

EPIDIAN RADACBOE
CITY of FIRE
and **COIN**



A SWORDS WITHOUT MASTER ADVENTURE

"The City of Fire & Coin" is an introductory adventure for the *Swords Without Master* tabletop roleplaying game. It contains all the rules you need to play and will appear as the second chapter in the forthcoming *Swords Without Master* rulebook.

A goal of this preview is to enlist you, my ravening wolves, and your keen vigilance to help mold this adventure into the lean, powerful introduction it will become. As you play the game, if you and your fellow adventurers have any questions or concerns, share them with me at the email address below.

For more information on *Swords Without Master*, updated versions of this preview, and other fine games of the imagination, visit www.dig100holes.com.

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The City of Fire & Coin

Under an unforgiving sun—at the crux of those foot-weary paths that draw bright caravans overladen with spices, silks, and far treasures through the searing eastern deserts—lies the City. The coin-hungry Old Kingdoms of the south provision her with merchants and envoys. Reavers and conquerors from the north and west are ever repelled by her high, hard walls.

Within, a metropolis teems. Peddlers, whores, and thieves ply their nefarious trades among the throngs. The chaotic knot of streets and alleys is home to slave and noble alike. Scattered bazaars of all manner offer goods mundane, exotic, and improbable.

Above, troops of sword and spear wielding monkeys control the rooftops, waging war among themselves. Below, the elite city guard prowl the wealthy neighborhoods on tigerback, protecting the Shining Lord and those in his favor while turning a half-blind eye to the violence of the slums and their criminal guilds. Beneath, dark and vast catacombs hide the City's more abhorrent denizens from the harsh light of day.

This is the City of Opportunity, the City of Misfortune, the City at the Center of the World, the City of Fire & Coin.

It Begins

You and your three boon companions will need several pencils, a few scraps of paper, and two six-sided dice that you can clearly tell apart. If your adventure begins here, it may take three or four hours to play, but as you become veterans of the road, you will learn ways to shorten and lengthen your excursions.

Choose now your Overplayer. The Overplayer's concerns and duties shall be detailed as we go along. All you need know now is that the Overplayer will be the one reading the rest of this text to the other players. And, unlike the other players, the Overplayer will not be charged with championing a specific character in the story you are about to create.

If you are already reading this, then the mantle might as well fall to your shoulders.

Lay your eyes upon the sword below. Immediately after it, you will begin. When you read, read aloud to the other players. Nothing within these pages is secret. Nothing shall be hidden from any player. Read and read until you come upon another sword in its scabbard. Then stop and play the game as you have been instructed. Once you have done all you can with your instructions, or if you find yourself adrift, simply pick up reading from where you left off.



Tones & Bones

Gather to me, rogues, and we shall embark on this night's adventure. Afore we begin, note well our dice. We must choose which among them shall be our Glum Die and which shall be our Jovial Die.



These are our guiding stars. It is by the light of the one in ascendance that we will govern our actions and narration. The highest die, be it glum or jovial, shall be our tone.

But these tones are much more than they appear. It would be a weary game indeed if they meant only what they meant and nothing more. So let us broaden their field and give them sway over a motley of other tones.

Within the melancholy court of the Glum Die, let us place all that is introspective or subdued, that we may choose any shade among these tones to temper our tale. Likewise, the mirthful realm of the Jovial Die shall contain all that is passionate or loud.

Before you do anything in the game, you must roll for your tone. As you narrate, use this tone to paint your imagery, to evoke your rogue's feelings, to determine the events that unfold, or merely to flavor your voice.

The dice are kept on the table for all to plainly see. When you roll, we are your audience. The

dice will shade what we hear and we shall reinforce your tone through our characters' reactions. We are here to help you achieve your tone, not to punish you if you fail to.

But stray not far from the tone. You may dip your toes in the river of the other, but do not dive in. A Glum

rogue may express quiet contentment without expressing the full joy of a Jovial tone. Just as a Jovial rogue may pause in the middle of a hearty laugh to give her foe a look of cold, steely purpose.

You need not capture every aspect of your tone. Indeed, you should not. A frothing rage is a perfectly Jovial tone. Though anger is at odds with the cheerful aspects of Jovial, your rage is clearly passionate. But if the rage takes a sullen form, marked by quiet seething, you have likely crossed over into the kingdom of Glum and should reconsider your path.

As the Overplayer I shall start each phase by rolling for the Overtone. This sets the overall tone for the scene. This is my tone, the tone of the world and all you meet in it. The rest of you shall use the Overtone only until you have rolled the dice and created a tone for yourself.

Glum	Jovial
Brooding	Boisterous
Weighty	Frivolous
Serious & Exact	Light & Carefree
Sarcastic	Mocking
Calculating	Reckless
Introspective	Passionate
Melancholic	Mirthful
Quiet	Loud
Cool	Warm
Dark	Bright

When one of you rolls the bones, you set the tone for your rogue. It may be in harmony with the Overtone or conflicting with it, but it does not change the Overtone. Your rogue and your narration will be in your tone until you roll again or a new phase has begun.

A Gathering of Rogues

Rogue Players, it is your charge to champion a specific rogue in the game.

Our objective is to toil and struggle together to craft an enthralling sword and sorcery short story. Your rogues are the heroes of this story. They are heroes because they are capable of great and profound deeds. They are heroes in that they are the protagonists, the characters we care most about. They are not always heroes because of their virtues or morals.

You will root for your rogues, wishing them the best. But what is best for your rogues does not make the most enthralling of stories. Allowing them to fail, to fall for traps and nefarious schemes, to suffer great hardships and pain will eventually bring them greater glory. Always be mindful of this: the safest path is the least interesting.

Muaphet Raum, Snorri and Manyara are your rogues. Find them on pages 4, 7 and 8. They are long time companions who have fought hard at one another's side on countless occasions, bonded in battle by both victory and defeat. Take a look at them now and claim your rogue.



Note that each rogue has specific Glum and Jovial reactions. For the present, the Glum and Jovial reactions are there to illustrate how the rogues behave when their lives are at risk. Your rogue will not always behave this way, but these examples will help you better know your rogue better. However, you are the ultimate authority on how you should play your rogue. If you are not interested in a reaction, smite it and write a new one for that tone.



The Tricks are special abilities you get for playing your rogue. They let you break the rules of the game in small, but vital ways. Each rogue has one. Since you are not well versed in the rules just yet, they may not be that meaningful to you. Read them now, and keep them close at hand. You will know when the moment is right, and then strike with them. Swiftly and surely.



Now we are prepared to begin...

...Our First Phase: Perilous

As we play, we will always be in one phase or another. There is no particular order to the phases. We need not to start with a perilous one, but I relish this opportunity to knock you around a bit.

Rolling for the Overtone

Grab a scrap of paper and write Glum on one side and Jovial on the other. This is our Overtone card. Before any phase begins, I must determine the Overtone, which I will do so now by rolling the dice and leaving them on the table.



The highest die is our Overtone. If I rolled a tie, for this first phase only, I may decide which Overtone I prefer: Glum or Jovial. After the first phase of any game, if I roll a tie for the Overtone, the card simply flips to the opposite of the current tone.

Flip the Overtone card over to the appropriate side and I will read the corresponding section below.

Leave those dice where they lie.



Glum

Our Overtone is Glum. As I read the following keep this tone in mind.

