

Bronze



Narrative TM
12
System



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Bronze

As the king vultures circled overhead, Bronze knelt upon the burning sand and tore two strips of cloth from his robe with which to bind his feet. He had stopped sweating two hours ago and had cast off his sword as dead weight the night before. Parched to the bone and completely defenseless, if the heat didn't kill him before he reached Halandor, the grak dogs would. And that was the last thought Bronze had before he collapsed face down in the sand.

The Giant

The giant grunted as he slung the twisted body of the stranger over his shoulder. Judging by the stranger's weight, Mingo figured that there was enough meat here to feed him for the next four days. Surely this was another sign from Kale that his destiny lie in Halandor. Mingo had received many signs from Kale over the last several days – indeed, just last night, Kale had delivered unto him a fine sword forged of heavy bronze with which to slay the grak dogs that had hounded him. As the giant made his way back to the nearby oasis, he gave thanks to the Blood God for his bounty.

Laying the stranger's corpse next to his bedroll, Mingo stepped back to examine his supper. As he stood over the dead man, Mingo marveled at his physical size. Never before had the giant seen a man that so nearly rivaled his own stature. This man must have been a mighty warrior in life, for even as he lay lifeless in the desert sand his bronze muscles commanded attention. Mingo frowned. Muscle tissue made for poor eating. Too tough, too stringy. He briefly considered the dilemma and then decided

that after he was done bathing, he would need to boil some water.

After shaking the sand from his hair, Mingo walked to the edge of the nearby pool of water and stripped off his robes. As the giant stepped into the pool, weeks of tension rolled off of his muscled body, the cool water soothing his sun ravaged skin. As the gentle night breeze blew through the oasis, Mingo's thoughts again drifted to the dead warrior. What wrong had the bronze man committed that so enraged Kale as to strike him down mere footsteps away from the salvation of the oasis? He surely must have offended the Blood God personally. What manner of warrior, wondered Mingo, would dare challenge a god?

The War God

When he opened his eyes, Bronze found himself staring up at the night sky. Or at least he thought it was the night sky. Disoriented and wracked with pain, Bronze found that he could not sit up. With great effort, he managed to feebly extend his left arm and explore his surroundings. Yes, he was definitely on his back. Raking his fingers through the sand, he stopped when they touched the hilt of his sword. His sword! Yar! Energy and pain surged through his veins as Bronze bolted upright, releasing a mighty howl. This was final judgement!

As Bronze struggled to wrap his fingers around the hilt of his sword, he wondered if it had been the grak dogs or the sun that had finally done him in. No time for that. Yar was near. Bronze cringed as he leaned forward and assumed a crouching position. No fear. If he faced Yar valiantly, the War God would grant him a charge in the great host. Bronze groaned as he tried to gain his feet, his vision blurring. He heard a

splash behind him and turned to face the War God who stood black against the pale moon, knee deep in a pool of crimson gore.

The Blood God

Mingo lie floating on his back in the small pool of water, visions of Halandor dancing through his head when, suddenly, the night was pierced by a bloodcurdling wail. Startled, the giant inhaled a mouthful of water as he jerked upright. A gurgling noise issuing forth from his throat, Mingo turned to see the dead man shambling about on the shore. Kale! The zombi was wielding his sword! His mind racing, the giant's hands fumbled beneath the surface of the pool looking for a weapon, a stone, *anything*. What had he done to anger the Blood God?

As he watched Kale's gruesome avatar stumble about, Mingo momentarily considered running naked through the desert in the opposite direction and hoping for the best, but then thought better of it. To die at the hands of the Blood God was a great honor. Or so his people believed. At the moment, Mingo wasn't so sure he wanted that honor, but if Kale demanded his blood, Mingo knew that sooner or later the god would have it. The giant decided that death was death, no matter when or how it came, and now was as good a time as any to die. With a grunt and a splash, Mingo stood up to face the Blood God.

Clash of the Titans

The Blood God readied his sword, groaning as he shifted from one foot to the other, watching the motionless War God, waiting for the giant in the pool to make the first move. The War God stood motionless,

his mouth contorting into a cruel smile as he wondered how to kill something that was already dead. For that single moment, the gentle breeze ceased to blow and time stood still. And then, with two mighty roars, the battle was joined.

The Blood God wailed as he lurched toward the bellowing War God, raising his sword in the air, while the War God bellowed as he ran toward the wailing Blood God, both arms outstretched as if to strangle the foul zombi. As they closed on one another, the Blood God dropped to one knee and rolled forward, his sword aimed at the charging War God's soft belly. With surprising speed, the War God knocked the sword aside with his left hand and made a motion to grab the Blood God with his right. Momentarily knocked off balance, the Blood God did the only thing that he could do to avoid the massive hands of the War God – he fell flat on his back.

As the War God stepped over the Blood God's prostrate avatar, the dead thing groaned, legs suddenly surging upward, corpse muscles rippling, planting both of its feet squarely in the War God's groin. And with that, the War God bellowed one last time as he fell on top of the already prone Blood God, pinning him firmly to the ground. As the gentle night breeze again began to blow through the oasis, the starry sky far above the desert floor was filled with laughter as Yar and Kale gazed down from the heavens upon their new champions.



