



Once We Were Heroes

The Summer Children



A Role Playing Game made for the
2015 RPG Geek 24-Hour RPG Contest

by Jack van Riel



The Elevator Pitch

Once We Were Heroes: The Summer Children is an RPG for a GM and up to 5 players. It's set in a world of faeries and boglins, and borrows heavily from European folklore, Celtic fairy tales in particular.

The players have memories of a previous life, when they were brave heroes who stopped a war between man and faerie, and then vanished. Now that there are signs of a new invasion, they are called upon to be heroes in this life. During their travels to the Otherworld, the realm of the fae, they will remember more and more of their previous heroic life, and grow more powerful. Or they might die.

Death is not the end, however. In the Otherworld, the players' spirits have no problem finding a new body, similar to the old one. But dying is not without a cost. The more the players reincarnate, the more they lose their humanity and the more fae-like they become. When they reach the faerie court, will they remember enough of their human past to save their kin?

Once We Were Heroes: The Summer Children gives an outline for a story, but you'll never play the same game twice. It uses only a few d6, and you won't ever have to sum dice or modifiers; you can see the result of a die roll at a glance. Shared narrative control is built into the game. Combat is fast, simple and deadly. Players have the tools and abilities to overcome challenges in many different ways (without fear of failure or death) and the GM doesn't have to pull punches.

The Story

In the olden days, people in the Westlands spoke of the Happy Folk as friends. Boglins would wander into the towns like lost children, looking for a story or something to eat. Faeries would show visions of the land beyond the hills, or enthrall the townsfolk with music. Over the years the fae visits became less frequent, until they stopped altogether, and eventually people forgot about them.

200 years ago Hallowe'en coincided with a blood moon. In what came to be known as the Blood Night, war bands of faeries and boglins streamed down from the hills, ravaged the Westlands and massacred hundreds of farmers and townsfolk. Afterward, the fae folk hid in trees and ponds, glades and marshes. Boglins would go on kidnapping sprees, and the faeries would lure the weak of mind to their deaths. Babies were stolen from their cribs, children off the streets, and grown men and women would walk away into the night and vanish. A band of heroes was formed, to visit the land beyond the hills and confront the faerie court. They never returned, but the attacks stopped. Songs were written about the sacrifice of Elwuanna, Servas the Poet, Ysulde Halfelf, Malcail Wose, and Old Finneban. The fae folk retreated to the hills and were never seen again.

20 years ago, on midsummer night, five children were born in different villages in the Westlands. They didn't cry but whispered in a forgotten tongue, and as they grew they sang songs that hadn't been heard in the Westlands in centuries. The druids remembered the faeries, how they would steal children and swap them with changelings. But they also remembered the heroes. And as the children grew, signs of the bravery of old manifested in the five, who were called the Summer Children.

Today, preparations are made for the Hallowe'en festivities. Several druids have warned the elders of a coming eclipse. Their anxiety is felt by all. Children are kept inside, as adults whisper of the Blood Night. Strange winds are blowing over the lakes, as unnatural sounds are heard in the forests. Farm animals have been found dead with no signs of wounds or illness, and no light falls in the sacred grove.

The elders of the five large towns have spoken. The Summer Children must be sent to cross the hills into the realm of the fae. They are to find the court and stop the attacks, just as the heroes of old have done, and they have to do it before the eclipse.

Now you are standing at the entrance of a cave, where the boglin king lives. Nobody has been this far into the hills in 200 years, and you must push on. Through the caves, through the hills to the land of the fae, and find the court. Only you can save the Westlands.

