



COMBAT PRIMER

FRANK BRUPPER
DESIGNER & WRITER

ZACH HOEFER
PROOFREADER

BETH ABEL, KEN BUTCHER, PHIL COBURN, JODY KUHNS, ZACH HOEFER
PLAYTESTING

MG, IF, SB, THE NS D20 CLUB, CHRIS DODD, AND MATT URBANSKI
ADDITIONAL PLAYTESTING

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HOW TO USE THIS PRIMER

Read it through once. Then get some friends together and grab sample characters from Appendix Two. Choose one of the sample scenarios on p. 16 and try it!

There aren't character creation rules included in the *Primer* (it's not the *Character Creation Primer*, after all!), but don't let that stop you from tweaking the sample characters. Give them different fighting styles and try the same fight again. See what happens, then post about it. With your feedback, we'll make the game even better!

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Thanks for downloading, reading, and playing the *Spellbound Kingdoms Combat Primer*.

Make no mistake, *Spellbound Kingdoms* is a complete fantasy RPG. In the Kingdoms, you'll find zeppelins, courtesans, feral children, alchemy, sorcery, engineering, politics, dragons, and slaving undead. But in this *Primer*, the focus is on combat.

Here's what I hope you get out of the *Primer*:

† Combat is fast. No initiative means no waiting.

† Combat is tactical. Every round, there are meaningful tactical decisions to make. Moreover, those decisions don't degenerate into choices made at character creation.

† Combat is fun! For example, to make sure that you don't often whiff with your ultimate maneuver, there are mechanics like inspirations and mood.

† Combat is dynamic. You'll be leaping off balconies, climbing up dragons' backs, insulting your enemy to throw him off guard, and toppling caryatid columns on top of hapless kingsmen.

† Combat is easy to learn but difficult to master. Style sheets make it simple to fight, and there is never any math after a die roll. Still, there is complexity waiting to be discovered. Which style counters which other style? What maneuver or what style is best depending on terrain, combat objective, enemy morale and skill, your allies' styles and skill, the number of enemies, the quality of their gear, and a thousand other factors?

So that's what I hope you get out of it. What I hope that I get out of it (you didn't think this *Primer* was totally free, did you?) is feedback. Lots of it! ENWorld.org, rpg.net, spellboundkingdoms.com, the Forge - post your feedback. Please! The full game comes out in August, and your feedback can help make it the best.

I will see you on the boards.
Enjoy the *Primer*!

COMBAT OVERVIEW

Here's an overview of combat:

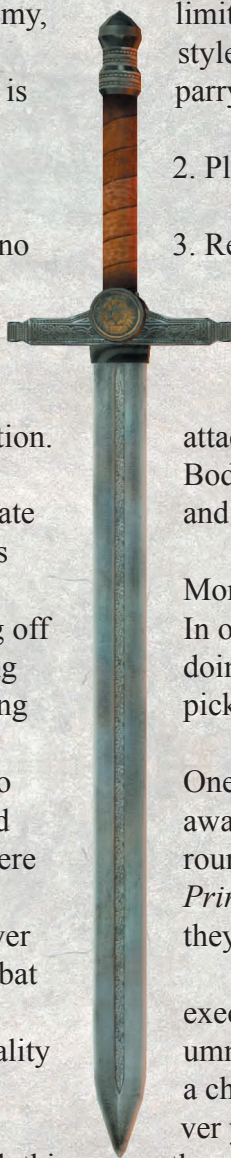
1. There is no initiative. Players and GM choose actions simultaneously. A player's choice of actions is limited by his character's current maneuver. Some styles don't teach you how to follow a lunge with a parry, for example.
2. Players and GM reveal actions simultaneously.
3. Resolve all actions simultaneously. Each maneuver on the combat style sheet lists an attack die (on the left) and a defense die (on the right). Roll the attack die against your target. Roll the defense die against anyone attacking you. On a hit, the default damage is 1 Body. That can change, so know your maneuvers and weapons.

More information follows, but that's the basic idea. In other words: "Watch what your opponent is doing and guess what he's going to do next. Then pick your maneuver, reveal it, and resolve it."

One more thing that you might want to know right away: Which maneuvers are possible in a given round? Look at your style's sheet (at the end of the *Primer*). Balancing maneuvers are underlined, and they're always possible.

Beyond that, the only maneuvers that you can execute are those that are in the same row or column as your current maneuver. Think of a rook on a chessboard. If a rook can move from the maneuver you just executed to the maneuver in question, then that maneuver is possible. If a rook couldn't get there, then it's not possible. Your style doesn't teach such a transition.

That's it! You can play with just those rules, but keep reading. That was only a quick explanation. Below, we go at a more leisurely pace, and I'll cover a lot more detail.



FIGHTING STYLES

Fighting skillfully in the Kingdoms means fighting in a particular style.

Every style is different. One style may teach the student how to disarm his opponent after parrying, while another may teach the student how to disarm only when he is on the offensive and backing his opponent down. A third style might never teach a disarm maneuver at all.

The key point to understand is that each style requires its own footwork, balance, timing, grip, and positioning. Each develops its own mental, physical, and emotional approach to combat. Swashbucklers swing from chandeliers and slash at opponents, savages charge and bear hug and bite, and guardsmen hunker behind shields and probe for a counterattack.

Each fighting style has requirements listed in the lower left hand corner. If you do not meet the fighting style's requirements, you cannot fight in that style. If, possibly through injury or fatigue, you do not meet the requirements of any styles that you know, you can only use the basic combat maneuvers. The basic combat maneuvers are listed in the lower right of every style sheet, and anyone can use them.

CHOOSING ACTIONS & THE STYLE SHEET

Each style has a flowchart, or style sheet, that depicts the maneuvers taught by that combat style. The attack die of the maneuver is to the left of the maneuver, and the defense die is to the right. When you execute a maneuver, roll the attack die. Whenever you are attacked, roll the defense die. If the attack die beats the defender's die, the attack scores and does one point of damage (possibly more, depending on weapons, armor, and other factors, as we will see below). Ties go to the larger die size; rolls that are still tied are re-rolled.

The style sheet also shows which maneuvers are accessible from which other maneuvers.

An accessible maneuver is one in the same row or column as the current maneuver.

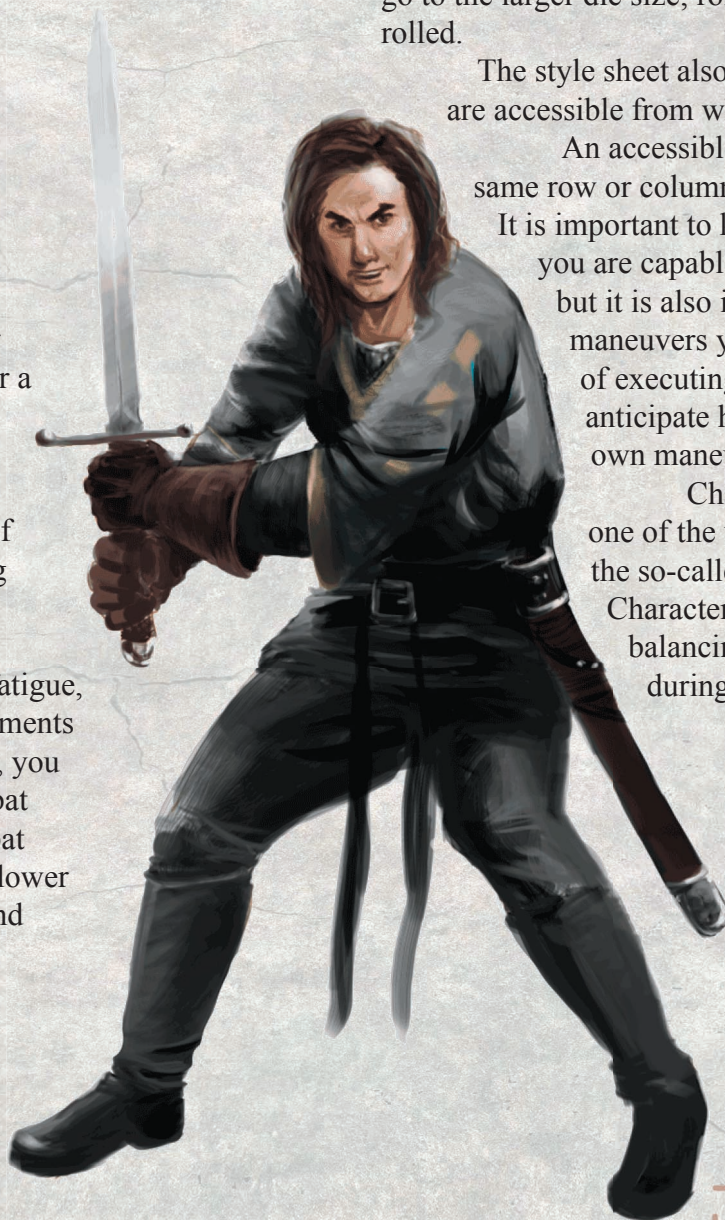
It is important to know what maneuvers you are capable of executing next round, but it is also important to know what maneuvers your opponent is capable of executing. That way, you can anticipate his actions and choose your own maneuvers to counter.

Characters begin combat with one of the underlined maneuvers, the so-called balancing maneuvers.

Characters may also rebalance to a balancing maneuver at any time during combat. In this case, the

balancing maneuver does not need to be in the same column or row as the character's current maneuver.

As I said in the overview, think of a rook on a chessboard. If a rook can get there (without jumping over any gaps in the row or column), then



TARGETING & ROUND LENGTH

your style allows you to flow into that maneuver from your current maneuver. This represents the style's teachings: one style may teach the footwork necessary to follow a spin with a jab, while another may teach you how to follow a spin with a parry or feint.

A player can use a figure or a die to keep track of her maneuvers on her style sheet. When it is time to reveal her choice for the round's maneuver, she simply moves her figure or die to the new maneuver.

Dice can be useful if there are multiple enemies: in that case, the number on the die designates which enemy you are attacking. A figure's facing can also designate an enemy.

The combat style sheets are at the end of the *Primer*. Following each sheet is a concordance that explains each maneuver.

Example. Fighting in Free Sword style, Vasquez feints to open the combat. Feint is in the same column as Precise Strike, Spin, and Unbalancing Feint, so he could use any of those maneuvers next round. He could also use any of the re-balancing maneuvers next round (Lunge, Warrior's Strike, Block, or Feint again). But that's it. He could not Trip, or push forward in an Onslaught. Those maneuvers can't follow a Feint in the Free Sword style.

Example. Jude is sniping with a bow in Arrowheart style. He can open the combat with Archer's Shot, Shot on the Run, Arrow Stab, or Aim and Breathe. He decides to take an Archer's Shot. Now his choices are the same three as before, plus Tumble and Shoot. He chooses Aim and Breathe in the second round. After he has aimed, in the next round he can choose any action on the chart with the exception of Penetrate and Anticipate (both of which must be preceded by a Mighty Pull).

