

# Wyrd

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Printed in the USA

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# INTRODUCTION

**WYRD** is a role-playing game that makes use of an innovative game mechanic called "runecasting". It involves drawing "stones" from a bag, and "interpreting" those stones to "divine" your Hero's future. The innovative part comes when you start permanently removing stones from your bag; you can actually watch as your Hero's life grows shorter, his fate closing in on him.

It is this element of Doom-and-Gloom that gives **WYRD** its setting - the world of Nordic Myth. **WYRD** can be used to tell any kind of story, but it is especially well suited for telling grim tales of fated Heroes struggling against an all-consuming destiny. This is a stark, beautiful world, full of unexplored opportunities for roleplaying. Need ideas? Pick up a copy of Beowulf, the Nibelungenlied, or any good account of Norse Mythology; check out The 13th Warrior, or the novel it was based upon, The Eaters of the Dead; Hell, even Erik the Viking would make for a good **WYRD** adventure.

## A GAME OF HEROIC TRAGEDY

If you're reading this, chances are you know what a roleplaying game is. You know that roleplaying games (RPGs for short) are all about cooperative storytelling, sort of like telling stories around a campfire, but with rules to keep it organized. You also know that RPGs ask you to identify with specific characters within those stories; the type of characters available depends upon the type of story you hope to tell. **WYRD** is no different; in this case, the characters you identify with are Heroes of Scandinavian myth, similar to Beowulf and Siegfried.

The Heroes of **WYRD**, however, differ from characters in most RPGs. As illustrated in the myths and legends of Northern Europe, these Heroes are a tragic lot. They live harsh lives in harsh lands – lands doomed from the moment of Creation to end in fiery destruction. Not surprisingly, they themselves are doomed to their individual fates, and the only question left unanswered is how that fate will play out. **WYRD** answers that question.

## A GAME OF EPIC STORYTELLING

**WYRD** is about something else as well - storytelling. Most RPGs hold storytelling as a goal, to one degree or another. In **WYRD**, it is the only goal. Good drama, and good storytelling, requires both heroism and adversity. **WYRD** is designed to allow for both, in nearly equal amounts. And when all is said and done, your Hero will have met his end, just as in all good Scandinavian epics.

Some readers may already be asking themselves, "If I can't hope to succeed, why play?" The answer is simple, Because you are not your Hero. To help encourage this separation of player and character, you will be known as a Skald. A Skald is a storyteller, a person who recollects and recounts the tales of great Heroes, and that is exactly the role you will play within the game. When the Hero succeeds at something great, it will be you who decides what that great thing is. When horrible tragedy befalls him, you will again be the arbiter of his fate. This is fun, because while the Hero suffers, you will still be able to appreciate the joy of having created compelling drama.

The Skald stands in stark contrast to the Hero: Where the Hero has no say as to his own fate, the Skald is the sole arbiter of everything that happens to him.

**WYRD** empowers players to take an active role in the telling of a story. This may at first seem strange to those accustomed to a more typical RPG, but give it time. Soon you will come to enjoy the opportunities and challenges **WYRD** offers.



## THE RING GIVER

The passage above suggests that all players are Skalds, but that's not quite true. One player must assume the role of Ring Giver (RG). In stories such as Beowulf, Ring Giver is the term given to the lord of a people, particularly if that lord is generous with his wealth. That description works well for what the Ring Giver does in **WYRD**.

Most RPGs have a role similar to a Ring Giver, although they might call it something else – something like Game Master. The RG does fulfill some of the same duties of the standard Game Master, but in other ways he is quite different.

First and foremost, the RG is not the chief storyteller of the game. In many RPGs, the players defer to the Game Master, who sets up and narrates much of the story's action to them, only asking for their input when it specifically relates to their characters. Not so in **WYRD**. The Skalds are the storytellers; the RG merely suggests plot elements to them that he finds interesting and would like to see explored.

An easy way to visualize this relationship is to think of a lord in a Norse age longhouse. The lord wants to hear a story, so he calls his best Skalds to him. He gives them some suggestions as to settings and characters he might like to hear about, and it is up to the Skalds to weave these into a tale (of course, to keep the Skalds from tripping over each others' narratives, they follow a set of easy rules). And like the annoying man that he is, the lord continually interrupts the Skalds, suggesting plot developments and contrivances that he finds compelling, even going so far as to insist that he narrate the actions of the enemies.

That's the Ring Giver for you. Unlike a normal RPG, where the players are the Game Master's audience, **WYRD** encourages the players to see the RG (and the other players) as their audience.

## WHAT YOU GET

In these rules, you get the basic runecaster system, as well as rules for making your own Heroes and advancing them along a path of glory. In addition, you get a treatise on the epic of Siegfried, translated into **WYRD** terms by the noted **WYRD** scholar Scott "Skippy" Heyden. The chapter on Siegfried not only provides you with an example of Hero Creation and game play, but it serves as sort of a mini-setting, illustrating one of many ways in **WYRD** can be played.

## WHAT YOU ARE NOT GETTING

You are not getting all the rules for **WYRD**. You will not see any of the rules for Seior (Sorcery) in this little pamphlet, nor will you find the options for the three different styles of play that **WYRD** supports (Mythic, Epic, and Historic). You will not find the chapter on Ring-Giving, which describes the Ring Giver's role and the many optional rules he can use to customize **WYRD**'s play. And finally, you will not find any of the actual Setting material for the game (although Siegfried makes up for this somewhat). All of this material is coming, when **WYRD** sees a full print version; what you see here is just to wet your appetite.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO PLAY

- A bag in a nice solid color (so you can't see through it) that can easily hold fifty or so marbles.
- Thirty marbles (15 each of two distinct colors), preferably the decorative kind that are somewhat flat on two sides. Alternatively, you could use any thing of approximately the same size, so long as they are uniform in size and shape, and come in two easy-to-distinguish-from colors.
- Some scratch paper and a few pencils.
- A friend or three (anywhere from one other person to four or five is good number)
- These rules.
- An active imagination.



## CREATING A HERO

Before you can play **WYRD**, you must have a Hero worthy of telling stories about. Every great Saga features a legendary Hero: Beowulf, The Nibelungenlied, and the Saga of Volsung all describe mighty Heroes. If you need ideas or inspiration, pick up any of these stories and read a few chapters. You will soon be in the mood to play **WYRD**.

Now you are ready to make your first **WYRD** character. However, before stumbling headlong into tragedy, you should first know a few things about Heroes.

**Heroes are doomed.** They may be Heroes, but they are Fated like the rest of us. In a world where even the gods' ends have been preordained, what choice does the Hero have? His story is not about besting the Norns or forging a destiny of his own; it is about experiencing his fate and discovering what destiny has planned for him.

**Heroes are passionate.** This is how Heroes differ from common men - they have Passions and desires that paint them as larger-than-life figures, capable of great deeds, but also immense tragedy. They live, fight, and love like there is no tomorrow, since, in fact, there may not be. These Passions are, of course, merely instruments of the Norns, but they are tools of the Skald as well. It is through your Hero's Passions that you will reveal his **WYRD**. What does your Hero feel strongly about?

**Heroes share deep ties with their family.** Heroes are nearly always members of heroic families. Sigurd is the son of Volsung, whose name lends itself to the title of Volsung Saga. Beowulf is the son of Ecgtheow and grandson of Hrethel, both great lords and Heroes in their own right. These ties of kinship can be seen in even the gods, where Odin (the All-Father) seems to be related to nearly all of the Aesir. Was your Hero's destiny marked by a remarkable lineage?

**Heroes share deep ties with their people.** A Hero's people are often an extension of his family. Beowulf was nothing if not a Geat. He gave everything for his people, and in return, they gave everything for him. People need strong leaders. Whether they fill that role by rank, position, or simply by example, the Hero's position as leader is all-important; as the story Beowulf tells us, a leaderless people are a people at their enemies' mercy. Will your Hero be the man to defend and protect his people?

