

Welcome to Nate B's wondrous game of Swords & Sorcery. Characters live large and face great dangers as they seek fame and fortune in a fantastic land of ancient civilizations.

# System Text - A Draft

## Adventurers

In this game you play an adventurer - everyone does. Your adventurer is Violent, Charismatic, Skilled, and Sorcerous - these are the four Methods. During play you will be faced with Obstacles and Adversaries. The four Methods are the tools you use to overcome these challenges.

To start with, you have 15 dice (regular 6-sided ones) to distribute among the 4 Methods. Give at least one die to each Method. If it helps, think of it like this: "On a scale of 1 to 5, how Violent (or whatever) is my adventurer?" An average everyday Method has 2 dice, which is enough to handle the mundane obstacles and confrontations regular people encounter as they go about their lives. A Method with only 1 die represents a bit of a disadvantage compared to most people. There's no limit on the number of dice you can assign to each Method. If you want your adventurer to be a stupendously powerful sorceress - say, on a scale of 1 to 5 she's a 9! - that's just fine.

## A Note about Sorcery

Just because every adventurer has at least 1 die in Sorcerous doesn't mean everyone is running around slinging spells right and left. It just means that if your adventurer encounters or engages with sorcery in some way, that's how many dice you roll.

Next, assign a Style to each Method. Styles provide a little color and background information about your adventurer; they represent all the stuff your character did before taking up a life of adventure. One Method gets to have two styles. That second style is your adventurer's specialty. If you want, you can leave one of the Methods blank and have two specialties. (A Method can't have more than one specialty though; pick one of the other two Methods.) If you want to use the same Style for more than one Method you can do that. There's a big list of Styles down below to choose from.

You begin every adventure with 1 Will. You will gain Will by having your adventure do certain things during play. Anyone can do one of the following any time nothing else is going on:

- Sleep in a Comfortable Place
- Eat a Good Meal
- Revel With Companions
- Enjoy Intoxicants

If you do, you get one point of Will.

Now you and your GM will need to brainstorm some other ways for your adventurer to gain Will. These are called Attachments. Your adventurer has 3 Attachments:

- Your Minor Attachment generates 2 Will points any time your adventurer does the reinforcing action. Minor Attachments should be fairly easy to access.
- Your Major Attachment generates 3 Will when activated. Major Attachments might be more

complicated to access, even requiring a roll or two to bring about.

- Your Pivotal Attachment generates 5 Will when activated. Activating a Pivotal Attachment represents a major accomplishment of some type. (A better name might be called for here... Crisis Attachment? Core Attachment?)

Your adventurer also has a Harm track that runs from 1 to 5. You don't have to do anything with it right now, but notice that it's there on the character sheet.

## Example Character

Grimm the Assassin

Violent: 8	Charismatic: 3	Skilled: 3	Sorcerous: 1
Poisoner	Stylish	Assassin	
Assassin		Acrobat	

Will: 1

Attachments:

- Minor - Witness a display of virtuosic skill
- Major - Smoke the "Dust of the Black Moss"
- Pivotal - Murder a stranger in cold blood

Harm: [1][2][3][4][5]

Trophies:

## The Mechanics

Any time an Obstacle or Adversary is encountered by your adventurer you can try to defeat it with one of the four Methods by rolling that Method's dice. Grimm the Assassin rolls 8 dice to do Violence. If you're using a Specialty, dice that turn up greater than 3 are successes. If you're using one of your other Styles, dice that turn up greater than 4 are successes. Otherwise, dice that turn up 6 are successes. Grimm the Assassin needs 4 - 6 to cut his victim's throat from behind, 5 - 6 to poison the wine, and 6 to duel with a sword.

Generally, a single success is enough to get what you want. The man on the street needs one success to kill or convince. Of course, if there are 10 of them you need 10 successes to defeat the whole angry mob. Naturally, some Obstacles and Adversaries will be more significant. The famous swordsman might need 5 successes all to himself, and the sheer wall of the Crying Magician's tower might need 3 successes to climb.

If you fail to get as many successes as you need you are stymied and lose one will. You must choose how to proceed:

You can spend Will points and roll again. Each Will you spend adds more dice equal to the Method

that you're using. You still get to use your original dice too. So let's say Grimm is trying to talk his way past a guard. He rolls 3 dice, but sadly doesn't get any successes. If Grimm spends 1 Will, he can retry the roll using 6 dice. If he spends 2 Will, he can roll 9 dice, etc.

