

IT was a question of honor, and honor was always foremost in the minds of the men who strode through the age of the Sun King. A deserted courtyard on the edge of Paris was the stage on which they met with . . .

# FLASHING BLADES™

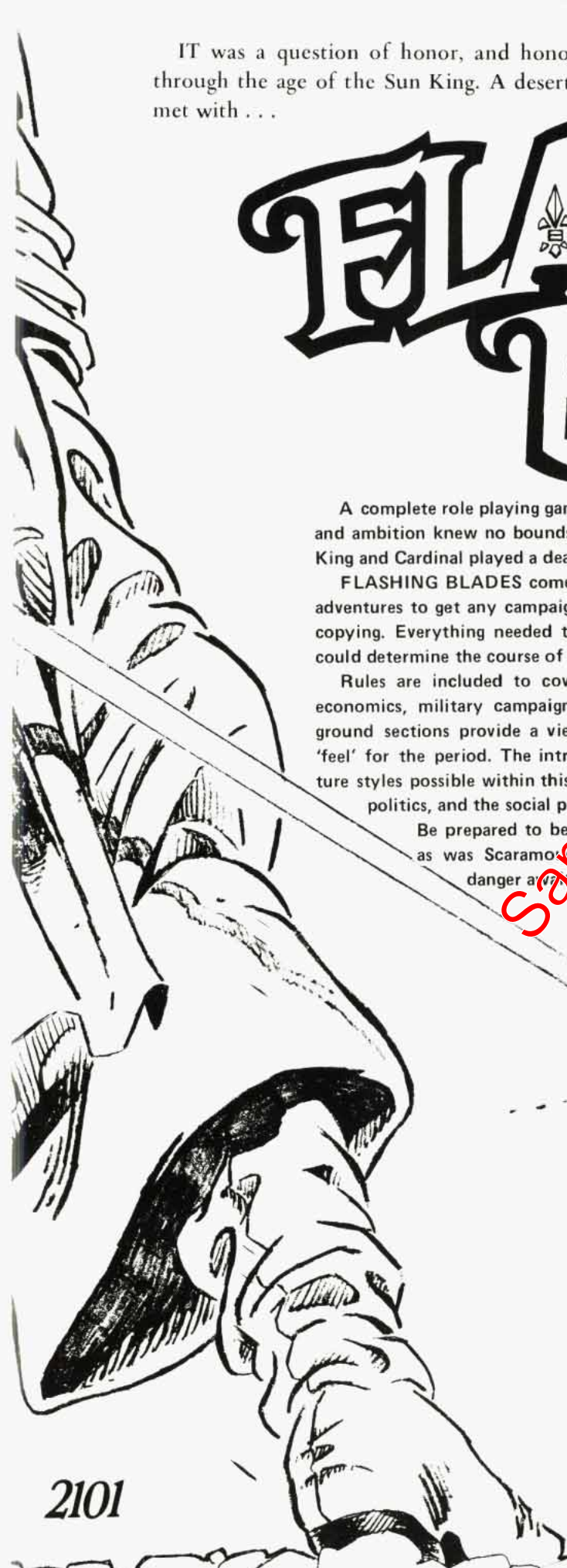
A complete role playing game set in the era of the Three Musketeers. A world in which a man's courage and ambition knew no bounds. It was a time of adventure and of intrigue in which the rival interests of King and Cardinal played a deadly game across France and all of Europe.

FLASHING BLADES comes complete with a forty-eight page rule book, a book of three introductory adventures to get any campaign started, a judge's screen, and a master character sheet suitable for photocopying. Everything needed to begin a life of romance and adventure in a time when a man's actions could determine the course of history.

Rules are included to cover character creation and skills, secrets and advantages, combat, careers, economics, military campaigns and character involvement, politics and social standing. Detailed background sections provide a view of the political climate, laws, religion, customs, lifestyles, and a total 'feel' for the period. The introductory adventures are designed to demonstrate a wide variety of adventure styles possible within this popular genre as they deal with out-and-out combat, intrigue, international politics, and the social picture.

