can earn artha. It's up to the players to nominate the character—for Embodiment, Personal Goals, etc. However, in practice, I've found that this acknowledgement is very rare. Thus I shamelessly pester the players if I feel like I've done a good job with an NPC: "Did you enjoy that performance? Can I have an Embodiment point?" Don't be shy. They're not going to give you anything unless you ask.

Trait Vote

Trait votes are an overlooked part of Burning Wheel's grand currency cycle. In a trait vote, the group provides feedback about the character play in the most recent arc of the campaign. The vote highlights the evocation of Beliefs, Instincts and traits and the group's own self-perception. The process is both a capstone of the currency cycle and a safety valve for the system—we get final say over the characters after all is said and done.

The basic mechanic of the trait vote is very simple, but the procedure is left rather vague.

When to Trait Vote?

There's no perfect time for a trait vote. Try to perform the vote after a major event or accomplishment in the campaign. I like a vote every six to 12 sessions. The exact timing is up to the events and flow of your game.

If you run a trait vote too soon, the players don't have a sense of each other's characters. The votes are strained. If you wait too long to vote, then the precipitating events of the campaign are forgotten and lots of good trait opportunities are missed.

Trait Vote Procedure

At BWHQ, we've developed a procedure for our trait votes. We devote a whole session to the process, with any extra time put toward smaller "interim" procedures like practice, copying over characters and single-player wrap-up events.

At the start of the vote, we review the period upon which we're voting. We try to recall a major event at the beginning of the eligibility period to mark it in our minds. Then we agree on how many traits we're eligible for in the vote. This usually takes one of three forms: one character trait only, one character trait and one other trait, or two traits of any type. We almost always break this limit, but it's good to set a guideline.

We go around the table in turn and read out our current traits. The GM and the owning player make cases for and against losing traits. We vote to keep or lose any traits that are so identified. Traits are lost if they are unplayed, unused or actively played against. This is a small but vital part of this process. This is your chance to get rid of those humiliating lifepath traits.

Once we've voted off any traits, we then pick a character. Each player in turn nominates that character for a trait. One player takes the role of secretary and notes down the nominations. Trait nominations can be based on traits from the lifepaths, the special list, the general list or traits that you develop on the spot during the vote using the Monster Burner's Trait Burner.

When you nominate, tell the group the name of the trait and why you think the character should have that trait. Don't give a speech, but a short comment is in order.

If we have a group of four players and a GM, at the end of the nomination process, each player should have five possible traits next to his name: one nomination from each player, including himself, and the GM.

Once all of the nominations are in order, starting with the first character nominated, read out the list of traits one at a time. The player who nominated the trait should make a case for the trait and why he thinks it is appropriate. Decide on the type of trait—character, die or call-on—at this point. If there is a question about what the trait does, use another trait as a model or trait burn it according to the rules in the Monster Burner. Vote on each nomination according to the procedure in the Burning Wheel. In our house rule, as presented in the Rules Appendix of this book, the owning player does not vote.

If a player is voted for more traits than he is eligible, review the deadlocked traits. Make cases for or against them. Revote until a decision is reached or you decide to break the eligibility limitations.

Following this procedure should lead you to shiny new traits in a reasonable amount of time.

Beliefs, Instincts and Trait Voting

The character sheets have a place in which you can note whether you've spent artha using a Belief or Instinct. This note is to help remind us of moments in which we've invested. And the amount of investment is a good benchmark for the types of traits for which the character is eligible.

This process is problematic in games with high Belief turnover. It becomes all but impossible to log your investments without keeping another separate record. I do not want to encourage more bookkeeping, so use this rule lightly. Use it to inform your decisions about the trait vote rather than as a strict measure.

Evolving Traits

Using the trait vote rules, you can neatly transform a character trait into something more potent and useful—a die or call-on trait. So when you're voting, examine traits that have been played well. Can they be evolved into a new form with more benefit to reflect how the character has been played? If so, propose their evolution rather than proposing a whole new trait.

Take care that you don't forget character traits. In our games, sometimes we get so caught up developing traits, we lose our character traits as they get promoted to other levels. As you evolve character traits, be sure to vote on new ones that accurately reflect changes in the character.

Reputation Votes

A trait vote is just one of two ways to vote to change your character in Burning Wheel. You also vote to change, increase, decrease, add or remove reputations. The process is essentially the same as a trait vote, but you're looking at reputations, not traits. Reputation votes can come at the end of any scenario, but they're usually lumped into the trait vote process. Don't overlook the reputation vote. It's very useful!

Advancement

I rant on and on about advancement in the Burning Wheel—
"advancement is lifeblood" and all that. Advancement is a
fundamental gear in the Burning Wheel currency cycle. As
a player, you're supposed to want to improve your character's
abilities.

Advancement shapes your behavior in play. To advance, you
must have your character attempt a variety of tasks. You can't
do the same thing over and over again to advance your ability.
You need to attempt a combination of easy and difficult acts.
Furthermore, you need to attempt tasks that are statistically
impossible.

Advancement also paces the campaign. The hard coded
system—how many rolls per session toward advancement—
determines how long it's going to take you to master that
sword so you can confront your rival.

The Rate of Advancement

Most abilities don't advance in a single session of play. In our
games, we see advancements pop three or four sessions into a
campaign.

It's possible to advance sooner, but you have to be slavishly
devoted to the ability's progress and a bit of a test-monger or
start with very low exponents.

This is part of the design. Burning Wheel is a game for
campaigns. It really starts to shine six, eight or even 12 sessions
into a campaign.

The Behavior of Routine Tests

When you need a routine test for advancement, the incentive
is to use FoRKs, lobby for advantage, linked tests and, most
important, accept help to get as many dice into your hand as
possible.

Help for routine tests is key in a group situation. The routine test you are benefitting from is often a difficult or even challenging test for the helper. So by helping one another, the group can earn a broad spectrum of advancements in a single session—or even a single roll if you're clever.

Behavior of Difficult Tests

Difficult tests require a bit of dice optimization. You want to gather the precise amount of dice so that the test counts as difficult and not routine for advancement. But you don't want to take too few dice, either! If you have a skill of B4 for an Ob 4 test, it's difficult whether you roll four dice or five. My first impulse in that situation is to get help. If no help is on offer, I root around for a FoRK or advantage die. I can afford to take that extra die and still log the difficult test.

Earning Difficult Tests Through Help

You can also earn difficult tests by helping another player. To gain this benefit, you must be attentive to the action. You must involve yourself in your friends' scenes. Place yourself in danger with them. Thus when then time comes for a test, you can justify your help. You give them helping dice to help overcome the obstacle while you compare the obstacle of the test to your raw exponent and log the appropriate test for advancement. Using this method, you can ensure that people who need routine tests get them—by piling on helping dice—and people who need difficult tests get them—by providing help.

Behavior of Challenging Tests

Challenging tests are a win-win situation. On one hand, you can be confident that you will fail a challenging test. You can grab your dice, toss them down diffidently and grin at the GM, "I fail."

Or, you can dig in, muster your traits, gather your artha, blow on your dice, mutter your imprecations to the gods and roll. You just might get lucky with some 6s and pull it off.

It's exhilarating!

Earning Challenging Tests Through Help

There's another way to earn challenging tests that isn't quite as invigorating: You can help another player in need. If your friend is making a test that's higher than your exponent, try to devise a way to help. He'll get a test relative to the number of dice he's rolling. You'll get a challenging test for advancement.

The hitch is that if your friend needs a challenging test for his exponent, he might not be able to accept help. Taking the extra dice will usually change the type of test. Thus you might need to set up the test differently—taking action yourself so your friend can help you and get the test he needs.

Balancing Success
Against Advancement

Sometimes you want to succeed. And sometimes you want to hurl yourself against impossible odds and fail. Once you start playing the advancement game, you quickly run into a juicy decision. Do you muster dice and pass the test with little risk of failure and no benefit to advancement, or do you risk failing the test by using fewer dice and logging a needed test for advancement? It's a simple matter to get enough help from your mates to turn any difficult test to a routine. But without the difficult tests, you won't advance. You must make a decision: Do you opt for short-term gain and pass the test or do you risk failure for a chance at long-term gain?

There's no right answer. Sometimes you'll need to choose one way—a goal will be too important to risk failure—and sometimes you'll go in the other direction—you're just one test away from advancing an ability. The best moments are when it is crucial for you to pass a test, but you also need the test for advancement—so you can't add too many dice. The tension between the two priorities—success against advancement—adds a lot to the game. If you are not sure which to take, check your Beliefs.

Beginner's Luck

Beginner's Luck imposes a double obstacle penalty on tests by unskilled characters. This is probably my favorite rule mathematically in the game. I find it simulates unskilled behavior very well—easy stuff is

still accomplishable without too much fuss; moderately complex stuff is possible to achieve, but not a sure thing; and difficult tasks are all but impossible for the unskilled. Simple, elegant, beautiful.

Of course, this simple, elegant and beautiful rule causes all sorts of headaches. Namely, how do you deal with a double obstacle penalty when you're making a versus test, skilled against unskilled?

At BWHQ, we halve the successes of the unskilled and round down. We compare that total to the skilled successes. If I'm skilled and roll five successes, that means your unskilled test needs 10 or 11 successes to tie me. 12 successes are needed to break the tie in your favor.

Beginner's Luck, Helping and Advancement

Unskilled characters may help one another with a test. The primary character tests using the Beginner's Luck rules. The helping character can earn a difficult or challenging test toward advancing his *stat*. Helpers do not gain skill tests applied to their aptitude.

When using Beginner's Luck rules in a versus test against a skilled opponent, it's best to count the unskilled successes as half-successes— so two successes are needed to equal one skilled success. This makes factoring advancement easier. Discard any remaining half-successes.

Factoring Beginner's Luck Obstacles With Disadvantage and Tools

When making a test using Beginner's Luck and disadvantage, the testing obstacle is double the base plus the disadvantage. The advancement obstacle is just the base obstacle plus the disadvantage.

When making a Beginner's Luck test without required tools, the testing obstacle is double the double obstacle! But the advancement obstacle is merely double the base obstacle—the obstacle for the test without tools.

Practice

Practice is a subset of Advancement, but we broke it out into its own chapter so we can take a deeper look at the rules and their application.

The Burning Wheel is explicit about the purpose of practice: It exists so you can acquire tests needed for advancement that you otherwise missed while out on campaign.

The hitch is that practice requires a substantial investment in game time. Your character spends a lot of time practicing. That time is not spent adventuring, working or recovering.

The practice cycles help set the pace of play. In fact, they are part of a suite of longer-term mechanisms—working, recovering, research—that are all scoped to produce a sense of the passage of time. You play hard, down in the shit for a while, then you crawl up out of the muck, rest, recuperate and reequip. Once you're ready, you head back into the fray and begin the cycle anew. This process creates a sense of ongoing life for the characters.

Pressure

The adventure-rest-practice-reequip-adventure cycle is the natural pace of the game. However, it's the GM's job to keep up the pressure for as long as he can without breaking the players. Don't give them a moment of peace. Throw challenges at them. When they stop for rest, move your pieces in the Big Picture. Make them say, "Uh oh…." Force the players to create their peace by accomplishing their goals or by spending themselves utterly. When they're wounded, broke and ragged, let them go to ground but let them know that their enemies will not rest.

Squeezing in Practice

Practice doesn't only have to happen during downtime. Certain elements of campaign life are meant to be noted as practice, rather than tests. You're not supposed to test to forage, cook and mend every night you're out on the trail, for example. You test when it's important. Otherwise, you note the time spent as practice.

In less adventurous lifestyles, you can practice Reading, Writing, Composition, Doctrine, History, Etiquette and a variety of other skills as part of your daily routine.

I prefer to limit this type of practice to stuff you do when you get up and stuff you do before you bed down for the night. For example, I play an Elf who keeps a journal of his travels. He makes his entries when his companions are resting. I use the journal to practice his Elven Script.

Practice Log

When squeezing practice between other events, it's important to keep a log. You can practice piecemeal—a day here, a day there. For example, I've noted in my Elf's practice log that he has 14 weeks of practice toward his Elven Script skill. Elven Script is an academic skill, so I need six months—24 weeks—before I can notch a test.

Practice Instincts

A great way to squeeze practice into your character's routine is via an Instinct. My aforementioned Elf has an Instinct, "Always keep a journal of my travels." Such an Instinct leaves no doubt as to your character's behavior. So you can be confident that when you explain that you've been practicing your Elven Script skill for the past year, your fellow players can see it in your Instinct.

Practice and Recovery

Can you rest and recover while practicing? I once heard a tale of a pneumoniac scholar who refused to rest and subsequently worked himself to death. Was he practicing while recovering?

Technically, according to the rules, you cannot practice while recovering. However, we play this situationally. If the nature of the injury permits, we allow light practice: routine tests for Reading, Research, languages, wises or similar.

However, you can practice while your friends are nursing their wounds. They're laid up in bed, pissing and moaning. You're out in the world, sharpening your skills and preparing for the next adventure.

Practice and Passage of Time

The practice rules are meant to allow for the passage of long stretches of time in your game. Let five years pass! You don't get to practice for all of those five years—you need to eat, sleep and work, too, right? But set aside a portion of that time that you feel is appropriate. Let the players practice and beef up their abilities. And let the setting and situation evolve and change meanwhile!

Practical Limits of Practice

The practice rules are very loose and meant to smooth over wrinkles between the advancement system and the game fiction. However, they can be too loose. The GM can and should impose intent/task limits on the practice cycle. If, for example, a player wants to practice his Sword skill, but he has no sword because he is, in fact, locked in a prison, then he may not practice that ability.

The literal time allotment for practice is too liberal—16 hours of potential practice for a Will of B4 is just too much. No one has that much free time and willpower! The GM can and should also limit the amount of time available. Characters must maintain their lives—they must sleep, eat and pay their bills. If a player wishes to push his character beyond reasonable tolerances, the GM may call for Will and Health tests to maintain his focus and dedication on his travails. Failure not only impedes his practice, but can also make him sick or crazy.

Practical Instruction

Instruction is a much more efficient way to gain tests for advancement than practice—possibly even more efficient than adventuring. Instructors can typically be found with Circles and hired with Resources. The Circles test obstacle is variable, but the Resources test obstacle is 4. By subjecting their availability to those two types of tests, you ensure that finding an instructor is also subject to the intent and task rules. Thus if it's not appropriate to search for an instructor, the GM can inform the player that his intent is inappropriate and move on.

Intent and Task

The intent-and-task procedure is a simple, vital part of Burning Wheel. It exists so we can clearly discuss how to interact with an obstacle. It is not a negotiation. Either the GM presents an obstacle and describes the options for testing to overcome it, or a player states an action for his character and the GM asks for the underlying reason—the intent—so he can judge the correct task.

Note that task and action are slightly askew in this scheme. As a player, you're telling us about what your character is doing. The GM (and usually the rest of the group), then need to translate that action into the system.

This makes the operation of the rules pretty simple. It boils down to "describe cool things for your guy and we'll figure out what it means in the rules and make a roll for it!" This philosophy stands at the core of the resolution system and bubbles all the way up into Duel of Wits, Range and Cover and Fight!

Intent

Intent—what do you want out of this roll? What are you trying to get from this situation? What are you trying to accomplish here? Intent addresses the player behind the character. Often, intent is implied by the situation. You're hunting for your enemy's hideout and you encounter a sentry. You want to sneak past the sentry. The GM calls for a Stealthy test. The underpinnings of that exchange are obvious to us—you want to sneak past; you are going to do it by being quiet and sneaky.

But that's not the only option. You can choose to alter the vector of your intent. You could choose to capture the sentry, trail him back to his observation post or even murder the sentry. Three different intents with three different outcomes for one obstacle.

You could also announce that you want to convince the sentry that you're on guard with him. Wait, the obstacle was to sneak past the sentry. You say, "What? You were sneaking through the woods and now you want to saunter up and talk to this guy?"

"Sure!"

"No, way. That's not an appropriate task for this obstacle."

The GM vetoes that intent. Why? Because it is inappropriate for the situation. It doesn't make sense in the fiction. You're not dressed like one of them. You're sneaking through the woods. They're on patrol. You can't just pop up out of nowhere, start a conversation and expect it to go well. That intent is no good for getting past the sentry.

So what happens? Usually, the player reframes his intent to something more appropriate to the situation. Or the player can press his case and describe how he will accomplish his intent—his task.

Task

Task describes how you accomplish your intent both mechanically and descriptively: "I pull off my boots and creep along the rocks quietly. I'm testing Stealthy plus Sentry-wise and Forest-wise."

Task must dovetail with intent. What you're doing must make sense as a way to get what you're after. The GM arbitrates this (usually backed up by the rest of the group). If it doesn't make sense to him, it doesn't fly.

So to return to our previous example, being sneaky and passing the sentry makes sense. What about the other intents?

To capture the sentry: "I sneak up behind him, muzzle him and choke off his windpipe." Test Stealthy plus Brawling (or Martial Arts) plus appropriate wises.

To follow him back to his observation post: "I keep my distance and trail him on his rounds. Where does he go?" Stealthy plus Observation or Tracking, maybe even Hunting.

To murder him: "I hurl my knife into his neck, slicing his windpipe, killing him before he can make a sound." Throwing plus Stealthy, Knives and any appropriate wises.

Note how merging the intent with the task changes what skill is tested and what FoRKs are appropriate.

Divining the implications of intent and task—what abilities can be used—is a huge space in the game. You are meant to enter that space creatively and suggest interesting, unexpected combinations. But to do so, you have to back it up in the fiction. The process points right back to the top: It's got to make sense to the people at the table.

Now, what about our waggish actor? He wants to impersonate another sentry to deceive this one. When we squint at it, the intent doesn't seem like that bad of an idea. So we ask him, "How would you do it?"

"Easy, I roll around in the mud and get good and dirty. Then I move off a good hundred yards or so in the direction he came. I call out loudly, 'Damn it!' Then I come staggering down the trail, cursing and muttering. 'Fell in the damned mud! Hey, friend! You're wanted back at the post. Damned mud. I slipped in it. Can you believe it? Anyway, yeah, you're wanted back at the post.'"

Hm. Well, it sounds unlikely, but it certainly is intriguing. The GM can still veto, but the player is clearly onto something. In this case, the GM can grant the test, "Fine, test your Acting, plus FoRK in Disguise and Falsehood. Obstacle is his Will and I'm going to give you a +1 Ob disadvantage because this is utterly outlandish. But I'll also give you a +1D advantage because it's pretty funny."

Note that he's changed his intent from the original example. He's not trying to sneak past, per se. He's trying to trick the sentry into leaving his post. The task is appropriate for the outlandish intent. If he succeeds, the player deserves the fruits of his labor. Fortune favors the bold and failure is fun.

By the way, my absolute favorite part of these moments is when the player responds to the GM's outline for his task saying, "Wait, I don't have Acting!" Well, that's why we have rules for Beginner's Luck. Don't let them weasel out of the test.

What Skills or Ability for the Task

Assigning skills for tasks takes some fluency with the game. The best way to learn is to let the player suggest a skill from his character. "I want to bypass this sentry."

"What skill would you use?"

"Falsehood."

Does his suggestion makes sense? If it doesn't, produce your own suggestion. Go with your gut. Don't flip through the book looking for an appropriate skill.

You'll gain an intuitive understanding of the skills after making calls like this during your games.

Tasks are a major part of the setting. They provide information about how this place works. So when you make a call on a skill for a task, be firm and be consistent. That's how it works here!

No Weasels

In Mouse Guard, we wrote a rule called No Weasels. It says that once a GM sets an obstacle, you must engage it. This rule isn't entirely applicable to Burning Wheel, but it's a good guideline. Once you've stated your intent and task, once your character is in motion and the obstacle has been presented, you're expected to roll the dice. Even if it's too hard!

No Fishing

Any negotiation about the appropriateness of the action should be handled when you state your intent. Any questions about rules clarifications and obstacles should be handled before you get to the intent stage. You can ask questions about rules and look stuff up in the rule books. We want you to be informed when you boldly declare your action. We don't want you fishing, "What's the obstacle to convince him? That's too high. What if I intimidate him? What if I use a wise to know what he knows?"

An obstacle isn't a physical thing. It's a metaphor. Once it's presented, you need to confront it!

Roll the Dice or Say Yes

The Say Yes rule is difficult to adjudicate, yet it's one of the most vital elements of the system. It grants the GM the authorial power to cut right to the important stuff and skip extraneous or tiresome action.

In a recent campaign, our characters were crossing a narrow span over a chasm. The GM, Pete, described the bridge in vivid detail. One of the players, Rich, described his character hopping up to the railing and capering along. Should Pete have called for a Speed test for Rich's character to keep his balance? No. Never. Why? Certainly "in real life"

there's a chance of falling, but in the story, it just didn't matter. Rich was roleplaying. He was embellishing, interacting with Pete's description. Rich made the scene better.

And what would the test have accomplished? He would have succeeded and stayed on the bridge. Success would have kept him at the same point. Or he would have fallen and we would have had to save him. It would have turned out like a false note in a bad action movie. There would have been quick cuts and close ups but nothing really would have happened.

Thus, Pete could Say Yes to this action. Rich wanted his character to look cool crossing the bridge. Great! Move on.

Later, those same characters needed to cross a narrow ledge to gain entry to a lost tomb. Pete described wind whipping along the cliff walls. We would have to make Speed tests to cross and get in. This was a totally legit test. The tomb was the goal of a long quest. Would we get in unscathed? Or would this cost us? In this case, it wasn't about us in particular, but about our gear and an NPC friend. If we failed, we'd lose those precious resources!

In another recent game, our previous session ended with Thor's summoner making a pact with a revenant to lead the group across endless plains. At the beginning of the next session, I had to resist every bad GM impulse. I wanted to call for Orienteering tests, Survival tests, Foraging tests. I wanted to dig right into that journey and make it real with dice rolls. But it would have been too much and unnecessary—and breaking the intent of the deal Thor made in the previous session. Thus I simply described the arduous journey and cut right to the good stuff— the group of travellers on the banks of the river that borders the Land of the Dead. Though I did not explicitly Say Yes, the idea is the same.

Don't Be a Wet Blanket, Mr. GM

Don't call for a test just to see a character fail. If you feel this impulse– "Well, he's walking down the street, but there's a chance he could fail and get lost!"—resist. Take a deep breath and describe the next obstacle.

If a player asks for a test or describes something simple and cool for his character, don't call for punitive tests. Ask yourself, "Is anything really at stake here?" A good measure for important tests is whether or not they actively challenge or build into a challenge for a Belief or Instinct. If not, just roleplay through it. If they do, negotiate an intent and task and roll some dice!

Success

Success in Burning Wheel is rather straightforward, almost rigid. You get what you asked for. Neither the GM nor the other players can impede or negate that result.

Since a successful player has earned his intent, we often turn to him to put the finishing touches on the test. He stated what he wants and how he's doing it. He gathered dice and rolled. He picks up the thread again and embellishes a bit on his victory, describing it to us with a detail or two.

This isn't a canon procedure, but neither does it drift the rules. It simply stretches the application of intent and task from before the roll to before and after the roll. It has a pleasant side effect: It helps us keep the thread of the narrative. Occasionally, we'll get bogged down in helping and FoRKing. The post-roll description reminds us where we left off.

Failure

You fail a lot in this game. You roll the dice quite often, and frequently the difficulty is rather steep. This is a design feature. Success isn't a given, it's something to strive for. And failure isn't a roadblock, it's a twist or a complication.

In fact, Burning Wheel advocates that a protagonist must fail en route to his climax. We think that failure makes a character much more interesting. How do you deal with the unexpected? What choices do you make when you don't get what you want? The answers to these questions deepen your character.

Success is the province of the player. He gets to pick a direction in the story and push for it. If he passes his test, he moves in that direction. Failure is the province of the GM. If the player does not overcome that obstacle, then the GM nudges the narrative in a direction of his choice.

Failure isn't a dead stop, it's an opportunity for a new, unexpected turn of events—more penalties, more tests, more conflicts and more situations. Failure also typically provides opportunities for advancement. And failure is rewarded with artha when you bring your Beliefs into play. You don't have to be successful; you merely engage with your goals in the fiction and you're rewarded.

Announcing Risk of Failure Before the Roll

According to the Burning Wheel (page 34), when a test is made, the player announces intent and task and the GM announces the results of a potential failure. It's a good habit to get into, and a valid rule, but I confess that I do not explicitly announce the terms of each test. Why? Two reasons: I find the results of failure implicit in most tests. If I'm doing my job correctly as the GM, the situation is so charged that the player knows he's going to get dragged into a world of shit if he fails. We project the consequences into the fiction as we're talking in-character and jockeying before the test.

At the climax of a night of play, my players attempted to intimidate a giant goblin king to reveal the location of a lost artifact. I didn't announce the failure result prior to the roll. I invited them to toss the dice. They failed. I paused and smiled, then described the giant goblin king placing his captive princess safely on his throne while he took up his spear and said simply, "Now I am going to kill you."