"Dawn is breaking on the Garden of Ascension. The Ascendant Priests were not as wealthy as you had been told. And after a night of digging through the catacombs beneath Temple of the Garden, you leave with only the copper you brought to weigh on your pouch."

"The City is quiet in the fading starlight, even for this solemn place. There is no bird song, no footfall of the peddlers dragging their goods to the early market. High in a temple spire, a single light is lit and slowly makes its way past the sparse windows on its way down."

Now I shall pick up the dice.



Grabbing the dice indicates that I have just presented the Thunder. The Thunder is a threat that is off in the distance. Something the rogues do not have to deal with at the moment, but might in the future, if they are not cautious. Thunder is ominous, but we do not know why just yet. By seizing the dice when I introduce the Thunder, I am letting you know that you should heed the words I have just spoken. In this case, it should alert you to the single light descending from the spire.



Muaphet Ram

A wandering scholar of forbidden lore, sorcery & the physical arts.

Glum: Wrestling with his opponents as he whispers dark spells into their ears.

Jovial: Calling upon the heavens to witness the glory he's about to bestow upon them.

- Trick -

Servant of the Worm Cult—After years of thwarting this mysterious sect, Muaphet has become a hunted man. Once during the game, before a phase begins, you may make the next phase a Perilous Phase & the make the Storm an assassin known as the Maw of the Worm.

Now I must provide you with the Storm—the threat you must immediately deal with.

"Your empty purse and the lack of security throughout the temple have dulled your senses. Just before you reach the outer wall of the Garden and egress into the city proper, a poison-tipped dart glances off of Snorri's helm. At last, the temple guards have awoken to your presence."

Now I shall hand the dice to one of you.



Our Perilous Phase has begun and I must Bring the Storm.

Jovial

Our Overtone is Jovial. As I read the following, keep this tone in mind.

"It's a crimson dusk on the second night of the Festival of Laments, and the streets are more crowded than yesterday. You are enjoying the spoils of a lucrative expedition into the vine-choked tombs of Unsalahk. The wine, song and wind dull the dying heat of the day as celebrants dance around you.

"Dancers snake among the reveling throngs, adored with bright masks that remind you of the disquieting idols you plundered in Unsalahk."

Now I shall pick up the dice.



Grabbing the dice indicates I have just presented the Thunder. The Thunder is a threat that is off in the distance. Something the rogues do not have to deal with at the moment, but might in the future, if they are not cautious. Thunder is ominous, but we do not know why just yet. By seizing the dice when I introduce the Thunder, I am letting you know that you should heed the words I have just spoken. In this case, it should alert you to dancers in the disquieting masks.

Now I must provide you with the Storm—the threat you must immediately deal with.

"But before you can ponder further, the dancers briefly part around you and Verthius, the Hammer of the Thieves' Guild, locks eyes with you. He clearly has not forgotten the last time you were in town and debts still owed. At his signal, a dozen cutthroats seep out of the crowd and swarm you."

Now I shall hand the dice to one of you.



Our Perilous Phase has begun. Time to Bring the Storm.

Bringing the Storm

In the Perilous Phase I am your opposition. It is my duty to threaten your rogues and all they care about. My tools shall be the Storm and, if need be, the Thunder.

The Storm is the most immediate threat to your rogues' lives. For this particular phase, your assailants are the Storm. In a moment, I shall describe their assault, starting small and building to a credible threat on the rogues' lives. If there are bystanders, I may harm them first, before working over the rogues. If the rogues are on their own, I might start with a couple near misses before seizing the jugular.

During this time, you may describe what your rogues are doing as long as long as they are either Struggling and Slipping.

Struggling rogues are dealing with the situation and meeting their enemies head on, but are not gaining ground. They can be barely defending themselves, attempting to flee, or busily working on a spell. Anything you desire, as long as it is not decisive.

Slipping rogues are falling behind, losing ground, suffering under the blades of their foes, their flesh carved into and their blood let.

Descriptions of Slipping and Struggling should be brief and colorful. The only way for a rogue to do anything else, to have any lasting effect upon the Storm, is to roll the dice, and only the player who currently holds the dice can roll them.

So I shall bring the Storm. I will narrate, and you will Slip and Struggle, and the only one who can stop it is the Rogue Player with the dice. The moment you roll, I will cease narrating and we will return to this text.



Facing the Storm

Glum or Jovial, your time is now. You are unleashed. Narrate as you wish anything about how your rogue deals with the Storm. No longer are you confined to Struggling or Slipping. Lay into your attackers. Wound them, slay them, flee from them, blast them with a spell, lose an eye to their blade, whatever pleases you and your audience.

Do what is interesting and appropriate for the tone. You have power over all that your rogue does and over how that affects anything in the story that is not also a rogue. However, you must leave the other rogues to their players and you cannot introduce anything not directly related to your rogue's actions into the fiction.

For the moment, do not slay all the opposition. Leave the other rogues a little something to toy with. At least for our first Perilous Phase.

If you rolled a tie, three things happen:

- First, your rogue is stymied. You decide how and why. The setting sun temporarily blinds Snorri. Too much ale the night before has dulled Manyara's reflexes this morn. Or Muaphet hesitates out of legitimate fear. Whatever the cause, your rogue is unable to directly affect the Storm this go around. And there is a good chance they are all in trouble.
- Second, the Overtone flips. If the Overtone was Glum, it is now Jovial, and vice versa. Whenever this happens, something occurs in the story to escalate to the new tone. A Glum scene, such as a stealthy assassination attempt, becomes a raucous Jovial scene as the alarm is raised. Or a Jovial scene, such as a lusty brawl in a crowded street, becomes a more sober Glum scene when it is revealed that one combatant draws a blade. You may explain this escalation through your narration of

how your rogue is stymied. If you do not, then the responsibility falls to me.

- Third, your rogue's tone now matches the new Overtone.

During all this—whether you rolled a tie or not—the other players may also role-play their rogues, telling us how they react to your rogue's action as well as the Storm. But they are still stuck Struggling or Slipping in the background. Their current mission is to reinforce what you're saying. This is your rogue's moment, not theirs.

Once you have finished your narration, pick up the dice and we will return to this text.



The Struggle Continues

Once again, I shall pound your rogues with my Storm. And if the Storm has been dealt with, then I shall bring in the Thunder. During this time, you are all back to Struggling and Slipping. This will not stop until someone rolls the dice, but that cannot be the player who just rolled.

You never roll twice in a row. Once you have had your moment, someone else must step up. But as the bearer of the bones, you do not have to relinquish the dice right away. If you have the dice, you can hold them for as long as you want while I tear into the rogues. It is an excellent way to build tension. Keep in mind, however, that very soon now you will find yourself in need of some dice.

When you pass the dice in a Perilous Phase, you may pass them to any other Rogue Player you choose. It could be the player of the rogue in the most imminent danger, but need not be. Your rogues have been through much together. They have pulled each other's fat out of countless fires. Handing the bones to unthreatened rogues gives them a chance to demonstrate the true value of an ally.

Now I shall once again bring the Storm, and we will not return to the text until a new Rogue Player has rolled the dice.



A Tangle of Threads

The time has come to complicate things. For it is your fate to create for us our first Thread.

Threads are many things, but foremost they are that which binds our tale together. When we create a thread, we are marking a moral, a motif, or a mystery that we may return to before our story is done.

Threads are scraps of paper that we write on and throw to the middle of the table for all to see.

There are three types of threads used in "The City of Coin and Fire" but we will, for the moment, only concern ourselves with...