Combat is a terrible mix of chaos and threat. Each round, you are assumed to be engaged with and threatening all other creatures in your area. Your action for the round – usually a combat maneuver – represents your best chance to score damage or cause some other effect.

You can target any other creature in your area with a melee attack. See Movement and Maps below for more information on areas.

Rounds vary in length. Generally, they are about six seconds long, but a round where all combatants circle each other, posture, and trade insults might be much longer. The GM is the final arbiter of round length, should it ever matter (usually it only matters for how long a noble can prattle on while the warriors go about the real business of combat!).

DICE EXPLODE

Dice explode, meaning that if you roll a maximum score on a die, you roll the next higher die size and take your best single roll as the result. For example, if you roll a 4 on a d4, then you also roll a d6. If you get a 5 or a 6, then that is the result of your roll. Otherwise, if the d6 rolls lower than the 4 on the d4, you keep the 4.

The usefulness of exploding dice diminishes as the die size increases. This is mitigated in the full game by appropriate talents.

WHAT'S HERE AND WHAT'S NOT



While the heart of the combat system is in the *Primer*, a number of combat rules are left out. All of the advanced fighting styles – called grand styles – are absent, for example. Rules for surprise, breaking items, mounted and vehicular combat, underwater and aerial combat, magical combat, extended stealth rules, maiming, healing, and more are all in the game but not in the *Primer*.



MULTIPLE ATTACKS & DEFENSES

If an attack is listed as d4/d4, that means that the character attacks twice. The attacks may be made against separate targets.

If a character executes a maneuver with a bonus such as “+1 attack die size next round,” and he follows that with a multiple attack maneuver such as d4/d4, the bonus applies to both of the attacks, making it d6/d6 in this case.

Multiple defense dice – say d4/d4 – are rolled against each attack. For example, if a character is two-hand-parrying for d4/d4 defense and comes under attack from two assailants, each making two attacks, then he rolls d4 and a d4 against the first assailant’s first attack, a d4 and a d4 against the first assailant’s second attack, a d4 and d4 against the second assailant’s first attack, and finally a d4 and a d4 against the second assailant’s second attack. Every time, he takes the highest single score on his two d4s as his result.

If a character executes a maneuver with a bonus such as “+1 defense die size next round,” and he follows that with a multiple defense maneuver such as d4/d4, the bonus applies to both of the defenses, making it d6/d6 in this case.

MANEUVERS REQUIRE A TARGET

Attack maneuvers must be executed against a target. A character cannot advance through the maneuvers of his style unless he is engaged with an enemy.

Put another way, a character can’t go through his forms in the villain’s coat closet and then burst out with his ultimate maneuver just as the villain opens the door. This is because a large part of any fighting style involves knocking your opponent off his rhythm, positioning him for your next blow, and judging his own movements in order to set up yours. You can’t do that if you’re fighting empty silk in the coat closet.



DAMAGE & EFFECTS

If a maneuver lists no effect, then it deals 1 body damage on a hit. If it lists an effect, it does no body damage; rather it causes the effect on a hit.

If it lists “1 + [effect],” then it does both 1 body damage and the effect (still, only on a hit; misses cause no damage or other effect).

Many effects are possible.

“Rebalance” means that on a successful hit, your opponent must rebalance next round (that is, execute a maneuver that is underlined on the style sheet, or else break style completely with one of the maneuvers in the lower right corner of the style sheet). Your opponent also loses any bonuses he might have built up, such as “+1 die size to next attack.”

“Unsteady” means that your opponent is knocked off his rhythm, although not as severely as a “rebalance” result. An unsteadied opponent must either break style, rebalance, or execute a maneuver that is adjacent to a re-balancing maneuver.

“1[characteristic]” such as “1 Str” means that the attack does 1 point of damage to the characteristic. This is important partly because of the minimum characteristic requirements for a style. A character brought below his minimum Strength for a style, for example, is too fatigued to carry on in that style. He might be reduced to panting and heaving, using only the basic “no-style” maneuvers available to everyone (in the bottom right of every style sheet). As with body damage, no healing is available in the *Primer*.

“Move 1 area” means you may move your target 1 area into an area of your choice. A target moved against its will must also rebalance.

“Move” means you may move as part of the maneuver. A move is normal horizontal movement. Fancy moves that let you gain altitude – like Climb – say “Move, gain altitude” or something similar.

“(r)” after a maneuver means that you must rebalance after executing that maneuver. “(u)” means you are unsteadied after executing that maneuver.

See the fighting style glosses at the end of the *Primer* for explanations of more special effects.



WORDS HAVE MEANING

Words mean what they say. If an attack says Trip, then it causes the target to fall down. It cannot be successful against a creature that is not standing upright. If an attack says

Death from Above, it cannot be executed without attacking from higher ground.

Note that just because an attack trips a target does not mean that the target begins the next round prone. On the contrary, although Trip maneuvers cause the target to fall down, in most cases it is assumed that, although the target falls, he quickly stands back up, ready to fight again (probably needing to rebalance, as the Trip maneuver states).

MASTER & APPRENTICE

Some maneuvers are marked with an M in the upper-right hand corner. A character cannot use these maneuvers unless he is a master of the style. A character who knows the style but has not yet mastered it is called an apprentice of the style.

SWITCHING STYLES

Switching styles requires a Trick, which is a maneuver located in the lower right corner of the style sheet.

After executing the trick, the character begins the next round executing one of the balancing maneuvers of his new style.

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIONS

In general, any non-attack action is covered by the Trick/Misc. Action maneuver in the lower right corner of the style sheet. This includes picking up a weapon, cutting the cord on the portcullis's counterweight, mounting, opening a door, and more.

A few flamboyant combat styles, such as Swashbuckler and Dagger-and-wine, feature maneuvers that allow for a Trick without breaking style. Others must rebalance after a Trick.

MOVEMENT & MAPS

Combat is broken up into abstract areas. The GM defines areas qualitatively: the library, the balcony, the space inside the giant cake before the royal chef's birthday feast.

Movement within an area is free and assumed as part of the positioning of combat. Movement between areas requires a move action (one action moves one area), which is usually the Trick maneuver in the lower right corner of the style sheet. Some styles have maneuvers that offer optional movement

as part of the attack (Savage Charge, for example).

When you move, you can be attacked in both areas of your movement. That is, if you are rushing up the stairs from the library floor to the balcony, then both the guards on the floor and the kingsman on the balcony can hit you with melee attacks this round, assuming they anticipated your charge and targeted you. On the other hand, when you move, you can only make a melee attack against a target in the area into which you are moving. That is, if you are rushing up the stairs from the library floor to the balcony, then you can only make attacks this round against targets on the balcony. (This applies only to melee attacks; ranged attacks may aim in any direction as usual.)

This means that you do not need a map to play Spellbound Kingdoms. By all means, however, use one if you enjoy doing so. Maps can be beautiful, illuminating, and inspiring. They can also remind players and the GM of the environment tricks available in different areas.

ENVIRONMENT TRICKS

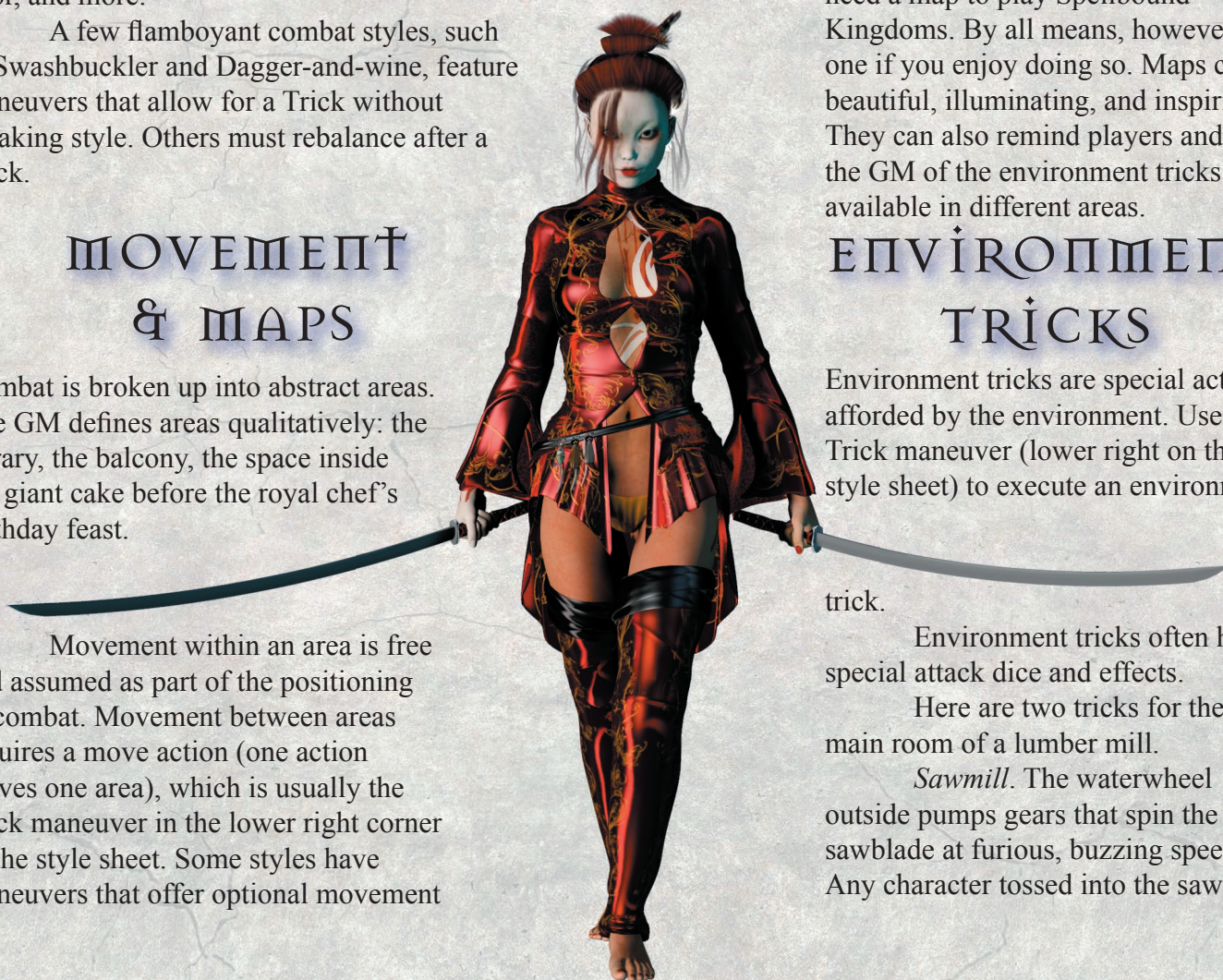
Environment tricks are special actions afforded by the environment. Use the Trick maneuver (lower right on the style sheet) to execute an environment

trick.