Sha'arm Desert

Urkal

Isles of Night

Halador

Black Sea

Karthum

1 Inch = 100 Miles

A Land of Bronze

Epic adventures, lost kingdoms, and legendary treasures await your discovery in the distant desert lands of Karthum (*Kar-Thoom*). Here, where the sword is a way of life and life itself is often short-lived, only the strong survive. A land of legends and home to heroes, this is the world of Bronze!

Life in Karthum

Although it is far removed from our own Earth, Karthum bears many similarities to ancient Greece, as described by the great poet Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Like that bygone Greece, Karthum exists, not as a unified nation, but as a small group of independent city states occupying a shared geographic area. Life from one city state to another often varies wildly, but there are some aspects of society hold true throughout the lands of Karthum.

Like the city states of ancient Greece, those of Karthum enforce a social hierarchy, although in Karthum, it is not a measure of skill or prowess (i.e., *arete*) that separates men, but a measure of wealth. In Karthum, it is the wealthy man that is respected and loved, while the common man is called upon to serve them. Due to the nature of this hierarchy, however, the common man often possesses more life experience than the noble man that he serves.

Another major parallel between the lands of Karthum and Homer's Greece is that of technology. The technology available to the city states of Karthum is analogous to that of ancient Greece with the notable exception of advances in clockwork. In the lands of Karthum, the spring was discovered far earlier than it was in our own time line,

leading to the development of both accurate clocks and primitive clockwork automatons by the Adept of Urkal (*Ur-Kaal*).

Like Homer's Greece, the lands of Karthum are the providence of humanity. While mythic creatures (many of which are discussed later in this document) do exist, humans are the only truly sentient species that exists upon the planet's surface. There are no elves or orcs in Karthum, and dwarves are merely men who suffer from a physical deformity, as opposed to an entire race of men unto themselves.

Finally, as gods played a large role in the daily lives of Mycenaean Era Greeks, so do they play an important role in Bronze Age Karthum. Almost every man and woman who makes their home in Karthum has dedicated themselves to at least one god, if not many. That said, despite their influence over the lives of many Karthumians, the gods do not tread upon the world's surface, but rely instead upon their devout mortal followers to enforce their will.



Commerce of Karthum

The system of commerce in the lands of Karthum varies from one city state to another, but not widely. For example, in both Halandor (Hal-An-Dor) and Urkal, a bronze coin serves as the standard denomination of currency. Outlined below are the common currencies of these two city states.

Currency of Halandor		
Currency	Composition	Value
Az	Bronze	1/4 Diponus
Diponus	Bronze	1/2 Tertius
Tertius	Copper	1/4 Dinarus
Dinarus	Silver	1/5 Triaire
Triaire	Salt	1/25 Auran
Auran	Gold	See Below

Currency of Urkal		
Currency	Composition	Value
Arn	Bronze	1/2 Drak
Drak	Copper	1/4 Drakim
Drakim	Silver	1/5 Triaire
Triaire	Salt	1/20 Drakima
Drakima	Gold	See Below

Note: There is no monetary equivalent to the Az of Halandor used in the city state of Urkal.

Once more valuable than gold, salt is still a very precious commodity in the lands of Karthum because of its preservative properties. Indeed, less than a decade ago, the Salt Wars raged across Karthum, ending only when the Adepts of Urkal pioneered an inexpensive method of harvesting salt from

the sea, thus making the valuable substance widely available.

Salt is traded in common units of dry measurement known as aires (air-ees) the lands of Karthum. An aire is equal to roughly one pound of weight. Larger quantities are denoted by an appropriate prefix. Thus, a *Triaire* (the standard unit of salt as currency), weighs roughly three pounds.

Despite the acknowledged value of salt, it is gold that currently reigns as the most precious of commodities in Karthum. Gold is a rare metal in the desert lands and, thus, is sought after by many. The value gold in a land that prizes wealth above all things is such that it drives otherwise honest men to murder for it. Those who possess gold do not openly advertise it.

As previously mentioned, despite its rarity, gold has not always been prized as the most valuable commodity of Karthum. While salt held this honor, a small number of gold coins were minted throughout the city states exclusively for use by the upper echelons of society. Although these special coins are still recognized as valid currency today, only a fool would dare flaunt them in public.

Society of Karthum

Directly tied to its commerce system is the societal structure of Karthum. Obviously, in a culture where wealth is prized above all else, the various governing bodies of the city states do what they can to ensure that the wealthy remain that way, even if it means further impoverishing the poor.

In Karthum, the wealthy live a life of decadent excess, while the poor struggle to survive from one day to the next under the harsh desert sun. This societal hierarchy of riches has created a great divide in aptitude between the rich and the poor of the region.

The wealthy are given to intellectual pursuits and exhibit a lack of physical prowess, while the rabble of the world have had to hone their bodies out of necessity.

Realizing that this delicate balance of power could easily shift was the common man granted access to the knowledge of society's elite, the wealthy take great care to guard their secrets, simultaneously making sure that commoners in their employ are taken care of very well. So far this approach has proven effective.

Technology of Karthum

In Karthum, it is technology and the its associated secrets that fill the same niche magic does in a great many other fantasy settings. This is not to say that sorcerous magic, as such, does not exist in Karthum, merely that it isn't the dominant force that it tends to be in other fantasy settings (such magic is discussed shortly).