...Mysteries

Mysteries are stymies caused by something supernatural or unknown. They are moments when your rogue is unable to intervene due to some mysterious or supernatural force. Normally, mysteries occur anytime a Rogue Player rolls a tie of three or less.



For the moment, we will ignore your dice and assume you rolled such a tie. This is how a mystery works:

- As with any time the dice tie, your rogue is unable to affect the Storm. But this time, the reason for the stymie is unknown or of supernatural origins. Your narration will give us a hint of something not quite right, something unnatural. Perhaps dark magic is afoot or there is a shadowy interloper. Use dramatic irony to tantalize us with details about the situation your rogue would not know. Mysteries allow you to step beyond your rogue for the moment and give you the power to introduce something new into the fiction, as long as it remains shadowy or unexplained. Just be sure to leave room for a Mystery.
- Again, since the dice have tied, the Overtone flips and the new Overtone is your rogue's tone. It is very likely that your Mystery is the most obvious cause for this change in tone. But if that does not make sense, something must occur in the story to

explain the change. If you do not explain it, I will.

- Take a moment and write a question pertaining to this Mystery on a scrap of paper. This is your Thread. "What foul magic freezes my flesh?" "Who is this shadowy stranger that hinders me?" "What horrible drug drips from the priests' darts?" The question should be something a reader would ask. Snorri may not be aware of the spell that holds him in thrall, but a reader would be, and would want to know its origin.
- Place that scrap of paper in the middle of the table for all to see.

Go now, create your Mystery. Once you are done, pick up the dice and we will continue.



Carrying On

Hold now the dice as I return once more to the task of bringing the Storm. You may pass them when it pleases you. And you will all be confined to Slipping and Struggling until a new rogue player rolls.

Although it is up to you to decide which of your companions you will pass the dice to, there is one among you who has not had the dice yet. When you give up the bones, pass them to this

Snorri

A northern exile, stargazer & spearman, who views swords as "Too short to make useful spears & too cumbersome to make useful knives."

Glum: Sardonicly reciting the poetry of a homeland now lost to him.

Jovial: Boasting & betting on what he's about to accomplish.

- Trick -

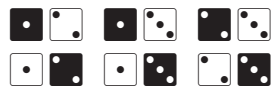
The Tireless Wolf—Snorri has never lost his prey. Once during the game, before a phase begins, you may make the next phase a **Rogue Phase** & the **Overplayer** must start it by demanding you demonstrate your tracking abilities in some way.

Rogue Player, so that when the dice are next rolled, we may learn about *Morals*.



Morals

Like the *Mystery* before, a *Moral* is a thread. It normally occurs whenever neither die is four or more and the dice are not tied.



For this one last time, we will ignore the dice and proceed as if you had rolled a *Moral*. Note, however, the tone you rolled. This is still your tone. And if you happened to roll a tie this one time, then your tone is the *Overtone*.

- Narrate as you would if you had rolled this tone without a *Thread*. You have the same latitude, the same freedom as before. No new restrictions.
- Once you have finished, I will create an unintended, undesired consequence of your rogue's action. I may shatter your sword upon an enemy shield. I may run through a villager you were protecting. I may place your rogue upon the foul end of my spear. Or you might suffer a less violent setback. Your prey might give you the slip. Your lover might sour to your cavalier attitude. Whatever the consequence, it cannot kill, maim or otherwise permanently alter your rogue without your permission. Often you will want to give permission—a missing eye or hand can only add character—but ultimately it is by your whim that these tragedies occur and no one else's.

- Then think of a lesson this consequence might be teaching. Your rogue does not have to learn or adhere to this lesson, but there has to be a *Moral*. "Wait for an opening before committing to attack." "Be mindful of your wards." "Control the battlefield and you control the battle." Write this *Moral* on a scrap of paper and place it in the middle of the table for all to see.



You might be tempted to give yourself a consequence rather than leaving it up to me. I will allow it, as long as I feel the bite. But this is not your responsibility. If you are stuck, do as you would do and let me worry about making it hurt.

Let us go now and create your *Moral*. Once we are done, you will pick up the dice and we will continue.



Once More into the Storm

By now we should understand how a *Perilous Phase* rolls forth:

- The *Overplayer* brings the *Storm* and puts the rogues in peril.
- The *Rogue Players* relish in it, *Slipping and Struggling* until they are ready to strike back.

Manyara

A skilled thief & swordswoman doomed to see all the world.

Glum: Fighting with indifference & a wistful stare at the horizon.

Jovial: Bellowing with fiery rage or contagious delight.

- Trick -

The *Well Traveled Warrior*—Manyara has journeyed farther than the wind itself & learn much along the way. Once during the game, before a phase begins, you may make the next phase a *Discovery Phase* that will give you an opportunity to use this knowledge. This phase cannot end until you've had the dice at least once.

- The *Rogue Player* who possesses the dice rolls to interrupt the action.
- The roll determines the tone of the *Rogue Player's* narration, and tells us if the rogue is *Stymied* or if a *Mystery* or *Moral* should be created.
- When finished, the *Rogue Player* picks up the dice and the *Overplayer* brings the *Storm* again.

When this ends is entirely up to you, not me. From this point on we will repeat this process

with you passing the dice amongst yourselves. You do not have to pass the dice in a particular order. The only rules about passing are no one is allowed to roll twice in a row and no one is allowed to pass the dice on without rolling. Once you feel the phase is played out, pass the dice to me so that it may end.

There are a couple specific rules about passing the dice to me in this phase:

- You can only pass them after you've rolled, contributed your narration and then picked the dice back up.
- The player holding the dice is the only one who gets to decide who to pass them to. If it comes down to it, they are the only one with the right to pass the dice to me and end the phase.

That which is occurring in the story when you hand the dice to me has an effect on how the phase will end. If the Storm has been soundly thrashed, things will likely end well for the rogues. If, instead, you end it while the rogues are being battered and beaten, things will not go well.

Remember that the more interesting ending is not always the best ending for your rogues. End it when it feels done. And if you are not quite sure when that is, end it sooner rather than later.

So let us play out the rest of the phase. Try different things. I might attack a rogue who

is not holding the dice. You can experiment with how long you can hold on to them before passing the dice. And occasionally try handing the dice to the rogue that seems like the least likely to deal with the situation. And when you are ready to hand the dice back to me, we will return here.



Ending the Phase

It is my privilege to end the phase. Every phase ends with a short epilogue. What happens during this epilogue depends on where the story was when you ended it.

There is an art to ending a phase. I am allowed to do almost anything with the story as long as it does not kill, maim or otherwise permanently alter any rogue. However, I must keep it short. A swift coda to tie up what has happened, but with enough room for more to occur. I will not concern myself with moving the rogues from this phase to the next. That bridge shall burn when we come upon it. I just have to put a cap on the action so far.

For now, I will just concern myself with whether or not the rogues have been captured or if they have earned their escape.



Motif

One of you, take now a scrap of paper. Make a column of three dots down the left side. Next to the first dot, write down a scintillating description or horrific detail you heard someone else offer so far in the game. Pick something that embodies what you expect from an enthralling sword and sorcery short story—whether that's a scene of savage violence, a hint at alien wonder, or a phrase that spoke to your personal sense of adventure. Something that made you nod in agreement when it was said.



This is our first motif element. There will be two more motif elements for this card, one next to each dot. As we adventure, whenever you or I hear something worthy of recording on the motif card, we seize the motif card write it down. It is best to do this without hesitation, but if we forget, there is no penalty for catching up later.

