Barons of
Braunstein

Rules for Historical Games Inspired by David Wesely's Braunstein

by
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Olde House Rules

For my wife, Robyn, who
knows the history of my heart and the
future of my happiness...

Cover and interior art from
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With love and many thanks
to Robyn George for all her ideas and
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INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that the role-playing hobby sprang from war-games sometime in the early 1970s. Less acknowledged is the role of the transitional "Braunstein games" to this evolution, being a missing link between the different modes of play.

One night back in the day, Napoleonic war-gamer David Wesely tried something a little different. Instead of having each person command an army, he set things between battles in the town of Braunstein, with players acting the part of important townsfolk, each having an agenda and personal goals within the game setting.

Thus, a new hobby was born...

Although Wesely was initially displeased with the result, finding it chaotic, his players enjoyed it and asked for more, and for a while, this style of gaming was referred to as a "Braunstein" in honor of the eponymous setting. There were third-world scenarios and, eventually, medieval adventures in this style.

Barons of Braunstein is a historical role-playing game, but one incorporating ideas and inspiration from the original Braunstein and designed for the medieval period (4-15th century).

GAME CONCEPTS

Readers are likely familiar with role-playing games, but for the uninitiated, the following applies, noting that, very often, the concept of the game is the game and that rules, for all their importance, are really secondary in the scheme of things:

One person is the judge. Before any play can begin, they must first write an adventure, normally, someplace to be explored, like a castle or ancient crypt. This might also include a town or village to purchase supplies before setting out, and all of this should be organized in detail before the first session so things will go smoothly.

Sometimes, the judge will need to map out important areas, like the wilderness between towns. This can be accomplished using graph paper to the required scale (1 square equals 10' indoors).

Everyone else is a player (1-5 are best). Each creates a character, complete with their own abilities, equipment, and/or personal strategy per the rules being used. Players must coordinate with the judge, who explains their setting (and its restrictions) well in advance of the first session, although much is left to the individual to decide.

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During play, the judge describes what is happening, acting out any supporting characters where necessary, and the players decide what, if anything, their own characters are going to do. The rules are then consulted and/or dice rolled to determine the outcome of certain events, like combat, where success is uncertain.

Each new session picks up where the last one left off as part of an ongoing chronicle. Assuming they survive, adventurers become increasingly more powerful, although death requires that a replacement character (or party) be generated.

DICE

This system employs six-sided dice, referred to here as a d6, being commonly used in war-gaming. Where the rules say to roll two dice, this is written as 2d6 for quick and easy reference.

MINIATURES

Although their use is optional, 25/28mm miniatures, painted to the participant's liking, can be used to represent characters and enemies in combat, making movement and position important. In this case, one figure on the tabletop equals but a single combatant, and 1 inch equals approximately 10', using a ruler or by sight.

GETTING STARTED

First, the judge decides what period (4-15th century) they wish to chronicle and then chooses one or more books on the subject, the latter providing important details about the social situation and monetary system used. After that, these rules can be used to create characters and resolve unpredictable actions in play.

Barons of Braunstein is suitable to a range of historical periods, and enthusiastic judges can add (or change) anything, making their chronicles challenging and fun, which is, after all, the whole point!

I. THE CHARACTER

Character creation is extremely simple, although players must first master a few basic concepts. This system emphasizes choices and personal interaction over detailed mechanics, even if some rules are needed to preserve the element of risk...

TRAITS

Characters are medieval men and women who have chosen a life of adventure. Accordingly, there are no classes or skills, as adventuring is what they did instead of doing something else. That said, they can fight and attempt any action available to an able-bodied adult and might enjoy other talents as per the following:

LITERACY

Not every character will know how to read, especially in a medieval environment, and while there are obvious advantages to literacy, unlettered commoners enjoy certain benefits as well, and the player can decide which is best for them:

ILLITERATE characters include commoners and country folk, although urban dwellers may also count, adding +2 LUCK for being streetwise and leading hardy lives of work and toil.

LITERATE adventurers come from the clergy or nobility, although wealthier commoners may also be. These can read and write in their own language (and Latin as the learned tongue), adding +1 if attempting to recall facts about history and/or the chronicle.

Of course, being illiterate does not imply stupidity by any means, and such characters make excellent adventurers.

SOCIAL CLASS

As itinerant adventurers, most characters fall outside of medieval society, although some details of their background might be useful when establishing a suitable back story:

CLERGY include Christian priests (and nuns from wealthy stock) and priests (or priestesses) from the old pagan faith, the latter being active through the 11th century. Christians are always literate and pagans sometimes are, knowing the runic script.

Note that while the Christianization of Northern Europe was complete by the 11th century, individual holdouts are always possible!