



HIGHLANDER

Second Edition

By Jason Vey

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There Can Be Only One

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Art: Varied and sundry (yet talented) photographers and camera people.

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This work is respectfully dedicated to all the Unisystem™ Fans out there, and to C.J. Carella, Alex Jurkat, and George Vasilikos, without whom we wouldn't be enjoying the Unisystem today!

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DESIGNER'S PREFACE

Methodos: "I spent years losing my conscience, only for him to go and find it again."

Methodos, 4:21, "Judgment Day"

The rules you now hold in your hand are the revised second edition of the *Highlander Unisystem rules*, updated with the release of the *Angel Roleplaying Game* and the wonderful supernatural creation rules therein. I've also revamped the Quickening rules to better reflect my own vision of how the Quickening works and taking fan comments into account. This also results in a slightly powered-down version of the Immortals, and ones that could possibly be run alongside other characters in a standard *Buffy* or *Angel* campaign. Unfortunately, you now need the *Angel Core Rulebook* to get the most out of these rules, rather than the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Core Rulebook*, but hopefully it works out for the best.



So sit back, roll the dice, and Enjoy! Oh, and don't lose your head.

-Jason Vey, April 2004

INTRODUCTION

Ramirez: From the dawn of time we came, moving silently down through the centuries, living many secret lives; struggling to reach the time of the Gathering, when the few who remain will battle to the last. No one has ever known we were among you... until now.

-Ramirez, Highlander

The *Highlander* mythology and universe was unleashed upon the world in 1985. Originally a script turned in by fledgling writer/director Gregory Widen as a final project in film school, this epic tale of immortal beings traveling through time, untouched by age and disease and driven to battle for a mysterious Prize that will, legend has it, bestow godlike powers to the victor, touched millions. *Highlander* is the story of Connor MacLeod, a young warrior in a Scottish town in 1536. After suffering a wound on the battlefield, Connor makes a miraculous recovery that leads his village to accuse him of witchcraft and banish him. Five years later, a stranger shows up at his doorstep, claiming that he, like Connor, is immortal and there to teach Connor just what it means to be what he is. Connor must learn to fight, because all of his kind are driven to battle to the death in pursuit of a mystical energy called the Quickening. When one single Immortal has gathered into him all of the Quickening from every Immortal who has ever lived, he will win the Prize, a mysterious, godlike, and never truly quantified power over all mankind. While disease and age can never touch Connor, he is susceptible to one type of injury. If he is decapitated, he dies and loses his Quickening—all of his knowledge and power, and everything that he is. Connor travels down through the centuries to 1985, having adventures along the way. In the end, Connor defeats his arch nemesis, the Kurgan, and appears to win the Prize (though we are shown in later films and the series that this is not the case).

The film was an underground success, and even more so when it reached the home video market, and in 1991, a sequel was released. This

sequel is universally considered to be vastly inferior to the original, and even the producers have dismissed it as "non-canon." The franchise, however, was off and running, and in the era of low-budget action mythology TV, a television series was inevitability. In 1992 the producers tried again with *Highlander: the Series*, departing from the motion picture canon and taking up tales of a new Immortal, named Duncan MacLeod, a distant relative who was 100 years younger than Connor, who had a similar origin story and who was in fact taught the ways of his kind by the original film's protagonist. The series was enough of a success to merit another stab at a film, and in 1994 *Highlander: the Final Dimension* hit theaters. The third film in the franchise did attempt to stay within the film continuity rather than that of the television series, and this time the filmmakers managed to produce a legitimate, if still inferior to the original, sequel. The television series ran for seven seasons and was very much a success, spawning a single-season spinoff series entitled *Highlander: the Raven*. In 2000 the producers finally crossed the series timeline into theaters with *Highlander: Endgame*. Just how good that film was is a subject of some debate among fans, but regardless, a fifth film is in production and the legacy of the Highlander lives on. The films and television series have in the years that followed become a cultural phenomenon, and there have been several failed attempts at role playing games since then, as well as a slew of Internet rules for various systems (my personal favorite was that written by John Gavigan and Hank Driskill for the White Wolf Storyteller™ system.)

The Unisystem™, particularly the "Lite" or "Cinematic" version, is ripe for the handling of the Highlander Mythos and is just aching for a net supplement. Internet searches have turned up several advertised sets of rules, but have almost universally yielded broken links. Thus, for part two of our Cross-Genre Action Netbook, we turn to the mythology of the Highlander universe. And remember: in the end...there can be only one.



THE WORLD OF HIGHLANDER

Duncan: "So after 5,000 years, your only solution is that I kill you?"

Methos: "He can beat me. He might beat you. He can't beat both of us."

Duncan: "If it's that simple, why don't you take my head?"

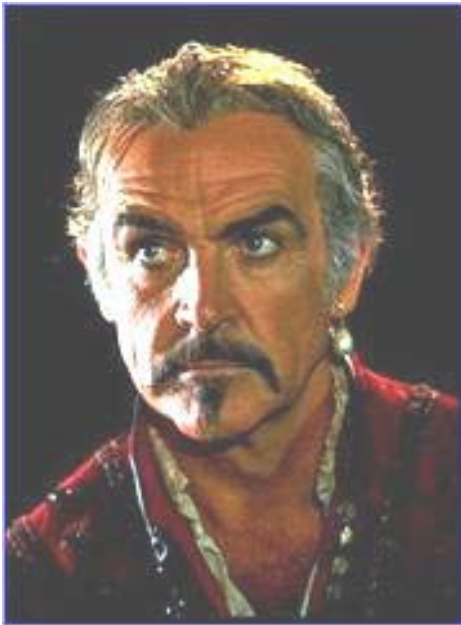
Methos: "Because it's not just a matter of who is the best fighter. It is about passion, and hate. I don't have the fire. You do. You want Kalas. (reaches down lifts Duncan's sword and presses it to his throat.) Live, Highlander, grow stronger. Fight another day."