The second reason I don't announce failure results is a bad habit at BWHQ. My players trust me. They know I have a devious GM-brain that will take their interests into heart and screw them gently but firmly. I can't write rules about this kind of trust and, frankly, I think basing a game solely on trust is awful. It leads to all sorts of other bad habits. However, it does have a positive side. Withholding some failure results allows for the game to move a little faster. It varies the monotony of the testing structure and provides room for the occasional inspired surprise.

And you know, sometimes the surprise is on me—sometimes I'm so caught up in my players' successes that I forget they can fail.

When I do announce failures before a roll, it's often after getting explicit intent and task from the players—we get everything clear about what's being rolled for. Even then, I'll keep my failure results vague, "If you fail this, you're going to be lost." If the failure comes up, then I embellish with details. Otherwise, I leave it unspoken.

So why do I have the rule to announce failure conditions prior to the roll in the Burning Wheel? Do I still support it? Announcing the risks of failure before a roll is absolutely a good rule and practice to follow. It forms good habits. It adds a new dynamic to the game—knowing that failure isn't arbitrary when you roll the dice. I'm a poor role model, so definitely follow what's written in the book.

Protesting Failure Results

On occasion, one of my players will protest a failure result. He'll claim that I've gone too far or even broken a rule. It's perfectly valid for a player to call foul in Burning Wheel if he thinks he's been wronged.

If I've made a call that breaks a rule or is against the spirit of the game, I apologize and offer something else. The GM is as bound to the rules as the player. Sometimes I get carried away in the heat of the moment and I honestly appreciate it when my players pull me back down to Earth.

If I've made a call that offends, I apologize and retract it. That's not my aim at all.

If I've made a call that seems to go too far—that provokes protest or incredulity—I reconsider it. Is the player turtling up and failing to engage a Belief? If I feel like my failure result appropriately, if forcefully, challenges a Belief, I let it stand. Protests be damned. If I've simply made a bad call, I attempt to retcon it and take a step back in the narrative.

Separate Intent and Task

When adjudicating the result of a failed test, we find it's a useful exercise to look at the intent and task separately. You wanted to assassinate the duchess quietly in a crowded room and implicate your enemy. A daring plan. The intent is to lay the blame of the duchess's murder upon your enemy's shoulders. The task is her secret murder by stiletto. The obvious failure result is that you do not murder your target and are caught. But that's a bit of a roadblock and it leads to rather trite situations that lack nuance—fighting your way out or pleading innocence. A less obvious option has you succeed in the assassination, but you are caught. It's certainly much harder to plead innocence when the blood is running down your hand. In this circumstance, the action is reframed: The duchess is dead and everyone knows you're guilty. A still less obvious and more devious turn has you succeed, but your dear friend is wrongly blamed for the act and carted off to the gallows. Your actions have dragged an innocent soul down. What will you do?

But which direction to choose? Each is serviceable. The key is in the character's Beliefs (or to a lesser extent, an Instinct). Which option presents an interesting and difficult choice for the player based on his Beliefs? If the player has a Belief about never fighting in the open, then the first option is quite valid. If the player has a Belief about maintaining his pristine reputation, then the second option is a strong challenge to

that Belief. If the player has a Belief about using the duchess's murder as pretext to propel his friend to power, then a twist like the third suggestion isn't an option, it's a necessity.

Directing failures is a matter of observation and practice. The best guideline I've found as a GM is that if the option seems boring to me, it's going to be boring for the group. But if the imagined turn of events makes me squirm or get butterflies in my stomach, it's probably the way to go. Listen to your gut!

The Light Touch Versus the Heavy Touch

Slamming your players with earth-shattering failures at every turn is exhausting. Your players will burn out, become frustrated or, worse, grow gun-shy. Be sensitive to the situation. Build up from smaller missteps to bigger disasters over the course of a session. It's even better if you can build up from minor inconveniences to true catastrophe across multiple sessions.

If a test isn't directly in service of a Belief or Instinct, use a light touch on the failure. Apply a minor inconvenience and move on. If a linked test, a test to make tools for a job or a test of a similar caliber becomes too onerous, the cost outweighs the benefit and players will quickly disengage from the system.

However, if a test is directly related to a Belief or Instinct, use failure to shock and surprise your players. Change the situation. Turn matters on their head. Shake them up. And then sit back and watch them scramble. Players will care about these twists because their Beliefs are on the line!

Failure Timing

Hold off on applying the results of a failure until dramatically appropriate. Delaying the inevitable can add to the tension. Just be sure not to wait so long that you forget.

If you are handling multiple, simultaneous actions, hold off for a beat. Resolve the rolls for as many of the players as plausible and then combine the failure result into a cascade of disaster!

Practical Success

Failure gets a lot of discussion, but what about poor old success? What can it do? In addition to having a noticeable effect on the fiction of your game, success can also be used to generate mechanical benefit.

- *Make stuff*. You can make items. Items can be for one use or built to last. You can also make items of a particular quality—poor, run of the mill or superior.

- *Acquire gear*. You can use your skills to acquire useful gear!

- *Find cash*. Success can produce cash dice! This effect isn't just from Resources, you can use a variety of abilities to squeeze cash out of a person or location.

- *Make a friend*. You can use social skills to build temporary alliances and induce NPCs to take action for you.

- *Alleviate the pain*. You can concoct solutions to alleviate penalties— whether medicinal, social, physical or otherwise.

Embellishing Success

The player's intent is made manifest and he describes his character's actions. I turn to my players, "Tell us what happened!" When they complete their inevitably entertaining description, I try to embellish a little. I try to add in reactions or other details. Adding a small detail can really help. It makes great success even more vivid and memorable. There's something special about collaborating to describe a brilliant victory.

If I'm unsure of where a player is going with his description of success, I'll back off and ask a few quick questions, "And then what? What happens next?" Rather than stepping on his victorious toes, I try to create room for him to make a statement.

Honor Success, Challenge Assumptions

Sometimes I react badly to success. "Fine, you get what you want." And play stalls on that point. Don't fall into this bad habit. The player accomplishes his intent. Describe the result. Honor it with an engaging illumination. Make it special.

Once the success is out there, solidly in the minds of the players, it's time to introduce new information, new problems. These aren't failure results. This information is stuff the players can see coming. Unlike a failure result, players get to choose how they'll deal with this new information.

Advantage

Success technically can't produce advantage dice unless the player or GM stated it was a linked test before the dice were rolled. This is due to the failure condition—+1 Ob—for linked tests. It's bad form to screw players with unforeseen penalties after a die roll. Hence, the reverse is true: It's bad form to give out advantage dice without risk.

Duel of Wits Results

Success in a Duel of Wits is one of the most powerful results in the game. Using this system, you can make another character do almost anything! Of course, to get what you want, you need to state your own goal beforehand or incorporate it into your compromise.

However, Duel of Wits results are flexible and versatile: You can get paid, cause people to take your side, gain reputations, add affiliations, cement relationships or push another character into an action he wouldn't otherwise take.

Go ahead, next time you're in a Duel of Wits, ask for a little bit more than you would have otherwise. Once you have an agreement, you're going to get what you want. Just be careful what you ask for.

Practical Failure

Burning Wheel is an effects-based game (mostly). The system provides a host of mechanical options that one can apply in a variety of situations. This section describes how you can use mechanical effects as failure results.

New Test

The most basic mechanical result of a failure is a new test. Rather than getting what he wants, the player is shunted down another course in which he must make an additional test to get back on track.

A failed Climbing test that leaves your character dangling from a precipice—now you must pass an Agility test to scramble to safety.

A failed Persuasion test results in a soldier demanding a bribe and thus a Resources test.

A failed Orienteering test can lead to a trapped corridor. You must pass a Speed test to avoid the trap.

Full-Blown Conflict
When failure causes a new test to be made, it can lead to a single test or a full-blown conflict: Duel of Wits, Range and Cover or Fight!

You jump a musketeer and attempt to clout him with a single blow. You fail, so now you must draw swords and duel with him. The Fight! rules are then brought into play.

Unexpected Encounter
When a test is failed, place a character or monster in the group's path. Usually a series of tests are needed to bypass this type of encounter. Also, you now have a new enemy who can be reincorporated into future obstacles.

Traveling through a wild wood, the ranger fails his Orienteering test and inadvertently leads his companions into the lair of the Doom Serpent.

A failed Intimidation test summons forth the peddler's cousin, who is ironically called "Tiny."

Obstacle Penalties
The GM can impose a +1 or +2 obstacle penalty on a future, related test.

You fail to surprise your opponent with a Stealthy test. You're in a bad situation; you now have +1 Ob to your initial positioning test.

During an argument, you so insult your friend that the GM applies a +2 Ob penalty to a future social skill test against him.

Gear Loss
One of my favorite failure results is to apply an effect against gear or property. Gear can be lost so that it's completely gone or so the character must test to recover it. Gear can be damaged—made poor-quality or assigned an obstacle penalty until it is repaired. Gear can be broken—made unavailable until repaired. Broken gear can require a simple Mending test to repair or something more substantial like a craftsman skill.

Gear loss is often best used in physical tests.

> *Swept away down a river, you fail your Speed test. Not only are you far from shore, but your arrows have spilled from their quiver. They sail off into the current.*

> *You fail to pick that lock and your lockpicks are jammed in the mechanism. It'll take a Mending test to extract them. Failure this time will trigger the trap mechanism for sure.*

> *A failed Seduction test at the ball prompts the young lady to spill her goblet of wine over your finery. Your outfit is ruined and you have an obstacle penalty to any other test at the ball until you change.*

Drastic failure results can see gear ruined—destroyed unless refigured with magic.

> *You jam your steel-gauntleted hand into a doomsday mechanism to halt its progress. You fail your Power test. Your gauntlet and greaves are sucked into the machine and crushed. The machine rumbles on.*

Injury

Failure in physical tasks can result in injury. You can assign a wound grade, rather than a coordinate, or you can assign a wound coordinate using the standard wounding rules.

Assigning a wound grade gives me more control of the effect of the result. "You fall and take a Midi," rather than "You fall and take a B7."

Using wound coordinates is more abstract, but it's a natural evocation of the system—PTGS coordinates are built into the mechanics! Wound coordinates are generally more fair, as well, since they let players use traits like Iron Skin to reduce their impact.

Injury is a great failure effect for martial versus tests—you are defeated and you take a wound. Brutal!

Superficial and Light wounds are assigned if the pressure is on the characters to succeed in the next scene and there's no time to rest. Typically, players can take care of these wounds rather easily if given a moment's rest, therefore they are of limited value as penalties.

Midi wounds are appropriate results for a fall, near-drowning, poisoning, an explosive or a trap. They're tough to treat, but they're not fatal. They leave a nice, lasting sting.

Severe and Traumatic wounds will take out all but the most powerful of characters. These are great results for a terrible fall, brutal trap, deadly poison or similar accident, but they should be used sparingly. Only the most dire of failures results in a Severe or Traumatic wound.

I don't like to use Mortal Wounds as test failure results for anything but fights, and even then only in the most extreme circumstances. You can use the effect as you see fit, but be careful.

Turning a Relationship

The nature of a relationship can change as the result of a failed test. Just like a character can turn from ill-disposed to favorably-minded due to a successful test, a character can turn from friendly to inimical.

A relationship can change temporarily—you're feuding with your lover, so for the time being, she's your enemy. Or the change can be permanent—too much damage has been done to her heart and she swears eternal vengeance upon you.

These changes can come as a result of a Duel of Wits compromise, but they can also emerge as the result of a failed Persuasion test against Will. They are also born of other kinds of failure—losing a fight, stealing something from someone, failing to pay back a loan—but be sure to telegraph these changes to the player. Set up the relationship as volatile. Play the character into the situation. Give the player no doubt as to what's at stake. Not merely because you stated failure consequences but because the character you are portraying is so vivid.

Destroying a Reputation

Page 117 of the Burning Wheel briefly notes that reputations can be destroyed as the result of a failed test. This is a failure result that even I overlook. It's too good to forget, though. Apply this result to any test in which the character's failure is visible and public: a duel, an argument, a battle or even a comically failed Inconspicuous test. The failure results in a die subtracted from the relevant reputation!

A reputation reduced to zero is lost. It can be re-earned in play.

Damaging an Affiliation

Affiliations can be damaged as the result of a failed test. This is a brilliant failure result for a failed Accounting or Estate Management test. Resources and Circles can be used as well, but they're the obvious choices. A battle lost might cause supporters to withdraw investments. Or poor conduct in court might cause business to dry up.

As in the case of reputations, this effect reduces the affiliation by one die. An affiliation reduced to zero is lost. It must be repurchased in play as described in the rules on pages 118-119 of the Burning Wheel.

Apply Traits

You may also apply traits as the result of a failed test. This is a rather drastic condition, so use it sparingly. This result changes a character fundamentally in ways that other failure results do not. Once assigned, a trait is hard to get rid of!

Character traits can be assigned for a variety of failure conditions: Characters can be scarred, branded or stigmatized; die traits that add obstacle penalties, reduce stats or skills or lower stat caps are appropriate for tests that carry the risk of dire physical consequences.

Die traits that provide infamous reputations are also excellent devices to tack onto particularly brutal social skill failures.

Do not assign call-on traits as the result of failure since they are solely beneficial.

Use Failure to Trigger Instincts

As we've demonstrated, a failed test provides many opportunities! In addition to all that we've mentioned, you can also use failure results to trigger a player's Instinct.

> *If you have the Instinct "Never let them forget that you're a noble," and you fail an Etiquette test, I'm going to use this chance to ride you. Your interlocutor responds, "Oh. Yes. I don't mean to be rude, but I don't recognize your name. Or your face. Your family is one of...good breeding, I presume?"*

> *Or if you have the Instinct "Never accept an insult," I'm going to use nearly every social skill failure result to insult you!*

> *Or if you have the Instinct "Never wear shoes," a failed Stealthy test is going to land you on some sharp rocks or broken glass.*

This may seem mean, but it's not. You're showing the player that you care, that you're paying attention. And you're providing him a chance to earn artha. See what a great GM you are?

Shades

Ability shading is an interesting, somewhat problematic aspect of the Burning Wheel system. The game is weighted heavily toward the default black/mundane shade. If used superficially, shading can appear superfluous to the system—perhaps it even looks like cruft.

If you're playing gritty one-offs, you really don't need these rules. However, if you're playing an extended campaign, or a shorter, higher-powered game, then these rules are entertaining and add a lot to the game.

Starting Shades

I'll be frank. At BWHQ, we don't like starting grays. We prefer that a gray be earned in play. We like the sweat, tears and blood that such a feat requires. We like long games.

We do not think it is appropriate to dump a stat down to 2 to purchase a gray shade. Nor do we like to see a wasteland of B2 skills topped with a single G5 Knives or Sword skill. Such play is bad form in our eyes.

Are Starting Grays Ever Acceptable?

Starting grays are appropriate in high-powered games—characters with six or more starting lifepaths. In the point distribution, Elves and Dwarves are most likely to have the points to pull this off. Eight-lifepath Humans and Orcs can pull a starting gray without crippling themselves. Trolls can field a gray Power at five or six lifepaths without too much jiggering. Roden, Wolves and Spiders don't usually get enough points to comfortably shade shift an ability during character burning.

Starting grays require the approval of the whole group. The person buying the gray should fess up, "I'm powergaming. Is that okay?"

Shade Shifting in Play

Shade shifting an ability in play is one of my favorite aspects of this system. The process requires discipline, determination and luck, but when you shade shift, it's just about the greatest gaming feeling ever— even better than pulling off a Feint in Fight!

Shade shifting is the longest arm of Burning Wheel's grand currency cycle. It happens far less frequently than trait votes or deeds point awards. In fact, it only happens after multiple deeds points are earned and a series of trait votes have transpired in the game. Using the epiphany rules, shade shifting requires 20 fate, 10 persona and 3 deeds points. The shade shift cycle is a beautiful, slow-moving gear that clicks into place with a sublime noise.

Personally, when I start a new character, I don't focus on any one path for him. I let the character's nature emerge in play. After I spend a deeds point or two, I start thinking about graying out a stat or skill. I assess the direction the character has been heading in and where I've been spending artha. Once I see a path, I am as diligent as possible, pushing artha into that ability as often as I can.

On your quest for a gray-shaded ability in play, you must game the system and slavishly focus your artha expenditures on one ability. Invest something in every test you can. Spend a persona point, use fate to open the 6s. And when you have a chance to spend a deeds point, dive into the situation and don't miss your opportunity. Shade shifting takes a long time in play. You don't always get the opportunities you need when you want them, so you need to take what you can when you get it!

Shade shifting can be a bit unnerving. Earning a gray-shaded ability changes the game. Your character's power in the now gray area increases exponentially. The GM must present new types of obstacles to make them more challenging. He must test you more stridently, lest your new power becomes boring.

Shade Shift From Traits

It is possible to earn, via a trait vote, a trait that shade shifts an ability. This doesn't require the artha expense of the epiphany. And, so long as the character retains the trait, he benefits from the gray or white shade ability.

Shade shifting via traits is controversial in my opinion. I don't like circumventing the epiphany cycle. However, I can see it being appropriate in two cases: For shorter, epic campaigns the trait vote cycle can supplant the epiphany cycle. For truly long-running "challenge the gods" style games, trait votes can be used to earn white-shade abilities.

Aristeia Shade Shift

After playing in some bad-ass campaigns during which each player shade shifted at least one ability with an epiphany, I feel that the Aristeia Minor Epiphany is too expensive. It's incredibly useful, but two deeds points is still too costly. If I had my druthers, I'd reduce the cost to one deeds point, three persona and five fate.

Gray Faith, Perception, Sorcery and Other Nightmares

It's very easy to shade shift Faith, Perception and Sorcery. Faith and Sorcery almost always need an extra success. Since they are open-ended abilities, you can spend a fate point to throw another die, even if you haven't rolled any 6s. Perception is used as a root for most of the skills in the game and it's open-ended. Therefore, it's generally easy to fabricate a Perception test and dump a point of fate into it.

I've found that players like to abuse these loopholes even further by spamming the GM with low-grade, low-risk tests. They ask seemingly innocent, interesting questions of the GM, then beg for a wise test (which they don't
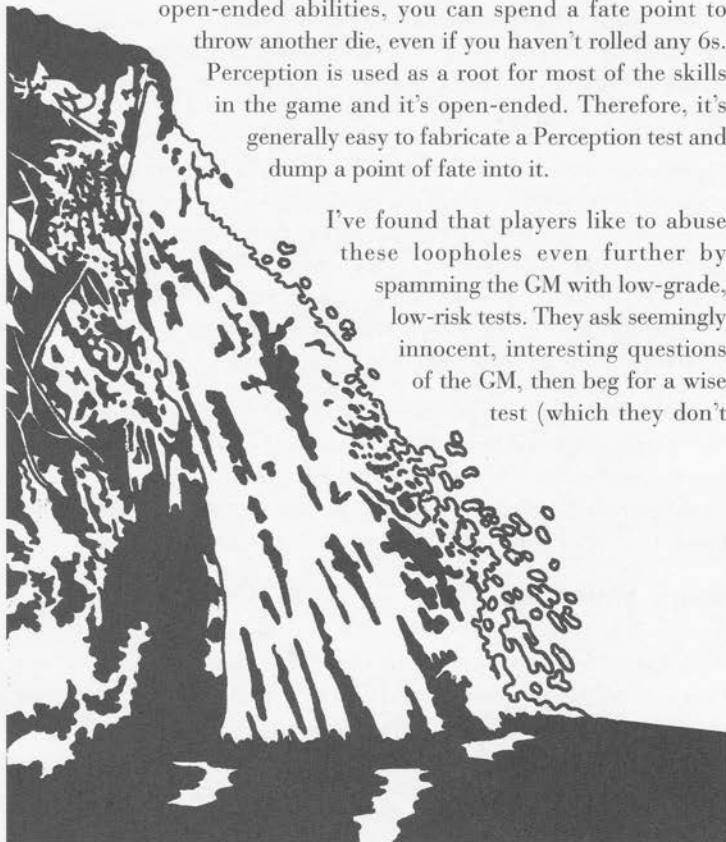
have) to get the information. For Faith or Sorcery, they cast spells without consequence that don't have great impact or risk, but they dump artha into them.

There's an easy tool you can use to curb this bad behavior from the players. As the GM, simply Say Yes to the low-grade, low-risk requests. "I cast Magesense…" Just Say Yes to the spell. "I ask for guidance…" Just provide the holy vision. Am I recommending adversarial behavior? No. I am recommending that the GM use the tools at his disposal to challenge the players across the longest arc of the game, so that their grand achievement—the shade shift—is fulfilling and rewarding, not cheap.

Gray Sorcery and Black Will; Black Sorcery and Gray Will

When you build your dice pool for traditional Sorcery and one of your abilities is gray, you should use two different colored pools of dice to represent the differently shaded abilities. I know it's much easier to count the pool as all of one shade, but that either gimps the gray shade or provides too much power at too little a cost.

Obstacles

Obstacles are problems that must be overcome. They can seem like they are a drag and imposing them can feel like punishment by the GM. This couldn't be further from the truth. Obstacles are love.

Burning Wheel thrives on its currency cycle. And while obstacles may seem like roadblocks, they're actually one of the building blocks of the cycle.

When a player wants to perform a task, the GM is obligated to set an obstacle. The GM can refer to the skill, spell or trait list in most cases. Some tasks are determined systematically—like the base obstacle to Strike in a Fight! And some tasks ask the GM to determine an appropriate obstacle using the rather loose guidelines on page 17 of The Burning Wheel.

Obstacles come in two forms—base and modifiers. Your base obstacle is the basic difficulty of accomplishing your task. Base obstacles are listed with skills, for example. And base obstacles are agnostic to your ability exponent. Ob 1 is Ob 1 whether you've got a skill of 2 or 8.

Modifiers are thrown on top of base obstacles to make a task more difficult. Modifiers come from incidental effects like injury, working conditions, magic and other in-game effects. The system hands out plenty of obstacle penalties on its own, but the GM can distribute disadvantage as he sees fit.

What is not obvious behind this system is that these obstacles create setting. When a player acts in the game, he needs a difficulty for his test. The obstacle is the number, but it's also the object of adversity in the fiction. Obstacles, over time, create a sense of space and logic in the game world. When a player repeatedly meets the same obstacle for the same task, he knows what to expect and he knows how to set up his character to best overcome this problem, or he knows enough to find another way around.

If the obstacle for the same task varies each time the player attempts it—with the same intent—it destabilizes the game world. The solidity and consistency of the world becomes confusing. It's harder for players to care. Rolls seem arbitrary.

Conversely, changing the obstacle for the same intent and task can be a powerful signal that something has changed. It can be a signifier of magic or otherworldly forces at work. But this only works if the obstacle has been used consistently up to a point before the mysterious change is presented.

And sometimes, you can change your task and use a different skill and get a whole different obstacle!

Punishment!

Obstacle modifiers seem punitive, a negative reinforcement. They make it harder for a player to succeed at a task. I know I often flinch when I assess a steep penalty. I don't like punishing anyone for trying to be heroic. However, there's a massively positive side to obstacle modifiers. In design parlance, they are feedback. You perform an action and the game gives you feedback about that action. In this case, the feedback lets the player know about the difficulties and limits of the environment and his character. This is important. The game exists only as an exchange between our imaginations and the rules. The penalties give us a scale and a structure for our imagination.

Obstacles and Advancement

Furthermore, at a certain level of play, obstacle penalties are necessary to keep the advancement system running. Tests become too easy. Characters need bigger challenges to advance. Obstacle penalties (among other elements) provide this opportunity. So what was punishing with a Stealthy B2 is a nice perk at Stealthy B6. It's a satisfying transformation for both player and GM to watch near-insurmountable problems become mere bumps in the road for our heroes.

Obstacles and Artha

In addition to advancement, obstacles provide opportunities to spend artha (and thereby earn epiphanies) and an incentive for other players to help (and earn their own necessary advancements). They may seem punitive or obstructionist, but obstacles are a vital, productive fundament of the game.

Practical Obstacles

The Character Burner skill list provides numerous obstacles for tests. Versus tests provide probably half of the obstacles in the game. The Hub provides a brief overview of obstacles. Even the trait list contains a handful of obstacles. And character stats make up the remainder.

Most of those obstacles are purely mechanical executions—you consult the skill, it tells you the difficulty. How do you, as the GM, judge an obstacle on the fly?

My Favorite Obstacle

The GM sets the obstacles for tests. They are his prime tool for challenging the players. Some players cry foul that the GM can seemingly set an arbitrary difficulty for their goals. Well, tough luck. Someone has got to make these challenges hard. In this game, the GM does that heavy lifting. His role is to challenge the players—setting obstacles is fundamental to that opposition.