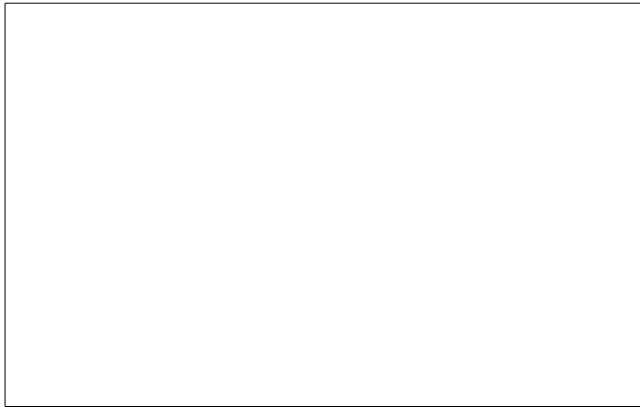
The Adventure

There's no easy way to get to the faerie court. The journey is split into five acts:

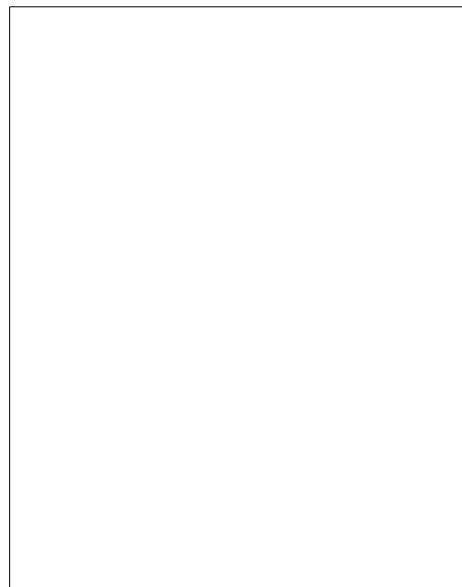
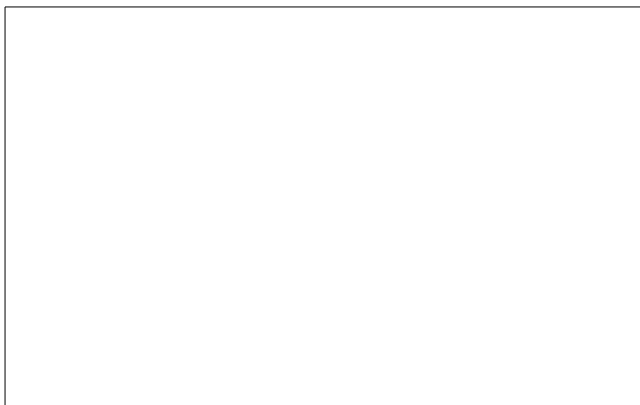
- The Boglin Caves, where you'll be lost without a guide
- The Valley of Plenty, where temptations are deadly and anything could be a shapeshifter
- The Desolate Cliffs, where Murrachob the Giantess rules and the very earth attacks intruders
- The Misty Forest, where the animals and trees are possessed by spirits
- The Twilight, where the faeries have their homes

Before the game starts, GM and players will have to decide if they want to play all five acts, and how much time to spend in each. What you might want to do, is focus on one thing in each act. For instance, pick from the maze of tunnels, the hordes of boglins or the king and his followers in the first act. Figure out what you want the challenge to be. Is it convincing the king to let you pass, navigating the darkness and natural traps in the tunnels, or getting past curious or aggressive boglins? Another option is to spend a session on one act, so you have a full story in five sessions.

During the adventure, the players will encounter strange places and even stranger creatures. How those creatures act and what they look like is left purposely vague. The GM and players are encouraged to discuss how they imagine these beings, and it might be different from one game to the next. Remember that in the Otherworld nothing is too strange.



Draw a boglin



Draw a faerie

??

Actions

All characters have 6 attributes. They are:

Combat, for hurting others

Physical, for athletic or acrobatic stunts

Wilderness, for survival skills in (super)natural environments

Trickery, for sneaking and deception

Social, for making friends and getting help

The 6th attribute is unique to each player character.

To perform any action, you simply describe what you do and then that's what happens. You are a (reincarnated) hero, so success is assumed. However, whenever you attempt to do something that carries risk, you have to roll the dice.

You roll a number of d6 equal to you relevant attribute. What you're looking for are 6's and doubles.

Double 6 You masterfully pull it off, with an extra flourish. Narrate your awesomeness. You gain something too: a confidence boost, admiration, power, help, a small item, momentum, whatever makes sense in the situation. We call that a tag(+). You can choose the tag, but as always the GM has veto powers. Write it down.

