

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL

DISTILLED

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Note on Distribution

This draft version of TOTG: DISTILLED is currently being offered for download (from primevalpress.com/games/totg/) for purposes of feedback. I ask that you not distribute the file but instead point people to the above address. Feel free to print a copy for your own uses. If you like it, then you can show your support by buying the final version when it's released. (Those who already own the original TOTG will receive the pdf copy of TOTG: DISTILLED free of charge.)

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1. Introduction

This Edition

This re-write has been done with several goals in mind:

- Keep the text clean, minimal and readable, but also “information rich.”
- Assume an experienced role-playing audience and therefore don't beat around the bush when explaining things. Also adopt a less formal tone.
- Focus on the core ideas of the game and their universal nature, i.e. Medieval stories aren't emphasized much.
- Discuss rules in practical terms so the game can be picked up and played quickly.

What the Game is About

Themes

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is a game about questing. A quest is a search; a search for something larger than life that when found will make things better. Better for you, your country, the whole world.

Questing has been an archetype of the human imagination since time immemorial. Every culture has myths of the brave hero who goes into the unknown to save his people. In our culture, the quest is epitomized by the search for the Holy Grail, a quest that began in the middle ages and continues to this day in both literature and popular culture.

TRIALS OF THE GRAIL is also about judgment. An easy quest is no quest at all, and every character who searches must be tested. In stories like *Percival* and *Gawain and the Green Knight* it is God who judges, but in other stories the judge is one's self, a love, society, humanity.

In TOTG, there is no single quest to play through and no single judgment to pass. What TOTG does is provide the tools for you to play with these basic concepts and make them your own. We'll talk about how to do this in Chapter 2.

Basics of Play

There are two kinds of participants in TOTG. One person is the Game Master and the rest are Players. (If you like, think of term "Player" as applying to a Shakespearean actor.) Each player gets one Questor, who he controls in the imagined world of the game. One Player will control the Lead Questor while the rest control Supporting Questors (more on this in Chapter 3). The GM controls just about everything else, most of the time.

Statements

The underlying basis of play is an imaginary world that all the participants conceive of together. The way things happen in this world—the way characters *do* things—is by someone making a Statement about that imagined world. Statements can be just about anything. They can describe part of the world or some change that it goes through. For instance, you could say any of the following.

"At the top of castle is a huge tower, with green light coming out of the windows."

"The bishop leaps up onto his horse and rides away."

"Lady Emily feels sad."

All of these sentences says something about the imagined world, so we call them Statements (capital "S").

There are restrictions on what statements you can validly make though. At the most basic level, you might say something that somebody else doesn't like, such as "Then aliens attack and the world is destroyed." That spoils everyone else's fun, so they're probably not going to let you get away with it. They'll complain and try to make you take it back or change it into something reasonable. Maybe "Aliens arrive. They want to destroy the world." That's something everyone can work with (potentially).

Of course, there's no way your friends can *force* you to take back a Statement you make even if they really don't like it. But they can ignore it. And they can not invite you back next time.

Beyond the basic social issues above, the rules of TOTG limit what you should properly make Statements about. To begin with, the Players usually only say things about their own Questors, like “George picks up the gun.” The GM can make Statements about almost anything, *except* for what the Questors do, feel, say, etc. He’ll often be describing the world and having other people in the world do things.

Trials

Often a Player will want his Questor to do or say something that affects other parts of the world. E.g. “George shoots the bank teller.” While George is the Player’s Questor, the bank teller is not, so the Player has indirectly altered the larger world. Can he make such a Statement? Yes but only provisionally. Depending on circumstances it may be rejected or modified. Similarly, the GM might indirectly alter a Questor by saying something about the world, like “The boulder rolls over and crushes Alex.” The same rules apply.

Usually, these Questor-world interactions will involve the Questor being tested in some way. Is he strong enough? Is he smart enough? Is he virtuous enough? Because of this they’re called Trials. What happens in a Trial—how the Trial is “resolved”—is determined by several factors. Right now we’ll just look at the very basics of the process and deal with details later (Chapter 4).

Basic Trial Resolution

The first thing to know is *who* is being tested in a Trial and *in what way*. It’s always Questors who are tested, never other characters in the world, and usually only one Questor at a time. Usually the manner of the testing will be clear from whatever Statement led to it, but if not, the Questor’s owner and whoever made the Statement should decide.

Linda, a Player, says “I’m going to jump into the choppy waters and try to swim for it.” In their minds, all the participants understand that this is a test of endurance and swimming ability.

Questor’s abilities are described by four Aptitudes: Manner, Survival, Wits and Fight. In every Trial a single Aptitude will be tested. When you decide how the Questor is being tested you should really be choosing an Aptitude to test.

Endurance and swimming ability are both contained pretty nicely in the Survival Aptitude, though the GM asks Linda, just to make sure. “Yeah,” she says.

All Aptitudes have two aspects, **Talent** and **Skill**. Talent is inborn ability while Skill is learned ability. Both Talent and Skill are assigned numbers, with higher ratings signaling more ability. Aptitudes are discussed more in Chapter 3.

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Trials get resolved by rolling dice and then counting some of them as “Successes,” which will add up to complete victory.

If you’re a Player, roll a number of ten-sided dice equal to your Questor’s Talent in whatever Aptitude is being tested.

Linda's Questor has a Survival Talent of 3, so Linda rolls 3 dice.

Now you need to know how tough the Trial is. This toughness is divided into two numbers, **Difficulty** and **Complexity**. The only difference between them is that Difficulty is best overcome with Talent, while Complexity is best overcome by Skill.

Subtract the Questor's Skill from the Trial's Complexity. Every die that comes up higher than this number counts as a "Success," one small step toward passing the Trial.

