

Dragons of Blood and Water

A 24 Hour RPG

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*When the grandsires of the grandsires of our grandsires were young,
there was a world.*

Now, there is just the Valley and the River.

*The world was consumed by the Unmakers. The peoples of the world fled
before this terrible storm. A lucky few – so few – found the Valley, and
there they hid as the skies boiled, as the mountains birthed slimy horrors,
as things made of stripped bone and bile stalked the land.*

For a time, there was no hope.

*A child played in the mud in the Valley by the banks of the river. She
made a dragon out of the mud, and it came to life. The next day, her
family came to the river bank and made a bigger dragon. It too came to
life.*

And so hope was born out of the mud.

*When the Unmakers came to the valley, the first dragon rose up to stop
them. The child's family became the first family of Shapers.*

*Others came to the river and made their own mud effigies. Those who
mastered the art became Shapers; others sheltered beneath the wings of
the dragons' and became the Settlers.*

*For all of history, this has been the way of things. The Settlers till the
fertile land of the Valley, Shaper families make dragons from the River
mud, and the dragons battle the great Unmakers when they attack.*

*But each year, the Unmakers come a little closer, and the Valley grows
smaller.*

One day, the dragons will be turned on each other.

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In the eastern section of the valley – the direction the river flows is said to be south, for compasses no longer function – there is a village where they worship the ruins of a dragon. According to the village's legends, the dragon was slain long ago, by an Unmaker army led by the King of Tears. To most travellers, the so-called dragon looks like a low bank of mud with a few scraggly thorn bushes. If you squint, you can make out what might have once been an eye, a horn, a tooth, but it could be just a passing fancy, a random confluence of meaningless shapes.

Still, the villagers are proud of their dragon, even if none of them could dream of Shaping it to life. They insist that they see it, and that is enough for them.

Family, Scion and Dragon

Players in *Dragons of Blood and Water* play three distinct types of entity within the game world – a noble Shaper Family, Scions (members) of that Family, the mud Dragon protector of the Family. Family and Dragon are created before the game proper starts; individual Scions can be created as need arises.

Adventures

Each adventure in *Dragons of Blood and Water* takes place in a single season; often, there will be only one adventure in a given year. Players may only play one Scion at a time, but can have any number of Scion characters.

Dividing Mind, Body and Resources

A player has a pool of 12 points to split among three basic qualities – Mind, Body and Resources. Each of these is split into two further qualities depending on the entity in

question. For example, at the level of Family, Resources breaks into Holdings and Strongholds, while at the level of Scion, it breaks into Gear and Effigy.

The player should have a concept for the Family and its associated Dragon before splitting the points. The players have a fairly free hand when it comes to coming up with Family traditions and Dragon concepts – all the laws and histories were swept away when the world ended, and the Valley’s society is a new thing.

Split 12 points among Mind, Body, and Resources. Each quality must get at least two points.

Checks

Whenever a player is trying to accomplish something important in uncertain conditions, make a check. Roll 1d6 and add it to the appropriate quality, then compare the total to a difficulty.

Trivial	2	Hard	8
Easy	4	Heroic	10
Average	6	Legendary	12

For example, lifting a fallen log needs an Average Might check – a Scion would have to get a total of 6 or more by rolling Might + 1d6. Bending iron bars would be Heroic difficulty.

There are also opposed checks, where two characters are pitted against each other. In such cases, both players (or player and games master) roll 1d6 and add the appropriate quality. Highest total wins. In certain conditions (such as combat), losing has further consequences.

Family

‘Hail the Blood of the Dragon!’ The priest raised a clay cup and tilted it so a droplet of red liquid fell to the ground in front of the congregation. ‘Give thanks to our lords, who guard us against the horrors beyond! Give thanks for the Dragons, the shield of the Valley, who are born from the wisdom of our lords! Give thanks for the River, which is life and flows from the generosity of our lords!’

Suddenly, there came a cry from the back of the church. A tiny clay man, no more than a handspan high, staggered out into the aisle before collapsing into a pile of formless mud.

“Who did this? Who!?” roared the priest. As one, the crowd parted to reveal a woman clutching a young child. The child’s hands were stained with mud.

“Please”, she whispered, “his sire was a Shaper. I didn’t think he had the gift! I didn’t know!”