The mysterious Order of Adepts in Urkal is, perhaps, the singular driving force behind technological advancement in the desert realms. It is this shadowy cabal that pioneered both clockwork technology, and the much vaunted harvesting process that brought the Salt Wars to an end. Whenever a discussion turns to technology, the Adepts warrant a mention.

Today, the most common technology in Karthum is that of clockwork variety, and this is most prevalent in Urkal, where it was pioneered. Not only does a massive, four-faced, clock adorn the basalt obelisk that stands in Urkal's central plaza, but the bulk of that city's labor force consists of simple clockwork automatons.

For the most part, it seems that the mysterious Adepts propagate technology to

benefit mankind, but rumors of the Adepts' dark rituals and sinister pacts swirl in the many drinking establishments of Karthum. Indeed, because of these many rumors, while technology is accepted as a way of life in Urkal, a great many citizens of Halandor are not as quick to embrace it.

Sorcery of Karthum

As mentioned previously, in the desert realms of Karthum, it is the more practical art of technology that occupies the niche usually reserved for magic in fantasy settings. Sorcery is, simply put, on its way out in the lands of Karthum – a fact that has stirred a sense of urgency in the few remaining 'pure' sorcerers of the region.

Technology makes possible a great many things in Karthum with far less effort than sorcery requires of those who wield it. Most importantly, *anybody* can learn how to improve their life with technology (it doesn't take much to wind a spring), while only those individuals with a natural affinity for magic can wield it effectively.

Those few pure sorcerers who remain in the desert realms spend most of their time locked away in seclusion, pouring over dusty tomes, and searching for (most would say in vain) a way to combat the public appeal of technology or preserve the secrets of magic for future generations.

Fauna of Karthum

Karthum is host to a wide variety of strange creatures, the likes of which serve as a source of constant threat for the people who make their homes in the region. The following creatures are common staples of the Sha'arm Desert.

Bauble Birds: Bauble birds are, for all intents, ravens – they are known as ‘bauble birds’ in Karthum due to their love (and theft) of shiny objects. Many a young street urchin has spent their afternoons trying to locate and loot the nest of a bauble bird in order to enrich their own lives with its shiny trinkets.

Beisere: Massive, scaled, serpents that live beneath the sands of the desert, Beisere were once commonplace throughout the lands of Karthum, but today they are nearly extinct. Beisere are thought of as mere legends in modern Karthum, but they do still exist – and woe be to the traveler who encounters one.

Death Worms: A small, parasitic, creature that resembles a centipede, the so-called “death worm” of Karthum makes its home in the shallow waters of desert oases, emerging at night to crawl into the ear of a slumbering traveler where it lays hundreds of eggs. The subsequent hatching of these eggs is not a pleasant site (or, if you’re a host, sensation).

Grak Dogs: Grak dogs are wild, hairless, canines with the dead, cream-colored, eyes of a corpse, razor sharp claws, and a mouth full of many sharp teeth. Grak dogs roam the desert in packs, feeding on other animals and, occasionally, upon the traveler who wanders lost in the Sha’arm Desert.

King Vultures: Airborne scavengers, king vultures are a common sight in the lands of Karthum. Thankfully, they pose little threat to the living, preferring instead to dine upon the flesh of the dead. That said, the birds are often feared, as their appearance is thought of as an omen of death yet to come.

Leviatan: Thought to be singular in nature, the colossal, serpentine, creature known as

Leviatan inhabits the waters near the Isles of Night. Responsible for many a shipwreck, some have hypothesized that this beast exists specifically to ward the isles and the City of Night from foreign influence.

Medusae: Mindless, inhuman, beasts with both a head and torso resembling that of a human female (at a distance), and the lower body of a snake. Up close, the head and torso of the creature are apparent for what they are – crude facsimiles, grotesque in their parody, designed to attract potential meals.

Sardukar: Once creatures solely of the wild, these large, docile, lizards, with their red skin and peculiar blue markings, were domesticated by the sages of Halandor for use as riding mounts.

Shades: Often attributed to hallucination, Shades are, in fact, very real – and extremely nasty. Manifesting as animated shadows, shades are psychic vampires, feeding upon the *sanity* of their victims. Where shades come from is unknown, but many suspect them of being a product of sorcerous spells.

Venomous Snakes: There exist, within the land of Karthum, over twenty-five varieties of poisonous snake – from the dreaded Drang Viper and its instantaneously deadly bite, to the Kimit Corpse Snake and its slow-acting (but equally deadly) venom. As a general rule, if it wriggles across the ground – kill it.

Zombi: Zombi are, simply, the reanimated corpses men (or women). Given the broad definition, zombi are not unlike venomous snakes in Karthum. There exist a great many varieties of zombi – from your basic shambling brain eaters to the agile, tool using, variety. All of them are bad news.

Religion of Karthum

There are literally hundreds of divine beings recognized in Karthum, some who are worshiped openly, and others who are revered only by secret cults. Indeed, in the desert realms, it is unusual for an individual to pay homage to a single god – rather, the practical citizen has pledged his heart to many deities, ensuring his health and well being in these savage lands.

Many tales recount the exploits of these deities, but not one among them has set foot upon the sands of the Sha'arm for untold aeons. In modern Karthum, the will of these deities is often unknowingly carried out by mortals who happen to draw the attention of a given divinity. Life for these unwitting avatars is often quite perilous.