My favorite obstacle is 3. It's great. Let me explain why. Ob 2 is easy. Even a character with a skill of 3 is likely to pass an Ob 2 test. On the other hand, obstacles 4 or 5 are just darn hard. It takes a character with six or eight dice at his disposal to have a good shot at an Ob 4 or 5. But Ob 3 sits right in the middle there. It's achievable with three, four or five dice, but there's also a reasonable risk of failure even when rolling eight or nine dice. It's a nice, comfy statistical zone in the system. When in doubt, set your obstacle at 3!

Of course you need Ob 2 (or even Ob 1) tests to make the world go round. Not every action is difficult; routine tests are needed for advancement. So, if an action is perfunctory or dead easy, don't hesitate to hand out an Ob 1 or 2 test. It's easy to think that you should Say Yes to low-obstacle tests. This is not the case! You should Say Yes when there's nothing at stake, no conflict. You should call for Ob 1 and Ob 2 tests in situations of risk, even if it's small. These tests often produce beautiful, unexpected results.

Obstacle 4 and higher tests are equally vital, but they're dangerous. When setting a high obstacle, you're saying, "Hey, this stuff is important! But you're probably not going to get what you want." High obstacles are the sharp means by which the GM confronts the players. They make players sit up and take notice. Be clear about what the player gets if he succeeds. Let him know just how important the test is. That way he can spend artha, use FoRKs and get help according to his priorities.

Social Skills Against Will

Simple social skill tests are very difficult in Burning Wheel. To use most social skills, you must meet an obstacle equal to the target's Will exponent. For characters with low skills—exponent 2 or 3—or unskilled characters, it makes the test seem impossible.

Social skill tests are designed to be difficult. Talking your way out of (or into) a situation is a powerful weapon. It's perhaps the easiest thing for us, at the table, to do. But this ease isn't representative of the difficulty of actually convincing or intimidating someone. That's hard to do.

The high obstacle provides a bit of insurance that characters can't simply run around shooting their mouth off, gathering a horde of thralls behind them.

The high obstacle encourages use of the Duel of Wits mechanic. If you're afraid of outright failure, initiate a Duel of Wits. Not only can you gun for a compromise if you're losing, but you can log juicy Will and skill tests during the conflict.

Finally, and most importantly, the high obstacle encourages a player to invest in the test. Such an obstacle requires you to use all the FoRKs at your disposal, to get help from your friends and to spend artha. This additional investment makes the end result—the enhanced roleplay, the more nuanced argument—much more satisfying.

Traps as Obstacles

How do you set a trap in Burning Wheel? First, determine the effect of the trap. What does it do? Does it cause an injury? Does it lock off a section of ye olde dungeon? Does it cast a spell? Release poison? Design an effect for your trap.

Next, set an obstacle to spot or avoid the trap. Observation can be used to spot traps before they're triggered. But too much looking for traps makes for a boring game. You can walk characters into traps and then have the players make Speed tests to dodge out of the way, Agility tests to get their hands free or Power tests to stop the mechanism, etc.

The effect of the trap is the result of the failed test. For easy, not-too-deadly traps, I'll allow a Perception/Observation test to spot the mechanism. If that fails, I'll force a second test to avoid the effects of the trap. For deadly traps, I describe the trap triggered and call for tests against the trap's obstacle. I make sure the players know the severity of

the situation so they can gather help and spend artha appropriately. I try not to get into spot-disarm mode as I find it tedious. It's much more interesting to have characters leaping nimbly from the jaws of death.

Weather

Weather can be used as an obstacle during play—not just as an obstacle modifier. You can use weather to invoke Navigation, Piloting, Orienteering, Climbing or other skill tests, or Perception, Speed or Forte tests.

The actual obstacle depends on your setting. In one of our home brew settings, winter and summer are calm, fall and spring are very volatile. Therefore, high weather obstacles are more appropriate in the spring and fall.

Weather is an excellent excuse to use outsized obstacles. Obstacles 1 to 3 are too weak for the force of nature. Obstacles 4 to 10 are much more appropriate!

Squalls and storms are good excuses for Navigation, Piloting and Orienteering tests. Rain provides a pretext for a Speed test for leaping a precipice. Snow is good ground for Forte and Speed tests. Ice and wind make fine friends for Climbing tests.

You can frame these tests like so: "Normally, this wouldn't be a problem, but the gods are angry and the weather is blowing. You need to test…"

Failure blows you off course to uncharted lands, causes injury, causes gear to be swept away, etc. There's lots of room for good, adventurey stuff.

Wilderness

Wilderness is similar to weather; it's a massive, implacable obstacle. Perhaps not quite so overpowering as weather, wilderness nonetheless provides excellent action. Swamps, steep ravines, rushing rivers, crumbling glaciers, and so on. If your game involves travel, be sure to present interesting terrain features as obstacles that the characters must thread through.

Wilderness obstacles most often test Orienteering and Speed—to stay on the path and to stay out of harm's way. Power can be used to move boulders or debris, or to haul people to safety. Ditch Digging is a fun and useful skill for carving trenches around dangerous terrain. Song of Arbors can be used to safely traverse an ancient forest.

Trapping, Foraging and Hunting tests can often lead to wilderness encounters. A failed test might lead a character into a sucking swamp or entangling vines. Prospecting can lead to dangerous rock slides or collapsing holes. Animal Husbandry can lead to a character chasing his herd through clinging brambles.

Wilderness obstacles are best set in the range of 2 to 6. The lower the obstacle, the more of a nuisance the challenge is—which can be good for the atmosphere. The higher obstacle, the more dangerous this land is.

Weather and Wilderness as Obstacle Modifiers

In addition to presenting its own obstacles, weather and wilderness can both act as modifiers for other obstacles.

If it's raining while you're tracking someone, your obstacle should be higher than it would be otherwise.

If you're fighting in a swamp, the obstacles for nearly all of your tests should be higher than they would be if you were fighting on dry land.

Beginner's Luck Obstacles

Beginner's Luck obstacles can get a bit fussy. We hope this helps clarify them.

Disadvantage

When you test using Beginner's Luck, you suffer a double obstacle penalty. However, you do not double any modifiers or disadvantages.

The GM calls for an Ob 3 Tomb Trap-wise to determine if this tomb is trapped. I have a Superficial wound and I am testing my Perception unskilled. (3x2)+1=7. My obstacle is 7.

Tools

When making a Beginner's Luck test without required tools, the testing obstacle is double the double obstacle.

I have to treat my friend's Midi wound. Only problem is, I don't have Field Dressing. That's Ob 4. I don't have the skill, so double that to Ob 8. I also don't have any tools—bandages, salve, splints, needles, thread. So double that again and it's an Ob 16 test. Maybe I should spend some time scavenging for some medical supplies before making matters worse than they need to be.

Versus Tests

Versus tests are the workhorse mechanic of the game. You use a versus test when you want to compete with another character or entity in a simple, direct way.

A versus test can resolve a situation in one throw of the dice or a series of versus tests can be used to create an iterated resolution. In this chapter, I talk about these tests specifically resolving situations in one roll. I'll talk about "iterative resolution" in the Fight!, Duel of Wits and Range and Cover sections.

Versus Tests to Resolve Social Interactions

Versus tests are used to resolve social situations only when both parties want to move the other party. If you want to convince a mercenary to help you on your quest and he wants to convince you to change your goals, you make a versus test.

You do not use a versus test when you're simply convincing another character who does not want to be convinced, wants to merely do his job or just wants you to go away. So if you're trying to convince that mercenary to join your quest, but he doesn't have a counterpoint, then the test is a straight independent test, not a versus test.

When to Use Versus Tests for Social Interactions

If you want to stand up and reject the attempt at manipulation, you let the other guy test his skill using your Will as the obstacle. And it's worth noting that Let It Ride will protect you from having to go through it again unless something changes, but Let It Ride also binds you to the result.

If someone wants something from you and you want something from them, you can resolve using a versus test. One of you is going to get what he wants. The other is not.

You can also escalate to a Duel of Wits, if you want something from the other person but you don't want to risk a black-and-white, win/lose result. Even unskilled in a Duel of Wits, you can often get a compromise from a skilled opponent.

Violence in the Versus Test

Violence is serious business in Burning Wheel. Nothing trumps it. You cannot trump a blade and the will to use it with words. In fact, by default Burning Wheel considers attempting to convince someone who is stabbing you a violation of intent and task.

"I run him through."

"I plead for my life."

There's no contest in these two statements in Burning Wheel. The intent and task system is not intended to make all skills equivalent, just the opposite. Using intent and task, we hope you can clearly delineate appropriate actions in each circumstance. And just know that by default, words don't counter actions. When a punch is thrown, it's time to duck. After the scuffle, you can talk.

Versus Tests to Resolve Physical Altercations

Versus tests are the best device for resolving physical contests. I have used versus tests for races, wrestling matches and fist fights among other altercations. Determine the appropriate ability, gather the dice and go.

Wounds in Versus Tests

Versus tests can be used to cause wounds. The simplest method is to declare your intent to injure your opponent as a result of the confrontation. But what wound is delivered upon such a result?

You must declare before the roll whether the severity of the wound will be determined by margin of success using the standard weapon mechanics or the wound will be determined by specific intent. If determined by margin of success, use the Add of the weapon to increase the damage as normal. Place the IMS on the victim's physical tolerances.

If determined by intent, the process is more tricky. This is the more "story-based" solution. In an old demonstration game, Inheritance, players would declare intents against each other like "I want to run him

through" or "I want to take his head in front of his wife" or "I want to put him down with a wound to the leg (to preserve his honor)." These are all excellent declarations, but they do stretch the limits of the rigid weapon and injury mechanics.

In those cases, I was playing with people who had never played Burning Wheel before. They didn't know the wound mechanics. Therefore, I worked hard to interpret their intent and apply it as wounds to their targets. Obviously, some of those tests involved death, whereas others involved adjudicating the appropriate wound level. For nonlethal, nonmaiming stuff, I assigned a Midi. -2D is a harsh penalty, but it doesn't knock you out of the game.

In the case of injury, I follow these guidelines: a Light wound is a bloody scratch that ends the fight, but leaves no lasting effect; a Midi is a merciful wound that will put your opponent down but allow him to recover eventually; a Severe wound is a dangerous, savage wound that cripples and could potentially kill your opponent; a Traumatic wound is the equivalent of a Mortal Wound, it just takes longer to die from it. I rule that the intent of death is valid for a versus test. If that intent wins the test, his opponent is killed.

Armor

Can you use armor after taking a wound as a result of a versus test? The system is mute on this, but implies that you can—that's how the armor rules work, right?

Personally, I think it's very bad form to test armor after a versus test in which the intent was to injure. Doing so negates the winner's intent. That's unfair. Rather, I prefer an armor advantage to be granted to the player with the best or most appropriate armor for the situation: Battling in a field with swords? The heavier armor grants the advantage. Wrestling atop rain-soaked crenellations? The armor with least Speed penalty grants the advantage.

Versus Tests for Competition

Versus tests are the best and simplest mechanic to resolve a competition between two characters—a race, a test of strength, a display of knowledge, etc. Set the stage, gather help and FoRKs and roll to determine who has won the contest. It's even possible to compete with three or more characters. Everyone rolls and the highest amount of successes wins the day.

Versus Tests with Help

A versus test can be used by the whole group to overcome an opponent. One player is designated the primary actor and everyone else helps. The group succeeds or fails together.

This is an excellent method for resolving skirmishes, gang fights and shouting matches.

What Versus What?

Versus tests are versatile. They don't always have to be Power versus Power, Speed versus Speed or Persuasion versus Persuasion. Let the players declare their intent/task. Use the abilities appropriate to the situation. If I want to tackle you, but you want to run away, we test Power versus Speed. If I want to convince you, but you want to rile the crowd, we test Persuasion versus Oratory.

Also, note that you must obey the skill versus stat paradigm—double obstacle penalty for the stat tested against the skill.

Abilities Must Be in the Same Realm

There are limits to the feasibility of versus tests. The abilities tested must be in the same realm. In Burning Wheel, it is not appropriate to test Persuasion versus Brawling when someone is beating on you. Once the punch is thrown, it's too late for words. The words can't physically stop the punch—and the situation is now very physical—so you need to resort to other methods. Stop him with your Power, run away with your Speed. Thwart him and then engage with the Persuasion.

Set My Obstacle

At BWHQ we have a bad habit picked up from playing Mouse Guard and Burning Empires. We make the GM roll first in a versus test so the opposing player can determine how much artha he needs to spend before rolling the dice. This a lazy, cowardly habit!

In a versus test we gather our dice at the same time—everyone knows how many dice the other side is rolling—and then we roll together and count up successes. After the roll we can use our call-ons, and spend our fate and deeds points if need be.

Ties

Versus test ties can be quirky. How do you define aggressor/defender? What happens when a tie can't be broken?

Aggressor/Defender

Ties in versus tests are determined by who is the aggressor and who is the defender. Ties go to the defender. The aggressor/defender tags aren't literal. Aggressor is analogous to the player who initiated—the player who wants something. Defender is analogous to the player who wants to maintain the status quo.

Deadlocks

In the case of versus tests in which both parties want something—two Orcs trying to kill one another, two monks debating doctrine, etc.—a tie deadlocks them.

What page 28 of the Burning Wheel does not say—though it is implied—is that the conflict now moves on from the deadlock to another test in the same situation. Combine the deadlock with the Let It Ride rule and you have a perfectly functioning cycle. Two wrestlers attempt to best each other with their skill. They tie. They cannot overcome each other with technique, so they surge back into the fight and attempt to overpower their opponent—Power tests. This too results in a tie. They are matched in skill and power, now it's a matter of endurance—Forte tests. Who can outlast the other?

That situation calls for three successive tests. What seemed like a simple versus test has turned into a Herculean struggle. The unintended results created tension, escalation and action.

This methodology applies to all similar situations. If you've ever played The Sword demonstration game with me, you'll remember that I often use this technique. Two characters rush for the sword. They tie on a Speed test. They get there at the same time. They both grab for the sword. They tie on an Agility test. They both grab it at the same time. They attempt to wrestle it out of each other's hands. They test Power and...

It's an effective technique and one of my favorite bits of interaction in the game. It does require the GM to be on his toes. As the GM, you've got to be ready with lightning-quick complications and descriptions so the players stay tightly focused on this immediate, pernicious problem.

Call-on Traits to Break Ties

You can use a call-on trait to break a tie or reroll failed dice. Doesn't rerolling failed dice break the tie?

Usually, you're going to use a call-on for the reroll, but there are instances when you'll simply want to break the tie in your favor rather than reroll: If you've rolled all successes (no failed dice) and the roll is still tied; or if you do not want to risk a re-roll and not get even a single success, when all you need is one. Using the call-on to break the tie in this case is a guaranteed win.

Help

Help is a vital part of Burning Wheel. Not only is it useful for passing tests, it binds the group together socially. It can make an otherwise-impossible test possible. It lubricates the advancement system, providing opportunities for tests too risky to attempt. It lets us resolve potentially complex scenarios involving lots of players with a single roll of the dice.

Burning Wheel is, by its nature, a group-oriented game. Players often act together. Help facilitates this part of the game. Rather than sitting out, players who are on the sidelines can participate by helping.

When to Use Help

Use help when the group is acting as a unit and failure for one member is the equivalent of failure for the whole group.

Sneaking about is a classic example. The group needs to sneak into a place together. Individual Stealthy tests will result in some getting caught and some going undetected. This is problematic and often renders the successful rolls moot. If the loud, clumsy characters are caught, the sneaky players are going to turn around and help their comrades. So why did they test in the first place? They were successful, but it didn't matter.

In those instances, we find it easier and more efficient to have the group test together using the helping rules. If the test is passed, the group succeeds. If the test is failed, the group fails.

Task of Help

When you help, you're piggybacking onto the primary player's intent—you agree with and you want it to be successful. However, to pass that helping die, you must state your task—what you're doing and how you're doing it. That task must be appropriate to the intent. If the task doesn't fit, then the GM can veto your helping die.

Coloring Help

The skill you use and the task you invoke become part of the test. These elements color the success and failure of the event just like the primary player's task does.

Accepting Help

In the Advancement commentary, we discussed why you would accept or decline help. You might need a particular type of test to advance, and taking extra dice will change the type of test, etc.
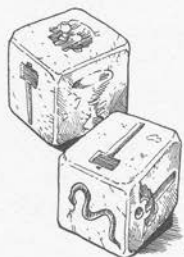
Conditional Help

When we hand over helping dice, we'll often make impromptu agreements. Simply: I'll help you now if you'll help me later. They're nonbinding, but they can be deliciously juicy when your fellow player has a Belief that runs counter to yours and he really needs your help on a test.

Advancement for Helpers

Helpers earn tests for advancement. You get a test as if you'd used your own raw skill. So if your skill is B4 and you helped with an Ob 3 test, you get a difficult test for advancement. It doesn't matter how many dice the primary acting player rolled.

Helping is vital to increasing your abilities. Helping one another pass Beginner's Luck tests is especially fun and useful. The primary acting player will usually get a test toward his aptitude (unless the test was really hard) while you can rack up a test for advancing the stat with which you helped.

Sharing the Spotlight With Help

The help rules are an excellent device for sharing the spotlight. Imagine you're the best in the group for a job and everyone knows it. Rather than routinely testing every time your niche arises in the story, you instead extend a hand to another player who is learning or struggling in this area. You roleplay your offer to help him learn. You hand him helping dice and say, "Go ahead, lead us through!"

Maybe you earn a test for advancement, maybe you don't. Maybe your fellow player earns a test. What's more important is that you have used the system to support teamwork and action.

Sharing the spotlight like this takes a conscious decision. We want to demonstrate our skill and expertise. We want to succeed. You have to remind yourself to back off. What immediate gain you sacrifice will pay off in the long run in terms of overall enjoyment and satisfaction.

Succeeding and Failing With Help

You all pile in on a test. Everyone helps the player of Mr. Bad-Ass Pants. The test is passed. What does that mean for the helpers? It means you all pass the test too. If you fail the test, all the helpers fail too.

The Many-Headed Beast

Helping creates a great dynamic at the table. It allows the group to participate in moments dominated by a single player. However, this also engenders a problem when the group acts as a many-headed beast, always helping. The game loses its mechanical punch when the players are tossing helping dice into one pile for every test. How do you prevent that without simply saying "No" all the time?

As the GM, you must accept that not all tests are appropriate for the whole group. Use the following guidelines: To participate in a test, each character must act at the same time. Characters can act in sequence to provide help—I trigger the mechanism, you run across the bridge—but characters may not help in a test and then wander off into another test saying, "Meanwhile...."

The characters must be physically in the same space or must be occupying the correct place when the test is made. The whole group can sneak across a room together using Stealthy. The whole group can scour a city together using Circles. The whole group cannot all fit in the cardinal's cabinet to convince him to take their side.

The characters must be able to conceivably operate on the task at hand. You cannot all make a watch together—one watchmaker, one apprentice; that's it. Five of you can't all fit in the forge—one master smith, one apprentice smith and someone to chop wood; that's all I'd allow. You can't all bend the king's ear—it's rude, so one of you may speak.

If this problem still persists after applying this wisdom, look at our new rule, Too Many Cooks.

Pass the Dice

When helping, you physically pass your die or dice to the player being helped. This small gesture creates a visceral connection between you two. You are now both bonded to this test. It seems like an unlikely thing, but you'll have to trust us. It's very powerful.

Also, at BWHQ we each keep dice of an individual color so that when we hand over helping dice, we can see whether or not we helped in the test. There's no mechanical incentive for this act. It merely adds some fun to the helping rules, and creates a nice simple ritual surrounding help. Everyone wants to watch the roll and see how they did!

Linked Tests

Linked tests are a versatile way to bring players together to overcome an obstacle. The danger with a linked test is that rolls are called for and made purely for the advantage rather than to make something happen in the fiction.

To make a test to provide a linked die, the linking player must have both a legitimate task and an intent that generates its own, appropriate result in the fiction. "I want to give him +1D" isn't a valid intent. "I want to help him by sharpening his tools and cleaning the workspace," is a valid intent and an excellent use of the Mending skill.

How Many Links?

How many linked tests can be made? We often hear this question. Unfortunately, our answer is rather lacking: It depends. Generally, we allow one linked test per player, if appropriate.

I've found the best guideline to descriptively set the scene. Stop the action. Find out who's doing what. Ask the players what they're doing and how they're doing it. If the players are involved in other matters at the time, then they can't participate with a linked test.

Link Intent and Task

It is vital that a linked test have its own intent and task—its own reason to be. A linked test must create something more in the fiction than just +1D. If a linked test doesn't mean anything then you're just rolling to generate a mechanical effect. Boring! Just beg for an advantage die in that case.

There are three possible results for a linked test: failure that passes a penalty on to the linkee; success that creates a result like any other test; and success that creates an exemplary result that grants the linkee +1D to his test.

Be sure that your character is cooking dinner, sharpening weapons or raising the troops' morale. So no matter the result, what you're doing makes sense in the fiction.

Link versus Help

Linked tests are mechanically similar to help. Both give advantage dice. When do you use a linked test as opposed to giving help?

If the conditions for help cannot be met or if help is inappropriate, the player may ask the GM if there is an action he can take that will link to the primary test.

When a player wants to do something tangential, but possibly helpful to a task at hand, a linked test should be used.

Linked dice may also be generated far in advance of a test. They do not need to be directly tied to the next test. You can prepare a bolt of cloth with your Weaving skill. This preparation can be used as a linked test to a future Sewing skill test.

And finally, some situations require the operation of a large mechanism—social, cultural or physical. A party, a religious service or managing a caravan should all be set up as a series of linked tests by the GM. Each test affects the next and, ultimately, the fate of the entire operation. In this case, the GM must determine what the final test of the series will be. He then offers the players a handful of possible skills they can use in the series. He tells them how many tests—and essentially how the tasks—need to be accomplished before the final test is made.

Alternately, the GM can set an obstacle for an important test and invite the players to link into it with tests of their own choosing.

The final test in the series often determines the overall outcome, but that doesn't always need to be the case. Using this method, you can generate a series of results that all color the final outcome.
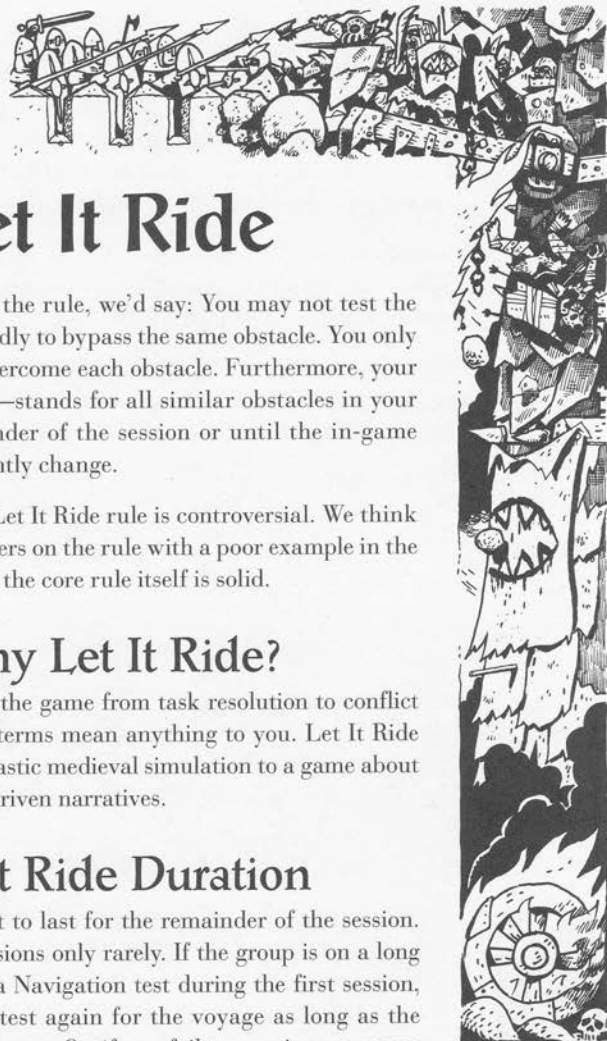
Let It Ride

If we had to restate the rule, we'd say: You may not test the same ability repeatedly to bypass the same obstacle. You only get one chance to overcome each obstacle. Furthermore, your result—pass or fail—stands for all similar obstacles in your path for the remainder of the session or until the in-game conditions significantly change.

In some circles the Let It Ride rule is controversial. We think we muddied the waters on the rule with a poor example in the Burning Wheel, but the core rule itself is solid.

Why Let It Ride?

Let It Ride elevates the game from task resolution to conflict resolution, if those terms mean anything to you. Let It Ride takes us from a fantastic medieval simulation to a game about creating character-driven narratives.

Let It Ride Duration

Let It Ride is meant to last for the remainder of the session. It should bridge sessions only rarely. If the group is on a long voyage and makes a Navigation test during the first session, they don't have to test again for the voyage as long as the conditions stay the same. Or, if you fail to convince someone of your cause and as part of the argument they vow to never speak to you again, you might have to deal with this over multiple sessions.

