



Chivary & Sorcery 1st Ed Review

by Lev Lafayette

Introduction and Product

Chivalry & Sorcery is one of the ground old role-playing systems for the early days of the hobby that still attracts a small, but loyal, following ? surpassing the life of the two authors. The first edition dates from 1977 and comes in a red soft-cover (now entitled ?the red book? with subsequent editions), with a two-column typed font ragged-right throughout. The binding of my copy has held up remarkably well, but that's at least because I handle this particular book with a great deal of care ? it strikes me as rather weakly bound and it is fortunate I have a copy in a condition as good as it is. The page count, at a mere 130 pages, is deceptive, as the font is impossibly small. There is several pages for the table of contents but no index. The writing is mostly game-formalism, but there is numerous quite informal moments when the authors become particularly enthusiastic about an item of interest (usually in condemning design decisions of other games). The interior black-and-white line art is mostly fair and is contextually appropriate to the text.

The game argues from first principles the importance of setting, and the importance of the feudal high middle ages in particular: ?Authenticity is the hallmark of Chivalry & Sorcery? is their deeply setting-simulationist orientation. The game opens with a ?Grand Campaign? chapter, followed by two chapters on Castles & Warfare, a chapter on Thieves, one on Clerics, two on Magick (note the ?k?) Users, one on Sorcery, followed by ?The Fantasy Campaign?, ?Levels and Experience? and finally ?Men and Monsters?. The contents do illustrate the limitations of scope and the difficulty of navigating the text. The chapters, it should be pointed out, are in the same font and size as non-chapter headings and without page breaks.

Characters and Setting

The game proper opens with character generation for a race, class, and level-based system. It begins with available fantasy races (Men, Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves) and the requisites for each with the non-human species being their own vocation. Only Men are available automatically; if any other is desired a random die-roll is required, which could result in the character being a lycanthrope or monster instead. Starting age is (optionally, effectively) $13 + 1d10$, sex is (optionally) randomly determined as well and weighted towards the male, except for female players. This is followed by size, height, etc., and then the usual abstract characteristics rated from 1d20; Dexterity, Strength, Constitution, Appearance, Bardic Voice, Intelligence, Charisma, and Alignment ? yes, alignment is randomly determined. Finally there are a range of derived values, such as Personal Combat Factor, Carrying Capacity, Body and Fatigue etc.

Everything about Chivalry & Sorcery is about the setting. Even if one never plays the game, it makes a good sourcebook on that level alone, at least in terms of locating player-character types (fighter, magic-user, cleric, thief) in a particular social environment where there is an strict feudal hierarchy. Player characters are not exempt from these rules. Social class, sibling rank, guild rank, etc, are also all part of randomised character generation. These ranks determine the character's social status, which ? along with Charisma - determines their Base Influence Factor, which contributes in making friends, alliances, and gaining a position in the royal bureaucracy. Income levels are provided for a variety of professions and with costs for food, shelter, and clothing and various forms of weaponry. The former should be affordable, the latter is challenging. For example, a master armourer will received 15sp per day; a good meal at an inn will cost 1sp, but a sword will cost 100sp and a chain shirt 150sp.

The rest of the first chapter is grounding in the principles of knighthood and chivalry, making up approximately half of the page count for that chapter. With illustrative examples and system rules, matters such as the fief, feudal obligations, high and low justice, canon law, the ceremony of knighthood, courtly love (which differentiates winning a lady's favour by consent or by force of arms!), and tournaments are all described, along with a listing of heralds and orders with the game bonuses for the latter.

Castles, Warfare and Combat

This is actually two chapters; a short, three-page 'Castles and Warfare' and an extensive twenty-six page 'Warfare in the Age of Chivalry' chapter, the latter which covers battle, siege, and personal combat. The first chapter includes construction costs down to the the square foot of wall or roof, along with general categories for castles according to size, fortification, and peripherals, along with rules for entering the realm and engaging in bribery.

The next chapter merges seamlessly into feudal battles, run on a day-long scale. Troop types include the aforementioned player-character races plus goblins, trolls, giants, and uruk-hai (there is quite a few direct Tolkien references), differentiated by experience. Social class even effects combat die rolls with dwarves, elves, and feudal regulars having more predictable results for determining commander scale. Battle games are expressed in scales for miniature wargaming with a complete set of rules, designed also to fit with the roleplaying game version, for various issues such as unit integrity, morale, etc. Various siege weapons are also included, with specific rules for damage to structures.