Or, you can accept your failure. If you stop now, you don't get what you want, but you suffer no CONSEQUENCES.

When you spend Will to roll again, you are taking a risk. If the second roll fails not only do you lose Will and fail at what you were trying to do, as above, but you also suffer one of the following CONSEQUENCES, depending on what Method you were using:

- Violent - You suffer Harm
- Charismatic - You receive a Burden
- Skilled - You experience a Complication
- Sorcerous - Your Sorcery runs Amok

## Some Nuances

If you want to, you can spend Will on your very first roll and so use lots of dice right away. If you do, though, you risk suffering CONSEQUENCES on that very first roll.

The initial "risk free" roll gives you a certain amount of descriptive leeway. If you're rolling to jump across a wide abyss and you succeed, then you made the jump. If you fail and don't spend Will, maybe at the last second you decided it was wider than it looked at first, so you don't make the attempt. If you spend Will to roll again but still fail, that's when you really jump but don't make it across.

The successes you generate from your rolls accumulate. If you have enough Will and want to keep spending it to roll a third, or fourth, etc., time you can do that. Just keep in mind that every such roll that fails to reach your goal generates CONSEQUENCES. So if it takes you four rolls before you finally win, you'll suffer two separate CONSEQUENCES.

## Harm

Harm is the difference between the number of successes you needed and the number of successes you actually got when failing a Violent roll. If the number of Harm is 5 or less, cross off the corresponding box (and ONLY that box!) on your adventurer's Harm track. If that box is already crossed off, cross off the next highest available box instead. This is called a "bump."

Harm can affect your character mechanically in two ways, depending on whether or not you have any Will left.

If you have any Will (even just one point) and you receive enough Harm to bump all the way off the track (i.e., you need to cross off box '5' but it is already crossed off, or you take 6 successes of Harm in one blow) you are Down. The GM decides what happens to your helpless battered and / or unconscious body, how long you're out, and what the circumstances are for your return to the world of the living. Additionally, you receive a Scar. A Scar is some kind of permanent mark left by your traumatic experience. It, perhaps, adjusts your HARM track by adding one to all of the boxes. Mike's alternate idea: You get a new box on the end (so, [6] the first time it happens), and you remove your lowest crossed-off box. So if you are [1][2][X][4][5] and you take 7 points of harm, you become

[1][2][4][5][6].

If you have no Will and you receive enough Harm to bump all the way off the track, you die.

Harm heals in two ways. First, your adventurer starts fresh at the beginning of every adventure, no matter what happened last time. Second, any time you gain Will you may uncross your lowest crossed-out box and cross off the one to the left instead. If your lowest crossed out box is the leftmost one, that harm is simply healed.

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Above this line is Nate's draft. Below are Mike's notes from online conversations.

## Character Generation

Players make characters per the below rules.

### METHODS

Characters have 4 METHODS by which they get stuff done.

- VIOLENCE
- CHARISMA
- SKILL
- SORCERY

The player distributes 15 dice between these. Scale is:

- 1 - Low Human
- 2 - Typical Human
- 3 - High Human
- 4 - Exceptional
- 5+ - Heroic

### STYLES

Each METHOD gets 1 STYLE specified for it, except for one the player specifies as the character's specialty, which gets two.

Here are some examples of STYLE:

Barbarian	Ranger	Warrior	Wizard	Sorcerer	Scholar
Merchant	Vagabond	Pirate	Thief	Beggar	Thug
Gladiator	Slave	Slaver	Prisoner	Shaman	Priest

Diplomat	Spy	Haberdasher	Cavalier	Archer	Soldier
Conjuror	Elementalist	Brigand	Scout	Holy Warrior	Beastmaster
Herald	Entertainer	Monk	Mentalist	Drover	Alchemist
Acrobat	Assassin	Noble	Witch	Mage	Warlord
Rogue	Swashbuckler	Freebooter	Tribesman	Poisoner	Craftsman
Reaver	Mercenary	Swordsman	Tradesman	Trader	Cutpurse

## MOTIVATIONS

The player will also select X moderate and Y major motives. For the effect of these, see The WILL to Power below.

Characters start play and every new adventure with 1 WILL.

## Character Sheet

Here is a character sheet template: [S and S Game Character Template](#)

## Resolution

This is how characters get things done.