Let It Ride Conditions

The Let It Ride rule states that your success or failure stands until conditions "drastically or significantly change." Here are some examples of changing conditions:

You discover new information; you're deceived or betrayed; you lose your horse/ship/flying carpet; the weather takes a sudden, horrific turn for the worse; you're lost; you're found;

your finery is covered in shit/blood/mud; you learn a new spell or school of magic; your precious possessions are stolen; you discover a powerful artifact; you earn a new trait; a miracle happens.

Conditions that don't generally count as significant or drastic: you're superficially or lightly wounded; you change a Belief; you change an Instinct; you ask "how about now?"; you fail another test.

If you're wounded so badly that the skill or ability with which you overcame an obstacle is reduced to zero, then Let It Ride doesn't apply. Otherwise, wounds shouldn't count as a change of conditions for Let It Ride.
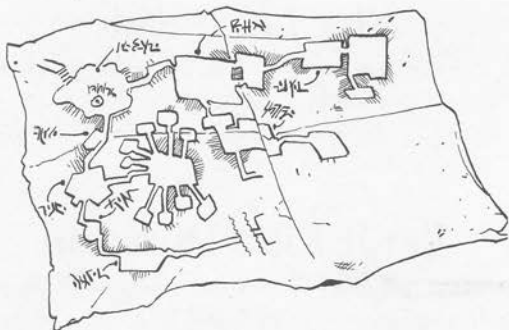
Circles

Circles is a vibrant, powerful mechanic. It grants players a substantial measure of creative control and unburdens the GM from an often-tiresome duty. Rather than being forced to rely on the GM for every little setting detail, Circles puts some responsibility firmly in the hands of the players. In this case, those details are the incidental characters who populate your setting. If the players want a character to appear in the story, the GM isn't obligated to whip something up, nor does he have to be the bad guy and flatly refuse. Instead, he calls for a Circles test.

We have found that this arrangement has an interesting side effect: Once the group embraces the Enmity Clause, the GM gains access to even more power than he had in the traditional arrangement. Engaging with the Circles rules entails the risk of finding an enemy. Arbitrary enemies feel like punishment. Once we adopted the Circles mechanic, we found our games suddenly had more enemies who were more interesting then ever.

Turn that on its head and the Circles test could be said to be a mechanic about determining NPC disposition toward the players. Sure, you find who you're looking for. But what do they think of you?

Circles Obstacle Modifiers

You're not supposed to use all of the Circles modifiers for every Circles test. It says so on page 112 of the Burning Wheel. Using all of the modifiers for each test renders the tests impossible—the mechanic won't see much use with impossible obstacles. However, use of the mechanic is intended to be a risky proposition, so you should use one or two obstacle modifiers.

Occupation

Occupation is the easiest aspect of Circles to consider. Examine the setting being called upon by the player. Is the character type common to that setting? For example, if a player uses his Born Noble lifepath to bring a knight into the story, we need to

ask "Does the character know any knights?" The answer is "Yes, almost definitely." But were those knights common to his circle—being a noble child? No. Common to his circle were pages, nurses, governesses and other children. But neither were knights rare. He probably saw them in court quite often. Thus the Born Noble circle imposes the +2 Ob Uncommon Occupation penalty on a Circles test to find a knight. If the character had the Page lifepath, Squires would be common to his circles. If he had the Squire or Knight lifepaths, squires and knights would be common to his paths, whereas little princes and princesses would be much less common.

If the occupation is unimportant to the Circles test, the GM can really offer some surprising twists. For example, "We need to find someone who knows the password for the Thieves' Guild." That's specific information; occupation doesn't matter. Thus the answer could be a disgruntled former guild member or, even better, the constable for this district. "What do you need that information for now, friend?"

Station

The station modifier recognizes class distinctions and social ranking. If you are dipping below or rising above your station, this modifier applies. So yes, it's more difficult for a king to find a servant than it is for him to find another damned courtier.

Time

The time modifier is problematic as written. It implies that the timing of the NPC's arrival is up to the GM. This grinds against the basic intent and task structure: state your intent, if successful, that's what you get.

Use the time modifier when it is highly improbable that the player meets his acquaintance. For example, the character is about to be hanged. The player makes a Circles test to place a rescuer in the crowd with a plan to free him *right now*. That's an appropriate use of a time modifier.

Place

The place modifier has similar problems as the time modifier. There seems to be this implicit idea that you can find your friend, but he's in the next town over. Again, it seems to break the intent and task paradigm.

The thinking behind this modifier is to create a sense of space in the setting, rather than have every NPC bump into you in a bar or at the market. You get word about your cousin, but he lives on a farm; you'll

have to ride out there to meet him. The modifier isn't intended as a way to punish or block, but as a way to deepen your setting with a momentary dash of narrative.

You only engage the "specific place/player decides" condition when it's utterly unlikely that the player could know someone here. You're an Elven Wanderer traveling through a Dwarven hold: Your starlight is stolen by greed-mad Dwarves; you make a Circles test to bring into play an Elven Chandler who knows the culture and can help you recover what was lost. I'd apply the local modifier to that test. It's unlikely there'd be such a character here in this Dwarven hold.

Affiliations

Affiliations dice are useful for passing Circles tests as they provide convenient creative bounds for Circles. When a player uses his affiliation with the army in a Circles test, this neatly colors the friend or enemy who might appear as the result of the test.

Going further, affiliations provide an excellent incentive to reinforce setting aspects. Give members of an affiliation distinctive dress, insignia, ceremonial weaponry or even specialized jargon. Taking the time to characterize the affiliation with just one detail pays huge dividends as the game progresses.

In one of our games, members of the Imperial Inspectorate received a jade seal as their badge of office. Over the course of many campaigns, that badge was flashed to invoke the affiliation. But the most powerful use of the seal was the day one of the players quit the office. He passionately described his character ripping the seal from his neck and violently throwing it to the ground. Suddenly, that small piece of colorful description took on the weight of the whole campaign.

Reputations

Reputations are similar to affiliations. They are simple mechanical representations of broad, fluid aspects of the fiction. The same dangers beset reputations as affiliations—it's too easy to gloss over them as a lever to pull when you want extra dice.

When I GM, I try to have NPCs recognize characters by their reputation without the player having rolled or invoked his reputation. For example, a player introduces himself, "I'm Dvalin…" and I interrupt him, "Not Dvalin the Bandit Slayer, is it?"

Such simple acknowledgements add a surprising amount of depth to the world. It lends an air that the players exist within a living, changing place.

Enmity Clause

The Enmity Clause is among the most powerful mechanical results in Burning Wheel—second only to the Duel of Wits compromise. It is a potent tool for the GM.

The Enmity Clause is a gift for player and GM alike. When a Circles test is made, there is no bad result—it's a confident, assured piece of drama. Friend or enemy, something is going to happen.

Enemies are not required to be in direct opposition, nor are they required to be the evil version of the character being sought. The Enmity Clause provides the GM with the opportunity to introduce an antagonist—someone opposed to the character's goals, directly or indirectly.

Simple Enemies

At its most basic, the Enmity Clause can produce simple antagonists like an angry shopkeeper, a surly drunk, a hostile thug, a stubborn guard, a haughty servant, an insubordinate officer or a jealous cousin. These simple antagonists oppose the immediate goal of the character. They charge more, obfuscate, provide misinformation or spurn the advances of the character.

They can raise the obstacle of any subsequent interaction—to purchase, persuade or pursue—or force a test to be made to bypass them before the character can move on—a versus test for a fight, argument or subterfuge. Once they're bypassed, they don't usually play much more of a role in the game. If they reappear, it's usually through another Circles test or via the GM's cheekiness.

Simple enemies can also be used to convey information to major antagonists—ratting the characters out, for example.

Epic Enemies

Epic enemies are characters who recur throughout the story, opposing the players' characters in surprising and escalating ways. Perhaps the epic descriptor is a bit of an overstatement, as these are the seeming nobodies who pop up in the darnedest places. We hate them, but we can't wait to see where they'll appear next.

To create such a recurring villain—an annoying magistrate, a quarrelsome cousin, a brutal hunter, an unbeatable bully—you need to be dedicated and focused with your Enmity Clauses. Whenever there's an opportunity for an Enmity Clause, this character should be invoked. Either he himself appears on the scene with a "Well, well, we meet again…" or one of his agents or allies acts for the enemy in the scene and reports the encounter back to this burgeoning villain.

Unexpected Enemies

Be creative with the Enmity Clause. It's easy to have the NPC arrive as an antagonist, but as I mentioned above, the opposition can also be indirect. The villain could have the same goals as the player and be willing to help, but he has his own nefarious reasons.

You can also use the Enmity Clause to place opposition between the player and his intended contact. The contact could be captured or waylaid by bandits, pirates or thugs. The contact could have been arrested and now languishes under the eye of a gaoler. Or the potential contact could be dead and inquiries about him arouse the suspicion of the authorities or the ire of his surviving family.

Expanding Circles

One flaw in the Circles mechanic is that once you burn up a character, he never acquires new lifepaths, thus the circles in which he walks remain static.

Technically, affiliations and reputations don't grant access to new Circles—they only grant power in existing Circles. If you are City Born and buy a knightly affiliation, you do not get Noble setting circles from it. Your affiliation bonus applies only in your urban home.

It's easy to fudge this rule and we're sure most groups do. It only makes sense that as you increase in reputation and experience, you can use your influence among new and varied peoples.

Traits provide an answer to the problem. During trait votes, bestow traits that not only grant affiliations and reputations, but also allow access to new circles.

Recently, an Elven character in one of our games was appointed by a Dwarven king to a post in Dwarven lands. He was subsequently voted for a trait that gave him contacts among the followers of this Dwarven king. He can now use his rather substantial Circles and reputations to call up Axe-Bearers and Graybeards and all manner of troublesome Dwarves!

Practical Relationships

Relationships are characters who are tied to a player but controlled by the GM. These characters are vital to presenting a rich, believable world. Relationships, while set up by a player, each need a voice and a perspective supplied by the GM. They need to be imperfectly aligned with the interest of the player who created them. If they are too closely aligned, they become dull and one-dimensional. Giving them their own priorities and attitude gives them life and adds energy to your game.

To Burn or Not to Burn

Players often create numerous relationships when starting a game. Once created, the GM then takes control of them. What obligation does the GM have to provide abilities, Beliefs, etc. for these characters?

I am a lazy GM. I treat relationships very lightly to start. If I think a relationship is important, I'll give him one Belief. If the relationship character needs to test for something, I use the NPC abilities on pages 280-282 of Burning Wheel Revised. Once play has progressed, and if the relationship has been featured, I'll consider burning up the character. Otherwise, I leave the relationship character as a very rough sketch.

Pick a Lifepath, Any Lifepath

I use a trick to create colorful NPCs off the cuff: I consult the lifepaths. A single lifepath provides an easy, one-dimensional character. I can use the skills and traits from that path at the ratings advised on pages 280-282 of the Burning Wheel.

If an NPC demands a little more depth, but not a full burn, I'll check his "last" lifepath—the lifepath that best represents who he is now—and then step backward through his requirements. This process takes about two minutes and gives me a useful, short list of traits and skills that I can use in the encounter at hand.

Relationships for a Player

If a player has an intimate relationship who is intended to accompany his character—like a bodyguard or servant—I make the player do a full burn for the character. He then remands control to me. I create a voice and personality for the character and play him as appropriate. I think I have a bad reputation in my group for playing some very mouthy and disagreeable servants.

If a situation arises in which the player's main character is absent, but the servant is present, I make the player take over the role of the servant. This a better solution than a player sitting idle as the GM plays with himself.

I make the player log all advancements and artha for the character, as well. I have enough to worry about on my end without logging Power advancements for your mute mameluk eunuch.

Relationships for a GM

If I have created a character in the course of play, I take ownership of that character. Even if that character came about from a Circles test, I'll usually retain complete control. I'll track his numbers and Beliefs. I find these characters a way to convey information to the players. Rather than issuing facts about a place or people as narration from on high, I provide details and color through the voices of these characters.

The danger of these characters is that you forget them. Since Burning Wheel is so player-character focused, it's easy to forget secondary characters who aren't part of Beliefs. To mitigate this problem, both the players and GM need to take responsibility. At the start of the session, a roll call is helpful. Quickly review who is present and where they are.

Unexpected Surprises

Burning up a relationship character does have its benefits. Often, the character grows and changes before your eyes. The choices that you make in character burning add elements that you hadn't anticipated. Suddenly, that simpler gaoler is a former knight turned extortionist who somehow landed this sinecure.

Practical Reputations

To make reputations useful and lively, I've found they need to be specific. Reputations designed during character burning are usually looser, since the setting isn't quite fleshed out yet. But reputations earned in play deserve to be tightly wound around a place and an event in the setting.

If you cleared a nest of bandits from the forest surrounding Verge, your reputation should state: Bandit Slayer of Verge—1D. As your fortunes grow and your reputation increases, you can build on that reputation: Destroyer of Cults in Specularum (and Surrounds)—2D. And finally, when you achieve the ultimate success: Dragonslayer of Karameikos—3D. Each reputation is built from your actions. Each supersedes the last. Each gives the sense of a growing sphere of influence and power.

Reputation Votes

There's a lot going on in a Burning Wheel game, both in the metagame and in the fiction. Reputation votes are easily overlooked. Don't do that! Use reputation votes as a way to celebrate events. They're different than trait votes in that they're not about how the other players see you, but about how your character is seen in the setting.

So when a great deed is accomplished, or a terrible disaster strikes, take a few moments at the end of the session to discuss how it affects your reputations.

Practical Affiliations

Affiliations are an unassuming but powerful element of the game. Nominally, they're just bonus dice for a Circles test. But look at them from a different perspective. An affiliation is a tie to an organization. An organization, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, has customs. But more important, an organization does not exist in a vacuum. An organization has rivals, suppliers, allies and supporters. An organization has disgruntled former members. An organization is a manifestation of power that seeks to ensure its own survival by fighting off attacks while accounting for its needs. Fleshing out just one organization can provide insight into a massive chunk of your setting.

When you have an affiliation, you're privy to some of the aspects discussed above. The more dice, the more you are privy to.

Also, don't forget that according to pages 118 and 119 of the Burning Wheel you can join and create new affiliations in play. If you join an existing organization, you gain access to people and information. Of course, you need to test your Circles to contact those people—who knows who your friends or enemies are in this new group? If you create a new organization, you give the GM the opportunity to bind you into the setting, a chance for him to spawn rivals for the upstarts and allies who seek to gain ground in a new order. Creating an affiliation is a situation unto itself. It's a small mechanical element, but it can have huge ramifications in play.

Resources

Resources represent wealth and temporal power. The system is quirky. You test to acquire more material wealth or to make payments. Success indicates your Resources remain steady or even improve. Failure indicates your Resources are reduced.

In the fiction, you're managing your assets. The test indicates whether you manage them well or poorly. Thus, if you manage well, you don't suffer any penalty. If you manage poorly, your resources dwindle.

Poverty

Low Resources begin a downward spiral into poverty. You have fewer dice to meet obstacles, therefore you're more likely to experience Tax. Tax increases your chances of failing tests. The effect of Tax is much more dramatic when your B2 is reduced to B1 than when your B5 is reduced to B4. With a low-exponent ability, Tax is more likely to reduce you to 0 and permanently knock a point off the exponent. In fact, it's common to bounce between B0 and B2—earning a few advancements and then getting Taxed back to oblivion due to an unlucky roll.

This cycle of poverty is by design. It is hard to climb out of poverty. The system creates incentive to take risks in venues outside of Resources. It's not enough to throw your Resources dice against every obstacle. You'll be Taxed eventually. That Tax will prod you to get a job. Once you're a working man, you're stuck in a cycle of recovering Taxed Resources while testing to maintain your lifestyle. It's a downward spiral.

To break the spiral, you need to look outside of Resources. You need to make linked tests into your Resources. You need to get cash from other sources like dungeons, raids, robberies, extortion, gifts, vassalage, taxes. These activities all make excellent sources of alternate income.

Gaming the Resources System

When you're poor and it's Resources maintenance time, you have to husband your wealth carefully. Or when you have a B1 Resources and you need to pass a big, expensive test, you need to be cautious. Let me give you some advice born from hard lessons.

Coordinate your Resources: Designate one player to make the big Resources test. If you can't risk being Taxed, don't help. Make linked tests into the Resources test. If you can accept the risk of Tax, help the primary player. You'll earn a test for advancement from your help.

Choose one character who either can afford the Tax if it hits, who is willing to take the fall, has cash on hand or has a trait like Pennywise to mitigate failure.

Adventurer's Income

Life as an adventurer is not a rich one. Gear and expeditions are expensive. The Services of doctors and armorers aren't cheap. And just when you make a penny, it's tax time and you've got to pay up on what little you earned.

When adventuring, be sure to take time out to Scavenge for loot. An Ob 3 test should be enough to net you a die or two of cash. Don't be afraid to take out loans and repay them. When negotiating a Duel of Wits compromise, ask for money!

Courtly Income

When at court, selflessly slaving away for the good of the kingdom, do not neglect your own needs. Be sure to secure donations to your cause in the form of cash, property, titles and funds. Persuasion, Intimidation and Extortion make excellent tools for acquiring money. You don't want your finery to become threadbare or fall out of fashion after a season at court, do you? You must think of your own needs at all times, lest you fall behind your rivals.

Noble Income

If you are noble and have vassals under your protection, do not neglect to send forth your bailiff to ensure the dutiful collection of taxes. Your vassals shall make payments from their own funds and produce for you cash for the appropriate, agreed-upon sum. By this method, with the help of just ten vassals, you can collect the funds necessary to raise a mighty fortress.

If ye find yourself in extremity and forced to treat with other wealthy lords for financial gain, ye may countenance to ask them for a loan. Be not fearful of such endeavors! Certainly thine enterprise shall be profitable and ye shall promptly repay all that is owed.

Religious Income

Donations are the bread of religious institutions. Suasion can loosen the purse strings of the most miserly merchant and cause him to proffer cash so that his soul might rest more easily. Such a donation is but a trifle for the rich.

And if donations are bread, titles are butter and properties are jam. Do not neglect to secure these temporal artifacts. Though they be burdensome, they are also profitable for the church.

Scoundrel's Income

If ye be a scoundrel, knave or rogue, ye can earn coin by lightening the purse of another through subtle tricks of the trade. Or, perhaps, should secrets be divulged to thine ear, you can trade them, or gather coin for your assurance they never be repeated. And should all of your pride and resources abandon you, you can take to thy knees and prostrate yourself before the mercies of your fellow man.

Cash Money

The Burning Wheel touches briefly on using Resources as money in the Currency section of the Resources chapter. To reemphasize this here: Your cash dice are bags of silver. Your cache is a box full of treasure and gold. Your loan is a promissory note that you can draw on. Et cetera.

Loot and Fence

How does loot work in the game? You grabbed a sweet sword and want to sell it? When you sell it, you convert it to cash dice. You don't test or use Resources to sell anything. You test Haggling to agree on a price—an amount of cash dice—or Persuasion to convince your mark to buy.

Linked Resources or Resources Help

A linked test into Resources risks raising the obstacle if the linked test is failed. Help carries no such risk. However, a linked test insulates the helper—he won't be taxed if the test is failed, whereas a player who gives a helping die is taxed if the roll is failed.

Lifestyle Maintenance

Every so often in the course of play, at a predetermined juncture, the GM calls for a lifestyle maintenance test. This test pits the expense of the character's day-to-day living conditions against his Resources. For a typical character, it's an Ob 2 test—poor adventurer. But it's important to pay attention to the actual living conditions for the last lifestyle maintenance cycle and assess the obstacle based on that. I've seen players set their characters to living on the street to lower their lifestyle maintenance obstacle to 1. The opposite is true as well—a profligate, careless lifestyle, living in hotels and eating well should raise the obstacle. Life at court is more expensive than life on the road. And so on.

Lifestyle Maintenance Failure

If you fail this test, you've been living beyond your means. Your lifestyle has taxed your Resources. In the future, you had better bring in more income, get a job or curb your expenses.

This failure isn't drastic, but it is notable. It should be commemorated with a notable description of all that heavy spending.

Failing and Reduced to Resources 0

Failing your lifestyle maintenance test and being reduced to Resources exponent 0 is bad. You're broke. You've spent it all on this lavish (or not) lifestyle. The rent is due, the piper calls and your pockets are empty.

It's time to go out into the world and earn some ducats.

No Resources for Lifestyle Maintenance

If a character has a B0 Resources and cannot get cash to make the maintenance test, then he automatically fails his lifestyle maintenance. He can't be taxed any further, so failure comes in a different form—he is made sick, his gear breaks down, his toolkits run dry, his animals die, his finery becomes threadbare, his reputation withers, etc.

Injured and Poor

If you're recovering from an injury like a Severe, Traumatic or Mortal Wound, then you'll most likely have to pass a lifestyle maintenance test as you convalesce. If you're poor, this can be a crushing financial burden. If you have no Resources at all to support yourself, the GM can chip away at your possessions or even your Health.

There is a massive incentive in the system to stay on the road, injured and poor. Keep hunting for that fortune. Don't rest until you know you can pay your expenses. It's harsh, but if you survive, you'll benefit mightily.

Practical Resources

For some games, Resources play only a minor part, but for adventurers in the tradition of Dumas or even Glen Cook, Resources are central to the action of the setting.

Setting and Currency

The Resources mechanic is an abstraction. We don't want to count coins or manage books. We want to make a roll, just like we'd make a roll to forge a shirt of mail. However, too much abstraction renders the mechanic dull. We make an Armorer roll to forge a shirt of mail from steel links, not merely "I make some armor." Likewise, if we reduce Resources to a roll merely to get some cash, we do the game a disservice.

Your setting has a currency system: gold, ducats, livres, pounds, talents, etc. Use it to delineate how much a die of cash is worth. You don't have to be too specific. A cash die is a small bag of silver, for example. A cache or fund is a talent.

In our games, I use currency to illustrate different locations in the setting. In one land, small-change cash is called "quick" and the gold standard is called an "imperial throne." In another land, the people instituted a currency of "fifths." Five fifths make up one unit. The whole unit doesn't even have a name! But five fifths buys a ton of rice, so it's a substantial amount of money.

Failure and Maintenance Cycles

Burning Wheel games are meant to play out over longer arcs of time than one would expect. Some scenes are played in intense detail and other scenes sweep months or years aside with but a few words. As time passes in the game, through travel, rest, recuperation and practice, you, the GM, must mercilessly call for lifestyle maintenance tests.

Rent comes due. The tax man comes. The king demands his share. Your ship needs repairs. When the maintenance test is failed, use the failure options mercilessly. Apply penalties to future rolls. Repossess property. Destroy their gear.

Why be so cruel? Because making money is a time-honored reason to undertake daring adventures!

Industry

Another way to make Resources shine is to link it directly to industry in your setting. Simple details like the industry of a city can add a nice sense of depth. Is a city a banking center? Does this province make its money growing and selling sorghum? Is this town known for its silk weavers?

These details then help qualify Resources tests. When you get cash or make a loan, you're tapping into the industry of the place—you're opening an account, buying a bushel of sorghum or six bolts of silk. These all count as Resources tests and cash dice, but the color is important.

Each character has a source of wealth, too. Each player should note the basis of his Resources according to the elements of the setting: rents, allowance, inheritance, industry, cash from wages, property, etc. Most characters start with a little cash, but the wealthier they get, the more nuanced the source of the Resources.

In play, this small detail provides the GM with tremendous opportunity. Let's say you have a young prince of a merchant family who makes their money from a trading fleet. In play, the family's rivals attack and burn one of their cargo-laden ships. This is an excellent excuse for a +1 Ob to Resources tests until the loss can be recovered. If the young prince goes a-raiding and captures a ship, the penalty is alleviated. Even better, if the young prince manages to capture a convoy of treasure-laden ships, you can grant the player a substantial amount of cash dice—+5D to +8D, I think. Thus the color of the source of income provides grist for the adventure mill.

Wises

Wises are among the coolest aspects of Burning Wheel, and they are also among the most misused or misunderstood aspects. On the surface, wises look simple: They're knowledge skills. They represent the little bits and bobs of information that characters pick up over time. But look a little deeper and they become a lot more complex.

In this chapter, we're going to look at three main questions: Under what circumstances should we use wises in our games? If I'm the GM, when should I call for a Wise test? And if I'm a player, when is it appropriate for me to ask to test a Wise?

Wises as Information

As GM, when a player asks for information on behalf of his character, the first thing you should consider is whether you have the information or not.

I played in a game in which the Big Picture was that long ago the black dragon descended upon a great Dwarven hall, slew the defenders and took it as his own. One of the players took the role of the last scion of that Dwarven house. His long-term goal was to slay the dragon and reclaim his homeland. The rest of the players created characters that wanted to help him for various reasons. This is Big Picture stuff because the entire campaign revolved around preparing for the goal.