**Heroes are intimately connected to the land.** Midgard is a harsh, beautiful realm and its Heroes are the living embodiment of this. They can be strong and tall like the mountain peaks. They can be cold and frigid like the winter blizzard. They can be grim and stoic like the glacial ice. Or they can be deep and dark like the great forest canopy. What aspects of the world will your Hero personify?

## THE FIRST STEP

The first thing you must do is think of a story you want to tell. It can be anything - a rousing adventure, a romance, a tragedy, even comedy, so long as it is suitably Nordic. Then you need to consider who the protagonist of that story will be; this will be the Hero that you are about to create. If you have given some thought to the questions posed previously, you may already have a good idea of who that Hero is and what his story might be. If not, spend some time glancing through the rulebook, paying attention to details of the setting and the artwork. Something here should inspire you. Jot down some notes or sketch some pictures of your own, and when you're ready, return here to start creating your Hero.

It is a good idea to begin considering supporting characters for your tale, as well as some events that you think would be fun and interesting to encounter. **WYRD** lets players add details like these to the story, either as part of the Ring Giver's main plot, or as a subplot of their own devising. Having some ideas prepared in advance will help the game run smoothly, and will add to your enjoyment of it.

## THE HERO'S WYRD

"**WYRD**" is the Germanic word for fate. In the Nine Realms of mythic Scandinavia, it is a fact that each man's **WYRD** is ordained for him at birth by the three Norns: Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld. **WYRD** is about discovering what they have planned for your Hero.

To accomplish that, **WYRD** uses a bag filled with stones of two different colors. One color represents Heroism, and the other Tragedy. The bag itself is the purse, although the stones and the purse as a whole are sometimes called the **WYRD**. As his Saga unfolds, stones will be drawn from the purse to determine how Heroism and Tragedy strike the Hero. This is called runecasting. At times, stones will be permanently removed from the purse, causing the **WYRD** to dwindle, and eventually close in on him. When the last stone is removed, the Saga is over.

The act of drawing stones from the **WYRD** is more than just a way of randomizing events within a story. It is even more than a storytelling device, although it is definitely that. It is actually a trait of the Hero, in the same way that Strength or Dexterity are traits of characters in other games. It is a Hero's most important attribute. It will be set for him now, and will affect all aspects of the game from this point on.

To determine a Hero's **WYRD**, place a number of stones into your purse. Thirty stones, fifteen of each color, is a good number for a typical Hero, but you can vary this number if you wish to play a longer or shorter Saga. The only thing that truly matters at this point is that you have an equal number of Heroism and Tragedy stones in the purse.

Once you have placed the stones in the purse, you must draw some of them out. Ten

stones is a fair starting point for a **WYRD** Hero, but again, you can draw more or less if you want a Hero who is more or less passionate. (See below to see how the stones you draw affect Passions.) The important thing here is that the draw is random. Set the stones you've drawn aside – you will be using them soon.

Now look at your purse. It is filled with stones, a somewhat random assortment of Heroism and Tragedy. This is your Hero's **WYRD**. Contained within is a story – your Hero's story, and all you have to do now is tell it.

## **PASSIONS**

Aside from his **WYRD**, the other primary attribute of a Hero is his Passions. You may be wondering where the more familiar traits, like Strength or Dexterity, are. Simply put, they do not exist in **WYRD**. In Midgard, strength is useless if you have not the courage to use it. A weakling can overcome with love what a strong, yet unmotivated, man never could.

Furthermore, there is no "set" of Passions. Every Hero's Passions are different, and while some are common (Courage), others are not (Duty to the Geats). There is a list of sample Passions, but this is meant to give you an idea of what is a Passion and what is not. Passions are not skills, attributes, or abilities. They are emotions, hopes, dreams, virtues, vices, goals, and flaws. Customize them to your liking; your Hero's Passions should be tailor-fit to the story you hope to tell.

### **Sample Heroic Passions**

Valorous  
Courageous  
Brave  
Love (of someone?)  
Kind  
Affectionate  
Merciful  
Sympathetic  
Charitable  
Selfless  
Generous  
Loyal (to someone?)  
Dutiful (to someone?)  
Shrewd  
Confident  
Patient

### **Sample Tragic Passions**

Cowardice  
Hatred (of someone)  
Anger  
Spiteful  
Envious (of someone)  
Jealous (of someone)  
Merciless  
Cruel  
Miserly  
Selfish  
Treacherous  
Conniving  
Arrogant  
Braggart  
Short-tempered  
Rage

By looking at the examples, you will see there are two types of Passions: Heroic and Tragic. These, of course, correspond to the two types of stones contained in your purse. Heroic Passions are those things we most often associate with Heroes: Courage, Mettle, Love, and Duty. Tragic Passions can be considered flaws: Temper, Anger,

Hatred, and Cowardice. Not that Heroic Passions are always good for a Hero; many Heroes have been brought low by their Love of someone or something. Likewise, Tragic Passions can often allow a Hero to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Hatred, for instance, can be a very powerful motivator. But for purposes of creating your Hero, consider Heroic Passions to be all those things that we like to see in our Heroes, and Tragic Passions to be those things that make him mortal, and maybe even a little unsavory.

Now you may determine your Hero's Passions. Take the stones you set aside earlier and look at them. For each Heroic stone you have, you may do one of two things:

**Create a Heroic Passion for your Hero, giving it a starting value of 1,  
Or  
Add 1 to an existing Heroic Passion**

Put the Heroic stones away, and look at your Tragic stones. Now do the same for them, only this time the Passions must be Tragic in nature.

Once you have recorded your Passions, remove those first ten stones from the game entirely. Place them in your barrow. They are gone, representative of that part of your Hero's Saga that has already transpired. (The barrow is the stockpile of stones that you have permanently removed from your purse. Save them for use in future games of **WYRD**, but separate them from your current game.)

### **Other Things You Can Do With Stones**

Your stones can be used for more than just Passions. Below are some other options you may want to consider when creating your Hero.

- You may decide to play a character less passionate than others, and thus may not want to assign all of your stones to Passions. Return the unused stones to your purse, to ensure game balance with your fellow Heroes.
- You may want to include allies, retainers, or lovers as part of your Hero concept. You may do so at no cost, so long as these things provide only set-dressing or minor benefit to your Hero. The Trappings chapter describes how to "create" allies or other such Supporting Characters who actually provide some important benefit to your Hero.\*
- You may want your Hero to possess magical items or special abilities. Again, the Trappings chapter describes how to do this.\*

*\*Note that to acquire a Trapping, a Hero must typically overcome some obstacle or Adversary. In the game, this is called The Rule of Tragic Happenstance. For purposes of Hero Creation, this rule is ignored.*

## PRACTICAL HERO BUILDING

How you allocate stones to Passions is up to you, but to have any chance at all of accomplishing truly Heroic feats, you will need a Passion of at least five or more. A well-conceived character will have a single ruling Passion at a high level (5+), and two or three of a somewhat lesser value. This will allow for moments of grandeur, both Heroic and Tragic, but will also provide the Hero (and the Skald) with something to fall back on when risking it all does not seem like such a wise decision.

## STARTING YOUR SAGA

Before you can begin play, there are a few final details you must address.

- **Name.** You must come up with a suitably Heroic, and preferably Scandinavian-sounding name. If you're having trouble thinking of a good name, any of the great epics referenced throughout the rules should provide ample inspiration.
- **Social class.** Great Heimdall came to Midgard once, visiting three families while there. In doing so, he created the three divisions of Scandinavian society: the Thrall (slave), the Carl (free peasant), and Jarl (noble). Your Hero will most likely be a Jarl – most Sagas deal with the actions of warrior-princes, but it is not an absolute requirement. A tale of a Thrall seeking Valhalla could be both powerful and moving.
- **Compose the first ten Verses of your Saga.** During the course of play, every stone that is buried in your Hero's Barrow is recorded on your character sheet as a line (or more) of prose. Such an entry is referred to as a Verse. At the end of his career, those Verses should be able to be read as a sort of story - that Hero's Saga. Since you start the game ten stones down, you must write the first ten Verses of your Hero's Saga immediately. More information on how to write a Verse is provided in the chapter entitled Growing Your Hero.