Duncan and Methos, 3:16, Methos

As with many Gothic action franchises, the world of Highlander is very similar to our own; more similar, in fact, than most franchises within the genre. One generally does not see monsters or supernatural creatures other than the Immortals themselves within a Highlander tale, although magic and demons have been shown to exist. The Highlander mythos is set in a world of fast cars, high buildings, corporate executives, international diplomats, world traveling...it's James Bond meets magic and mysticism. Your Immortal characters will soon become world travelers, if they aren't already as established by their background. Immortals come from every walk of life, and so

any aspect of our world that your game wishes to represent can be present: urban decay, the decadence and detachment of corporate execs high up in their glass towers, quiet country antique dealers, computer programmers experimenting with virtual reality, even priests. The Highlander world is perhaps the most diverse and easily adapted setting of any Gothic action franchise.

Indeed, your game could span any time in history as well as any aspect of society. Immortals are, well, immortal. You can have your Series take place in the Old West, Victorian England, the Middle Ages in Europe, even a high-tech dystopian future with robots, battlemechs, and cybernetic implants. The great thing about running Highlander-style characters is that they are above all else, *adaptable*. Someone who gets shot one day, then wakes up to discover that she is never going to die, so long as her head remains firmly on her shoulders, is far more likely to accept and adapt to other strange situations thrown at her. A vampire might catch her off guard at first, but she'll quickly adapt to include such creatures into her world view. Overall, though, the best way to approach a game that is truly in the spirit of Highlander is to present the cold, harsh reality of everyday life.



IMMORTALS

Matthew: You are an Immortal, now, Carl. It is time to put away mortal concerns!

Matthew McCormick, 5:3, Manhunt

Immortals (as most of you probably already know) can only be killed when their head is removed from their body. At that moment, if their killer is another Immortal, their life essence, knowledge, strength, and power goes into the victor of the battle, making him stronger and more powerful. But, as a great Immortal once said, "The sword isn't your life. It's what keeps you alive." Many Immortals have lived lifetimes and could tell stories that would amaze even the most educated or skeptical of listeners. Except for the constant fight to survive in a Game that requires every other Immortal out there to cut your head off, being an Immortal is every bit as glamorous—and as lonely—as it seems.

How does one become an Immortal, though? Immortality, or the potential for Immortality, is inborn. A person has it when they come into this world. All Immortals are foundlings; not a one knows who their natural parents are, which has led to some wild theories about their origins. In truth, no one knows what Immortals are or from where they come. They simply are.

Potential Immortality can only burst forth when triggered by the shock of a violent death. It doesn't matter if the death is an automobile accident, a fall from a great height, an assassination, or a drowning. If it's an unnatural death (i.e. not disease or old age) and the victim has the potential for Immortality, then that potential becomes real. All damage taken heals miraculously, although any scars the person had in life will remain, and the new Immortal awakens, generally very confused and unaware of what has happened to them. Aging stops at this point, regardless of whether the new Immortal was five or fifty. Experience can bring a very young Immortal a sense of cleverness, but emotional development (maturity) does seem to arrest along with the physical body. In either case, all diseases

and ailments (though not missing limbs) will be cured, and the Immortal will be in the peak of health.

If the new Immortal is lucky, another Immortal who has a good heart will find them and teach them about what they are and the Rules of the Game. If they're incredibly unlucky, an Immortal whose intentions aren't so pure will find them first, and their Immortal existence may not last for very long. There are those who learn what they need to know through experience, but these are certainly not the longest lived members of their species.

THE WATCHERS

Duncan: "For thousands of years Immortals have fought, and Watchers have observed. One day, there'll only be one of us left, and someday maybe none at all. Somebody has to record that we've lived, somebody has to record the history that we've seen and the lessons we've learned. Someone who feels, someone who knows. Someone who has honor, like you."



Duncan, 5:2, End of Innocence

One important theme to keep in mind when presenting the world of Highlander is that of *secrets*. Immortals must keep their identities secret, lest the world find out and hunt them out of fear. In addition, there are secret societies lurking around every corner. The most important of these secret societies, of course, are the *Watchers*. Watchers in Highlander are a secret society of mortal men and women who know the secret of the Immortals, but who themselves are unknown to the world at large, and even to the vast majority of the Immortal population. Watchers observe the Immortals, and record their exploits for posterity, out of the firm belief that the experiences of these extraordinary men and women should be retained for all posterity, should not be lost when their heads fall from their shoulders. Thus, throughout history each identified Immortal has had a mortal assigned to observe and record his exploits, but never to

interfere with his progress. Every Watcher takes a sacred vow to observe and record, but to never interfere. On occasion, Watchers have broken this vow and befriended Immortals; Joe Dawson is perhaps the most notable among them due to his friendship with Duncan MacLeod, and his violation of his vows led to him being put on trial by the Watchers, with his very life in the balance. Eventually, he was exonerated due to the appearance of Adam Pierson (actually the ancient Immortal Methos, disguised as a Watcher researcher) with an antique diary that demonstrated just how friendship between Watchers and Immortals could be beneficial. The trial led to some serious tension between Joe and Duncan, and Joe eventually quit the Watchers, only to rejoin at MacLeod's behest. The Watchers are trench coats, dark glasses, and secret meetings, but as Joe says in the series, "it was never meant to be that way." Indeed, it eventually came to light that the Watchers were secretly founded by the Immortal Methos, and have served their purpose for thousands of years. It is only recently that said purpose has become muddled and blurry due to the self-importance of certain leading members of the organization.