The Shaper families are the rules of the Valley. It is only through their constant vigilance and their Dragons that the Unmakers are kept at bay. The Shapers are the oldest families in the Valley, ruling over the newer Settlers. Many of the Shaper families are rather eccentric. The mark of a Shaper is the ability to make gods out of mud, and this supernatural gift touched people randomly in the early days of the Valley. For every Shaper family who are wise rulers dwelling in a mighty stone fortress, there are two more who are rife with madness, incest, self-hatred or Unmaker taint.

The Shaper gift is passed on through the blood. The child of a Shaper is likely to be able to make living beings from the mud of the River. The Shaper families jealously guard their status – if there were too many Shaper families, there would be a host of weak, fragile Dragons instead of a handful of mighty Dragons capable of fending off the Unmakers. Therefore, Shapers may only marry other Shapers. Familial alliances are sealed by marriage. Bastard Shapers are exiled beyond the Valley.

When creating a Family, the player should decide on a basic concept before assigning points. Sample concepts include:

- Barbarian warlords who intend to conquer the Valley
- Degenerate sybarites who abuse their Settlers
- Crazy hillbillies living in a decaying shack
- Fanatics who worship their Dragon
- A dying family, searching for new blood to replenish their ranks

Make your own society.

*Once the player has a concept, split the points allocated to the **Mind** quality between **Influence** and **Lore**. Both qualities must get at least one point.*

Influence

Influence measures the Family's political sway and control. While there is no central government in the Valley, the Shapers do have feudal ties and alliances. Influence allows a Family to call in favours, as well as spy and gather rumours about others.

Lore

Lore is the family's understanding of magic and mud. Magic, it is said, has only been possible in its current form since the coming of the Unmakers. Books of lore, then, are mostly scribbled journals written by the crazy survivors of the end of the world. Lore also covers the Family's understanding of old relics and devices. A Lore check is used to discover secrets about Dragons and Unmakers.

*Split the points allocated to the **Body** quality between **Army** and **Vigour**.*

Army

The Army score determines the Family's military strength. Armies in the Valley generally consist of relatively untrained troops armed with shield and spear – no match for a Dragon, but enough to keep Settlers or bandits in line.

Vigour

Vigour measures the family's manpower and industry. A family with high Vigour can grow or recover from injuries quickly. A Vigorous Family controls many Settlers and is generally healthy and fertile.

*Split the points allocated to the **Resources** quality between **Holdings** and **Stronghold**.*

Holdings

A Family's Holdings measures how much land and wealth the Family can muster. The currency in the Valley is iron and gold, although some also trade in lumps of died mud from the River.

Stronghold

Strongholds are shelters from attacking armies and the wrath of the Unmakers. A high Stronghold score indicates that the Family has a stone castle or other refuge, like a cave network or underground bunkers. A low Stronghold means that the Family has relatively little protection should their Dragon be overcome.

Example Family:

The inspiration for the Ghast family is Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast – a dwindling family of eccentrics knocking around inside a giant crumbling castle. The player early split the 12 points as follows: Mind 4, Body 2, Resources 6.

The Family probably has plenty of old secrets and deranged ramblings, but is not a major factor in Valley politics. The split there is Influence 1/Lore 3.

As each quality must have at least one point allocated to it, Army and Vigour get one point each.

Stronghold is obviously the big one for this Family, getting four points. Destroying that massive pile of stone will take a great deal of effort. The remainder does into two points of Holdings, the scanty land around the keep.

Politics: Politics between Families is normally resolved by opposed Influence checks. A family who loses an Influence check is indebted to the winner for a time, and must pay back this debt somehow. Every such debt reduces the Family's effective Influence by 1 until the debt is paid.

To make an Influence check, a Family must send a Scion to the target Family to speak to the leaders of that family.

Battles: Battles between Family armies consist of opposed Army checks using the combat rules (see below, under Might). As Armies do not have a Speed, the smaller Army acts first.

Sieges: Sieges work like normal battles, but damage is applied to the Stronghold score first. Furthermore, it takes two points of damage to remove one point of Stronghold. Furthermore, sieges take time – only one siege can take place per season, so there is a maximum of four per year.

Yearly Changes: At the end of each year, a family gains a number of points equal to the *lower* of its Holdings and Vigour. These points can be split among any of the following:

- Army
- Vigour
- Influence
- Stronghold

Also, points from growth can be spent to replenish the point pools used to generate Scions (see below), or to repair a Dragon whose Might has been reduced by damage.