## UNECASTING

Once you have a Hero, you can begin to tell his story. How that story unfolds will depend upon many things: the Ring Giver's suggestions, the actions of other Heroes as told by the other Skalds, and by the Hero's **WYRD**. Later chapters will explain the subtleties of interacting with other players to tell a good Saga. This chapter, however, is about your Hero's **WYRD**, and how you use his Passions to explore it.

### **RUNECASTING: WHAT IS IT?**

Runecasting, in **WYRD** terms, is the Skald's act of reaching into his purse, pulling out some stones, and interpreting an event based on the draw. This represents an ancient form of divination – the drawing and interpreting of magical runes that reveal the Hero's immediate fate. It can better be interpreted as a game played by Skalds as they attempt to jointly tell a tale, hoping to entertain a bored or disgruntled lord. Perhaps such a recreation really did exist; the Norse played a variety of games to pass the time during their harsh winters, and colored beads and glass with no apparent use are often found in Viking excavations. Coincidence?

Before discussing the mechanics of doing a runecasting, it's important to understand some vocabulary.

### **THE VOCABULARY OF RUNECASTING**

As you already know, the bag that holds the Hero's **WYRD** is called a purse. When you draw the stones to perform a runecasting, you place them in the pot. When the stanza is finished and the runecasting complete, the stones from the pot are then placed back into the purse, save for one, which goes into the hoard. When all but one of your stones is in the hoard, the last stone pulled from the purse gets buried in the barrow. When that happens, all the stones in the hoard are returned to the purse. This may not make much sense now, but as you read the rules, all will be made clear.

A stanza is an abstract unit of time: it is the time it takes for a Skald to interpret a runecasting. A Stanza is complete when the stones from the pot are returned to the purse (except for the one that is deposited in the hoard). A scene is another abstract unit of time: it is any amount of game time connected through location and/or action. A cycle is a game mechanic, and begins when the first stone is drawn from the purse, and is complete when the last stone is placed into the barrow, at which time all of the hoard stones are returned to the purse.

## **WHEN TO PERFORM A RUNECASTING**

A runecasting is performed whenever a Hero's fate is in question. This most often occurs when another player (usually the RG) places an obstacle or barrier in the Hero's path, but a Skald can choose to perform an unbidden runecasting to seize control of the narrative for a stanza. Whether normal or unbidden, runecastings are always performed the same way.

## **HOW TO PERFORM A RUNECASTING**

Performing a runecasting is simple; the Skald merely draws a number of stones from the Hero's purse, revealing them to all. Those stones are placed in the pot, and then interpreted by the Skald.

The most important element of a runecasting is its Guiding Passion. A Guiding Passion is the Passion that is most applicable to the Hero's situation at the moment of the runecasting. This is a moment of judgement, and discretion must be used. The Skald will usually declare which Passion is the Guiding Passion for a Runecasting, but the RG can suggest otherwise. If there is a disagreement between the Skald and the RG about which Passion should be used, the RG's decision is final. If there is no Passion that naturally lends itself to the situation at hand, use the Hero's least Passion.

When performing a runecasting, a Skald always draws a number of stones equal to the rating of the Guiding Passion.

### **Heroic Events**

- The Hero accomplishes a simple task...1 stone
- The Hero negotiates a minor obstacle...1 stone
- The Hero accomplishes a typical task...2 stones
- The Hero negotiates an ordinary obstacle...2 stones
- Something unexpected, but useful happens...2 stones
- The Hero accomplishes a difficult task...3 stones
- The Hero negotiates a significant obstacle...3 stones
- The Hero accomplishes a near impossible task...4 stones
- The Hero negotiates an extraordinary obstacle...4 stones
- The Hero accomplishes an impossible task...5 stones
- The Hero negotiates an inconceivable obstacle...5 stones
- The Hero introduces a Trapping into the game...see Trappings

### **Tragic Events**

- The Hero experiences a minor setback...1 stone
- The Hero experiences a mild setback...2 stones
- The Hero experiences a major setback...3 stones
- The Hero experiences an incredible setback...4 stones
- The Hero experiences an extraordinary setback...5 stones
- The Hero removes one of his Trappings...see Trappings

## **INTERPRETING A RUNECASTING**

Now you have a handful of dual-colored Stones. Some of the Stones represent Heroism, while the others symbolize Tragedy. What does that mean in game terms, though?

It can mean anything. You are the Skald, the storyteller, and just as the Norns weave the Fates of men, it is up to you to weave the elements of Heroism and Tragedy into an interesting Event (or series of Events).

Start by thinking of the stones as cash with which you can "buy" Events. The more stones you possess, the more power you have to influence the story. You can spend your stones on several small Events, or you can buy a couple of larger ones. If you are of the mind, you can use them all to create a single sweeping Event. It is up to you and your sense of drama.

Nearby is a list of sample "costs", rated in the number of stones of a particular type it would take to "buy" that event. This list is vague and far from comprehensive; you should try to add to it every time you perform a runecasting.

## **THE RULE OF MINIMAL ADVERSITY**

When interpreting runecastings and spending stones, it is perfectly acceptable for Skalds to spend more Tragic stones than what actually exist in their pot. The pot simply represents the minimum amount of adversity a Hero can face from a given runecasting; the RG should never seek to limit a Skald who wishes to truly challenge a Hero. After all, it is through the adversity that they face that Heroes are measured.

## **THE RULE OF MAXIMUM CONQUEST**

Like The Rule of Minimal Adversity, The Rule of Maximum Conquest gives Skalds a way to modify their pot. The Rule of Maximum Conquest allows for Skalds to spend fewer of their Heroic stones than what they actually draw; the pot merely indicates the maximum amount of success a Hero can achieve.

## **THE RULE OF TRAGIC COMPLICATION**

You may have noticed in the above lists that Heroic stones must be spent to "succeed" at various tasks, but Tragic stones can not be spent to achieve "failure". This is because failure is an implicit result of not paying the Stones needed to succeed. Instead, Tragic Stones are meant to represent complications, hindrances, and obstacles to the Hero, above and beyond simple failure. In short, they are all of the things that make for good tragedy and real drama.

## **THE RULE OF TRAGIC THROWAWAYS**

Occasionally you will encounter Skalds who want to spend their Tragedy Stones on "throwaways" – Events that do not really hinder a Hero.

The classic example of this is the Skald who spends a Tragic stone and then states "Wulfgar's spear falls from his grip, clattering down the cliff face." A perfectly good expenditure in most cases, until you realize that Wulfgar's spear was merely set-dressing – his weapon of choice is actually the sword at his waist.

Some throwaways are okay – they can add color to a story, and the story is what is important. But if a Skald gets carried away with throwaways, particularly if he starts loading up his Hero with items and allies just so he can throw them away later, the RG needs to reign him in. This can be accomplished by simply prohibiting the behavior, or by punishing the Skald. The best way, however, is to have the throwaways come back to haunt the Skald.

To continue with the above example, Wulfgar's spear is now at the bottom of a sheer cliff as a result of a Tragic Throwaway. This is the third such instance in the same night, and the Ring Giver is becoming frustrated with the Skald's lack of imagination. At the next crossroads, he decides to interject.

*"As Wulfgar approaches the bridge across the chasm, a wild boar rushes out of the underbrush, and is heading straight for Wulfgar. Now Wulfgar must overcome the boar, but without his mighty spear, he does not have a weapon that will safely keep him away from the creature's tusks. Skald-draw for Wulfgar's combat, but you must incur an automatic penalty of one tragic stone for the loss of your spear."*

## **THE RULE OF SIGNIFICANT ADVERSITY**

Similar to throwaways is the Insignificant Event. Sometimes a Skald will be tempted to declare an obstacle to the Hero as a means of expending Tragic stones, and immediately nullifies the stated Event with a simple expenditure of Heroic stones. Such use of stones is forbidden.

Skalds who wish to introduce obstacles for their Heroes to overcome are free to do so, but the proper way to resolve such an action is to use one runecasting to introduce the Tragic Event, and a second to explain how the Hero bests it.