Unfortunately, some Watchers decide that fate can't be left to the Immortals. There are splinter groups of the organization that attempt to take matters into their own hands. Perhaps the most dangerous of these splinter groups are the *Hunters*.

THE HUNTERS

The Hunters, founded by an evil man named James Horton, have decided that all immortals are abominations to be tracked down and destroyed. All former Watchers themselves, they stole copies of all of the Watchers' files and journals, and began a campaign of slaughter that left dozens of Immortals dead behind, their Quickening scattered to the ether. Among those murdered was Darius, a Franciscan monk who was a father figure to Duncan. Duncan set out on a quest to avenge his friend, and the Hunters were crippled when Horton died at MacLeod's hand, but while they are in

disarray, they are still out there, and any Immortal that comes into contact with a Hunter is best advised to run for her life, for the Hunters give no quarter and are not bound by the Rules of the Game.



THE SANCTUARY

Methos: "You know a little about Buddhist monks. Some of them come to cherish life so much that to step on an insect, or harm a blade of grass becomes a violation of their creed, so they place themselves under an extreme form of protective custody—a Sanctuary of sorts. Well, for an immortal who comes to abhor the bloodshed, there's a similar solution, A way to be removed from the game forever. The price is unimaginably high, but you are, for all practical purposes, protected from the violence within you. And it's called The Sanctuary."

Methos, Highlander: Endgame

Another important splinter group of the Watchers are the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary began as a grand experiment, a voluntary retreat where Immortals who had tired of the Game could hide in absolute solitude, guarded over by men and women who had sworn an Oath to maintain their hiding place. Unfortunately, the evil Immortal Kell tracked the Sanctuary down and slaughtered every Immortal hiding there, save one: Connor MacLeod, who was set free that Kell might hunt him down later. Kell, too, was defeated at the hands of Duncan Macleod, but the Sanctuary as it had been was finished. Since then, the Sanctuary Watchers have also become fractured and splintered, but the Sanctuary itself is no longer voluntary. The Sanctuary Watchers hunt and

abduct Immortals, forcing them into their drug-induced stasis in an effort to prevent the Game from ending, and thus keep the Prize from the hands of an evil Immortal.

THE MOOD OF HIGHLANDER

Methos: "We're none of us perfect, MacLeod. Not you, not me, not even Darius. And sure not your friend Steven Keane."

Duncan: "You should write fortune cookies."

Methos: "Yeah, well, maybe I should. Just so long as I am not writing your epitaph. What Keane hates you for, happened. Nothing you do is going to change that. You accept it, MacLeod. It's part of who you are."

Duncan: "We talking about me, now?"

Methos: "Yes."

Methos and Duncan, 5:16, Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Immortals are faster, stronger, more agile, and generally superior to humans in almost every respect, but the key element is that they are indeed still human beings, just human beings with a very special gift. Immortals have all of the same passions and pains as mortal beings, although their outlooks and way of dealing with these issues tends to differ due to their extraordinarily long lifespan and the fact that they kill to survive, on a daily basis.

These aren't Slayers or Demon Hunters. They're not dusting vamps and turning evil supernatural creatures to puddles of ooze. Rather, they kill others just like them. They look into their foes' eyes, face them in single combat, and cut off their heads. They live a "kill or be killed" lifestyle, and live it by a very strict and rigid code, the Rules of the Game. Immortals who try and remove themselves from the cycle of battle generally wind up dead, and those who disobey the Rules find themselves hunted or punished by whatever mysterious force out there enforces the code. The Rules of the Game are as follows.

Holy Ground

Ramirez: You are safe only on Holy Ground. None of us will violate that law. It's tradition.

-Ramirez, *Highlander*

Dawson: *In all of our records, there's only one mention of an Immortal killing on holy ground... It was in Pompeii. 79 AD.*

-Joe Dawson, 5:8, *Little Tin God*

This is the single most important Rule of the Game that all Immortals follow. No Immortal will ever face another on Holy Ground. This rule is absolute and is enforced by unseen powers. Holy Ground doesn't just mean Christian Churches, either. Cemeteries, Native American sites of power, even Buddhist shrines apply. Immortals can always sense when they are on Holy Ground, and can not battle therein, at least, not to the death. Fisticuffs, however, are permitted.

Rules of Engagement

Duncan: *What, it's a team sport, now?*

Calvin: *Didn't anyone tell you? Whole new ball game.*

Two or more Immortals are not allowed to team up against a single one. All combat between Immortals must be one-on-one; if two Immortals both carry a grudge against the third, they're supposed to get in line. In addition, once a challenge has been issued and joined, no Immortal is allowed to interfere with a battle in progress. Unfortunately as we've seen on the show and in the films, this rule is a matter of honor, and while the vast majority of Immortals do follow it, there are those who have broken the rule. Tradition alone holds this one intact, and a group of unethical Immortals who choose to violate the rule can indeed be a force to be reckoned with; however, it should be noted that even the Four Horsemen, the most cruel and feared band of Immortals in history, abided by this tradition.