Linda's Questor has a Survival Skill of 2. The Complexity of the Trial is 8. $8 - 2 = 6$, so this is what Linda needs to roll over. She rolls: 4, 7, 1. The 7 is higher than 6, so Linda's Questor gets one Success.

A Questor passes the Trial if his successes equal or exceed the Difficulty. If he has fewer successes, he fails.

The Difficulty of Linda's Trial is 1. Since she got 1 Success, her Questor passes it.

In our example, I've only provided the Difficulty and Complexity as we've needed them. But the GM actually needs to come up with both of these before any dice are rolled. How to do this is discussed in Chapter 4.

Trial Narration

Even when we know a Questor has passed or failed his Trial, we still don't know how it went. We don't know what the Questor did or what actually happened to him. Now is the time to decide that.

If the Questor passed his Trial then his Player gets to describe how the Trial went. If he failed the Trial, then the GM describes it. This description is the Trial's **Narration**. Whoever gives the Narration has the ability to make Statements that affect *both* the Questor *and* the rest of the world. He can talk about what the Questor does, the results of his actions, and what any other characters do (but usually not the other Questors)

The Narration should also contain an immediate consequence to the Trial. A Trial with no consequences has no real meaning and should have been handled with Statements alone. The Questor must have been risking something or had something to gain by attempting it.

Narrations can be brief or long, have effects that are far-reaching or highly circumscribed, all at the discretion of the Narrator. As always, the other participants can dispute the Statements in a Narration and argue for them to be changed. Guidelines for making Narrations are discussed in Chapter 4.

Since Linda's Questor passed her Trial, Linda gets to Narrate her victory.

"Josephine splashes into the water and immediately goes under. After a while she finally emerges again, downstream a ways. She gasps for air and starts swimming. Finally she makes it to the far shore, heaving and coughing. She's escaped the Duke's men."

2. Setting up the Game

While TOTG provides the rules and themes of play, it leaves the setting and some key ideas for you to customize. This section explains what you'll need to do.

Setting and Tone

TOTG has no pre-defined setting. While it borrows a lot from the medieval epics, with their knights in shining armor and religious themes, nothing says your game has to be set there. Decide on a time and place, real or fictional, for your story. It could be inspired by a book or movie, real history, or be made up by you.

You'll also need to establish a tone for your game. Is it serious? Moral? Dark? Humorous? For your game to work, all the participants will need to be onboard with these basic ideas.

Tenets

There are six critical elements, or **Tenets**, present in every game of TOTG. They don't deal with specifics but with broad themes and ideas. Your group will have to decide what each one means in your game.

- The players' characters are **Questors**. Who is a Questor?
- They're looking for the **Grail**. What is the Grail?
- The Grail will "heal" the **King**. Who or what is the King? How is he ill?
- The King is connected with the **Land**, which will also be healed. What is the Land and how is *it* ill?
- To pass judgment and obtain the Grail, the Questors will carry out deeds of **Virtue**. What is virtue?
- Ultimately they strive for **Wisdom**. What is Wisdom?

You won't be able to think about any one of these things in isolation, since they all fit together. Brainstorm with your group to come up with some answers.

The Questors

First, the Questors are all of a kind. They're all knights, motorcycle-gangers, teeny-boppers, soldiers, *something*. Normally you'll probably want to think in terms of profession or social class. But depending on what kind of search the Questors are going on and how they'll be judged, other qualities might be more important, e.g. age, gender, species, "race," nationality, religion, and so on.

The Questors are also good at what they do. What they "do" should be based on their shared role, from above, and must be the same for all them. If they're knights, they're among the very best knights anywhere. If they're kids, then they're really good at being kids and can do all the things kids should do (like play games and worry adults). What skills you want to emphasize is completely up to you. You can even play characters who, by normal standards, are amateurs or real losers. But they're really *good* at being amateurs and losers.

Also, the Questors have been drawn together for the upcoming quest. Why? Have they always known each other? Have they sworn an oath together? Has someone else (maybe the King) brought them together? Obviously you'll need to give some thought to the other Tenets before answering this.

The Grail

The Grail has two main properties: it's hard to find and it can heal the Land and the King.

You may want to decide exactly how this healing is going to happen, based on how the King and Land are ill. For example, if the king has an alien plague, the Grail might be the vaccine stolen from the alien home world. But the Grail's real purpose can also be left mysterious. It will heal the King *somehow*.

You need to know what form the Grail takes. It could simply be a physical object to be retrieved, like a glowing cup. But it can take on almost any form: a person, a place, an idea, an emotion, an object—any noun. It might not even have just one form, but transmogrify itself to stay hidden or according to who's looking for it. In the source material, the Grail is really a metaphor for happiness, salvation, and so on. You might like to give some thought to this so you can address related themes as you play. Or not. You can be as "deep" as you want.

Finally, you can think about what kinds of obstacles will stand between the Questors and the Grail. Here we're mostly talking about material obstacles, not the larger issue of how the Questors are judged worthy. Is the Grail far away? Is it guarded? Do the Questors have enemies who oppose the quest? Most of the obstacles they encounter will relate to what they generally do: fighting if knights, socializing if teeny-boppers.

The King

The King has two important qualities: he's hopelessly ill (mained) and he's intimately tied to the Land. His fate matters, especially to the Questors. The King is almost always the same kind of person as the Questors (knight, teeny-bopper or whatever) and a father figure more generally, particularly for the Lead Questor. Your group needs to decide the nature of the King's illness, possibly how he got it and also why he's so important, both to the Land and to them.

Alternately, the King might not be a person at all. He/it should be the epicenter of the land's illness. In a futuristic world, the King could easily be a robot or computer; in a fantasy world, an intelligent wood. Non-sentient Kings, though even less conventional, are also possible.