## **THE RULE OF GATHERING CLOUDS**

There may come a time when you would like for your Hero to succeed at some Heroic task, and not darken it with the shadow of Tragedy. The Rule of Gathering Clouds allows for this, by permitting you to ignore any or all Tragic stones drawn during any normal or unbidden runecastings (not contested, however). The dark side of this is that the RG keeps track of how many Tragic stones have been left unspent by each Skald, and he may use a Skald's "stored up" stones at any time during the game, even during combat, to beleaguer his Hero. In essence, you are handing over your right to narrate a Tragic moment of your Hero's Saga to the RG, in exchange for an unblemished moment of glory.

Keep in mind that the stones are not actually "stored" anywhere; they go back in the purse at the end of the runecasting as normal. The RG is responsible for keeping track of the unspent stones in some way that is easy for him – scrap paper, dice, or perhaps stones of a different color than those used in the Skalds' purses.

## **EXTENDED RUNECASTING**

There will be times when fate works against you, and a single runecasting simply does not provide enough stones of a particular type to allow you to accomplish what you set out to do. In these instances, you may make an extended runecasting.

An extended runecasting functions much like a normal one. First, spend however many of the stones, Heroic or Tragic, you like on Events. The number and types of stones that you do not spend should be somehow noted, possibly on scratch paper or with some other sort of marker (do not use extra stones you have laying around – they are too easily confused with your actual stones). Finish the runecasting as if you had spent all of the stones by placing one in the hoard and the rest in your purse. Now, make a new runecasting; the stones from this new runecasting may be added to the stones from the previous one, providing you with more stones with which to build Events.

There's no practical limit to the number of extended runecastings a Skald may make, although the RG should be wary of allowing too many extra draws. This is particularly true of extended unbidden runecastings.

Each additional runecasting does require the normal one stone to be placed in the hoard, and all of the Tragic stones from all of the runecastings must be taken into account.

## SUCCESS AND FAILURE

It would be easy to see runecasting as simply a mechanic for determining success and failure, but it is much more than that. It is a powerful storytelling tool, designed as much to help Skalds get past creative blockades as it is to help a Hero overcome physical ones. As such, there is no need to wait until a Hero encounters an obstacle to attempt a runecasting. **WYRD** encourages a more proactive approach to storytelling. Any time a Saga seems to be losing steam and you are not sure where to go or what to do next, perform an unbidden runecasting and let the Stones be your guide.

## PRACTICAL RUNECASTING

It may seem obvious, but when stones from a runecasting are returned to the purse from the pot, it is important to mix them up a bit. This helps to preserve a random mix of stones, and prevents Skalds from redrawing the same assortment of stones over and over. If a Skald seems to be doing so, it's perfectly acceptable for the RG to take his purse and give it a thorough kneading.





## CONTESTED RUNECASTINGS

A contested runecasting is one in which a Hero comes into conflict with another Hero or an Adversary (referred to in both instances as Contestants). In such an event, each Skald and/or the RG declares their intent for the coming stanza. The RG decides which Passions of the Contestants should be the Guiding Passions for the Contest, and the Skald whose Hero has the highest Guiding Passion gets to make the runecasting. The other Skalds do not make Runecastings (and the RG never makes runecastings, since Adversaries do not have Passions).

When deciding who gets to perform the runecastings, if two or more Skalds are tied for the highest Guiding Passion, each Skald may make a runecasting. The Skald that draws the most Heroic Stones wins and gets to keep his pot; all other Skalds must return their pots to their purses (except for one stone, which, as with all runecastings, gets placed in the hoard).

Once the runecasting has been made, its results must be interpreted. This is where contested runecastings differ; while the Skald who actually performed the runecasting retains the ability to interpret the Heroic Stones that were drawn, the contesting Skalds (or the RG, in the case of Adversaries) get to decide how the Tragic stones are to be spent. For purposes of game balance, all Contestants are considered to be under the auspice of The Rule of Maximum Conquest. Because of this, The Rule of Minimal Tragedy is not in effect.

If during a contested runecasting there are more than two Contestants, the Skalds who do not make the runecastings can decide among themselves how they wish to spend the Tragic stones. If the RG is Contesting as well as two or more Skalds, the RG automatically gains interpretive power over the Tragic stones.

If a contested runecasting ever becomes more complicated than a simple exchange between a single Hero and his opponents, they should be broken down into separate contests. Determine the order in which the contests will be resolved by comparing Passions and allowing the highest Passions to resolve before the lower ones. In the case of ties, allow both to make their Runecastings; the Skald who draws the most Heroic stones resolves his contest first, while the other waits it out (keeping his pot, though, until it is his turn to act).

When multiple Heroes are fighting the same Contestant (typically an Adversary, but potentially another Hero), each Hero with a Guiding Passion greater than the opponent, gets to make a runecasting. The embattled Contestant still gets the opportunity to develop Events against each of his opponents (using only the Tragic stones they drew against them). If the embattled Contestant is a Hero and possesses the greatest Guiding Passion, he is the only person to make a runecasting.

## **EXTENDED CONTESTED RUNECASTINGS**

Contested Runecastings often developed into extended contested runecastings, as opposing Contestants attempt to build towards a single, dramatic coup-de-grace. The most common example of this is combat, where many Adversaries require a dozen or more stones to defeat.

Extended contested runecastings are handled just like normal extended runecastings, except that all Contestants must have an opportunity to spend whatever stones they desire before proceeding on to the subsequent runecasting. It is not necessary for all Contestants to save stones, or even to agree to extend the runecasting; if one Skald or the RG chooses to save stones towards a future runecasting, and so long the Contestants remain in conflict with each other, the runecasting automatically is considered extended.

## **BLOCKING STONES**

During contested runecastings, and only during contested runecastings, a Hero or Adversary may spend stones to cancel or reduce the effect of Events created with other stones. This is called blocking. When blocking, the following rules apply:

- When blocking, stones can only cancel stones of the opposite type. Heroic stones block Tragic stones, and Tragic stones block Heroic stones.
- When blocking an attempt to introduce or eliminate an Event or Trapping, the blocking Skald (or Adversary) must be able to match the original expenditure stone for stone. If they can not, no block may be attempted. The only exception to this rule is when blocking damage.
- When blocking damage, partial blocks are allowed. For each stone spent, one stone of the opposite type is canceled out. It is not necessary to be able to block all of the original expenditure.

## COMBAT

Midgard is a violent place. It was created in a moment of bloodshed, and so shall it perish. And for that final, fateful day every Hero must prepare.

Combat in **WYRD** is a contested runecasting. It is handled in the same manner as any contested runecasting, but the way in which the stones may be used is somewhat limited. They may be saved (as per the extended runecasting rules); spent to buy a Tragic Condition Trapping for your opponent; spent to remove a Trapping from your opponent; or used to Block stones spent by your opponent.

To "kill" an Adversary (which is a type of Trapping), you must accumulate enough Heroic stones to pay its cost, thus removing it from the game. Killing a Hero is nearly impossible; you are better off inflicting as many Tragic Condition Trappings as possible upon him, rendering him ineffectual, and thereby forcing a retreat.



# THE ARMOURY

Much is made about a Hero's accoutrements in the various Sagas of Midgard. It would, therefore, be remiss to not say something about the weapons and armor available to such Heroes.

Even so, the benefit provided is relatively minor; this is a game about Heroes, not their toys.

Damage (as noted on the weapons list) should be considered the equivalent of extra stones of whatever type is appropriate, which can only be used to inflict Tragic Condition Trappings upon an opponent. This bonus can only be applied to a Contestant who has actually been the target of an actual stone during the current stanza; a Hero or Adversary can not spend Damage "stones" to inflict a Condition upon a Contestant without spending at least one real stone in conjunction with them. Damage stones can not be accumulated during an extended contest; they can only be used on a stanza-for-stanza basis, and any Damage not spent during a stanza is lost.

Protection ratings (as noted on the armor list) can be considered extra stones, of whichever type is appropriate, that may be used to block an opponent's stones. These Protection "stones" may only be used to block Tragic Condition Trappings or attempts to remove an Adversary from the game. Unlike Damage, they do not need to be accompanied by an expenditure of a "real" stone (Protection functions passively).