Weaponry

(Methos shoots Keane)

Keane: *You bastard... (falls)*

Methos: *Sticks and stones.*

Methos and Keane, 5:16: *Forgive Us Our Trespasses*

While Immortals cannot be killed by gunshots, stakes through the heart, fire, or falling from a

building, such things do indeed incapacitate them for a time. The interesting facet of Immortality is that Immortals suffer damage just as normal people; they just always get better so long as their head is attached. This being said, guns are certainly a device that gives one an unfair advantage in a sword duel. Another strictly-adhered to tradition is that all battles between Immortals are to be fought with archaic weaponry. Swords are the most typical, though some do use axes. If an Immortal shoots another, she is expected to *not* take their head. Unfortunately, this is one of the most often disobeyed Rules of the Game, and even some non-evil (we hesitate to call Methos a 'good guy') Immortals have resorted to the Great Equalizer at times.

PLAYING THE GAME

Kell: *"What you need to understand is that I don't care about the Game. I don't care about the rules. I don't even care about these other pathetic souls you lock away as a barrier to the Prize."*

-Jacob Kell, *Highlander: Endgame*

One of the keys to playing a character in the Highlander world is angst. Like any Gothic action franchise, Highlander has plenty of 'why me' about it. Immortals are characters who are forced to live for centuries, watching and suffering as all those who love them age and die. They cannot procreate; they are all sterile. No Immortal has natural parents; all are foundlings. They are truly alone in the world because the only others like them are as likely to kill them as they are to get along. Any ties they make in the human world bind them only temporarily, as mortals will often die long before Immortals, or the Immortal in question will have to move on from where he currently resides. Some Immortals start to feel that death would be better than eternity alone, and so they actively seek it out, picking fights with other Immortals or challenging the authorities anywhere they go in hopes of drawing enough attention to themselves that they meet death somehow. Unfortunately for those poor souls caught in the

crossfire, a suicidal Immortal can do a great deal of damage before he finds the end he seeks.

Fortunately, angst isn't the only key to playing in the world of Highlander; in fact, it's not even the most important. Many Immortals do deal very well with their Immortality and learn to deal with death much as we mortals do; indeed, they become adept at dealing with it. Some, in fact, become a little too adept; these Immortals become cold and dispassionate, even cruel as they gradually lose touch with their emotions and distance themselves from humanity.



Another key to playing an Immortal in the Highlander mythos is that of time. Immortals have no shortage of it; in fact, many can harbor grudges for centuries, plotting and scheming the perfect way to wreak their vengeance upon another Immortal who has wronged them. We've seen this more than once in the series, and it can make for high drama, particularly if the Immortal in question has some degree of guilt over past betrayals or mistakes. An important element in playing with

time is that of *flashbacks*. Immortals have years, decades, even centuries of experience behind them, and after so long, there isn't much that is new or surprising. Often times, Immortals will draw upon past experiences to adapt or relate to current ones, and this is where flashbacks come into play. Flashbacks can be "cut scenes" read aloud to players, or they can be fully interactive, with the player acting his way through the flashback sequence and attempting to apply the experience to his current one. Flashbacks are tricky to deal with and difficult to get the hang of, but once you pick up the knack, they add an incredibly important element to the game, helping to set mood and develop character at the same time.

Last but not least, and perhaps the most vital idea that must go into a Highlander-style game, is that of the eternal struggle between good and evil, and the difficult choices one must make who is involved in this battle. Immortals in the series are drawn in three camps: those who are champions of light, those who represent the forces of utter darkness, and those who continually bounce between the two. The overriding premise of the show revolves entirely around the idea that if the Prize falls into the hands of the wrong Immortal, "mankind would suffer an eternity of darkness." The dichotomy is essential to the concept and theme of Highlander. Immortals are called upon to make hard choices on a daily basis; in the series we have seen Duncan kill other Immortals who were close friends, because they had strayed too far over the line into darkness. He never takes such choices lightly; indeed, if an Immortal takes too much darkness into himself, he runs the very real risk of becoming evil himself, be it through temptation, bloodlust, or the dreaded and legendary Dark Quickening.

And so they battle, falling one by one, down to the last. The Gathering is now, and depending upon whether you choose to follow the film or television series continuity, it is either an event or a period of time. Regardless, Immortals are inexorably drawn to one another as never before, and the forces of good and of evil clash in the

shadows of old warehouses, abandoned power plants, darkened parking garages, and suspension bridges in the dead of night.

QUALITIES AND DRAWBACKS

Dawson: "For 400 years he's been a warrior, a lover, a wanderer, constantly facing other Immortals in combat to the death. The winner takes his enemy's head, and with it...his power."

-Joe Dawson, Highlander: the Series intro (seasons 4-6)

The vast majority of Qualities and Drawbacks from the Core Rulebook are available and unaltered for any Cast Member in a Highlander-style game. Directors wishing to maintain a game faithful to the films and/or series should probably restrict such Qualities as Vampire, Werewolf, and Robot, although there's no reason you couldn't expand your mythos to include such beings. The one vital Quality from the Core Rulebook that needs to be slightly altered for the HL-verse is Watcher, and this is detailed below. Other than that, I present to you the new Qualities and Drawbacks that are indeed essential for anyone wishing to participate in a Highlander-style role playing game.

Age (3 point per level Quality)

The Age Quality is slightly altered from the Core Rulebook. It costs 1 more point per level, and in addition to other benefits, each level of Age purchased adds 1 to the effective power level used to determine initial Quickening Powers (described later).

Anachronistic (1-3 point Drawback)

Silas: "Where are the stables? The horses? No? Well, how do we ride?"