Anyone, rogue player or Overplayer, may write an element down. But the element must be something that someone else has said.

Once we have filled this motif card, we will start a new one and then a new one after that. Each subsequent motif card works like the first one, except at least one of its elements must echo an element from a previous card. If we had "a serpent-drenched altar" on an earlier card, you could add "a snake god" or perhaps "an altar of

skulls" to another. As with any element, this echo must be something one of us has narrated. So take note of these motif elements and look to hint at them as you play.

It is by the motif card we measure the length of our tale. Once three of them are filled, giving us nine elements, we will begin the end game. If we do not fill them, we cannot end. So be ever watchful for opportunities to add to the motif.

Explore with me now this world strange and harsh world through the knowledge and experiences of your rogues in...

...Our Second Phase: Discovery

It is again my privilege to start the phase. I will begin, as always, by rolling the Overtone.



As before, the Overtone is the tone of the highest die; or, if it is a tie, in the opposite tone of the most recent Overtone. I will now flip the Overtone card to the proper side, leaving the dice where they lay.



At the beginning of each phase, I say where the Rogues are, what condition they're in, and what is happening, minding what happened in the last phase, and the current Overtone. You may offer suggestions, but ultimately, it is mine

to decide where the story and the bones have taken us thus far.

The City teems with people from lands near and far and beyond; and these people populate local haunts just as varied. From the glimmering towers of the noble districts to the hollow neighborhoods reclaimed by the desert sands. From the ship-choked harbors to the black markets sheltered by the great shadows of its walls. From the brothels to the tea houses to the taverns to the opium dens, there is any number of places you can lose yourself if you had fought your way free in the previous phase. I need only decide on one that fits the Overtone and then offer it and its denizen to you.

If you have not earned your freedom, well then, there too are many and varied places to hide a prisoner or three. High in the their temple spire, the Ascendant Order has its oracles, eager to discern the future from the portents found in the scattered entrails of heretics. Buried in the livestock markets, the thieves' guild has its own inquisitors, ready with hot iron and cold knife to glean whatever they will. To say nothing of the putrid prisons, blistering stockades, and dank cells scattered throughout the City.

Let me now decide and describe to you where you are, what condition you are in, and what is happening.



Possible Discovery Phase Locations

The Rogues are Free & the Overtone is...

...Glum

- ☐☐ On the rooftops, gazing at distant chaos below, as the sun sits red & fat on the horizon.
- ☐☐ Lost in the maze of alleyways that make up the Old Town, covered by shadow & dust.
- ☐☐☐ Nursing wounds in the refuge of an old friend's cellar while he quietly closes up shop above.

...Jovial

- ☐☐ Celebrating in a wine house where the crowd is singing a lusty song.
- ☐☐ Running through a bazaar, dodging merchant, thief, & errant camel.
- ☐☐☐ In a gambling den, frittering away your fortunes on lizard races & wine.

The Rogues are Captive & the Overtone is...

...Glum

- ☐☐ Chained to a stone wall in the still darkness of an underground cell.
- ☐☐ Awoken manacled to racks in an eerily silent & otherwise empty torture chamber.
- ☐☐☐ In an austere room with a guard in every corner, enjoying a cup of tea with your captor.

...Jovial

- ☐☐ Chained to pillar, badly beaten, awaiting the whip as a cacophony of screams dances around you.
- ☐☐☐ Tossed in a pit filled with rotten food & a handful of drunk sailing men.
- ☐☐☐ Bound to a chair, surrounded by chanting acolytes, & made witness to a dark ritual.

And now I shall bring the Thunder. As with the Perilous Phase, the Thunder is a distant threat. An unruly cellmate or tavern-goer, sounds of a fray outside, a threatening glance, something as obvious as a torturer sharpening his tools or as obscure as an ill omen. I do not have to be specific about it. We will worry about specifics if the Thunder becomes a Storm in a future Perilous Phase. For now, I will just give you the Thunder and then pick up the dice.



Unlike the Perilous Phase, there is no Storm. You are not faced with a threat you must immediately deal with. Instead, your purpose in this phase will be to flesh out the world through what your character is able to find, learn about, or what your character already knows. I will hand one of you the dice and you shall immediately roll them.



If your tone is Glum, whisper to us what your Rogue knows about the situation that no one else does. If your tone is Jovial, tell us what treasure or opportunity your Rogue noticed that no one else has yet. If you rolled a tie, then tell us how your Rogue failed to notice an escape route or new danger.



Now you must ask me a question about this revelation. It cannot be a yes-or-no question. The question should be loaded, but not leading. It should leave me room to surprise you, but hint at much more. "What fate awaits us if we do not take this course of action?" "What history do I have with the torturer that I would know such things about him?"

Do this now and we will return before my answer.



Here I shall contemplate these mysteries. My goal is to devise an answer that will propel the story forward. We are in no hurry, so I will take a moment to ponder the question before offering my answer, ever mindful the Overtone.



Having given my answer, it falls to me to decide if this phase should end or not. It ends when I feel we have created enough hooks and twists to carry the story forward. But for this first Discovery Phase, we wait until each of you has had a chance to discover or reveal something.

As I am not ending this phase yet, then the player with the dice should hand them to another rogue player.



Now it is for you to make a discovery or revelation. But this time, we will mind the threads.

Mysteries & Morals

We have Mysteries and Morals in the Discovery Phase just as we did in the Perilous Phase. Any tie of three or less is a Mystery and when there is no tie but both dice fail to read four or more, it is Moral.

A Mystery means something unknown or supernatural has prevented you from learning, finding or revealing something to us. Just like any tie in the Discovery Phase, you must tell us what your rogue has failed to notice or recall. Then write a question about this unseen force or queer event that has thwarted you. Do not confuse this question with the leading question you will ask me about your failed discovery. The Mystery question is about that which blinded you and the discovery question is about that which you did not see.

Morals also work much like they did in the Perilous Phase. You will make your discovery and then I will add an unintended consequence, a foreboding note, or a danger unbeknownst to your rogues.

Roll now for your tone and to see if the dice demand a Moral or Mystery.



If you rolled Glum, tell us of a secret you have just learned. If you rolled Jovial, what do you know of these events that makes you alone laugh?

If you rolled a tie, what is it that you should have recalled, but did not? If that tie is also a mystery, what weirdness prevented you from recalling this?



Ask me now a question about your revelation, keeping in mind that it cannot be a yes-or-no question.



Now I shall take a moment to answer your question, taking care apply a Moral if the dice dictated it.



If you rolled a mystery or a moral, take a moment here to write the appropriate thread. A question about what mysterious circumstance clouded your senses or memory, or a lesson to be learned from the consequence of this discovery.



Hand the dice now to the one of you who has not made a discovery yet.



Ending the Discovery Phase

You will now roll, as your fellow rogues have rolled before you, and make your discoveries. Once you are done, I will answer your leading question and then decide if we have enough information to continue on our adventure. If not, you will pass the dice once again to another rogue player. This will continue until I have decided we have had our fill. Then we will return sated to this text.



Motif Reprised

Take a moment and recall the Motif cards. In our eagerness to learn about the world around our Rogues we may have neglected them. If so, take the current card and add another element to it—a detail that someone else added to the tale that spoke to you.

Remember, if we do not come up with three elements for each of these cards, our tale will never end.



The Anatomy of a Motif Card

Each card has room for three elements on it.