The following deities are among the best known and most feared and revered in the thriving city states of Karthum and the surrounding Sha'arm Desert.

Kale, the Blood God

Depicted in mosaics as a muscular man with a black mane, yellow eyes, and a red cloak, Kale is the Bringer of Life. The blood of all creatures is sacred to Kale and, should any dishonor it, he has been known to breathe life into the bodies of the dead and use them to punish such infidels.

Followers of Kale never aggressively seek to spill the blood of another creature, and do so only in self defense. Should they either slay a creature or encounter an already dead body, they honor Kale's gift of life by dutifully consuming the flesh and blood of the fallen creature (or man).

Those who fail to understand the true sacred nature of blood (or the importance of preserving the circle of life), often view the followers of Kale as mindless savages or,

worse, inhuman cannibals. Although worship of Kale is widespread in Karthum, most of it takes place in hidden grottos or underground temples hidden from prying eyes.

Krul, God of the Sea

Of indeterminate gender, Krul is often depicted as a towering, inhuman, being in ancient texts, although the details of that inhuman nature often vary from one text to another. Where Krul's nature is concerned, however, all texts are agreed – mighty Krul is the undisputed lord of the sea.

Worshippers of Krul are given to magic rituals and other practices shunned by polite society in Karthum and so, the religion has been relegated to the status of a cult in the desert realms – a cult that has, for better or worse proven very popular amongst the few remaining sorcerers in the region.

Perhaps it is simply society's dim view of magic, or perhaps the rituals involved in Krul worship are truly vile, but whatever the reason, the cultists dedicated to the god of the sea do not enjoy a good reputation in the city states of Karthum.

Mira, Goddess of Thieves

Myth holds that the first theft to take place in the world was that of Yar's heart at the hands of the beautiful, blue-skinned, and black-haired, Mira. It was this deft act that granted the beautiful goddess her station in the heavens. It is Mira whom all thieves pay tribute to, lest they incur her wrath.

The followers of Mira are all thieves of one stripe or another, be they simple cut purses, accomplished burglars, or desert raiders who lay siege to caravans. To honor their goddess, the faithful of Mira tithe one quarter of all the riches that they steal to her, using these treasures to adorn sacred shrines erected in her honor.

The followers of Mira are cultists, as openly praising theft in a society which prizes wealth can only end badly. As such, with one exception, Mira is worshiped in secret – and that one exception is the City of Night, an entire, jewel-encrusted, city dedicated to the worship of Mira and populated entirely by her faithful thieves.

Seidra, Goddess of Fertility

Twin sister of the treacherous Mira, Seidra seeks to give to the world, rather than take from it. Seidra is responsible for the many scattered oases found in the Sha'arm Desert, as well as the children who roam the streets of Karthum. It is to Seidra whom both farmers and pregnant mothers alike pray for blessings and offer their thanks.

The followers of Seidra hail from all levels of society in Karthum, for a wealthy woman loves her children as much as a poor woman, and a poor farmer needs grain as much as the wealthy merchants who sell it do. Seidra's temples are numerous in the lands of Karthum (indeed, even the City of Night is said to house one).

Ssas, the Death Lord

Commonly held to be the brother of Kale, Sass is depicted in mosaics as a gaunt man with pale skin, grey hair and yellow eyes. Appearing to be a wizened version of the Bringer of Life, the Death Lord's devout claim that he is not Kale's brother, but Kale himself, later in life.

Devout followers of Sass wear only black and eschew the practices of Kale's faithful, killing when it suits them to do so, and honoring the dead with burial, rather than by consuming their flesh. Despite the differences that the faithful of Sass have with Kale's followers and their beliefs, they revere their brethren all the same.

Sass worship gained a measure of popularity during the Salt Wars, largely due to the mass casualties of those conflicts. Since that time, many temples dedicated to Sass have sprung up in the various city states of Karthum, including Urkal and Halandor, as well as distant Thule.

Yar, the War God

Depicted as a large, bronze-skinned, bare-chested, wild man in the mosaics that decorate the walls of his temples, Yar is one of the most widely worshiped gods in the many city states of Karthum.

Followers of Yar, seeking to imitate the War God's own sense of fashion, often dress only in a loincloth. While such dress often causes Yar's faithful to be dismissed as simple barbarians by those unfamiliar with the religion, it also allows them to move very quickly in combat, where heavier armor acts to restrict that range of motion.

Although the War God is worshiped openly throughout Karthum, he is especially popular in the city state of Halandor, where one can find a grand gladiatorial arena that bears his name and more than thirty shrines and temples dedicated to his glory.

Zer, the Magus

The nefarious Zer is held to be the source of all magic in Karthum and, as such, he is worshiped by the vast majority of the few remaining sorcerers in the region. As one might expect, Zer is shunned by those who embrace technology and view magic as tired and old, seeing it as a relic of the past rather than the road to the future.

Worshippers of Zer dress in flowing robes of blue and white when a ceremony demands it, but otherwise blend in amongst the citizenry of Karthum undetected (when it suits them to leave their towers). Few non-

sorcerers pay homage to the Magus, but it is feasible that any who seek to unlock arcane secrets may turn to Zer.