Silas, 5:12, Revelation 6:8

Anachronistic characters are unable to adjust to changing times. They still wear the types of clothes that were en vogue during their life, use the same speech patterns, and have the same outlooks on life, technology, and magic that were held to be

true whenever the Immortal was alive. The severity of this drawback comes from how far removed the Immortal in question is from their time of origin. An Immortal awakened in the 1980's, for example, would suffer from a 1-point version of this drawback, as his anachronism would not yet severely interfere with his interactions with people and society, though he would be looked upon as unusual and possibly freakish by the majority of people he comes into contact with. The 2-point version of this Drawback results from Immortals who are more than five or six decades active, and, say, "trapped in the 1920's." These Cast Members suffer a -1 on all social rolls and tasks due to being out of touch with the times. An Immortal with a 3-point Drawback would be one who is centuries, or perhaps millennia old and is simply incapable of grasping the changes in the times. Immortals with a 3-point Anachronistic Drawback suffer a -2 penalty to all social tasks and rolls related to the use of technology significantly advanced from their current time period. In addition, they cannot learn technologically advanced skills such as Computers, and any ranks in Science skills they possess will be alchemical in origin and based heavily on archaic theories.

Immortal

(10 point quality)

Connor: "I am Connor MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod. I was born in 1518 in the highlands of Scotland, in the village of Glenfinnan on the shores of Loch Shiel. I am immortal, and I cannot die."

Connor MacLeod, Highlander

You are one of the chosen. Not that that is necessarily a blessing; lucky you gets to stop aging, never get sick, and never die...at least not permanently. That is, as long as your head stays stuck to your body. The problem with that is, there are hundreds of others like you, all just rearing to take it off. That's because you've become a beacon of mystical energy; all of your experiences, power, and knowledge are boiled

down to your Quickening. Your soul has become tangible and ripe for the harvesting by anyone with the wherewithal to do it. Immortals gain the following:

- +1 to any two physical attributes. Immortals can raise physical attributes to a maximum of 10
- 3 free levels of Hard to Kill (and may purchase up to 10 total)
- 1 level of Getting Medieval
- Regeneration: Constitution per minute
- Unique Kill: Decapitation
- Reduced Damage: half damage from Slash/stab weapons. It's not easy to decapitate an Immortal.
- Honorable (1-point) Drawback, related to the Rules of the Game. The Immortal gains no points for this Drawback
- 3-point Secret (Immortal) Drawback. The Immortal gains no points for this Drawback.
- Adversary (Other Immortals) 4-point Drawback. The Immortal gains no points for this Drawback.
- Supernatural Senses (Basic): Immortals can sense others of their kind. This occurrence is automatic and always happens as soon as any two Immortals come within 300 yards of one another, but does not point to a location, merely as a generic presence sense that manifests as a sort of nausea and 'pins and needles' sensation, combined with a sort of white noise in the ears of the Immortals. In a shared-mythology game, Immortals can sense other supernatural beings as well, with a simple Perception test as described in the *Angel* core rulebook.
- At the Director's option, Immortals can purchase any of the Demon Qualities in the *Angel* Core rulebook except for Dual Form, Limited Use, Natural Attack and Supernatural

Attack. Optionally, a Director *may* allow an Immortal to purchase Supernatural Attack and have it apply to the damage caused by their sword (in effect, they "charge" their weapon with Quickening), though this is a more "superheroic" style ability. This covers abilities such as Cassandra's "Voice" power, Immortals' enhanced combat abilities, psychic phenomena, and other of the various supernatural abilities Immortals have manifested throughout the series and films.



Old Soul (4 point per level Quality)

This Quality is found in the *WitchCraft* core rulebook, page 87, but must be heavily modified for use in a Cinematic Game. In the context of *Highlander*, it represents the knowledge and experience gained from battles fought with other Immortals, and manifests as a boosted skill level. In a Cinematic Game, after a successful invocation of the Quality as described in *WitchCraft*, the Immortal adds his levels in Old Soul as a bonus to any skill he possesses. Using this Quality requires concentration and peace of mind, and thus it can never be called upon during a duel. In Essence-based *Highlander* games, the Quality functions exactly as written. (due to copyright issues, I cannot reprint the Quality here, but *WitchCraft* is available as a free download at <http://www.edenstudios.net/witchcraft/>).

Sorcery (5 point per level Quality)

This Quality is unaltered from that in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Core Rulebook.

Watcher (5 point Quality)

This Quality is almost unaltered from that in the Core Rulebook, save that Watchers in the *Highlander* universe are assigned to Immortals; the organization was detailed earlier. Rather than the special bonus to learning Occult Lore that Core Book Watchers receive, *Highlander* Watchers gain 2 levels of the Wild Card skill "Immortal Lore."

THE QUICKENING

Duncan: "Aye, Connor, I know, it's called the Quickening. Our strength, our knowledge, our life essence, flows into the victor, making him stronger, yes?"

Connor: "It's what drives the other Immortals to kill us, and what forces us to be smarter, better than the rest."

Duncan: "I understand."

Connor: "Do you?"

--Duncan and Connor, Highlander: Endgame

The Quickening is what gives an immortal his power, strength, and very life. It is similar to the standard Unisystem conception of *Essence*, but far more concentrated. In fact, in games using *Essence*, the beheading of an Immortal serves as a Time of Power, and witches and magi can tap into the released energy, and even steal it from another Immortal, preventing him from taking his enemy's power into him.



