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Preface

Spellwoven is a 'paper and pencil' tabletop roleplaying game (RPG), where players take on roles in a story and take actions to play out drama, intrigue, fights, adventures and feats of magic. Roleplaying Games have been around for some decades now, and it is likely that you are familiar with the notion, if not through tabletop games, then at least via the computer RPGs that are loosely based on a tabletop structure. *Spellwoven* broadly assumes that you have a passing familiarity with these games. If you are completely new to tabletop roleplaying, this may not be the best place to start. A lot of the assumed knowledge may simply be confusing. A game with an expansive introduction and beginner's rule-set is more likely to be a good starting place.

Another Fantasy RPG?

Spellwoven is a bit of a departure from other freebee fantasy RPGs I've released. Most of the other games I've contributed to have been quasi-historical: *Danse Macabre* was set in a dark and demon-haunted Europe, *Mythos of the Maori* in mythical New Zealand, and *Wayfarer's Song*, although nominally set in a fantasyland, is so heavily Norse and Celtic inspired that it might as well be set in a mythic Northern Europe. *Spellwoven* is closer to being a pure secondary world fantasyland. It's the closest thing I've released to being a full-blown 'fantasy heartbreaker'... which is a term for a fantasy D&D clone with a few interesting features, and a lot of heartbreaking effort for no real point of difference. So, what are my goals with *Spellwoven*?

- **Rules medium:** This is just my rule preference.
- **Components:** A modular game where you can (fairly easily) remove or add rules to tailor to your group's liking.
- **Creativity dump:** Being modular, *Spellwoven* is a place where I can mind-dump interesting ideas as optional supplements. This is exclusively for my benefit. I'd like a place to drop rules subsystems and setting material that don't deserve a whole system of their own, but which I think are sufficiently interesting to be put out there.
- **A bit different:** As a challenge to myself: try and devise a fantasy game with no (or maybe very few) standard fantasy races or monsters (excepting humans). This last one is a moveable feast, and will likely be some cross-pollination with 'standard' fantasy tropes. This is something I've toyed with before (*Stone of Souls*), but I'd like to have a go at doing this more expansively.

Nimuestere
Magess of Winters



The Game, Flow and Story

The general expectation in *Spellwoven* is that the game flow and story should be favoured over rolling to resolve outcomes. Where a group is able to reasonably agree on the likely outcome, there should be no particular need to roll dice against skills or other traits. That is, most of the story will be narrated and acted out in an improvised sort of way, and rules come into play where it becomes obvious that the outcome of a situation is in doubt.

Object of the Game

Although broadly speaking, any RPG can be used to (almost) any ends, it is likely that Players will start to focus on one or more of the following setting-related goals. Note that these are not explicit goals within Character Advancement, but rather, these are things that might be achieved within the setting:

- Found or substantially advance a lasting noble lineage.
- Obtain possession of one of the Swords of Power.
- Kill an Ageless, and thereby become Ageless.
- Rid the world of the Seething Malice (or at least limit its expanse or power).
- Find one of the Twelve Great Treasures of the Arcanists.
- Explore the ruins left behind by the Scarle.

There are other possibilities, although these are the more obvious goals to settle upon. These are all, to some degree or another, epic, *bildungsroman* style goals, and would involve a long growing towards power and experience. You will likely want to set a series of more modest in-setting goals after reading through the setting material in this book.

The Gamemaster

One overarching rule in *Spellwoven* is that the Gamesmaster has final say on any rule disputes. The Gamesmaster is the player who is devising the story, playing the other supporting, or **Non-Player Characters**, ordering the universe and rolling dice for any creature, force of nature or person that has dealings with the Players. Rather than allow arguments about rules to spiral out of control, the Gamesmaster is also allowed to decide that his or her interpretation of a rule is final. A few other suggestions:

- If you are the Gamesmaster, take some time to read this book as thoroughly as you can.
- It is almost always better to plan out some detail around what the Characters will be engaged with during a session, but keep in mind that Players will ruin the best

laid plans. Allow for the possibility that Players will act in ways you didn't predict. Often it is better to sketch out a scenario, rather than intricately design it, so that when your players burn the royal palace to the ground (instead of helping the king, as you expected), you don't feel like too much effort has been wasted.

- I would generally advise against the Gamesmaster having a Character of their own in the game, or a 'pet' Non-Player Character. This usually leads to the Gamesmaster's Character being perceived as being favoured, which ruins the fun for everyone else.

The Dice

Spellwoven uses ten-sided dice, also called d10s. You can obtain d10s from any games store or online. Often a d10 is numbered 1 to 0, and for *Spellwoven* you would read the 0 as a 10. You can find dice where the 0 is labelled 10 instead, if you find that helps. You'll also sometimes be asked to roll on a scale of 1 to 100. This is called a d100 or d%. Rather than buy a 100 sided dice (they do exist), it's easier to roll two d10s. Roll one d10 as the ones and one d10 as the tens. So, a roll of 3 and 6 would be 36. A roll of 0 and 1 would be 1. A roll of 00 would be 100. However, be careful to ensure you decide which is die the ones or tens before you roll. Using two different coloured dice can be helpful. Otherwise, you might find yourself unsure if you rolled a 29 or a 92.

