

Blood & Steel

a plug-in accessory for use with the *octaNe* roleplaying game

Written and designed by Jared A. Sorensen

Blood & Steel is a pulp fantasy plug-in for use with *octaNe*. With it, you can create your own sword & sorcery tales like those written by the likes of Robert E. Howard, Michael Moorcock and Fritz Lieber; stories of bold warriors, dark magic, decadent civilizations and lusty exploits.

Unlike *octaNe*, the world of **Blood & Steel** doesn't have any pre-defined geography, history or characters. The Moderator and players are free to build the entire world from scratch as they play. But first, we should discuss how **Blood & Steel** characters are created.

CHARACTERISTICS

Characters in **Blood & Steel** present an interesting problem. In *octaNe*, the characters are defined by their unique Roles. In **Blood & Steel**, everyone in the story has the same Role (heroic warrior types). There are no classes or professions as there are in other fantasy RPGs.

So rather than just have one Role (which is kind of boring), every character in **Blood & Steel** is created from the ground up, using the character elements found in sword & sorcery fiction. Basically, we're going to write an in-character statement of introduction (called a Hero's Declaration), the kind of thing that your character might say to a stranger upon meeting him or her. The hero announces himself by name, homeland, past deeds and whatever gods he or she prays to.

Follow these seven steps to create your character:

- 1) **Name:** What is your character's name? This can be anything from a simple nickname to an elaborate affair of ranks, titles and sobriquets. Try to avoid the stereotypical, mono-syllabic "barbarian jock" name. Most characters in sword & sorcery fiction have real-world (albeit antiquated) names or flowery, otherworldly names. Be creative!
- 2) **Homeland:** Where is/was your character from? If your character has no homeland (due to its destruction or his exile from it), then choose a place where your character feels he "belongs." This could be anything from "the open road" to "the wild lands of the forest." But be warned that having such a vague Homeland will cause you to miss out on the more interesting features of **Blood & Steel**.
- 3) **Deeds:** What is your character famous for doing? Think of Deeds as heroic exploits in the character's past (near or distant, whichever you prefer).

- 4) **Lineage:** What is/was your father's name and what was *his* role in life? If you come from a matriarchal society, feel free to use your mother's name. For characters with mysterious backgrounds or uncertain parentage, your Lineage is "Bastard."
- 5) **Blood:** What is your background and temperament? Are you simple, forthright and earthy (Red-blooded), duplicitous and aristocratic (Blue-blooded) or are you a dark soul who has been touched by supernatural forces (Black-blooded)? Note that Blood in this case doesn't refer to your lineage. A simple stable boy can act like a nobleman and a king may yearn for simple pleasures. Also, heroes with "black-blood" aren't necessarily evil...but they do walk in darkness.
- 6) **Relationship:** What is the most important person in the character's life? What is the nature of that relationship? This can be a friend, lover, family member or even an important enemy or rival.
- 7) **Spiritual Allegiance:** What god does your character pray to? If he does not pay honor to a particular god, then what god looks over the character (for good or ill)? Names are not required, but you will need to determine the god's spheres of influence (like, the God of Strength, the Moon Goddess, the Lord of Chaos, etc.). Remember that in this world, men and women are not entirely in control of their own lives and destinies. Just because your character has a dim view of this "god nonsense" doesn't mean that the gods feel the same way.

It sometimes helps to write down these characteristics as a paragraph or so of background information. When you've established one of your hero's characteristics, underline that word or phrase.

***Example:** My character is a slave named Gosa San, a mighty gladiator who fights in the "blood arenas of Gôn" (hey, that sounds good!). First I decide that his most famous deed was to slay the Great Beast of Gôn in his first arena match...but then I reconsider. Instead, I decide that Gosa San has escaped from the arena and is attempting to reclaim the throne from the tyrannical Warlord of Gôn! Gosa San is actually the rightful heir to the throne. The Warlord usurped his father (the king of Gôn) and Gosa was cast down into slavery, his name and true lineage erased from history. Despite his status as an escaped slave, Gosa has the blue blood of a dynasty flowing through his veins. Gosa's old combat teacher (who adopted the orphaned child) seems like a good choice for a relationship, but an even better one would be the Warlord of Gôn himself! Lastly, I decide that Gosa follows no gods or goddesses, but he does believe that the spirit of his dead father watches over him and protects him from harm.*

When you've finished, write out a "shorthand" version in list form. This list of characteristics defines your hero as a unique Role.