The Quickening allows Immortals to boost their strength, agility, and toughness to heights far greater than those of normal human beings, and to perform feats of mysticism most people will never achieve. Quickening can be used to detect and

track other Immortals, engage in stealth operations, in combat, and other situations. To activate a Quickening ability, the Immortal must roll Willpower (Doubled), and achieve a number of success levels equal to the Power Level of the ability. Each power level beyond the base counts towards increasing the effectiveness of the ability, as described under each power. In the power descriptions, this is defined as "per additional success level." There is no limit to how many Quickening Powers a character can attempt to invoke at one time; however, every ability beyond the first that the character attempts to invoke incurs a cumulative -2 penalty to the roll for each currently active power. All Quickening powers have a duration of one round, unless the ability in question specifically states otherwise, and Immortals must be conscious to invoke Quickening abilities.

An Immortal does not begin the game with access to any and all Quickening powers; rather, she begins with powers whose total Power Levels and bonuses equal the character's Willpower Score. The player may choose any powers available, but cannot go above the character's Willpower levels in power. The only way to gain new abilities is to face and defeat other Immortals in combat. It is possible to develop individual abilities beyond their base level. This is achieved in a similar manner to increasing skills, and levels in abilities manifest as a bonus to invoke that particular power. Each new ability begins at level zero, meaning that the character receives no special bonus to invoke the power. Adding levels to the power costs Experience, Quality, or Drawback points equal to double the new level obtained. Abilities can only be raised one level at a time after character creation. At character creation, each level granted to an ability must be paid for in full (so going from level 1 to level 3 costs 10 points: 4 points to achieve level 2, and then 6 more to achieve level 3). Another way to gain levels in a power is to defeat another Immortal in combat. This will be explained later.

For those wishing to use Immortals in a *Witchcraft* or full Unisystem game, Quickening is simply Essence. Quickening abilities are activated via Essence Channeling, and each separate Quickening Ability below becomes a Special Skill learned at character creation. Immortals simply gain 1 level of Essence Channeling for free, and use their Essence as their Quickening. In such games, Immortals cannot permanently die from Essence Loss, but can "temporarily" die as with any other type of death. This is because Immortals can never be completely drained of all their Essence unless beheaded. The following abilities, in an Essence-based game, cost their power level in Essence (Quickening) to activate. Immortals should also have access to any and all Martial Arts Chi Abilities from *Enter: the Zombie* or *Mystery Codex*. Combining the two systems is quite possible for Directors who wish to expand the usefulness of the Quickening but do not wish to add Essence into their game. In such cases, the Power Level of any given ability is equal to the Essence Cost that would normally be required to invoke the power. So a Chi ability with an Essence Cost of 2 from *Enter: the Zombie* would in the Cinematic system have a Power Level of 2 to invoke.



QUICKENING POWERS

The Last

Power level: Varies (treat as 2 for purposes of starting powers)

Immortals are attuned to everything; the birds in the sky, the beasts on land and in water. They are even more intrinsically a part of the Earth than

any other creature. This link to the land gives them special powers and abilities beyond those of normal people, and allows them to enhance their physical bodies in ways that normal humans cannot. In game terms, Immortals can invoke this ability to mimic any one Physical Quality for one minute per additional success level. The Power level to invoke the power is equal to the point cost of the Quality in question. So mimicking Fast Reaction Time requires a Power Level of 2, while mimicking Hard To Kill is only a Power Level of 1. An Immortal using this power cannot mimic Qualities she already possesses at maximum level. So an Immortal who already possesses Hard to Kill at level 10 may not use The Last to mimic additional levels. Alternately, when in combat (and only when in combat) Immortals can use The Last to increase any one Physical Attribute by half their additional success levels. The Power level to achieve this effect is equal to the attribute in question (the stronger, faster, or tougher the Immortal is, the more difficult it is to enhance the attribute). Enhanced Attributes last for one round as standard.

Quickening Attack

Power level: 2

This ability allows an Immortal to make herself more potent in an offensive capacity, increasing either the damage she deals with her blows, increase her chances of hitting with a single strike, or increase the number of attacks she can make. Upon successfully activating the power (2 success levels on a Willpower (Doubled) roll) the Immortal can do one of three things: either she can add her additional success levels to her next attack roll, she can make a number of additional attacks equal to half her additional success levels (minimum 1 extra attack) at no penalty, or she can add her success levels as a bonus to the base damage her strike inflicts. This ability can only be activated when fighting with the Immortal's melee weapon of choice.

Quickening Defense

Power level: 3

Quickening Defense works the same as Quickening Attack, but applies to defensive maneuvers rather than attack actions. Thus, a character can use this ability to add her success levels beyond 3 to a single defense action, may add her additional success levels to her Armor Value against a single attack, or may make a number of additional Defense actions at no penalty equal to half her success levels (minimum of 1 additional).



Quickening Healing

Power level: 1

Quickening Healing may only be attempted while the character is conscious and instantly knits wounds the character has suffered. Successfully invoking this ability instantly heals wounds equal to the character's Willpower multiplied by her additional success levels on the roll. So a character with a Willpower of 3 who gains a total of four success levels on a Quickening Healing roll instantly gets 9 Life Points back (4 success levels, minus 1 to activate the power, leaves 3 times the character's Willpower of 3).

Recognize Buzz

Power level: 10

A very difficult ability to master, and one very few Immortals possess, this power allows Immortals to recognize the distinctive pattern of energy put off by another. Since Essence is merely life energy, one signature is very much like another; not to mention, the energy put off by plants, animals, and the Earth itself interferes with

the Buzz. Recognizing the miniscule differences in the energy signature that denote a specific person are difficult at best. A successful use of this roll allows an Immortal to glean the identity of the Immortal she's sensed. The character may gain bonuses or penalties to the roll depending on how familiar she is with the target, at the Director's discretion. Regardless, it is impossible to positively identify any Immortal that the character is not familiar with. If you haven't met him, you can't ID him.