Getting Started

The following are some basic steps to getting started:

- The Gamesmaster (at least) should read this rulebook.
- Obtain the necessary dice, paper and pencils.
- Arrange a group of 3-6 players.
- The Gamesmaster should spend some time sketching out and devising a story, with goals, obstacles and potentially some mysteries, puzzles and potential plot twists. Remember that role-playing is open ended. The plan needs to have contingencies for players doing unexpected things. Which they will do.
- Each player other than the Gamesmaster creates a Character.
- You may wish to establish a purpose for the group to be together, and some relationships among the Characters. There is a short Chapter addressing this after Character Generation.
- Introduce the session, and set up the first quandary, obstacle or goal.



The Rules Landscape

What follows is a brief one-page overview of the rules landscape. The below are summaries only. The information is repeated in more detail in the **Rules for the Game** chapter. *Spellwoven* uses a **'roll-under' resolution system**. **Target Number** is abbreviated to **TN** below. This is the number you need to roll equal to or under to score a success on a d10 (ten-sided dice).

Attribute Test: Attributes are innate measure of strength, intelligence, quickness and so on. They are scaled from 1 to 4. Attribute tests are used to quickly resolve a reactive or innate response. Roll 3d10. **Standard:** TN = relevant Attr. x2. **Hard:** TN = relevant Attr. One 'success' needed to pass. Spend 1 **Effort** to pass automatically.

Test of Skill: A single **Test of Skill** is used to resolve a single proactive action by a Character. Your **Skill** level will be more important than your **Attribute**, but both can make a difference. Roll 3d10. **Skills** are ranked 1 to 9. Your **Skill Rank** is the **TN**. A natural roll of 1 scores two successes instead of one. Difficulty is 1, 2, 3 or 4 successes required to pass. Rules for skill levels beyond 9 are provided, but see the **Rules for the Game Chapter** for details. Spend 1 **Effort** = Add successes equal to relevant Attribute.

Contest of Skill: If two Characters are taking opposing actions, and you want to resolve who is successful, you can pitch two **Skill Tests** against each other. In this **Contest**, the roll with the most successes wins. There is no static difficulty. The Gamesmaster narrates results in a way that makes in-game sense, including draws. Spend 1 **Effort** = Add successes equal to relevant Attribute.

Action Round: If a number of Characters are acting at cross-purposes, either in a generalised conflict, or where 'teams' are involved, then you may wish to use an **Action Round**. An **Action Round** is an arbitrary period of time in which everyone involved is allowed one action. This is simply to maintain fairness at the table.

Prolonged Conflicts: A Prolonged Conflict occurs when you decide that the only way to resolve a situation is to use a succession of **Action Rounds**. There are two rule-sets for Prolonged Conflicts in *Spellwoven*: **General Conflicts** and **Combat Rules**.

Prolonged Conflicts (General): *Spellwoven* has a set of rules that allow you to resolve any prolonged conflict. Examples might include a chase through city streets, an argument in a royal court, a wrestling match or a ball game. The system assumes there are 'teams' or 'sides'. Sides build up victory points, and then spend these on desirable effects, such as removing an opposing Character from the conflict, or blocking one of the other team's actions. Part of the suspense derives from choosing how to spend (or save) victory points secretly at the end of each **Action Round**. You might choose an option that the other team anticipates and blocks with their own point spend. In theory at least, armed combat can also be resolved using the **General Prolonged Conflict** rules, but this tends to result in a fairly 'abstract' battle. Some player groups will like this, some will not. Thus, there are also dedicated combat rules. Note also that **Social Conflicts** are treated as a case of **Prolonged Conflicts**, but **Influence** and **Obligation** may need to be accounted for. **Social Conflicts** are otherwise the same as other cases of **Prolonged Conflict**.

Prolonged Conflict (Combat): A set of rules dedicated to resolve armed battles and skirmishes. The rules are intended for small scale fights where everyone involved is allowed an action each round. If you want to resolve a large massed battle involving armies, the **General Prolonged Conflict** rules will be more suitable. In general, most other subsystems assume you will opt to use the **Combat Rules** for armed fights. For example, magical descriptions will include how to decide wounding, which is a component of combat. That said, the **Generalised Resolution Mechanic** can be used as a fallback.

