

BECOMING HEROES

BE AWESOME. FIGHT EVIL.



designed by
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1st edition

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Transneptune Games*

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Any remaining problems are our fault, not theirs.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

*“Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy”
—F. Scott Fitzgerald, Notebook E*

There was a time, nigh forgotten now, when evil did not hide behind suits and ties but wore armor of obsidian and bone. Its mad visage would haunt the dreams of the wise and its laugh would tear the world asunder. There was a time when bold heroes would rise against it. Armed with firm hearts and dangerous magics, these once-ordinary people would confront the evils that threatened their world head-on. It was a time of great battles, ancient wonders, and hard choices.

In **Becoming Heroes**, you are the heroic legends of ages past and you fight the tide of malice that seeks to destroy all you hold dear. But you are neither helpless nor alone. Fate, that sharpest of blades, is in your hands; with it you can cut through the atrocity and woe that the wicked will cast your way.

Use it. Fight the chaos and the void as they march upon your land. Sever the hands that would claw your sons and daughters from you. Sunder the towers of the corrupt and reduce the law of tyrants to ash.

Become a hero.

YOU WILL NEED

- A few friends to play with. We find three to six people to be about right. One of them will take the role of the Game Master, or GM, who represents the adversity in the story, and the rest will take the role of the story’s protagonists.

- A host of six-sided dice, or as they're commonly called, d6s. Ten to fifteen should do fine for a single player, while the GM will need about double that.
- Counters of some sort. We prefer glass beads of the kind you can get at a game store, but poker chips or coins work as well. The colors are not terribly important, but you'll want two, and if you're the GM, you'll want a third color for keeping track of Stunts. We will refer to these as beads throughout this text.
- Paper and pencil.
- Character sheets. Find these at games.transneptune.net or bundled with the PDF. There's a small version in the back of this book.
- An idea of the sort of story you want to play, and time to discuss it and change it with the other players. This game works best with a lot of input from everyone at the table.
- Time to play. At least one session will be devoted just to creating characters. Stories usually take at least three to six more sessions to resolve.

SETTING

Becoming Heroes takes place in a particular sort of world, one where good and evil are big and clearly conflicting forces. But that leaves a lot of detail for you to decide. You can build any kind of setting as long as it conforms to general epic story patterns. We've used this game to tell many different kinds of stories in many different kinds of worlds.

Which isn't to say we don't have recommendations. There are plenty of really great, imaginative fantasy settings out there just waiting for you. Don't be afraid to steal what you like. *Avatar: the Last Airbender* and *Dungeons & Dragons* can both be borrowed from to supply your group with a good setting. If there's a setting from a movie or novel that your group likes then please, use that!

Keep in mind that while **Becoming Heroes** is a game of epic fantasy, many settings diverge from that *aesthetic* while still keeping the *structure* of fantasy intact. If you look at *Star Wars*, for example, you see a very well-done fantasy setting and story. It has starships, aliens, and robots, all things from a very different aesthetic than what one

usually thinks of as fantasy, but it also has inherited destinies, heroes' journeys, and magic hermits. That universe is science fiction on its face, but the structure and individual elements of the story are all quite fantasy. You'll find similar elements in space opera, wǔxiá, and magic realism.

SOME EXAMPLE SETTINGS

Roma Vaporaria

A man in Roman Egypt invented an engine that converted steam to kinetic energy. An Indian man invented rails for a new kind of transportation. In our world, they never met each other, but what if they had? Roma Vaporaria is an alternate historical fantasy world where the glory of Rome is kept aloft by the discovery of steam power. Great airship battles wrack the sky, SPQR written in bold red upon their sides. Trains take Rome's influence to every corner of the world. And there is a looming threat of war with the Persians to the east.

In the Daimyō's Service

The Daimyō has struck a deal with great Oni Kings. In exchange for souls, these demons bind their minions to the bodies of his soldiers. His fell soldiers have unmatched strength and speed, and with them the Daimyō will conquer the world. The other clans do not stand a chance against him unless they can find a way to put aside their differences and unite. But things are not well in the prefecture. Everywhere, forests die and wither. Children are sickly, and strange things haunt the nights.