Track Quickening

Power level: Special (treat as 4 for purposes of starting powers)

This ability allows an Immortal to track the "buzz," or Quickening trail, of another. Rather than a Willpower (Doubled) Roll, this power relies upon a Perception + Willpower roll, and lasts as long as the Immortal concentrates (though multiple rolls may be required.) Invoking this ability requires a number of successes equal to the Willpower of the Immortal being tracked, plus one; however, Immortals who are aware they are being tracked, or who want to be found, can voluntarily reduce this target as low as they wish, to a minimum of 1. Sometimes they just *want* you to find 'em.

Por ejemplo: Methos is hiding in a warehouse from a group of Hunters; he senses a buzz that he recognizes as Duncan's. Anxious for his friend to find him, Methos drops the veil on his signature to allow Duncan to locate him. Duncan would normally have to roll a number of successes equal to Methos' Willpower of 3 to track the signature; however, since Methos *wants* to be found, Duncan only needs one success level to track the Quickening. He does, and finds his friend cowering in an old broom closet and looking very indignant.

LOSING YOUR HEAD

Ramirez: Never lose your temper. If your head comes away from your neck, it's over.

Juan Sanchez-Villalobos Ramirez, Highlander

Now that the functionality of the Quickening is covered, it's time to move onto how an Immortal gains and loses Quickening. The concept behind this is simple: if an Immortal is beheaded, she loses everything that she is and ever was. Her life energy quite literally flows out of her body. If there is another Immortal nearby, this life energy—the Quickening—will burst forth in a violent stream of lightning, fire, and explosions, engulfing the surviving Immortal and pouring into them, making them stronger and more powerful.

If there is no Immortal nearby, the Quickening simply flows silently back into the Ether, with barely a crackle of energy to mark it. Such an event is tragic, and many believe that the knowledge and power of Immortals killed in such a fashion is forever lost. There is, however, the as yet unexplained fact that new Immortals continue to appear even now, in the time of the Gathering, and in perhaps even greater numbers than ever before. One possible theory that takes this into account is the idea that a new potential Immortal, or even multiple ones, are born whenever another Immortal's Quickening is lost to the Ether. Such a monumental event would depend upon the raw power available from the killed Immortal, which would be divided evenly among new Immortals created. The theory makes more than a little sense, given that more new Immortals seem to be appearing than ever before, and the population explosion has occurred close to the time when the Hunters first appeared on the scene.

Decapitation

Regardless, it's what happens when two Immortals battle to the death that concerns us here. So now we turn to the mechanics of combat between two Immortals. As has been stated, to die permanently, an Immortal must be beheaded, generally with a sword or melee weapon of some sort. This is not an easy task, for an Immortal's throat is naturally (or perhaps supernaturally) tougher than the rest of her body. In game terms, a Decapitation maneuver performed on an Immortal works the same as a Through the Heart maneuver

does on a Vampire. Multiply base damage from the attack by five, and if this damage is enough to kill the Immortal, her head comes off and the light show ensues. If it's not enough to kill her, she merely suffers base damage (not multiplied for slash/stab). Immortals also suffer half damage from all slash/stab attacks. It's not easy to just go around cutting off the heads of Immortals. Hence, the flashy swordplay. This half-damage should be applied *before* any modifiers for attacking specific body parts are figured in.

For example: Ramirez slashes at the Kurgan's throat, a hit with 5 success levels that would normally deal 16 points of base damage, plus success levels (so 21 total). Normally, hitting the throat (decapitation) would figure to 105 points of damage; however, the Kurgan is an immortal. The base damage is halved, to 10 points, and Ramirez inflicts 50 points to the Kurgan's throat. Not enough; the Kurgan suffers only 10 points of damage to his neck for the failed decapitation effort.



Given the above, it's usually a good idea to wear your opponent down a good bit before you take their head off. There's also the matter of honor involved. Immortals don't just fight to kill; they fight to win. A clear victory is always important, and often an Immortal will not perform the decapitation until her opponent yields the battle. Of course, there are always exceptions...

Combat maneuvers for a swordfight between Immortals are unaltered from those described in the core rulebook, with the exception of

Decapitation, as described above. However, for dramatic effect, the Director should encourage the player to be as descriptive and detailed as possible when stating which maneuver she's using. Don't be afraid to award a Drama Point for a well-fought battle, if and only if the player was extra descriptive. Also, since the battle between Immortals is the event around which every Immortal's life revolves, Directors are encouraged to use full (not Quick) character sheets for Immortal nemeses, and play out the combat with all die rolls involved. It may drag out the battle, but it will be more dramatic and satisfying in the end.

Yielding the Battle

Duncan: You can walk away, if it ends here.

Clay: It's what we do.

Duncan and Clay, 5:2, End of Innocence

When engaged in a swordfight with another, it is highly unusual that an Immortal will actually lose consciousness. Rather, when reduced to zero Life Points or below, the Immortal falls to their knees and is unable to act any further. At this point she is at the mercy of her better, who may utter those famous words, "There can be only one," and perform the *coup de grace*, or who may offer mercy (though the latter is unusual at absolute best). Note that this rule is in place only for dramatic purposes, and applies only to single combat with swords. It allows the defeated to make a final speech before the end, or to beg for their life, and is similar to the final moment rule in the Core Rulebook.