Environment tricks often have special attack dice and effects.

Here are two tricks for the main room of a lumber mill.

Sawmill. The waterwheel outside pumps gears that spin the sawblade at furious, buzzing speeds. Any character tossed into the sawblade



CHARACTERISTIC CHECKS

must defend a d10 attack or suffer 2 Body damage. Treat the blade as a separate area, so that maneuvers such as Savage Charge, Driving Onslaught, *et al.* can force opponents into the blade.

Fling Sawdust. Attack die d6. You scoop up sawdust and fling it in your opponent's face. A hit penalizes your opponent with -2 die size to attack and defense until he uses a Trick to wipe his eyes clean.

In most cases, environment tricks should be obvious to characters, and the GM should tell players which environmental tricks are available when the characters first enter an area.

Environmental tricks provide ways for characters without a strong fighting style to be effective in combat. In the full game, there are many engineering environment tricks. Engineers, logically, execute them more effectively than any other class.

SIMULTANEOUS, CONFLICTING ACTIONS

Environmental tricks can lead to simultaneous, conflicting actions. Two characters might pick up the same dropped musket at the same time, for example. Or one character might try to shove a door closed in the same round that another tries to prop it open, or one character grabs a second while he is trying to flee.

Roll a characteristic check to determine the winner. Keep in mind this is not necessarily a Quickness check to see who does his action first. The actions are likely simultaneous. Instead, in the above examples, each character would roll Strength. The higher rolling character yanks the weapon away, or pushes the door into place, or drags the grabbed character into his area.

In the full game, there are histories and skills that modify characteristic checks. For now, to roll a characteristic check, simply roll the largest die that does not exceed the characteristic. For example, a character with Strength 5 would roll a d4 for a Strength check. A character with a 10 Reason would roll a d10 for Reason checks; a character with a 9 Reason would roll a d8.

Characteristic checks can be modified by mood and inspirations (see below) just as any other roll.



WEAPONS & ARMOR

Weapon and armor quality are ranked according to quality. A typical farmer's scythe used as a weapon might be quality 1, while a prince of the blood's broadsword might be quality 8. An average kingsman's sword has quality 3. If your weapon has a quality 3 or more greater than the armor that it is attacking, then your attacks do 1 extra point of damage.

By the same token, if your armor's quality is 3 or more greater than that of the weapon attacking it, then attacks against you deal 1 less damage.

GMs must therefore be careful with weapon and armor qualities. Players must also take care. A beast with a legendarily tough hide either requires a legendary sword to slay it or else judicious use of

SELECTED WEAPONS AND ARMOR

	QUALITY	MIN. STRENGTH	WEALTH LEVEL
Common broadsword	2	4	2
Kingsman's broadsword	3	4	3
Flight officer's cutlass	3	3	4
Common dagger	1	1	1
Tumenant royal dagger	4	1	7
Club, stick, chair leg	1	1	0
Rithite mace ¹	3	4	4
Short bow (ranged)	3	4	3
Culverin (hand cannon) ² (ranged)	5	3	5
Studded leather jacket or hamata	2	3	3
Chain mail hauberk	4	5	4
Sun plate	5	3	6

¹ This weapon treats an opponent's armor quality as one lower than it actually is, so long as the armor does not exceed the weapon's quality.

² This weapon requires a trick/miscellaneous action to reload.

high-damage maneuvers such as Backstab, Spin, and Eviscerate.

Some styles teach maneuvers that improve the effective quality of a weapon, shield, or armor. Some styles also teach maneuvers that attack a weapon or armor and degrade its quality.

5 BODY

Most humans have 4, 5, or 6 Body. (And humans are the most common race in the Kingdoms; the only other intelligent species are trolls, who are elegant, regenerating humans - not warty, hook-nosed bridge haunts).

When a character reaches 0 Body, he can no longer fight. The consequences of this are treated in the full game and include being taken captive, dying, being maimed, and more. For now, simply end the combat.

INSPIRATIONS & STUNTING

To understand the Kingdoms, you have to understand inspirations. Inspirations define a character, motivate her, and breathe life into her.

Inspirations are described in detail in the full game. For now, assume that a character has two or three inspirations such as Loves Brother (3) or Seeks Vengeance on Baron Vountainn (2). The numbers indicate how strong the Inspiration is, and usually run from 1 through 6.

In combat, inspirations function similar to action points. That is, a character can use an inspiration to gain a boost to an action. His love, or vengeance, or madness, or other inspiration spurs him on to greater deeds.

When a character uses an inspiration, he gains his heart die as a bonus to the roll. The result of the roll is highest number showing on either die: the



normal die for the roll or the heart die.

If the player narrates how his inspiration relates to the situation at hand and describes his character's inspiration and action (this is called "stunting"), then the bonus Heart die that he rolls is increased a number of times equal to the value of the inspiration.

A character can decide to use his inspiration after he rolls his initial roll and sees the result.

A character can use each of his inspirations once per combat. Anything more than that causes the inspiration to become a distraction rather than a motivation. Since most characters have only a handful of inspirations, wise use is important. There is no carry-over if an inspiration is not used in a fight; that is, you do not get to use an inspiration twice in the next fight if you don't use it now. It is to the character's advantage to use all of his inspirations in every fight (except if he wants to keep them secret,

but that only occurs in the full game, where secrets are often deadlier than blades...).

Example. A character with a Heart characteristic score of 5 and Ambition: Dreams of Nobility (2) is fighting in Free Sword style. He makes a Warrior's Strike. His attack die is a d6. He rolls a 1 and then decides to use his Ambition to lend him strength. Since he does not narrate anything, he rolls a d4 for his Heart. On this d4, he rolls a 3, and takes that as the result of his attack.

Example. Sergeant-errant Oliver Ghespure, with Heart 7, is inspired by his Faith in the King's Army (2). Fighting a suspected traitor, he executes a Haymaker, which normally attacks with a d8. After Sgt.-Et Ghespure rolls a 2, he falls back on his faith. His player says, "A sergeant in the King's Army cannot fall to a traitorous knave!" He then rolls his Heart die increased twice. This is a d10 (d6 Heart die, increased twice for the narration and value of the

inspiration). He gets a 7 on the d10. The result of his attack is that 7, which is the better of his two dice.

In the full game, social scenes and other activities can cause a character's inspirations to wax and wane. You can sleep with the Baron's wife to reduce his Domineering Pride (3), or write a review in the broadsides that fans the actress's Fear of Aging (2), or spend a night drinking mead and throwing skullrattle dice to increase your Love of a Good Time (4). Inspirations are magical in the Kingdoms, and much play revolves around increasing and decreasing allies' and enemies' inspirations.

MOOD

Moods are "inspiration lite." That is, mood can give you an extra die on a single roll just as an inspiration does. One difference is that mood dice are limited to a single Heart die; the die size cannot increase or decrease (there are many non-combat differences in the full game).

If a character's mood increases by 1, he gains a bonus die equal to his Heart die. He may use this die once, at any subsequent time. It is a bonus die like any other: the player makes the normal roll, and then if he does not like the result, he can roll the mood die and take the higher of the two results.

If a character's mood decreases by 1, he gains a penalty die equal to his Heart die. He must use this in the next round on a meaningful roll of his choice. As a penalty die, he rolls his Heart die along with his normal die and takes the lower of the two as his result.

RANGE

Ranged attacks suffer a -1 die size penalty per area after the first if they travel more than one area away.

Example. Lydia shoots an arrow from the deck of the *Tumult*, across the docks, and into the harbormaster's office. This is two areas away (deck → docks → office), so she takes a -1 die size penalty to her attack die.

Example. Samuel Torch throws his knife from the entryway all the way across the great hall, which

the GM has described as divided into four areas (entryway at the foot of the hall, feasting tables, low stairs, and lord's table). Samuel takes a -2 die size penalty because the lord's table is three areas away (foot → feasting tables → stairs → lord's table).

CRITICAL HITS

Any time the defender rolls a 1 and the attacker rolls over half on his die, the hit is a critical hit. The attack does one extra point of damage.

DICE SIZES & SIZE WRAP

Die sizes are d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20. They can never be reduced to lower than d2. If modifiers increase a die size above d20, it starts rolling over again at d4.

Example. A d12 attack is increased by three die sizes. It becomes a d20 and a d6. Both are rolled, and the best single number is the result.

GRAB

You can grab someone else in combat. Most of the time, if you succeed with a grab attack, then both you and your target are considered grabbed. Some attacks, such as Dagger-and-wine's Tangled Cloak, grab a target without causing the attacker to be grabbed.

When grabbed, you can't move, and you can only execute re-balancing maneuvers or Grab maneuvers (such as Bear Hug or Throw). You can also execute reasonable tricks, including a Strength vs. Strength check to break the grab.

Grabs end after one turn if not maintained. For example, if Octavia entangles Wilhelm in a bedsheet in round one, then Wilhelm is grabbed during round two. He is free in round three, however, unless Octavia successfully executes another Tangled Cloak maneuver in round two.

SITUATIONAL MODIFIERS

Many situational modifiers are already included in the fighting styles. The Savage style's Dive, and the Swashbuckler style's Death from Above, for example, both include a higher ground advantage for the attacker.

Modifiers should only be applied for truly unusual circumstances, such as an earthquake causing the Hall of Mirrors to collapse on the combatants, or being poisoned before fighting in a duel, or several ballistae firing directly into the combat. When modifiers are applied, they usually take the form of a penalty to attack or defense dice.

TRAINED VS. MOOKS

If you are trained in a combat style and attack someone who is not, you do one extra point of damage on a hit. "Trained" means that you know a combat style at the apprentice level or higher.

This, combined with the weapon and armor rule (red shirts do not make good armor!), means that mooks can go down in one or two hits. It also means that some PCs are mooks – in combat, if not elsewhere. So be careful!

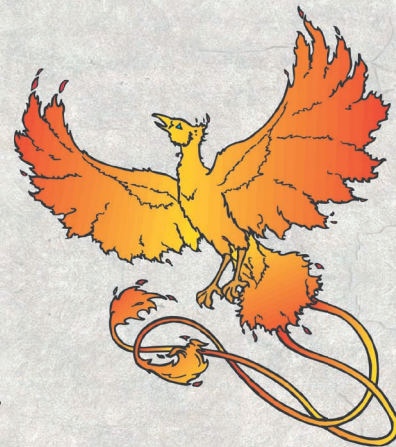


MONSTER STYLES

Different anatomies force different fighting styles. A tentacle-dragging skyhook the size of a small village does not draw a saber and carefully strike a Court Sword stance. A twisted giant smashes and stomps in ways that no man-sized creature can emulate. Spellbound Kingdoms accounts for this with dedicated monster fighting styles. These styles are usually based on the physiques of beasts, both natural and man-made.