## Target Number

The GM sets a target number based on how well suited the character's METHODS and STYLES are to the task at hand.

6 - anybody can do this, but the character is not particularly well suited

5 - this is something the character specifically knows how to do, but not what they're best at

4 - this is something that fits well within one of the character's styles

## Adversity Rating

The GM selects a number of successes that the player must roll for the character to succeed at the action.

## Dice Pool

The player takes as many dice as the rating for the method their character is using.

## **WILL**

The player can add dice to their pool equal to the method rating by spending one WILL.

## **Reading the Roll**

The player rolls the dice and counts the number of dice that equal or exceed the target number. If this count is equal to the Adversity Rating, the character has immediately succeeded. If not, the player must decide if the character fails, or if the conflict escalates (see below).

## **Escalating**

If a character fails at something, the player can spend will to add dice to their pool, and roll again. However, if the character fails once this is done, they risk having some sort of actual (mechanical) harm befall the character.

## **HARM**

Harm is what happens when a character fails an escalated conflict.

## **The WILL to Power**

WILL is very important. As noted characters start with only 1 WILL, but can gain more from various activities.

## **Minor Gains**

These are activities that can gain any character a WILL, and represent the small pleasures that most any adventurer enjoys. Players should inform the GM when they think their character has gotten one of these that their character enjoys, and the GM will decide if the events in question count. Note that these rarely, if ever, take conflicts to acquire, mostly being about opportunity costs instead.

- Sleeping in a Comfortable Place
- Eating a Good Meal
- Reveling With Companions
- Enjoying Intoxicants

## Moderate Gains

The player will specify X conditions for the character that will gain the character 2 WILL. Note that this level means that it is cost inefficient for the character to spend much will to get these, so these should represent things that are obtained relatively leisurely, or otherwise without much actual motivational benefit.

## Major Gains

The player will specify X conditions for the character that will gain the character 5 WILL, when satisfied. These must be fairly difficult sorts of things to accomplish, and may require some WILL spent in contests in order to get them.

## TROPHIES

At the end of an adventure, a player may spend unused WILL to purchase TROPHIES, which make permanent any sort of loot they want the character to retain permanently. Any other gains are likely gone when the next adventure starts. Such is the life of an adventurer. Trophies have dice equal to the amount of Will spent on them. They can add those dice to re-rolls as bonus dice. Trophies are things like powerful magic items, famous weapons, social positions, wealth, etc. If you're the King of Town (2), then any time it matters to the other guy that you're the King of Town, you can add 2 extra dice to your re-roll.

## Play Testing

[About Thornstad](#)

## Notes, July 2017

### ADVENTURERS

The Adventurers are the uber-characters. There may be adventuring NPCs, but no NPC exists on the same terms as an Adventurer. The Adventurers exist on their own terms, casting down old tablets and building up new ones.

Distribute 10 points among the 4 methods: Skilled, Violent, Charismatic, Sorcerous. Each method must have at least 1 point.

You begin play with 1 Will Power.

### REWARD LOOP

## 1. There is a psychological “substance” - Will Power.

This is not a material substance, but an emergent property of the psyche that \*seems\* real, subjectively. It fluctuates as a simple scalar, like Humanity in Sorcerer or the Pool in The Pool. We can have more or less of it, we consume it to do things, and if we lack sufficient of it we are stymied. We can call it Will, Power, Willpower, Spoons, Agency, Effectiveness, or simply Points or Dice. In game terms it is the currency of the reward loop.

## 2. What generates it?

Life-affirming things! There are universal life-affirming things available to all:

\* Rest \* Food and drink \* Intoxicants \* Companionship \* Sex

In addition, there are personal life-affirming things that reveal the character’s personality. Generally, these have to do with expressing an ideal of some kind and are self-affirming, or self-overcoming.

Examples: practicing a skill, displays of skill, wining a fight, winning an argument, quiet contemplation, studying philosophical texts, praying, meditating, conversing with a respected companion, self-sacrifice to save or help another, resisting temptation

There are two parts to a personal life-affirming thing: first, its essence expresses that the character is (or at least feels) \*in control\* of some specific thing or in some specific way. Second, it reveals some specific facet of the character’s value system. Activating the personal life-affirming thing involves making a choice of some kind. “I give all my money to the poor” involves a concrete choice and sacrifice in exchange for a concomitant buoying up of morale / spirit / feeling of potency.

