The Wayback Machine - http://web.archive.org/web/20051107223102/http://www.eyeballkid.co.za:80/ironsides.html

RISUS: Ironsides

Written by Dylan Craig. This document may be downloaded and reproduced for non-commercial use only.

1. Introduction

The 17th Century was an era rife with opportunities for heroes, villains, adventurers, idealists, and vagabonds alike. It was the time of dour Scots witch-hunters, gallant French Musketeers and fearsome Spanish Conquistadores; of the Great Plague, the Thirty Years' War, and the Salem Witch Trials; and of the formulation of the scientific theories of Kepler, Newton and Boyle. The rules that follow are intended as an aid for running a campaign set in any of the multitudinous facets of the 17th Century.

The basic rules are those of the excellent RISUS system (written by S. John Ross and available on his website, The Blue Room). It is recommended that all optional rules (as specified in version 1.4 of the system) regarding double-pumps, multiple dice types, etc., are used. In addition, the following new rules apply.

Definitions:

- *Calling* is used as a substitute for *Cliche*, in keeping with the atmosphere of the setting.
- Callings should be chosen such that they end in nouns; hence, a character may have Callings as a *Blacksmith (3)*, a *Loudmouthed Drunkard (5)*, and a *Fervent Royalist (2)*.
- The Calling which is being used to provide the dice in any round of contestation (i.e., opposed roll), is called the *Active Calling*. This is thus the score which drops by one die when a character loses an opposed roll.

2. Dice Rolling and Mishaps

When rolling dice to generate a total, any roll showing only 1's and 2's can be considered to indicate that a Mishap has occurred. The results of a Mishap are usually twice as bad as a simple failure; in a swordfight, for instance, a fighter will not only lose a dice from his Active Calling, but might also lose his or her weapon or shield, or trip over a protruding stone on the ground. The exact nature of the results is up to the GM; it is suggested that these results are the kind of thing that quick thinking and a good dice roll can instantly correct: in other words, inconvenient rather than catastrophic. If the total generated by the roll is still sufficient for success, then the attempt is successful, but has some unpleasant side effect or consequence.

To prevent characters with level 1 Callings from embarassing themselves every three attempts, any roll of a single dice is only considered to indicate a Mishap if it comes up showing a 1.

3. Using Several Callings at Once

If a character has two Callings that might be considered appropriate to the situation – say, both *Bare-Knuckle Pugilist* and *Village Constable* in a tavern brawl – the lower Calling may be used to provide a single bonus die to the higher. The down side of this tactic is that, should the new total be beaten in a contested roll, *both* Callings drop by one die. Similarly, if the higher Calling is pumped to increase the overall total, both drop in level as a result.

Multiple Callings may be judged appropriate, with each extra Calling providing a bonus dice and submitting the the rules above; however, double- and single-pump Callings cannot be combined.

Example: Werner, the notorious Brigand of Bell's Road, is in combat with three dragoons. The GM rules that both his Highwayman *(3) and* Swordsman *(2) Callings are appropriate to the combat, and so Werner may elect to use his* Swordsman *Calling to boost his* Highwayman *Calling by one dice, to* Highwayman *(4). Every time he loses a round, however, both scores drop by one level. If either is reduced to zero, he is out of the fight. If Werner were to pump his newly increased* Highwayman *(4) to* Highwayman *(5), in the round that follows his Callings would drop to 2 and 1 respectively.*

4. Non-Cooperative Teams

The basic RISUS rules assume that teams of combatants are coordinating their attacks, with some providing distraction while one rushes in to land a single blow. This situation may not apply if the attackers are rushing forwards in a mob, each intent on inflicting damage. In this case, each attacker

rolls separately, but with a bonus of one dice to each of their rolls. Their target rolls only once. Each attacker roll is compared against the target's single roll as if the two were in single combat, and the damage results applied normally in each case. No 'Vengeance Bonus' is given. It can be seen that in this type of brawl, superior numbers can often overwhelm a foe instantly; but, if the attackers are inferior in skill, they take much more risk of multiple casualties than if they were coordinating their attacks.

Example: During the combat with Werner, the three dragoons each have a total of 3 dice in their attack. They could attack co-operatively, with a total skill of 5 (3 basic, +2 for having three members in the team), gaining the Vengeance Bonus if Werner somehow manages to land a blow on them, but they will only be able to wound Werner once per round. Or, they could try and mob him, each rolling on only 4 dice (3 basic, +1 for mob attack), foregoing the Vengeance Bonus but gaining the ability to wound him up to three times in a round, possibly taking him out of the fight immediately if they all manage to roll higher than he does.