The *Primer* includes two fighting styles used by monsters: Giant and

Claw/Claw/Bite. The sheets for these monster styles are included at the end of the *Primer* along with the more common fighting styles suited to the anatomy of mankind. In the full game, there are monster styles such as Tentacle, Swarm, Madfire, Zombie, Dragon, Twitcher, and more.





GM TIPS



Spellbound Kingdoms helps the GM keep things moving: no map to draw or lay out, no initiative to track, few persistent conditions, few modifiers, minimal math before the roll, and no math after the roll. Still, style sheets for combat are new for most if not all GMs, and some tips can't hurt. Here are ideas for style sheets and more.

Managing combat style sheets. If you have a lot of bad guys all fighting in the same style, use different figures or dice on the same style sheet. That saves space and time. If you use dice (or figures), assign each player a number (or facing). The die number (or figure facing) indicates the player attacked by that bad guy.

Go ahead and place the style sheets where everyone can see them. Then people can try to predict the bad guys' moves and counterattack accordingly. In the full game, there are sometimes restrictions on peeking at an opponent's style sheet because a neophyte can't always anticipate a veteran's moves. But for now, put the sheets out in the open.

Extra damage rules. With critical hits, the weapon and armor rule, the trained vs. mook rule, and power-up maneuvers like Spin or Furious Rage, there are many ways to deal extra damage. These can add up quickly, which is great because it allows PCs to mow down foes and shows players the power of their characters.

But be careful. PCs can get overmatched by the same rules. In such a situation, you might need to remind players to fight in their most defensive styles.

Style differences. For that matter, you might need to remind players to choose styles with care. Styles have varying effectiveness against each other, and the seasoned warrior knows every style's counter-style.

Create. Design your own environment tricks, combat objectives, maneuvers, and more. As long as you are consistent and having fun, you are playing the game as it was meant to be played!

NARRATION

In I-go-you-go games, it's easy to spot when to narrate: "A 20! Sweet! Harold the Axe leaps off the back of the wagon, cleaving down through the chest of the beastman, cracking ribs as he goes. Ok, Chris, now it's your turn." In SK, everyone goes at once. So when does the GM, or player, narrate?

The easy answer is: narrate whenever it will enrich the game. That is different for every group, but reading your group is one of your jobs as a GM or player (that's why you get paid in rubies as big as your fist, right?).

The hard answer is: narrate when actions are revealed and when they are resolved. When everyone first moves their figures to a new maneuver at the start of a round, narrate the actions. The GM can often

sneak this in while players all look at each others' selections.

For example, if the swashbuckler chooses Death from Above and the kingsman chooses Block, then you have, "Tristan swings off of the balcony, lets go of the rope halfway out over the tavern floor, and plunges toward the guard with his dagger leading the strike. The guard grunts in surprise and yanks his shield up to block." Then both players roll dice, and both actions are resolved. Narrate the outcome. "Tristan thuds onto the kingsman, who couldn't get his shield all the way up in time. Tristan plunges his dagger to the hilt in the burly man's shoulder. The man's grunt of surprise becomes a scream of pain."

EXAMPLE OF COMBAT

In an alley between tenements in the Foreign Quarter of Rithaigh, Anton Poincarre steps out of the shadows to confront Lydia Novele and her companion, Trevor Thorpe. Anton demands the return of the Madfire Seed Lydia took from him. She refuses, and the fight is on.

This alley is near Lydia's one-room home, so the players and the GM already know the environments and the tricks available. We begin!

Round 1. Trevor, a warrior, knows Free Sword and Swashbuckler. Faced with a fop likely to be fighting in Court Sword, Trevor chooses Free Sword, opening with a conservative but potentially telling Warrior's Strike against Poincarre.

Lydia knows only Dagger-and-wine, and she promptly tries to dodge into the shadows.

The GM, playing Anton, does open with Court Sword, in its most defensive balancing maneuver, a feint. He also waves his hand and two archers step into the windows high above the clotheslines and tomato lines.

Now that all have revealed their styles and maneuvers (simultaneously!), attacks are resolved.

Trevor rolls a d6 for his attack against the fop, and Poincarre rolls a d6 for his defense. A 4 for Trevor and a 3 for Poincarre means that Trevor's sword slices a cut along Poincarre's thigh for 1 body damage.

There are no other attacks, so we move to round 2.

Round 2. Trevor, seeing the archers, knows that Free Sword, a stationary style, is not suited for this battle. He breaks style to switch to Swashbuckler. That requires a Trick/Miscellaneous action this round.

Lydia, anticipating archer fire, flashes out of the shadows just enough to "Duck and Slip" between Poincarre and the archers.

Poincarre is injured but imagines that Trevor and Lydia will run for cover from the archers. Not needing to worry about his defenses, he lunges at Lydia.

As the players' and GM's choices are revealed, the GM narrates Poincarre's evil chuckle as he lunges to skewer Lydia. He rolls a d10 for attack (d8 for the

lunge, increased by one for last round's feint) and gets a 5; Lydia matches with a 5 on her d6. Poincarre wins, however, because his die size is larger. He sticks Lydia for 1 point of damage.

Now the archers shoot at Lydia, each fighting



in Arrowheart, each choosing an Archer's Shot. Each rolls a d6, resulting in a 5 and a 3. Lydia rolls her d6 defense twice more, getting a 3 and a 4. The first arrow slices open her shoulder for 1 body damage. The second, however, is now rolled as an attack against Poincarre because of Lydia's duck and slip! The arrow's d6 is a 3 this time. Poincarre rolls his d2 lunge defense and gets a 2. That explodes, so he rolls a d4, but alas, the result is only another 2. His own archer's arrow sticks Poincarre's bicep! The damage is 1 body. Poincarre roars at the archers to hold.

Round 3. Trevor does a daredevil move climbing up the clotheslines and tenement walls to assault one of the archers. Because the maneuver lists "Climb" as a result, he does not need to make a characteristic or skill check to succeed at this.

Lydia decides that her duck and slip won't work this round. She isn't ready to risk a further wound with a low-defense sneak attack, so she thinks

about using the clotheslines to tangle up Poincarre. Ultimately, she decides to dodge into the shadows again.

The archers shoot at Trevor as he scales the tenement, and Poincarre strikes a pose: the "Judge's Stance," a dueling pose taught to him by his honored father the Butcher of Marmn. This is the pose maneuver, and it intimidates those who know it (along with the Poincarre family's reputation for torture).

The GM narrates, and resolution is straightforward. The archers each roll a 4 on a d6; Trevor rolls a 1 and a 5 on his d6. The 1 would result in a critical hit for 2 body damage, but Trevor uses an inspiration - his love for Lydia drives him faster than any arrow can fly - allowing him to roll a d10 for defense (d6 for his heart, increased twice for the stunting narrative description). He rolls a 4, which wins because of the larger d10 die size. The arrows whiz by, and Trevor takes no damage.

Round 4. Lydia decides now is the time: a sneak attack from the shadows can almost finish off Poincarre. She whirls out of the shadows and slices at his throat.

Trevor thinks about a spectacular strike involving tomatoes and laundry thrown into the face of a humiliated archer, but he wants to maintain his momentum for next round. He decides to attack the highest archer with a charge.

Poincarre has his feet under him now; he

knows how to riposte out of the Judge's Stance pose. That is what he will do. His archers run for their lives into the tenement hallways, not willing to face a swashbuckler at close range.

Lydia rolls a 3 on her d8; Poincarre rolls a 2 on his defense and a 4 on his Reputation die (bonus from posing last round). The rogue misses! But Lydia uses an Inspiration - ambition to become a Queen Below, and Poincarre stands in her way - and she rolls a 5 on her inspiration d12. She hits. Normally, this would do 2 body damage, but Poincarre's armor is of higher quality than Lydia's weapon, so it deals only one point of damage. Poincarre is at 2 body.

Poincarre would have a chance to riposte against Lydia if she had missed, but she did not.

Trevor's charge on the archer allows him to slice one for 2 body damage (4 on a d6 vs. 1 for the archer's defense; a critical hit).

Round 5. Seeing his archers chased off, Poincarre turns to flee.

Trevor has other ideas. He leaps from the balcony, swinging down on a tomato line, screaming Poincarre's name. This is a Death from Above maneuver. Lydia dodges into the shadows again.

Trevor's is the only attack. He rolls a 4 on his d8; Poincarre gets a 3 on his d4. Trevor hurtles down, smashes into Poincarre and finishes the combat with the fop bleeding and groaning underfoot!

COMMON ENVIRONMENT TRICKS

TRICK	ATTACK/ DEFENSE	EFFECT
Set fire to an area	-/-	1 body damage per round to all in area
Take cover	-/+2 die size	+2 die size to defense vs. ranged until you move
Crash through glass/wall (on purpose)	d6 vs. you/-	1 body vs. you if hit; +1 Mood to you and allies
Sandbag dropped on head	d4/-	1 body + rebalance
Soup in the face	d6/-	-2 die size to attack and defense next round
Fall off a ledge	-/-	Rebalance + 1 body/five feet beyond ten feet
Use bystander as marionette	d4/d2	1+2 Mood damage to humiliated foe; +1 Reputation to you
Rip open a bag of flour	-/-	-3 attack die size & -1 defense die size to all in area
Tie foe to ox cart, slap ox	d2/-	Move (random) & 1 body/round until untied (Trick unties)

TWO SEEDS & TWO SCENES

Here are four different combat playtests to run. The first two are seeds. Plant them on your table, water them with dice and Cheetos, and see what sprouts. The second three are slightly more detailed scenes.

First seed: Kumite. The first combat you might want to try is a good old-fashioned, one-on-one Bloodsport style tournament. Stage your duels on a bare sand arena floor, one character vs. another, nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. Use all the sample characters provided. Tell me who wins!

Second seed: Monster and pie. Next try a standard adventuring party vs. monsters scenario. The players each pick a character while the GM picks out a sample monster or two. Then the PCs kick down the doors and try to take the pie.

First scene: Tower assault. On top of the inn's old stone tower, the innkeeper's daughter Jeny is about to be sacrificed by her father, Orson, who is a druid. The players have 15 rounds to get to the top and stop the ceremony.

The inn has three levels. The first is watched by two nervous, emaciated druidic cultists (body 3, leather 1, dagger 1, Free Sword). A fire crackles in the hearth, and venison stew bubbles in a pot. The door to the tower stairs is locked with a key held by one of the cultists.

The second level smells like a barn. It houses three descent lions (see the end of the *Primer*), who have made a den of the girl's bed. Stairs rise 30 feet to the roof.

The roof is clerestoried. The daughter is chained to the ground where her father (body 5, leather 2, two daggers 3, Twin Sword, Savage) and his two acolytes (body 4, leather 1, Savage) are prepared to sacrifice her.