I was playing a wizard named Petronax the Hawk. Early in the quest, we were attempting to track down some information about this particular dragon. Trying to come up with a place to start, I asked the GM, "Do I know any stories about the origin of dragons?"

Before answering my question, the first thing Anthony, the GM, had to think about was whether he knew the answer or not. When he was preparing this campaign, did he determine where dragons came from?

For argument's sake, let's say that he did. At that point, Anthony would have had to decide whether to simply Say Yes and give me the information or call for a Dragon-wise test. He had to consider further questions: Would having the answer allow me to circumvent obstacles Anthony had planned? Could he think of an interesting consequence or complication that would result from a failed Wise test?

If the answer to either of those questions was "No," he would have just given me the answer. "The first dragons were born from the sparks that flew off when the world was forged upon the anvil of the Void. It's a common legend that everyone in these parts knows."

If the answer to either of those questions was "Yes," Anthony would have called for a test. He might even have fished for more details: "Do you want the common legend that is told around hearths on stormy nights? That's Ob 2. Or do you want the story dragons believe? That's Ob 8.

But what if Anthony hadn't thought about the origin of dragons in the game? In that case, he would need a little more information about what I was looking for and why. For instance, I might tell him I wanted information about where dragons came from so we could go there and hopefully pick up the trail of this particular dragon. I might have suggested they came from the Isle of Dread.

At that point, Anthony would have had to consider more questions: Does the player's contribution contradict something previously established in the game? Would having the answer allow me to circumvent obstacles Anthony had planned? Could he think of an interesting consequence or complication that would result from a failed Wise test?

If the answer to any of the questions was "No," Anthony would have just said Yes and gone with my suggestion. "Sure, they come from the Isle of Dread."

If the answer to the first question was "Yes," Anthony would have just denied me. "You've already been to the Isle of Dread and there wasn't any evidence of dragons there. Plenty of other big lizards, but not dragons."

If the answer to the latter two questions was "Yes," then Anthony would have considered my contribution and set an obstacle.

In our game, what actually happened is that Anthony had not considered the origin of dragons at first, but he'd been casting it around in his head as we played. When I asked the question, he had an idea in mind: "Remember when you guys were searching for the Lost City of Panax and you fought your way to the Chronicle of Ages in the Hall of the Allfathers to do some research? You recall there was a section dedicated to dragons that you didn't have time to investigate."

I would have to wait for another opportunity to test Dragon-wise. And it would be a bit more time before we learned the awful truth: Dragons are born when a Dwarf advances his Greed to exponent 10.

Information as Setting

In the commentary on setting, we discussed creating setting with broad brush strokes and filling in details over time. It is primarily the GM's job to fill in those details through play. Many of those important details should be shared with the players in the course of play, as per Roll the Dice or Say Yes. If a detail is essential to helping a player engage with the situation for game session, just go ahead and share it!

If the session's situation depends upon the players knowing that the prince just murdered the chatelaine in cold blood, then tell the players. After all, everyone's talking about it! The chatelaine's son has demanded a judicial duel, and the prince's uncle—the new king—has agreed!

But if the players want more detail, want to draw out more information that will provide a more nuanced understanding of the situation, then a Wise is just what the doctor ordered.

Why is the king siding with the chatelaine's son against his own kin? Court Gossip-wise. What are the rules for judicial duels? Trial by Combat-wise. Do any other kingdoms stand to gain from this turmoil? Politics-wise.

The answer to each of those questions, whether the test is successful or failed, has the potential to spin the game in a new direction.

Establishing Setting as a Player

In addition to being useful for eliciting more information from the GM, wises are a key way for the players to put their own stamp on the setting. This is implicit in the core Burning Wheel rules but perhaps not quite as apparent as it should be. This heading guides you in using wises to generate little bits of setting.

Wises, Intent and Task

Like all other skills in the game, wises must be considered in the context of Intent and Task and Roll the Dice or Say Yes. The player states his intent—what he hopes to accomplish—and also his task—the description of how the character goes about achieving that intent. In many cases, the player's intent for a Wise is going to match up with what the GM has in mind for the Big Picture, the setting or the session's situation.

For instance, in the situation described above, the player might declare that his intent is to determine whether any other kingdoms stand to gain from the turmoil at court. He wants to use his familiarity with the court's affairs (the character grew up with the prince) in the form of Politics-wise.

In this case, the GM should already have a pretty firm grasp of the details, as they connect directly to his situation. If the GM does have foreign affairs in mind, he should call for an Ob 1 test as a list of the country's closest enemies should be common knowledge to anyone with Politics-wise. If the GM knows that no foreign powers stand to gain from the situation, he should just Say Yes and tell the player that no foreign mischief is afoot to keep everyone focused on the situation at hand.

However, sometimes your players will attack a situation from an oblique angle. They'll use wises you never expected to hunt for details you never anticipated. For instance, one of the players has the Poisons skill (not a Wise) and is hunting for a way to use it to affect the coming duel. He tells the GM that his intent is to determine whether it is customary for the king to offer a cup of wine to each combatant before the duel begins. He fought in a number of duels himself when he was a younger man, and he wants to use Trial by Combat-wise as his task.

In this case, the GM had never considered such a custom before. He doesn't know if this court has such a custom or not, but the existence of such a custom wouldn't contradict or invalidate the situation he's presented. It's important to keep in mind that the GM's goal is to

ensure the players address the situation in some fashion. If they come up with an interesting or novel way to do so, that's fine. The GM then asks the player for more information: Why does the player want to know about this custom? The player explains that he wants to know because it would create an opportunity to attempt to poison one of the combatants. Ah! That presents some very compelling potential complications! The GM tells the player that it will be an Ob 2 Trial by Combat-wise test for an interesting fact. A character would need to have some passing familiarity with judicial duels to know something like that. And if the player succeeds in the test, then the custom really does exist and the player will have added a new bit of detail about the ceremony surrounding a judicial duel in that court.

The accumulation of such details over time and the richness they bring to a setting are part of what make wises so special. And it's important to note that the facts established with wises in this way need not be minor. For instance, in your setting two nearby barons have been warring with each other for years and their neighbors and allies are being drawn into it as well. Their battles are really more of a backdrop at this point—the real action is elsewhere and the GM hasn't dedicated any thought as to why the two are at each other's throats. But you might see an opportunity to use your Feud-wise to establish the cause of their enmity. That's a test that could have far-reaching consequences. Wises allow the GM to paint the setting with broad strokes, knowing that he can either fill in the details later, or allow the players to fill in the details that interest them through a test.

The players and the GM should take note when such facts are added to the game. They are now a true and established part of the world. Record these facts in the same notebook you use for Duel of Wits compromises and other setting details.

Wises and Let It Ride

Recording these details helps ensure that you can recall them when necessary, but just as important, it ensures that the group doesn't contradict itself down the road.

Pete: "I am going to find a secret entrance into the Citadel of the Unconquered Sun."

Thor (as GM): "No way. We already established that this keep is the strongest in the entire kingdom. You failed that Citadel-wise test way back at the start of the campaign. If you want to get in, you are going to have to use diplomacy, trickery, battle or start scaling the walls."

Established information, whether introduced through GM description or via player use of wises, holds a privileged position in Burning Wheel. Once a fact has been established, it stands until the players change it through their actions or a new situation introduced by the GM changes it.

For example, once it's established that the Citadel of the Unconquered Sun has no secret entrances and the only means of ingress is the front gate, that's true until the players dig their own tunnel or the GM introduces a situation in which a foreign army lays siege to the place and sends in sappers.

An astute reader will notice that I'm simply restating Let It Ride here.

Wises and Failure

Wises are no different than other abilities in Burning Wheel when it comes to failure. As a GM, it's not enough that a player has an appropriate intent and task. Before you allow the player to proceed with testing a Wise, consider the consequences of failure. If you can't think of an appropriate complication or twist, and there's no other contravening facts in play, don't test. Say Yes and move on.

That said, there are always complications and twists to be had.

Are the players using Family Secrets-wise to determine that the duchess is having an affair so they can blackmail her? Well, it's true that she had an affair, but her paramour happens to be a powerful crime lord with all sorts of resources at his disposal to make the characters' lives a hell.

Citadel-wise to determine the location of a secret entrance? Oh, it's there, but the defenders know all about it. It's guarded and well-trapped.

Trial by Combat-wise to establish a wine-sharing ceremony beforehand so you can poison someone? Both combatants drink from each other's cups, as does the king.

A good failure doesn't lead to a brick wall. It requires the players to make new and interesting choices.

Etiquette of Wises

As you can see, wises accomplish two very different things. On the one hand, they are a method for eliciting more information from the GM. On the other hand, they give players the power to establish facts in the game.

Navigating those two abilities requires a bit of etiquette. It's not polite to go to your GM and demand to establish something as true without first asking if it contradicts what he has planned for the Big Picture, the setting or the situation. Nor should the GM allow the player to do so.

For example, a player has a character with Illness-wise. He wants to use it to establish that everyone he meets has a terminal illness. This is potentially abusive, especially if used upon other players' characters without their consent. What's a GM to do? Use the Say Yes or Roll Dice rule. "Your intent is to determine whether he has a terminal illness or not? No need to test. He doesn't."

And as the GM, don't step on players' ideas for using wises out of hand. If you don't have a legitimate reason to prevent the test and the player isn't simply test mongering, allow the player the freedom to add to the setting.
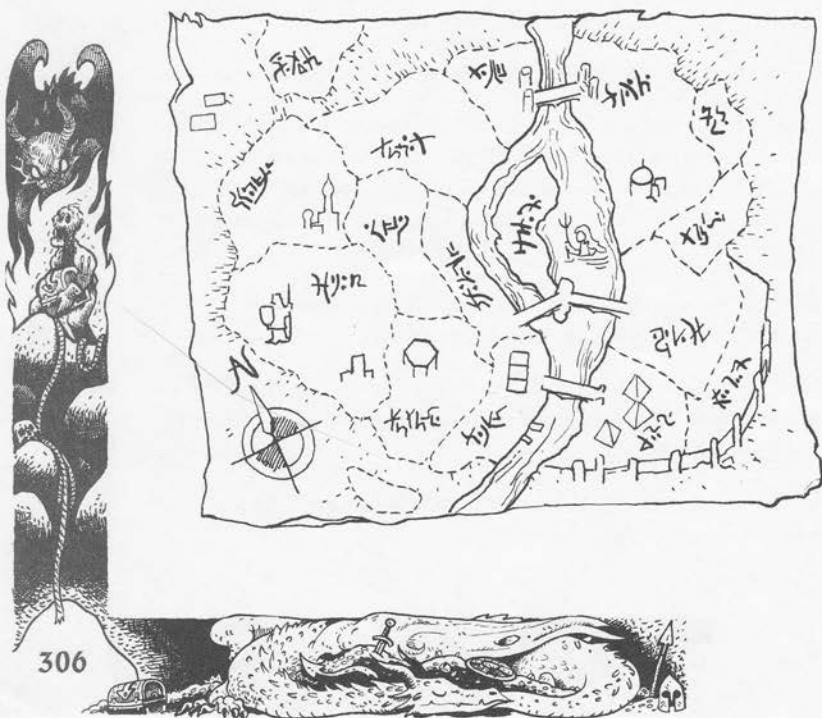
Wises Are Contextual

Roleplaying games are all about context, and Burning Wheel is no exception. By context we mean the details that help us to care about the situation and the way our characters resolve obstacles.

For instance, let's say the situation is that a small band of thieves has just stolen the holy artifacts from the temple of their neighbors. That's interesting on its face, but what's the context? In our game, the neighboring people have been making war and enslaving the thieves' people. In your game, the thieves need the artifact for a despicable rite. The context throws the situation in a very particular light.

Context is where wises shine. The right wise could tell us about the artifacts and their purpose, or a wise could provide details about the planned rite like other necessary components or a specific time or location.

But it is important to note that not all wises are equal. Village of Hochen-wise is very different from Village-wise. Village-wise will give you information on villages in general: how they tend to be organized, how their economies work, basic layout, etc. Village of Hochen-wise, on the other hand, will give you much more specific information: who the wójt is and who the lord is, who the most disliked man in the village is, and which fields are being left fallow this season.

Broad wises like Village-wise can be useful because they are so widely applicable. A player can probably find a use for his character's Village-wise in any village he happens to pass through. However, it will be difficult to use it for specific details of a particular place. Very specific wises, like Village of Hochen-wise, are really only applicable in certain situations but can provide a deep level of detail in those situations. For instance, determining that Martin Rayla is the wójt of Hochen is an Ob 1 test for Village of Hochen-wise. It's common knowledge! But it might be Ob 8—freaky details or specifics—for Village-wise. You might know about villages, but that doesn't mean you know intimate details about this particular one.

Village-wise Example Obstacles

The difference between a village and a hamlet, Ob 1; The typical governing body for a village in this province, Ob 2; The composition of the buildings in villages in this area Ob 3; A big holiday that villages

in this province all celebrate, Ob 4; Villages in this country all claim a specialty food; judging by the crops, can I tell what this village might produce? I want to impress a girl…, Ob 5.

Village of Hochen-wise Example Obstacles

Village of Hochen-wise: Who's the chief of Hochen? Ob 1; What does Hochen produce? Ob 1; Which lord lays claim to Hochen? Ob 2; Where do I find a priest in Hochen? Ob 3; Why is Hochen in such a shambles? Ob 4; Are there any bandit groups that frequent the areas around Hochen? Ob 5; Does Hochen have a history of occultism? Ob 7.

Nooks and Crannies

Wises are a way for players to comment on the lifepaths their characters have taken. A knight who has Bandit-wise and Ambush-wise has led a different life than a knight who has Court Gossip-wise and Lady-wise. Wises show where the character has been and what they have studied closely or learned from their travels.

They can also make a competent character into an outright brutal killing machine through the use of FoRK's and helping dice. An Orc with Elf Armor-wise is a frightening enemy, able to often call on an extra die when confronted with an Elf or aid his fellow Orcs with a well-placed helping die, "Elven helms have a weak point above the nose. Aim high, goblin."

Learning Wises

Wises aren't just the province of Character Burning. Learning wises through play can be incredibly rewarding. Both Practice/Instruction and Beginner's Luck are viable ways to learn wises through play. You aren't limited to the wises listed in the lifepaths. You may create your own, as long as the GM agrees it is legitimate.

Wises learned through play can become skill-based artifacts that shine on the character sheet. The player of the Orc who has acquired Dwarf-wise and Dragon-wise while dealing with the war between the Dwarven kings and the dragon, Spider-wise while slaying the spider goddess and Elf-wise while dodging Elven patrols in the western forests has hard-won and tangible evidence on his character sheet, showing where the character has been and a way for the dice to represent what he has learned.

Wises and Beginner's Luck

Wises tests can be made with Beginner's Luck just like other skills. As with other skills using Beginner's Luck, unskilled use of a wise is subject to a double-obstacle penalty.

As a GM, when a player wants to make an unskilled wise test, you must consider it thoughtfully. First, is it test mongering? If the player is simply testing to open a wise, don't allow the player to test. It's fine that the player is gunning for a test, but he must supply a game-appropriate reason to do so. Furthermore, he must provide a bit of color as to how he came by this knowledge. It's not enough to say that you want to test Trial by Combat-wise to establish the custom for the king to offer duelists a goblet of wine before a judicial duel. You should add, "I know this because I was a hothead in my youth and fought a lot of duels." Remember, wises don't just define the world, they also define your character.

As with other wise tests, when making a Beginner's Luck wise test, the GM needs to balance the equation with a juicy complication or twist that results from a failure. As a GM, if you can't think of an interesting consequence for failing a Beginner's Luck wise test—or a previously established fact—you should Say Yes and move on.
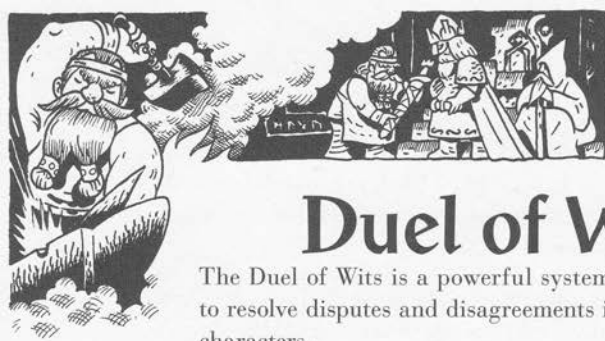
Duel of Wits

The Duel of Wits is a powerful system that allows players to resolve disputes and disagreements in the game via their characters.

When to Engage in a Duel of Wits

Let me give you some advice when you're considering using the Duel of Wits mechanic: Roleplay, you bastards. Feel it out. Talk. Poke around. Can you come to an agreement? Are you just blowing off steam? Are you simply making a declarative statement?

Or are you at loggerheads, repeating yourselves, not making any progress? Is there something you want the other party to do? If so, then it's Duel of Wits time.

Is there a Belief at stake? Maybe not your Belief, even. Maybe your friend has a Belief on the line and you want to challenge it, see if he really means it. If so, a Duel of Wits is in order.

Procedure

Just for fun, I'm going to break down the Duel of Wits procedure into a series of bullet points.

- Declare that you want a Duel of Wits with another player.
- The other player can agree or walk away.
- Announce your statement of purpose and then write it down on your Duel of Wits sheet.
- Roll for your body of argument.
- Choose your actions in private.
- In each volley, use the three Rs: reveal, roleplay and roll. You must roleplay to roll the dice. And you must roleplay if you're giving a helping die.
- When one side is reduced to zero body of argument, end the Duel of Wits.
- Compromise based on the damage done to the winning side's body of argument.

Tactics

Let's talk a bit about setting up your statement of purpose and choosing actions for a Duel of Wits.

Setting Your Statement of Purpose

The best statement of purpose compels another player to action—especially when that action contradicts a Belief. Don't worry about changing someone's mind. Make them do something if you win. That will ratchet up the tension quite nicely and make your statement of purpose much harder to ignore.

Certain clever players have been known to engage in a Duel of Wits with a compromise already in mind. Knowing that if they lose, they will not get what's included in their statement, they do not mention this potential compromise. Instead, they write a statement that aims higher than what they hope to gain. In the event they lose, they have a ready compromise—in fact, they've achieved what they were after all along. And if they win, they gained more than they expected.

Of course, there's a risk in this tactic. Sometimes, you don't really want to aim so high and push so hard. You just might get what you asked for. Be careful.

Choosing Actions

Make decisions based on your performance, your traits and your Instincts. Don't make random decisions and don't make optimal tactical decisions. Use the action choice to say something about your character.

Action Combinations

The following combinations or series of actions have proven useful in play:

- *Incite-Point:* Cause your opponent to hesitate and then attack him without risk of reprisal. Don't follow Incite with Avoid, Obfuscate, Feint or Rebuttal actions.

- *Obfuscate-Rebuttal*: Use Obfuscate to impose a penalty on your opponent in the next volley. This tactic maximizes the effectiveness of Rebuttal since the dice pools for Rebuttal are smaller than an incoming attack.

- *Obfuscate-Point*: If your opponent is using Point-Rebuttal combinations, use Obfuscate to stop his Point and then reduce the effectiveness of his Rebuttal with the +1 Ob penalty.

- *Dismiss-Dismiss-Dismiss*: If you need to win the first volley, you can use this combo, but you'll probably hesitate in the second volley (unless your opponent pulled off a successful Obfuscate in the first volley). Also mathematically, this tactic is less effective than Point-Point-Point. Hesitating an action in the Duel of Wits is very costly.

- *Point-Point-Point* or *Point-Point-Dismiss*: Both of these combinations are devastating attacks but neither acts as any defense. This is not the wisest tactic if you care about compromising. And if you think a compromise is a negligible thing, then you're playing wrong.

- *Feint*: This action is a dangerous choice, but if used effectively it can pay off. Use this action when your opponent is on the defensive and convinced you're going to attack.

- *Avoid*: Don't use Avoid in the third volley. You're more likely to be Dismissed in the third volley. Use Obfuscate instead.
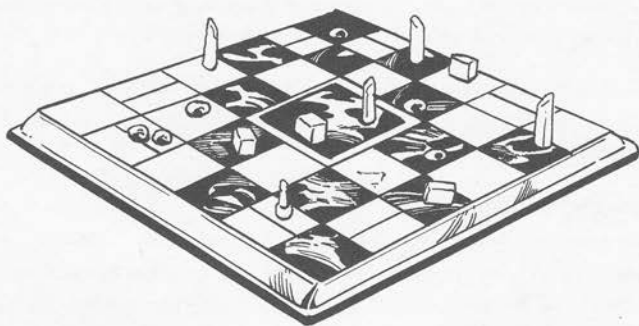
Group Participation in the Duel of Wits

The Duel of Wits is always led by a single player. He writes the objective, generates and tracks the body of argument and chooses actions. What does the rest of the group do during a Duel of Wits? They help. Don't be shy. Jump in. Listen to what's being said. Help one side when you agree and the other side when you disagree. A Duel of Wits is an excellent way for the group to have a lively, structured discussion—a perfect opportunity to clear the air or state some viewpoints that have been lurking in the back of your mind.

Compromise

Compromise generated by the Duel of Wits is probably the single most important result in the game. It's far more significant and powerful than any one test result—even one that results in a Mortal Wound. Mortal Wounds are endings. Compromises are beginnings, sudden shifts and new directions for the game. They are vital and powerful. But more important, compromises are of the players. They are bursts of inspiration, born from the fires of a rousing debate and a hard fight.

While you can use standard or versus tests to overcome social obstacles, the simple resolution lacks nuance. That resolution is direct and predictable, there's no nuance to it. Whereas compromise brings acceptable, contextual consensus to the fore.

The actual Duel of Wits—the points, the actions—is there so everyone gets a reasonable chance to say their piece, so we can get a rough measure for how much compromise is necessary. But the compromise itself is the most important part and it's vital that the whole group agrees to it. Compromises blow up obstacles and create rubble and ruin in their wake. They are a wild, uncontrollable aspect of the game powered by the group's collective will and cunning.

The rules for compromise are very loose in Burning Wheel. I like it that way, but looking to some of our other games for inspiration, I think there are a few instances in which we can offer better advice.

I think the text in Burning Wheel overlooks a fundamental aspect of a compromise in a Duel of Wits: The goal of the Duel of Wits system is to come to a decision as a group. Compromises are not the sole jurisdiction of the winner or the loser. Traditionally, we allow the loser to propose his compromise first. If it is rejected, it is the winner's responsibility to make a counteroffer. If that is rejected, it is the responsibility of the other players involved in the Duel of Wits to offer suggestions. If those are rejected, you can consult uninvolved players or the GM.

Duel of Wits Results Are New Obstacles

Once a Duel of Wits result—a win, a loss, a compromise, a tie—is determined, it is set in stone. The winner's statement is a hard mechanical fact in the game, like it or not. The loser's statement has been discredited and is unattainable. The story can't go in that direction...unless something dramatic changes.

A compromise, a win, a loss are all new obstacles. They can be broken down and overcome like any other—so long as the group abides by the result of the Duel of Wits.

How? The best way to counteract a Duel of Wits result is with another Duel of Wits. You can't attack the first result directly. You can't contravene the rules. So you must be subtle and clever. You must build your case. You must undermine the opposition.

You present your case to the duke, "Your cousin, the Black Eagle Baron, is corrupt and evil. He harbors black magic and plots against you. Arrest him now before it's too late."

The duke demolishes you in a Duel of Wits with a statement like, "Your claims are specious and you will never again speak ill of my cousin in court." So you've been booted from court and you have to stop badgering the duke with what you know to be true. So what happens in the game now? You go out and prove the duke wrong. You take the fight to the Black Eagle Baron. You rout his army of witches. You exact a confession from him.

The compromise didn't block your actions at all, rather it forced you into action!

When the group confronted the duke, the story reached a juncture. The group could be allies of the duke and aid him deposing his evil cousin. Or the group could be forced to antagonize the duke by outing his cousin as the evil bastard that he truly is! Either direction is cool.

We detailed one possible outcome of the second result above—the players take the fight directly to the Black Eagle Baron. A classic story of heroic vigilantism: "The halls of power are deaf to our righteous cries, therefore we must wage this just war ourselves." Another direction could have lead to the players themselves being hunted or arrested by the duke for slandering a member of his family.

All this from one Duel of Wits compromise!

Walking Away

A Duel of Wits is not mandatory. When challenged to a Duel of Wits you have two options: to accept or to walk away. You do not have to participate. Because if you do participate, you're bound to the results, good or bad. Thus, sometimes the situation is such that you don't want to be bound. Sometimes someone will want something from you, but

you don't want anything in return. You should never engage in a Duel of Wits out of a sense of obligation. If you don't want something out of it, you should walk away.

If you do choose to walk away, your character must exit the scene. You literally walk away. You do not roleplay out the argument any further. The matter is no longer open for discussion. Essentially, you've conceded the high ground to your interlocutor while preserving your own opinions. It can be very hard to walk away, knowing that your friend has made his point uncontested!