The other qualities – Lore and Holdings – can only be improved through events in play, such as finding or stealing books, conquering land and so on.

Scion

Ael rode into the village on his dun steed. He could hear the sound of the stream running through the small settlement, and the creak of the millwheel turning, but there was no other sound, no sign of life. He scowled and laid a hand to his sword. The buildings looked old and rotted, but this place was too close to his family's keep to have stayed abandoned so long. No, this place had fallen victim to Unmaking...

The Scions of the Valley are the leaders and champions of the Families. It is in their blood, in their actions and in their heroism that the future of the Valley will be found. As it is the responsibility of the Shapers to defend the Valley against the Unmakers, Scions are sent to investigate rumours of taint and invasion.

A Family has many Scions; nobles and leaders and spies and embarrassing black sheep.

The creation of Scion characters works slightly differently to that of Families or Dragons. All of a Scion's qualities start at 3 except Gear and Effigy, which start at 0. The player may spend points from the pools of Mind, Body and Resources to increase these qualities. There is a *single* pool which all Scions of a Family draw from – for example, if a player allocated five points to Mind, then there are five points and five points only with which to boost a Scion's Wit or Magic qualities.

Each point increases the relevant quality by 3.

*Points in the **Mind** pool for Scions may be used to increase **Wit** or **Will** by 3 per point.*

Wit

A scion's Wit quality measures his intellect, cleverness and charm. Wit covers riddle contests, puzzles, wordplay, military tactics and so on.

Will

This quality is used to manipulate magic. It also covers determination, focus and so forth. Most magic in use in the Valley deals with the Dragons. There are also banishing rites used to deal with specific Unmakers, which must be discovered during adventures or researched using Lore. Sample spells are listed below.

*Points in the **Body** pool for Scions may be used to increase **Might** or **Speed** by 3 per point.*

Might

Might covers physical strength, health and melee combat ability. Damage subtracts from a character's Might.

Speed

Speed covers physical dexterity, dodging, agility and movement, as well as ranged combat. In combat and other crisis situations, characters act in order of their respective Speeds.

*Points in the **Resources** pool for Scions may be used to increase **Gear** or **Effigy** by 3 per point. Note that Gear and Effigy start at 0, not 3.*

Gear

A character's Gear score gives him personal wealth and equipment beyond the average. These might be finely made weapons, relics from before the end of the world, magical talismans made of River mud and so on. Points allocated to Gear are further subdivided. Each point of Gear

- Gives a +2 bonus to Might checks when attacking in either melee or ranged
- Reduces damage by 1.
- Increases a character's personal wealth. A character with wealth points may make Gear checks to purchase items.

Effigy

While the Dragons are the most visible and important form of Effigy, individual Scions can shape lesser gods and creatures out of river mud. Common effigies include servant golems, horses, spies, familiars and homunculi. Each point in Effigy gives 2 points to split among the Effigy's Wit, Will, Might or Speed. An Effigy put have at least one point in Might.

Example Scions

Continuing the saga of the Ghast family, the player creates a Scion. Martin is a young wandering swordsman, exiled from the Family for breaching one of the Ghast's confusing law, created for an adventure that takes place in the wilderness at the edge of the Valley. This is the first Scion created for the Ghast Family, so the point pools are full.

As a reminder, the Ghasts have Mind 4, Body 2, Resources 6.

Martin's Wit and Will start at 3 each, and the player is happy to keep them at that level. He spends no Mind points.

For Martin's Might and Speed, the player decides that Martin probably needs a bit of extra Might, so he spends one of the Body points to boost Might by 3.

Finally, for Gear and Effigy, the Ghasts aren't especially rich, but have lots of old relics. The player decides that Martin took an old homunculus with him when he left. The homunculus looks like a serpent with the head of an old man, and constantly pleads with him to return to the family and obey tradition. It is also well informed on matters of Lore. The player puts one point into Effigy, for a score of 3. The effigy ends up with a Might of 1, and a Wit of 5.

Combat: Is resolved using opposed Might rolls. The loser of the roll suffers a loss of Might equal to the difference in the scores if the attacker is using a lethal weapon like a sword. If the attacker is using bare fists or an improvised weapon, then the Might

loss is equal to half the difference (round down). A character reduced to 0 Might is slain.