Second scene: Broadsides at 1000 feet. Two zeppelins are side by side, 1000 feet in the air, and the only way the characters' zeppelin can escape is if they cut all five grappling lines tethering the two vehicles together. The other zeppelin has four archers (body 4, chain 3, bow 3, cover) in the rigging who continually shoot at the party. The other zeppelin also has six

pirates in the boarding party (body 4, leather 2, cutlass 2, Free Sword). Each grappling line requires a combat trick to cut, and each line is in a separate area (some are gunwale to gunwale, but others are rigging to rigging or even cannon brace to gunwale).



⊕ BALANCE

Keep in mind that not all styles are meant to be balanced against each other individually. Rather, the game as a whole is balanced. Some styles should consistently kick certain other styles from here to the Kingdoms and back!

MORE TO COME!


The styles presented in the *Combat Primer* comprise roughly half the styles in the full game. The other half includes many grand styles, which are apprenticed only by masters of the more common styles presented here.

The full book also includes variations. Variations have names like Fra Lippi's Escape, Bonetti's Defense, and Northern Free Sword. In a variation, one or more maneuvers of a style are replaced by others maneuvers. For example, in Northern Free Sword, the Free Sword's Unbalancing Feint maneuver is replaced by an Overhead Chop (r). This sacrifices defense and versatility for offense. Bonetti's Defense, of course, is perfect for rocky terrain (or any uncertain surface, such as the deck of an out of control zeppelin or a castle wall crumbling under trebuchet assault).


Variations, magic, inspirations, chases, mass combat, guild and kingdom rules – all are waiting in the core book. And of course there are social encounter rules. If you like the combat rules, you'll love everything else. So come on back in August and buy the full game!


ARROWHEART

COMBAT STYLE


M
d6  d2
Penetrate (r)
2 + ignore 2 armor


0  d2
Mighty Pull
Ignore range penalties
for first three areas
next rd


M
d6  d2
Anticipate (r)
Name maneuver;
3 dmg if correct


d4  d8
Shoot and Dive (r)
1 + take cover

d8  d2
Rapid Shot


d4  d2
Called Shot: Leg (r)
1 + rebalance


0  d4
Aim and Breathe
+1 atk die size next rd


d4  d2
Called Shot:
Arm (r)
Atk. vs. Str
or dropped

d2  d2
Called Shot:
Head and Neck (r)
3

d4  d4
Arrow Stab

d6  d2
Archer's Shot
1 + take cover

d4  d6
Tumble and Shoot

d2  d4
Shot on the Run
Move

Requires bow.

All attacks except Arrow
Stab are ranged.

Strike
Str/d2

Defend
0/Qck

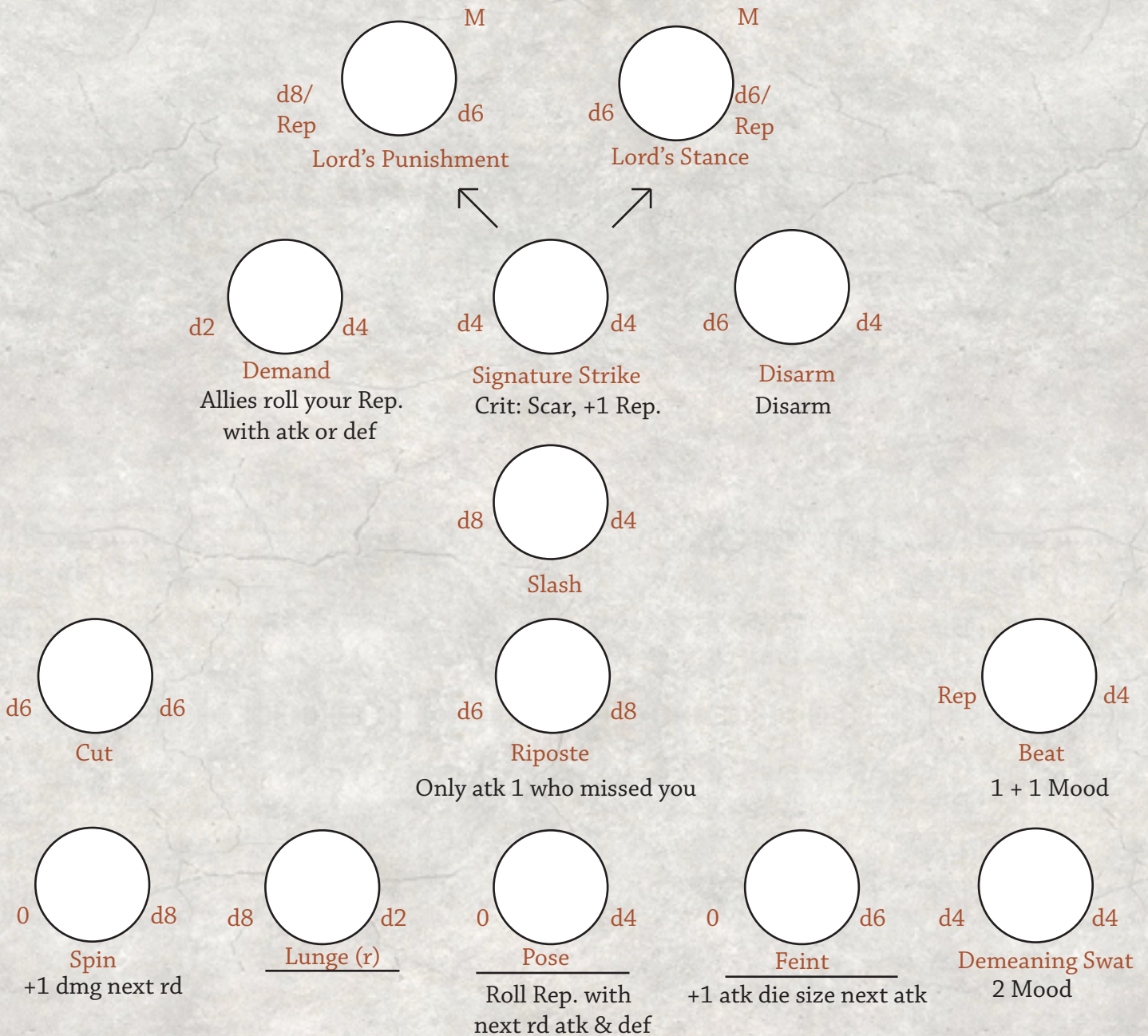
Grab
Str/d2

Throw/Shoot
Qck/d2

Trick/Misc.
0/d4

COURT SWORD

COMBAT STYLE



Requires weapon, no shield.

Strike

Str/d2

Defend

0/Qck

Grab

Str/d2

Throw/Shoot

Qck/0

Trick/Misc.

0/d4

DAGGER-AND-WINE

COMBAT STYLE



Between the Ribs (r)
2



Backstab (r)
3



Disarming Embrace
Disarm



Tangled Cloak
Grabbed
Req. cloak, bedsheets, etc.



Dodge into Shadows
+1 dmg next rd



Hide in Shadows
Move



Whirling Trick
Move + env. trick



Sneak Attack



Dagger Flurry



Duck and Slip
If missed, atk goes vs.
creature of your choice



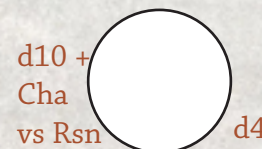
Low Blow (r)



Cut



Intimations
Can't use Inspiration
Req. secret



Stun
Tgt can't act next rd
+1 dmg next rd
Req. secret



Bitter Whispers
1 Mood

Requires Weapon, No Shield.

-1 dmg vs. any armor that is
1 or more higher value
than your weapon.

Strike

Str/d2

Defend

0/Qck

Grab

Str/d2

Throw/Shoot

Qck/0

Trick/Misc.

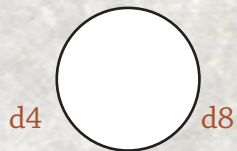
0/d4

FIVE SEASONS

COMBAT STYLE



Melting Ice Stance
+2 def. die size next rd



Hand of Snow



Winter Wind
Move target 1 area



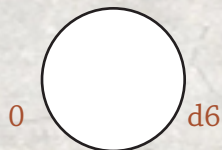
Blizzard Mind
Add d8 atk next rd



Fevered Spring Kick



Cyclone Kick



Budding Leaf Movement
Move



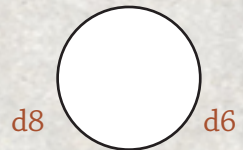
Inner Life Flashback
Recharge one inspiration
Useable 1/encounter



Sere Pressure Point (r)
Remove 1 column or
row from target's style;
Trick (Str vs. Str) ends.



Stunning Fist
1 + can't move next rd



**Fists Like Sobs
of Autumn**
2



Fires of Spring Stance
+2 atk die size next rd



Earthfall Trip
Rebalance



Summer Sun Kick



**Meditation
on Fleeting Summer**
Add move next rd

Requires Rsn 6, Qck 5, Str 5,
no armor, no shield.

Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2
Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.	
Qck/0	0/d4	

FREE SWORD

COMBAT STYLE



Requires: weapon, armor,
Str 6, Qck 5.

Strike
Str/d2

Defend
0/Qck

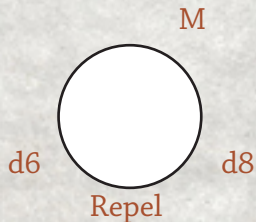
Grab
Str/d2

Throw/Shoot
Qck/0

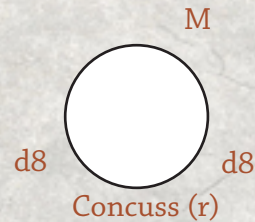
Trick/Misc.
0/d4

GUARDSMAN

COMBAT STYLE



Attack only those entering your area
1+ Target can't enter your area
Up to 3 targets



1 + rebalance



Defend Other
1 + Ally rolls your
attack as def bonus die



Bodyguard
1 + As Escort



Shield Tactics
+1 def die size and
armor next rd



Body Blow



Knock Down
Rebalance



Escort
As Shield Other
plus move



Guard's Strike



Expertise Block
Armor quality
treated as 2 higher



Shield Other

Ally rolls your
def and his



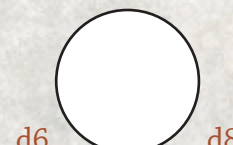
Shield Bash

Unsteady



Shield Run

Move



Riposte

Only atk one creature
who misses you



Block

Requires: Str 6, weapon, armor, shield.

Strike

Str/d2

Defend

0/Qck

Grab

Str/d2

Throw/Shoot

Qck/0



Trick/Misc.

0/d4

PARAPET DEFENSE


COMBAT STYLE

M

d6  d6 d4  d4

Devour
1 + 1 magic
+ recast


Occult Stab
1 + 1 vs. spellbound

0  d4


Feed
+1 dmg next rd

d4  d4

Heart Blood
1 + you and one ally
roll Heart as magic def

0  d6

Shelter
All allies in area
get your magic def.

