

DRAGON WARRIORS

The Classic British Fantasy Roleplaying Game

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CHAPTER 2

CREATING A CHARACTER

BEFORE YOU CAN begin your first *Dragon Warriors* game, each player must create a character who will be his or her fantasy ‘alter-ego’ in the Lands of Legend, the world of the game. Only ordinary six-sided dice are needed for this.

ROLEPLAYING

Newcomers to fantasy roleplaying (‘FRP’) often spend their first few games immersed in the wondrous new world that it opens up. For a while they find it enough merely to ‘pretend themselves’ into adventures where they can creep nervously down the winding black tunnels of the Ogre’s lair and seek vast wealth in the cobweb-draped vaults of the Vampire’s crypt. If you are new to gaming, feel free to skip ahead to ‘Step One’ below, and come back to this section later—perhaps after you have tried playing an adventure or two.

Players eventually tend to consider other aspects of the GamesMaster’s fantasy world. What is daily life like between adventures? Who are the local lords, and what are the political intrigues between them? Most importantly, what is ‘your’ (meaning your character’s) attitude to the world around? Why did he or she become an adventurer rather than, for instance, a blacksmith, a merchant, or whatever profession his or her parents followed? Questions like this are the starting point for true roleplaying.

Playing a role is what makes FRP really special, and what makes an FRP adventure far more exciting than any solo gamebook or computer adventure could be. You should choose a personality for your character—which need not be anything like your own personality. You can experiment and see what it’s like to see a world through the eyes of someone with different attitudes or beliefs, or a different skin colour or race, or a different gender. During an adventure, try to act in a way that reflects the role you have chosen.

Start by thinking a little about your character’s past life. Maybe you’ve chosen to play an impoverished noblewoman, perhaps? She should demand some deference from the other player-characters, and moan bitterly if she has to borrow money from them to support her doubtless extravagant tastes. Or your character might be an ex-soldier, just back from the Crusades. Maybe he finds the unprofessional approach of his fellow adventurers to be annoyingly amateurish. His conversation could be a string of military clichés and anecdotes. A roving Barbarian could find civilization hard to understand, and might prefer to solve most problems using an axe. A scholarly Sorcerer might go off on an expedition just to collect ancient *objets d’art*. Gold and silver would mean nothing to him. He has no interest in the tactics of adventuring, so he would leave the warriors in the party to decide on any battle plans.

Consider also ‘your’ attitude to the rest of the party. Without a doubt you will eventually meet—or

even play—the cowardly villain who covets treasure so much that he runs off with the loot while his comrades are battling the monster. Less familiar is the brave adventurer who will risk his own life to delay a foe while his friends retreat. Our own campaign includes the tale of Dagronelt the Harpist, who befriended an NPC (a ‘non-player character’ operated by the GM) and then experienced a conflict of loyalties when the other player-characters fought the NPC in question.

You may also want to create a background and a life story for your character: where they’re from, what their family is like, why they chose their profession, and any important experiences they may have had before the game started. There are three ways that you can work out this information. First of all, you can simply choose for yourself: read the rest of the book to get a clear idea of the world in which the *Dragon Warriors* game takes place, and decide how you want your character to fit into it. (Subject to the GM’s approval. You cannot simply decide that your character is heir to a kingdom!)

Alternatively, you can create it randomly. There are tables to generate more detail about your character’s region of origin and other background information in Chapter 6: ‘In the Beginning’. For GamesMasters, these are also useful for creating non-player characters (NPCs) in a hurry.

If you want to get stuck into playing the game straight away, then feel free to skip that chapter for the moment. There is no need to develop an entire life history at the start of your first game, though. You can always come back to it later. Often a character will take on a persona of his own after you have played him a few times, and you and the GM can add events or details to his background later on.



Step One

THE CHARACTERISTICS

Each character is initially defined by his scores in five characteristics. These are Strength, Reflexes, Intelligence, Psychic Talent and Looks. The value

of each characteristic is found by rolling three six-sided dice (3d6), and therefore ranges from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 18.

Strength is a measure of the character’s fitness and physical toughness.

His **Reflexes** score indicates his dexterity, agility and speed of reactions.

Intelligence shows how clever the character is (so a player who rolls low for this ought to role-play as though he really is dim-witted).

Psychic Talent represents the character’s basic ability to resist (and in some cases use) magic.

The character’s **Looks** score reflects his appearance and personal charm; this has no bearing on his adventuring skills, but you should certainly take it into account when deciding how non-player characters (NPCs) would react to him.

The player rolls 3d6 for each of these five characteristics, then, and records the scores in the appropriate boxes on his character sheet. These scores will never change—except in rare cases, through illness or sorcery.

Each player will require a blank Character Sheet like the one shown on the next page, to keep track of their character’s scores. A full-size character sheet will be found at the back of the book, and you may make as many photocopies of it as you need.

Special note: The luck of the dice means that sometimes a player will create a character with hopelessly bad scores, quite unsuited to life as an adventurer. The player may discard the character and roll up another. It is for you, as GamesMaster, to decide whether a character is ‘hopeless’ or not. As a guideline, we suggest you allow a player to discard any character with more than two characteristics below the average (9 to 12) range.

Step Two

CHOOSING A PROFESSION

In the *Dragon Warriors* game there are seven Professions to which an adventurer may belong: Assassin, Knight, Barbarian, Elementalist, Sorcerer, Mystic and Warlock. Players who have never played an RPG before may find it easiest to play either a Knight or a Barbarian. These two classes don’t need to concern themselves with magic or stealth, just cold steel, mighty thews and valour.

DRAGON WARRIORS CHARACTER SHEET		
NAME	PROFESSION	RANK
STRENGTH <input type="checkbox"/> REFLEXES <input type="checkbox"/> INTELLIGENCE <input type="checkbox"/> PSYCHIC TALENT <input type="checkbox"/> LOOKS <input type="checkbox"/>	ATTACK _____ DEFENCE _____ EVASION _____ STEALTH _____ PERCEPTION _____	WEAPONS
HEALTH POINTS <input type="checkbox"/> CURRENT SCORE <table border="1" style="display: inline-table; width: 50px; height: 20px;"></table>	ARMOUR FACTOR <input type="checkbox"/> ARMOUR TYPE _____ SHIELD? YES/NO	
SKILLS/MAGIC	MAGICAL ATTACK _____ MAGICAL DEFENCE _____	OTHER EQUIPMENT
EXPERIENCE POINTS _____ REGULAR OUTGINGS	AMULETS/POTIONS	
		CASH

A SAMPLE BLANK CHARACTER SHEET

In any case, Knights and Barbarians will be by far the most common classes in most *Dragon Warriors* games. Indeed, there is no particular need to include the other classes at all for many adventures, and some campaigns will play out in their entirety with only these two. Most parties, though, will have a balance, with perhaps a majority of Knights and Barbarians and the occasional Mystic, Sorcerer, Elementalist or Warlock. Assassins are scarce indeed, and are often better fitted to use in solo adventures (with only one player character and the GM) or campaigns in which everyone plays an Assassin!

Knights are the best all-around fighters in *Dragon Warriors*. Though physically less robust than Barbarians, they are able to wear heavy armour without losing any of their combat skills. Play a Knight if you want a character who strives to be like King Arthur, or Lancelot, or Gawain.