The Land

The Land is the King's *domain*, his sphere of influence. Therefore the Land need not be a physical location like a kingdom. It could instead be a business, agency, extended family, or religion. Decide how the King commands it—what position he holds—and how the Questors fit inside it.

The Land is ill, just like its King. Things just don't work any more and it's only getting worse. Decide what exact form this "illness" takes. A medieval kingdom might be threatened by plagues, an American farm by locusts, a business by insolvency, a religion by lack of faith. The illness must be strange and severe, not an every-day occurrence.

Virtue

This is the big one. Virtue defines how the Questors will be tested, because to succeed they need to perform virtuous actions. Your group must decide what kind of moral issues it would like to deal with, and define Virtue around that. There are two main routes you can take here:

- Precisely define a moral framework with attendant *dos* and *don'ts*. Have a good idea of what specific actions the Questors will need to take.
- Identify what issues you'd like to address and maybe the basics of the Questors' own moral system. But leave those issues open-ended questions to be dealt with in play.

The latter option is more interesting from a story-telling perspective, since the outcome is much less known. What you're doing there is raising questions that the Players get to answer (through their Questors). The alternative is more concerned with the "how" of being moral rather than with the "what" or "why." Of course, there's no dividing line between the two options but a continuum. Choose where on it your group wants to spend most of its time.



You'll probably want to relate your definition of Virtue to the Questors' own morals. Knights believe in chivalry and Christianity, for instance. You could emphasize a one aspect of the Questors' beliefs, e.g. focus on "Thou shalt not kill," or favor chivalry over Christian values.

Alternately, you could base Virtue on something completely different from what the Questors believe in. Maybe they're McCarthy-era Commie-hunters but Virtue is about loving one's fellow man. The Questors may have to change their ideas in order to succeed—and maybe they will and maybe they won't. Or they may just have a long, conflicted journey, making progress only when their values happen to coincide with what's Virtuous.

Regardless of which way you go, remember that there's only one Virtue in any game, so the Questors are all judged by the same metric. It's up to you whether this Virtue is real, cosmic truth; simply the Questor's own morality; your morality as Players; or something else still.

Wisdom

While a Questor's Virtue describes what actions he's taken, and how moral they were, it doesn't say what he gets out of the process, i.e. what he learned. That's what Wisdom does. Questors are ultimately judged by how much Wisdom they have, and they get Wisdom by doing good deeds.

Decide what does Wisdom means in your game. Is it spiritual wisdom? Faith? An understanding of scripture? Or is it brotherhood? Reason? Sympathy? Usually some kind of lofty ideal is appropriate, but a cynical kind of "Wisdom" is certainly possible too. There are many options. You should also relate Wisdom back to Virtue and to the Grail.

3. Questors

Roles

There are fundamentally two kinds of Questor, Lead and Supporting. The story is ultimately focused on the achievements of the Lead and he is given more time “on stage.” The quest is especially personal for him and he’ll be judged most severely. All the Questors, however, are protagonists and “main characters.” They all take actions that make the story go somewhere.

The Lead

All Leads share specific character traits that make them central to the quest.

They are all neophytes. They begin the game young, naïve and undeveloped. Part of their task is therefore to gain experience. They rely on the Supporting questors to see them through difficult periods and to tutor them.

Leads are also gifted individuals. They’re the best. Maybe the best ever. What are they so gifted at? Whatever it is the Questors do. If they’re all knights, the Lead is the best knight among them. If they’re robbers, he’s the best robber. And so on. But the Lead’s natural gift is undeveloped. It’s really *potential* he has. Only if he can marry this with hard-won experience will he attain the greatness he seems destined for.

The Lead is usually a new arrival on the scene, whatever that scene is. He has a mysterious background and is not well known to the other Questors.

Because of his great gifts and his timely arrival, the Lead is usually seen as the best hope for the Land and King. If anyone can succeed in the quest, he can. When the time comes to finally claim the Grail, it is the Lead who will be personally tested.

Supporting Questors

Supporting Questors (SQs) are all highly skilled and among the best at what they do. They know the King and have been hand-chosen for the quest (or have elected to undertake it themselves). No other group would have the chance of success that they do.

You may be thinking that the Lead seems to get all the fun. He’s more powerful (in the end) and gets more attention. Why would you want to play a Supporting Questor? There are several reasons. To begin with, SQs begin as experienced men or women.

- The Lead begins as a naïve block of clay. He relies on them to protect and support him as he grows. And even though the Lead will eventually become powerful, he could still never succeed alone. The quest is very much a group effort.
- SQs get less “screen time,” than the Lead, but are more complete, fleshed out characters with richer personalities and histories.
- While the Lead is uniquely dedicated to the main quest, Supporting Questors have more freedom, both to make mistakes and to pursue goals of their own.

In the end, neither type of Questor is universally preferable. Sure, some Players will always prefer to play the Lead, but others will prefer to play SQs. They each offer different challenges and rewards. A third group of players will want to try both roles.

Aptitudes

The four Aptitudes are:

Manner

This is the Questor's social graces. His charm, etiquette, sympathy and empathy. Most social sorts of Trials depend on Manner.

Survival

The ability to survive. "Survive" may mean literal, physical survival, but also emotional, economic, etc. To survive is to resist being changed against your will, to keep going despite hardship and to pick yourself up after a defeat.

Wits

The Questor's ability to think on his feet and solve problems. His creativity, resourcefulness and common sense. It may also relate to book smarts, logic and traditional "intellect," but doesn't have to.

The final Aptitude will be referred to generally as **Fight** but its nature changes a lot from game to game. It describes whatever it is the Questors *do*, as Questors, apart from the first three Aptitudes. It often involves being proactive, especially physically and of generally asserting power over others, but it doesn't have to. It all depends on the Questors.