Ranged combat works in a similar way, but uses a Speed check against a difficulty of the target's Speed+3.

Advancement: At the end of an adventure, a Scion may increase any one of his qualities by +2. Alternatively, the Scion may increase any two qualities by +2, but cannot then be used as a player character in the next adventure.

Dragon

The effigies made from the mud of the River are called dragons, for that was the shape of the first such being. They are worshipped as gods in some Families, or treated as unthinking weapons of war in others. They have been shaped into great worms, into giants, into beasts, into half-remembered shapes from before the end of the world – but always, they have *shape*. They are form from chaos, the polar opposite of the Unmakers.

The Dragons are sentient and intelligent to a degree, but their personalities are derived from the Shapers who made them and how they are treated. Some Dragons are honoured members and advisors of the Family; others are gods to the fearful Settlers, or steeds for heroic scions. The Dragon is the soul of the Family made flesh, born of all their fears and desires and hopes.

Once made from the mud, the Dragon must be awoken from its slumber. The magic from this ritual fades over time. Therefore, the Dragons slumber in the bosom of the Family until roused when needed with further sacrifices or rites. The Shaper Families normally only awaken their Dragons when the Unmakers attack the Valley.

In game terms, a player may play his Dragon only when it is awoken, either through events in the game, or when the scenario begins with the Family Dragons active.

Dragons characters are built like Families, from the Mind, Body and Resource qualities.

*Split the points allocated to the **Mind** quality between **Wit** and **Will**.*

Wit and **Will** work the same for Dragons as they do for Scions. Dragons live much longer than humans, but are no smarter or wiser.

*Split the points allocated to the **Body** quality between **Might** and **Speed**.*

Might and **Speed** work for Dragons much like they do for Scions, but Dragons are immeasurably stronger. A Dragon can use its Might against Armies and Strongholds, for example, tearing down stone walls as easily as a man might tear paper.

*Split the points allocated to the **Resources** quality between **Armour** and **Waking**.*

Armour

A Dragon's Armour quality is used to reduce damage dealt to it in battle. Each point of Armour reduces damage done to the Dragon by 1.

Waking

The Dragon's Waking quality determines how easy it is to wake it from slumber. To wake a Dragon, the Family must perform a rite. There are four types of rites:

- Magical Rites: The Family must succeed at a Lore check.
- Religious Rites: The Family must succeed at a Vigour check.
- Great Labour: The Family must succeed at a Holdings check.
- Sacrifices: The Family must either bargain with the Unmakers or commit human sacrifices, both crimes in the Valley. No roll is needed.

The type of rite used to awaken the Dragon is chosen when the Dragon is created, and is a closely guarded secret for the Family.

The difficulty of the check depends on the Dragon's Waking quality – the difficulty is equal to 6-the Dragon's Waking quality. If the check fails, then making a Waking check at a difficulty of 4. If this second check fails, then reduce the appropriate Family quality by 1 permanently.

Example Dragon: The Ghast family Dragon is very much a classic dragon, slumbering in the cellars of their rambling keep. It is called Grammoth, and was first Shaped by the founder, the Great Ghast himself. It is crochety and mean, used to being treated with respect.

As a reminder, the Ghasts have Mind 4, Body 2, Resources 6.

The player chooses to split the Mind evenly between the Dragon's Wit and Will, giving it scores of 2 in each.

For Body, the player puts both points into Might, giving Grammoth Might 2, Speed 0.

Next, Resources. The Family is going to be using Lore to awaken the dragon. They have Lore 3, so a single point in Waking ensures that Grammoth will be easy to stir when he is needed. The other 5 points go into Armour, making the dragon virtually invulnerable.

Unmakers

Beyond the confines of the Valley, there is no order, no reason, no form. The world has dissolved into the madness of Unmaking. Things – not creatures, not minds, not distinct entities, but the antithesis of all these things – are vomited out of the dissolving ruin of the world. The Unmakers are drawn to the Valley, to the last remnant of order left. The Dragons are all that stand in their way.

Unmakers are composed of broken things. An Unmaker might resemble a rotting forest of legs bearing a writhing ruin of barbed wire and dripping sludge, or a sky that suddenly fills with flapping plastic and leather and dripping acid.