Barbarians are better in attack, but defensively less skilful than Knights. Their fighting style is fast and mobile, and heavy armour hampers them. They are able to go berserk in combat, making their attacks still more ferocious. Play a Barbarian if you

want a character who could be a Viking warrior, or a skilled brawler from the pages of fantasy novels, like Conan or Fafhrd.

Assassins are average in combat but excel in sneak attacks, when they can target an unwary opponent. They are by far the most stealthy character class in the game, and gain a variety of other abilities that might seem magical to the unwary. Play an Assassin if you want a character who could have come straight out of a martial-arts fantasy movie like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or *Hero*, or who emulates one of the great rogues of fantasy literature like the Gray Mouser.

Sorcerers are the most common and general magic-wielding character profession—if any of these rare individuals can be called ‘common’. They are relatively ineffective in mundane combat but can blast their foes with magic. They have a more varied repertoire of spells than Elementlists and a little more raw magical power than Mystics. Play a Sorcerer if you want a character resembling Merlin, or Gandalf, or Harry Potter.

Mystics use magic of a sort, but this is a personal magic that comes from the Mystic’s mastery of his own mind rather than some external source. A Mystic is a good all-rounder, not quite so magically strong as a Sorcerer or Elementalist, but reasonably capable in combat and with a few other useful special abilities. Play a Mystic if you want to dazzle your foes with the power of your character’s mind alone.

Elementlists are specialist magicians, using the power of the natural elements to achieve their aims. Each Elementalist’s magic is focused around a particular element, chosen from among Fire, Air, Earth, Water and Darkness. Like Sorcerers, they tend not to be very skilled with conventional weapons such as swords and bows. Play an Elementalist if your favourite characters are the shamans, witches and druids of legend and fantasy literature.

Finally, **Warlocks** combine magic with sword-play. They can wear armour and use their spells to boost their combat abilities. They aren’t quite so versatile in combat as Knights or Barbarians, but can be devastating when armed with their preferred weapons. Play a Warlock if your favourite fantasy hero is Elric, or just if you want the best of both worlds!

The player decides now to which of these Professions she wants her character to belong, and notes this at the top of her character sheet.

Step Three

HEALTH POINTS

Having chosen his Profession, the player can roll his character's Health Points score. A character's Health Points (or HP) show how robust he is. Whenever the character takes a wound in combat, the wound is expressed as a number which comes off his HP score.

The character falls unconscious when his Health Point score reaches 0, and will die if it is ever reduced to -3 or less. Lost Health Points can be recuperated by resting after the adventure—as long as the character survives (see page 68).

A Knight starts with 1d6 +7 Health Points (roll 1d6 and add 7).

A Barbarian starts with 1d6 +9 Health Points.

An Elementalist or Sorcerer starts with 1d6 +4 Health Points.

For an Assassin, Mystic or Warlock, initial Health Points are found by rolling 1d6 +5

A character's initial Health Points score increases as he advances in rank (of which, more later).

Step Four

THE COMBAT FACTORS

The player is now ready to determine her character's ATTACK and DEFENCE scores. No further dice rolling is required—you have already made the necessary rolls and choices. The basic scores are:

for Assassins:	ATTACK score is 13, DEFENCE score is 5
for Barbarians:	ATTACK score is 14, DEFENCE score is 6
for Elementalist:	ATTACK score is 11, DEFENCE score is 5
for Knights:	ATTACK score is 13, DEFENCE score is 7
for Mystics:	ATTACK score is 12, DEFENCE score is 6
for Sorcerers:	ATTACK score is 11, DEFENCE score is 5
for Warlocks:	ATTACK score is 12, DEFENCE score is 6

These are, in fact, the scores for an average character at the start of his career. If the player rolled above or below the average range (9–12) on certain of his characteristics at Step One, she may have to



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modify her ATTACK and DEFENCE scores slightly as a result—see the Effects Table below.

After making any adjustments, the player should enter these ATTACK and DEFENCE scores on their character sheet. (In subsequent adventures, as the character rises in rank, these scores will increase.)

The way in which ATTACK and DEFENCE are used in the game is explained in Chapter 8: The Rules of Combat.

Step Five

MAGICAL COMBAT FACTORS

ATTACK and DEFENCE, as we shall see, represent the character's fighting prowess. In the Dragon Warriors world, where magic is a reality, it follows that these Combat Factors must have a magical analogue: MAGICAL ATTACK and MAGICAL DEFENCE.

The basic MAGICAL DEFENCE score is 3 for Assassins, Knights, and Barbarians; 4 for Mystics and Warlocks; and 5 for Elementalists and Sorcerers. This base score is modified if the character's Intelligence and/or Psychic Talent fall outside the

average range—see the Effects table below.

Elementalists, Sorcerers, Mystics and Warlocks have a MAGICAL ATTACK score. (Assassins, Barbarians, and Knights do not need a MAGICAL ATTACK score as they cannot cast spells.) The basic MAGICAL ATTACK score is 15 in the case of Elementalists and Sorcerers, 14 in the case of Mystics, and 13 in the case of Warlocks. This basic score is modified if the character's Intelligence and/or Psychic Talent are outside the average range. As above, see below.

The rules for using magical defence and magical attack are in Chapter 9: The Use of Magic.

Step Six

DODGING

Some attacks are not covered by the normal combat rules of Chapter 8. A character who tries to parry a dragon's fiery breath with only a sword is going to be fried! In such cases, the best thing is to dodge out of the way. The score that shows how good the character is at dodging is EVASION.

The basic EVASION score at 1st rank is 3 for an Elementalist, Mystic, Sorcerer, or Warlock, 4 for a Knight, and 5 for an Assassin or Barbarian. This is

EFFECTS OF HIGH AND LOW CHARACTERISTIC SCORES ON ATTACK, DEFENCE, ETC.

	Characteristic score									
Characteristic	3 4 5	6 7 8	9 10 11 12	13 14 15	16 17 18					
Strength	-2 ATTACK	-1 ATTACK	No Effect	+1 ATTACK	+2 ATTACK					
	-1 DEFENCE	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 DEFENCE					
Reflexes	-1 ATTACK	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 ATTACK					
	-2 DEFENCE	-1 DEFENCE	No Effect	+1 DEFENCE	+2 DEFENCE					
	-2 EVASION	-1 EVASION	No Effect	+1 EVASION	+2 EVASION					
	-1 STEALTH	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 STEALTH					
Intelligence	-1 ATTACK	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 ATTACK					
	-1 DEFENCE	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 DEFENCE					
	-1 MAGICAL ATTACK	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 MAGICAL ATTACK					
	-1 MAGICAL DEFENCE	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 MAGICAL DEFENCE					
Psychic Talent	-2 MAGICAL DEFENCE	-1 MAGICAL DEFENCE	No Effect	+1 MAGICAL DEFENCE	+2 MAGICAL DEFENCE					
	-1 PERCEPTION	No Effect	No Effect	No Effect	+1 PERCEPTION					
	Not applicable*	Not applicable*	No Effect	+1 MAGICAL ATTACK	+2 MAGICAL ATTACK					

*Characters with Psychic Talent of 8 or less cannot use magic.

CHAPTER 4

The WIZARDS

IN THE *DRAGON WARRIORS* game there are four magic-using professions, each with different specialisations, strengths and weaknesses. They are known collectively as ‘wizards’. Ordinary people don’t understand that there are different types of spell-caster, and treat all those who deal in magic with a mixture of suspicion and fear.

Sorcerers are those who seek to master the arcane enchantments which enable them to draw energy from other dimensions and channel it according to their wishes. They make poor fighters but their spells can be quite devastating.