The exact name you give to Fight doesn't much matter and you needn't rename it at all. What's important is Fight's centrality to (1) the identity of the Questors and (2) the nature of their quest. Knights don't seek the Grail by entering knitting contests, but by fighting. Scientists don't win it in duels but at the microscope bench.

For example, Hell's Angels Questors might have a Fight for "Riding." A bunch of scientists would have "Research." And the archetypal knights in shining armor would have a Fight for "Warfare" or some such.

In a given TRIALS OF THE GRAIL game, there can be only one Fight Aptitude. That is, all the Questors have to share the same kind of Fight, as does every other person in the world. (Even if they lack it, that lack is noted.)

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Remember that each Aptitude is broken down into two aspects, Skill and Talent. To begin making a Questor, assign points between each of the eight scores. All Talents begin at 1 while Skills begin at 0. Supporting Questors use 22 points total. Put 14 into Skills and another 8 into either Talents or Skills, your choice. Leads only get 16 points. Put 8 into Talents and another 8 into either.

You don't have to use all of your points. If you have the Lead, unused points turn into Virtue, times two. If you have a SQ, they turn into Narrative Points, again times two. (So if you use 13 of 16 points, your Lead gets 6 Virtue.)

It's often good to know why a Questor gets a particular score. Is he better with some uses of the Aptitude than others? Worse? How did he get the ability that he has?

Write a few words or a short phrase for each Aptitude, describing it however you want.

Let's follow Elaine as she makes a Supporting Questor. She's decided she wants a gutsy, take-no-guff archaeologist from Britain whose been working in Egypt for the past ten years, named Alice Braithwaite. Her Aptitudes:

Manner: Talent 1, Skill 3. Brusque and commanding.

Survival: Talent 3, Skill 3. Tough. Grew up in the big city.

Wits: Talent 2, Skill 4. Sees connections.

Archeology (Fight): Talent 2, Skill 4. Good all-rounder.

Since Elaine's used all 16 points, she gets no Narrative Points to start with.

Strengths

A Strength describes some kind of situation that a Questor does well in. Whenever he experiences it, he tends to succeed. In game terms, a Questor gets one extra die to roll in any and all Trials that occur in his chosen situation. For example, imagine an old sea dog who's Strength applies to boats. The sea dog gets a bonus when inspecting boats, piloting them, having fist-fights on their decks, and when drinking in the hold.

The situation named by a Strength can be defined by locations, people, actions, weather conditions, mood, moral significance, almost anything. However, it can't be a ubiquitous situation that occurs every day or even every week. Don't be afraid to choose a rare situation. Strengths are signals to the GM that say, "This is what I'm interested in seeing as a Player." It's his job to make sure you do. If you choose the situation "elephants stampeding," you can bet you'll see some enraged Paciderms further down the line.

A few examples: Air raids, time travel, bar-room brawls, secret deals, when bad strategies are being formulated, gothic cathedrals, first dates, people who hate me for no good reason, full moons. While some of these a little far out, all of them are usable (depending on the specifics of your game).

The success a Strength brings could be from any number of sources. The Questor might actually perform better. He might be trained for the situation, or he might feel invigorated by it. Alternately, he might succeed because of luck, destiny or the hand of God. Or it might have nothing to do with the internal logic of the world at all, and the Player simply wants his Questor to do well for dramatic reasons. You can make it whatever you want or leave it as an unknown.

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SQs get two Strengths, while Leads only get one. They're just less developed people, who rely on more universal success.

Alice is a Supporting Questor so she needs two Strengths. Elaine decides that Alice is well acquainted with seedy bars, so that becomes one Strength. Alice will be able to get quick service, brush off unwanted advances and play a mean game of darts whenever she visits a sufficiently seedy dive. Additionally, Elaine writes down

“throngs of locals.” Alice always hires a lot of local labor on her digs. If there’s anyone who can organize them, get directions, or negotiate a pay cut, it’s Alice—but only if they constitute a “throng.”

Weaknesses

In contrast with Strengths, Weaknesses are situations where a Questor makes poor choices. These choices lead to bad things happening and which hurt him, his friends, maybe anyone around him. Weaknesses are often temptations that flout Virtue and Wisdom, however you’ve defined them.

You can also define a Weakness as a *kind* of poor choice a Questor tends to make, leaving the situation where that choice occurs implicit.

Some Examples: hopeless cases, gin and tonic, chances to show off, family get-togethers, religious services, traveling in open country, when I meet a girl I like. As you can see, Weaknesses can be pretty self-defeating. That’s the point.

As with Strengths, you have some freedom when choosing the breadth of a Weakness, but it shouldn’t be something to experience all the time—unless you really want to run your Questor into the ground, which is fine. And again, your GM will help make sure Weaknesses get brought up in play even if you don’t.

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Weaknesses never *make* a Questor do badly. Nor do they force his Player to make him do badly. They merely suggest when failure through bad choices would be appropriate, and reward it. Whenever a Questor makes a bad choice, and that choice was suggested by a weakness, his Player gains Narrative Points. The number of NPs is commensurate with the harm caused by the decision. The GM judges this, and usually gives between 1 and 5 points.

Only you, as a Player, decide when Weaknesses are used. When should you use them? Whenever it you want, either to make a good story, your friends laugh, or to score some NPs.

All Questors must have two Weaknesses.

Elaine first decides that Alice disdains men in authority, who she usually sees as undeserving and pompous (which, of course, is often the case.) Then she gets angry. Secondly, Alice is ambitious. She rarely misses an opportunity to advance her own career or reputation.

Mysteries

Mysteries are questions that a Questor has about the world; they are the world’s secrets, waiting to be uncovered. Many mysteries are personal and relate to a Questor’s own history or family, e.g. “Who is my real father?” These will probably only be of interest to him, but they’ll be of very *great* interest. Other mysteries are impersonal, dealing with larger issues of the world that a lot of people might wonder about, e.g. “What happened to the lost kingdom?” But even then, the Questor has taken it upon himself to solve this mystery, so it becomes important to him.