Doubles It happens as you describe; you're not in danger.

No doubles, one 6. Something went wrong. That doesn't mean you screwed up, it could simply be bad luck, but it didn't go as planned. Narrate your mishap. You succeed at your attempt, but you lose something: focus, a chance, an item, willpower. Or maybe you're injured, grabbed, lost, or something else. Your choice, but it should be something that hinders you. The GM is the final judge. That's a tag(-), which you write down. Alternatively, you can choose that at the last minute you decided the action was too risky, and that you didn't do it.

No doubles, no 6's. Something went horribly wrong. The GM will narrate what happened, and has free choice. As always you succeed, but the price is high: possibly your life. It depends on how dangerous the attempt was and what makes sense in the situation. It doesn't have to be an injury, it could also mean you've woken up a trollwife, for instance. Unless it actually ended, your life has become more complicated. You gain a tag(-); write it down.

Example: You're chasing a spriggan that stole your sword. It has grown to giant size and can easily step off a cliff, but for you it's a series of risky jumps down the slope. Physical or Wilderness would make sense here, and you choose Wilderness (since it's higher, a 4) to find a path where you can descend in relative safety. You roll 4d6.

You roll 6,6,6,3: That's double 6 (triple, even: feel free to go gonzo with your description). You narrate how you find a rocky overhang from where you jump down on the spriggan's neck! You write down as a new tag(+): on its neck.

You roll 6,2,2,1: Doubles (and a 6, but that's not relevant here). You narrate how you skillfully descend, barely slowing down.

You roll 6,5,4,2: No doubles, but you do have a 6. You narrate how you tumble down the slope, and painfully land in a cloud of dust. As you scramble to your feet, you momentarily panic as you can't see the spriggan anywhere. When you do glimpse it again, you've lost a lot of distance. That's the tag(-) you write down.

Alternatively: You decide that going down the slope is too risky, and you will have to find another way to get your sword back. Maybe you can trick the spriggan.

You roll: 5,4,3,1: No doubles, and no 6's either. The GM narrates how your hasty descend triggers a rock slide, and now you're helplessly pinned under a large rock as the spriggan turns around and looks at you cruelly. You write down that you're pinned(-). This could end badly.

Often, it will be self-evident how a tag helps or hinders you. It could give you options you would otherwise not have had, or it might take options away. The GM could also reason that a task that would otherwise be considered a success without risk, now requires a roll.

If it isn't clear in the narrative what the tag does, it affects a future roll. If you have a tag(+), you can use it to reroll one die. If you have a tag(-), the GM can force you to reroll one die. A tag can only be used once in this way. Note that usually the narrative consequences are bonuses/penalties enough; only use rerolls if there would be no effect otherwise, and never reroll more than once for any given tag, even if they are persistent in the narrative.

Tags go away when it makes narrative sense. You keep the 'lost my sword' tag until you get it back (or a new weapon).

Combat

Combat is always risky, and therefore requires die rolls. Actions in combat can usually be qualified either as a setup, or as an attack. An attack uses the Combat attribute, and it deals 1 damage regardless of the result of the roll. Setups can be made with any attribute, including Combat. Things like feints, shoves and taunts are all setups. A setup roll is made with one die less than the attribute (with a minimum of 2), unless it makes use of something specific to the combat situation, in which case it is at full value. Taunting a boggart by insulting its looks is at -1, throwing the severed ear of its brother whom you've previously killed at its feet is at full value. Surrounding a puca is at -1, using the mysterious thick fog to get behind it unseen is at full value. A setup adds 1 extra damage to the next combat roll made against the targeted creature, regardless of the result of the setup roll. Multiple setups can boost one attack.

As with any roll, double sixes with a setup or attack gives a tag(+). Narratively, it can make more intuitive sense if it affects the opponent rather than the attacker. For gameplay it doesn't matter if you write down "It is disarmed" or "I have disarmed it". Similarly, a tag(-) usually represents the opponent striking back at the character.