Note that the weapons and armor descriptions state damage in terms of that inflicted or prevented per stanza. This means that, in the entire course of a stanza, that is the amount of extra stones that may be applied to the contest. It is not applied to every attack with a particular weapon, or to every blow against a suit of armor, and when it is used up, it will not provide further bonuses until the next stanza.

Note also that armor does not protect against self-inflicted Tragic stones, such as might occur outside of a contested runecasting.

## **Weapons & Armor**

*Small Weapons* – daggers, saps, clubs, etc. – provide little in the way of combat effectiveness. They provide one extra point of damage per stanza.

*Standard Weapons* – broadswords, axes, spears, warhammers, etc. – provide 2 extra point of damage per stanza.

*Great Weapons* – greatswords, battleaxes, mauls, etc. – provide 3 extra point of damage per stanza, but disallow the use of a shield.

*Hide Armor*, which includes leather armor and padded clothing, prevents one point of damage per stanza.

*Chain or Ring Armor*, protects from 2 point of damage per stanza. There is nothing better than this type of armor in Midgard.

*Shields* will protect from an additional point of damage per stanza but will prevent the use of great weapons.



## THE DWINDLING WYRD

A key concept in **WYRD** is that of dwindling **WYRD**. Everything in Midgard is plunging headlong towards a fateful, doomed finish - even the gods. Your Hero is no exception, and the mechanics of runecasting help to emulate this.

Your Hero's Saga is measured in several ways, one of which is the cycle. A cycle represents a stage in his life, and is measured by drawing through all of the stones in your Hero's purse. When you perform a runecasting, you place several stones in your pot. When the stanza is finished, all of the stones, save one, are returned to your purse. That one lone stone is instead deposited into your hoard. The stone that is deposited into the hoard should be of the type that predominated the runecasting; if there were equal amounts of Heroic and Tragic stones, you may choose which type of stone to place in the hoard.

Each time you perform a runecasting, you will deposit one stone into your hoard save for the final runecasting of a cycle. The final stone drawn from the purse is always buried in the barrow. That stone is gone forever, representing a step towards your Hero's eventual doom. Once a cycle is complete and the final stone in the purse is buried in the barrow, all of the stones in your hoard are returned to your purse. A new cycle then begins.

Eventually there will come a day when a cycle ends, your last stone having been buried in the barrow, and there will be no stones in your hoard to return to your purse. On this day, your Hero meets his fate, and his Saga ends. Write his last verse, cheer his glorious career, and then create a new Hero.





# RAPPINGS

Trappings are those external things that help or hinder your Hero, be they allies or enemies, enchantments or curses, or items of a magical nature. Many Sagas focus on a Hero's cursed ring, his fated love with an unattainable mistress, or the enmity he shares with a hated rival. Your Trappings may even become the focus of your Passions. Here you will find the rules needed to design such Trappings, and the methods by which you may introduce them into the game.

## WHAT CAN TRAPPINGS DO?

A Trapping can do almost anything. It can provide bonuses to Passions. It may bestow upon you special abilities. The most powerful may even give you some slight control over your **WYRD** by allowing you to pre-select certain stones from your purse. Your imagination and the needs of the story are your only guides.

## HOW LONG DO TRAPPINGS LAST?

Trappings will usually remain for the duration of the Scene into which they are introduced, although the RG could rule that they last as little as a stanza, or as much as a cycle. They can be made permanent by spending twice their normal cost.

## SIZES AND SHAPES OF TRAPPINGS

Trappings come in many forms. Below are a few of the most common.

- **Items:** Magical or otherwise, the most common type of Trapping is a piece of equipment that somehow helps or hinders a Hero.
- **People:** Allies or Adversaries can also be Trappings. When they are present, they bestow upon the Hero an advantage or disadvantage, depending upon what Qualities they have.
- **Conditions:** A Condition is a physical aspect of the Hero itself; some kind of boon or bane that is can not be represented with Passions. Perhaps your Hero is strong like an ox, resulting in a bonus to Damage. Perhaps he has a disease or illness that causes him problems.
- **Enchantments:** Enchantments, whether they be curses or blessings, are a magical variation of Conditions. Siegfried's invulnerability to normal weapons was an Enchantment (brought about by bathing in Dragon's blood), as was Sigurd's ability to speak to birds.

# CREATING TRAPPINGS

Trappings are created as Events by using the normal runecasting system.

First, you must announce to everyone that you wish to introduce a Trapping into the game. You must describe what sort of Trapping this would be: an ally, an item, a weapon, some kind of magical ability, etc. The RG must approve your runecasting; if he does not feel the situation warrants it, he can forbid the runecasting.

Once the RG has given permission for the Trapping to be introduced into the game, you may make a normal runecasting. The cost of a Trapping is one stone (of the appropriate type - Heroic stones for beneficial Trappings, Tragic stones for those that hinder the Hero), plus the cost of its Qualities. The one stone represents something, a normal item, a person or thing, or even a place, that by itself has only minimal influence on the game. It can be a normal weapon, a person with special information, or anything the player wants. Because the player has paid one stone for it, it can reasonably be assumed to have some minor affect on the game, but nothing so great that it should have been bought as a Quality. The Qualities are what make normal things special.

Some Trappings may have hidden or unknown Qualities. If a Skald desires, and the RG approves, he may "stash" a number of stones of either type, to be defined as Qualities of the Trapping at some later point in the game. These stones are not actually stashed anywhere; they are returned to the purse or the hoard as normal, but their values are recorded on the Hero sheet and may be used to purchase Qualities at a later time. This rule can be used to simulate a variety of effects, from magical items with mysterious latent powers, to allies who suddenly manifest newfound insight or Passions late in the game. The RG must approve any Qualities bought with these "stashed" stones.

## **Heroic Qualities**

**1 Stone Qualities:** +1 to a passion, +2 Damage, +2 Protection, Night Eyes.

**2 Stone Qualities:** Flight, Breathe Water.

**3 Stone Qualities:** Shapechange, Urd's Favor (when performing a certain type of action, you must select 1 Heroic stone from your purse).

**4 Stone Qualities:** Protection from all weapons, Ignore armor.

**5 Stone Qualities:** favor of the Norns (when performing a Runecasting, you must select one Heroic stone from your purse Automatically)

## **Tragic Qualities**

**1 Stone Qualities:** -1 to a passion, -2 Damage, -1 Protection, Night Eyes.

**2 Stone Qualities:** Blindness.

**3 Stone Qualities:** Involuntary Shapechange, Urd's Disfavor (when performing a certain type of action, you must select 1 Tragic stone from your purse).

**4 Stone Qualities:** All weapons inflict double damage, Armor provides no protection.

**5 Stone Qualities:** Disfavor of the Norns (when performing a Runecasting, you must select one Tragic stone from your purse Automatically)

A Skald may also wish to "enchant" a Trapping at some point in the game (i.e., he wishes to add new Qualities to an existing Trapping). Doing so is the same as creating a new Trapping, minus the initial one stone cost (since that much of the Trapping already exists). A new runecasting may be made and the stones garnered from it may be spent to improve the Trapping. The cost to improve an existing Trapping is equal to the level of quality to be imbued, plus any existing qualities. Note that The Rule of Tragic Happenstance still applies.

For example, Siegfried has an enchanted sword, Balmung. His initial cost was two heroic stones, one for the item, and one for the Quality (+2 damage). The Skald decides that it is time to upgrade the sword. He wants the sword to inspire courage in combat, and therefore give Siegfried a +2 to his Valor Passion. This is a two stone Quality. The cost then, would be two stones for the new Quality, plus one stone for the existing Quality. He must also overcome a Tragic Happenstance of three stones to obtain the enchantment. If at some future point, Siegfried's Skald wanted to further enchant the blade, it would cost three stones, plus the cost of the Quality to be imbued.