Mysteries are assigned ranks depending on just how important they are—mostly to the Questor but also in general. For a Lead Questor, take 15 points total but put at least 10 into personal Mysteries. For a SQ, take 10 points and use them however you like (personal or impersonal). Create at least two Mysteries and no more than five.

Keep in mind that you aren't defining *answers* to any of your Questor's Mysteries at this point, just questions. Answering them is part of play. Create Mysteries that don't directly deal with the Grail, since all the Questors are investigating that. A Questor's Mysteries should also be unique and not shared with any other Questor.

Elaine has 10 points to use for Alice's Mysteries. Years ago, Alice was granted permission to dig at a site, but at the last minute the government revoked her license and granted it to someone else. She never found out who, or why he was favored. She still wants to know. Elaine ranks this mystery at 6 points.

Additionally, Alice has heard stories about a small but rich tomb, half-buried in the desert but occasionally unearthed by sand-storms. She's always wanted to know what's out there. 4 points.

4. Trial Details

While we laid out the basics of Trial resolution in Chapter 1, this section will give some details and elaborations.

Infirmities

When a Questor fails a Trial he could suffer further consequences, such as becoming injured or having his pride hurt. These are **Infirmities**.

Getting an Infirmity

After a Questor loses a Trial, subtract the successes he rolled from the difficulty. The Questor receives an Infirmity equal to this number minus two. So if the difference was 1 or 2, he gets no Infirmity at all.

Every Infirmity is associated with a particular Aptitude, which the Questor's Player chooses. Often the Aptitude that was just tested in the Trial is used. The Player should also describe the Infirmity. This description usually springs from the nature of the Trial, but Players have a lot of latitude. For instance, a knight who loses a battle might be physically injured (in any number of ways) or he might have had his armor stolen, his ego bruised, his reputation tarnished.

The Player should record the Infirmity's level on his Questor Record Sheet and also write down a brief form of his description.

Effects

Infirmities temporarily lower the Talent rating of whatever Aptitude they affect. Whenever the Questor uses that Aptitude in a Trial, he rolls that many fewer dice. Multiple Infirmities can affect the same Aptitude and their effects are cumulative.

If a Questor has one of his Talents effectively reduced to zero (his Infirmities equal his Talent), he can't use that Aptitude in Trials. You can still imagine him doing every-day things though, even if they're related to the Aptitude. He's just not up to being *tested*.

If a Questor's Infirmities ever exceed one of his Talents, making it effectively negative, he becomes **Crippled**. A Crippled Questor isn't much good to anyone. He can't take part in Trials or do every-day things. The Player will have to decide exactly what the Crippling means. He might become an invalid, be driven mad or fall into a coma. A Questor can still come back from being Crippled with his friends' help, but his Player can give him up and play a new Questor instead, if he wants.

The only way to get rid of Infirmities is to spend Virtue. See Chapter 6.

Different Kinds of Trial

Group Actions

Some times multiple Questors are tested together and take part in the same Trial. Roll for each Questor individually as usual. Then pool their successes and compare them with the Difficulty. They win or lose as a team. If they win, check to see who contributed the most successes and let that Player narrate (if there's a tie, just choose someone or roll for it).

Group actions shouldn't be very common. Most kinds of actions are made by individuals, even if everyone is taking the same kind of action and working toward the same goal. If the Questors are knights fighting wild beasts, each Questor should get his own Trial roll; they don't collectively fight all the beasts at once. The GM should only allow group actions when everyone is really working together on the same action, at the same time. Even then, he can increase the Difficulty on the grounds of "too many chefs spoiling the soup."

Group Actions with a Leader

In an even smaller number of Trials, the Questors will be cooperating in an action but one of them will be orchestrating their efforts. For instance, the Questors push a car out of the mud while one of them steers and tells them how to push. He's the leader in a group action. These Trials are handled almost like other group actions but each Questor uses the leader's Skill rating instead of their own. If they pass the Trial, the leader narrates.

From the example above: say the Questors who are pushing have Skills of 1, 2, and 4. These become irrelevant and they instead use their leader's Skill of 3 to count successes (even though one of them has a higher skill).

Competition Between Two Questors

Occasionally two Questors will oppose one another in a Trial, having opposite aims. Handle this just like a regular Trial but don't set a Difficulty for it. Instead, whichever Questor rolls more successes is the victor and his Player narrates.

Judgments

The Lead Questor will be judged at the end of the adventure for his worthiness. But even before that, any of the Questors may be judged during the course of a Trial. These judgments test a Questor for his Wisdom. The GM will decide when a Trial should include Judgment. He can notify the Players of this fact before they commit to it (or not).

In a Judgment, the Player rolls dice equal to his Questor's Wisdom plus his Talent. Successes are counted normally and compared with the Difficulty. But if the Questor fails the Trial and does badly enough to get an Infirmary, he loses Wisdom instead of getting a normal Infirmary. The Player can devise a rationale for this, but essentially the Questor has proved that his Wisdom was not deep enough.

Guidelines for Narrations

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As far as length goes, the roll itself is your best guide. If the Questor failed or passed by more than three successes, the problem should usually be resolved with just the single. If he passed or failed by only one or two successes, then feel free to make the Narration incomplete and even begin introducing a follow-up.

5. Narrative Points

Narrative Points, or NPs, gives Players a lot of freedom to make Statements. Instead of being restricted to talking about their own Questors, spending a Narrative Point lets them give a completely unrestricted narration, just as in a successful Trial.

To use NPs, a Player just needs to let his GM know he wants to. The GM then finds a stopping place in whatever he saying and lets the Player take over. NPs can't be used in the middle of a Trial though.