0  d6

Wind Pattern
Move, climb

d4  d4

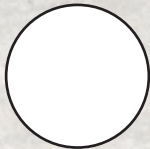
Hunger Pattern

d6  d6

Rampart Guard

0  d4

Night Pattern

d4  d4

Heart Pattern

d6/
d4  d2

Storm of Arrows (r)
Ranged

d4  d4

Eclipse Strike
Recast


d6  d2

Shoot
Ranged

d4/
d2  d6

Starfall

M

d4  d4

Veil
1 + can't target you
with spells; Trick ends

Requires weapon, Str 5.

You are spellbound.

All maneuvers have magic defense d4 unless
noted (upper right).

Strike
Str/d2

Defend
0/Qck

Grab
Str/d2


Throw/Shoot
Qck/0


Trick/Misc.
0/d4


SAVAGE

COMBAT STYLE

Str  d2
Bear Hug
 1 + 1 Str
 + grabbed


d8  d6
Throw (r)
 1 + move target 1 area

Str  d2
Grab
 Grabbed


0  d4
Mighty Rage
 As Rage + you take -1 dmg this rd

d8  d4
Fury Strike

d6  d4
Rampage
 1 + move

d4  d2
Savage Charge

1 + Move
 Str vs. Str to knock
 target back 1 area


d6  d4
Slam

0  d4
Rage

+1 atk & def next rd

d8  d2
Dive

Req. altitude
 Atk 2 tgts
 Crit: rebalance

0  d4
Climb


Gain altitude

Requires: Str or Qck 6
 No Shield, weapon for
 Fury Strike, Rampage

Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2
Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.	
Qck/0	0/d4	


SWASHBUCKLER



COMBAT STYLE


d6  d6
Spectacular Strike (r)
1 + 1 Mood to allies


d8  d4
Slash


M
d6  d6
Swath of Destruction (r)
3 targets


d8  d4
Death from Above
2
Req. altitude


M
d4  d4
Disarm
Disarm
d8  d6
Disrobe (r)
2 to clothing
or armor (temp.)
+ 1 reputation

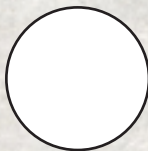
d6  d6
Charge
1 + Move

d6  d8
Humiliating Blow (r)
-1 Reputation


d6  d4
Mocking Blow
1 + 1 Mood

d6  d4
Thrust (r)


d6  d6
Trip
Unsteady

0  d8
Spin
+1 dmg next rd

0  d4
Flourish
Env. Trick
+1 Mood to self

0  d6
Daredevil Move
Move, climb

0  d6
Jest
+1 Mood to ally

0  d6
Feint
+1 atk die size next atk

Requires Cha 6, Weapon, No Shield

Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2

Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.
Qck/0	0/d4

TWIN WEAPON

COMBAT STYLE



Double Feint
Add d6 atk next rd



Find the Gap
Treat tgt armor
as 2 lower next atk



Flurry



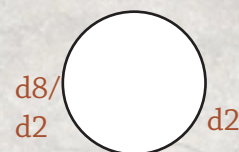
Masterful Feint
+1 atk & def next rd



Counter Storm



Whirlwind Cut
Up to 4 targets



Stab and Slash



Warding
Flurry



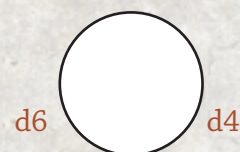
Blade Wall



Flashing Blades



Exploit
+2 wpn quality next rd



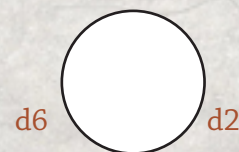
Jab



Off-hand Strike



Twin Strike



Main-hand Strike

Requires Quickness 6, Weapons

Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2


Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.
Qck/0	0/d4


CLAW/CLAW/BITE

COMBAT STYLE


D6  D4
Bite


D6  D4
Corner
1 + can't move next rd

0  D4
Pack Assault
1+ Increase atk die size
by 1 per pack member
to a max. of d12

D2  D4
Tackle and Rake
1 + Grabbed + Increase
atk die size by 1 per pack
member to a max. of d12


D4/
D2  D4
Claw Frenzy

D4/
D2/
D6  D6
Claw/Claw/Bite

0  D4
Pounce
Move
+1 atk next rd

D4  D4
Swipe
1 + disarm

D4  D6
Claw

0  D8
Circle

D4  D4
Forepaw Rush
Both move 1 area together


Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2

Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.
Qck/0	0/d4

GIANT

COMBAT STYLE

d2/
d2



d2

Clobber Walk
3 + Move


0



d4

Wind Up


d4



d4

Two-hand Overhead
Smash (r)
3


d6



d4

Bat (r)
1 + move target
1 area

d2



d2

Sweep (r)
Atk all targets in area

d8



d2

Kick
1 + unsteady


d8



d2

Stiff Arm
Target can't enter
your area


d4



d4

Stomp
Move +
all smaller creatures
in area rebalance


0



d4

Flex
+2 atk die size next atk


d2



d2

Slam
2

d8



d2

Grab
Grabbed

When hitting smaller targets, giant weapons do neither extra damage against weaker armor nor lower damage against stronger armor.

Requires giant size.

Strike	Defend	Grab
Str/d2	0/Qck	Str/d2
Throw/Shoot	Trick/Misc.	
Qck/0	0/d4	

Appendix One: Combat Style Sheet Glosses

These glosses are here for reference. You shouldn't need them during play, at least not after the first time using a style. The notes on the style sheet should suffice.

Gloss for Arrowheart

Arrowheart is the most common archery style in the Kingdoms. Many fighters praise the simple, clear principles of Arrowheart. There are only three different bow grips, and one of them is used exclusively for Rapid Shot. The style works for bows, but other fighting styles allow similar maneuvers with crossbows.

Aim and Breathe. Aiming increases your attack die size by 1 next round.

Anticipate. Write down your prediction for your opponent's maneuver. Reveal it after all other maneuvers have been revealed. If you are wrong, your attack cannot hit this round. If you are right and your attack hits, you do 3 damage. You must rebalance.

Archer's Shot. As part of this maneuver, you can take cover (+2 to all defense die sizes against ranged attacks; bonus lasts until you move).

Called Shot: Arm. If you hit, the target roll a strength check. If he does not equal or beat your attack roll, he drops one held object (your choice). You must rebalance.

Mighty Pull. You ignore range penalties for the first three areas next round. Area penalties for the fourth area and beyond are normal, viz. -3 die sizes for a target in the fourth area, -4 die sizes for a target in the fifth area, and so on.

Penetrate. After a Mighty Pull, the arrow flies with such force that it does 2 body damage and ignores 2 armor quality from the opponent (causing an additional point of damage if the arrow's weapon quality exceeds the armor by 3 or more). You must

rebalance.

Shoot and Dive. As part of this maneuver, you can take cover (+2 to all defense die sizes against ranged attacks; bonus lasts until you move). You must rebalance after this.

Shot on the Run. You can shoot and move. Martial talents can improve the accuracy of this maneuver.

Gloss for Court Sword

Noble children and savage children have this in common: their lives are in danger often from the day they are born. The courts abound with spies, assassins, and deadly duels disguised as sport. Court Sword is the fighting style deemed worthy of aristocrats across the Claw. It is a rapier, saber, or long sword style, fought without a shield.

As much as the saber, however, the noble's reputation is his weapon. Reputations are caught up in the spellbound nature of the kingdoms, and they have very real effects. Of course, if a reputation does not cover a certain opponent, it is not usable. For example, if a princess has a Vicious Reputation with the Subjects of Rithaign 6, she could use a d6 when dueling anyone from Rithaign, but not when facing, say, a sellsword from the Dragon Isles.

Special note on arrows: when there are arrows in a combat style, the style teaches you to transition with the arrow but never against it. Lord's Stance and Lord's Punishment are accessible from Signature Strike, but not from each other. Nor can you transition back to Signature Strike. Once a court swordsman is caught up in a lordly stance, or obsessed with meting out punishment, his only recourse is to continue with righteous certainty in his current path or to rebalance.

Beat. This causes 1 Body and 1 Mood damage.

Demand. You demand that your allies perform up to your standards. Next round, they roll your reputation as a bonus die with either their attack or defense die. You must have a reputation with a group that includes an ally for that ally to benefit from your demands.

Demeaning Swat. The swat deals no damage, but it insults your opponent. If it hits, he loses two mood. Any negative mood he has must be used as a Heart penalty next round on a roll or rolls of his choosing (roll Heart die along with the regular die and take the lowest result).

Feint. Your next maneuver with an attack die has its die size increased by one.

Pose. Next round, roll your reputation as a bonus die with both your attack and defense. For example, if your reputation with your opponent is d6 and you execute a Slash next round, you would roll a d8 and a d6 for attack (taking the highest result), and a d4 and a d6 for defense (taking the highest result). The reputation bonus attack die does not grant you an extra attack or an attack where you otherwise would not have had one (with the Spin maneuver, for example).

Riposte. Pick one foe who misses you this round as the target of your attack. If no one misses you, you cannot attack.

Signature Strike. If your signature strike scores a critical hit, your opponent is scarred in a manner of your choosing. You gain 1 reputation with an appropriate group, usually either a group that includes the target or a group that includes the audience.

Spin. Note that unlike Feint, the bonus to damage is available next round only. A feint's deception yields a longer lasting advantage than a spin's momentum.

Gloss for Dagger-and-wine

Dagger-and-wine is the preferred style of courtesans and assassins. Simple, intimate, and effective in close quarters, it relies on revelations, entanglements, and backstabs. Charisma is important for fighting in such a personal style.

Dagger-and-wine does not emphasize heavy combat. You suffer a -1 penalty to damage whenever your opponent's armor is higher quality than your weapon (with most styles, this penalty only applies if the armor quality is 3 or more higher than your weapon's quality).

Bitter Whispers. This decreases your opponent's mood by one (next round, he rolls his Heart die along with one roll of his choice and takes the lower of the two as his result). You attack with Charisma, and your opponent defends with Reason. Like Stun and Intimations, the attack does no Body damage.

Dodge into Shadows. Exploiting the shadows grants +1 damage next round.

Duck and Slip. If an attack misses you, it is rolled again against another creature of your choice (that creature must be in the same area as you are).

Intimations. Like Stun, in order to use this maneuver, you must know one of your enemy's secrets and reveal it during the fight. The secret must concern one of your target's inspirations. Then, if your intimacy intimidates your opponent successfully, he cannot use that inspiration for the remainder of the fight. You roll your Charisma to attack with this maneuver, and your opponent rolls his Reason to defend.

Low Blow. An awkward strike, it forces you to rebalance.