5. Bonus Dice

As outlined in the basic RISUS rules, exceedingly effective or well-crafted items may add to the user's effective skills when used. This should not be confused with *Wound Dice* or *Shock Dice*, which are detailed below. Bonus Dice are only granted in the case of items which make it easier to do whatever they are used for; a finely made rapier, for instance, constructed from exceptional materials and with a grip specially crafted for a particular hand, might give a Bonus Die to its user when it is used for swordplay. Note that this is a quantity which sets *this* rapier apart from *other* rapiers, not swords in general or all of weaponkind. Items with Bonus Dice, therefore, should be rare and carefully dispensed.

Temporary Bonus Dice may also be assigned by the GM for particularly effective strategies or to reflect a situation which is biased in favour of one contestant. These dice do not persist or convey any long-term benefit once the situation which prompted them is no longer in effect.

Example: Guard Captain de Luche is fighting a mysterious band of assailants for possession of his castle. He is wielding a spear and retreating up a spiral staircase as he does so; the GM assigns a Bonus Dice to his efforts as a result of his ownership of higher ground and a weapon with a longer reach than his antagonists' swords. The Bonus Dice is added to his Old Soldier *Calling of 4, which gives him a temporary Calling level of 5. Should the situation change (because he reaches a landing, for instance), he loses the Bonus Dice; if this reduces his Calling to 0, he is out of the fight.*

6. Aimed Attacks

A character may decide to aim for a particular part of his or her adversary in melee combat for a variety of reasons. The foe may be wearing partial armour which the character wishes to circumvent; the character may wish to disarm the foe by striking at their weapon; or, the character may wish to scar the foe's insolent face to goad them into a rage.

The extra effort and attention required for such assaults leave the character open to retaliation, however. The character making the aimed attack must temporarily drop the calling he or she is using by a number of dice to make the attack. These dice are not 'lost' - they re-appear as soon as the character switches back to a more conventional mode of attack.

Attacks aimed at the torso, limbs, or a one-handed weapon require the attacker to operate with a one die penalty; those aimed at the head, chinks in armour, groin (for the tavern brawlers out there), or a two-handed weapon, require two dice to be set aside.

The effects of successful aimed attacks should be adjudicated by the GM. They will cause the foe to lose a level from their active Calling as usual; in addition, they may cause extra Life Point loss, grant a Bonus Die for the next round, flick the foe's weapon out of his or her hand, provoke appreciative applause from onlookers, or whatever the GM deems appropriate. It is important to note that the attack was, after all, a success; the benefits of the strategem should be worthwhile.

7. Life Points

In order to handle the effects of illnesses, will-sapping environmental effects, and wounds delivered outside of melee combat, a system of Life Points is used. Each character is assumed to begin with 12 Life Points, which represent the reserves of strength and endurance available to the average adult. Each strongly physical Calling of *at least 3 dice* in level allows the player to increase the character's LP total by 1d6 during character creation. Should these Callings increase during play (through experience), the LP total rises by 1 point (not 1 dice) per level or dice type gained. At the GM and player's discretion, certain debilitating Hooks or Callings may also reduce the LP total by 1d6.

Example: Herr Gurney Hollenbeck is a scholar and a gentleman whose Callings are Silver-Tounged Courtier (4), Bookworm [2], *and* Astronomer (2). *His Life Point total is the basic 12 points. His brother Siegfried, however, has Callings which reflect his more hands-on approach:* Tavern Brawler (3), Musketeer (3), Unstoppable (3), *and* Athlete (1). *He starts the game with a basic LP total of (12 + 3d6): between 15 and 30 Life Points, depending on how the dice come up. He receives no LP benefit from his Athlete Calling because of its low level.*

8. Life Points in Combat

Standard combat is handled exactly as portrayed in the basic RISUS rules. However, in addition, characters who lose a round of combat may also lose Life Points, to indicate (firstly) that they have received a physical wound, and (secondly) that they may well drop from their injuries before their will and ability to fight (i.e., number of dice they roll with) is gone. Characters lose a dice roll of Life Points for every *full* 6 points by which their enemy's attack roll exceeded their own. The type of dice rolled is the same as the dice rolled by the opponent for his or her (or its!) attack.

When a character's Life Point total drops *below* 6, he or she is judged to be Seriously Wounded and must halve, rounding up, the number of dice rolled for any physical task. This penalty remains until his or her LP total rises to at least 6. At the GM's discretion, and in the case where the damage was inflicted in a single blow doing more than 6 points of damage, a Seriously Wounded character may lose an extra Life Point per round of strenuous activity until their wounds are bandaged.