In his narration, the Player makes Statements about the imagined world. But he still can't make Statements about the other Questors and he can't contradict anything previously stated. Narrations also cost more NPs the longer and more significant they are.

Narration Costs

Two factors decide a Narration's cost, Benefit and Size. The GM keeps track of this cost as the Narration goes on and should let the Player know if it gets too expensive for him.

A Narration's Size says how much it adds to the world, how much information it contains. A Narration with one, vague Statement costs one NP. For example, "There are some bad guys

over that hill.” Narrations with multiple, detailed, and sweeping Statements cost more. E.g. “an earthquake destroys all of Russia. Then we fly to Greece and intercept the secret envoy.”

NPs	Narration Size
1	A few vague, circumscribed Statements.
2	A few Statements with some detail or impact.
3	Many vague Statements
4	Many Statements that are quite detailed or impacting
5	Multiple large Statements

Benefit says how much the Narration helps the Questors in their quest. A very beneficial Narration costs more NPs while a harmful one becomes cheaper, maybe even free.

NPs	Narration Benefit
+3-4	Significant help in larger quest
+2	Resolves local situation, minor help in larger quest
+1	Significant help in immediate situation
0	Neutral, minor help/harm locally
-1	Significant harm in immediate situation
-2	Complicates situation, minor harm to larger quest
-3-4	Significant harm to larger quest

A really harmful Narration might be made free but it's cost never goes negative. In other words, NPs are never given back to the Player.

Mysteries

You can create new Mysteries by Narrating them into the story. Since no one knows the answers to mysteries when they're created, you need to establish some back-story and then drop hints using smaller Statements. Finally you need to bring it home to your Questor in some way so that he adopts it as his own.

The easiest way to make a Mystery is from the ground up, using Narrative Points exclusively. But you're also free to build off of existing elements in the world and Narrations made by the other Players. You can conspire with them to create some inter-woven Mysteries, or do it all by yourself. Tell the GM of your intentions though, so he can keep track of what your progress.

After you've done the ground-work for a Mystery and introduced it, the GM will assign it a maximum rating. This will go from 1 to 10, based on how important the Mystery seems to be, how strongly it relates to the Questor and how well you've described it. You then need to spend two NPs per level of Mystery you want, up to this maximum.

Most of the Narrations made for building Mysteries are neutral, so they aren't very expensive. As a guideline, expect to spend a number of NPs roughly equal to the Mystery's level. Thus, in the end, you'll be spending three times that level in NPs to buy a Mystery.

Gaining Narrative Points

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There five ways to gain NPs

- Start with them. Unused Aptitude points, for SQs, turn into NPs.
- Per-session points. For every hour of game-play, Players with SQs get one free NP.
- Trial Resolution. A Player who's given the right to narrate can come up with a complication and then turn most of the narration over to someone else. This nets him 1 NP.
- Weaknesses. Every time a Player invokes one of his Questor's weaknesses, the GM will give him 1 to 5 NPs, based on how badly the Questor was harmed.
- As a general reward. Just being a good Player and helping the other participants to have fun is worth a few NPs. Addressing the themes of your game might merit some too.

6. Virtue & Wisdom

Virtue is probably the single most important part of the game. On one hand, Virtue acts as a reward and therefore propels the story forward. On the other, it ties together the other parts of the rules. Recall that Virtue is very flexible and needs to be tailored to your individual game.

Earning Virtue

There's only one way to get Virtue: do virtuous deeds. Preferably suffer for them at the same time too, just to prove your selflessness.

Jack is playing Darrel, a hard-boiled investigator (and SQ). Darrel was hired by a wealthy heiress to dig up dirt on her ex-husband. Darrel discovers that she may have had connections to an old murder. Although her patronage (and money) could really help him out, he looks into it and finally hands the evidence over to the police.

The GM will decide when a Questor has done something particularly Virtuous. Virtuous actions have to be *successful* actions. They don't include noble but failed efforts. They often take place as part of a Trial, but don't have to.

The Questor's Player rolls dice to see how much Virtue is earned. The number of dice depends on how virtuous the act was. A trivial, every-day act—relative to who the Questor is—doesn't deserve a roll at all, while saintly beneficence might grant 5 dice. The decision ultimately rests on the GM but it's often a tough call so he's encouraged to discuss it with the Players.

Darrel saved the heiress's husband from blackmail and may have helped see some justice for a murder victim. The GM decides this is moderately Virtuous, and gives Jack 3 dice to roll.

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Now sacrifice enters the picture. It gets rated from 0 to 10, with lower numbers representing greater sacrifice. Every die that comes up higher than this number counts as one point of Virtue earned.

To evaluate sacrifice, begin with a base of 10 and reduce this with every kind of sacrifice the Questor endures.

- Immediate infliction of an Infirmity. Every level of Infirmity should lower the target number by 3.
- The risk of an Infirmity, through losing a Trial, if the risk is severe, e.g. a Questor rushing into a burning building. But risk is the least substantial kind of sacrifice and should only lower the target number by 1 to 4.
- A purely plot-based obstacle or set-back. The threshold should be lowered by 1-3 for small, local problems, 4-6 for intermediate-level issues and 7-10 for major, quest-affecting ones.

Both risk and plot-based sacrifice has to be judged subjectively by the GM.

Darrel has not suffered any Infirmities, nor risked doing so. Instead he's given up a potential ally, given up a good sum of money and gained an enemy. The GM evaluates the sacrifice at level 5.

Jack rolls the 3 dice and gets 7, 1, 3. Only the 7 is higher than the five he needed, so Darrel gains 1 point of Virtue.

Using Virtue

Virtue can be used to permanently increase Skills, temporarily boost Skills, heal Infirmities and gain Wisdom.