## **THE RULE OF TRAGIC HAPPENSTANCE**

The Rule of Tragic Happenstance states that before any Trapping may be introduced into the game, some sort of obstacle, Adversary, or problem must be overcome. If this condition does not exist within the current context of the game, it must be met by expending Tragic stones to create an Event that satisfies the rule. This is a good way to spend any Tragic stones you may have drawn during the runecasting for the Trapping, especially if you do not wish to saddle your Trapping with some form of drawback.

When introducing your Tragic Happenstance, you must spend at least enough Tragic stones to match the Heroic stones spent on the Trapping. Not possessing enough Tragic stones is not a problem; you must simply make use of the Rule of Minimal Adversity.

The rule of Tragic Happenstance assumes that you will be building a Trapping from Heroic stones, but some Skalds, for reasons of dramatic intent, may wish to build Trappings predominantly from their Tragic stones (thus, introducing cursed items or hostile enemies to the Hero). In these cases, the Skald may elect to spend any Heroic Stones from the runecasting in the way he sees best fit, as the Trapping itself meets the Tragic Happenstance condition.

## **REMOVING TRAPPINGS**

At anytime during play, a Skald or the RG may remove a Tragic Trapping (a Trapping built primarily with Tragic stones) from play by spending a number of Heroic stones equal to the total number of stones (Heroic and Tragic) that went into creating it. The

Skald must provide some suitable narrative to explain the disappearance or destruction of the Trapping.

Trappings that have been designed as Permanent may be removed temporarily from play by spending half the cost that was paid for the Trapping. That Trapping is removed for the scene, unless the Skald contests the attempt to remove it. It can be permanently removed just like non-permanent Trappings (i.e., by spending Heroic stones equal to its total cost).

A Heroic Trapping (one built primarily from Heroic stones) may be discarded at any time by the Hero, with no cost to get rid of it.

## **PASSIONATE INVESTMENT**

A Skald may choose to make a Trapping a functional part of the Hero. To do so, he must designate a Passion (in the normal way that new Passions are designated, see Growing Your Hero) that specifically refers to the Trapping in some fashion (e.g., love of the Trapping, or whatever else seems appropriate). This Passion is called the Invested Passion.

The advantage in doing so is that the Trapping can not easily be removed or eliminated from the Hero; doing so can only be done by paying the total cost of the Trapping, plus a number of stones equal to the Invested Passion. Furthermore, if the Trapping is ever taken from the Hero's possession, he automatically receives a bonus to his Invested Passion equal to the total cost of the Trapping; this bonus remains until the Trapping is somehow regained, at which point the Invested Passion returns to its normal rating. The downside of Passionate Investment is that when the Trapping is used, the Invested Passion will typically be used as the Guiding Passion for any applicable runecastings. Until you have had time to develop the Passion as part of the Hero, you will be reduced to drawing just a stone or two at a time when making use of the Trapping.

## **TRAPPINGS AND HERO CREATION**

Trappings can be used to add a bit of color to an otherwise drab character. Here you have a way to tailor your Hero to your own private vision, so why not make the most of it? Are you upset because **WYRD** doesn't have a strength stat? Just design a Condition called Strong Like The Bear that gives you extra Damage. Want a weapon that mirrors Siegfried's dragon-slaying Gram? Design it using the rules for Trappings and Qualities. Do you wish to play a lovelorn warrior? Create a romantic interest for him. Anything is possible within these guidelines.

Note that any Trappings you give your Hero during Hero Creation are exempt from The Rule of Tragic Happenstance.



## ROWING YOUR HERO

As you already know, there will be times when stones are permanently removed from the game, going to rest in your Hero's barrow. Part of his life has passed him by, and he is one step closer to Valhalla. This is symbolic of the Hero's journey in life, his onward rush to meet with destiny.

It is also symbolic of his growth as a person.

Each time a stone is removed permanently from your bag, you must add a new line of verse to your Hero's Saga. This passage must tell a part of his adventure. If the stone was Heroic, you should describe a moment of great valor that occurred during the past cycle. If it were Tragic, you should describe some misfortune that occurred to him in that same expanse of time. Additionally, if that stone was Heroic, you may add 1 to a Heroic Passion, or start a new Heroic Passion at a rating of 1, or reduce a Tragic Passion by 1. The same holds true of Tragic stones; you may either modify a Tragic Passion upwards by 1, or create a new Tragic Passion with a value of 1, or reduce a Heroic Passion by 1. The Passion that is modified or created must be exemplified in the written verse in some way.





# ADVERSARIES

Adversaries are a special kind of Trapping; they represent enemies and antagonists for the Heroes to contend with, usually by means of physical combat. Most Adversaries are the province of the RG, but Skalds may introduce them as opponents for their own Hero (or, if during a contested runecasting, as foes for other Skalds and their Heroes).

They are created just like normal Trappings, with whatever Qualities seem most appropriate. Below are some sample Adversaries; each Quality is listed with its cost in stones, and a total value is then listed (which is the amount of damage/and or stones that must be spent to remove the Adversary from play).

## Great Wurm

Qualities:

Dragon Might (+4 Damage per stanza, 2 stones)

Dragon Hide (+4 Protection per stanza, 2 stones)

Disfavor of the Norns (2 Tragic stones are automatically entered into any Hero's runecasting while facing this Adversary, 10 stones)

Fiery Breath (if the Wurm wishes, any Tragic Condition or stones spent to remove an Adversary from

the game may be applied to all opponents within easy range, 4 stones)

Total Value: 19 stones

## Grendel

Qualities:

Horrible Strength (+6 Damage per stanza, 3stones)

Thick hide (+2 to Protection per stanza, 1 stone)

Immune to Weapons (no damage from any attack involving a weapon, 4 stones)

Total Value: 9 stones

## Frost Giant

Qualities:

Giant's Strength (+6 to Damage per stanza, 3 stones)

Armor and Thick Hide (+6 to Protection per stanza, 3 stones)

Disfavor of the Norns (1 tragic stone is automatically entered into any Hero's

Runecasting while facing this Adversary, 5 stones)

Total Value: 12 stones





# iegfried

By Scott Heyden

In this section, we will explore the story of Siegfried, one of the heroes of the Nibelungenlied. We will describe Siegfried in game terms, and present an insight into how to create similar heroes of this epic genre.

Note: The Nibelungenlied is an epic poem, of anonymous origin. It contains stories that are partly historical, and partly mythological. It has been retold in several versions, including Richard Wagner's operatic cycle, The Ring of the Nibelung, and William Morris' poem, Sigurd the Volsung. The majority of the text references in this work are taken from the translation found on the Berkeley Digital Library SunSITE, with some artistic license taken for purposes of clarity or storytelling.

Siegfried is the prototypical Epic Hero. He is strong, beautiful, charming, and altogether the embodiment of what it means to be a warrior. He is also arrogant, greedy, and self-centered. The bonus to this is that it gives me huge amounts of material to use as I define the character for a game of **WYRD**. Were I to create a Siegfried-like character, I would begin by writing my own opening story. With the Nibelungenlied text available, I have chosen to take excerpts from the story, and have used them instead of creating my own.

## HERO CREATION

First, like any **WYRD** character, I begin with the draw. I fill my bag with 20 white, and 20 black stones. After discussion with my Ring Giver, we agree that Siegfried is somewhat greater than a typical **WYRD** Hero; I pull fifteen stones, with the following results:

10 - Heroic

5 - Tragic

This is a good mix for this character. So taking my story from the Nibelungenlied, I begin to tell the tale of Siegfried. Lines in bold are used to define my attributes, or qualities.

"In the Netherlands there grew the child of a noble king, (Siegmund his father, Siegelind his mother) in a mighty castle, known far and wide.

**Of this hero I sing, how fair he grew. Free he was of every blemish. Strong and famous**Öthis valiant man. (+1 Grace)(Heroic)

**Ho! What great worship he won in this world! Full many kingdoms did he put to the test through his warlike mood.** (+1 Competitiveness)(Tragic)

**The most stately women held him in their love; with the zeal which was his due, men trained him.** (+1 Valor)(Heroic)

Gladly the people saw him, many a maid wished that his desire might ever bear him hither.