Be prepared to be 'born with the gift of laughter and the sense that the world was mad,' as was Scaramouche in Sabatini's novel. It's all for one and one for all as adventure and danger await just beyond the next bend in the road.

Sample file



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# FLASHING BLADES™

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Design: MARK PETTIGREW



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# 1.0 Introduction

This game, *Flashing Blades*, is a complete system for role-playing adventure. It is set in 17th Century France; the France of the bland King Louis XIII, the dynamic King Louis XIV, the evil Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, the dashing three musketeers, and countless other swashbucklers, dandies, cavaliers, rogues, villains, highwaymen, and cutthroats; a time when duels, brawls, and high adventure were the order of the day.

As one might expect, *Flashing Blades* is designed to capture the adventurous and light-hearted spirit of swashbuckling adventure stories and movies. It has been necessary at times to sacrifice some realism and historical accuracy to this end. Players might imagine the game as being set in 'the France that might have been' rather than 'the France that was.' *Flashing Blades*, like all other role-playing games, requires a creative imagination.

As a role-playing game, *Flashing Blades* also requires a referee (referred to as the 'Gamemaster'). The Gamemaster must invent adventures for the other players and control or 'run' the environment of the adventures. The Gamemaster must function as the judge at times, clarifying rules for players, making up new rules for extraordinary situations, and generally making sure that each gaming session is exciting and balanced. The position of Gamemaster is usually filled by the player who knows the rules best. All other players are represented by characters (referred to as 'player-characters') in the game. The players control the actions their characters take in situations presented to them by the Gamemaster. Characters which are not directly controlled by a player (known as Non-Player Characters or NPCs) are created and controlled by the Gamemaster. NPC's range in importance from beggars on the streets of Paris to the King himself.

The adventures dreamed up by the Gamemaster may be scenarios (adventures which may be finished in one or two gaming sessions) or campaigns (series of connected scenarios). Adventures may be based or built around the personal histories of the player-characters (a plot to assassinate a sworn enemy, for instance) or they may take other forms. Common types of swashbuckling adventures are: military campaigns, political intrigues, espionage, the courting of fair damsels, etc. Each adventure may provide chances for duels, brawls, heroic actions, indiscretions, gambling, wenching, carousing, and numerous other boisterous activities. The Gamemaster should design adventures to have interesting plots, but at the same time to be exciting, and not too time

consuming. Several example scenarios are included in a separate booklet to be read only by prospective Gamemasters.

Players in the *Flashing Blades* system may find that death and grievous wounds are more easily encountered in these rules than in some other role-playing games. In an attempt to be more realistic and historically accurate, combat has been made fairly dangerous. Players should remember, however, that most duels were only to 'first blood.' Once a wound was scored on an opponent, that duel ended with the superior fencer having gained 'satisfaction.' In less organized combat situations, players will quickly learn to run away when outclassed. After all, 'he who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day!'

A reasonable amount of background information is included in these rules to help develop the proper atmosphere for 17th Century role-play. Much of this information is placed in the appropriate sections of the rules: Starting Characters (3.0), Personal Combat (4.0), Ranks and Positions (5.0), and Experience (6.0). In addition, a larger reference section is included in the Appendix (7.0). Players, especially those who wish to referee *Flashing Blades* are advised to read this Appendix in order to familiarize themselves with the period and setting.

A word to players about the sex roles of the times is also in order. A perceptive reader will notice that the pronoun 'he' is used consistently in this rulebook when referring to the characters. This is both for simplicity, and because women, short of Queens, rarely played an adventurous role in the 17th Century. The Gamemasters of some games may not wish to allow female characters due to this fact. Others may ignore historic accuracy in favor of fun and playability, and allow female characters to be created exactly as male characters. A compromise between these two camps might be to allow female characters, but to adjust their attributes and choices of skills and backgrounds accordingly. What role female characters play in the game is up to each individual Gamemaster. Remember, the purpose of the game is enjoyment, and no player should feel limited in the role he or she must play.

The 17th Century of legend is a wonderfully romantic and adventurous time, rarely tread upon by role-playing gamers. *Flashing Blades* attempts to capture some of the magic of that period. I hope that you have as much fun playing this game as we had making it.