Increasing Skills

To increase a Skill, a Lead Questor spends 2 Virtue per Skill level while an SQ spends 3. This can be done at any time. If you like, describe and/or justify the increase.

Skill Boosting

One point of Virtue can temporarily raise a Skill by one level. The Player needs to announce this before a Trial roll, but he can wait until after the GM names the Difficulty and Complexity. The boost lasts for at least one Trial roll but potentially for several if they are closely related, use the same Skill, and occur over a short span of time (several hours). The GM is the judge of this, and three Trials is the maximum.

Healing

Infirmities can be healed when a Questor experiences an Epiphany: some kind of enlightening experience. We'll discuss what exactly constitutes an Epiphany and how to bring one about shortly. During an Epiphany, a Player can buy off any of his Questor's Infirmities by spending one Virtue per Infirmity level.

The GM may set an upper-limit on what can be healed based on the quality of the Epiphany. The Healing process should be described by the Player as part of the Epiphany. A Healing may be linked with a Wisdom gain (see below).

Gaining Wisdom

An Epiphany also allows Virtue to be traded for Wisdom. The GM will rate the quality of the Epiphany from 1 to 9. The player rolls one die for every Virtue he spends. Every die that comes up higher than the GM's rating grants a point of Wisdom. (The Virtue is lost regardless.)

Virtue can be spent on both healing and Wisdom simultaneously. Each point heals an Infirmary and gives one die to roll.

Epiphanies

In every Questor's career there are moments when he gains sudden insight. The black curtain of reality is pulled back, God speaks to him, he masters himself, the pieces fit together.

Epiphanies can *only* be brought about by a Player spending Narrative Points. He must set the scene, say what happens, if anything, and then describe how his Questor is enlightened. (Although he can build off the GM's material as well.) What kind of experience is it, on an emotional, intellectual, or spiritual level? Every Epiphany will be unique, though they will usually have the same basic flavor throughout your game.

Not all Epiphanies are created equal. The more deep, inspiring, and grandiose the event, the more benefit the Questor will get from it (either healing or wisdom). To create a more powerful Epiphany, describe it well, in appropriately grand terms, and spend a lot of Narrative Points on it.

Wisdom

Like Virtue, Wisdom must be custom-defined for your TOTG game, and might encompass spiritual, moral, scientific, or some other kind of personal growth (see Chapter 2). A wise Questor is more likely to pass judgments, and you may want to play him differently, e.g. more thoughtful or calm. Wisdom is also the only way to approach the Grail. We'll talk more about that in Chapter 9.

7. Relics

Relics are items of power and meaning that are sought out just like the Grail. You have a lot of options for how Relics work in your game. They're usually physical objects, maybe ancient technology, holy artifacts or items with strong emotional connections. They can also be insubstantial, like a computer program, secret hand-shakes or martial arts training, though these take a little more thought. Usually you'll want to have all the Relics in your game be of the same basic kind, but you could be more eclectic and use all of the above types at once.

Acquiring Relics

Since every Relic is unique, there are no absolute rules for finding or using them. However, Relics are not ordinary objects that can be used like any other tool. Like the Grail itself, they must be sought out or bought at a high price (and generally not with money).

Relics also judge Questors for worthiness before allowing themselves to be used. This judgment may come as part of the search, when the Relic is first picked up, or when someone tries to use it. A judgment can come either in the form of a Trial, as described in Chapter 4. It can also be a simple Wisdom requirement, whereby all Questors with the prescribed amount pass automatically.

Relics might be thought of as semi-intelligent, and able to exercise their own will over who gets to use them. Others are more passive, but will still yield to only certain kinds of people. Others still may more tool-like and simply be guarded or kept hidden, and therein lies the judgment.

A Questor who is unworthy will find a Relic impossible to use. Some will appear to work but in fact back-fire and cause trouble. Others will do nothing or find a way to leave the Questor, perhaps bouncing out of a bag when nobody's looking. Others are more proactive in their judgments, and will harm on the Questor with an immediate Infirmity.

Using Relics

There are two main kinds of powers that Relics grant Questors. Of course, you should invent your own variations, or entirely new powers, to fit each particular Relic.

Infirmity Relief

First is the power of relief. Here, a Relic negates the effects of Infirmity and gives back those lost dice for use in Trials. This power is not infinite but restricted to a maximum number of dice and usually to a particular Aptitude. So a magic sword might relieve up to 5 levels of Infirmity in Fight. If the Questor doesn't have such an intense Infirmity, he doesn't get any extra dice (i.e. no more than his usual Talent score).

Endowment

The second power type is Endowment. Endowment grants a Questor some new ability that he didn't have before. This can take the form of Aptitude Bolstering, by which extra dice are added on to a Talent. But Endowment can grant much more exotic powers a Questor. He might be Endowed with the ability to fly, to open locked doors, to see around corners, etc.

There are only a few limits to these powers: Relics can never affect Virtue or Wisdom in any way (other than to test them) or permanently affect Aptitudes or Infirmities. (So a Relic can't let one Questor heal another for instance.)

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Both kinds of power only work as long as the Relic is in the possession of the Questor and he continues to pass any Wisdom requirement it has. Relics that bolster Aptitudes may also

require that no Infirmities apply to that Aptitude. Infirmity Relief by other Relics doesn't affect this, so proper healing is the only recourse.

Wisdom Requirement*	Aptitude Bolster	Infirmity Relief
3	0	1
5	1	2
10	2	3
15	3	5

* Wisdom necessary for *either* Bolstering or Relief.

8. The Grail

There are three requirements for finally encountering the Grail. First, it has to physically be reached and discovered in the story, through the long labors of the Questors, and probably with some Narrative Points spent along the way. But no single Statement can summon up the Grail; its final appearance is the purview of the GM alone. Of course, what kind of events do get the Questors to the Grail depend on just what the Grail *is*.