Not all Unmakers are giant monsters – smaller Unmakers can slip past the watchtowers at the edge of the Valley. These lesser horrors often inhabit corpses or create false bodies from fallen leaves and other debris, to masquerade as humans. However, as all Unmakers are things of entropy and decay, the mere presence of a lesser Unmaker in the rich humus of order can give rise to larger Unmakers.

For example, an Unmaker that takes the place of a gravedigger in a Settler village would exude decay and undermine all that it touched, until the rotting corpses in the Lichfield arose as an unholy nightmare of twined-together bodies. Scions can sometimes find these intruders and banish them before they spawn greater Unmakers.

Sample Unmakers

Skitterer: A skitterer is a small Unmaker that resembles a twisted monkey made of rotting plant matter studded with gibbets of flesh, all wrapped in moss. They move with alarming swiftness, slashing at living beings and carving them up to spawn more of Skitterers.

Wit: 1 Will: 0 Might: 1 Speed: 4 (Scion scale)

Gullhead: Gullheads are assemblages of dead birds, slick with oil. They can fly by dividing themselves into rotten flocks, reassembling themselves before tearing their foes to pieces and devouring the remains. They are shock troops of the Unmakers.

Wit: 2 Will: 4 Might: 5 Speed: 3 (Scion scale)

The Swallower of Thunder: A greater Unmaker, the Swallower of Thunder is a zone of utter silence and utter darkness. It moves across the land, absorbing the energy of vitality of whatever it touches.

Wit: 0 Will: 5 Might: 8 Speed: 2 (Dragon scale)

Dark Times

If a greater Unmaker is not destroyed by Dragons or banished in some fashion, it grows and encompasses a vast area, possibly even the whole Valley. These dark times are disasters for all those living in the Valley. Each Family must make a Stronghold check against the Unmaker's Might. If this check fails, reduce the Family's Stronghold by the difference between the total and the Unmaker's Might as the Unmaker washes away some of the Family's defences.

Then, reduce the Family's Influence, Vigour and Army to a maximum of its new Stronghold quality.

For example, if Grammoth failed to stop the Swallower of Thunder, the Ghast Family would have to make a Stronghold check against the Swallower's Might. The Ghosts have Stronghold 4, and roll a 3. The difference is one, so their Stronghold is reduced by 1 to 3. None of their other qualities (Influence, Vigour or Army) are high enough to be affected – the family's handful of followers can easily hide in the massive castle. Their neighbouring Families may not be so lucky – perhaps the coming of this Unmaker can actually profit the Ghosts, who will come out of this Dark Time relatively unscathed...

Adventures

Adventures in *Dragons of Blood and Water* can take place on any of three scales – Family intrigue and politicking, Scion adventuring and investigation, and Dragon stomping over chaos beasts.

Generally, each year begins with the Families taking actions – plotting against each other, building new fortresses, rites to please their Dragons, keeping the Settlers in line and so on. From these actions, the Games Master should pick and choose a few plot threads, and then set the scene for the Scion-scale game. The players then pick one of their Scions (or generate an entirely new Scion) who enters that scene and attempts to further the interests of the Family.

For example, three players have their Families perform the following actions, respectively: spy on another family, try to recruit a powerful unaligned Settler town, and make contact with a sentient Unmaker so they can switch their Dragon to being awoken through sacrifices.

The GM decides that the adventure will take place in this town. There is an Unmaker-worshipping cult in the town, who are trying to secure mud from the River to assemble their own corrupt Dragon. They have imprisoned a scion from a fourth Family, who has the gift of shaping and can make a Dragon. One Player will want to uncover this plot to impress the Settlers; another will want to make contact with the cult and learn their secrets before destroying them; the third will be trying to discover the true motives of the others.

Dragon-scale games arise from the other styles of play. For example, the above adventure might end with the Scions desperately fleeing the wreck of the town as the Unmaker Dragon destroys it, trying to make it to a nearby Stronghold so they can awaken one of their Dragons to fight the Unmaker.

Notes and Suggestions:

- While a player should only have one ‘active’ player character at a time, it is possible to play different Scions from the same Family in the same time – just keep it to one per scene.
- The resolution of a scenario should generally involve either an Unmaker attack, or a clash between Families. The Valley is united by an external threat, but divided by internal battles, giving plenty of scope for conflict and backstabbing.
- *Creation* is a virtue; *Destruction* is equated with evil in the Valley.
- The Families are infinitely more rapacious and greedy than Dragons.
- Magic does funky plot device stuff. Argh.