# 2.0 Components

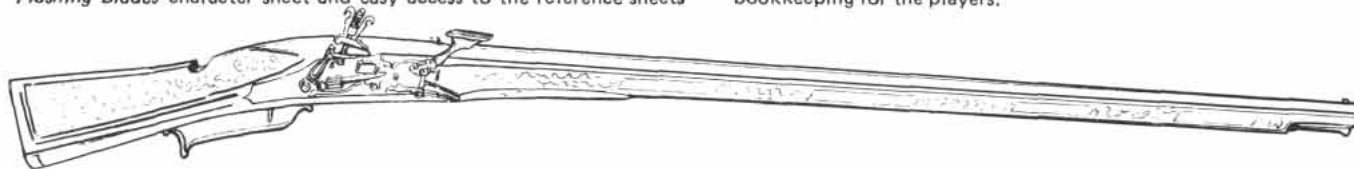
To play *Flashing Blades*, you must have this rulebook and the other necessary materials listed below:

- 1) Dice: Each players should have several six-sided dice (often abbreviated as 'D6' for game purposes) and one twenty-sided die (abbreviated as 'D20').
- 2) Paper and pencils: Each player should have scratch paper and a pencil; the Gamemaster may require a notebook and graph paper.
- 3) Charts and sheets: For ease of play, each player should have a *Flashing Blades* character sheet and easy access to the reference sheets

or rules. These may be photocopied from those samples included in this box.

Optional materials, which may come in handy, include:

- 1) Plastic overlays and a grease pencil: The Gamemaster may wish to use these materials to map out areas of interest in the game.
- 2) Miniatures: Period miniatures may be used to represent the various characters in the game, to add flavor and realism.
- 3) Calculators: The Gamemaster may find a calculator useful in bookkeeping for the players.



# 3.0 Starting Characters

## 3.1 DETERMINING ATTRIBUTES

The first step in creating a *Flashing Blades* character is to determine attributes, height and build, Hit Points and Encumbrance value. There are six attributes, each representing one area of physical or intellectual ability. A character's starting value in each attribute is determined by rolling 3D6 and adding the dice together, providing a range of 3 to 18. The higher the score in an attribute, the greater the character's ability in that area. The exact nature of each attribute is listed below:

**STRENGTH** represents the character's physical might, and determines how much force he can exert.

**DEXTERITY** is a measure of physical coordination, agility, and speed.

**ENDURANCE** represents physical stamina, constitution, and the ability to resist disease and poison.

**WIT** is a measure of intelligence, intellect, and cleverness.

**CHARM** represents leadership ability, charisma, animal magnetism, and physical attractiveness.

**LUCK** is a measure of the character's ability to be in the right place at the right time (to have a large body of water beneath him when he falls from a window, for instance, or to trip over buried treasure).

Attributes may be modified by a character's specific height and build. Height is classified into the categories of Tall, Average, and Short. Build is expressed as Thin, Average, or Stocky. Either Height or Build may be chosen by the player, but not both. That aspect not determined by choice is determined by the roll of 2D6, added together, and cross referenced on the table below:

Roll	Height	Build
2-5	Short	Thin
6-8	Average	Average
9-12	Tall	Stocky

Modifications to the basic attributes for Height and Build are shown below:

Height and Build	Modifiers
Short and Thin	+2 Dexterity, -1 Strength
Short and Stocky	+1 Endurance
Average and Thin	+1 Dexterity
Average and Stocky	+1 Endurance
Tall and Thin	+1 Dexterity
Tall and Stocky	+2 Strength, +1 Endurance, -1 Dexterity

All other combinations of Height and Build do not affect attributes.

Once a player has determined his character's attributes, he may wish to raise his score in some areas. To do this, he may transfer points from one attribute to another on a two-for-one basis. This reflects the possibility of a character training to raise one or two attributes while neglecting others.