Mystics, on the other hand, meditate so as to harmonize themselves with the unseen forces of Nature—perhaps we would call them ‘psionics’ in modern terminology. Mystics learn something of the fighting arts, and many of their spells serve to enhance the Mystic’s own physical and mental prowess. They can generally cast fewer spells per day than the other wizardly character classes.

Elementalists strive to master the raw elements of nature, rather than studying the more refined dweomers of Sorcerers, but are otherwise similar.

Warlocks work their magic much like Sorcerers or Elementalists, but their spells are devoted to enhancing their already mighty prowess in weapon combat. They are the most capable of the wizardly classes in the ways of the warrior, even when all their magic is exhausted.

Any player choosing to be a wizardly character will soon realize the big difference between the magic-using Professions and the fighting Profes-

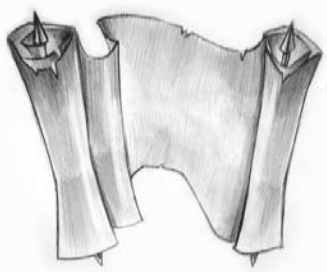
sions. Sorcerers, Elementalists, Mystics, and Warlocks are able to use a lot of power in a short time, but once their spells are exhausted they are relatively weak. A wizardly character who comes, fresh and with spells undiminished, to a battle with a Knight, Assassin or Barbarian of similar rank will usually win. If the magician had already used his day’s spells, however, the reverse would be true. Over a typical adventure—four hours (game-time) in a monster-ridden dungeon, say—the whole thing averages out. As a GamesMaster you may find it useful to remember that short adventures favour the magicians while long adventures favour the fighters.

Each of the four Professions is able to use a particular type of spells. These four spell groups are quite different, with little or no overlap, so as to fit the particular styles of each character class.

There is a further distinction between Mystics and the other spell-users. When a Sorcerer, Warlock, or Elementalist casts a spell he expends Magic Points to do so; when he has used up all his Magic Points he can use no more spells that day. Mystics do not have Magic Points. When a Mystic casts a spell, she makes a check to see whether she ‘fatigues’ her spellcasting ability; when this psionic ‘fatigue’ occurs, the Mystic can cast no more spells that day.

On average, a Mystic and a Sorcerer or Elementalist of equal rank will be able to use roughly the same number of spells in a day—but whereas the Sorcerer always knows precisely how much spell-power (in the form of Magic Points) he has left, the Mystic can never be sure when she is going to

suffer 'fatigue'. Mystics have to get used to a life of uncertainty. To balance out this uncertainty a little, each Mystic may select one Mystic spell which she is capable of casting at will, without risking fatigue. In effect, this one spell has become an innate ability, so carefully honed and practised that the Mystic can leave it 'always on' if desired.



SORCERERS

Sorcerers are the civilised, scholarly magicians, found in most lands other than in Thuland and the Mercanian Coast where Elementalists predominate. They use their knowledge and wits to master magic. All Sorcerers are left-handed.

Minimum Requirements

A player who wishes his character to be a Sorcerer must roll scores of at least 9 for both Intelligence and Psychic Talent. If these scores are below average, the character is not qualified to study sorcery.

Spellcasting

Sorcerers have a certain number of Magic Points available each day, which they use to cast spells. See Chapter 9: The Use of Magic for full details of Sorcerer spells and spellcasting.

Sorcerers and Armour

There is nothing to stop a Sorcerer wearing heavy armour, but it is not usually a good idea. Sorcerers are not trained to fight in armour, for one thing, and suffer combat penalties if they do so (see p. 71). More seriously, armour hampers the freedom of movement necessary if the Sorcerer is to make accurate occult gestures (see p. 77). Few Sorcerers wear anything heavier than a suit of padded armour.

The Special Abilities of a Sorcerer

Sorcerers do not rely only on their innate ability to cast spells. A study of sorcery imparts the techniques needed to prepare scrolls, potions and minor magical items. A high-ranking Sorcerer will go adventuring with a small arsenal of such magical adjuncts.

Sorcerers are trained in four unique skills:

- ♣ *Calligraphy*
- ♣ *Alchemy*
- ♣ *Artifice*
- ♣ *Use of Wands*

Calligraphy

This is the ability to prepare magical scrolls, a skill known to any Sorcerer of 4th rank or higher. The total cost of the basic materials for a scroll will be 3-18 crowns: parchment of high quality is called for, along with gold leaf and some rare and expensive pigments. The scroll may be for any spell that the Sorcerer is able to cast (that is, whose level does not exceed his rank), and the maximum number of Magic Points placed in the spell is limited by the Sorcerer's rank. An 8th-rank character could not write out a scroll for a 9 MP *Wall of Magic*, even though he could personally cast the spell at three times that strength. The process of inscribing and illuminating a scroll takes a full lunar month (twenty-eight days).

Each scroll that a Sorcerer prepares temporarily suppresses 2 points of his normal Magic Points score until it is used. A 10th-rank Sorcerer with five scrolls at his belt would thus have 25 MPs instead of his usual 35.

Alchemy

Alchemy is the science which governs the preparation of potions and thaumaturgic compounds. A Sorcerer first begins to master this skill when he reaches 6th rank.

A fully equipped laboratory, which can be established at a cost of some two hundred crowns, is the first prerequisite. This comprises a lot of equipment, so the Sorcerer must have somewhere to set it all up. If he later needs to relocate his laboratory (maybe the locals think he's doing something unholy), 2-20 crowns of the set-up cost can be salvaged in the form of small portable items and ingredients.



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The Sorcerer does not become a Master Alchemist overnight. At 6th rank he knows how to distil only the less complex potions. Others must wait until he gains more experience:

<i>Sorcerer's rank</i>	<i>Potions which can be prepared</i>	<i>Cost of ingredients</i>
6th	Dexterity	35C
	Occult Acuity	40C
	Strength	35C
7th	<i>all the above plus</i> Healing	40C
	Replenishment	100C
	Poison	120C
	Theriac	100C
8th	<i>all the above plus</i> Night Vision	35C
	Smoke	50C
	Amianthus Dust	150C
9th	<i>all the above plus</i> Control	120C
	Truth	100C
	Love	100C
	Sleep	200C
10th	<i>all the above plus</i> Transformation	200C
	Dreams	200C
	the Elemental Essences	200C
	Evaporating Potion	200C
	Elixir Vitae	250C
	Virus Lunare	180C

It takes twenty-eight days to distil a potion. In a normal-sized laboratory there could be up to ten potions 'on the boil' at one time. The Sorcerer cannot leave these bubbling away while he goes off on an adventure; the alchemical process calls for continual supervision as various ingredients are mixed and added, vaporized, condensed and filtered.

There is always a chance that the Sorcerer will do something wrong or miss out some vital ingredient. This gets less likely as his experience grows. The chance that a potion will turn out misbrewed and useless is 40% when the Sorcerer is 6th rank, decreasing by 10% per rank above the 6th. This roll is made by the GamesMaster; the Sorcerer only finds out whether he got the formula right when he (or someone else) drinks it.

Full details of the various potions are given in Chapter 13, on pp138-141.

Artifice

This is the skill involved in constructing magic amulets, talismans and rings. It is a very precise science, and there is only a very slight chance (5%) that the item will turn out flawed or useless. The work

CHAPTER 6

IN THE

BEGINNING

THE PURPOSE OF this chapter is to give each player-character a background, a provenance upon which the player can build his life history from birth to the time he enters the campaign as a young blood of 1st rank. The same procedure can also be used for NPCs (non-player characters) if required, as the tables below will supply a history for any newly rolled character.