At any time in during the game, any player may write down a new element on the current card.

Motif elements should be things you have heard other players say that epitomize the themes of violence, wonder and adventure you expect from an enthralling sword & sorcery tale.

At least one element on the second card should echo an element from the first card.

At least one element on the third card should echo an element from either the first or second card.

Once the third element on the third card is written, the end game immediately begins.

Our Third Phase: The Rogues' Phase

The third and final phase we must learn is the Rogues' Phase. Here we are witness to your greatest deeds and most harrowing moments. But we may also see you at your most vulnerable, your most intimate. The Perilous Phase is about brutal violence and death-defying action. The Discovery Phase is about the world at large and the wonders it contains. The Rogues' Phase is about the rogues themselves. It is about what they are capable of and why they are what they are.

I shall again start this phase by rolling for the Overtone.



Our Overtone is that of the highest die; or, if it is a tie, in the opposite tone of the most recent Overtone. I will now flip the Overtone card to the correct side, leaving the dice untouched.



As with the Perilous and Discovery phases, first put brush to canvas and paint for you the current scene. It may take place immediately following the previous scene, some time may have passed, or it may even be a flashback. It is up to me to say where the rogues are, what is their current state and what is occurring. It should naturally flow from what has already occurred and fit the current Overtone. Your ideas are welcome, but it is still my mantle to decide where the story and the bones have taken us.

Perhaps you are still at the mercy of your captors. Perhaps you have caught the scent of some new wonder or riches to pursue. Perhaps you are laden with riches already and seek spend them on wine and warm embrace. Wherever fate has led you, it now falls to me to tell you where you are, why, and what is happening.



And now the Thunder. As with the Discovery and Perilous phases, the Thunder is a threat, but not an immediate concern. It may be the continuation of a previous Thunder or it may be something new. As I give you this Thunder, I pick up the dice to remind you of its significance.



Again, the Storm belongs solely in the Perilous Phase. But as you soon shall learn, this phase is not without its imminent threats.

I will now select one of you to hand the dice to. But before I do, I must first make a demand of you. I wish to witness your rogues in action, to test their mettle against what challenges await them in their world. It is within my power to do this. I have but to simply request it, to make the demand that you show me.

I must be specific about my demand. Show me how you free yourself from the rack and slay your would-be torturer. Show me how you lead your companions across the city unseen by the thieves' guild's spies or the Overlord's guard. Show me how you fritter away your newly acquired treasure.

When I make this demand, I give you what you do and leave the why and how up to you. And then I hand you the dice.



Now roll your dice and determine your tone.



As always, the highest die is your tone. Tell us then, how you achieved what I demanded, making sure you remain in this tone.

If you have rolled a tie, then your rogue has not accomplished what was set before him or her. The Overtone will flip and you tell us how this happened in the new Overtone.

Once you are done with your narration, pick up your dice and we shall return here.



It is your turn now to make a demand and pass the dice. You may make this demand of another Rogue Player, asking to see their rogue in action, or you may make this demand of me, asking to see what any other character is up to. But for now, let us focus on the rogues.

When making these demands, consider the story that is unfolding. What would you like to see happen next? What have you not yet seen that you feel you should? And consider the rogue whose player you are about to make the demand of. What difficulties would you like to see them overcome? What do you most want to see them do?

It works best if you begin your demand with the phrase, "Show me..."

Make this demand and pass the dice to the Rogue Player you made the demand of.



You will get the opportunity to answer the demand, but this time, just like the Discovery and Perilous Phase before this, we are going to incorporate the Moral and Mystery threads.

Mysteries & Morals

Any tie of three or less is a Mystery and when there is no tie but both dice fail to read four or more, it is Moral.

A Mystery, just as any tie, means you are unable to accomplish what is demanded. It means something unknown or supernatural has held you back. You must tell us about this strangeness that has prevented rogue from achieving the demand. Then write a question about the mysterious event or strange force that has thwarted you.

Morals also work much like they did before. You will show us how your rogue meets the demand and then I will add an unintended consequence to your rogue's actions. After hearing about the consequences, you are to write a lesson one might learn from this event down on a piece of paper.

Roll now for your tone and be mindful of our threads.



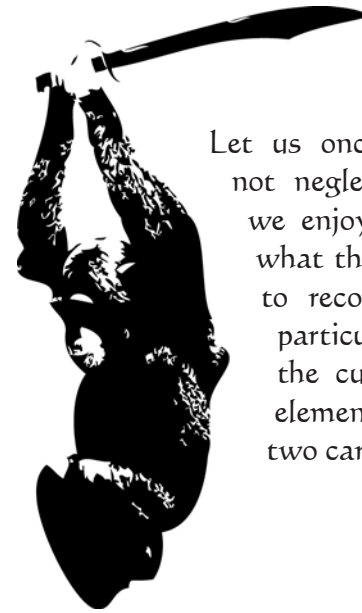
Now you may answer the demand. Once you have finished your narration, pick up the dice and we will return here.



Ending the Rogue Phase

Each of us has the power to end the Rogue Phase whenever we are ready to move on to one or another of the other phases. When the player answering the demand has picked the dice back up, as you have now, to indicate they are done narrating, then we are any of us is allowed to call an end to this phase.

For now, let us continue until each of us, myself included, has had a chance to answer a demand. Ever mindful of our threads, the Moral, Mystery and Motif. Then when we have reached a point where we do not know where to go, or we wish to learn more about the world, or a brutal fray is about to explode, we will return here.



Motif Revisited

Let us once again make sure we are not neglecting our Motif cards. As we enjoyed watching the rogues do what they do best, did we remember to record any elements we found particularly compelling? If not, take the current card and add another element to it. We should have one or two cards complete by now.



The Rogues Unleashed

We are free now to wander the phases unbidden by structure. After each phase ends, it is my duty, as the Overplayer, to determine which phase we enter next. It may be any of the three, regardless of the phase we had before. Each time we start a phase, I will roll for the Overtone and then tell us:

- where the rogues are,
- why they are there,
- what condition they are in,
- and what is happening.

For each phase, I will supply us with a Thunder and pick up the dice as I do.

For Perilous Phases...

...there will also be a Storm with which you must immediately contend. I will hand one of you the dice and bring the Storm. You roll the dice to interrupt me and narrate your reaction to the Storm in your tone. After that, and once you have pick up the dice, I will continue to bring the Storm until you hand the dice to another Rogue Player and that player has rolled.

As the Rogue Players, you are the only ones able to end Perilous Phases.

For Discovery Phases...

...there is no Storm. I hand the dice to one of you and you immediately roll them. Then you make a discovery or revelation in your tone. Once you are done making your discovery, you must ask me a single question about it. This cannot be answered with a mere yes or no. Once I have answered your question, pass the dice to another Rogue Player who then immediately rolls and makes a discovery or revelation.

As the Overplayer, I alone can end Discovery Phases.

For Rogue Phases...

...there is no Storm. I will make the first demand of one of you and then hand you the dice. You will immediately roll the dice and answer the demand in the your tone. Once you are done,

pick up the dice and make a demand of any other player, passing them the dice.

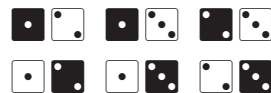
Any of us may end a Rogue Phase between the time the dice are picked up and the next demand is made.