**Enough gazed on him with favor; of this the prince was well aware.**

(+1 Arrogance)(Tragic)

**Now he was of the strength that he bare weapons well. Whatever he needed to, of this he had enough.** (+1 Valor)(Heroic)

**Forasmuch as both Siegmund and Siegelind were still alive, the dear child of them twain wished not to wear a crown, but fain would he become a lord against all the deeds of force within his lands, whereof the bold and daring knight was sore adread.**

(+1 Competitiveness)(Tragic)

Then did the son of Siegelind aspire to lofty love. Kinsmen and liegemen enough advised him, since he would have hope of constant love, that he woo one who was his peer. At this bold Siegfried spake: "Then will I choose Kriemhild, the fair maid of Burgundy, for her beauty is beyond measure.

**"This I know full well: never was emperor so mighty, and he would have a wife, that it would not beseem him to love this noble queen."** (+1 Arrogance)(Tragic)

(Siegmund and Siegelind) sought to turn the hero from this venture.

"And thou wilt not turn back," spake the king, "then am I in sooth glad of thy will and will help thee to bring it to pass, as best I may. Yet has this King Gunther, Kriemhild's brother, full many a haughty man. If there were none else but Hagen, the doughty knight, he can use such arrogance that I fear me it will repent us sore, if we woo this high-born maid."

**Then Siegfried made reply: "Wherefore need that hinder us? What I may not obtain from them in friendship, that my hand and its strength can gain. I trow that I can wrest from him both folk and land."** (+1 Arrogance)(Tragic)

To this his father replied, "Thy speech liketh me not; Long time have Gunther and Gernot been known to me. By force may none win the maid, of this have I been well assured."

"It is not to my mind," spake again Siegfried, "that warriors should follow me to the Rhine, as if for battle, that I constrain thereby the noble maid. My single hand can win her well - with twelve comrades I will fare to Gunther's land."

So Siegfried the bold rode to court in Gunther's land.

To the king, Gunther, now the word was brought, that full lusty knights were come, who wore white breastplates and princely garb. None knew them in the Burgundian land. Much it wondered the king whence came these lordly warriors. Then bade the king that Hagen and his men be brought.

"There be come to my house strange warriors, whelm here none knoweth. If ye have ever seen them, I pray you, Hagen, tell me now the truth."

"That will I," spake then Hagen. He hied him to a window, and over the guests let his glances roam.

**"I dare well say, " so spake Hagen, "though I never have seen Siegfried, yet can I well believe, however it may be, that he is the warrior that strideth yonder in such lordly wise.** (+1 Fame/Reputation)(Heroic)

**"By (his) hand were slain the bold Nibelung, Schilbung and Nibelung. Since then he hath wrought great marvels with his huge strength."** (+1 Valor)(Tragic)

"The hoard of Nibelung was borne entire from out a hollow mountain. The dwarves of Nibelung wished to divide it there. This the hero Siegfried saw and much it gan wonder him. Such store of gems was there that a hundred wains might not have borne it. Still more was there of the ruddy gold of the Nibelung. Schilbung and Nibelung greeted well the knight; with one accord these creatures bade Siegfried divide the hoard. Eagerly, they asked it, and in turn, he gan vow it to them. As a guerdon, they gave him the sword of Nibelung, but they were served full ill by the service which the good knight Siegfried should render them. For with the gift of the sword, Siegfried also claimed the right of the firstborn, full half the hoard. Angry of mood they grew."

**"Twelve bold men of their kith were there, mighty giants these. What might that avail them! Siegfried's hand slew them soon in wrath, and seven hundred warriors from the Nibelung land he vanquished with the good sword Gram."**

(2 White - Magic Sword that gives + 4 Damage in combat)

"Because of the great fear that many a young warrior had of the sword and of the valiant man, they made the land and its castles subject to his hand. Then did he fight the mighty dwarf Alberich, who weened to venge straightway his masters, till he then discovered Siegfried's mighty strength; for no match for him was the sturdy dwarf."

**"Like wild lions they ran to the hills, where from Alberich he won the Cloak of Darkness."** (3 Heroic - Magic Cloak of Invisibility)

So, let us see how this interpretation of Siegfried stacks up. Taking the lines that define his characteristics, I have the following attributes:

**Valor** - 3

**Grace/Beauty** - 1

**Fame** - 1

**Arrogance** - 3

**Competitiveness** - 2

In addition, the following items:

**Gram** - Magic Sword (+4 Damage in combat - Cost: 2 Heroic stones)

**Cloak of Darkness** - Invisibility Cloak (+1 Heroic stone when trying to be stealthy - Cost: 3 Heroic stones)

My RG and I agree upon this interpretation. There are many ways that I could have interpreted the same passages, however, this fits with my concept of a flawed hero.

Note that during creation, I interpreted Arrogance and Competitiveness as Tragic traits. Once I begin play, these can actually work to my benefit, if I can interpret a situation where they will benefit me. However, my RG and I recognize that more often these traits will work against me, as I will be forced to use them in contests of will, or to work with other people. Remember that when I am performing actions of my choosing, I get to use the attributes I want. When I face obstacles, or encounter challenges, others have the opportunity to play upon my fears and weaknesses.



## **THE STORY OF SIEGFRIED**

Now I have left off my character at an odd point in the saga of Siegfried, but let's pick it up from there. Since I have already spent my fifteen starting stones, there are a few points of the Siegfried legend that I will have to forego as character building points, but can be used as part of the legend. Once, I slew a dragon, and bathed in its blood. This made me invulnerable to weapons, but I just do not have the points to develop it. We will chalk that up to the more inventive stories told to inflate my reputation, or maybe we will place that later in the timeline.

Therefore, here I am at Worms, in the land of the Burgundians. I have come to woo Kriemhild, who I have heard is the most beautiful woman in all the lands. Moreover, it is only fitting that I woo her, since I am the fairest prince that did ever walk. First, I have to win the trust of her kinsmen, particularly King Gunther.

As Gunther strides up to meet me, I use my Fame attribute, certain that he has heard of me. My RG agrees, and I draw- oops - a Tragic stone.

Now my RG takes an interesting spin on this. He decides that it was actually my arrogance that made me think my fame would ride before me. He suggests that I should draw three more stones for that attribute. As fate would have it, I get two Tragic and a Heroic. Therefore, we unfold it this way:

After the initial introductions, I start into a speech about what a noble and valiant king I have heard Gunther to be. Wanting to assure him of my nobility as well, I quickly tell him that I am equally brave. In fact, I wonder if he is as brave as I am. If he is, I pledge myself to him. If not, I will take his kingdom from him. Land and castles shall be subject to my hand. (My arrogance slips through at the cost of one Tragic stone.)

Naturally, he and his liegemen are offended. I try to mollify the situation by telling him that my strength of arm will keep peace in his land. Should his arm be the stronger, then he would maintain peace in my lands. This does little to satisfy him, however. Hagen, his mightiest knight, stands impassive, realizing a contest of will is occurring. However, one of the other vassals, Ortwin of Metz, challenges me, asking by what right I make these claims.

Again, I came here in peace, but my arrogance will not let me be challenged by so insignificant a man. I tell him, "Thy hand shall not presume against me. I am a mighty king, a king's vassal thou. Twelve of thy ilk durst not match me in strife." The situation continues to get out of hand. (I spend the other Tragic stone here.)

Finally, King Gunther's brother Gernot steps in, and prevents the duel. As a prince and equal, he is able to calm me by welcoming me as an equal. He proclaims that all their lands shall be open to me, as if I were one of them. I relax, as this is what I had intended all along, but my manner of presentation smacked of arrogance. (I spend my Heroic stone here to salvage the situation.)

But because of my actions, and the fact that I drew two Tragic stones, I have made an enemy in Ortwin, and Hagen does not fully trust me. I may later win his loyalty, but the seed of unhappiness is sown in this first impression.

So then, my plans are delayed, through my own actions, and it seems I must wait and prove my worthiness before the beautiful Kriemhild, whom I have still not met.