Often a player will like to concoct his own life history. The GamesMaster will certainly allow and encourage this if the player's ideas are (1) interesting and (2) do not conflict with the needs and style of the GM's campaign. But sometimes players take the chance to be extravagantly optimistic ('Okay, I've worked out my life story—I'm heir to the Kingdom of Algandy...'), and at other times even the most inspired player will find his imagination flagging. Then it is time to let the dice lead the way: refer to the tables below and see what result you get. You may be surprised to find that your new Knight character was born into a merchant's household or that your Assassin could have followed his father into the Plasterers' Guild. How can this Warlock be a scion of the nobility, how can this Sorcerer suffer the stigma of coming from a community of charcoal-burners? Finding answers to questions like these will spur you into developing a fully fleshed-out personal history.

Having created a new character, dice are rolled to determine his social position by birth—i.e. whether one or both of his parents were nobles, peasants or whatever. Since most 1st-rank characters will

probably be about 17-22 years old, it should not be surprising that this is not always the social position that the character now enjoys. A lot of water can pass under the bridge in seventeen years. The GM will often rule that the character has suffered several changes of fortune in his time.

Take the example of Launfric, a character whom the dice indicate to be of noble blood. The GM may decide that this roll applies only to his mother, abducted in her youth by raiders from Mercania. A birthmark on his forearm is Launfric's only clue to his father's identity. Or possibly it was his father who was the noble—a lord who dallied with a comely tavern-wench one night and passed on without a second thought for the brat he had sired. Yet another alternative would be that a rival lord had slain Launfric's parents and taken his father's lands. Launfric is then a dispossessed heir, doubtless scheming for the day he will take revenge on his parents' murderer.

There are many ways for the GM to ensure his campaign is fair and balanced between all the players while at the same time giving each player-character a colourful and individual life history.

Interlude: social class

Most of the societies of the Lands of Legend are feudal, with the complex system of mutual obligation and status structure that this entails. It will help

if players have some idea of the relative status of the various classes. Bear in mind that status is not entirely fixed. There is some degree of social mobility—not much in an orderly region such as Chabrette, but in Algandy or northern Albion levies may be knighted in the same battle that deprives a lord of all his estates. Modifiers such as wealth and prestige (especially high office in the Church) also make a great deal of difference. Riolta, the 1st-rank Sorceress, provokes only sullen looks and mumbled prayers when she passes a group of serfs tilling the fields, but if she survives to become Riolta the Wyrddcaster, wealthy 6th-rank Sorceress with her own (appropriated) castle, even great barons may treat her with respect.

The **nobility** are the powerful lords and their families—men such as Montombre, Grisaille and Baron Aldred (p. 152). Their attendant knights form the **gentry**, and this class also comprises minor lords-of-the-manor. (The erstwhile lord of Axbridge village, Sir Hathnar, was such a one, the *vavasour* or sub-vassal of Aldred, who removed him and took direct responsibility for Axbridge about a year before the events described in Chapter 19.)

The division between town and country is beginning to take shape, although it is only along the shores of the Coradian coast that more than one-tenth of the population choose the former with its admixture of wealth and squalour, security and discomfort.

Craftsmen have the highest status in the town—after the local nobility and gentry, of course. These are the masons, shipbuilders, carpenters, etc., who are now beginning to consolidate the Guilds, destined to wield much power in the centuries to come. At approximately the same level we find the **learned professionals**—the scribes, lawyers, doctors and so on. Next are the **tradesmen**, a group comprising such occupations as butcher, grocer and baker.

Below these come the **menials**, who are essentially the feudal working class. Rather than following a set occupation throughout his life, a member of this class will do whatever job he can find that pays him a living. Some will belong to the town guard, unless this function is performed by soldiers of the king or the local lord. Extra guards will be taken on at festival times, and some university towns have a separate force for the 'gown'. Other menials



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will perform tasks such as lighting the street-lamps (some towns have bronze bowls full of pitch set at the end of main thoroughfares), collecting refuse and sewage, delivering pitchers of water¹, town-crying and burying the dead. Last of all are a group we may call the **riffraff**, using this term to encompass beggars, street hawkers, whores (but not the more reputable madams who could almost be considered professionals and borrow some of the status of their prestigious patrons), cutpurses, lazars and other indigents.

In the countryside, the pre-eminent class are the **freemen**. To this group belong farmers, artisans (blacksmiths, wheelwrights, armourers, etc.), foresters, innkeepers (like the famous Gully, whose inn is the best in northern Albion), and the men-at-arms who form the bulk of a castle's garrison. They are the feudal middle-class, few in number but usually quite well off by the standards of the time. Many own horses, swords and even armour. They are their lord's vassals and owe him a number of services, including forty days in his army each year, but they own property and may come and go as they please. Below the freemen come entertainers and merchants. Though it should be added that bards², who journey from castle to castle with their epic tales and songs of vanished glory, are really very highly regarded and may be on a par with the gentry.

Serfs, or villeins, come next. They are as much a lord's property as is his livestock, and sometimes not much better treated. They have no rights in law, nor title to their homes. They must work three days in each week on the lord's land and grow whatever they can for their own needs in the time that remains. Nonetheless they are of higher status than the **cottars** who, though technically free and able to possess a cottage and a plot of land, have no fixed identity within the feudal structure. They are often very poor and must perform their tasks for a daily (and barely sufficient) wage. A cottar will turn his hand to any employment available, therefore. He may dig ditches, herd cows, press apples for cider, keep bees, thatch the roofs of other villagers, fetch and carry and run errands—and in return get a few coppers from the village reeve. A cottar's freedom is of no advantage to him in a society where a man is judged by his obligations and his standing. A serf will say to a cottar, 'I am a bondsman whom my lord values

and protects as his property'—not with any sense of dissatisfaction, but with the assured superiority that comes from knowing his place in the scheme of things. Little wonder, then, that this class often produces the sort of disaffected ne'er-do-well who is likely to become an adventurer.

Close to the bottom of the pile are the **slaves**, nowadays rarely seen in the more 'enlightened' lands of the True Faith though common enough in the Ta'ashim countries and also in Thuland, Ereworn, Krarth, Mercania and some parts of Cornumbria. We should also mention the **outlaws**, who live in the wildwood and respect no authority. Last are the **charcoal-burners**, lower even than the riffraff of the towns. These strange, secretive folk live in isolated communities at the forest's edge and make occasional visits to the nearby villages to barter their only commodity in exchange for food and tatters of hide. A sullen people with an inbred distrust of strangers, they smell vile, are stained swart by the smoke of their fires, die after a short and ugly life, and venerate pagan spirits that they knew in prehistoric times.

These, then, are the possible provenances of an adventuring character. To the above it need only be added that by the life he has chosen for himself an adventurer rarely commands the respect that might be his by birth. A freeman and even a serf would peer down his nose at any lordless wanderer who came into his village—though if the wanderer is clad in armour and has a strong sword-arm he will doubtless be treated with a semblance of equality.

Determining background

A player uses the following tables once he has generated a new 1st-rank character. Players with already established characters could also use these rules, but it is usually unsatisfactory to suddenly 'discover' a character's life history when he/she has been in the campaign for some time.