As each phase ends, I will declare what type of phase we are going into next and then roll for Overtone. Sometimes which type of phase should follow is obvious. If we are on the edge of battle, then we should enter a Perilous Phase. If we wish to witness the rogues journeying and experiencing the perils of wonder, then we should enter a Rogue Phase. If a treasure trove has been uncovered, a Discovery Phase is in order.

If ever I am at a loss as to what phase to enter next, if the story feels like it is losing its direction, then we should enter a Discovery Phase. This will give us the direction we crave.

As we continue the game, we must not forget the threads.

Morals



Whenever a Rogue Player fails to roll higher than three one both dice, and the dice do not tie, then we have a moral. It is my duty to apply an unintended consequence or unforeseen danger to whatever it is you are doing. Then you must

write down on a scrap of paper a lesson that someone might draw from these events.

Mysteries



Whenever a Rogue Player rolls a tie of three or less, then we have a mystery. You are thwarted—prevented from doing whatever it is you were attempting to do. And the cause is something unknown or something supernatural. Write down on a scrap of paper a question that arises from this.

Motifs

As we continue, we must be ever vigilant about our motifs. Any time you hear a phrase or description of something that pulls you more and more into the world of the rogues, write it down. Remember that the second motif card must contain an element that echoes one from the first. And the third care must contain an element that echoes one from either the first or second.

Let us continue on with our adventure, wandering through the phases as we please, returning here once we have finished the third element on the third Motif card when we may begin the end game.



Ending the Game

And so it is that our story has now brought us to the point of no return. Let us discover what this was all about. Let us find our way to the conclusion of this strange and fantastic tale.

The End Game starts the moment the third element is filled in on the third Motif card. It can happen between phases or in the middle of a phase. This does not matter. We will pick up playing exactly where we left off. But know that the game is soon about to end and our story is about to be completed.

The End Game is when we reincorporate our threads. While we continue to play the game as we have just learned, look for opportunities to bring the Morals, Mysteries and Motifs back into the tale, ways to echo, answer or restate these threads. Each time we do so, we come one step closer to the very end.

Morals

A Moral may be reincorporated by showing us how a rogue has learned this lesson. Or by having one rogue demonstrate to another why this lesson is important. Or by showing us how a rogue will never learn this lesson.

Mysteries

A Mystery may be reincorporated by answering the question. Or by hinting at an answer. Or by

providing a clue to the answer. Or by advancing the mystery with more questions.

Motifs

A Motif card may be reincorporated by taking one of the cards and combining any two of the elements on it. If a card had "treasure embedded in flesh" and "a still pool that casts no reflection" on it, you may reincorporate it by driving a jeweled pike through the giant serpent and describing the dark pool of blood that pours forth from the wound.

Only Rogue Players may reincorporate, and you may only reincorporate when you have the dice. Once you have reincorporated, pick up the thread. You can no longer roll the dice. You are still in the game, participating as before, but your part of the story is essentially over. Do not fret. The game itself ends once two of the three of you reincorporate.

Now let us take this journey to its very end.



The Unknown Made Known

Can a Rogue die?

Yes. It is up to the rogue's player to decide if the rogue has perished. However, you may only kill a rogue if death is offered to the rogue. This may occur in the Rogues' Phase if the player handing you the dice specifically mentions that life or death is on the line. And it may occur at any moment during the Perilous Phase when the rogue is engaged with the Storm or Thunder. Otherwise, your rogue survives and is all the stronger for it.

Can I narrate the other rogues helping mine?

In your narration you may not narrate the actions or thoughts of another's rogue. You may invite them to join you and even suggest how they may, but the other rogues' players must narrate for their rogues. The other rogues' players may either narrate as invited or decline, but they cannot significantly alter your narration without your permission. If you hold the bones, you are still in charge.

Must our phases occur sequentially?

No. Your travel in time and space is unhindered between phases. Flashbacks, flash-forwards, and the like are all fair game as long as everyone is sure about what is going on.

Must our tale follow from the action in the first phase?

No. Where you take your story is your concern. Many an adventure tale begin *in media res* only to wrap up that action immediately and move on to the true meat of the story.

What happens if someone introduces something a little too weird for me?

Weirdness is a staple of the sword and sorcery genre. Magic and fantastic creatures are part and parcel, as are robots, aliens, time travelers, demons and gods. It is hard to know where the boundary is. In *Swords Without Master*, when someone creates a bit of fiction that is too weird for you, you may ask them to wait and introduce it through their Rogue during the next Discovery Phase. This gives everyone a chance to get used to the idea.

What happens when I roll a Moral or a Mystery during the End Game?

You may treat it as a normal Moral or Mystery, generating a new thread. Or you may choose to to reincorporate a thread that is already on the table instead. If you choose reincorporation, it must be a thread of the same type as you rolled. All other aspects of the roll remain (you still suffer a consequence or a stymie) but you reincorporate the old thread instead of creating a new one.

When is it best to use my trick?

Each of the three tricks presented in this adventure involve demanding that the next phase be a certain type of phase with conditions applied to it. These sorts of tricks can be used whenever a phase ends and before the Overplayer starts a new phase. Once you have learned how to play each type of phase, it is often best to use your trick as soon as you can, to ensure that the story you are creating is in some way about your Rogue.

Who has final say over what a tone means?

Whoever has just rolled the dice.

Glossary

Demand: During a Rogue Phase, other players will make illustrative demands of you. These set up the subject for your narration. They usually begin with the phrase "Show me..." such as "Show me how you saved us from the first of the guild's death traps."

Discovery Phase: During this phase, the players may use their rogues to uncover or illuminate things about their world, themselves or the current tale. It is used to give the Overplayer inspiration and nudge the story in the right direction. The Discovery Phase begins with Thunder, but no Storm. The Overplayer's job during this phase is to answer the loaded questions the players come up while making their discoveries. The phase ends when the Overplayer decides.

Heroic Feat: Each rogue has two Heroic Feats: a Glum one and a Jovial one. They typify how the rogue may react in each tone. Once every game, a Rogue Player may ignore a roll they just made—including ignoring any ties or threads made by the roll—and decide to use one of their Heroic Feats instead. This Heroic Feat is then crossed out and a new one must be made before the Rogue adventures again.

Loaded Question: During a Discovery Phase, after making their discovery, the Rogue Players will ask the Overplayer a loaded question about the discovery. A loaded

question cannot have a yes-or-no answer. It is not a leading question, where the answer is heavily hinted at. Instead, a loaded question is one in which question itself tells you almost as much about the world or story as the answer would.