Blades of Destiny

Deep under the earth, at the center of the Land of the Dead, an old evil slumbers and whispers secret malice into the fabric of the world. Blights and demons plague both the righteous and wicked alike. Ghosts hunt for the flesh of the living after dark. But Heaven has not turned its face from the world. Learned mentors have been sent to teach a special few the secrets the gods used to shape the world. With it, they may overcome this insidious evil that seeks to annihilate all life.

The Lands Between

Technico Corp runs the world with cyberdrones and an iron fist. No one dares oppose them, but on the fringes are those who are rediscovering the power of Between. Using the power that courses through all reality, these new mages appropriate it for their own use, teleporting through ancient gates, or using the power of dusk to cloak themselves in shadow. The gates between the worlds have been closed for so long the kingdoms of the far lands are but a faint memory. A memory which is frantically being researched by Technico scientists.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We think you should start by reading this book in linear order; it's a book, after all. But having done that once, you may find certain sections more useful to you based on what you're trying to find.

If you're making a new character, *Character Creation* on page 13 covers character creation.

If you're in the middle of a **Becoming Heroes** campaign, you might find the *Arcs* and *Threads* sections (on page 59 and page 77 respectively) to be useful reference.

Finally, if you're the GM, read the *Running the Game* section on page 45. It's got a lot of good advice.

INFLUENCES

We owe a deep debt to the following stories and games. Listed by author, our thanks go to:

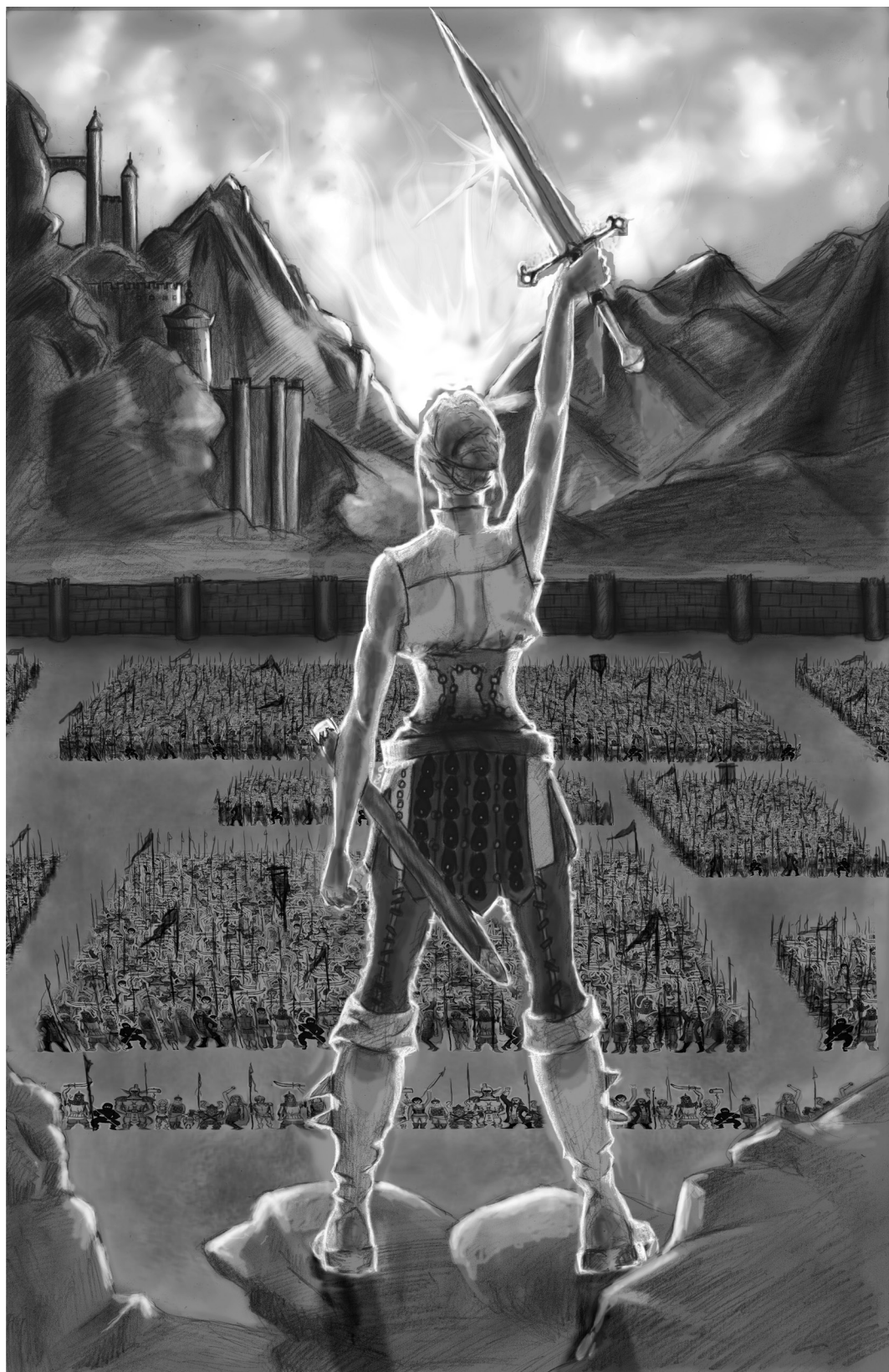
Stories

- Jackson Crawford's *Tattúínárdóla Saga*
- Michael DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko's *Avatar: the Last Airbender*
- George Lucas's *Star Wars*
- Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*
- Garth Nix's *Abhorsen* Trilogy
- Shī Nài'ān's *Water Margin*

- J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*
- Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- Joss Whedon's *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*

Games

- D. Vincent Baker's *Dogs in the Vineyard*
- Luke Crane's *Mouse Guard*
- Paul Czege's *My Life with Master*
- Tony Dowler's *Principia*
- The Impossible Dream's *Dread*
- Margaret Weis Productions's *Leverage*
- White Wolf's *Exalted*
- White Wolf's *Promethean: the Created*



II. THE BASICS

Becoming Heroes is a game where you and several of your friends sit down and become the heroes of fantastic lands. One person serves as the Game Master, who is responsible for all the villains, and for making sure everyone gets a fair share of the limelight. The others are all playing characters, and all of these stories are intertwined. These stories are all about the characters rising to meet their destinies, called **Arcs**, and you get to pick which arc you want to follow. Each arc has a set of events that must happen in that particular story, but most of the details of those events are up to you, the player.

As important is your hero's **Virtue**—a guiding principle that informs your idea of right and wrong, such as Compassion, or Justice. Like everything else about your character, you get to pick a virtue that makes sense or seems fun to play with; perhaps you're a Lost King running away from his throne because you're afraid to shoulder the responsibility of so many people. Are you overly compassionate, and fear hurting others? Or are you afraid you lack the wisdom for truly just rule? Your virtue is how you communicate that decision to the other players. By following your Virtue, your character becomes empowered, represented by gaining **Destiny Beads**. These beads can be spent later to change the world. Denying your Virtue gains you **Doom Beads**, which are powerful, but come at a cost.

Traits are things about your character and their story that come up when talking about that hero. They might be an ability, such as the ability to wield magic. They might be a person that your character has sworn to protect. They might be a situation that drives the character forward, such as being hunted by the state. The traits you choose will shape the world in which you play, and the kinds of situations you get into as a character.

Finally, there are **Threads**. Threads are a kind of lever that you can use as a player to move the story in ways that you want it to go. While traits are about what your character does, a thread is more like a theme or common happening in your character's story. Does your character have a knack for showing up when they are most (or least) wanted? Are you frequently raising armies to fight off oppressive omnipresent evils? Those things are threads.

When your hero attempts to, for example, fight a raging dragon at the top of a crumbling precipice, you enter a **Conflict** to determine what happens. Usually these conflicts are external—do you defeat the master swordsman while trading witty banter on the balcony? Sometimes, it's more internal, such as a crisis of faith brought about by a recent betrayal from someone you've known since birth. In any case, conflicts are about doing things, using the power of your traits. When you call upon traits in a conflict, we call it **taking an action**.

These are the basic pieces of the game. Play flows from conflict to conflict, as you narrate in traits, or simply leverage threads to avoid conflicts altogether, in order to follow what you believe is right and to complete your destiny.