The second requirement is an evaluation of the Lead's Wisdom. Only when he has personally reached a certain level will the Grail appear to him. This level should be settled on before any play ever begins. 25 is a starting point, but you can adjust it up or down to alter the length of the game and the relative importance of the spiritual part of the quest.

Finally, the Lead Questor cannot have any Infirmities for the final confrontation.

The Final Trials

To claim the Grail, the Lead has to go through a series of special Trials. The Supporting Questors sit on the sidelines but their Players still have a role to play.

When the Grail appears, the GM should describe it and the scene somewhat roughly. Each Player except for the Lead's Player then makes a single Statement, elaborating on the what the GM has said. They can spend NPs to say more.

The Master Difficulty

The sum Difficulty of the Final Trials is the Master Difficulty. Its exact value is set by the GM but should be at least 10, plus 3 per Questor. It should be increased if the Questors take a long time in finally confronting the Grail, even after the Lead has enough Wisdom.

Jack, Mary and Rob are Players, with Rob playing the Lead. Jack and Mary's Supporting Questors have 10 and 8 Wisdom between them, for 18 total. The Lead's Wisdom is irrelevant in this.

The Master Difficulty gets divided up into separate Trials by the SQs' Players. The Wisdom of the SQs is first summed. The Final Trials are formed individually using this Wisdom. By default, all of the Master Difficulty would go into a single, massive Trial. For every point of Wisdom you use, one level of Difficulty is held back from use in this first Trial.

The GM has set the Master Difficulty at 19. If no Wisdom were used, the Lead would face a single Trial with Difficulty 19—decidedly impossible. Jack and Mary first spend 11 Wisdom so that only 8 points of Master Difficulty go into the first Trial (19-11=8).

Whatever Master Difficulty *isn't* used in the first Trial remains Master Difficulty and gets put into later Trials instead. When you're satisfied with the size of the first Trial, move on to the next Trial, and keep going until there's no Wisdom left. The remaining Difficulty makes one last Trial.

There are still 11 points of Difficulty left and the Players have 7 Wisdom. They spend 5 of it to create a Trial of Difficulty 6. Now there are 5 points of Difficulty left and they have 2 Wisdom. They spend all of it to make two Trials of 3 and 2.

Splitting up the Difficulty is a group decision by the SQ's Players. Of course, the Lead's Player can make suggestions, but he gets no real vote. Also, Wisdom isn't permanently spent here, but temporarily used. In the case that the Lead fails the Final Trials and the game continues (it doesn't necessarily) the Wisdom will still exist to be used again.

Resolving the Trials

The Final Trials are each handled a bit differently than normal Trials. First, they're ordered according to their difficulty and faced by the Lead in order of lowest to highest (regardless of what order they were created in).

Mary and Jack have made three Trials, with Difficulties 2, 3, 7, 8.

Each Trial should be defined by roughly four small Statements. The SQ's Players can choose to make any or all of these by spending one NP per Statement. Any they don't purchase will be made by the GM. He becomes a little more adversarial here and is encouraged to describe more hairy Trials than the Players might come up with.

The Players can choose to make their Statements before or after the GM's. The Lead's Player can't make any Narrations himself, but he can give NPs to the other Players to use.

For the first Trial, Mary and Jack decide that they only need to buy one Statement. Jack spends the NP from his pool and says "The Holy Grail starts to fly away." The GM completes the description: "It hovers into a dark wood. There, Sir Edmond [the Lead] gets lost track of it. He can feel its presence, but doesn't know how to find it in the dense undergrowth."

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After it's defined, the Lead's Player can name a basic approach he takes to overcoming it, including the Aptitude he'll use. In the Final Trials, the same Aptitude can't be used twice until all other Aptitudes have also been used. The same holds true for a third use, and so on. The GM then assigns a Complexity to the Trial, based on its description and the Lead's approach.

Rob says, "I'm going to doggedly look for it, using Survival." The GM gives it a Complexity of 9.

Before the Trial is rolled for, the Lead's Player can also decide to use Wisdom to gain extra dice, or Virtue to boost his Skills. Every point of Wisdom used gives one extra die. Both this and Boosting lasts only for the single Trial.

Rob decides to spend 1 Virtue to Boost his Survival Skill to 5. With the Complexity of 9, he'll need to roll 5s or higher. He rolls 3 dice for his Talent and gets: 2, 6, 10. With two successes, he passes the Trial.

Results of the Trials

When the Lead passes a Trial, his Player gets to Narrate briefly how it was overcome. He doesn't get to give up Narration rights, as usual, and can't make any more far-reaching Statements.

If the Lead fails any of his Trials, then he fails in the entire endeavor. The Trials immediately end and the Lead gets an Infirmary equal to his margin of failure (not the margin minus 2). All the Questors also lose 2 Wisdom. The GM should Narrate this punishment and the disappearance of the Grail.

At this point, you can decide to keep playing and make another attempt at the Grail, or have the Questors give up. If they give up, the GM can describe what effects this has on the world, e.g. the King dies, the Land withers.

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If the Lead passes all of the Final Trials, then he claims the Grail. His player should narrate the immediate victory. Then, every Participant takes a turn Narrating the larger consequences, e.g. the Land is healed, the wars end, and so on. Begin with the Lead's Player and rotate clockwise around, ending again with him (he gets two turns). Be sure to include the GM. If there seems to be lots to say, rotate around again.

Finally, every Player gets a turn to describe what happens to his Questor after the story is resolved. Maybe he retires into obscurity, becomes a hermit, or goes on other quests. Make sure to end with the Lead's Player. The GM should wrap up any other loose ends, maybe including what happens to other important people in the story.

With that the game is over.