If, after the initial rolls and modifiers, a character has less than 54 total attribute points, he may take the difference between fifty-four and his total, and assign the extra points to any attribute(s) he wishes. Note that this rule only applies if the initial total is less than 54; if the total is reduced to less than 54 by trading points on different attributes, no extra points are gained for distribution.

Two basic aspects of a character which are determined directly by the attributes are Hit Points and Encumbrance value.

Hit points represent how much physical damage a character may take before being killed. Hit points start at a base value of ten (10), and are modified as shown below:

Attribute	Attribute Score					
	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18+
Strength	-1	-	-	+1	+1	+2
Endurance	-2	-1	-	+2	+3	+4
Luck	-1	-	-	-	+1	+1

In addition, any character with a Thin build subtracts one (1) from starting Hit Points. Any character with a Stocky build adds 1 to his starting Hit Points. How Hit Points come into play in the game is fully discussed in section 4.5.

How much weight a character may carry is determined by the character's Encumbrance value. Encumbrance is measured in weight points (approximately 1.5 kg, or 3.3 lbs. each). Encumbrance value has a base score of ten (10), modified by the attributes as shown below:

Attribute	Attribute Score					
	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18+
Strength	-2	-1	-	+1	+3	+4
Endurance	-1	-	-	+1	+1	+2
Dexterity	-1	-	-	-	+1	+1

Any character with a Stocky build adds 1 to his Encumbrance value.

A character may easily carry up to his Encumbrance value in weight points. He is then lightly encumbered, and is not hindered in any way.

A character may carry up to three times his Encumbrance value in weight points and be heavily encumbered. Heavily encumbered characters get -3 on Dexterity and Endurance rolls (see section 3.4), -3 to hit or parry with weapons (see section 4.0), and move at half speed.

A character may easily lift up to five times his Encumbrance value in weight points. To lift more, he must make a Strength roll, with a modifier for every three weight points above his normal maximum lift capacity (see section 3.4).

The weights of common items are listed in section 3.72. The weight of a normal human being is 36 weight points (+2 if Stocky, +2 if Tall, -1 if Thin, -1 if Short).

## 3.2 BACKGROUND

The second step to creating a *Flashing Blades* character is to assign him a background. Basic character background helps determine which skills a character may have, starting ranks and positions, and how much money he receives at the beginning of the game. Character background is also important in developing the *Flashing Blades* atmosphere, and players are encouraged to give their characters period names, personalities, and short personal histories.

The basic backgrounds are split into four categories.

### 1. ROGUE

A rogue is a common person of low birth who has had little formal education and has learned to live by his wits. Some common occupations for Rogues are: pickpocketing, robbery, gambling, adventuring, and banditry. Despite their lack of training in proper etiquette and the finer social graces, Rogues prove quite useful due to their unique assortment of skills.

### 2. GENTLEMAN

A Gentleman is a person of middling status who has received a wide and liberal education. Gentlemen may be the sons of wealthy merchants or landowners, or the bastard sons of noblemen. Gentlemen may start the game as low-level Clergymen, Bureaucrats, or Bankers, and although characters of other backgrounds may eventually enter these occupations, they may not start the game as such. For a full description of the Clergy, Bureaucracy, and Banking system, see section 5.0.

### 3. SOLDIER

A Soldier is a person who chooses to make the military his career. A Soldier may choose his exact company type in section 3.52, and his exact regiment and company in section 5.3. Soldiers are the only characters who may start the game in the military trade, although characters of other backgrounds may eventually join. Ranks, positions, promotion and Campaigns are all fully discussed in section 5.3.

### 4. NOBLEMAN

A Nobleman is a person born into the ruling class. Such a character has the advantages of status and wealth, but his education may be of little practical use outside of the royal court.



All characters are assumed to be citizens of France. The Gamemaster may allow occasional exceptions, changing the rules slightly for characters of other nationalities. The Gamemaster should encourage players to suggest their own backgrounds, and adjust their choice of skills, allowance, etc. appropriately.