When a character's Life Point total drops to 0, he or she swoons from shock and exhaustion and falls insensate. Any further injuries or blood loss which cause the character to drop to -6 Life Points or below will be fatal.

Example: The ill-fated Holm Durrant is collaring a cutpurse when the ungrateful wretch slides a needle-tipped stiletto between his ribs. The cutpurse's attack roll was a 14; Holm rolled a mere 6. Holm's Calling drops by one dice as usual, but he also loses 1d6 Life Points because the ruffian exceeded his roll by 8. Holm's LP total is a healthy 17, so he is not yet Seriously Wounded and can continue fighting without having to halve his Calling levels.

9. Wound Dice

Particularly deadly weapons (such as envenomed poniards, razor-sharp scimitars, and firearms) may gain 1-2 *Wound Dice*. These dice are added to any damage dice assigned as the result of a successful combat round. Aimed attacks made at the head or bowels may also gain a Wound Dice.

Example: Holm's reaction to the wickedness perpetrated on him by the footpad in the example above is to draw 'Quietus' - a two-foot, lead-weighted baton with hobnails driven into the shaft - from his belt. This weapon has previously been judged by the GM to be worthy of an extra Wound Dice. Every time Holm lands a blow on the thug (i.e., wins a combat round by any margin), his attack will cause an extra die of damage.

10. Shock Dice

Weapons which are particularly devastating in terms of impact may have 1-2 *Shock Dice*. Examples of such weapons are firearms, polearms, weapons used from the back of a charging horse, and weapons of great mass or bulk (such as double-bladed axes). Each Shock Dice causes the loser of a contested roll to lose an extra level from the Calling they employed to make their attack roll.

Example: Lady Caroline is suprised by an shadowy figure at her window one night. Wasting no time, she snatches an ornamental half-pike from her chamber wall and engages the intruder in desperate combat. The Assassin (for he is such) is using his Knifeman *Calling of 4 dice in his attack; Lady Caroline is resisting with her* Feisty Old Battleaxe *Calling of 3 dice. The half-pike gains a Shock Dice as a result of its size and weight; hence, if Lady Caroline manages to land even a glancing blow, she will cause the Assassin to lose 2 levels, not the usual 1, from his* Knifeman *Calling.*

11. Missile Weapons

Ranged combat is rarely conducted as a standard opposed contest. That is to say, combatants do not attempt to wear their opponent down until he or she is at their mercy - instead, missile attacks are applied as once-offs and have their effect on the target's Life Points, instead of their Callings like a melee attack.

The single exception to this rule is when a character who is engaged in melee combat or some other contested task when he or she is shot by a third party outside the contest. In this case, the number of Shock Dice applied to the weapon's damage are subtracted from the active Calling.

The Target Number to hit a human-sized target is equal to the number of yards (or meters, or paces) between the firer and the target. This TN is then modified as follows:

Weapon is a long or shoulder arm (musket, crossbow, longbow)	TN is divided by 2
Weapon is a firearm with a rifled barrel	"
Weapon is being fired using a rest, aiming stick or brace	"
Firer spends an entire Combat Round aiming at the target	"
Target is twice the size of a human (e.g., a horse)	"
- for each doubling in size thereafter	"
Target is half the size of a human (e.g., a dog)	TN is doubled

These modifiers are cumulative, but in an additive sense; in other words, if three conditions for dividing the TN by 2 apply, the TN is divided by 6, not 8.

Once the target is hit, the weapon's Wound Dice are applied as damage, with the ususal bonus die for each full six points by which the TN was exceeded.

Example: Lady Caroline's steward enters her chamber armed with a blunderbuss. This fearsome weapon gets 1 Bonus Die, 1 Wound Die, and 1 Shock Die. The Assassin is six paces from the Steward, and still engaged in combat with the Lady. The Steward fires immediately; his TN is 6, and he rolls (with the Bonus Die), a total of 19. He thus inflicts 3d6 damage on the Assassin (1 basic, +2 for beating the TN by 13), and the Assassin's Knifeman *Calling drops by 1 level from the shock.*

12. Armour

Armour is divided into two categories:

Soft armour - such as a padded leather jerkin - serves mostly to cushion the user against blunt impacts, knife slashes, and the like. The effects of this armour are simple to model; characters wearing such materials may subtract 1-2 points from any Life Point loss sustained in combat or as the result of missile attacks, depending on the thickness of the armour and whether any reinforcements such as studs or plates have been sewn into it.