Stun. This is a rare maneuver. To attack with it, you must reveal knowledge of one of your opponent's secrets. Secrets are learned through roleplay and depend on the campaign milieu, but they might

include the identity of a bastard son, knowledge of a forbidden magic style, or sin. Alternatively, you might reveal a secret of your own that has great import to the target. The GM is the final arbiter of what constitutes a stunning secret.

When you reveal the secret, roll a d10 and your Charisma die (that is, the largest die size not greater than your Charisma score), taking the higher of the two as your result. Your opponent defends with his Reason die. If you win, your stunned opponent cannot do anything next round except Defend (0/Qck).

Successful or not, you can only use a secret once.

Tangled Cloak. This does no damage, but if you hit, your opponent is grabbed next round. Discarded clothes, bed sheets, or the like must be at hand.

Whirling Trick. You move and execute an environmental trick such as cutting the sandbag's support rope, pulling the sheet off a painting, or tipping the book that rotates the secret bookcase-wall.

Gloss for Five Seasons

Five Seasons is the fighting style of fists and feet rather than swords and spears. The advantages are obvious. When kings outlaw steel and black powder, when magic is only whispers in alleys and the fixer's poisons cost their weight in gold, a fighting style that relies only on the body is precious knowledge. Several Five Seasons maneuvers, such as Stunning Fist and Sere Pressure Point, require precise strikes against the anatomy of the target. The GM must judge when these strikes are ineffective (against animated statues, for example). In general, they are ineffective when the target has little recognizable anatomy.

A Five Seasons warrior wears no armor and often uses no weapon. For purposes of attack and defense, however, a Five Seasons warrior treats his body as having weapon and armor quality equal to half of his martial levels (minimum one).

Blizzard Mind. You gain an extra d8 attack next round.

Earthfall Trip. The target takes no damage but must rebalance next round.

Fires of Spring Stance. Next round, increase your attack die size by two.

Inner Life Flashback. Once per combat, a flashback allows you to “recharge” one inspiration. Pick one inspiration that you have already used this combat. You can use it once more, exactly as if you had not used it already.

Note that this maneuver is disconnected from all other maneuvers. There is a “gap” between it and the maneuvers in the spring and winter movements to its right and left. Consequently, the only way to execute Inner Life Flashback is by re-balancing to it. The only option after an Inner Life Flashback is one of the re-balancing maneuvers.

Meditation on Fleeting Summer. You can move as part of your maneuver next round.

Melting Ice Stance. Next round, increase your defense die size by two.

Sere Pressure Point. You must rebalance after executing this maneuver. Palsied by your strike, a hit creature loses the ability to use one row or column of your choice on his combat style sheet. Next round or on any subsequent round, he may use a Trick to roll his Strength vs. your Strength. If he wins, he shakes off the nerve-wrack and the effect is removed.

Stunning Fist. The stunned creature cannot move next round.

Winter Wind. The target takes no damage but is forced to move one area into an area of your choice. The target must also rebalance.

Gloss for Free Sword

Free Sword is the most popular style of armed melee combat taught in the Kingdoms. Many non-experts consider Free Sword style to be synonymous with swordplay and do not even know of, much less appreciate, other styles. Free Sword offers a balanced mix of offense and defense, although it is not a mobile style.

Brutalize. You must rebalance after this terrible blow, but so must your opponent.

Cleave. You can attack two separate targets. The attack die size, d4, is the same for both.

Decoy Jab. The jab does one point of damage and grants you a one die size increase to your attack and defense die next round.

Driving Onslaught. If either attack hits, you and your opponent both move 1 area together. Since you move along with your opponent, unlike most forced movement, this does not cause your opponent (or you) to rebalance.

Eviscerate. This does characteristic damage and two body damage, but you must rebalance after executing it.

Feint. Your next maneuver with an attack die has its die size increased by one.

Lunge. You must rebalance after executing this maneuver.

Power Bash. Such a powerful maneuver does damage and unsteadies your opponent (causes him next round to rebalance or move to an accessible maneuver that is adjacent to a re-balancing maneuver).

Precise Strike. This strike causes characteristic damage in addition to body damage. It may cause someone to drop below the minimum required

characteristics for a fighting style.

Spin. Note that unlike Feint, the bonus to damage is available next round only. A feint's deception yields a longer lasting advantage than a spin's momentum.

Trip. Trip does no damage (unless it follows a Spin), but it does cause your opponent to rebalance.

Unbalancing Feint. This causes your opponent to rebalance, but does no damage.

Gloss for Guardsman

Guardsman is the style of bodyguards, caravan watchmen, and the king's personal guard. It requires a shield and armor. Not surprisingly, the focus of the style is on protecting oneself and allies. Still, though the focus is defense, a guardsman is a formidable offensive threat as well. His patient, steady defense allows him to stay in the fight long enough for his careful blows to find an opening.

Bodyguard. This affords all the bonuses of Escort, plus you can attack.

Concuss. Your opponent and you must rebalance after this tremendous blow.

Defend Other. When he is defending this round, one ally in your area rolls both his defense and your offense die this round, taking the better of the two, as usual. You must declare the ally you are defending at the time you reveal your maneuver for the round.

Escort. This affords the bonus of Shield Other, plus you can move. This does not grant a free movement to your ally. If he wants to move this round with you, he must take appropriate action.

Expertise Block. Treat your armor quality as two higher this round.

Knock Down. No damage occurs, but your foe must rebalance next round.

Repel. This attack only targets creatures that are moving into your area this round. Because you must select a maneuver ahead of time, not knowing if creatures are going to charge into your area, using Repel requires a guess and incurs the risk of losing your action if no targets present themselves. Of course, screaming madfire twitchers sprinting across the public square at you is often a good indication that there are enemies incoming.

On a hit, Repel does 1 point of damage and

stops the creature from entering your area. You can attempt to repel up to three creatures per round.

Riposte. Pick one foe who misses you this round as the target of your attack. If no one misses you, you cannot attack.

Shield Bash. Your opponent is unsteadied (must rebalance or execute an accessible maneuver adjacent to a rebalancing maneuver next round).

Shield Other. When he is defending this round, one ally in your area rolls both his defense die and yours this round, taking the better of the two, as usual. You must declare the ally you are defending at the time you reveal your maneuver for the round.

Shield Run. Move one area.

Shield Tactics. Your armor quality and defense die size are increased by one next round.

Gloss for Parapet Defense

Parapet Defense is an anti-magic fighting style. It was originally developed for warriors defending castles from magic and aerial assaults. The sweeps and arcs of the defender's weapon, his stances, and his movements are all derived from forms of the Color of Stars magic style. As a result, the fighter becomes spellbound while in this style, interfering with other casters, weakening their intended effects, and increasing the likelihood of wild magic surges. While not strong against most other fighting styles, Parapet Defense excels at assaulting wizards and defending from cover against magical or mundane attack.

Devour. A struck wizard must abandon his current spell and recast. He also takes one Body and one Magic damage.

Eclipse Strike. A hit forces the wizard to abandon his current spell and recast.

Heart Blood. You and one ally of your choice roll your Heart score as a bonus magic defense die along with your normal magic defense die, taking the higher of the two, as usual.

Occult Stab. You do 1 extra Body damage if you hit a spellbound creature.

Shelter. All allies in the area roll your magic defense as a bonus magic defense die along with their own, taking the higher of the two, as usual.

Veil. The wizard that you strike cannot affect you with spells until he uses a Trick/Misc. Action to clear his mind.

Gloss for Savage

Savage is the fighting style of the wolf children and the tribesmen who live beyond the fields we know. It is a mobile style. It can be practiced with or without benefit of armor, though a shield is impossible to wield without breaking the style. Save for two maneuvers (Rampage and Fury Strike), a weapon is not required. A savage fights well with nothing more and nothing less than his body.

Bear Hug. Your opponent takes 1 Strength damage and you are both still considered grabbed. When the grab ends, regardless of the reason, you must rebalance.

Climb. Moving as a Miscellaneous Action often requires a Strength check to climb steep slopes, statuary, trellises, and the like. Climb allows the savage to succeed without rolling when so moving.

Dive. You must be in an area higher than your targets' area. You can attack two targets as you dive. If you critically hit a target, he must rebalance.

Grab. Both you and your opponent are grabbed (cannot move, and cannot take actions other than rebalancing maneuvers, grabbed actions, and reasonable tricks).

Mighty Rage. You gain one die size for attack and defense next round, and you ignore the first point of Body damage you would have taken this round.

Rage. You gain one die size for attack and defense next round.

Rampage. You move one area and attack.

Savage Charge. After moving, attack. If you hit, you do one Body damage, and you roll your Strength against your opponent's Strength. If you win the Strength check, push your opponent one area in the direction of your motion.

Throw. After being tossed one area, your opponent must rebalance. You also must rebalance.

Gloss for Swashbuckler

Daredevils, glory seekers, and romantics, swashbucklers employ flamboyant maneuvers that are as flashy as they are effective. It is a very mobile style, concentrating slightly more on offense and spectacular displays than on defense and survivability.

Charge. You move and attack.

Death from Above. This attack is only possible if you begin in an area higher than your opponent.

Disrobe. You cut the stays and straps on your opponent's garment. This causes no bodily harm, but the armor or clothing has its quality reduced by 2, and the disrobed victim loses one reputation point with a group of your choice. The armor or clothing quality reduction is easily fixed, but not during combat.

Feint. Your next maneuver with an attack die has its die size increased by one.

Flourish. You execute an environmental trick and gain a Mood bonus die (as with Jest, but your Mood rather than an ally's).

Humiliating Blow. Such a blow lives on in story and song, subtracting 1 from the humiliated foe's reputation with a group of your choosing. You must rebalance, probably with a wry smile on your face.

Jest. One ally gains a Mood bonus die (she rolls her Heart along with her normal die on a roll of her choice, taking the best result, on the next round or some subsequent round).

Mocking Blow. Your opponent takes 1 Body and 1 Mood damage. A negative mood gives him a penalty Heart die for every negative mood. He must roll a Heart die along with his normal die and take the lower of the two on a roll or rolls of his choice next round.

Spectacular Strike. Normal damage accrues, and each

of your allies, encouraged by your display, gains 1 Mood.

Spin. Note that unlike Feint, the bonus to damage is available next round only. A feint's deception yields a longer lasting advantage than a spin's momentum.

Swath of Destruction. Capitalizing on the momentum from your Death from Above maneuver, you cut a swath of destruction, attacking up to three targets. You must rebalance after this exertion.

Gloss for Twin Weapon

With a weapon in each hand, a Twin Weapon warrior is the most easily recognized warrior in the Kingdoms. The offense requires two weapons, naturally, and it places a premium on offense. Defense is possible with maneuvers such as Counterstorm and Blade Wall, but most Twin Weapon masters prefer to press the attack, believing that the best defense is a good offense.

Double Feint. You make an extra d6 attack next round.