Threat Tracks: Threat Tracks are used for **Character versus Nature** situations. Examples include poisons, diseases, inflections, exposure to cold or heat, but also magical curses. You might only test your personal battle against a slow acting disease or curse once a week, and move the **Threat Track** accordingly. As such, Threat Tracks tend to be something that is going on in the background. It would involve book-keeping, but in principal you could run a **Threat Track** against hypothermia during a fight that is happening in a snow-storm. At the end of each **Action Round**, everyone involved would have to check if they are moving closer to freezing to death whilst trying to kill each other in the snow.



What Rules to Use?

Most roleplaying groups will choose and discard rules as pleases them, and maybe 'house rule' their own alternative sub-systems. However, it can be difficult to work out which rules are essential to a game you want to run, and what can be discarded. Spellwoven has been designed to be somewhat modular. If there is a subsystem you don't want to employ, you can (probably) discard it.

No Magic, No Pathways

The most basic version of *Spellwoven* that you can run completely excludes **Magic** and other **Pathways**. When spending **Background Points**, you wouldn't be allowed to spend any points on **Pathways**. Everything in the game will be **Attribute** and **Skill** based.

But when would you want to play a game like this? You might want to play a low magic, grittier sort of game. Or, you might want to start characters off as having not yet chosen a path in life. In this case, you might give everyone another 3-6 bonus **Background Points** to buy Pathways *after* a set number of game sessions have been completed using only the **Attributes** and **Skills** rules.

What to include and exclude:

- Include most of **Character Generation**.
- Except, disallow **Pathways** in the **Background Point** spend.
- Include **Attributes** and **Skills**.
- **Character Advancement** will be entirely **Skill** based.
- Include rules about **Tests** and **Contests of Skill**.
- **Anma** probably isn't highly useful, but it is easy to calculate, so players might as well note it down.
- You can either use the **Prolonged Contest** rules to resolve all contests that invoke **Action Rounds**, or use the **Combat Rules** as well (specifically for fighting).
- You can ignore the **Optional Combat Rules**, if you want to keep things really simple.
- Unless you are planning on a highly social game, you can disallow **Social Obligation** and **Influence** as well. Maybe keep a track of how much Influence Characters have left to spend, but this would only be in case you decide to start using **Influence** or **Obligation** in the future.
- You can likely exclude **Threat Tracks**, to keep things simple.

Warrior, Mage, Rogue

As above, but you are introducing the more fundamental **Pathways**. In this iteration of the game you would include all of the above elements, but also allow the Pathways **Mastery at Arms, Skulduggery** and **Spellweaving**.

- **Anma** will be necessary for Spellweavers.
- You will almost certainly want to use the **Combat Rules** sub-system if you have specialised fighters in a group.
- The **Optional Combat Rules** are still optional, but may be helpful for giving a combat-focused Player something to think about.
- You will probably need to include **Threat Tracks** as well, if no other reason then at least to keep track of magical curses.
- **Character Advancement** will involve both **Skills** and **Pathways**.

Intrigue

As above, but bring the **Social Obligation** and **Influence** rules into play. It is possible to add an Intrigue component just to a plain *No magic, No Pathways* game. In which case, you would be dealing with political characters, lords and ladies, not possessing much skill in fighting or magic. You need to include:

- The rules around **Social Obligation** and **Influence**.
- **Character Advancement** will involve **Skills** and **Pathways**, as well as spending and gaining **Social Influence**.

Magic Weird and Wonderful

As with *Warrior, Mage, Rogue*, but allow any of the other magical Pathways, such as **Sigildry** or **Herbalism**. A Player who wants to use Sigildry should be primarily responsible for understanding the rules and keeping track of any features of the subsystem that need to be kept track of. The Gamesmaster shouldn't be tracking every last piece of information about active runic scripts or what herbs are currently in someone's satchel. You now include:

- All magical **Pathways**, not just **Spellweaving**.

Once More, With Drama

As above, but make use of the **Drama Cards**. Drama Cards are reasonably non-system specific (i.e. you could use them in any game with a similar setting), but they are definitely an optional extra. Probably best to use only once you are comfortable with the basic system.

For the System Monkeys

The core resolution mechanic is a 'small dice pool and roll-under' system. So long as the dice pools remain small, then a granular normal distribution of successes results. The system will break if too many dice are added to the pool. For this reason, Skill Tests in *Spellwoven* are (more or less) always based on 3d10.

This type of system is one of the 'standard' systems described at John Kim's rather excellent tabletop RPG site, although it isn't as commonly used as some other 'standard' systems.

In *Spellwoven*, the system is modified to create a longer upper tail of successes (by allowing natural ones to count twice).

For the curious, I've provided some Trolldice code to allow you to check the distributions:

Troll Dice Code

```
\ Spellwoven Core Resolution  
  
\ Change N to alter the number of  
dice (typically set at 3d10)  
  
\ Change S to alter the Skill Rank  
(typically 3-9)  
  
N:=3d10;  
  
S:=4;  
  
(count S> N) + (count 1= N)
```

This code is reproduced in the **Rules of the Game** chapter for ease of reference.