### 3.3 CHOOSING SKILLS

Each character gets to choose several skills appropriate to his background. Initial skills must be 'bought' with Skill Points. Skill Points may also be spent to increase Expertise in weapons (see section 3.2.1) and adjust Secrets and Advantages (see section 3.6). How many skill Points a character begins with is determined by his Wit and Luck. Each character has ten (10) Skill Points, plus or minus the modifiers indicated on the table below:

Attribute	Attribute Score					
	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18+
Wit	-2	-1	-	+1	+2	+3
Luck	-1	-	-	-	+1	+1

Skills are categorized within each of the four background types. Within each background are several Bonus Skills. Each normal skill from a character's background costs 2 Skill Points. Each Bonus Skill from a character's background costs 1 Skill Point. Each skill chosen from a different background costs 3 Skill Points. The only skills to which these rules do not apply fully are Literacy and Languages, which are discussed in the skill descriptions.

Each skill is based on an attribute. To choose a skill, a character must have a score of at least eight (8) in the base attribute. If a character wishes to progress quickly in a skill, he should have a fairly high score in the base attribute.

The skills for each background are listed below. Those which are all in capital letters are Bonus Skills. The base attribute for each skill is shown in parenthesis next to the skill.

#### ROGUE SKILLS

Acrobatics (Dexterity)  
 Bargaining (Wit)  
 Bribery (Wit)  
 Carousing (Endurance)  
 CUT PURSE (Dexterity)  
 Disguise (WIT)  
 FINE MANIPULATION (Dexterity)  
 Forgery (Wit)  
 Gambling (Luck)  
 Literacy (None)  
 STEALTH (Dexterity)  
 Tracking (Wit)

#### GEN'LZMAN SKILLS

Acrobatics (Dexterity)  
 Gambling (Wit)  
 BARGAINING (Wit)  
 Bureaucratics (Wit)  
 Carousing (Endurance)  
 Chemist (Wit)  
 Disguise (Wit)  
 Espionage (Wit)  
 ETIQUETTE (Charm)  
 Fine Manipulation (Dexterity)  
 History (Wit)  
 Horsemanship (Dexterity)  
 LANGUAGES (Wit)  
 Magistracy (Wit)  
 Oratory (Charm)  
 Seduction (Charm)  
 Theology (Wit)  
 Tracking (Wit)

#### SOLDIER SKILLS

Acrobatics (Dexterity)  
 Bargaining (Wit)  
 CAPTAINCY (Charm)  
 Carousing (Endurance)  
 Espionage (Wit)  
 Gambling (Luck)  
 HORSEMANSHIP (Dexterity)  
 Stealth (Dexterity)  
 STRATEGY (Wit)  
 Tracking (Wit)

#### NOBLEMAN SKILLS

Bribery (Wit)  
 Captaincy (Charm)  
 ETIQUETTE (Charm)  
 Gambling (Luck)  
 HERALDRY (Wit)  
 History (Wit)  
 HORSEMANSHIP (Dexterity)  
 Languages (Wit)  
 Magistracy (Wit)  
 Oratory (Charm)  
 Seduction (Charm)

### 3.4 USING SKILLS

During the course of an adventure, characters will wish to make constant use of their skills. This is achieved normally by rolling a D20 against one of the character's attributes. A roll equal to or less than the attribute indicates that the skill was used successfully.

The attribute rolled against is usually the base attribute for the skill, but this may vary depending upon the circumstances. For instance, a character with Acrobatics skill might roll against his Dexterity to put on a 'sham' brawl, but would be required to make a roll against his Wit to recognize one if he saw it. The difficulty of most rolls will vary widely, so the Gamemaster should add bonuses or subtract penalties from the needed roll as indicated by the situation. For example, a character with Stealth skill, and a Dexterity of 13 would normally need to roll 13 or less to hide effectively. If there were no shadows and little cover, he might receive a -2 penalty, making his needed roll 11 or less. Likewise, if it were late at night in a thick forest, he might get a +4 bonus, making his required roll a 17 or less. In cases of extreme difficulty, the Gamemaster might require a roll under a given attribute divided by two or three (always round up).

When two characters use their skills in opposition to each other, it becomes a resistance roll. The first character's roll modifies the second's by the difference between his roll and what he needed. Thus, if a