Take Them Away

With influential or potent antagonists, I don't have them exit the scene so much as I send the player characters away. I refuse to discuss the matter and show the characters the door. It's much more appropriate to their rank and station.

It is a powerful statement when an influential antagonist refuses to engage in a Duel of Wits. If the players challenge you and you refuse, you've essentially ended the scene. Further discussion screeches to a halt. In roleplaying terms, I think it's an excellent quirk. Negotiations end for the day. They'll resume on the morrow when perhaps you're in a more polite frame of mind.

Walking Away from the Group

Our group uses a craven tactic during big Duels. If one of our members is dissatisfied with what's at stake, he'll have his character exit the scene while his companions battle it out. Since he's walked out, he's not bound to the results of the Duel and can act according to his whim.

It's a valid character choice, but I find it a rather cowardly game tactic as it provides room for one player to sabotage agreements made by other players. It usually arises when a player is unhappy with both sides.

If you have walked out on a Duel of Wits, your character should sit the scene out. Returning in the midst of a duel you spurned is bad form.

Duel of Wits Secrets

The Duel of Wits allows a player to take on the role of a social character and carry equal weight in the rules as a combat- or magic-oriented character. This power was once controversial. Thankfully, it's not any longer.

One of the secrets of bringing the resolution of social conflict into the rules is that we found a way to settle player disputes at the table. Duel of Wits isn't about character disputes, just like Beliefs aren't really about the character either. It's about the player having a fair chance to voice his thoughts in the context of the game. Presenting a fair system for resolving arguments between players has had a few knock-on effects. It's sped up our games immensely. No more hours of arguments that last until someone gives up due to exhaustion. Now we can just disagree and, if we disagree forcefully enough, jump into a Duel of Wits to resolve it. And this speedy resolution has, in turn, created a strange effect: We disagree more now. Not just because we're old and curmudgeonly, but because we know we can have productive disagreements now. We can argue, cajole and plead and it'll get resolved in a satisfying manner so we can move on and keep playing!

Fight!

The Fight! system in Burning Wheel is designed to be dangerous, unpredictable, frightening, ritualistic and exhausting. It demands much of both player and character. It is not something to be taken lightly.

Neither is it an abstract system. You're not knocking away points of indeterminate meaning to be resolved by negotiation. Your disposition in a fight is your skill and body. Compromise is writ in blood and fear.

Despite the danger, most fights do not result in the death of a character. You are far more likely to be incapacitated, to flee or to surrender. In fact, it is rather difficult to kill with a single blow in the melee.

Violence has different roles in a game of courtly intrigue as opposed to a Tolkien epic war. A game about courtly intrigue might have an assassination or duel once every few sessions—perfect Fight! material—while the Tolkien stuff would be full of versus tests and Range and Cover tests, and only rarely call for the full Fight! rules.

Thus while this game is about fighting for what you believe, and the Fight! mechanics are central, they are meant to be used at the proper juncture. Overusing them can do just as much harm as underusing them.

Scripting Sheets

The Burning Wheel provides a graphic of some old-school scripting sheets. At BWHQ, we use newfangled sheets that contain all of the actions in a check-the-bubble format. I laminated about eight sheets at the local copy shop and we use china markers/pencils to write on them. The materials last for years and they're much more efficient than writing in pencil or even using an alternate system like cards. You can download a PDF of this sheet from our wiki.

Fight! as Climax

The Fight! rules are best used during climactic events. Fights in Burning Wheel are high stakes and intense. Fight! should not be used to resolve every single physical (or even violent) dispute. If you're engaged in a low-stakes, violent activity like "ye olde dispatch the guard," then use a versus test.

Or if you're on your own and the whole group is waiting for you to finish your scene so they can get on with the climax of the session, use the versus test mechanics, not Fight!

However, when you're confronting a character described in your Belief— when the plot has reached a climax, death is on the line and every second counts—then by all means dive into a full-blooded Fight!

Fight! as Opening Action Sequence

If your group is Fight! friendly, it's a good idea to surprise them once in a while with a jump-start combat at the top of the session. Kick the session off with a sharp exchange or two. It gets the blood pumping. Be prepared to spend the rest of the session dealing with the fallout!

Fighting Smart

The Fight! system has an internal logic. It rewards players who fight smart. There are optimal and suboptimal strategies. To effect any strategy, you must begin planning before you cross swords with your opponent because, indeed, a sword might not be the right weapon for the job.

Intelligence

Assess your opponents before a battle. Find out how they fight—their weapons, their armor. If you're fighting heavily armored opponents, you need to develop tactics and use weapons that neutralize their defenses. If your opponent uses longer weapons to keep his enemies at bay, you need to either beat him at his own game or prepare a gambit to close with him.

The system substantially rewards this forethought. Bashing a sword against plated mail armor is a futile endeavor. Better to have your mace or axe ready.

Implicit in these lofty entreaties is the idea that gathering intelligence and learning how to fight differently are integral parts of play. They are not to be glossed over. You are meant to use your Perception, your wises, your Resources, practice time, instruction and anything else you can think of to gain advantage in the sessions preceding a confrontation. These are significant and important parts of your adventures!

Ambush

For the less scrupulous among us, ambush is a tried-and-true fight-winning tactic. Surprise your enemy and force him to take a Steel test. Use any hesitation to your advantage. If your opponent is only hesitating for a moment, knock him down with a Push or Charge. If he's hesitating for a few beats, try to Lock him up. He can't resist. If he's hesitating for anything longer than a moment, have at him with a Great Strike or two.

The Crossbow and the Gun

Another dastardly tactic is to stand outside of your opponent's paltry striking distance and shoot him down like the dog that he is with a crossbow or gun. If you fail to incapacitate him with your shot, draw steel and move in to engage on your terms.

Processing Missile Weapon Length in Fight!

Missile weapons should always be in striking distance in Fight! How do you get out of striking distance of a weapon meant to strike down a person at 100 paces? If you're out of striking distance of a missile weapon at this close range, what's happening in the fiction? You're too close to shoot; you're behind cover; or there's another body between you and the shooter.

Weapon Length for Missiles in Fight on pages 150-151 of the Burning Wheel describes the die bonuses for using missiles in combat.

Weapon Speed

Weapon speed breaks up your options in the course of a script. A slow weapon isn't really slow, it just require a beat between attacks. One important thing to note is that hilt strikes count as a separate weapon. So if you're using a sword (slow weapon speed), you can script Strike/Strike and use the blade and then the hilt.

Weapon speed is useful for both breaking up your own rhythms and using alternate attacks like Push or Disarm. But your opponent's weapon speed can be used as a clue to help you better plan your attacks. If you can predict when your opponent can't Strike, you have an opening that you can exploit.

Positioning

If you have a longer weapon, fight for the initial positioning and set yourself up at your opponent's disadvantage. At the least, put him at lunging. At best, put him out of striking distance and whittle away at him while he tries to close.

If you have weapons of similar length, but your opponent is more dangerous than you are, try to fight from lunging. Use the reach penalty to provide some protection for yourself. Conversely, if you have a substantial advantage in skill dice, fight from lunging against lesser-skilled opponents. They'll flail away while you land blows.

Use the Environment

Unarmed? There's a whole slew of found weapons described in the weapons list on page 259 of the Burning Wheel. Use your Scavenging skill to whip something up before your enemies burst through the door. Or if you're fighting in the kitchen, use an Assess action in the fight itself and find a boiling pot to grab so you can smash your opponent in the face with it!

You can also spend an Assess action to make a linked test to find an advantage in the fight. You could spot a doorway. If you successfully position into the hallway, you can use the Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide rules. You could spot a window to dive out of.

You can use physical actions to overturn tables, climb up balconies or slam doors shut. These actions call for Power, Speed or Agility tests respectively. They can completely change the nature of the battle space. You can provide advantage for positioning, escape the fight or cut off retreat respectively.

The key here is to use descriptions of the battle space to engender questions. "Is there a window out of this room?" These questions can lead to the GM Saying Yes or they can lead to one of the tests suggested above. This is vital: these questions and tests must abide by intent and task. If you're fighting in the kitchen, this is viable intent for an Assess "Is there a boiling pot on the stove? I want to grab it." If you're fighting in the throne room, it's not. If you use these questions judiciously, your fights will be richer and more exciting. If you forget about intent and task and use the Assess action to introduce improbable elements, then your fights will become silly and unsatisfying.

Use Your Hands

The Physical Action is often overlooked, too. Spend two actions and you can use your hands (or feet) to get some work done! I mentioned that you can open and close doors using the Physical Action. You could also use this to rip pieces of armor off of your opponent. Of course, you need to have him in at least a 1D Lock to get started, but how shocking would that be if some brute just grabbed you and ripped your helmet off? Terrifying!

Use Power and Agility tests to resolve Physical Actions like that.

Armor

If you're heavily armored against an opponent without an armor-penetrating weapon, be aggressive. Don't defend yourself. Let your armor absorb the blows while you crush your enemy.

If you're lightly armored, use Avoids and Counterstrikes to soften incoming blows so if your armor should fail, you're not at great risk.

If you're fighting a heavily armored opponent and you can't penetrate his defenses, change your tactics. Close inside of his striking distance.

Push him down or Throw him if you can; Lock him up. Tear away his helmet (with a Physical Action and a Power or Agility test) and stab him in the face.

Retreat

If a fight is a stalemate, don't be afraid to retreat and exit the battle. You can reengage another time on terms more favorable to you.

Surrender

Don't be afraid to surrender if you're overmatched. Surrender is an excellent time to push for a Duel of Wits. Surrender can lead to all sorts of fun situations like: capture, prison, ransom, a trial or even your favorite, slavery!

Tactics

There are 14 actions in Fight! The interactions between all of the actions are complex, but there are certain optimal combinations.

Avoid

Avoid should be your default defensive action. It's effective and there's only a light downside. Your Avoid roll works against all incoming attacks on that action. All of your subsequent actions in the volley suffer a +1 Ob disadvantage—even other Avoid actions.

Beat and Bind

Beat and Bind is a niche action. It's only useful if you're playing a strong positioning game. Use it when you want to set up a big positioning action in the next volley. Otherwise, it's useless.

Block

Block is only useful if your weapon skill is much higher than your Speed or if you can't afford to absorb the +1 Ob disadvantage from using the Avoid action. If you're going to combo with a defensive action followed by a Strike and you need your Strike obstacle to be as low as possible, use the Block action to defend yourself. Otherwise, go with Avoid or Counterstrike. We try to address this with our new Block variant presented in the Rules Appendix.
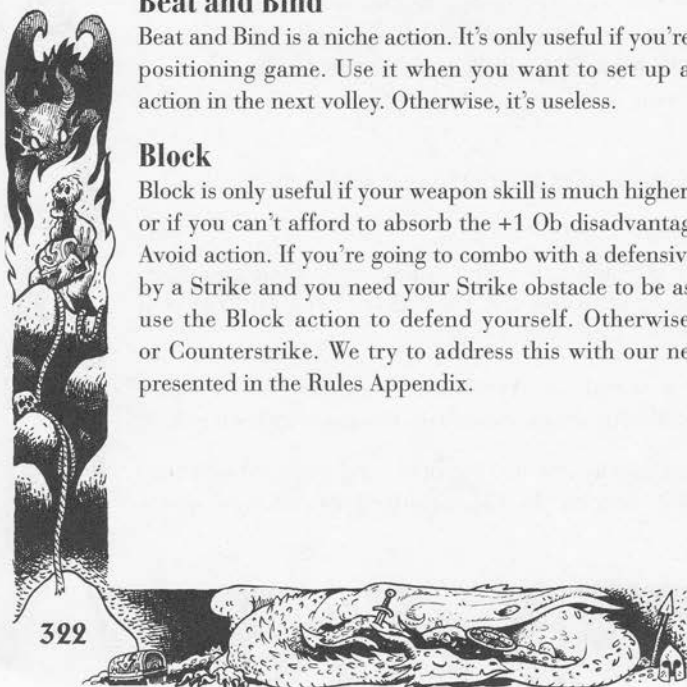
Charge/Tackle

When you use the Charge action, you throw your body into your opponent to knock him down. You remain upright and at optimal striking distance. When you use the Tackle action, you take your opponent to the ground. You are both inside each other's reach.

If you are outside of striking distance or at lunging distance, apply a +2 Ob to your Charge action. To more effectively Charge, close to optimal then, in your next volley, Charge. You'll eliminate the penalty and gain an extra advantage die to boot.

If you do not get more successes than your opponent, your Charge action fails. You do not close any distance—you dash in, but your opponent moves away, keeping you at bay. You lose your next action due to hesitation.

Counterstrike

Counterstrike is versatile and effective. The goal for your Counterstrike action shouldn't be to deliver a fatal blow. You should plan on winging your opponent. Land an incidental hit. Give your opponent a Superficial wound. This will shift the momentum in your favor.

Any penalties apply to both sides—attack and defend—of the Counterstrike action. Any advantages apply to one side or the other.

Counterstrike can be performed from any range category. If you're out of striking distance, but your opponent is in striking distance for his weapon, you can block him, but not strike back. If you're in lunging distance, you can block at no penalty and strike back at a +1 Ob penalty. If you're in optimal, there's no penalty either way. If you're inside your weapon's striking distance, you pay the penalty for both the blocking and striking halves of the Counterstrike action.

Disarm

Disarm is a strong, forceful attack. It's most effective against unskilled opponents or opponents with skill exponents of 4 or lower. A successful Disarm can seriously trip up your opponent and make him rethink his actions. His weapon is gone, so he'll lose access to that skill until he recovers it or switches tactics. Also, you'll neutralize any weapon length advantage he has and potentially gain a big advantage yourself.

Even so, it's a very difficult action to pull off. The obstacle is high. One way to mitigate this is to build into a Disarm. Wear your opponent down. Give him a Light wound if you can. Get him in a Lock. Then kick his weapon out of his hand. It'll be much easier.

And be sure to follow up Disarms with an attack—either a Strike, Great Strike or Lock. Your opponent will be temporarily off balance. You have to capitalize. He'll recover by drawing another weapon or retrieving the one he dropped. And it won't take very long.

Feint

Feint is another niche action. It is only appropriate in rare circumstances, but when it works it's the greatest feeling ever. Feint is such a gamble that you only ever want to use it when your opponent drops into defensive stance or if you know that he's hooked on the Counterstrike action.

Great Strike

Set and strike. This powerful action is both satisfying and useful. The two actions of Great Strike can be separated by the interval between volleys or even between exchanges. You don't have to Set and Great Strike in one volley. You can get clever with it, setting in your second action, baiting your opponent to forfeit and change actions.

Great Strike is a necessity when using a weapon with little or no VA against an armored opponent. When fighting an unarmored opponent, use Great Strike to deliver extra damage.

Lock

Lock is perhaps the most powerful attack available. It bypasses the damage circuit and directly, if temporarily, removes dice from the target.

The Lock action is limited because you must close to the inside to effectively use it, and because the opponent gets to resist. If you're applying a Lock, your opponent rolls his Power unmodified by any other Locked dice. If your opponent is trying to escape the Lock, he tests his ability but with the penalties from the Lock.

Successes from resisting the application of a Lock lessen the effect of the incoming Lock. If the defender is already in a Lock, and he gets more successes than an attacker using the Lock action, he may apply his extra successes to escape from the existing Lock.

Players should attempt Locks with their characters regardless of their Power. Not only is it good opportunity to get tests for advancement, but it's an easy action to get lucky with.

Push

Push is a workhorse action. Anyone can pull off an effective Push, regardless of ability. It's a solid attack, very useful as an offbeat action when using a slow speed weapon: Strike, Push, Strike is an effective, aggressive combination.

Push is so useful because it can be done from lunging, optimal or inside striking distance. Thus if you're trapped inside the striking distance of your own spear by your opponent, you can use the Push action to shove him back and not suffer the spear's penalty for attacking from the inside.

It can also be performed without penalty by unskilled characters. Thus if you're ever in over your head in a fight, an Avoid/Push script will usually see you through.

Strike

Ah, good old Strike. What would we do without you? Actually, Strikes aren't necessary. Unlike the Point action in the Duel of Wits, you do not need Strike to win a Fight! You can disable or run off an opponent with Charges, Locks, Pushes and Throws.

However, when it's time do violence and harm to your opponent, there is no better choice. Strike is efficient because there's no natural defense against it. If you Strike when your opponent is not defending, you have a good shot at tagging him and doing damage.

If you're heavily armored, use your armor as protection and pound away on your opponent with as many Strikes as you're able. If you're lightly armored and can't absorb a hit, try to time your Strikes and put them in unexpected intervals. Second action, volley 2 is always a nice place to tuck one in.

If your opponent is a hitter—Strike, Strike, Strike, Strike, etc.—drop into defensive stance and use Avoids and Counterstrikes. Try to protect yourself and tag him with a Superficial wound. Play for the long game. Don't try to take him down in one shot, wear him down. Defend yourself as you position for advantage. Work yourself into a position that neutralizes his weapon—outside if you have a missile or inside if you have nothing else.

If your opponent is lightly armored and on the attack, give him a strong poke. Don't let him get the initiative by forcing you on the defensive when he can be struck down with a solid hit. Of course, don't make yourself vulnerable. If you have to take up a defensive posture, try to wear him down as we described above.

Throw

Throw is a devastating attack that requires skill and timing to pull off. It's really not worth attempting unless you're skilled. But if you have the Boxing or Martial Arts or similar skill, you should use this as a main part of your repertoire.

Throw combines the effects of a Push or Charge with a Strike. With this action, you can easily take your opponent to the ground and do damage at the same time. It's awesome. Unfortunately, it's darned hard to pull off.

Stances

Stances are an advanced part of the fighting system and often overlooked. Aggressive Stance provides +2D advantage dice to Strike and Great Strike, while it restricts Avoid completely and penalizes Block and Counterstrike with a +2 Ob. Those advantage dice are often necessary for a character to be able to deliver superb hits. Without them, a character with a B3 skill can only hope to get Mark results with most weapons.

Defensive Stance is the inverse and perhaps more potent version of Aggressive Stance. It provides +2D to Block, Counterstrike and Avoid. Strike and Great Strike are penalized with a +2 Ob penalty while in this stance. Defensive Stance also has the added benefit of acting like a Block action when it is scripted.

The +2D to Counterstrike and Avoid are invaluable in any fight. Using those advantages, you can keep an aggressive opponent at bay while worrying him with counterattacks. The striking portion of Counterstrike is not penalized in Defensive Stance! I've seen swordsmen win whole fights against multiple opponents using just defensive Counterstrike and Push actions.

Fighting as a Group

A good Fight! can include every player at the table fighting against hordes of bad guys. For the most basic group fight, each player squares off one-on-one with an opponent. If one opponent is dispatched, that player may make a positioning test to close with another opponent and move in to help his friend.

The Unskilled Fighter

If you find yourself in a melee without any skills, don't sit out. Unskilled fighters can be very effective using Avoid, Push and Lock actions. You act as an irritant and a distraction while a more skilled fighter (hopefully) dispatches the enemy.

Acting as a Group

If you have five goblins fighting one Sword Singer, should you script for each little monster individually? No. Use the goblins in one or two groups. The members of the group all help one of their number perform an action—Close, Strike, Avoid, Charge, etc.

When performing actions for the group, use the member with the most obstacle penalties or penalty dice. Meaning, if one goblin has a Superficial wound, apply his +1 Ob penalty to the roll. If one member of the group is knocked out or killed, subtract his help from the total and carry on.

I don't recommend this trick for player characters. It's far better for them to stand and act individually.

Two Versus One

Fighting two opponents at once is a dangerous proposition. Each combatant chooses his actions individually and privately (as per the normal rules) and executes them separately.

A character always receives his natural defenses, even if he's attacked twice in one action. His single natural defenses roll counts against all appropriate incoming actions.

Defensive actions are different. Avoid works against all incoming attacks for that action. Block, Counterstrike, and Block and Strike only work against one single attack incoming action. So if two attackers are Striking, you can only Block one. The other attack hits you unopposed. Though if the attack provides for natural defenses, you may make that roll.

Positioning Tricks

The positioning system is easy to use when fighting one-on-one, but how does one use it in a general melee? As stated above, pick your target. Try to square off one against one.

If facing a target or group, the players may help one another and position together—provided they script the same positioning actions. Characters who help one another then succeed or fail together, adjusting their position as appropriate.

A positioning action cannot accomplish two intents at once. You cannot Close and Withdraw at the same time. Let's say you are facing two opponents, one at lunging and one at optimal. You close from lunging to optimal with the one opponent. You do not change your relative position with the other opponent unless he positions against you.

However, this also means that you can draw your opponents into combat with you, closing with one after another, pulling them in. This maximizes your action options—you can strike the most vulnerable target, for example—but it also makes you vulnerable to multiple attacks from multiple sources.

If you're Closing against one opponent and another fighter is Closing on you, what happens? You and the second fighter automatically close one fighting distance. If he beats your Close positioning successes by two or more, he can choose to move in one or two fighting distances—from outside striking distance to optimal, from lunging to inside striking distance. If you win, he still advances one fighting distance, but for your weapon length, not his.

If you're Withdrawing from one opponent who is maintaining his distance while a second fighter Closes on you, what happens? The Withdraw action works against anyone trying to position against you. Thus, if you roll more successes than the maintaining opponent, you move away from him. If you roll more successes than the closing fighter, you move away from him, too. If you tie or lose to the maintaining opponent, you do not retreat from him. If you tie the closing opponent, you do not retreat from him. If the closing opponent rolls more successes than your Withdraw action, he advances on you.
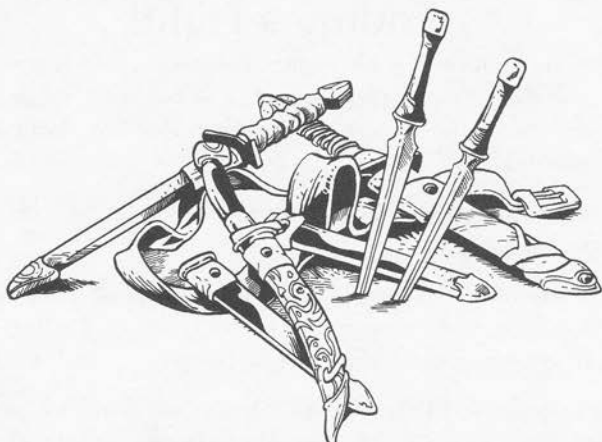
Felling Your Opponent and Moving On

If you incapacitate your opponent and there's more work to be done, you need to position against a new opponent. If your fighting distance is otherwise unknown—the GM did not determine it to start and you have not positioned against or been positioned against by this opponent—assume you start out of striking distance.

Crosscutting

Sometimes a Fight! is happening while other action is taking place elsewhere in the story. Do your best to cut between the various scenes of action. Run one exchange of the combat, then jump to another scene— perhaps an exchange of Range and Cover—and so on until everyone has had an equivalent amount of screen time. Usually you can resolve quite a bit just while combatants are choosing their actions.

Bidding for Initiative

We don't use this mechanic at all at BWHQ. I think it's a sop for people uncomfortable with the core Fight! conceits who need more of a traditional "I go first!" set up. It's perfectly valid mechanically. It works fine. We just don't like it anymore.

Ending a Fight!

One of the weaknesses of the Fight! mechanics is their lack of a clear end point. Not every conflict needs to be played out to the death, but the rules give no direction on in this regard. Hopefully, I can clear up any confusion.

- You should end a Fight! if the other side is killed. That's the obvious one, right?

- You should end a Fight! if one side is incapacitated. There's no need to stay in the action structure if no one is actually fighting—you're just beating on unconscious soon-to-be-corpses.

- You should end a Fight! if one side isn't necessarily incapacitated, but they're incapable of fighting. Your opponents all have -3D/+1 Ob penalties? Just end the fight. You don't need to play out the end of this sorry mess action by action.

- You should end a Fight! if something shocking or earth-shattering transpires that commands everyone's attention.

- You should end a Fight! if one side wants to quit. That's tantamount to surrender. Pick up the scene there. No more fighting (invoking the Let It Ride paradigm). One side has been defeated.

- You should end a Fight! if you're at a stalemate. If you're circling outside of striking distance for a whole exchange or you both have each other in 3D Locks and can't gain any advantage, end the fight.

When a Fight! is over, you have two main options as the GM. You can pick up the action right where the Fight! leaves off. One side surrenders to the enemy. He offers you terms. Negotiations ensue. Or you can cut away, incorporating the resolution of the combat into the next scene, but in a new situation. You were all incapacitated—you wake up in the duke's dungeons, stripped to the waist. The duke and his torturer mock you as they douse you with water.

The appropriate choice is highly circumstantial. If you're unsure which option to choose, focus on the characters' Beliefs. What situation would challenge them the most, a new scene with a new problem or dealing with the fallout here and now?