Tags(-) in combat escalate. If you get a tag(-) in combat when you already have one or more tags(-), this should be on the level of a serious wound, being mind-controlled, definitively shattering your magical protections, or similar. Mark it tag(--). The next tag(-) kills you.

The faeriefolk, monsters, giants and other creatures are harder to kill than mere humans, and wounding them doesn't make them any less dangerous. Instead of tags, they have a wound value. When they take total damage equal to or above their wound value, they die, although many can transform or have other ways of escape. Extra damage over their wound value has no effect. Players might not always know the exact wound value of a creature, but the GM should give an indication how wounded it is.

At the start of combat, the GM picks one player to act first. They can make one attack or setup, and any other supplementary actions (that may or may not require die rolls). The GM can put a limit on how much a player can do on their turn. After their actions, the player picks the next player to go, from among the players who haven't yet acted. And so on. After each player has had their turn, the GM describes what the opponents do. They automatically tag(-) one or more characters. More dangerous monsters might put a tag(--) on a character even if it didn't have any tags(-) yet, or strike a killing blow. Their actions aren't necessarily in the form of a strike with a claw or weapon. They could also topple trees, call for reinforcements, shapeshift, frighten a character, turn a character into a rock and so on. Afterward, the GM picks the next player to start the new round.

Characters, Death and Advancement

A player character in *Once We Were Heroes: The Summer Children* is made up of two parts: the current life (as a Summer Child) and the previous life (as a Hero). At the end of this document you find sheets with all required information. When you start the game, choose a Summer Child and a Hero to play. You can also randomize one or both among the players.

The adventure is split into five acts: The Boglin Caves, The Valley of Plenty, The Desolate Cliffs, The Misty Forest, and The Twilight. After each act, you become more powerful. If you completed the act without dying, you gain memories from your heroic past and abilities you used to possess. Choose an advancement from the list that belongs to your Hero. If you died, you gain a fae advancement. Choose one of two advancements that belong to the act where you died. If you died multiple times in one act, you still only gain one advancement.

Whenever you die in the Otherworld, your spirit lives on and your body reforms at the end of the scene. Describe how it happens. A flash of light, and your body is gone? And you appear in the next room? Or do your wounds knit together and you are whole again, with a change in your face that's hard to describe?

When you reincarnate, you lose all tags such as wounds, but you keep friends you've made, items you've found, et cetera. You also have to cross out a heroic past advance that you haven't yet taken. You won't ever be able to take it; such is the price of death. Die again, and lose another. If you ever run out of heroic advances, you no longer advance at the end of an act, not even if you died.

List of heroic advancements (and starting powers)

Choose one after any act in which you didn't die. Cross one you didn't take yet out when you die. You can use the abilities at will, unless it's noted that they can only be used once per act.

Elwuanna

Starting power: You can make light where there is darkness, or create faint sounds or smells

Advances

- 1/act You can speak telepathically when one person you can see
- 1/act You step through space and time and instantly move up to 10 meters straight ahead
- 1/act You can levitate and move up to 10 meters vertically
- 1/act You can create a simple illusion
- You can see perfectly through darkness, mist or illusions

Servas the Poet

Starting power: You deal 1 extra damage when you roll double 6 with an attack

Advances

- 1/act You can tell a convincing lie, although you can't force someone into danger
- 1/act You can make someone tell you the truth
- 1/act You challenge someone to one-to-one combat and they accept
- 1/act After you make an attack, the creature flees in pain and terror
- 1/act You can make anyone stop what they're doing and listen to you

Ysulde Halfelf

Starting power: you can move with absolute quiet, over any terrain

Advances

- 1/act You can make any roll with 5 dice instead of your attribute score
- 1/act You just happen to have the right tool, small item or weapon you need
- You can hide in shadows and be invisible as long as you don't move
- You can climb any surface and jump down without risk
- You can always escape whenever you're grabbed, bound, cornered, pinned or similar

Malcail Wose

Starting power: animals (except shapeshifters in animal form) obey your simple commands