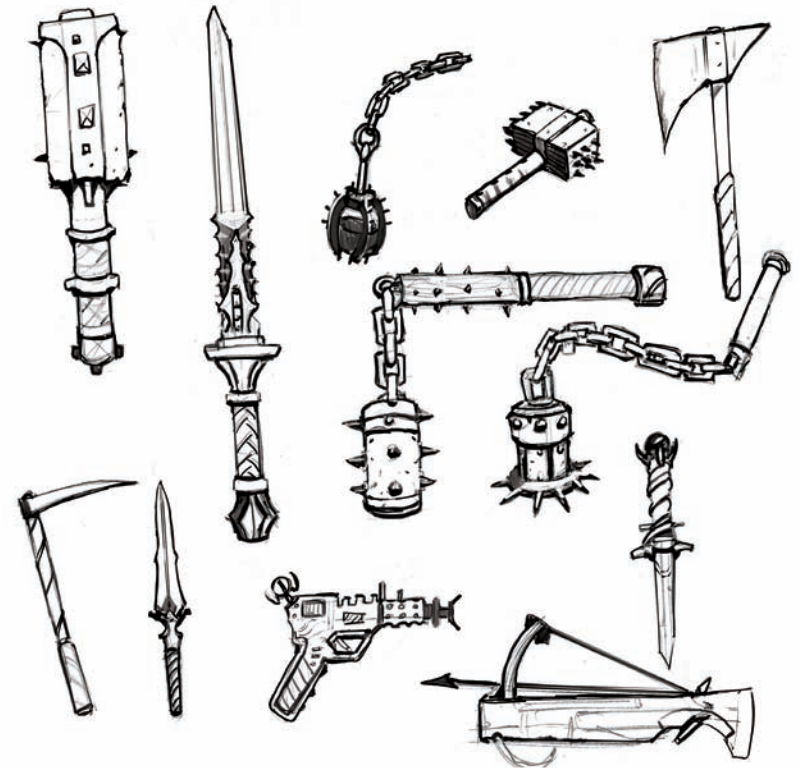
Moral: When a rogue's actions have undesirable consequences. This happens when the bones are both three or less and are not tied. The player narrates as usual, but the Overplayer then adds a consequence. From that consequence, the player deduces a moral or lesson that should be learned, writes it on a Thread, and places in the middle of the table.

Motif: A Thread that also acts as the game's timer. When you hear something you like in the narration, you can make it a Motif. Pick three elements about the narration that you liked, write them down, and place that Thread in the middle of the table. This starts the Motif. After this point, any new Motif added must have three elements, one of which it shares with a previous Motif Thread. Once you have three Motif Threads down, the end game begins.

Mystery: When a rogue is prevented from thinking or reacting fast enough to interfere with the course of events by some unknown force. This happens when the bones are tied and are three or less. The player

can narrate something strange happening to their rogue that prevents the rogue from acting or interfering. Then the player fills out a Mystery Thread asking a question related to this phenomenon and puts that Thread in the middle of the table. Then they pass the dice on as normal. Because this is the result of a tie, the Overtone is always flipped on a Mystery.

Overplayer: The Overplayer does not have a rogue like the other players. The Overplayer's narration introduces and ends each phase, and they are responsible for all non-Rogue characters when no Rogue Player has the narration.



Overtone: The overall tone of the scene. The Overplayer and any other player who has not determined their own tone yet must adhere to the overtone while narrating. Whenever there is a tie, no matter who rolls it, the Overtone always flips to the other tone. When this happens, an escalation must occur in the story to explain the change in tone.

Perilous Phase: The phase in which the Rogues' lives and things that they hold dear are in direct peril. It is used to create action and boil the blood. The perilous phase begins with both the Thunder and the Storm. The Overplayer's job during this phase is to put pressure on the rogues and threaten that which they love: especially themselves. The phase ends when the players decide.

Phases: During play, you are always either in a phase or transitioning into a phase. There are three phases: Perilous, Discovery, and Rogue. The phase determines which rules are in play, specifically how the bones are passed, why they are rolled and what is to be added to the fiction. A phase is not a scene. One phase can contain many scenes and there may be several phases within a scene.

Player: This refers to anyone playing the game, be they Overplayer or Rogue Player.

Rogue Phase: During this phase, the players illustrate something specific about their rogue, what their rogue is doing or a relationship their rogue has. The Rogue Phase starts with Thunder, but has no Storm. The Overplayer's job is simply to get

the phase rolling by making the first demand. The phase ends when either the Rogue Players or the Overplayer decides.

Rogue: While this term may occasionally be used in the plain English sense, in general it means a Rogue Player's character.

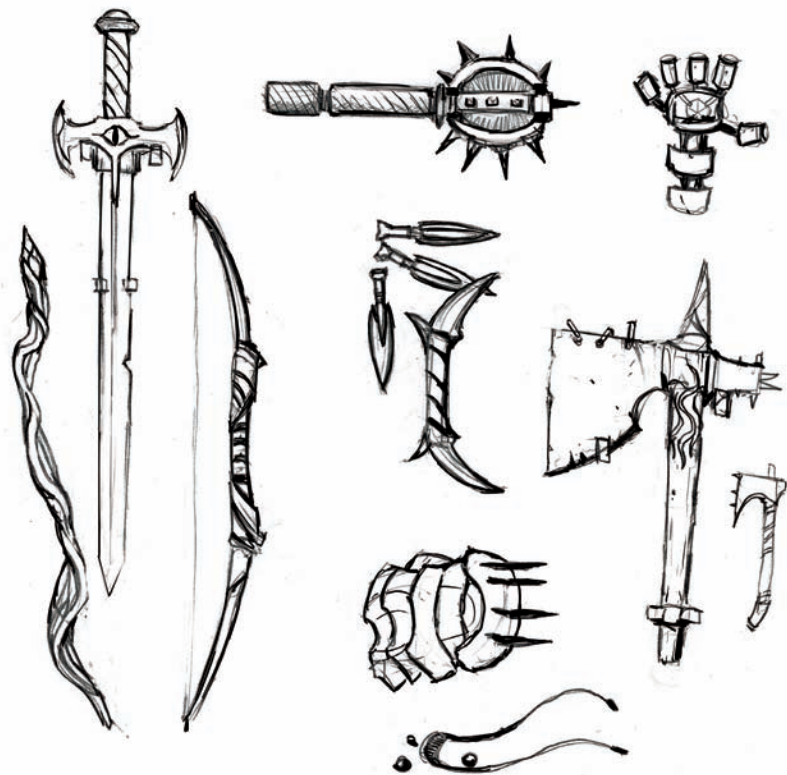
Rogue Player: The players who are not Overplayers and thus have rogue roles that they play and champion.

Slipping: During a Perilous Phase, when the Rogue Player does not have the dice, their rogue may only Slip or Struggle. A Slipping rogue is slowly giving way to his or her opponent.

Storm: This is an immediate threat the Overplayer introduces in Perilous Phases. The Storm is something the rogues have to deal with right now, as opposed to the Thunder, which is a possible threat in the future.

Struggling: During a Perilous Phase, when the Rogue Player does not have the dice, their rogue may only Slip or Struggle. A Struggling rogue is only able to match their opponent, not overcome them.

Stymie: When a rogue is unable to move, think, or react fast enough to interfere with the course of events. This happens when the



bones are tied. The Rogue Player narrates why their character was not able to act or interfere. Because this is the result of a tie, the Overtone is always flipped on a Stymie. When this happens, an escalation must occur in the story to explain the change in tone.

Threads: These are the notes that are created and piled in the middle of the table as the game proceeds, and can be reincorporated at the end of the game. There are three kinds of Threads: the Motif, Mysteries, and Morals. The first is created whenever the players wish. The latter two are created when the bones tell you to create them.

Thunder: This is an ominous threat the Overplayer introduces at the beginning of every phase that is in the distance. Thunder is not something the rogues must deal with immediately, but might have to in the near future. When the Thunder is given, the Overplayer picks up the dice.

Tones: Generally this means Glum and Jovial. The tones set the mood and voice of the narration. They are mostly likely determined by a roll of the bones, though there are cases in which the players can change the tone without dice. Before you do anything in *Swords Without Master*, you must determine your tone.

Tying a Thread: When you reincorporate or resolve a Thread during the end game. This can only happen if you have rolled the dice.



What Lurks Beyond the City?

The rules in this preview are enough to bring you many nights of adventure, but eventually your thirst for the unknown will drive beyond their reach. What then?