There Can Be Only One

Kronos: You still don't understand, do you? I am the end of time!

Duncan: You're history.

Kronos and Duncan, 5:12, Revelation 6:8

This is the part you've been waiting for. The battle is over, your opponent is on his knees. He slowly raises his head to look you in the eyes, and says, "Do it." Your sword flashes in the sun, swings down in a blur of motion, and it's over. The calm before the storm.

Slowly, gently, a breeze sweeps in, tickling your hair. Then it builds to an almost gale force wind. The body of your opponent glows, rises off the ground. Electricity arcs from the neck, leaping to whatever minor or major conductors are nearby. It's coming for you. Everything stops, for one split second, then it hits you like a million hammers, flashing into you, through you, lifting you off the ground, then dropping you to your knees. All around you, explosions erupt, windows implode, fires leap into existence. It lasts an eternity of seconds. Then, it's over. You're weak, exhausted, and filled with new powers and memories to integrate. You stagger away, knowing that the knowledge and power you've just absorbed must soon be defended and used, when the next challenger arrives at your doorstep. But for now...you need a drink.

Killing another of his kind in combat is the only way an Immortal can increase his own power and strength. In game, when an Immortal emerges from combat victorious, several things happen. First, the Immortal takes Bashing damage from the Quickening, equal to the sum total of all of his opponent's attributes. This damage can never result in unconsciousness, although it is possible to already be unconscious when the Quickening hits. When the bashing damage occurs, the Immortal must succeed at a Constitution (doubled) roll at -3 or fall to his knees under the onslaught. This damage heals normally, and can be healed through the use of the Quickening Healing power if the Immortal possesses the ability.



Second, the Immortal receives his reward for a battle well fought. First, a Drama Point should always be awarded for winning a battle with another Immortal, unless the loser was phenomenally weaker than the victor. In the latter case, it may be appropriate even to take a Drama Point away from the victor, depending upon the character and role playing involved. Besides the Drama Point, however, the Immortal gains the power and experience of his opponent. One bonus experience point should be awarded to the victor in a battle between two Immortals. Also, for every *four* Immortal opponents defeated, the Immortal makes a Willpower (not doubled) roll. If he succeeds, he gains a level in the Old Soul Quality, as described earlier in this document.

The strength, power, and knowledge of the loser of the contest between Immortals manifests as a kind of "alternate past life" for the victor, and he can call upon this knowledge and experience in times of need.

In Series that use Essence-based Quickening, the Immortal victor gains levels in Essence Channeling equal to half the Essence Channeling of the loser, rounded down (zero is possible); and gains Increased Essence Pool equal to 1/10 of the Essence Pool of the loser (minimum 1 level).

Complications

Here's where the Rules of the Game we talked about earlier come into play. Never can two Immortals "gang up" on a single one; if they do, there are cosmic repercussions. The majority of the Quickening goes to the Immortal who actually beheads the opponent. It is the Immortal who actually delivers the death stroke who gains the Drama Point, Old Soul, and/or Increased Essence. The secondary Immortal gains one bonus Experience Point, to be applied however the player sees fit. However, the Immortal who actually delivers the death stroke also *loses* levels in skills of the Director's choosing, equal to the secondary Immortal's Intelligence score, which are transferred to the secondary Immortal. It is possible to forget skills entirely in this manner. In

the case of more than two victors, each Immortal involved loses ranks in skills equal to her own Intelligence score; all points are then pooled and redistributed by the Director. Note that this only applies if two or more Immortals actively gang up on a third. Merely being present at a Quickening doesn't affect the observer in any way whatsoever. No one knows why this is, but the Quickening seems somehow drawn to only those who participated in the battle.

Consequences for battling on Holy Ground are entirely up to the Director, but they should be cataclysmic at best.



CROSSOVERS

Probably the greatest thing about using Immortals in your Unisystem™ game is that they cross over almost seamlessly into any other setting, with little to no adjustment whatsoever. Since they're mostly empowered, long-lived humans, Immortals can be important players in your game, and while their power level does indeed approach that of the Slayer, they shouldn't be so unbalancing as to overshadow such a character in a more "canon" game. Look, for example, at the very first season of *BtVS*. Before he was revealed as a vampire, Angel could very easily have been an Immortal. He had the same sort of "feel" to him that we've seen many times in the *Highlander* television series.

Look also at the Watchers. Perhaps in a crossover universe the Watchers are a massive, all-encompassing organization with different branches to deal with different elements of the

supernatural. Each branch is self-contained, and has its own methods, problems, and responsibilities, but all answer to an overall tribunal or Council which enforces the secrecy and non-interference policies that they all seem to engender (remember, Giles is exceptional in his assistance of Buffy. Most Watchers are expected to stay back and let their Slayers handle the dirty work).

Introducing an Immortal and the Game into any other setting is every bit as simple as a good concept, which players can work on with their directors. The difficult part is actually on the shoulders of the Director, who must make sure to occasionally throw in that Immortal opponent to keep things interesting and plausible for the Cast Member in question.

On the other hand, introducing other types of characters into the "canon" Highlander universe may be a bit more difficult. You could make Occultism more widespread an ability, perhaps allowing Immortals to get a free level with the Quality, or make it dependent upon age. Too much in the way of vampires and ghosts upsets the delicate balance of the Highlander 'verse, which is by and large very low in the supernatural. There's also the fact that Immortals play by their own rules, and interference by Slayers and other supers would certainly not be welcome. Still, a hybrid of 'verses is probably easier with Immortals than with any other type of Gothic Action character, and can be a world of fun to play.