Exploit. Each of your weapons increases its quality by two for the next round. If a weapon's quality exceeds the target's armor quality by three or more, the weapon does one extra point of damage.

Find the Gap. Treat the target's armor quality as two lower than its normal quality next round. Like other such effects, this applies only for your strikes, not the strikes of allies.

Masterful Feint. The feint grants a one die size increase to all of your attack and defense rolls next round.

Whirlwind Cut. You make one attack each against multiple enemies in the area, up to a maximum of four enemies.

Appendix Two: Pre-Generated Characters

These sample characters are on the combat-oriented end of the SK character spectrum. They are provided for fun. Please do not limit yourself to the combat styles included with these characters. Switch them out for any other styles you like! Mix and match! Go crazy!

Roland Dusarre, knight devisee and heir to the Duchy Raixe
Male Human (Nineblood).

Fighting Styles: Court Sword (apprentice).

History, skills, and reputation:

Went on many hunts as a child to get out of the manor and away from parents (2).

Reputation with Duchy Raixe subjects: respected and feared (4).

Reputation with Duchy Raixe nobles: Imre's boy, the future duke (4).

Inspirations: Ambition: become Duke (4).

Fear of losing status (1).

Love of justice and the law (2).

Class Abilities: Noble house. Begin play with one organization (noted below).

Noble voice. Gain your reputation as a bonus dialogue die.

Peer. Begin with a number of reputations equal to your Charisma
(max. 4 to start; already included above).

Racial Abilities: Gain one die size increase on all attempts to resist magic. +1 Heart.

Str 4, **Qck** 6, **Rsn** 7, **Cha** 8, **Mgc** 3, **Hrt** 6. **Body** 5, **Mood** 0.

Noble 1.

Organization Huntsman's Lodge of House Dusarre, Duchy Raixe

Scope 1

Force 2

Shadow 2

Arcana 1

Income 0

Wealth 6

Buildings and Resources: Hunting lodge in Ombrelon.

Troops. None. **Gear (quality) and possessions:** Saber of Trenton Dusarre, third Duke of Raixe (5); silksteel chain shirt (5); ivory stock huntsman's crossbow (5); noble wardrobe (5); thirteen nested sterling figurines, kingsmen all, consecrated to the Ceremony; cabochon sapphire necklace with House Dusarre signet on setting's reverse side; harmonica; hunting horse and hounds (4). **Wealth** 6.

Yord, Andatje savage, native of the Fyrajji forest where it slopes toward Widewater and the Grenmarch
Male Human (Nineblood)

Fighting styles. Savage (apprentice).

Fyrajji Atrocity (Savage variation).

Skills and History: One of the youngest tree-cut braves of the Andatje tribe (1).

Inspirations: Love for his tribe (4).

Superstition concerning a prophecy made by a trader concerning snake tattoo: "You will meet your destiny when the woman with the ink snake asks you a question you dare not answer." (1)

Desire to raise strong sons (1).

Class Abilities: +1 Body.

Tribal communication. Can send a message across homeland in a day,
1/week per Savage level.

Racial Abilities: Gain one die size increase on all attempts to resist magic. +1 Heart.

Str 8, Qck 6, Rsn 5, Cha 4, Mgc 3, Hrt 8. Body 6, Mood 0.

Savage 1.

Gear (quality) and possessions: Dynn inquisition saber (3); gnarsk hide tunic (3), horn bow (2); Thyrian tattoo artist's knife (1); 2 vials Thyrian tattoo ink; worn copy of Thyrian graphic designs; wives' ink; two waterskins with saltwater from the Sea of Princes, three Andatje medicine poultices; wealth 1.

Tajal Abize, thief, world traveler, and spell smuggler

Male Human (islander)

Fighting styles. Free Sword (apprentice).

Boarding Party (Free Sword variation).

Skills and History: Spent childhood poling trash skiffs in the canals of Azenahal (1).

Trusted by the nephew of the Monarch-Sage to run fixes (1).

Reputation with Trastamaran corsairs: one of our kind (1).

Inspirations: Ambition: wealth and luxury of a King Below (4).

Fear of capture (2).

Faith in the Stars (1).

Class Abilities: Interesting life. One extra history and one reputation at first level.

Hunter and hunted. In a chase, once per round, increase any one of your dice by one size.

Declare this before rolling the die.

Racial Abilities: Increase all perception rolls by one die size.

Decrease the Doom by one, once per scene.

Str 6, Qck 8, Rsn 3, Cha 7, Mgc 4, Hrt 5. Body 5, Mood 0.

Rogue 1.

Gear (quality) and possessions: Broadsword (3); leather jerkin studded with noble dress clasps (3); nobleman's outfit (5); gentleman's outfit (4); travel papers bearing the seal of the nephew of the Monarch-Sage; chrysoberyl compass; calendar keying the color of stars. Wealth 3.

Harold Torrance, young Rithite kingsman, stationed on the Harvest Road
Male Human (Nineblood)

Fighting styles. Guardsman (apprentice).
Free Sword (apprentice).

Skills and History: Works with the trackers to learn their trade when not on patrol (1).

Inspirations: Faith in royalty (3).

Madness: despises free casters and blames them for his sister's death (2).

Vengeance: hunts his sister's killer, who is a tall, green-eyed weremage (1).

Class Abilities: +1 Strength.

Live by the sword. Treat the quality of the weapon you wield as one higher than its actual quality.

Racial Abilities: Gain one die size increase on all attempts to resist magic. +1 Heart.

Str 9, Qck 7, Rsn 6, Cha 3, Mgc 4, Hrt 6. Body 5, Mood 0.

Warrior 1.

Gear (quality) and possessions: Halberd (4); short sword (3); chain mail (4); steel shield of Rithaign (4); crossbow (2); journal detailing his research on tracking and weremagic; his sister's locket, which contains a small oil painting of a man and a woman whom he has never met before; patrol horse; kingsman's cloak (3).
Wealth 2.

Sjana Elsven, zeppelin privateer, second officer on the Thyrian vessel *Nevermore*
Female Human (Nineblood)

Fighting styles. Swashbuckler (apprentice).
Shoot and taunt (variation).

Skills and History: Trained zeppelin officer and pilot (1).

Athletic and sure-footed on deck (1).

Reputation: sought-after dinner guest among nobles in Thyre (1).

Inspirations: Ambition to become captain of the *Nevermore* (4).

Love for the open sky (1)

Love for drama, games, and social climbing (1).

Class Abilities: Interesting life. One extra history and one reputation at first level.

Hunter and hunted. In a chase, once per round, increase any one of your dice by one size.

Declare this before rolling the die.

Racial Abilities: Gain one die size increase on all attempts to resist or defend against magic. +1 Heart.

Str 3, Qck 4, Rsn 8, Cha 7, Mgc 6, Hrt 6. Body 5, Mood 0.

Rogue 1.

Gear (quality) and possessions: Dagger with Royal Thyrian monogrammed pommel (3); Flight officer's cutlass (3); Ghosts in Silver intaglio barrel musket (4); flying leathers (2); aurine fur ball gown (6); pet cat Scratcher with two wooden peglegs (forepaws) and one gold incisor; extensive spirits collection (shared with captain and stored in her quarters) (4). Wealth 3.

Deirdre Axameira, Zocith templar and jungle tamer

Female Troll (Rain).

Fighting Styles: Twin Weapon (apprentice).

Arrowheart (apprentice).

History, skills, and reputation: Constantly leads forays into the jungle around Zocith to quench madfire, clear out beasts and vagabonds, and maintain the Sun Goddess's wards.

Inspirations: Love for her husband, fellow templar Horace Caithe (4).

Madness: xenophobia (2).

Faith in a Princess of Vines (1).

Class Abilities: +1 Strength.

Live by the sword. Treat the quality of the weapon you wield as one higher than its actual quality.

Racial Abilities: Regenerate 5 body per season (a Trick to regenerate 1 body in combat). Increase one skill roll by one die size per scene.

Str 6, **Qck** 7, **Rsn** 3, **Cha** 6, **Mgc** 4, **Hrt** 8. Body 5, Mood 0.

Warrior 1.

Gear (quality) and possessions: Zocith machete (3); sun plate (5); short bow with 25 obsidian-tipped arrows (3); Templar necklace (3); rope and grappling hook; bedroll; waterskins; bed netting. Wealth 2.

Appendix Three: Sample Creatures

Descent Lion. Lions with heritage from the Descent: opalescent highlights in the mane and shoulder fur, black eyes, and startling quickness.

Str 6, Qck 10, Rsn 1, Cha 6, Mgc 6, Hrt 4. Body 4.

Fighting style: Claw/Claw/Bite.

Variation: Descent Lion. Replace Pounce with Improved Pounce (0/d6; move; +1 dmg and +1 atk die size next rd). Replace Tackle and Rake with Descent Growl (Cha vs. Rsn; -1 Mood to all who can hear).

Claws and bite are quality 5.

Opalescent streaked fur is quality 1.

War drake. Six feet tall at the shoulder, war drakes are miniature dragons, bonded from birth to a handler.

Str 10, Qck 4, Rsn 1, Cha 6, Mgc 4, Hrt 4. Body 6.

Fighting style: Claw/Claw/Bite.

Claws and bite are quality 3.

Scales are quality 4 (6 with barding).

Chimera. These winged quadrupeds are foul-tempered in all three of their minds. The three heads are usually a lion's, a goat's, and a serpent's.

Str 6, Qck 7, Rsn 1, Cha 4, Mgc 8, Hrt 6. Body 4.

Fighting style: Claw/Claw/Bite (chimerical variation only).

Variation: Chimerical. Replace Pack Assault with Swoop (d4/d6; move, fly). Replace Tackle and Rake with Venom Spit (r) (d8/d4; 1 + 1 Str).

Claws and bite are quality 3.

Scales and fur are quality 2.

Royal ape. The 10-foot tall gorillas of Jakatta are trained to fight, most often with studded gauntlets.

Str 10, Qck 6, Rsn 1, Cha 6, Mgc 3, Hrt 6. Body 7.

Fighting style: Giant (giant ape variation only).

Variation: Giant Ape. Replace Stomp with Furious Ape Leap (0/d4; Move, Climb, +1 attack die size next round).

Studded gauntlets are quality 4.

Gorilla hamata is quality 2.

Appendix Four: Art Credits

Cover page SK logo by Mark Quire

p. 2 Sword by Sade

p. 3 "Garrett Hart, a swordsman of Thyre" by Jason McLellan

p. 4 Archer girl silhouettes by Sade

p. 5 "Giant Style," pencils by Kismagu

p. 6 "Nakine, one of the seventeen daughters of Asenkut Ragul," by Sade

p. 8 Axe by Sade

p. 10 "Azenahal" by Igor Kieryluk

p. 12 "Flocks" from the public domain courtesy Dover

p. 14 Detail from map of Rithaigh City by Gillian Pearce