



Prologue

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

The Giant

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

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

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

The War God

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

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

The Blood God

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

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

Clash of the Titans

The Blood God readied his sword, groaning as he shifted from one foot to the other, watching the motionless War God, waiting for the giant in the pool to make the first move. The War God stood motionless, his mouth contorting into a cruel smile as he wondered how to kill something that was already dead. For that single moment, the gentle breeze ceased to blow and time stood still. And then, with two mighty roars, the battle was joined.

The Blood God wailed as he lurched toward the bellowing War God, raising his sword in the air, while the War God bellowed as he ran toward the wailing Blood God, both arms outstretched as if to strangle the foul zombi. As they closed on one another, the Blood God

dropped to one knee and rolled forward, his sword aimed at the charging War God's belly. With surprising speed, the War God knocked the sword aside with his left hand and made to grab the Blood God with his right. Momentarily knocked off balance, the Blood God did the only thing that he could do to avoid the massive hands of the War God - he fell flat on his back.

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

About Bronze

Bronze is a set of rules designed to emulate swords and sorcery adventure in the vein of Lin Carter, Fritz Leiber, and Robert E. Howard. Bronze actually began life as Zak Arntson's *Thord of Relings*, a set of intriguing design notes that can be found over at the Harlekin Maus site (<http://www.harlekin-maus.com>). While attempting to play a game using those notes, several changes were made along the way and, ultimately, a new set of rules was born.

Materials Needed to Play Bronze

Aside from two or more people willing to cooperate with one another in order to weave engaging tales of adventure, you'll need three other things to get a game of Bronze off the ground. First, every player (with the exception of the chosen referee) will need six twelve-sided dice of one color and another six twelve-sided dice of another color (12d12 together). After each player has gathered the appropriate dice, they'll also need to grab a pencil and a sheet of paper.

Player Characters in Bronze

Think of the imaginary world that you will explore as being a novel, yourself as being an author, and your character as being a pen - your character is the tool that you, the player, use to express your creative vision within the imaginary world. The method of defining characters utilized by Bronze is designed to be as simple and concise as possible.

Your Character's Name

All characters have a name that their acquaintances know them by - this name might be one bestowed upon the character at birth, a nickname, or both. As a general rule, characters have a strong, single syllable, forename and no surname (Conan, Fafhrd, Thongor, etc), although they may be known by a nickname related to their appearance or profession (Grey Mouser, One Thumb, Warlock, etc). Choose a name for your character.

Your Character's Traits

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

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

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

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

I decide that Fane's youth in Hrsup probably won't play a large part in the game and so assign three points to the trait that deals with it. I further decide that the death of his brother is what led Fane to hang up his sword and take up tinkering, so that trait is pretty important - I assign six points to it. I decide that the only trait more central to my concept of Fane than the death of his brother is his love of battle, something that tugs at his heart strings despite his terrible loss - so I assign seven points to that trait. Finally, I decide that Fane is proud of his part in the Siege of Halandor and brags about it when drunk - thus, I assign my remaining four points to that trait.

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

Your Character's Incidentals

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

- *Recovered the legendary sword Griefmaker: 5*

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

The Prologue

Like all good works of swords and sorcery fiction, all games of Bronze begin with a short prologue. A prologue is simply a short bit of colorful narrative delivered by the referee that briefly describes the setting, sets the tone of the adventure, and explains where the player characters fit into the overall scheme of things. For example, a typical prologue for a game of Bronze might consist of the following narrative:

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

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

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

After the referee has delivered the prologue, what happens in a game of Bronze from that point forward is entirely up to the other players. Players merely engage in situational *roleplay* (that is, they assume the roles of their characters and begin acting) until such time as the referee or another player introduces a conflict, as described below.

Introducing Conflict

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

Garnet, a not unattractive female cutpurse, is attempting to seduce the rather slovenly guard who is warding the entrance to the local dungeon. The referee decides that this is a good opportunity to introduce conflict and so states that the guard, while intrigued, is also a trained professional and won't be easily taken in by Garnet's attempts to seduce him.

Yes, introducing conflict into Bronze is truly as easy as the example above makes it seem. Initiating conflict is no more difficult than announcing "I seek to oppose X" or "X is opposing your action" with X being a specific character, object or other force. That said, only the referee can introduce conflict on behalf of a non-player character or other force removed from a player character, while other players alone may introduce conflict that is a direct result of their own character opposing an action already in progress. So then, what about *unopposed action*? In games of Bronze, *unopposed actions simply happen*.

Resolving Conflict

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

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

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

Character Traits and Conflict Resolution

Now, all of that having been said, here is where things get a bit more complex. First, if a player manages to incorporate one of their character's traits into *either* of the two outcomes that they present, they may gamble points of that trait's rating to roll up to five additional Conquest Dice (more twelve-sided dice of the same color as their current Conquest Die) when resolving the conflict in question. For each point of trait rating (up to five) gambled in this manner, a player may roll one additional Conquest Die. When the dice are then rolled, the player only counts the *highest* Conquest Die result, discounting the other Conquest Dice completely. For example:

Dave, whose character Gregor possess the trait 'Formally trained in swordplay: 5', is attempting to best an angry grak dog in combat (an obvious conflict), and presents the possible outcome of this conflict that benefits his character as "I call upon my formal combat training, feinting to the left and driving my blade through the unsuspecting grak dog's belly when it leaps forward." Thanks to his inventive description, Dave may gamble up to five points of Gregor's trait rating to roll additional Conquest Dice when resolving this conflict, and chooses to do so. Dave decides to gamble two points of Gregor's trait rating, thus picking up two addition Conquest Dice to roll.

So, where do points of trait rating actually go when gambled in this manner? Well, if the roll outcome favors the character whose action was being opposed, any points of trait rating that the player of that character gambled to roll extra Conquest Dice don't go anywhere - the trait rating remains unchanged. If, on the other hand, the roll outcome does *not* favor the character whose action was being opposed, any points of trait rating that the player of that character gambled to roll extra Conquest Dice are subtracted from the current rating of the trait in question and awarded to the player who introduced the conflict that was being resolved (either the referee or another player) and become *Bane Points*.

Bane Points and Conflict Resolution

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

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

Note that, unlike points of trait rating, Bane Points are actually *spent*. Once Bane Points have been spent, they *stay gone*, regardless of a conflict's outcome. Given this, some players may be tempted to hoard Bane Points, but in doing so, they'll be missing out on an opportunity to flex their own narrative muscle.

Time Between Conflicts

After the referee has narrated the immediate outcome of a given conflict, what happens in a game of Bronze from that time until the such time as the next conflict is introduced is (once

again) entirely up to the other players. As they did after the prologue, players engage in situational roleplay until such time as the referee or other player introduces the next instance of conflict.

Character Growth

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

In order to facilitate the creation of such new character traits, a referee may want to consider raising the maximum number of trait rating points that a character may possess when a critical juncture in the story being told is reached (increasing the maximum number of allowable trait rating points in this manner works best when done in increments of five).

Final Notes

Bronze has been play-tested, but not extensively - there likely is some room (perhaps a lot of it) for improvement. I'd certainly be interested in hearing what you have to say about Bronze, and listening to any suggestions that you may offer. Please, if you have something to say, either drop me a line via email at jdrakeh@softhome.net or contact me over at the RPGnet forums (<http://www.rpg.net>) under my screen name (yep - jdrakeh).