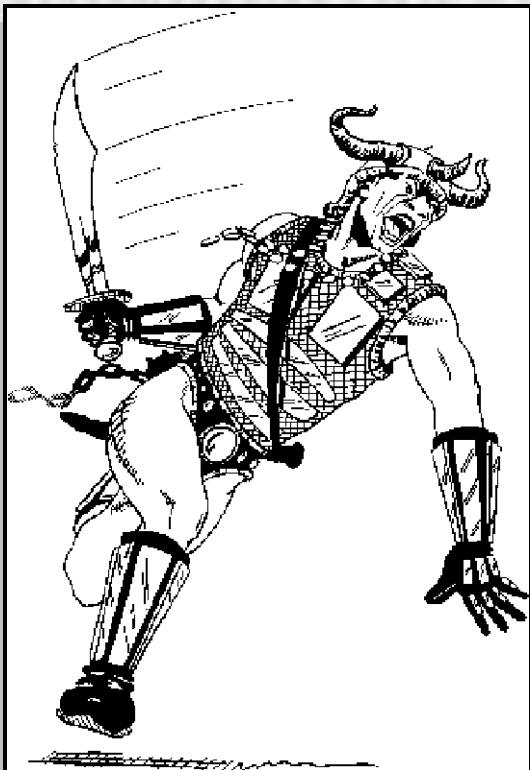
Those who worship Zer do so openly, although the number of shrines and temples dedicated to the Magus has dwindled much in recent years. As technology tightens its grip on Karthum, faithful worshippers of Zer grow increasingly scarce.

Legends of the Land

Many tales swirl in the taverns of the city states and around the campfire rings of bedouin traders. These are some of the most popular and well known.

Lost Azur

A city of unparalleled majesty, long lost Azur was the birthplace of technology in the desert lands, a place so brilliant that



even Urkal's technological wonders pale by comparison. Sadly, the sages of Azur were consumed by their quest for technology and, eventually, it consumed them.

The exact nature of the cataclysm that destroyed Azur is a mystery, but it is certain that the technology of the sages turned upon them, bringing about their doom. Let the tale of Azur serve as an example to those whose ambitions exceed their control.

Oasis of Death

Somewhere, hidden amid the shifting dunes of the Sha'arm Desert, there lies an oasis that is not the safe haven that it seems. This oasis is a place of death, designed to lure helpless travelers to their deaths at the hands of the foul demon who makes his home there, under the stars.

It is whispered that the demon of the oasis cannot be killed, but that one may enter into an unholy pact with this creature in order to escape death – by promising to lure other victims to the oasis, instead.

Sargassum Sea

If ever a deadly place existed upon the ocean, it is the dreaded Sargassum Sea, a roving mass of seaweed that ensnares the ships of unwary sailors, stranding them to die upon the cruel tide.

A haunted place, the Sargassum Sea is said to be haunted by the spirits of those souls that it has claimed in the past, ensuring that any who find themselves trapped within its waters will suffer a horrible fate.



Playing Bronze

As a game, Bronze is designed in the vein of fantasy fiction written by the likes of Lin Carter, Fritz Leiber, and Robert Howard. This revised version of Bronze introduces a default setting (i.e., the setting that I initially envisioned when writing these rules and in which early playtest sessions took place), as well as some much needed rule clarification and a fancy record sheet.

Materials Needed to Play

Aside from 2 or more people willing to cooperate with one another in order to weave engaging tales of adventure, you'll need three other things to get a game of Bronze off the ground.

First, every player (with the exception of the chosen referee) will need six twelve-sided dice of one color and another six twelve-sided dice of another color (i.e., 12d12 altogether).

Second, after each player gathers the appropriate dice, they'll also need to grab a sheet of paper or print out a copy of the official Bronze record sheet (located at the end of this document).

Finally, every player needs to grab a pencil (or, alternately an erasable pen) with which to fill in those aforementioned Bronze record sheets.

Player Characters

Think of the imaginary world that you will explore as being a novel, yourself as being an author, and your character as being a pen - your character is the tool that you, the player, use to express your creative vision within the imaginary world of Karthum.

The method of defining characters utilized by Bronze is designed to be both as simple and concise as possible.

Your Character's Name

All characters have a name that their acquaintances know them by – this name might be one bestowed upon the character at birth, a nickname, or both. As a general rule, Karthumian males have a strong, one or two syllable, forename, while females have flowery forenames consisting of three or four syllables. A list of common male and female names in the desert realms of Karthum follows.

Male Names	Female Names
Amal	Damayanti
Bijan	Fariba
Demos	Jayashree
Kosta	Maneka
Khader	Norzairree
Naresh	Nayantara
Omid	Ophelia
Payam	Soraya
Towfik	Tsavena

Your Character's Traits

Traits are *biographic details* central to a given character's concept – that is, traits are things that either *have happened* or *are currently happening* in a character's life, as opposed to simple descriptors such as 'great strength' or 'master thief'. Write down three to five different biographic details that you consider central to your character concept. For example:

I'm defining Farid, a former sell sword currently eking out a living as a tinker in the city of Thule. Outwardly jaded, Farid often remarks that the age of adventure is over and that if kids were smart, they'd pick up a marketable trade like he did. Secretly, Farid would give anything to swing a sword in battle again. Taking a few minutes to mull over this character concept, I choose the following traits for Fane:

- *Born in the distant land of Hrsup*
- *Fought in the Siege of Halandor*
- *Brother killed in the Salt Wars*
- *Seduced by the sword*

Once you have recorded your character's traits, you need to determine exactly *how* central they are to that character's concept. Every player has twenty points with which to rate their character's traits - the more points that a player assigns to a trait, the more central to the character's concept they consider it to be. At this time, take a moment to distribute twenty points amongst *your* character's traits. Let's return to the previous example to illustrate:

I decide that Farid's youth in Hrsup probably won't play a large part in the game and so assign only three points to the trait that deals with it.