Name: Gosa San
Homeland: Gôn
Deeds: Escaping the blood arenas of Gôn
Lineage: Son of the High King of Gôn
Blood: Blue
Relationship: Warlord of Gôn (enemy)
Spiritual Allegiance: the spirit of his dead father

HERO'S DECLARATION

When turned into the Hero's Declaration, it might read:

"I am Gosa San, former slave and rightful heir to the throne of Gôn! I have travelled far from the blood arenas of my former days to seek vengeance for the death of my father, the king. Do not stand in my way, for I shall do whatever it takes to reclaim my birthright and return glory and honor to my homeland!"

This Hero's Declaration probably won't be used during the actual game but it can be a good way to introduce your character to the other players, just so everyone has an idea of the kinds of stories you're interested in creating.

STYLES

The Styles used in **Blood & Steel** are the same ones used in *octaNe*. The major difference is that Might and Magic are much more prevalent in **Blood & Steel**.

- **Daring:** acrobatics, swift attacks, swinging and climbing, bold maneuvers
- **Ingenuity:** cleverness and cunning, fits of inspiration and insanity
- **Craft:** stealth and skill, trade-craft, forgotten lore from bygone years
- **Charm:** a sharp tongue and a sharper wit, confidence schemes and coercive plots
- **Might:** feats of strength and endurance, brute force and a steely grip
- **Magic:** arcane spells and occult rituals, use of magical artifacts, potions and scrolls

All Styles start at zero but the choices you made in character creation determines what Styles your character possesses at +1 or higher. Unlike *octaNe*, your hero can have up to +4 in a single Style!

SEX

Your character's sex does matter in the world of **Blood & Steel**.

Male characters start with +1 Daring, +1 Ingenuity or +1 Might.
Female characters start with +1 Craft, +1 Charm or +1 Magic.

Does this mean that men are stronger, more daring or cleverer than their female counterparts? Not at all! Remember that in *octaNe*, Styles simply determine how you are rewarded for "in character" behavior.

BLOOD

Next, your character will gain a point in one of the six Styles based upon his Blood characteristic and your conception of how the character chooses to act.

- **Red-blooded** characters have either +1 Might or +1 Daring.
- **Blue-blooded** characters have either +1 Charm or +1 Craft.
- **Black-blooded** characters always have +1 Magic.

Characters without a Blood attribute (typically the fools and sidekicks) are called "unblooded." Such characters gain no die bonus but may add +1 to their Ingenuity Style. Unblooded characters are usually peripheral characters and may not take Oaths (explained in the System Changes section).

SPIRITUAL ALLEGIANCE

Your Spiritual Allegiance also affects your Style. Choose what Styles your character's god (or gods) best represent. A trickster god might view Craft or Charm as a virtue while the God of War would definitely hold Might above all other Styles. You have two points to spend on these Styles (place both points into one Style or add one point to any two Styles).

Gosa San, our example character, would have the following Styles:

Sex: +1 Might (Male)

Blood: +1 Charm (Blue-blooded)

Spiritual Allegiance: +1 Craft, +1 Might (the spirit of his dead father)

Gosa San's Styles are Might 2, Craft 1 and Charm 1.

SYSTEM CHANGES

The rules for Blood & Steel differ from those in **octaNe** in these three instances:

- 1) Characters may have both the Might and Magic Styles.
- 2) Players don't always roll three dice during Stunt Rolls.
- 3) Might and Magic do not require Plot Points to be used.

The first and last differences are self-explanatory. The second requires further information.

Characters in sword & sorcery literature are often defined (and haunted) by their pasts and other uncontrollable elements. If a tyrannical and cruel warlord raised the most honorable warrior in the land, then the warrior must fight against this mark of shame. If the warrior is known for helping orphaned children, then this too will affect him. It's all about destiny. Things are written in the past and revealed in the future.