Advances

- 1/act You can look through an animal's eyes, wherever it goes within the act
- 1/act You can shapeshift into a small, non-flying woodland animal
- 1/act You can speak with an animal and it tells you what it knows
- 1/act You summon a non-flying creature to act as your mount that stays with you until the end of the act

- You can find food, water and a safe place to sleep, anywhere

Old Finneban

Starting power: When you roll no doubles on a setup, you may make an attack or another setup (after you suffer the consequences)

Advances

- 1/act You can give a command to a creature smaller than you, which they'll obey unless it puts them in danger
- 1/act Someone you touch loses a tag(-), as long as it makes sense in the narrative
- 1/act You or anyone you can see rerolls all dice
- 1/act A friendly creature you met in a previous act appears and helps you
- You can take an extra tag before dying

List of Death Advancements

Choose one after an act in which you died one or more times.

The Boglin Caves

- As long as you're touching the ground with your bare feet, you can sense other creatures approaching
- Whenever someone tries to charm, enchant or mind control you, instead you gain power over them

The Valley of Plenty

- You can change your size at will, anywhere from half to double your normal size
- 1/act you can (crudely) change the shape of a nonliving thing you touch

The Desolate Cliffs

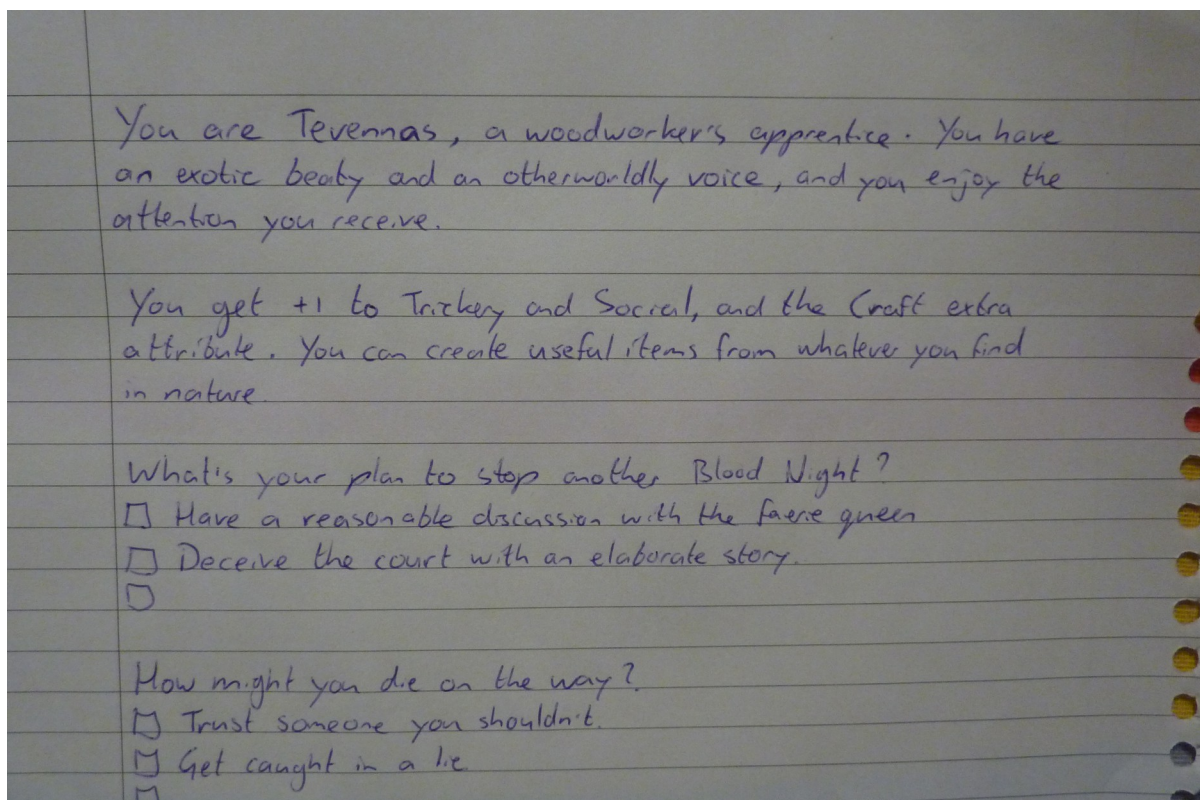
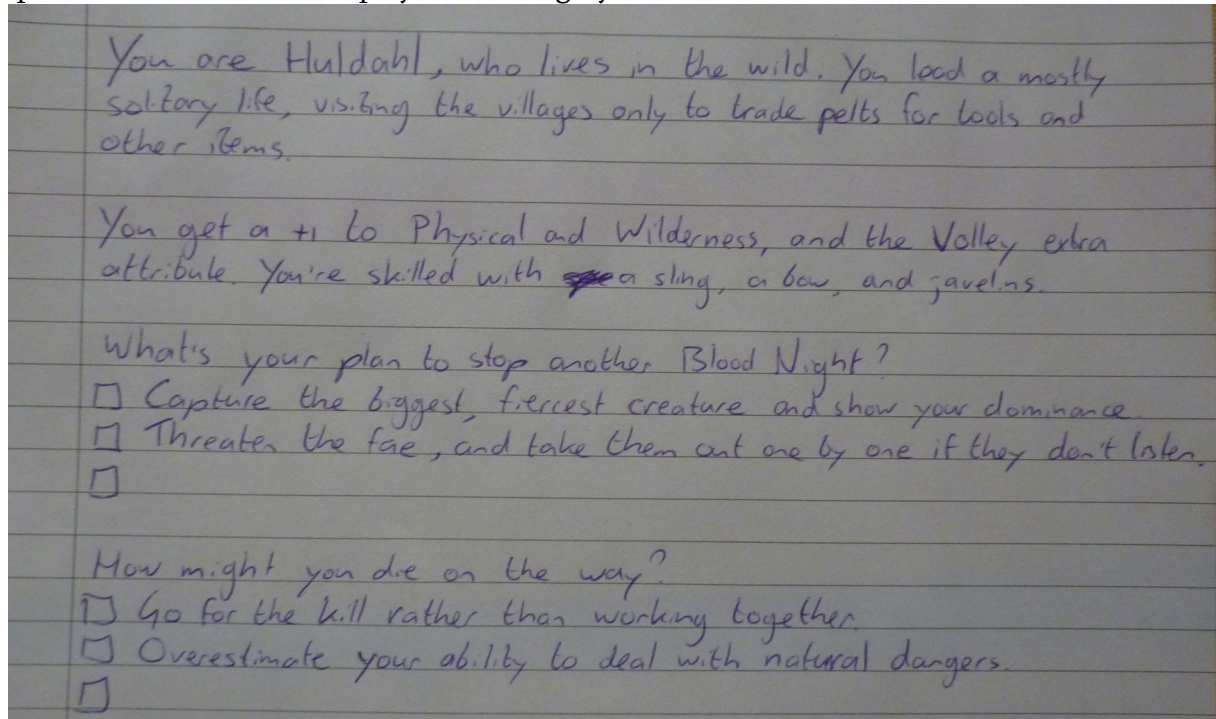
- 1/act You can turn yourself to stone, and back again. In stone form you can't move but you can't be hurt
- Creatures bigger than you won't harm you

The Misty Forest

- 1/act You can learn someone's deepest desires and fears
- 1/act You can see through a wall or other solid object

Character Sheets

Each player gets one (hastily scribbled down – sorry) sheet, either by choice or randomized. They list your Summer Child name and a short description, plus modifiers to your attributes and an additional attribute unique to your character. They also encourage you to think about how you may act on your quest. Check a box or write something yourself. If you want, you can keep it secret from the other players, although you should show it to the GM.



You are Paghme, youngest of the druids. You spend a lot of time meditating, but you're always ready with a kind word. You have many doubts about your path in life, but you keep those to yourself.

You get +1 to Wilderness and Social, and the Commune extra attribute. You can talk to the spirits of all living things.