New Adventures

Now that you are experienced adventurers, you need not be bound by the strict order of phase "The City of Fire & Coin" begins with. Starting a new game is as simple as rolling for an Overtone and choosing what phase you wish to start in.

These new adventures may take place at any point in the rogues' careers. Perhaps before "The City of Fire & Coin," perhaps after. Often is not necessary to even know the sequential order of the adventures. Rogues themselves often argue about what happened when.

Old Threads

Whenever you finish an adventure and you have threads left over, threads that have not been reincorporated, threads that you are curious about, save them. At the beginning of the next adventure, toss them down in the middle of the

table and see if you can get to the bottom or them. This is particularly useful for Morals or Mysteries, but with a little finesse a Motif would work, too.

A New Thread

Each new adventure needs a Title. In *Swords Without Master*, the adventure's Title is also considered a thread and can be reincorporated during the End Game.

Some adventures, like "The City of Fire & Coin," have a title going into them. Some require that you create a title for them while playing. To create one during an adventure, all you have to do is write it down when an appropriate one comes to mind. If everyone agrees with it, you have your title.

The Heroic Feats

As noted before, your rogues have two reactions written up for them: a Glum one and a Jovial one. These reactions are called the Heroic Feats. They typify how the rogue may react in each tone. Once every game, a Rogue Player may ignore a roll they just made—including ignoring any ties or threads made by the roll—and decide to use one of their Heroic Feats instead. They react in the feat's tone, incorporating elements from the feat.

This Heroic Feat is then crossed out and a new one must be written up before the rogue adventures again.

New Tricks

Manyara, Muaphet Raum and Snorri have more than one trick up their sleeve. A Rogue may only ever have one trick per adventure, but after you have used your trick, you may use the other one for your rogue in a subsequent adventure.

Manyara

The Infectious Laugh: Manyara has a voice that lightens an enemy's heart, even as her sword seeks it. Once during the game you can ignore all results of a roll—including the tone or any thread or stymie results—and change it to a Jovial result by invoking your laughing battle cry. When you do, the Overtone immediately becomes Jovial.

Muaphet Raum

Secrets of the Worm Cult: After years of tracing the origins of this mysteries sect, Muaphet has pinpointed their lost library deep within the catacombs of the city. Once during the game, before a phase begins, you may demand the next phase is set in the Catacombs of the Worm.

Snorri

The Hunter Descending: Snorri is convinced that destiny is dictated by the stars. Once during the game you can ignore a roll by treating it as a *Mystery* with the following question: "Why have the stars blinded my eyes?" You are stymied and the *Overtone* flips.

Once a rogue has used up their second trick, you can start making up new ones based on the other rogues' tricks. Snorri may find himself hunted by cousin with a blood-feud and model his new trick on Muaphet Raum's *Servant of the Worm Cult*. Manyara might create one based on Snorri's *The Tireless Wolf* to show off how immensely strong she is. And so forth.

New Rogues

To create a new rogue, you must start with an *Eidolon* or *Simulacrum*. This is something from our world that reminds you of your rogue. For Snorri, Manyara and Muaphet Raum, the simulacra are their little illustrations that accompany their text. For your new rogue it can be some other illustration, or a miniature, or a song lyric, or a line from a book or movie, or an actor you would imagine playing the rogue, or beverage that your rogue usually drinks, or whatever you can dream up that exists in our world, but reflects the rogue.

Once you have that, you need only to write up a *Glum and Jovial Heroic Feat* and a trick.

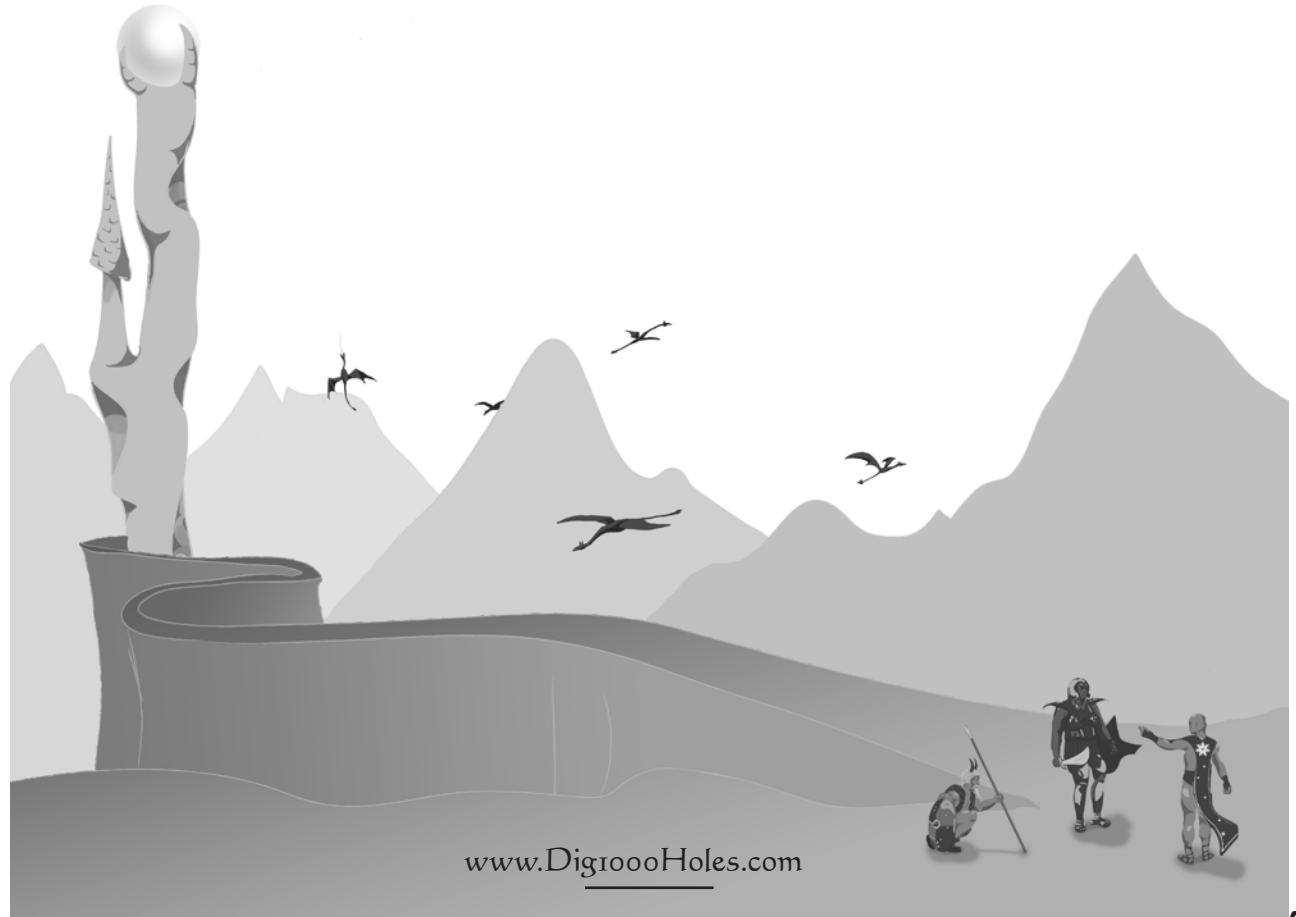
Swords Without Master

A Game of Sorcery & Adventure by Epidiah Ravachol

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