Two Professions do not use the tables. *Elementalists* are a very localized subgroup: the shaman-priests of Thuland and Mercania.³ They are a class unto themselves. A few foreigners may become

¹ Except in some old Selentine cities that actually have a plumbing system.

² Called in Cornumbria and Ereworn the 'flidh'.

³ Actually, a few Elementalists hail from other backgrounds. The kastrian sorcerers of Khitai and the storm-wizards of the Desert of Songs can also be considered Elementalists within the structure of the Dragon Warriors rules. Neither of these is a particularly likely source of player-character, however.

BALIN, A 3RD RANK KNIGHT FINDS HIMSELF STANDING ALONE AGAINST TWO BRUTISH ORCS...



BALIN
ATTACK: 14
DEFENCE: 9
HEALTHPOINTS: 12
PLATE ARMOUR

ORCS
ATTACK: 11
DEFENCE: 5
HEALTHPOINTS: 4 & 8
HARD LEATHER ARMOUR

THE GM HAS ROLLED A HIGH **REFLEXES** SCORE FOR THE ORCS SO THEY GET TO STRIKE FIRST. BALIN SPLITS HIS DEFENCE...

HE PUTS A DEFENCE OF 5 AGAINST THE FIRST ORC, WHICH THUS NEEDS TO ROLL $(11-5)=6$ OR LESS ON A 20-SIDED DIE TO HIT HIM

BALIN'S REMAINING DEFENCE OF 4 GOES AGAINST THE OTHER ORC...

BUT BALIN IS WEARING FULL-PLATE ARMOUR, GIVING HIM AN ARMOUR FACTOR OF 5.



...IT ROLLS A 7... A NEAR MISS!



...NOT ENOUGH! WITH A "HIT ROLL" OF 2, IT EASILY GETS PAST HIS GUARD.



THE ORC NEEDS TO ROLL GREATER THAN 5 ON AN 8-SIDED DIE. IT ACTUALLY ROLLS A 2, SO THE BLOW GLANCES OFF THE KNIGHT'S ARMOUR.



NOW IT IS BALIN'S TURN.



BALIN GETS A 3 ON HIS "HIT ROLL", BUT THE ORC HAS A **SHIELD**.

HE GOES FOR THE FIRST ORC. HIS ATTACK IS 14 AND THE ORC'S DEFENCE IS 5, SO HE NEEDS A 9 OR LESS ON A **D20** TO HIT.

ON A ROLL OF 1 ON A D6, ITS SHIELD WOULD BLOCK THE BLOW. ALAS FOR THE ORC! IT ROLLS A 2 AND BALIN'S SWORD SLIPS PAST THE SHIELD.



BALIN EASILY MAKES HIS "ARMOUR BYPASS ROLL" AND HIS 2-HANDED SWORD INFLECTS A 5-HEALTH POINT WOUND. THE ORC GOES DOWN... A NEW COMBAT ROUND BEGINS AND NOW BALIN HAS ONLY ONE OPPONENT.

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CHAPTER 14

THE LANDS OF LEGEND

'A myth is a pure and absolute imagination; a legend has a basis of fact, but amplifies, abridges or modifies that basis at pleasure.' —Rawlinson

EVERY ROLE-PLAYING campaign needs a setting. Without a fantasy world to be the backdrop for their escapades, players are losing out on nine-tenths of the role-playing experience.

Many GamesMasters enjoy constructing their own fantasy worlds, and often the world creation becomes a two-way process as the GM incorporates elements suggested by the players. That takes a lot of time, of course. The GM must prepare maps, lists of languages, details of calendar and weather—and much besides—before the campaign can begin. But this is a lot of work, so here you have the essential material for setting a role-playing campaign in the world of Legend.

One book cannot go far towards describing every detail of a fantasy world. In any case, it is the prerogative of each individual GamesMaster to give his/her campaign its 'fine tuning'—the distinct flavour that makes it unique. Different groups have different styles. Some may choose to role-play dauntless Crusaders marching south with the banner of the 'True' Faith, charging into battle against the pagan horde. Others will prefer to take the part of Ta'ashim warriors, defending civilization against the crude infidels from the north.

Some will choose to focus on the broad canvas of Legend—trading and politicking their way to power in the courts of kings, getting involved in

assassination and skulduggery in Ferromaine, or siding with various factions in the power struggles of the Tamorian Senate. Those with a taste for low-key adventures can take a small section of Legend and develop it with meticulous care.

For others with more exotic tastes there are always the areas we have included off-map: the theocracy of Batubatan, with its gold temple-towers scraping the very floor of Heaven; the majestic land of Minj, awlirl with coloured silks and the clash of cymbals; Khitai, the empire that has endured throughout Time, where a ponderous bureaucracy involves itself in ever-greater refinements of etiquette and philosophy; or war-torn Yamato, where the *haiken* swordmasters follow their ethic of honour even if it leads them to ritual suicide.

Or, if you prefer, take a different time period. Set your campaign in the days of the Selentine Empire, or in the heyday of Ancient Kaikuhuru—or move forward to the Age of Discovery, when ships open up a new world beyond the western ocean. In this future time the old class divisions are crumbling as merchants buy noble titles, and old aristocrats sink into the peasantry. Musket and rapier have taken the place of bow and broadsword. Possibly sorcerers will not be the rare and solitary folk that they are in medieval legend. There may even be a 'Magician's Guild'!

What I am saying is that GamesMasters can make their own campaign. You do not need to be constrained by what is set out in this book (change any bits you dislike, in fact) but there is plenty of



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detail here if you do not have the time to make up your own. However, players should respect their GamesMaster's decision; the campaign is *his*, and he must have the final say. If you disagree with what he says, you can always quit the campaign—or start your own!

The Lie of the Land

The world of *Dragon Warriors* has a name: Legend. It is a place of warring nobles and mysterious wizards—a place for adventures. But there is a 'real life' behind the adventuring scenes. The country of Ellesland is described here in more detail than the rest of the world, and will be the focus of many of the published adventures for the game. But you should not feel constrained by that!

The GamesMaster should remember one thing in particular. Players may read these chapters about the game-world, but their *characters* will not know very much about the world unless you, as GM, tell them. A character who knew everything about Legend that is included here would have a very high level of general education. If players make use of information that they (as characters) do not have access to, then the GM should change a few key details here and there so as to give them a surprise. A *nasty* surprise....

Cornumbria

Ellesland (pronounced 'EL-ess-land') comprises five nations: Albion, Cornumbria, Thuland, Glissom and Ereworn. It is in Cornumbria and in Ereworn that the original natives of Ellesland still predominate. At one time they ruled from shore to shore, but their fierce armies were broken by the legions of Selentium in ancient times, and the people became citizens of the Empire. Later, when the legions departed to protect the core of the Selentine Empire (by then under serious threat from constant barbarian incursions out of the western plains), the Elleslanders were prey to attacks from the mainland. Finally they were driven back to Cornumbria by the invaders.

Authority in Cornumbria is centred on the lofty hill-forts where the chieftains and their grim thanes overlook the moors and valleys of their land. The High King is elected at the meeting of all the

chieftains, and it is also not impossible for such an assembly to strip the High King of his rank (though this has happened only rarely).