I further decide that the death of his brother is what led Farid to hang up his sword and take up tinkering, so that trait is pretty important – I assign six points to it.

I decide that the only trait more central to my concept of Farid than the death of his brother is his love of battle, something that tugs at his heart strings despite his loss – so I assign seven points to that trait.

Finally, I decide that Farid is proud of his part in the Siege of Halandor and brags

about it when drunk - thus, I assign my remaining four points to that trait.

- *Born in the distant land of Hrsup: 3*
- *Fought in the Siege of Halandor: 4*
- *Brother killed in the Salt Wars: 6*
- *Seduced by the sword: 7*

Your Character's Incidentals

Incidentals are, simply put, props (equipment carried, clothes worn, etc) that may or may not be utilized by the character during the course of a story, but that have no *mechanical effect* in games of Bronze. That said, some equipment may actually be incorporated into a character's traits and, therefore, possess the ability to impact a game mechanically. For example:

- *Recovered the legendary great sword Griefmaker: 5*

Pieces of equipment incorporated into traits like this are considered central to a character's concept by the player and, thus, are *far* from incidental. Such important weapons or other items incorporated into a character's traits should not be recorded as incidentals. Now, take a moment to record any incidentals that your character has in their possession. After you do this, you'll be ready to learn how games of Bronze are actually played.

The Prologue

Like all good works of swords and sorcery fiction, all games of Bronze begin with a short prologue. A prologue is simply a short bit of colorful narrative delivered by the referee that briefly describes the setting, sets the tone of the adventure, and explains where the player characters fit into the overall

scheme of things. For example, a typical prologue for a game of Bronze might consist of the following narrative:

"Silence was shattered in the winding, torch lit, back alleys of the City of Night as the city guard raised the alarm – Mira's treasure vaults had been breached and the cursed Jewel of Hassan stolen. Thankfully, you were already clear of the city's main gate when you first heard the cries of the guards. As you sailed off into the night smiling, you couldn't help but think that for a cursed gem, the Jewel of Hassan had already brought you a great deal of good luck!"

Think of the prologue as a jumping off point for adventure or the 'establishing shot' of a film. If possible, the prologue should convey action, but not lock the players into any given course thereof. For instance, in the previous example of a prologue, a flight from the City of Night under the cover of darkness is described, but not in such a way that it locks the player's characters into a pre-ordained course of action afterward.

Finally, a prologue should most definitely take the character concepts of the players into consideration – if the players have created a group of mercenaries, for instance, the preceding prologue would be wildly inappropriate. When a player creates a character concept, they do so because *they want to play that character*. It is important that the referee honor this wish of the player, rather than try to redefine their character.

After the referee has delivered the prologue, what happens in a game of Bronze from that point forward is entirely up to the other players. Players merely engage in situational *roleplay* (i.e., they assume the roles of their characters and begin acting)

until such time as the referee or another player introduces a conflict, as described directly below.

Introducing Conflict

A conflict is, simply, opposition posed to an action already in progress. Thus, initiating conflict is a two part process – first, a character must be taking action and, second, another player must state that they oppose that action. For example:

Samina, a not unattractive female cutpurse, is attempting to seduce the rather slovenly guard who is warding the entrance to one of the many jails in the city of Halandor. The referee decides that this is an excellent opportunity to introduce conflict and states that the guard, while very intrigued, is also a professional and won't be easily taken in by Samina's attempt to seduce him.

Yes, introducing conflict into Bronze is truly as easy as the example above makes it seem. Initiating conflict is no more difficult than announcing "I seek to oppose X" or "X is opposing your action" with X being a specific character, object or other force.

That said, only the referee is allowed to introduce conflict on behalf of a non-player character or other force removed from a player character, while other players alone may introduce conflict that is a direct result of their own character opposing an action already in progress.

So, what about unopposed action? Well, In games of Bronze, unopposed action *simply happens*. While that may sound like a totally alien concept in the context of RPG rules, give it a spin – I think you'll find that it greatly enhances play, keeping the focus on conflict, rather than simple action.

Resolving Conflict

To resolve a conflict in Bronze, the player who initially narrated the action being opposed grabs two of their twelve-sided dice (one of each color) and designates one of these dice as their 'Conquest Die' and the other as their 'Defeat Die'. Before either of those dice is rolled, however, the player takes a moment in order to present two possible outcomes of the conflict – one of which favors their character and one of which does not. To illustrate, let's return to our previous example of conflict:

In response to the referee's challenge Heidi, the player portraying Samina, grabs a blue twelve-sided die and designates it her 'Conquest Die' and a green twelve-sided die that she designates her 'Defeat Die'. Once she has done this, Heidi declares that if things go Samina's way, the guard will grant her access to the jail and, should things not go Samina's way, the guard will refuse her entry, sounding the alarm and drawing his sword to subdue her.

