



the Burning Wheel



Fantasy Roleplaying System
Revised Gold Edition

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Revised Gold Dedication

For Robert Bob Bobathoth Bobo Doherty, a creature of kindness, compassion and curiosity. Truly one of the best of us all. Without him, this game would have never been made.

A Special Nod

To Barbara Tuchman, JRR Tolkien and to Ursula K. Le Guin for continuing to inspire me.

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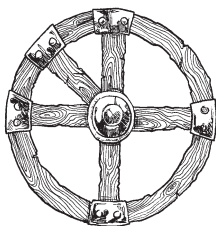
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Contents

Foreword	6
the Hub of the Wheel	
It Revolves on This	9
Elements of Character	17
the Spokes	
Testing Your Abilities	24
Advancing Abilities	40
Beliefs, Instincts and Traits	53
The Artha Wheel	61
The Spokes in Play	72
the Character Burner	
Fire in the Garden	77
Character Burning	81
Dwarven Lifepaths	110
The Halls of the Dwarves	118
Elven Lifepaths	131
The Ages of Elves	139
Human Lifepaths	163
The Mortal Kingdoms	198
Orc Lifepaths	228
The Hate of Orcs	235



the Lists

Skill List	252
Trait List	310

the Rim

Wheel Meets Road	357
Steel	360
Resources	366
Relationships, Circles, Affiliations and Reputations	377
Duel of Wits	388
Range and Cover	403
Fight	424
Weapons	463
Armor and Shields	474
Anatomy of Injury	484
Sorcery	499
Emotional Magic	522
Natural Magic	528
Distance and Movement	530
Riding and Mounted Combat	533
Materials	541
Heroic and Supernatural	544
Playing the Game	548

Appendices

Weapons Appendix	554
The Die of Fate	559
Burning Rogues	562
Index of Headings	572
Bibliography	598

Foreword

At their core, the Burning Wheel books are instruction manuals on how to play. Luke and company have never wasted much ink on why to play their game. Perhaps because when one sees *how* to play the game, the *why* becomes clear.

So how do you play Burning Wheel? Fight for what you believe. Or, since it's a roleplaying game: Fight for what your character believes. Everything else in the rules tells either how to craft that character's beliefs or how to fight for them.

Burning Wheel's character creation drips with character history. History breeds conflict. Conflict means taking a stand. What will your character stand for?

Burning Wheel's core mechanics, advancement and Artha rules demand more-than-usual attention from the player. Skill or stat advancement isn't an afterthought, but rather a crucial part of the game. The decision to solve a problem with cold steel or silken words isn't just one of better numerical values—it's a question of who you, the player, want your character to become. Every action—pass or fail—is growth. Every decision affects how your character matures, shifts, changes. Even little decisions impact the character in permanent, subtle ways.

The Wheel's Rim, those "crunchy bits" that players like me thrive on, builds tension when the heat is on by putting more control into the player's hands. Burning Wheel is a game, and like all good games, it requires skill to play. To really enjoy Burning Wheel requires some investment in Burning Wheel. You, the player, have to care. You have to believe.

I believe in Burning Wheel.

Like a Burning Wheel character, I'm an amalgam of my experiences: military brat, missionary in a foreign land, veteran of the Iraq War, husband and father, and historical European martial artist. For each of these things, the *why* is built into the *how*. I love each of these parts of my life because of how I lived them. If life is a game, then I love my experiences because of how I played them.

Burning Wheel's why is built into Luke and company's extensive how. The game is meant to be played as written. Each rule has been lovingly crafted—and now, many of them re-crafted—to support player-driven stories of white-knuckled action, heart-rending decisions and triumph against the odds. Burning Wheel Gold is the result of a decade of such stories. It's not a "fix" of Burning Wheel Revised or Classic. It's a new how.

May you enjoy discovering the why as much as I will.

Jake Norwood

March 2011

Jake Norwood is the creator and author of the acclaimed (and out of print) roleplaying game The Riddle of Steel. He is also a veteran of the 101st Airborne (Rakkasans!), president of the HEMA Alliance (www.hemaalliance.com) and an internationally recognized German longsword fighter and teacher. He lives in New Jersey with his wife, daughter and mom-in-law.



the Hub of the Wheel



But need alone is not enough to set power free: there must be knowledge.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*



It Revolves on This

The Burning Wheel is a roleplaying game. Its mood and feel are reminiscent of the lands created by Ursula K. Le Guin, Stephen R. Donaldson and JRR Tolkien in their works of fantasy fiction. It is also heavily influenced by the brilliant medieval historical accounts of Barbara Tuchman and Desmond Seward; a dirty, complicated world full of uncertainty, but not without hope or opportunity for change.

Unlike many other roleplaying games, there is no set world in which you play. Burning Wheel is an heir to a long legacy of fantasy roleplaying games, most of which contain far better worlds and settings than could be provided here. Also, it is my strong belief that players of these games are adept at manufacturing their own worlds for gameplay; my own world pales in comparison to what you will create.

In the game, players take on the roles of characters inspired by history and works of fantasy fiction. These characters are a list of abilities rated with numbers and a list of player-determined priorities. The synergy of inspiration, imagination, numbers and priorities is the most fundamental element of Burning Wheel. Expressing these numbers and priorities within situations presented by the game master (GM) is what the game is all about.

Though the game has no world full of ethics and laws, the rules do contain a philosophy that implies a certain type of place. There are consequences to your choices in this game. They range from the very black and white, "If I engage in this duel, my character might die," to the more complex, "If my character undertakes this task, he'll be changed, and I don't know exactly how." Recognizing that the system enforces these choices will help you navigate play. I always encourage players to think before they test their characters. Are you prepared to accept the consequences of your actions?

The in-game consequences of the players' decisions are described in this rulebook. The moral ramifications are left to you.

Using This Book

This book, *Burning Wheel Gold*, is the updated, revised and combined edition of *Burning Wheel Revised*. It contains both the *Burning Wheel Fantasy Roleplaying System* and the *Character Burner*. These books are identified with wood and flame borders respectively.

The basic rules for play are presented first. We recommend starting by reading the first 75 pages of the *Burning Wheel*. After digesting the basics, make—or “burn,” in our parlance—a character. Then get some friends together and play the game! After you’ve played, explore the rules further to see what you’d like to add to your game.

Voices in My Head

As you read through the rules, you will encounter three little imps. These imps represent the author’s voice in certain parts of the text.

Basic rules text is not preceded by any of the imps. This “rules voice” is used to convey most of the information in the game. The imps offer commentary on the rules.



This character indicates that I am asking the reader to take note. The text following him is written in my voice, rather than the rules voice. I call this guy the *Instructor*. You can call him “Luke” if you want to. For example: “Thanks Luke, that was very helpful!”



This is the *Ranter*. He rears his ugly head whenever I am yelling about something. This usually comes in the form of harsh advice or warnings regarding the limits of *Burning Wheel*. Take what he says with a grain of salt. For example: “I wish Luke would shut up!”



The *Weeper* is a strange one, prone to outbursts of tears at the oddest times; sometimes tears of sadness, sometimes fear and sometimes tears of joy. He frequently squirts when death or something else very scary is near. “What’s he carrying on about now?”

The Flow of the Game

Burning Wheel is best played sitting around a table with your friends—face to face. It is inherently a social game. The players interact with one another to come to decisions and have the characters undertake actions.

One of you takes on the role of the game master. The GM is responsible for challenging the players. He also plays the roles of all of those