Whenever your character performs a feat that invokes a former Deed, his Lineage or his Blood, you gain one die per characteristic. For bastard characters, you only gain a Lineage die when your parentage is called into question, or when your worthiness is challenged because of your status. You can gain an additional die when your single Relationship is threatened or otherwise called into play.

You also gain a die while within your homeland or when acting under the auspices of the character's god. This gives most characters a range of zero to five dice per Stunt Roll.

Example: *During the game, Gosa San is captured by a tribe of ape-like beasts who intend to sup upon the flesh and bones of our hero. To escape their clutches, Gosa tries to trick the ape-men into releasing him by saying that he is a powerful chieftain and demands to be released or else his army will destroy the creatures. He's trying to Escape (something he's known for doing), so he gets one die. Another die comes from his Lineage (he actually IS a powerful chieftain!). A third die comes from his Blue Blood (he is using persuasion and trickery). I would roll three dice when attempting to Charm the ape-men.*

If Gosa was captured while chasing the Warlord of Gôn, he would gain a fourth die (his Relationship) when trying to escape.

HOMELANDS

During a game of **Blood & Steel**, the players are free to invent features of their characters' homelands. No one else (not even the Moderator), can alter the features of a character's homeland. In fact, while adventuring in a character's homeland, that character's player becomes a **Co-Moderator**. This allows him to take over the duties of the Moderator for awhile, as that player is imminently qualified to describe that part of the world and its history.

In order to create something in your character's Homeland, spend a Plot Point and describe the person, place, event or whatever else you can dream up. You can even spend Plot Points to create Hazards (as explained in the Character In-Fighting section of **octaNe**). Characters without a Homeland characteristic do not gain this advantage so while the "wandering sword-slinger" thing can be cool, it pays to have roots.

OATHS

Oaths are powerful invocations to a character's ancestors or god. By taking an oath (essentially, making a promise to the your god or to ancestral spirits), the character may borrow six Plot Points. The character is then Oath-bound to do two things: fulfill the promise made to his ancestors or gods and pay back the borrowed Plot Points. If the game session ends before the Oath is fulfilled, the character will be unable to use either his Lineage or Spiritual Allegiance characteristic (whichever is appropriate to the circumstances of the Oath) until the Oath is fulfilled. If two game sessions end before the Oath is fulfilled, he will also be unable to use his Blood characteristic.

***Example:** Gosa San has infiltrated the Warlord's stronghold and is ready to reclaim his birthright from the murderous despot. All of a sudden, the Warlord of Gôn appears with several armed guards. "Kill the slave!" says the Warlord. Gosa San raises his sword and cries out an Oath to his dead father. "By the Great Seal of Gôn, I shall avenge you, father!" The Warlord suddenly realizes whom he faces, and Gosa receives six Plot Points with which to defeat the Warlord and his guards. Gosa receives dice from Homeland, his Relationship, his Lineage and his Allegiance – four dice, plus any he gains from spending Plot Points. He must defeat the Warlord this game session and pay back six Plot Points or else he'll be unable to use his Allegiance characteristic until he does kill the Warlord.*

RE-DEFINING YOUR CHARACTER

Whenever your character resolves some part of his past, you are allowed to re-write that characteristic to better suit the character. For example, if your Bastard character is revealed to be the son of the villain, you would re-write the Lineage characteristic. The Homeland, Deeds, Relationship and Spiritual Allegiance characteristics may also be changed during the course of play. Keep in mind that these aren't simple changes: the whole point of a story might be to vanquish an enemy Relationship or perform some great new Deed. Also, remember that if your character changes his Spiritual Allegiance, his Styles will change as well.

FURTHER READING...

Go to <http://www.adept-press.com> and order Ron Edward's **Sorcerer & Sword**, an insightful and erudite look at sword & sorcery genre of fantasy fiction. Although it's a supplement for **Sorcerer**, I consider it an invaluable resource for all fantasy RPGs.