Cornumbria was brought into the True Faith in the latter days of Selentium and has remained so since then. Perhaps harking back unconsciously to their ancestral tradition of a wild, solitary priesthood, Cornumbrian priests have opted for a monastic Church with no central authority. The monks live in the most inaccessible and uncomfortable places—not just abbeys on chilly, windswept sea cliffs, but even in caves and on barren islands. They are famous for their learning and their works of art. (The illuminated manuscript known as *The Book of Dathnan*, of which there are five copies, is widely considered the grand masterwork of limnery.) However, the monastic Church of Cornumbria is effectively autonomous from the Selentine Church, and for that reason is regarded with some suspicion by priests of the neighbouring countries.¹

Albion

The ancestors of the current inhabitants of Albion were reavers from the mainland—mainly from the region now called Chaubrette. They were originally heathens with the same grizzled warrior-gods as the Thulanders, but the True Faith now predominates. Trade routes extend far to the south and west, providing the lords of southern Albion with a rich source of taxes. With their coffers full, they are free to indulge their incessant squabbles.

This is a feudal society. Land is held by lords from the king. Originally this meant that there was a 'pyramidal' pecking order: the king ruling over his vassals, the dukes and earls, many of whom have vassal lords of their own. Most lords have castles where their retinue of knights and men-at-arms reside with them. Some knights have lands of their own and they, as well as some of the minor nobles, oversee their estates from manor houses. The peasants are the foundation of the feudal society. They work the land of the manor, which may be only one of many in the lord's fief.

That is the system in theory. In practice, like most feudal societies, it is somewhat upset by the rise of the merchant class. Merchants become wealthy without themselves producing wealth, but just by buying, transporting and selling the goods and pro-

¹ Though the occasional accusations of black magic or even devil worship are surely unfounded.

duce of others. Specialized crafts also develop, so that, whereas in a small village a family must build their own house, make their own clothes, etc., in a town it is possible to pay someone else to do this. Eventually the craftsmen organize into guilds and *insist* that you use guild members to build your house and so on. The towns achieve autonomy from the local lord, receiving their charter direct from the king. The citizens of Port Clyster, for example, are freemen—not the vassals of Baron Aldred, nor of any other lord. Technically, a serf can obtain his freedom by escaping to a town such as Clyster and remaining there for a year and a day.

Tradition and mutual obligation are strong forces in Albionic society. The peasants work hard for their lord, but they are also under his protection. The knights who fight and even die in the lord's name also thrive by his beneficence. The king bestows the land, but in return he can call on his lords in time of war.

Albion's king, Hadric, has his court in the city of Ongus. Hadric is a weak king and a poor judge of character. This unpromising mix means that he has surrounded himself with ruthlessly self-serving advisers. Untold damage has been wrought in the last ten years of Hadric's misrule: the lands of loyal vassals have been stripped away, unworthy men have been ennobled, and peasants have suffered under a yoke of hard taxation. In the north, old foes like Aldred, Baron of Gorburn, and Earl Montombre care little for the king's law. They have their own grudges to pursue.

The towns of Albion tend to be quite small. Apart from the larger ports and market towns, most have grown up around a lord's castle—a place where the citizens can be sure of protection in times of trouble! Others may co-exist with a strongly fortified abbey. Confined within secure walls, a town's population is unlikely to number more than a thousand. In all the country, only about a dozen cities have populations in the tens of thousands. The overwhelming majority of the people live in manors consisting of perhaps twenty cottages.

Thuland

The country north of Albion is a high, craggy place split by deep river valleys and cold blue lakes. The people—settlers from across the Mergeld Sea, both from the Mercanian Coast and from the outer Thulan islands to the north—are barbaric and fierce,

often at war with their neighbours. Lords sit out the winter in smoky mead-halls, surrounded by their housecarls, waiting for the summer months of reaving. Wandering priests brave hostility and harsh weather in order to bring the True Faith to the people. In this they are hampered by the same rugged geography that prevents any real centralization of power.¹ Some of the lords have been converted, but even they show no inclination to completely reject the old gods of their ancestors—Wotan, Tor, Loge and the others. The merchants here are also minstrels, welcome to barter their wares if they can regale the hall-heroes with stirring tales. The serfs who till the land have no rights. To their lords they are of little more importance than animals.

Ereworn

In the far north, the influence of law is scarcely felt at all. Brigands and masterless knights roam unchecked about the foothills of the Pagan Mountains. The racial stock is mostly native Elleslander, with an admixture of Mercanian and Algardian blood.² The gods worshipped here are the strange primeval deities that the Druids called upon—Lahmfada, Kernanu, Morkaan; shadowy entities of the forest and mountains.³ The True Faith is not recognized at all.

The lords of Ereworn are either mad or irredeemably steeped in evil. Some are both. Vendettas among themselves and wars against Thuland, Cornumbria and Albion form the yearly round. The throne lies empty while numerous claims to the succession are made. Assassination is the accepted means to advance one's cause, and an entire subculture—the Clan of Harbingers, who live in solitary mountain villages and are roughly equivalent to

1 The court of the King of Thuland is located at Katorheim. His rule is strong enough on the island itself, but the Thulan lords across the sea in Ellesland may really be considered to rule over semi-autonomous duchies.

2 Mercenaries from the continent were employed by both sides in the 'Black War' fought between Cornumbria and Ereworn some three hundred years ago. After hostilities dwindled down into the customary skirmishing, the mercenaries stayed on and gradually became absorbed into the native population.

3 Most of these gods were 'discredited' in the conversion of Cornumbria by the time-honoured proselytizing technique of equating the gods of the old religion with the devils of the new. As far as the average Cornumbrian is concerned, therefore, his northern neighbours are devil-worshippers. Generally this is a bit of a slur—the old gods are elemental and uncivilized, but not intrinsically a force for evil. However, some of the crazier lords (e.g. Duke Darien—see the adventure-book *The Elven Crystals*) revere still stranger gods. Balor and Rinfax were demons even in the Druids' pantheon, and there can be no doubt that they appeal to all that is vile in the human heart.

Japan's *ninja*—has developed to cater to this need. At present Duke Darian holds the old king's fortress, Castle Ereworn, but he is too canny to put his life at risk by claiming the crown.

Merchant-adventurers seldom brave the ports of Ereworn, for villains lurk as thick as shadows and one's life may be lost as easily as one's merchandise. Outside the towns, the countryside is bleak and scattered with crude forts and peasant hovels. Many villages are deserted because of the Black Death that has claimed many of the people in recent years. At night the peasants shutter their windows and cower by the fireside while goblins dance on the rooftops and the Devil, they say, stalks the land with his two hounds—Pestilence and Plague.

Deep within the Pagan Mountains, beyond the bandits' foothills, a number of proud Dwarves dwell. Rarely seen by people, these Dwarves are vaguely aware of the problems of Ereworn, and long ago withdrew from all diplomatic and mercantile contact with the humans of the kingdom.

Glissom

The social structure, customs and religion of this small country resemble those of Ereworn. You will find a description of it in the adventure-book *The Prince of Darkness* (see page 255).

The Stranded Isles

A few words will suffice for these forlorn islands which are located dead west of Ellesland in the Hadran Sea. They are permanently covered by a pall of mist, for they lie at a point where the winds are still. We must rely on mariners' tales for our knowledge of the isles—as, for example, in the logbook of Olo of Cornumbria, whose ship was becalmed there for ten days. Olo wrote that “the sea was like a pane of blue glass, the mist like drifting strands of silk”. Several of his crew claimed to see wild naked figures leaping among the cliffs by the shore, but there is some evidence that they had by this time resorted to drinking salt water. Only adventurers would have any reason to journey to this forsaken corner of the world.