Range and Cover

Range and Cover is an iteration of our conflict mechanics designed to represent missile combat. Just like the other conflict systems, players privately choose actions, reveal them and play out the consequences. It's much simpler than Duel of Wits or Fight! There are only four actions: Close, Withdraw, Maintain and Let 'em Come. There's no disposition like in Duel of Wits. And it often transitions right into a Fight! rather than being resolved on its own. The special rules used by the system—range categories, range dice, cover dice and the interaction of the abilities—aren't complicated, either.

The system is perhaps too simple. There's not a lot of tactical choice. Regardless, it's useful and efficient. In this chapter, we'll talk about some of Range and Cover's features and how to get the most out of it.

Set It Up

Range and Cover is an abstract system, so much so that it suffers greatly without a strong in-game context. When you decide that it's time to let fly, the GM needs to step up and offer a vivid description of the scenery. Describe the weather, the ground, potential areas of cover and how far apart the opponents are. Don't be dry about it, either! Be florid and rich with detail. Burning Wheel isn't a tactical war game; it's a character-driven roleplaying game. So describe the field as the characters would see it.

Setting Up With Tactics, Fortifications and Wises

In our games at Burning Wheel HQ, we often jockey for advantage in Range and Cover with Tactics, Fortifications and applicable wises.

Tactics Skill in Setting Up Range and Cover

We use Tactics to look for advantageous positions or to set up in prudent formations. These Tactics tests count as linked tests for initial positioning. We also use Tactics to try to set up ambushes—Tactics versus Tactics or Observation. If successful, we can cause the enemy to take an obstacle

penalty to initial positioning and maybe their first couple of volleys. If we're really lucky and successful, we can force them to make Steel tests and then shoot them down while they flee.
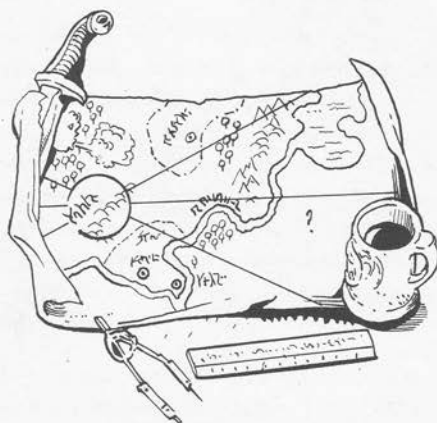
Fortifications Skill in Range and Cover

We use Fortifications if we can choose the field of battle and have time to entrench. We throw up barricades if we only have a few minutes— sometimes we have to use Scavenging to gather materials if there's nothing available. If we have a few hours time, we will dig trenches and set up fenced positions. The obstacles and the dice conferred are listed under the Fortifications skill.

Wises in Setting Up Range and Cover

When setting up a battle in Range and Cover, we use wises to ask quick questions about the battlefield. Sometimes, you just have the right skill for the job. An Ob 2 Battlefield-wise test could give you the lay of the land and get you a nice linked die to initial positioning. An Ob 3 Forest-wise test could find you a defensible grotto. An Ob 4 Paths-wise test could lead you to a trail that circles back behind your enemy.

These wise tests aren't always for just a linked die. Tests like these introduce new information about the setting. This new information can change the disposition of the battle. However, results like these are intensely contextual. The new information must make sense. And the GM decides how it affects the conflict at hand.

Describe Your Actions

Range and Cover actions are very abstract—Close, Withdraw, Maintain and Let 'em Come. The system is abstract so that it can be used in many different circumstances—fields, forests, castles and even ye olde dungeons. If played raw, merely announcing mechanical actions, it can get boring quick.

Take a moment to describe your character's movements. What's he doing? Where's he looking? What does he do when he runs? What does he do when he ducks behind cover? What does he do when he peels off a shot?

Helping players are actually the prime describers in this situation. They must narrate their actions to hand over those helping dice. Without a cool description, they can't help. So if you're helping, step up and inspire everyone else with your great description.

When to Use Range and Cover?

When do you initiate a Range and Cover conflict? I find it's pretty obvious. Ambushes, hunting parties, raids and skirmishes all come up in play. They are excellent opportunities to engage these mechanics. However, don't be overzealous. Range and Cover is a big deal. If you can resolve an altercation with a simple versus test and move on to something more important, do that. But if there's nowhere left to run, and it's time to fight, by all means, these are the rules for you.

Integrating Range and Cover

The Burning Wheel notes that the timing for a Range and Cover volley is plastic, not fixed. If we have multiple conflicts engaged in play, we've found that it's best to bounce back and forth between them, volley to volley. Trying to play an exchange of Fight! for every Range and Cover volley isn't a good idea.

Same goes for non-conflict actions: Play a volley of Range and Cover then cut away to the action elsewhere. Resolve a roll or two and then cut back to the Range and Cover. Keep bouncing back and forth until one situation or the other resolves.

Range and Cover to Fight!

Sometimes, when you're fighting a Range and Cover battle, one character moves into the "too close to shoot" range—in other words, he's charged into melee. At this point, you have two choices. You can bring

all participants in the battle into the Fight! mechanics. Or you can have the character who charged into melee wait until the Range and Cover has concluded or at least come to a lull.

I prefer to have the whole melee dragged into Fight! It makes the situation more dangerous, more desperate. Those who charged use the Too Close to Shoot and Last Ditch Arrow rules. Everyone else starts outside of striking distance. If they just loosed arrows in this volley or the last, then their weapons are considered unloaded. If they haven't loosed any volleys, their weapons are considered loaded and ready.

Tactics

Range and Cover tactics are fairly simple, but let's see if we can share some battle-earned wisdom with you.

Initial Positioning

We generally don't invest too much in initial positioning. It's nice to win it and control the battle space, but it's not vital since the shooting hasn't started yet. You can lose the initial positioning but win the first action and still come out ahead.

When to Maintain

There are two types of maintain actions: Speed Maintain and Perception Maintain. Use the maintain actions to hold your position. Get to your best range and then hunker down using maintains.

Perception Maintain

Perception Maintain is your go-to action in Range and Cover. It should be your most frequently used maneuver. It's simple and potent—Perception is automatically open-ended. And even noncombatant characters can have a high Perception. Use this action frequently.

Speed Maintain

Speed Maintains are useful only if you have a high Speed and decent Speed multiplier. Otherwise, don't bother with this action.

When to Close

There are three types of close actions in Range and Cover: Speed Close, Stealthy Close and Steel Close. Only close when you absolutely have to. It's a risky maneuver—your opponent might close at the same time and drag you closer than you want to be.

Stealthy Close

The Stealthy Close action is the most effective of the bunch, provided you have the skill and your opponent is weak in Observation. If you're fighting wolves or something similar, this is not the action to use.

Speed Close

Speed Close is simple and easy, but not as sweet as Stealthy Close. It is useful because it gets you advancements for Speed.

Steel Close

Steel Close is a great action if you've got a high Steel and a low hesitation. It's open-ended and Steel can easily be exponent 7 or higher. However, you've got to be able to soak up the hits when you use this action. If you can't risk getting hit, do not use this action.

When to Withdraw

There are three types of withdraw actions in Range and Cover: Speed Withdraw, Stealthy Withdraw and Steel Withdraw. Withdraw allows you to control range, keep your opponent guessing and hedges against accidental collisions.

If your extreme range is longer than your opponent's extreme range, you can withdraw so as to be out of range for him, but still in your own extreme range. Remember, you move according to your opponent's weapon ranges in Range and Cover.

Speed Withdraw

Speed Withdraw is very useful because it grants a +2D advantage. It is restricted in that it costs three successes to buy an action. But if you're using it to gain a positional advantage, pulling off a shot in that moment shouldn't matter too much.

Stealthy Withdraw

Like Stealthy Close, Stealthy Withdraw is nice because it's a sure thing. You use your Stealthy exponent to set a base obstacle. You roll your range and cover dice and add those successes to your exponent to set his full obstacle for the maneuver.

Again, don't use this against opponents with high Observation. Also, if you can outguess your opponent, use Stealthy maneuvers while he's on the move. It's more effective against Speed-based maneuvers than Steel or Perception.

Steel Withdraw

Only use Steel Withdraw if your Steel is incredibly high and you absolutely must get out of range or even get out of the fight. Otherwise, the cost is too high.

When to Let 'em Come

Technically, you can't use Let 'em Come in Range and Cover. It's an option for Fight! positioning. However, it's on the combat sheet under positioning, so kids have started using it in Range and Cover. Essentially, this is a voluntary hesitation action. You don't roll. You don't shoot. Your enemy rolls unopposed. It's very dangerous, but it can be useful for causing your enemy to overshoot—either to close or withdraw too far. It's kind of like a stutter-step fake.

Cover

When you win your first positioning test in a Range and Cover skirmish, don't spend your successes on shots or actions unless you absolutely must. Instead, take cover. Always take as much cover as you can—2D. If you move out of that position, use your successes to retake cover when you get to where you need to go.

Ranges

Fight from extreme range if you have the advantage in skill. Force your opponent to shoot on the move or to take wild, unlikely shots. If your skill isn't up to the task of hitting Ob 4 targets, you can also sit out at extreme range as a delaying tactic. Of course, you'd better be delaying for a reason.

Fight from optimal range only if you can afford to absorb a few shots or if you absolutely must close in to reduce your shot obstacles. Otherwise, optimal range is too dangerous.

When closing into melee, try to have your weapons loaded. If you win that close action and get to the "too close to shoot" range, you'll be able to launch into Fight! with a deadly, point-blank volley.

Skirmishes

Using the Range and Cover rules, it's possible to run skirmishes involving groups of two to ten fighters.

In its simplest iteration, you run a skirmish by placing all of the players on one team—whether or not they can fight—and allowing them to help one another test for positioning. One character leads, everyone else helps. The leader doles out action dice. On the GM's side, he lumps his villains into one horde, grabs a pile of helping dice and doles out his actions as appropriate.

Alternately, you can break down into multiple groups. The GM divides his forces into an equal number of groups to oppose the characters. Note that the size of the groups doesn't have to be equal. If the players break into two groups, the GM splits his forces into two groups. The groups can be evenly divided or one group can consist of a Troll and an Orc while the other could be 10 Goblins.

When positioning, pair off two opposing teams and run two simultaneous Range and Cover battles: player group alpha versus Orc and Troll, player group beta against 10 Goblins. One group will inevitably fall. The remaining group will want to help their companions. Allow them to make positioning tests against another group on the other side. In order to maneuver and gain action, they must beat their target's positioning rolls as per the standard rules. Their target only rolls once to defend itself from the two incoming attacks.

For extra fun, use the Slowest and Loudest rules found in this book in combination with Range and Cover skirmishes. These new rules neatly curb any die bloat from forming teams.

The Battle Space

For skirmishes and groups of fighters to make sense to everyone at the table, the GM must clearly describe the battle space. He must set up the situation on the ground. Who's where? What are they doing? What are they defending? What are they assaulting?

You can sketch a map if necessary, but usually florid description is more than enough.

We promise you, if you do not describe every maneuver with a short spray of vivid details, the conflict will quickly turn to mush. No one will understand where he is or what he's fighting for. It is a roleplaying game after all, the mechanics exist for you to hang your lovely descriptions on.

Mass Combat

With a little modification, it's possible to use Range and Cover as a mass-combat system. The problem is one of scale. If used as is—with unit members all helping and taking action dice—the math just breaks down. You roll too many dice and generate wild results. I beat you by...20. Okay, that's 20 shots....

That's just too tedious to resolve. Better to scale it back if you're fighting with more than 10 fighters per group.

When managing large units, only the lead character tests. He cannot accept help from his subordinates. He must lead them! Each action given to the unit counts for half the unit, rather than for just one character. If you're leading 10 men, one shot opportunity counts for five of them. Two shots count for all of them.

Have one representative member of the unit roll for his group. Success indicates that whole section was successful. Apply damage and Steel tests to the whole target unit.

The leader may only participate in the action if the entire unit is activated with actions and he spends an action on himself. He tests for himself.

When fighting skirmishes, use the Command skill in place of Perception. Use Tactics in place of Stealthy. Steel and Speed are still used as Steel and Speed. A unit with Formation Fighting Training (Character Burner, page 243) gets +1D to Steel-based maneuvers using these rules. Units of soldiers with Skirmish Tactics Training (Character Burner, page 260) break the helping restriction stated above. One member of the unit may help the leader make Range and Cover maneuver tests. Strategy and Logistics have no place in these rules. Use them to set up wars, not fight battles.

Otherwise, use the Range and Cover rules as normal.

Injury

At a glance, the Injury mechanics seem punitive. They appear to encourage a cautious, conservative style of play. They seem to say, "If your character is badly injured, he will be rendered ineffective and forced to sit out for an inordinately long period of game time." That seems clear incentive to avoid injury at all cost.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In practice, death as a result of injury is rare. Mortal Wounds are hard to come by. And for Severe and Traumatic wounds, there's plenty of time to be treated before you die. Light and Midi wounds are not life-threatening; they're more of a nuisance than anything else. Superficial wounds are annoying but fleeting. Once you overcome the fear of taking an injury, you can see that it isn't a burden, but an opportunity.

Injury as Advancement

Resting times for injuries are long. If you take a bad shot and need recovery, you're probably out of play for the near future. That's no fun. There's one sure way to counteract that—don't rest until the action is over. Suck up your penalties and keep playing.

Playing injured, you'll have far fewer dice at your disposal. When you're injured you roll fewer dice against obstacles. The same obstacles that were easy to overcome when you were healthy are now troublesome and dangerous. That's great!

If your B5 Speed is chopped down to B3, Ob 3 tests now count as difficult tests for advancement—whereas with a B5 they don't count for anything. Your listed rating doesn't matter for advancement, only the amount of dice you're rolling. When injured, you're rolling fewer dice against the obstacle, therefore the test is more valuable.

Playing injured is an excellent technique for advancing stats and skills of exponent 5 or higher. These require difficult and challenging tests to advance. It's much easier to rack up those tests when obstacles 2, 3 and 4 count for advancement.

When playing injured, your character appears clumsy for a good number of sessions. But as those advancements accrue, your abilities quickly jump up—particularly your stats. Once you've recovered, you've reacquired your injured dice and boosted a few exponents to boot. The jump in power is significant and satisfying.
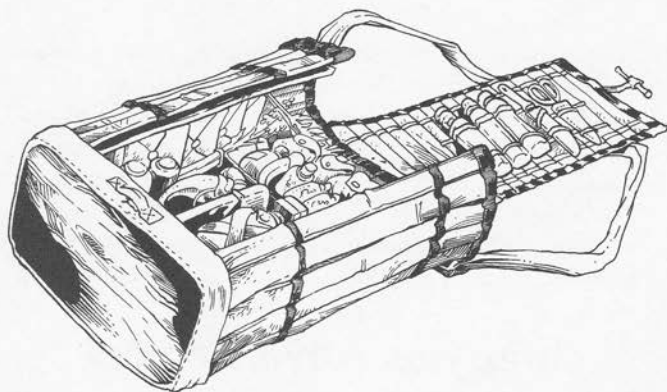
What Can I Do While I Recover?

Recovery times are long. Technically, according to the rules, resting to recover absorbs all of the character's down time. You don't recover while slogging through a dungeon. You recover while laying up in a hostel, drinking soup.

In general, at BWHQ, we allow characters to engage in light practice while they recover. Reading, writing, researching or conversing for a few hours a day are all acceptable. Light travel—aboard a ship, sedan or carriage is also permissible. Physical training regimens, whirlwind social activity, hard travel, adventure or intense practice—more than two or three hours a day—are all out of the question.

You cannot get a job and work to recover taxed Resources while recovering from an injury.

What Do My Friends Do While I Recover?
Conversely, while you're laid up, your friends can practice, work, instruct one another, do research, pay your bills, etc. Your recovery is their gain!

Resources and Recovery

Injury and Tax combine to create a downward spiral of poverty and privation in the game. If you're injured, you need to rest. Rest typically takes you through one Resources maintenance cycle. You need to test Resources to maintain your lifestyle. If you fail, you're taxed. Thus your recovery costs you.

Worse, if you're taxed while going into a recovery period, you're going to remain taxed, possibly becoming even more taxed. You can't work while resting, so you have to live off of your current Resources or you need to forgo rest and boost your Resources by working while injured. It's an ugly cycle. And it's a deliberate design. Infirmity and poverty are disruptive and destructive elements in the system.
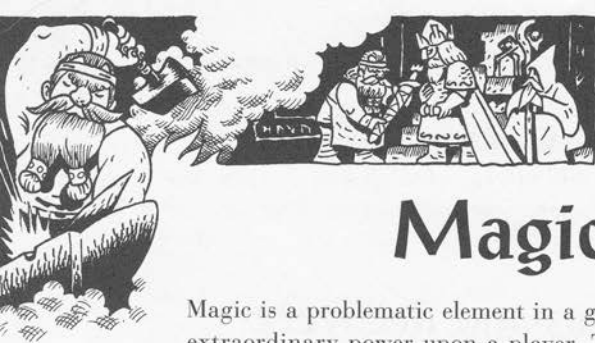
Magic

Magic is a problematic element in a game since it confers extraordinary power upon a player. This chapter briefly discusses how to challenge magic-wielding characters in your game.

To facilitate the explanations in this chapter, I'm going to lump priests, sorcerers, summoners and death artists under the "mage" category.

Challenging Mages

Mages are a pain in the ass. They're powerful. They have unexpected solutions to lots of problems. Or, sometimes, they have one trick that they milk to get past anything you throw at them.

How do you challenge the mages in your game? You need to oppose them with an antagonist who can resist their depredations. Such an antagonist could be a mage with a sustainer for the Eldritch Shield spell and an Instinct to maintain the spell at all times, for example.

Another common tactic for limiting magical power is to make magic forbidden or illegal in the setting. I find this is of marginal effectiveness. As a GM, I'm never willing to fully enforce this custom. I feel terrible arresting and imprisoning player characters for doing their thing. So I don't use this option very much. But it can be used effectively if you're willing to lay down the law and then play out the ramifications. The struggle of magic against law or tradition could make for a good game, but then that's what the game is going to be about.

Magic Against Obstacles

Set up obstacles that can't be solved with a single spell. For example, place multiple opponents set against a powerful mage or set up witnesses to interfere with a sneaky mage.

Set up encounters that play against the mage's weaknesses. If you're challenging a summoner, press him for time. Don't give him breathing room to draw his circles and call forth powerful allies. If you're dealing with a mage with white fire bolts, use Orcs with crossbows to out-range him and pepper him and his allies.

Make magic inappropriate. In intimate encounters with powerful characters, casting a spell is obvious and perhaps rude or dangerous. When the player inevitably persists with summoning his power before this potentate, stop the action and round on him, "What are you doing? How dare you?!" Make an issue of it. It'll make the setting seem richer, more believable.

Finally, beat up your mages. In fights, attack them with force and vigor. Don't give them a chance to sit back and leisurely cast their spells. Gun for them. Try to hit them so that you interrupt their spells and rituals. They're clearly powerful. It only makes sense that their enemies take them seriously.

I like to build up pressure against them. As a mage's reputation increases, I turn the attention onto him more and more. I make him work for his power. And if he backs off the fire-spewing madness, so much the better.

In a social setting, treat the mage with skepticism and caution. Don't gloss over the fact that he is a powerful freak who treats with demons. He can't be trusted. Let your villains refuse to engage in disadvantageous Duels of Wits. Cite mistrust and superstition as your reasons.

If a mage is known for abusing his power, it makes perfect sense for leaders to exclude him from their dealings. It also makes sense for power-hungry souls to seek out mages and bargain with them. Use Duel of Wits compromises to shape and focus the mage's power. An excellent minor compromise against a mage is "Of course, I'll do as you ask because I know you'll never use your powers against me." Such a small thing to ask, but it makes the compromised character incredibly dangerous to the mage.

The Victimized Mage

In my games, when I introduce challenges directed against magery, I sometimes see a strange phenomenon emerge. The mage player feels victimized. He claims he's being unfairly singled out. My incredibly healthy and productive tripartite response is to roll my eyes, laugh and tell him to get over it.

Perhaps a better response is to remind the mage player that it is your job to challenge him and that you're doing the best you can. And if you're making him sweat, then it sounds like you're on the right track. Maybe even ask him for some ideas on how to better challenge him. Give him a little rope and he just might help you fix the noose.
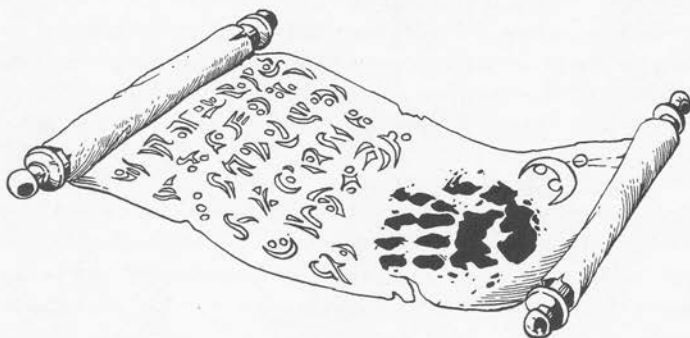
Squishy Faith

Faith is a powerful, versatile ability with one very squishy requirement attached to it—the player must say a prayer. If any rule is abused in Burning Wheel, it's this one. Either Faithful characters grandstand during a single Fight! volley, or they rapidly mutter, "Rubadubdub, thanksforthegrub," and toss the dice before we can all protest.

Faith rules are subject to the intent and task paradigm of the system. The prayer or invocation of the player is the prime part of the task. And, as we've discussed in this book, the task must be appropriate to the intent. The player must offer an invocation appropriate to the moment and his idiom. If he doesn't, the GM can and should inform him that his task is inappropriate to his intent and stop the Faith dice before they hit the table.

Happy Helping Faith

Helping Faith with Faith is also another very squishy, oft-abused area of the rules. According to the letter of the help rules, Faith can help Faith any old time, right? So gather a pile of priests and pray up some major miracles!

What's a valid way to limit help among the Faithful? In our games, priests from different religions may not help one another unless they pass a Rituals test. It's a small restriction, but one that's added a lot of depth to our religion-heavy games. I provide the Rituals obstacles that we developed in the Rules Bloody Rules appendix of this book.

We also encourage you to make the truly Faithful rare in your world. If a player tries to use Circles to bring the Faithful into play, impose the +3 Ob Specific Disposition modifier.

Faith in Fight!

How quickly can you pray? According to the rules, you can pray and fight. We love to see battle priests bashing heads while they invoke divine might. How often can you pray? Each prayer must be a complete idea spoken, sung or invoked in the proper idiom. The spoken prayer is part of the task of this test! If the task is inappropriate to the intent, disallow the test. Since only a few words can be spoken in each volley, most prayers should take two volleys. More elaborate prayers can take three to six volleys.

Most successful prayer effects ride for the duration of a conflict. If a particular prayer is failed, invoke Let It Ride for the remainder of the conflict.

Prayer in Duel of Wits

Instead of using a Duel of Wits action, faithful characters may use prayers. Most prayers only take one volley in the Duel of Wits. Perhaps crazy stuff like a Major Miracle will take longer. While praying, you may not attack or defend or perform any other action. You are completely vulnerable. Your prayer takes effect on the volley after it was successfully completed.
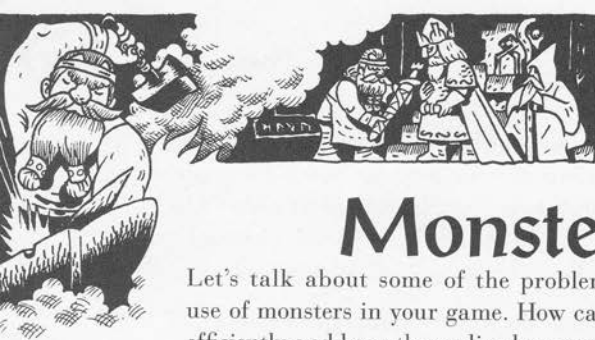
Monsters

Let's talk about some of the problems surrounding the use of monsters in your game. How can we use them more efficiently and keep them alive long enough to do something interesting?

Using Monsters

I find that we fantasy GMs have a tendency to place Big Bads at the end of a story—ye olde boss fight.

We've learned that in Burning Wheel, those single monsters, unless overwhelmingly powerful, will crumble against the onslaught of skills, help and artha that the players pour on. Whether in Range and Cover, Duel of Wits or a Fight!, more often than not, a group of PCs will conquer any single opponent. Let us GMs pause and have a moment of silence for all our villains lost to a single, abrupt blast of white fire.

Ahem.

Our collective job, as GM, is to challenge the players, right? Well, what must we do to have our Big Bads and eat the players too? We must do a little prep work. We must, before placing a powerful villain into the game, consider how he can best challenge the group.

Fighting Monsters

A single monster is going to fall to a rain of blows unless he's either heavily armored or has a mortal wound higher than the characters' weapons shade—usually gray or white.

If you want a big fight against a single creature, try using armored creatures like Trolls, Formians or even B'hemahs. If your group is up for it, you can use gray- or white-shade creatures, but make sure your group has a chance to defend against their attacks. Otherwise, you'll just wipe them out— and that's not fun.