## 3. What depletes it?

Great deeds! I.e., the RESOLUTION MECHANIC. You can spend it BEFORE rolling to get an extra die, or AFTER rolling to re-roll all the dice you just rolled.

### RESOLUTION MECHANIC

#### 1. There are two sources of opposition: Obstacles and Adversaries.

An Obstacle is some feature of the material world that is getting in your Adventurer’s way or creating danger. An Adversary is another character acting at cross-purposes with your Adventurer.

2. Obstacles are overcome using Skill. All traditional RPG “task” types are incorporated herein - climbing walls, jumping chasms, picking locks, searching libraries, sneaking around, etc.

3. Adversaries are overcome using Violence or Charisma. Violence means real physical contact, not mere threat: you forcefully restrain, harm, or kill the Adversary. Charisma means you manipulate the Adversary. You lie / mislead, intimidate, seduce, etc., them into doing what you want. Good-faith dialogue and negotiation does not engage with the mechanics; just play it out. Using Charisma means you are bamboozling the Adversary; playing on fear, stirring up anger, engaging their lust or avarice, confusing them with clever arguments, etc.

#### 4. What about Sorcery?

Who the fuck knows. Mike can design it.



## 5. How it works

OK. Options:

The methods are:

1. A dice pool ← counting successes 2. A target number ← means rolling low is good 3. A die size 4. An additive (i.e., bonus) ← means an extra math step

The Obstacles / Adversaries are:

1. A fixed static target (i.e., always 10) 2. A dynamic static target (i.e., GM chosen DC) 3. A fixed dynamic target (i.e., 3d6) 4. A dynamic dynamic target (i.e., GM rates difficulty in sorcerer dice)

Spending will before rolling increases chance of success:

1. More dice 2. Larger die size 3. Better TN ← seems inelegant 4. Straight bonus (+1) ← this one doesn't combine well with re-rolls

Roll 2d6. If you spent Will before rolling, roll 3d6 and drop the lowest one. Add your Skill, Violence, or Charisma, whichever you're using. If you get 10 or better, you win! Otherwise, you fail. If you fail, you have a choice to make:

You can stop here, with no consequence beyond not getting what you want. This is the best you can do at getting this thing, though. You can't just try again until something seriously changes.

OR

You can spend a Will to re-roll all the dice you just rolled. If you get a 10 or better, you win! Otherwise, you fail for good and all. Also, this time when you fail there are Consequences:

Violent - You suffer Harm Charismatic - You receive a Burden Skilled - You experience a Complication Sorcerous - Your Sorcery runs Amok

Consequences can be either applied immediately, or converted into a Disadvantage to be applied against a future roll, as the GM wishes. The application of a Disadvantage takes this form:

"Because of your wound..." "Because Miriam saw through your lies..." "Because you made so much noise..."

"...you have a Disadvantage."

Mechanically, when Disadvantaged, roll an additional die and drop the highest. This sounds like it might get complex, but it really doesn't. It just means that if you are Disadvantaged and you spend Will up front you roll 4d6 and take the middle two.

Will spent: 3d6, top two Default: 2d6 Disadvantaged: 3d6, bottom two Will spent \*and\* disadvantaged: 4d6, middle two

The GM decides whether or not to use the Disadvantage before the player rolls. If the roll fails and the player spends a will to re-roll, the Disadvantage die gets rerolled too. The Disadvantage goes away after the GM uses it. (I suggest a card-based tracking method).

The Fable / Window / Ironclaw Method

Each method is rated with a die type - d4, d6, d8, d10, d12.

Choose one of the following sets of dice and distribute among the four methods:

5: d12 d4 d4 d4 4: d10 d6 d4 d4 3: d8 d8 d4 d4 2: d8 d6 d6 d4 1: d6 d6 d6 d6

Also known as: You have 8 die levels to distribute, minimum d4 in each. OR All methods start at d6. You can raise one method one level by lowering a different method one level.

To do a thing, roll that thing's die. If you get a 4 or better you win. Otherwise you fail. You can spend a Will to re-roll. Spending Will before the roll gives you an extra d6; roll both and drop the lowest one. OR Spending Will before the roll gives you +1 to the roll. OR Spending Will before the roll bumps you up a die size (what happens if you bump up a d12?)

The Trollbabe / Runequest Method

Each method is a target number. Roll 1d10 vs. that target number. Less-equal to the TN succeeds. Spend will before rolling to roll 1d8.

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