The North-west Mainland

The people of Chaubrette, Algandy and Kurland—the three great kingdoms of the north-west penin-

sula—incline to the view that the Elleslanders are simple ruffians, with coarse ways that set them little above their barbaric neighbours. Occasional wars across the Glaive¹ over the years have caused much ill-feeling and doubtless fuelled this prejudice.

The royal families and nobilities of these countries are strongly linked by blood—and, in fact, there are also ties with some of the lords of Albion.² The last twenty years or so have been relatively peaceful. The land is fertile, trade profitable. Life is comfortable even for the peasantry. The robber knights, who had been marauding and trouble-making through the length and breadth of the land for centuries, have been given an acceptable outlet for their rapaciousness in the form of the Crusades.³ The Age of Chivalry is thus flowering, and warlike energies are channelled into such sport as tourneys, jousts and steeplechases. The perfect gentle knight of an elegant castle in, say, Chaubrette cuts a very different figure from his rough Elleslandic cousin, sitting in a draughty keep, clutching a wench in one hand and a brimming mead-horn in the other.

From a geographic point of view, these lands are generally higher and more mountainous than Ellesland. Climate is similar, warmed by south-westerly ocean currents from the tropics.⁴ These lands are more densely populated, and large tracts of forest have been cleared for farming.⁵

The Gouge

This is a deep rift-valley that cuts like a scar through the Drakken Peaks. The wind that screeches along it carries a permanent bitter chill. From some mountain tops along the edge of the Gouge one may look

1 *The Glaive: the channel separating Ellesland from the mainland.*

2 *As an example, Montombre's wife Talia is a niece of the King of Algandy.*

3 *The idea of the Crusade was formed jointly by the Pontiff and King Vergang of Algandy. Nominally a Holy War, it was more truthfully a way of getting these troublesome knights out of 'civilized' regions and putting them somewhere that they could grab land to their hearts' content.*

4 *Krarth and the Mercanian Coast do not receive the benefit of these warm currents and are correspondingly colder than Ellesland even though at much the same latitude. Krarth in particular is a flat country subject to winds off the polar ice. Temperatures drop to -30° Celsius or lower in winter and rarely attain +15° in midsummer. Contrast this with the mean annual range of -6° to +28° Celsius for Albion.*

5 *Even so, some 10%–30% of the countryside is wild forest. Areas which appear close together on the map may be quite isolated from one another. A traveller might easily encounter a forgotten palace enclosed by tangled woods barely a day's ride from a bustling town. This is particularly true of Algandy, whose woodland areas have an ill and eerie repute. There are times of the year when the moon raises a luminous ground-mist from the rotting leaves, and faerie sorcery drips from the boughs of old oaks....*

CHAPTER 19

THE DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN

An introductory scenario for 4-6 1st-rank characters

By Frazer Payne

How to GM this adventure

THIS ADVENTURE IS designed to show you how to structure and run a typical *Dragon Warriors* scenario. Each location where the characters may go is described in its own section, called a scene, along with any non-player characters they may meet there. At the end of each scene you'll find a list of likely choices the players might make and directions to the appropriate scene.

For example, you might see "If the players take the overgrown left path, turn to scene 7, The Secret Path. If they follow the stream, turn to scene 8, The Cottage". All text in italics may be read directly to the players. You can paraphrase it if you prefer.

Several sections also include boxed text. Here you will find an explanation of why certain events and locations appear in the adventure. Read back to back, these boxed sections form a guide to GMing and writing your own adventures. Read them at your leisure; you don't need to refer to them while you are running the game.

On the next page is a diagram showing the path the story will take. This is based on the structure of a traditional folk-tale or myth. You don't have to

draw one of these diagrams for your own scenarios, or structure them the same way, but this one will help you understand what is happening in this particular adventure, and why events occur in a certain order. Notice also the line at the top, showing how the level of action and tension grows from event to event, until it peaks at the climax.

GamesMaster's Overview

The characters arrive at Maiden's Vale, a village under a curse. If a child is born on the night of a full moon, two nights later a strange house appears in the forest. At daybreak three days after its birth, the child will ail and pass away. Local legend tells how the mistress of the house, a 'White Lady' known as Queen Fhionn, eternally mourns her own lost child and so steals the lives of others. Over the years many have attempted to reach the house and defeat this evil spirit. No one has ever returned.

The local lord, Sir Olvar, and his wife Lady Angela have long been envied by their cousin, the scheming Maxim Le Cloche.

Two days ago, on the night of the full moon, Lady Angela gave birth to a son. A storm began and the lights of the white house appeared between the lashing branches of the trees high on the wooded slopes above the town. Sir Olvar rode out to seek the house and demand of Queen Fhionn that she spare his child.

As soon as Sir Olvar had departed, Le Cloche seized control of the manor house and ejected Lady

Angela and her child, who have taken shelter in her cook's humble cottage. He has brought in a band of hired thugs from nearby towns to enforce his strict new rule. Le Cloche assumes that Sir Olvar will never return and the child will fall foul of the curse, leaving him heir to the title of Lord of Maiden's Vale. But when the characters undertake to find Sir Olvar and rid the village of Queen Fhionn, he takes steps to ensure they never reach their goal.

Pre-game preparation

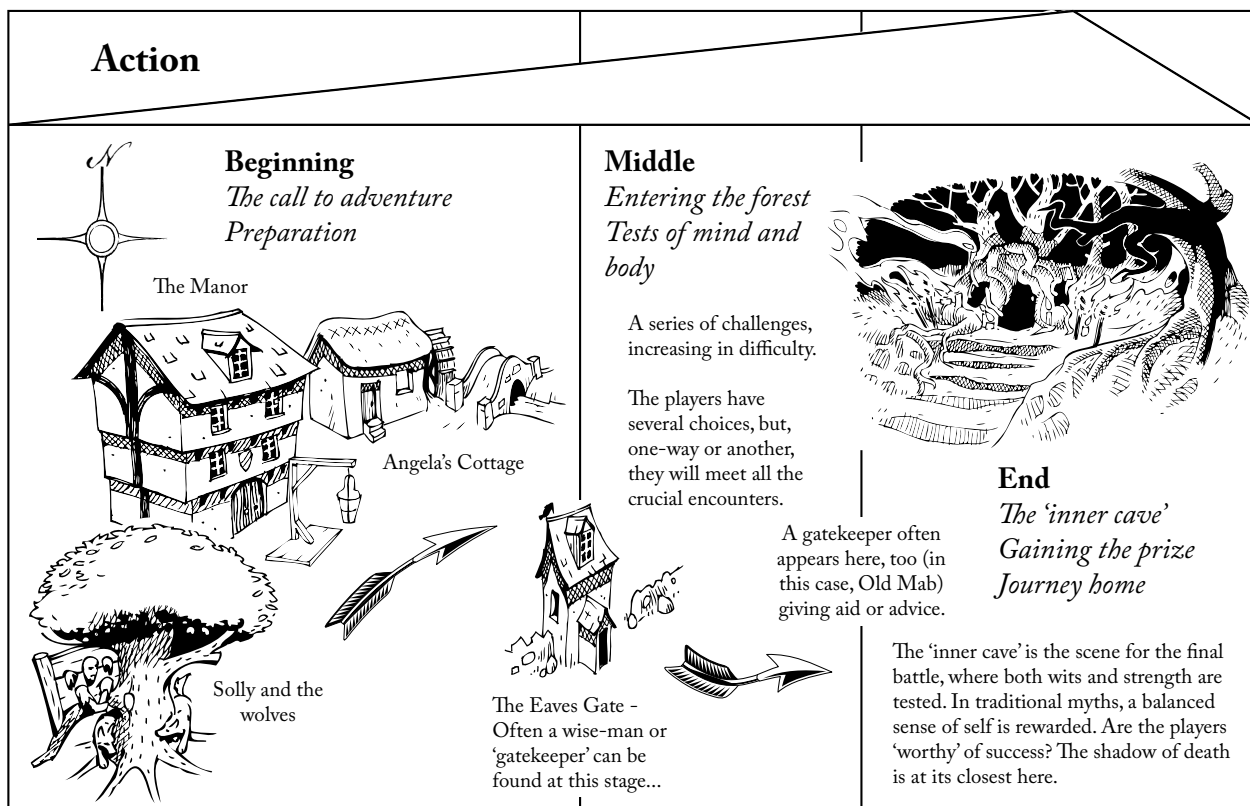
This is probably the first time the players' characters have adventured together, or at all. The question is: why should they work together, rather than wander off to achieve their own personal goals?