What's your plan to stop another Blood Night?

- Learn the true nature of the eclipse from the court.
- Show the fae that killing is never the answer.
-

How might you die on the way?

- Try to reason with hostile creatures or spirits.
- Being indecisive or hesitant to do what must be done.
-

You are Belwym, bigger and stronger than anyone in the Westlands. When you're not hauling trees or cutting them down, you're getting drunk or in trouble.

You get +1 to Combat and Physical, and the Intimidate extra attribute. You inspire awe and fear.

What's your plan to stop another Blood Night?

- Gather an army of boglins and sprites, and march to the faerie court.
- Break into the court and take the queen hostage.
-

How might you die on the way?

- Overestimate your strength.
- Get distracted from the goal.
-

You are Dagni, a rogue and scoundrel and occasional robber.
 You are creative and inventive and if you want something, you take it.

You get +1 to Combat and ~~Ph~~ Trickery, and the Disable extra attribute. You can destroy things with a touch.

What's your plan to stop another Blood Night?

- Steal the faerie court's source of power
- No plan. You're only going so people don't say you're a coward.
-

How might you die on the way?

- A clash with someone more powerful than you.
- An ill-advised show of heroism.
-

The following are the hero sheets. Each player gets one, by choice or randomized. Fill in the name, attribute modifiers and extra attribute from your Summer Child to complete your hero sheet. There's room to write down tags and note advances, either from memory of your heroic past, or from reincarnating in the Otherworld.

Name: _____ Tags: _____

Hero: Elwanna

Combat	3 +	=	
Physical	2 +	=	
Wilderness	3 +	=	
Trickery	4 +	=	
Social	2 +	=	
		=	4

Starting ability: create light/sound/smells

Advances:

- * Telepathy 1/act
- * Fae step 1/act
- * Levitate 1/act
- * Illusion 1/act
- * True Sight

Name:
Hero: Selvas the Poet

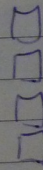
Tags:

Combat	4+	=	
Physical	3+	=	
Wilderness	2+	=	
Trickery	2+	=	
Social	3+	=	
		=	4

Starting ability: +1 dmg on double 6

Advances:

- * Lie 1/act
- * Force breath 1/act
- * Challenge 1/act
- * Terrifying Strike 1/act
- * Stop and Listen! 1/act



Name:
Hero: Ysulde Halfelf

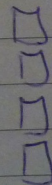
Tags:

Combat	2+	=	
Physical	4+	=	
Wilderness	2+	=	
Trickery	3+	=	
Social	3+	=	
		=	4

Starting ability: move quietly

Advances

- * Roll 5d6 1/act
- * Produce item 1/act
- * Invisibility
- * Spider climb
- * Escape artist



Name:
Hero: Malcail Wose

Tags:

Combat	2+	=	
Physical	3+	=	
Wilderness	4+	=	
Trickery	3+	=	
Social	2+	=	
			4

Starting ability: command animals

Advances

- * Animal Eyes 1/act
- * Shapeshift 1/act
- * Speak Animal 1/act
- * Summon Mount 1/act
- * Food & Water

Name:
Hero: Old Finneban

Tags:

Combat	3+	=	
Physical	2+	=	
Wilderness	3+	=	
Trickery	2+	=	
Social	4+	=	
			4

Starting ability: extra action after
no doubles on setup

Advances:

- * Command 1/act
- * Remove tag 1/act
- * Reroll 1/act
- * Summon Friend 1/act
- * Die Hard

Sample monsters

Boglin

Wound value: 2

severely wounded dead

A boglin places one tag(-). If solitary often “bitten” or “stabbed”. In a group, often “swarmed by boglins”.

Yttin

Wound value: 6

shaken wounded severely wounded dead

An Yttin places two tags(-) on different characters, such as “thrown to the ground”, “dazed by blows” or “broken shield”.

Water Sprite

Wound value: 3

wounded severely wounded turned to water and fled

A Water sprite places either a tag (-) such as “blinded by spray” or once per scene a tag(--), such as “under the sprite's control”.