After the player presents these two outcomes, they then roll their Conquest and Defeat dice. If the result of the player's Conquest Die is equal to or greater than the result of their Defeat Die, the outcome that favors their character wins out and the referee narrates the immediate result of the conflict accordingly.

On the other hand, if the result of the player's Defeat Die is greater than the result of their Conquest Die, then the outcome that hinders their character wins out and the referee narrates the immediate result of the conflict accordingly.

Traits and Conflict Resolution

Now, all of that having been said, here is where things get a bit more complex. If a player manages to incorporate one of their character's traits into either of the two outcomes that they present, they may gamble points of that trait's rating to roll up to five additional Conquest Dice (more twelve-sided dice of the same color as their current Conquest Die) when resolving the conflict in question.

For each point of trait rating (up to five) gambled in this manner, a player may roll one additional Conquest Die. When the dice are then rolled, the player only counts the highest Conquest Die result, discounting the other Conquest Dice completely. For example:

Dave, whose character, Iman, has the trait 'Formally trained in swordplay: 5', is attempting to best an angry grak dog in combat (an obvious conflict), and presents the possible outcome of this conflict that benefits his character as "I call upon my formal combat training, feinting to the left and driving my blade up through the soft flesh of the unsuspecting grak dog's belly when it leaps forward to attack."

Thanks to his description, Dave may gamble up to five points of Iman's trait rating to roll additional Conquest Dice when resolving this conflict, and chooses to do so. Dave decides to gamble two points of Iman's trait rating, thus picking up two additional Conquest Dice to roll.

So, where do points of trait rating actually go when gambled in this manner? Well, if the roll outcome favors the character whose action was being opposed, any points of trait rating that the player of that character gambled to roll extra Conquest Dice don't

go anywhere – the trait rating remains unchanged. If, on the other hand, the roll outcome does *not* favor the character whose action was being opposed, any points of trait rating that the player of that character gambled to roll extra Conquest Dice are subtracted from the current rating of the trait in question and awarded to the player who introduced the conflict that was being resolved (either the referee or another player) and become *Bane Points*.

Bane Points and Conflict Resolution

This is where things get interesting – a player may, when initiating a conflict, spend Bane Points to force the player of the character whose action is being opposed to roll up to five additional *Defeat Dice*, thus shifting the scales to favor the character who is doing the opposing.

For every Bane Point (up to five) spent by the referee or other player initiating a conflict, the player of the character whose action is being opposed must roll an additional Defeat Die (another twelve-sided die of the same color as their currently designated Defeat Die). When the dice are then rolled, the player only counts the *highest* Defeat Die result, discounting the other Defeat Dice completely. For example:

Andros, played by Jan, is hitting on a comely young serving girl in the local tavern. Vasil, played by Mike, decides that he is also taken with the comely serving girl in question and talks down Andros, initiating a conflict – and just to make things interesting, Mike spends three Bane Points, gaining the upper hand by forcing Jan to roll three additional Defeat Dice when resolving the conflict.

Note that, unlike points of trait rating, Bane Points are actually *spent*. Once Bane

Points have been spent, they *stay gone*, regardless of a conflict's outcome. Given this, some players may be tempted to hoard Bane Points, but in doing so, they'll be missing out on an opportunity to flex their own narrative muscle and contribute to the story being created.

Time Between Conflicts

After the referee has narrated the immediate outcome of a given conflict, what happens in a game of Bronze from that time until the such time as the next conflict is introduced is (once again) entirely up to the other players. As they did after the prologue, players engage in situational roleplay until such time as the referee or other player introduces the next instance of conflict.

Character Growth

Characters in games of Bronze, like their fictional counterparts, don't change *much* from one story to the next, although they *do* change. Characters in Bronze can be whatever you want them to be right out of the box, so awarding players three to five points of trait rating (up to their maximum of twenty) every 3-4 game sessions should prove sufficient. These points can be used to either replenish lost points of trait rating in traits that a character already possesses or assigned to new traits based upon events that have actually transpired during the game currently in progress.

In order to facilitate the creation of such new character traits, a referee may want to consider raising the maximum number of trait rating points that a character may possess when a critical juncture in the story being created is reached (increasing the

maximum number of allowable trait rating points in this manner works best when done in increments of five).

The Bronze FAQ

Since its initial release in early 2005, Bronze has attracted a small bit of attention, much of which came in the form of queries asking about the rules or the setting. Herein those questions get answered officially.

Q: When do PCs die in Bronze?

A: The fate of heroes lies largely (but not entirely) in their own hands. The player of a given PC must declare the death of that PC as the adverse outcome of a conflict, and then roll as normal to resolve the conflict (with a Defeat Die result that exceeds their Conquest Die result indicating death).

Q: When do NPCs die in Bronze?

A: Unlike PCs in Bronze, NPCs aren't the focus of the game and, thus, enjoy no built-in plot immunity. An NPC can be (and is) killed whenever a player-defined conflict outcome demands it.

Q: Can I use Bronze to tell an epic story?

A: No, not really – but you can use it to *create* an epic story. The same rules that make Bronze a great game for cooperatively creating a fictional epic during actual play make it a really crappy game for trying to act out a pre-scripted storyline.

Q: Isn't this just a Conan rip-off?