If you want to fight with a monster who isn't so armored—an Orc, a Great Eagle, a Great Spider or a Martikhora, for example—you can try two things. One, you can fight smart: Fight from an ambush; hit and run; stay out of direct battle.

Or you can give the monster help. Look at your group of characters. Build a suite of monsters that will challenge each of them. I'm not saying to unleash six Great Eagles or five Martikhora. But maybe one lead beastie and then some lesser willing thralls who can add to the mix.

Arguing With Monsters

Unless your monster is a master of intrigue and rhetoric, refuse the Duel of Wits! Attack (or run; monsters know no pride)!

If that's not the right path, how do you prevent the players from ganging up on you in a Duel of Wits and wiping you out before you get even a teeny compromise? You need to plan ahead. Try to corner your target character alone. If you can't do that, try to manipulate the group before the Duel of Wits so that some sympathize with your side—so that they'll give you help during the conflict.

It's lame if the group gangs up on and shouts down every opponent they face. If you send a Troll Warlord against them, for example, refuse to talk to anyone but their leader. The lesser worms can't speak in the presence of such greatness. It's unheard of in the Legion!

Shooting at Monsters

Some monsters can be effective in Range and Cover: the Martikhora with their tails, Ophidia with their bows, Graymen with their rocks, and the Dragon with his mighty breath. Some monsters like the Hsigo or the Great Eagle are adept at avoiding such engagements or closing to their benefit. But some monsters are helpless in such a conflict.

You should gauge the strengths of your adversaries before pitting your monsters against them. Opposing a troop of Elves with a handful of rock-throwing Graymen is going to end badly for the Graymen. The Elves have range and killing power with their bows.

But one of the most deadly, effective monsters I ever played was a bow-armed Hsigo. I threw a pack of them at a group of Elves. It was a narrow thing for the Elves. They barely survived. Thus it was an excellent, exhilarating challenge!

If your monsters aren't suited for a running fight through the forest, don't set up that situation. When framing the action, try to set things up to your monster's advantage. Why? Because you want to challenge the players. It's boring if they just shoot down everything they come across. So ambush them and force them to withdraw or fight at close quarters, or simply don't offer battle unless the players force it.

Monsters and Magic

Many monsters are vulnerable to magic. There's not much to do about it unless you bring in your own sorcerer to counter the characters' magic. You can protect your Big Bads with Eldritch Shield if they have a friend who's a sorcerer! If your players are carving through your monsters with magic, you're obligated to use such tricks to provide a challenge.

You can also plan ahead and give your monsters protection in the form of enchanted items like the Jade Amulet. However, whatever you give your monsters will likely end up in the hands of the players. You can assign anti-magic traits to your monsters.

These tweaks are good for stiff challenges, but not good as a regular thing. Too much of it gimps your mage players.

Finally, you can just straight-up target the mages and priests. Take their asses out. Use clever tactics, henchmonsters and dirty tricks. Hit them hard and fast. Use attacks that will make them hesitate. Be unconventional—the Troll Warlord will bounce off the mage's Turn Aside the Blade spell, but he can easily knock him over with a well-timed Push, thus interrupting the spell. Your players will sweat it, but when they're ultimately triumphant, they'll thank you for the thrilling fight.

Rules
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Rules
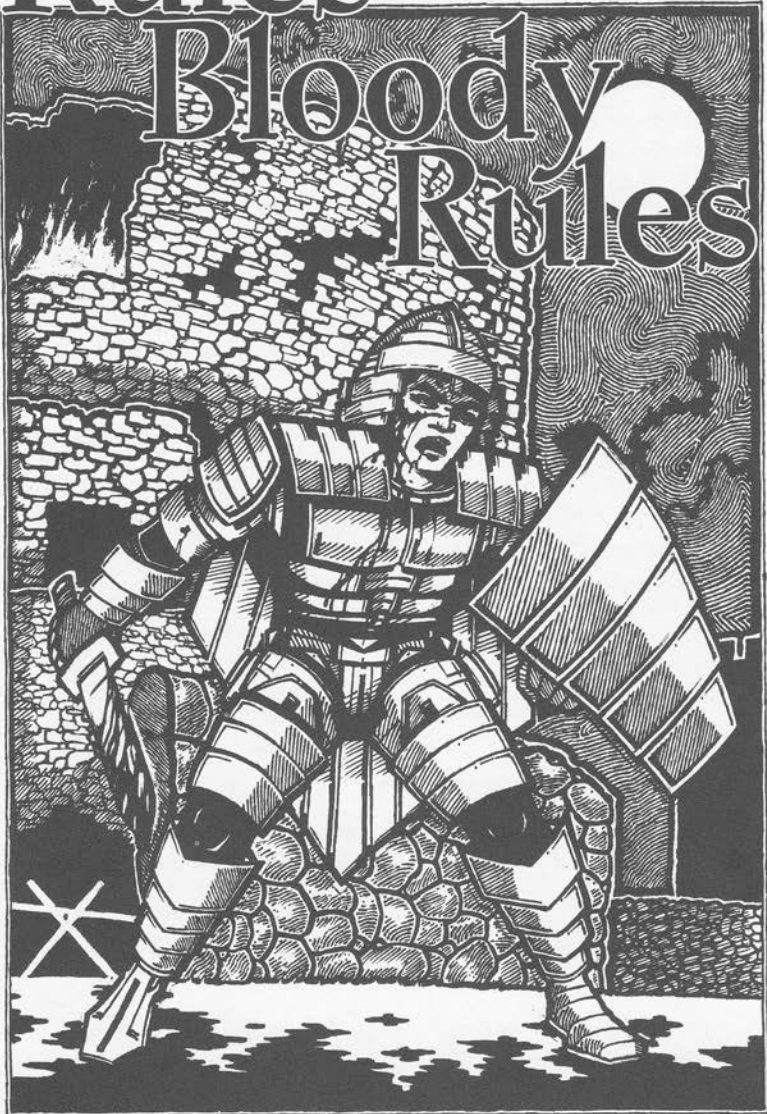
More Bloody Rules

The majority of this book contains explanations of existing rules. This chapter is the black sheep. It contains new rules. More rules for your Burning Wheel game! Rejoice!

The rules herein are recommended but optional. Nothing is going to burst into flames if you stick to using Burning Wheel Revised as is.

However, after playing the game for the past five years, we've found that these tweaks enhance play—especially for longer-term games. They're like a little salt sprinkled across an already good meal. They bring out the flavor!

Too Many Cooks and Slowest and Loudest tweak the helping rules to prevent abuse.

Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide adds flavor to your combats by adding in terrain modifiers for positioning.

We've added Damaging Locks, which were accidentally omitted from Burning Wheel Revised. And we've reconfigured the Block action to render it useful and attractive.

Our house rule for trait votes has been included as well as some skill obstacles that we've expanded upon.

We bowed to Pete's pressure and included a slight mechanical adjustment for effects that generate dice or penalties by meeting or exceeding their obstacle.

Faith Hindrance was tweaked so that attacking a dragon with your divine might is harder—which is as it should be.

And lastly, we included our alternate rules for recovery from a Mortal Wound. It's no less severe. We just took out a couple of rolls.

I hope you like these new rules. And I hope they enhance your 30-session campaigns as much as they've helped ours!

Rules Appendix
Too Many Cooks

For tests in which space or time is constrained, when design by committee would prove detrimental, or when the GM feels like it, only one helper should be allowed unless extraordinary conditions are met. Extraordinary conditions include a training skill or trait that allows for extra help, a workshop (not just tools) or extreme conditions as determined by the game's circumstances.

Slowest and Loudest

When using help to make a test as a group—like running away, sneaking or climbing—the character with the currently lowest exponent must make the test for the group. If two characters have the same exponent, use the one with the higher obstacle penalty.

Slowest and Loudest is applicable to tests in which the group must succeed together—they are all trying to convince someone, they are all sneaking together, they are all fleeing an enraged monster, etc. It is not a universal rule to be applied to all help. Sometimes the master can accept help from the students. But other times, when the students have to escape the rampaging monster, the protective master can only go as fast as the slowest of his pupils.

Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide

The positioning rules generally model having freedom of movement. These rules present obstacle modifiers to flesh out restricted terrain and make fights more interesting. They can be used with both Range and Cover and Fight!

Rooms With One Exit

A character trapped in a room with one exit, rushed by a gang of monsters, is in a dangerous situation.

The trapped characters gain +1D advantage to initial positioning and to their first volley positioning actions. Thereafter, each Maintain or Withdraw action incurs a +1 Ob cumulative penalty. There's only so much room to run, right?

So Maintain, Maintain, Withdraw would incur +1 Ob on the second volley, +2 Ob on the third volley. If more Withdraws and Maintains were scripted in the next exchange, the obstacle would continue to accumulate.

These modifiers can be used for many variations of holding little ground against rushing attackers.

Closing in this scenario indicates you are rushing your attackers in attempt to get to grips with them. Maintaining indicates you are fighting them at the choke point, trying to hold them back. Withdrawing in this circumstance indicates you are fighting through your attackers, trying to force your way out.

Fighting in Corridors and Atop Battlements

When fighting in narrow channels like corridors and battlements, forward movement is direct and intuitive, but holding ground is difficult. Impose a +1 Ob penalty to all Maintain actions.

Successful Pushes and Throws can, of course, be used to toss characters over the side of walls, into pits or down stairs.

Fighting With Your Back to the Sea

If you're surrounded, and your back is to the sea or a river, all Withdraw actions suffer a +2 Ob penalty. Maintain suffers a +1 Ob penalty until you fight free.

Slogging Through Swamp, River and Sand

Slogging across water, swamp, mud or shifting sand to fight against a defended position grants the defender +1D or +2D to his initial positioning and Maintain actions so long as the defender holds his position. He may not Close or Withdraw. He also loses his position if he is pushed or thrown a full fighting distance.

Positions like this can be taken up using Tactics (for small fights) or Strategy (for battles).

General Unpleasantness

Fighting on ice, in water or in thick mud is strenuous and difficult. Add +1 Ob to all positioning tests.

To represent sucking mud or cracking ice, increase the obstacle penalty by one each time a positioning test is failed.

For grim comedy, use the following: Any positioning or Natural Defenses Speed test failed by more than two successes results in the character slipping and falling prone.

Fight! Action Revisions

Block

Defensive Maneuver
Tests: Weapon Skill
Defends against: Strike, Disarm, Beat and Bind
Countered by: Feint

Effects: Successes from a Block subtract from attacker's Strike, Disarm, and Beat and Bind actions. If blocker gets enough successes to drop the attacker's successes below his obstacle, the attack is completely deflected. If blocker gets fewer successes, the remaining attacker's successes are applied to damage/effect as normal. (In case of a Beat and Bind, the blocker would get to test his skill twice; once for the block and once for his Natural Defenses.)

Furthermore, margin of success over the attacker's action can be used to greater effect:

- One extra success: +1D to blocker's next action or, if appropriate, positioning test (i.e., Block occurs at end of Volley).

- Two extra successes: +1 Ob to the blocked character's next action.

- Three extra successes: Blocked character loses his next action. In essence, he hesitates, but may only Stand and Drool as a result.

These effects can only be generated through the use of the Block action. The defensive portion of a Counterstrike or Block and Strike action cannot be used in such a way.

Counterstrike Variants

There are two variants to the Counterstrike action that we use at Burning Wheel Headquarters: Counter-Lock and Counter-Disarm.

They use the same basic mechanics as the Counterstrike—the same action interactions. You divide your dice between defense and attack.

The attack portion of the Counter-Lock acts as a Lock action. Your opponent may resist with his Natural Defenses Power. If you beat his natural defenses, you have him in a Lock equal to your margin of success and you are now considered to be inside your opponent's striking distance.

The attack portion of the Counter-Disarm acts as a Disarm action. Your attacking obstacle is equal to your opponent's current weapon skill exponent. If you meet your obstacle, your opponent drops his weapon. If you exceed your obstacle, you may take your opponent's weapon or you may toss it away to lunging distance.

I only recommend incorporating these variant actions if you're looking to add more martial flavor to your game. I also recommend limiting them to specific skills or even individual characters who can teach them. A simple instruction cycle can be used for teaching this new technique.

Damaging Locks

This rule was accidentally omitted from Burning Wheel Revised. It's technically not an optional rule, but you can do with it as you will.

After a character has incapacitated his opponent with a Lock action he may continue to apply the Lock action even though his opponent cannot resist any further. Each subsequent unopposed Lock action counts as a bare-fisted Strike. The Locking character may not use any weapons for this Strike—only his raw Power (unless he has a special trait that breaks this rule). The defending victim may not defend himself in any way. He may not use armor to protect himself, either.

Fighting on the Ground

There are substantial penalties for attacking from the ground. Apply these penalties to characters who are knocked down from Charges, Pushes and Throws. If your opponent takes you to the ground, he is in an advantageous position. Do not apply the ground fighting penalties to the attacker in the advantageous position. All other penalties apply—namely, weapon length and injury.

Small Sword

The small sword, or arming sword, is a light, quick blade designed to balance between cutting and thrusting. It's useful in a street fight against ruffians, but not as useful on the battlefield as an axe or spear.

Small Sword: Weapon Power +2, Add 2, Weapon Speed Fast, VA —, Long, may Great Strike.

Elven Rope

Elven rope, in addition to the features described in the Character Burner, acts as tools for and grants +1D to the Climbing skill.

Revised Armor

In the standard armor rules, gambesons have 1D and plated leather is rated at 3D. I don't like that jump in ratings. Reinforced leather is meant to represent brigandine and coat-of-plates-style protection, but it's just too effective for what it is. If I had my druthers—and I do—I'd add an intermediary armor type and adjust the other categories like so:

Gambeson	1D
Reinforced leather	2D
Light mail	3D
Heavy mail	4D
Plated mail	5D
Full plate	6D

Clumsy Weight for Reinforced Leather

The names have changed, but the Clumsy Weight penalties remain the same as per the die type. The Clumsy Weight penalties for the new type of 2D armor, reinforced leather, are as follows: helmet, +1 Ob to Perception/Observation; breastplate, +1 Ob to Health or Forte tests for exhaustion or fatigue; arms, +1 Ob to delicate Agility tests aside from fighting or shooting; full leggings, +1 Ob Speed tests including positioning and running; half-leggings, no penalty. Armor Training is required for light mail and heavier armors.

Resources Costs for Reinforced Leather and Light Mail

I'd revise the armor resource point costs as follows: Reinforced Leather, 6 rps; Light Mail (formerly plated leather), 8 rps; Heavy Mail (formerly chainmail), 12 rps.

Modified Trait Vote

At BWHQ, we've modified the trait vote slightly: The player whose traits are being voted on may not participate in the vote. He may nominate himself for traits, but he must sit and remain silent when it comes time to vote for his traits.

Expanded Skill Obstacles

Rituals   Perception

Here are some suggested obstacles for using Rituals in combination with Faith—as linked tests or opening up help as described in the Squishy Faith section of this book.

Rituals obstacles: Ob 1: Low Ritual (Faith Obs up to 4); Ob 3: High Ritual (Faith Obs 5 to 7); Ob 5: Great Ritual (Faith Obs 8 to 10)

Doctrine   Perception

Failures for Doctrinal challenges result in misinterpretation of Doctrine: the wrong beliefs are ascribed to a sect, a holy day is cited for the wrong date, a passage is misquoted, a tenet is misinterpreted, and so on.

Doctrine Obstacles: Low Doctrine (daily practices, overall or general mythology), Ob 1-2. Outsider Doctrine (outsider practices, outsider mythology), Ob 3-5. High Doctrine (esoteric practices, temple practices, instructional doctrine, esoteric and Old World mythology), Ob 6-8.

Foreign Languages   Perception

A character with this skill has had the opportunity to learn foreign languages over the course of his life. Test this skill when attempting to communicate with another character in a language that is not your native tongue.

There are constraints based on which level of speech you aim for. You can cover basic ground with survival/conversational language, but there are whole swaths of meaning that are simply beyond your grasp if you can't express ideas in metaphor or other abstract concepts. Good luck expressing the meaning behind your actions.

It's created some pretty neat scenes in our games!

Here are some suggested failure results: The character is able to communicate, but screws up the words for numbers, ordinal directions, etc. Or the character can understand what is said, but can't make his speech understood. Or you can only use single words and gestures to get across your meaning.

Obstacles: Close dialect to your native tongue, Ob 1. Obscure or thick dialect of your native tongue, Ob 2. Simple or related language, Ob 2. Difficult language, Ob 3. Complex language, Ob 4. Mystical/esoteric language, Ob 5.

Conditional obstacle modifiers based on what you're trying to convey:

Philosophical/abstract concepts: +2 Ob

Formal/ritualistic concepts: +1 Ob

Dead language: +1 Ob

Survival language/conversational language: No penalty

Using gestures, pointing, visual references: +1D

Meeting Obstacle and Margin of Success

For tests that require margin of success results, like the Aid effect of Faith, count meeting the obstacle as the first step of success. Each additional success over the obstacle grants additional steps of success.

Aid requires an Ob 4 Faith test. If you roll four successes, you get +1D of aid. If you roll five successes, you get +2D.

Stature

Stature gets a short shrift in Burning Wheel. Let's see if we can make up for that.

Grabbing the Big Guys

Add a +1 Ob penalty for each step of difference in stature when a smaller character is attempting to Lock, Charge or Push a character of bigger stature. Due to their Stout trait, Dwarves count as Middling stature for the purposes of this rule.

Thus, a Dwarf or Man has +1 Ob to Push, Charge or Lock a Troll (Massive stature). They would have +2 Ob to Push, Charge or Lock a Dragon (Gigantic stature).

Faith Hindrance Against Stature

When attempting to use the Faith Hindrance miracle against creatures of larger than middling stature, use the following modifications: massive stature counts as two people (Ob 5); gigantic stature counts as three people (Ob 6).

Alternate Mortal Wound Recovery Rules

If your character suffers a Mortal Wound and you spend a persona point for the Will to Live, then your character is guaranteed to recover. The wound will close over time and he will wake up. If you don't spend the point, then your character bleeds out, is killed instantly or whatever. He's unrecoverable if no point is spent.

Treatment and Heath tests are still conducted at each stage of recovery. The obstacles remain as described for Mortal Wounds on pages 201 and 203 of the Burning Wheel. Your character can get back on his feet after the Mortal Wound stage has passed and he's recovered enough dice so that none of his stats are at zero.

Successful treatment at each stage grants advantage dice equal to margin of success to the Health test for recovery. Failed treatment grants disadvantage to the Health test equal to the margin of failure.

A successful Health test for recovery reduces recovery time for the stage by 10% per extra success. A failed Health test indicates maximum time for recovery for the stage, and the character earns a trait.

If the Mortal Wound stage is failed, the character earns the Mortally Wounded in the Gut (or Head or Ass or whatever trait). This trait reduces the maximum for one stat by 3—from 8 to 5 for Humans, for example. The GM may determine the stat to be capped.

If the Traumatic to Light wound stages are failed, in addition to losing the wounded dice as described in the Recovery section of the Burning Wheel, the character earns a trait like Blind, Lame, Missing Limb, Palsied or any other penalty-inducing trait that the GM deems appropriate.

Index

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Reference
Recommended Reading

In addition to the bibliography in the Burning Wheel Revised, Thor and I recommend the following books that have further influenced us:

Lloyd Alexander: *Book of Three, The Black Cauldron, Castle Llyr.*

Edgar Rice Burroughs: *A Princess of Mars, The Gods of Mars, The Warlord of Mars.*

Louis Cha: *Heaven Sword & Dragon Saber.*

Glen Cook: *The Black Company, Shadows Linger, The White Rose.*

Alexander Dumas: *Three Musketeers, Twenty Years After, Ten Years Later; The Count of Monte Cristo.*

Lord Dunsanay: *The Charwoman's Shadow, The King of Elfland's Daughter.*

E.R. Eddison: *The Worm Ouroboros.*

William Goldman: *The Princess Bride.*

Gregory Keyes: *The Waterborn.*

Harold Lamb: *Wolf of the Steppes.*

Fritz Leiber: *Swords and Deviltry, Swords Against Wizardry, The Swords of Lankhmar, Swords and Ice Magic.*

Johnston McCulley, *The Mark of Zorro.*

C.L. Moore: *Black God's Kiss.*

Arturo Perez-Reverte: *Captain Alatriste, Purity of Blood, TheSun Over Breda* and *The King's Gold.*

Rafael Sabatini: *Captain Blood, The Seahawk.*

Jack Vance: *Tales of the Dying Earth.*

Karl Edward Wagner: *Bloodstone.*

Gene Wolfe: *Shadow and Claw* (*Shadow of the Torturer, Claw of the Conciliator, Sword of the Lictor, Citadel of the Autarch*).

Recommended Gaming

Here's a list of games that we've played that we can't say directly influenced any design decisions in this book, but they definitely permeated our thinking in the last few years.

Vincent Baker, *In A Wicked Age*.

John Harper, *Agon*.

Danielle Lewon, *Kagematsu*.

Michael Mearls et al, *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition*.

Joshua Neuman, *Shock: Social Science Fiction*.

Jared Sorensen, *Lacuna Part I: The Creation of the Mystery and the Girl from Blue City (second attempt); Action Castle!*

Greg Stafford and friends, *Sartar Rising: Orlanth Is Dead!* (Hero Wars supplement by Issaries)

Brennan Taylor, *How We Came To Live Here*.

Colophon

THIS BOOK WAS CREATED USING A MACINTOSH DUAL 2.3 GHz POWER PC G5 RUNNING OS 10.5 AND THE ADOBE CREATIVE SUITE 2 (SPECIFICALLY, INDESIGN CS 2). THE TYPEFACES **Bauer Bodoni**, *Caliban*, Post Medieval AND **Post Antiqua** ARE USED THROUGHOUT.
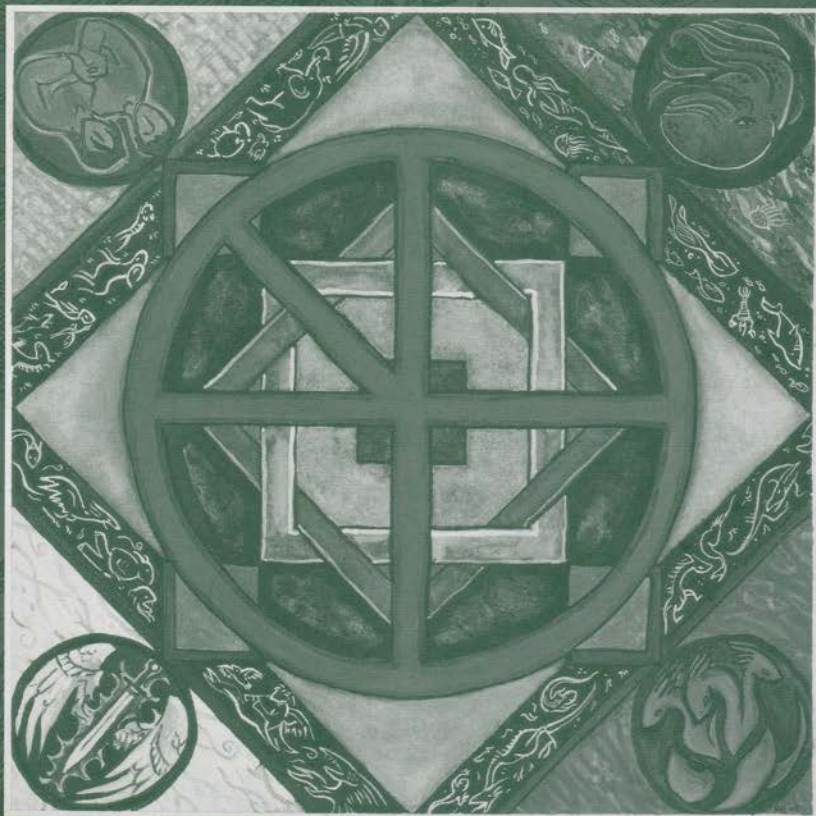

Sketches by Kev Sather

5

is the number of the Wheel, imperfect yet indivisible.

the Burning Wheel

Adventure Burner

The Adventure Burner

Adventure: What we consider adventure, some call hardship, pain and certain death. The privation, the politics, the bloody fights all take their toll, but it is only when we struggle that we truly live. We fight to overcome. We deal for gain. We suffer for glory.

The Adventure Burner is the third supplement for the Burning Wheel Fantasy Roleplaying System. It provides a system for setting up and running sessions, adventures and campaigns. Examples are provided in the form of three ready-to-run scenarios—The Sword, Trouble in Hochen and Thelon's Rift—and 42 sample characters.

In addition, this volume provides extensive insight into the Burning Wheel system. 150 pages of commentary guide the reader through the game and its application in play. A handful of new and clarified rules complete the book.

These assets make the Adventure Burner an invaluable resource for eager neophytes and haggard veterans alike.

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Book 5