Personal combat is resolved through a determination of surprise, first blow based on weapon length etc., a hit probability modified by defensive actions and armour. Base damage is based on the armour class of the defendant multiplied by the attacker's Weapon Damage Factor with a different table according to the class of attacker (military elite, infantry, non-fighters etc). There are also rules for critical hits, a variety of situational modifiers (especially foot vs horse), and maneuvers. There are two combat rounds per five minute game turn, during which there are a few opportunities to land a blow against an opponent.

Other Characters and Sorcery

Other player-character vocations in Chivalry & Sorcery includes thieves and their kin (i.e., brigands and assassins), various monastic (friars, fighting clerics, priests), and magicians (natural and trained). Such characters have the sort of skills and abilities that can be expected. Thieves, can pick locks, disarm traps, pick pockets, move silently, hide in shadows, engage in muggings, and have enhanced hearing. They typically belong to a Guild along with beggars and prostitutes. In contrast the various monastics have some fighting ability, the social status to perform various religious rites, the capacity to call for divine intervention, and the ability to generate miracles from a fair selection.

Magicians have divergent class origins and type of magic that they are born with, determined randomly, with intelligence prerequisites, and a second characteristic to partially determine their Personal Magick Factor. Spellcasting has a spell level that roughly correlates with character experience level. Magicians, at least of the learning variety, will spend inordinate amounts of time engaging in studying and enchantments. It is still a hotly debated topic on whether this level of 'realism' is appropriate for the game, even given the amount of down-time that is offered. What is not under much dispute is that magic users who cloister themselves away for an extended period of time can come out their studies armed to the teeth. To gamist oriented players who find notions of balance and challenge preferential to realism such a design will not to be their liking.

Learned magick comes in the form of Arcane Arts, of which a dozen or so are specified each with their own level-based powers; alchemists, artificers, astrologers, diviners, witches, conjurers, enchanters, necromancers, thaumaturgists, along with various mystics (cabbalists, power words etc). Natural magick users are in a different situation. In broad terms their powers tend to reflect powers, rather than spells that have learned over time. These are, interestingly, modified by character background so that a Yeoman will have talents such as Find Direction, whereas a Noble will have Know Alignment. Other natural magick users will generate their talents through a channelling method,

whether through drug induced trances or achieving mystical states through dance or chanting.

As with many other aspects of this game, the magick resolution system is cumbersome, with different probabilities of a casting against a target depending on the relative experience of the caster compared to the target, the type of spell being cast, and the species or vocation of the target. This can be modified by various magical and natural defenses and spells that miss the target can end up, by random determination, striking other targets instead. In particularly bad circumstances, a spell can backfire.

The Campaign, Character Development, and Creatures

The final three chapters of the book can be summarised as campaign development. The first covers the various activities engaged in the adventuring or (more likely) mission-based service professions, effectively time and movement and travelling encounters. One feature of the game is that it deliberately avoids the inclusion of 'dungeons' as being particularly unrealistic, although they gave themselves an escape route by having them as rare 'places of mystery', their location protected by magick from the usual roaming eyes of church and state.

The experience point system contains the innovations of awarding experience based on race or experience correlated with the activity carried out. The gold piece value of loot is relatively unimportant to fighters, clerics, magicians, and elves, but has full value to dwarves and others. For other examples, fighters receive experience points for fighting, knights for engaging in courtly love, clerics for carrying out rites, and so forth. Level gains from experience points give bonuses to Body, Fatigue, PCF, along with various skills and actions previously described in the text.

The final pages review various types of potential opponents with a paragraph or so to individual creatures, but with broader and longer descriptions for classified groups (e.g., giant races, goblins, dragons). Tables are provided to illustrate capability changes according to level for the sapient and player-character kinfolk, and age for the monsters. Animals are included in table form which includes statistics as a combat opponent, but only notes at best in terms of description. The section includes giant versions of normal beasts.

Overall

First edition Chivalry & Sorcery includes a lot of innovative ideas, quite a lot of colour (especially in the twin aspects of chivalry and sorcery) and comes across with a good level of content per page (even given the pages in question). It has critical flaws however in presentation, organisation, and a fairly cumbersome case-by-case method of resolving actions and makes significant losses in the fun quotient both due to the complexity and the randomness in character generation.

Further editions were a notable improvement on the game in these aspects, as long as they retained the innovations and colour, which accounts for its continued support. By itself however, most people would be put off actually playing first edition C&S, even if there is some historical and reference value in having such a book on one's gaming shelf.

Style: $1 + .0 \text{ (layout)} + .6 \text{ (art)} + .6 \text{ (coolness)} + .3 \text{ (readability)} + .2 \text{ (product)} = 2.8$

Substance: $1 + .7 \text{ (content)} + .7 \text{ (text)} + .1 \text{ (fun)} + .2 \text{ (workmanship)} + .1 \text{ (system)} = 2.8$

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