A: No. As indicated elsewhere, the game does draw heavy inspiration from the works of Robert Howard and other authors of swords and sorcery fiction, but it is hardly a 'rip-off' of those works (if it's a rip-off of

anything, it's a rip-off of Homer's poetry and Walt Disney's *Aladdin*).

Q: Why does Bronze shaft the GM?

A: Bronze doesn't shaft the GM, but rather, equally distributes control over the flow of the game between all players involved. Bronze is about cooperatively creating stories, not one player guiding others through a pre-scripted adventure.

Q: Why is the setting so vague?

A: For the same reason that the descriptions of settings like Hyboria and Nehwon were deliberately nebulous – so that the setting can be expanded upon as the readers (i.e., players) experience it. The world of Bronze belongs to the players, not to the author of this game.

Q: Why are there no write-ups for NPCs?

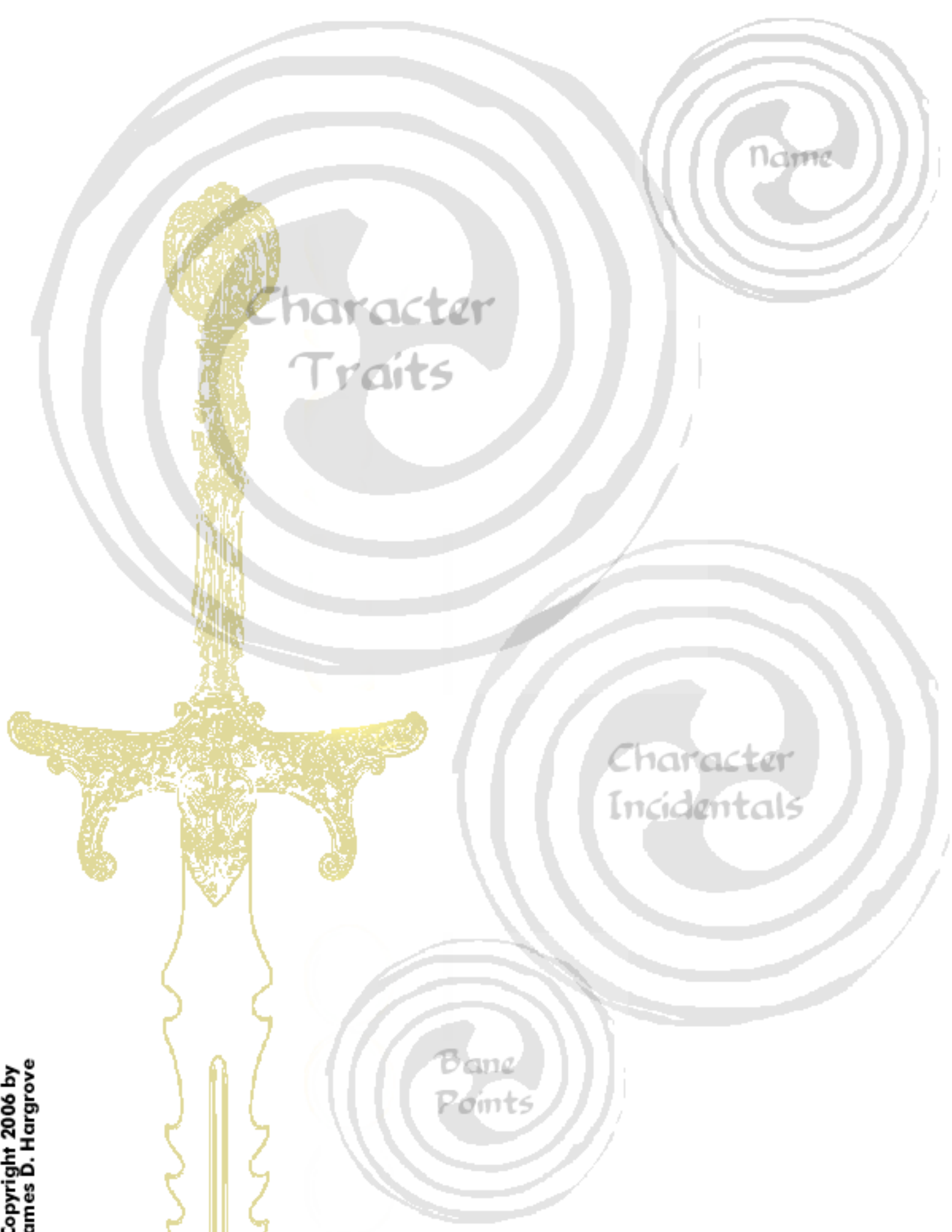
A: Because, as mentioned earlier, the NPCs in games of Bronze aren't the focus of the game – that honor falls to the PC heroes and *their* exploits. NPCs in Bronze exist to provide eternal definition for PCs, giving them somebody to interact with, not to define the setting as they tend to do in many games.

Q: Can I copy this material?

A: Sure – but for non-profit use *only*. If you're copying this for your Friday night game group's use, cool. Similarly, if you're copying this to hand out for *free* at a convention, also cool. You can even host this file for free download on your web site, if you like. What you *cannot* do is copy it and sell it for a profit in any way, shape, or form.

Q: Can I alter this document?

A: No. Really, there isn't much to elaborate on - you may not, under any circumstances, alter this document. Ever. Period.



Name

Character
Traits

Character
Incidentals

Bone
Points