## **DEVELOPING THE LEGEND**

The story of the Nibelungenlied is far from ended there. This is perhaps one-tenth of the story, with many more developments to come. The legend goes on to tell of how Siegfried is put to many tests before he is allowed to wed Kriemhild. He leads the armies of the Burgundians in a mighty victory against the Saxons, and thus is allowed to finally see Kriemhild, whereupon they fall immediately in love. But then, Siegfried must perform another task for Gunther. Gunther has heard of a beautiful woman, a

mighty warrior herself, who lives in far off Isenland. With Siegfried, Hagen, and Dankwart, he journeys there to win her love. She puts them to tests, vowing never to submit to any man but that which can best her at three games.

Gunther, is no match for her, but Siegfried, using the Cloak of Darkness, moves Gunther's limbs for him, and thus, Brunhild becomes Gunther's wife. However, Siegfried refuses to take place in any games, to ensure Brunhild does not learn of his great strength. She thinks him a coward for this, and develops a deep hatred for him.

When they return to Worms, Siegfried demands that he finally be allowed to wed Kriemhild, and Gunther agrees. When Brunhild sees Kriemhild and Siegfried together, she weeps that Gunther's noble sister is forced to marry so low a man. Gunther tells her that Siegfried is a mighty king, and that there is good reason. Brunhild demands to know why, but Gunther will not tell her. Brunhild refuses to take Gunther to bed that night on their wedding day. When he tries to coerce her favors, she binds him, and hangs him on a nail for the rest of the night.

Gunther then enlists the aid of Siegfried in subduing Brunhild. Under cover of night, and with his cloak about him, Siegfried attempts to subdue Brunhild's strength, posing as Gunther. Once mastered in strength, she will submit to Gunther's advances. The plan works, but she wounds Siegfried sorely, as only a man can be wounded. In spite, he takes from her a ring and girdle, as victory tokens, then leaves as Gunther steps in to consecrate his marriage. The ring and girdle become Siegfried's downfall. He gives them to his wife, Kriemhild, as a token of love, and proof that he was faithful to her.

Later, there comes a time when the wives begin to argue about whose husband is greater. The conflict escalates until Kriemhild reveals that it was Siegfried, not Gunther who not only bested Brunhild at arms, but in her bedchamber as well. As proof, she shows Brunhild the ring and girdle. Brunhild, betrayed, runs to Gunther.

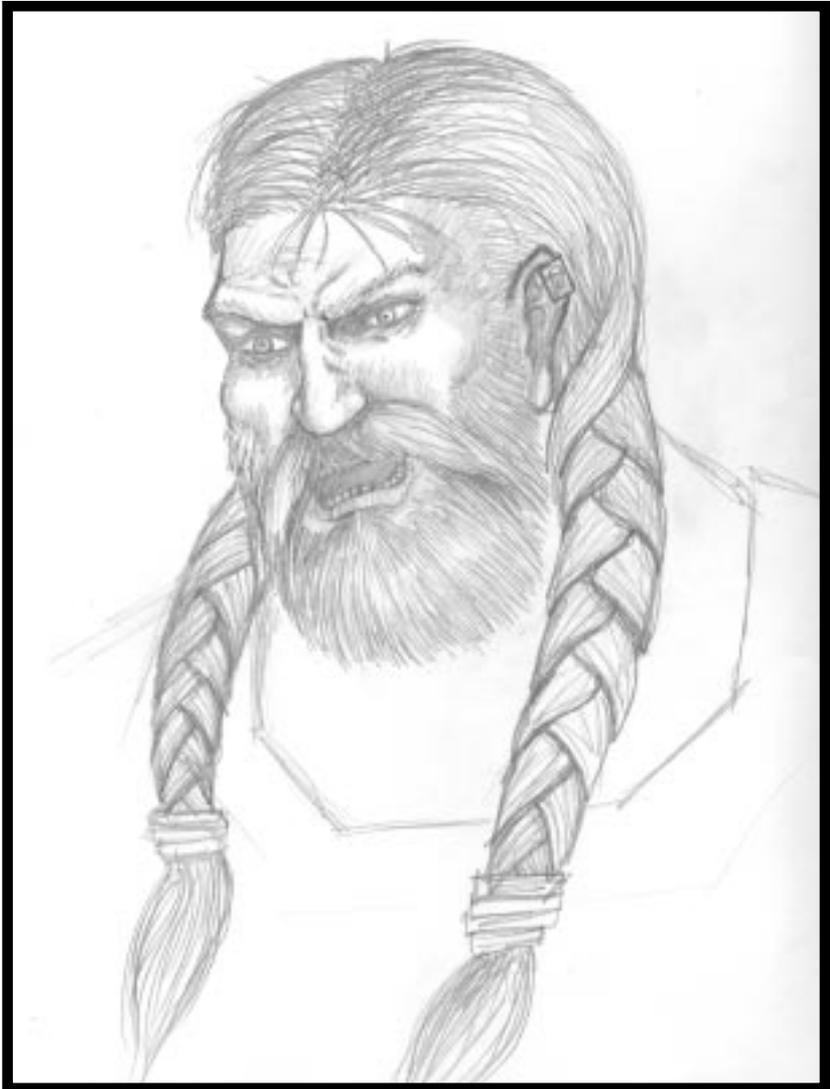
Gunther and Siegfried meet, Gunther sorely upset by Siegfried's boasting of his combat to his wife. Siegfried apologizes fiercely, and himself is most upset by his wife's loose tongue. He and Gunther agree to counsel their wives to avoid each other, and to refrain from using harsh words.

Brunhild, however, is still seething with anger. As Hagen finds her weeping, she tells him the story, and he vows vengeance for her sake with his life. She is the wife of his sovereign, and as such, she commands his loyalty. Then Siegfried's old enemy, Ortwin, suggests murder to Brunhild, and Hagen and Gernot agree. Gunther will not hear of it, so a plan of betrayal is formed. Hagen will slay Siegfried through treachery, during a hunt. The plan is carried out, and Siegfried is slain.

The remainder of the story spans years, as Kriemhild is given to Etzel, the Hun as wife. In him she finds the instrument of her vengeance. A ruthless conqueror, he is more than willing to destroy those who offended his wife in the past. In the end, all who betrayed

Kriemhild suffer woe beyond measure in the fullness of her vendetta, which employs the same false friendship and betrayal that felled her first husband, Siegfried.

Fortunately for us, a role playing game gives us a launching point for a story, but does not require that we follow that story exactly. The flavor of the Nibelungenlied is one of flawed, but human characters, capable of great love and great betrayal. Characters in this game will be superior in combat, as were most of the warriors in the epic, but will be deeply flawed in aspects of character. Arrogance and greed will be common traits, as will valor, justice, competitiveness, loyalty, and cunning. Honor is a rare quality, as the deeds tend to exemplify the character more than any code.



## STORY IDEAS

**Hagen's past:** The character of Hagen is a complicated one. He is fiercely loyal to Gunther, and thus, to anyone in Gunther's family. His loyalty is such that he is able to choose Gunther's wife over Gunther's sister, with no compunction. He does not hesitate to use treachery to kill Siegfried, yet his only motive is the supposed betrayal of Gunther. Note that although Gunther forbids the murder, Hagen performs it anyway, thinking that he is acting in the King's best interest, despite his lord's protest.

What has made Hagen the man he is? It might be fun to play him as a youth, before he became the Master of Arms for Gunther, in his middle years. He is past his prime in Gunther's employ, but his earlier feats were enough to gain him considerable fame. There is little detail of his exploits, so there is a lot of room for development there.

**Etzel the Hun:** Another variation of Attila, Etzel is another character with a mysterious past.

**Siegmond (Siegfried's father):** A mighty warrior himself, the exploits of Siegmund's youth are also unknown.

**Siegfried's vassals:** One of the twelve knights of the Netherlands who accompanied Siegfried to Worms. What deeds might they accomplish after his death? Many served Kriemhild out of loyalty to Siegfried after his death.

There are dozens of other possible characters that can be played in the Nibelungenlied. Perhaps the best stories are ones that you create yourself, using the flavor of this epic as the backdrop, with completely unique legends developing as you tell them. **WYRD** is above all a game of freedom. Play without limits.