Your first task as a GM is to encourage the players to think of reasons why their characters are bound together. Try asking the players to write a brief background history for their character, including their mannerisms, motivations, and family life.

Next, invite the players to briefly discuss ways in which their characters might be connected with at least one other in the party ("She's my friend," "I know of him by reputation only," "We are twins" etc). This adds depth to the characters.

Now when a companion gets into trouble, the others will not simply shrug and continue filling their backpacks with treasure, but charge to the rescue. This makes for a richer game for all concerned. Of course, some of the connections might be negative rather than positive ("I secretly harbour a vendetta against him, and am waiting for my chance to strike!") but such connections should be rare. Too many of these, and the party will scatter rather than bind together.

Since this is their first adventure, we are going to take the opportunity to contribute to the background history of one of the characters in particular. This will ensure they are deeply committed to completing the adventure.



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Choose the player whose character is the most high-born (such as a knight). This character is going to begin the game with a mission. Read out the following to that player, allowing all the players to hear: *A few days ago you were called to your father's private chamber.*

"I have good news," he told you. "Your second cousin, the Lady Angela and her husband, Sir Olvar, will shortly be blessed with a child. They deserve all the support our family can muster. I want you to escort Mother Clay to their village, Maiden's Vale. She's the finest nurse for leagues around, and sure to bring the child up to be proper and strong."

Beside your father, hunched on a stool, was the old crone known as Mother Clay, a faithful retainer to your family since before written history. She is thought of fondly by the elders of the family, and with vague dread by the youngsters. You have been subjected to her foul-tasting 'cures' on more than one occasion.

"When you present yourself to them," your father continued, "give them this gift with the best wishes of our family, and place yourself humbly at their service. If you are determined to be someone of substance in this world, this will set you on that road."

"The way to Maiden's Vale is long, and not without

some small danger. Take some friends who you trust.

"Sometimes you let your heart rule your head. Stay sharp, and bring honour to our family. Dismissed."

Your father then handed you a package and a letter bound with the family seal. By his gruff manner it was clear that this meeting was at an end.

The package, should anyone open it, contains a finely crafted wooden doll. Its teeth are made of pearl, and its eyes of blue lapis lazuli. The letter, addressed to Sir Olvar, explains who the character is and expresses the assurance that he will be of service to Sir Olvar in any endeavour.

The player's character will know of Maiden's Vale: it lies in the west of Baron Aldred's fief, at the edge of Helfax Wood and the first peaks of the Shrivens Hills, but too small to appear on any map.

Scene 1:

On the Road

Read this out loud to all the players:

You have been on the road for several days now. For the last two it has rained incessantly. To make matters worse

Mother Clay has done nothing but complain about her various ailments. Still, there is not much further to go. As night approaches, you look forward to the comfort of a warm bed for the night, and the chance to show your quality to your cousin and her husband. You think fondly of the rich rewards their patronage might bring.

At this point it can be helpful to invite the players to describe the appearance of their characters to each other. If the players are reticent about speaking in character at this stage, don't worry. It can take a while to relax into roleplaying. Just keep the action moving along. Stress how the sound of the rain makes it hard to be heard, how everyone's hair is plastered to their faces, and how freezing water is soaking through their travel-cloaks and running down their necks. Feel free to improvise the ramblings of the old crone, Mother Clay. She is unhappy about having to travel at her age, and dismissive of the young folk who have been assigned to protect her.

Once the players have had time to banter in-character, go to the next scene.

Scene 2:

Solly in the Stocks

The track winds northwards up a hill, so sodden that it is more like a muddy river than a road. Cresting the top, you find yourself looking down on the village of Maiden's Vale: a huddle of ancient stone houses weighed down by moss-coated thatched roofs, in a valley of dark woodland. No glimmer of welcoming firelight can be seen in the windows, or wood-smoke curling from the chimneys. The village looks deserted. In the centre is a small square, overshadowed by a manor house remarkable for its even greater age. It stands a storey higher than the rest, with walls made of wattle around row upon row of mill stones, giving it an armoured appearance.

Beside the road is a huge oak tree. Its thick boughs, bent by age, rest on the ground. Fixed between two of them is a wooden stocks. A bedraggled man sits on a third bough, his head and hands locked into the rough wood shackles. He looks scared.

Dark shapes are circling the foot of the tree—a pack of feral dogs. They stop trying to reach the prisoner, and instead lope towards you, tongues lolling hungrily.

There is one feral dog for each member of the party. The village is still a quarter of a mile away. If the

party try and outrun the dogs, describe how Mother Clay cannot keep up. They will have to fight.

FERAL DOGS

ATTACK 12, Fangs (d4, 3)	AF 0
DEFENCE 3	Movement 12m(25m)
MAGICAL DEFENCE 1	EVASION 3
Health Points 5	STEALTH 16
Rank-equivalent: 1st	PERCEPTION 11

Remember that combatants take turns, those with the highest Reflexes go first. The feral dogs will not attack Mother Clay, who will avoid them by staying in the party's midst. They are hungry, and will fight to the death.

After the fight, the players may choose to ignore the man in the stocks. In this case, describe how Mother Clay breaks from her monologue of ills and squints at the man. "Solly? Is that you? What are you doing out here?" she cries, and bustles over to him, tutting. She knows him as a long-serving member of Olvar's household. If the player-characters approach the man, read out the following:

As you approach, the man's expression of gratitude turns to confusion, then pain. Something whizzes from amongst the higher branches to hit him on the head! You see a scrawny squirrel further up the tree, throwing acorns at the forlorn prisoner. From its chirruping, it seems to be enjoying itself. It is remarkably accurate.

The strange creature will evade all attempts to catch or injure it before escaping through the tree tops. This squirrel is important to the adventure later on.

SCRAWNY SQUIRREL

ATTACK Not applicable	AF 0
DEFENCE 9	Movement 15m(20m)
MAGICAL DEFENCE 6	EVASION 8
Health Points 10	

The man is Solly, a servant in Sir Olvar's household. If the players ask why he is in the stocks, read out the following:

"All I did was show surprise when Maxim Le Cloche came barging into the manor house yesterday morning. Next thing I know, he's dragged Lady Angela from her bed and cast her and her newborn into the street. Well, of course, I asked him on whose authority he had the right to treat her ladyship so. He says, 'On the authority of the new lord of the manor—me!' Then he charges me