Hard armour, on the other hand, almost always consists of metal plate - breastplates, lobster-tail helmets, segmented gauntlets, and so on. This armour works differently to Soft armour in that it doesn't subtract from Life Point damage - instead, it contributes to a buffer of dice that are lost *instead of* Life Points and levels from the Active Calling when a combat round is lost. In other words, the loser erases *Armour levels*, rather than levels of the Calling he or she is using to fight.

The number of Armour levels a character has is equal to the number of items of hard armour he or she is wearing, as follows: helmet, breastplate or mail shirt, gauntlets, greaves, and shield. Hence, it can be seen that the highest Armour level a character can possess is 5. Although Armour level may rise and fall, its Initial value should always be noted; this value is used to calculate the protection offered against missile attacks. One Armour level is also lost for every die of Life Point damage the blow would have caused. Impacts from weapons with Shock Dice lower the Armour level by as many levels as the wearer would have lost from his or her Active Calling has they been unarmoured. Should the wearer not have enough Armour points to soak all the effects of a blow, what points he or she has are first used to negate Life Point loss, and then to negate the loss of levels from the Active Calling.

The loss of Armour levels does not represent a physical deterioration in the armour; rather, it is interpreted as general battering which contributes to the exhaustion and fatigue of the wearer. When enough damage of this sort has been done, the wearer is slowed up and concussed enough that the attackers can begin to place their blows on unarmoured areas with greater ease, or that subsequent impacts on the armour are painful enough to make the armour itself redundant.

This being said, every time a character's Armour is reduced to zero, one piece of armour has been destroyed or caved in, and must be discarded, leading to a 1-point reduction in the character's Initial Armour level until it is replaced. Armour levels regenerate at the same rate as lost Calling levels - one point every half hour. This can be interpreted as the period it takes to readjust straps, buckles, etc., hammer out dents, and massage bruised body parts back to functionality. The number of points regained per half-hour is increased by 1 for every assistant the wearer has in this respect.

Against missile weapons, Hard armour works differently than it does in melee combat. When an armoured character is struck by a projectile, a d6 should be rolled; if this roll is greater than the character's Armour level, the attack has struck an unprotected part of the body and the armour has no effect. If this is not the case, and a part of the body protected by armour plate is struck, Life Point damage is rolled normally, but the total is *halved*.

Example: Thatcher is battling for his life against a highland warrior armed with a fearsome two-handed sword. The highlander beats Thatcher's defence by six points; in addition, her engraved claymore gains a Wound Die and a Shock Die. Thatcher is wearing a helmet, breastplate, and gauntlets, giving him an Armour level of 3. The fearsome impact of the claymore would have caused him to lose 2 dice from his Active Calling (1 basic, +1 for the Shock Die) as well as 2d6 Life Points (1 for the 6-point margin of success, +1 for the Wound Die) if he was unarmoured; as is, his Armour level of 3 soaks up the Life Point loss and one of the lost Calling levels, leaving him battered and reeling but still on his feet. He will gain no further benefit from his armour until he has a chance to regain his wits.

13. Healing and Recovery

The time unit for the recovery of Calling levels lost as the result of contestation is the hour.

Lost levels recover quickest when a character is resting, or otherwise undistracted. If the character is not resting, but travelling or engaged in some other mild exertion, the recovery time is one hour for every die regained. Any strenuous exertion during this time - such as combat, or another contestation using that Calling - negates any recovery which would have taken place at the end of that hour. If the character is resting, the effectiveness of the healing process is doubled; two dice return every hour.

If a character has lost levels in multiple Callings, these levels return simultaneously; the character doesn't have to wait for one to return to its initial level before another begins to recover. Lost Life Points are recovered at the rate of one per day of rest, or one point per two days of mild exertion, with the same provisios as above. The full-time attention of an assistant - be it a nurse, counsellor, or drinking partner - doubles the rate of recovery. Each assistant can affect only one Calling at a time.

Characters who have been reduced to 0 in a Calling have an additional hurdle ahead of them; their confidence has been shaken, and they will take longer to recover. Their healing time is doubled for each Calling that has been reduced to 0, and they must rest for 1d6 extra hours before the healing process begins. Similar rules apply to characters whose Life Points have been reduced to less than 6; their healing time is doubled.

These rules are biased towards Callings whose use is instant in nature, such as fighting skills or academic debate. More intricate Callings, whose resolutions are measured in days or weeks - such as the *Strategist*, *Composer*, or *Sculptor* Callings - use these time frames, rather than hours, as their time units for recovery. At the GM's discretion, the rest and exertion conditions might be reversed for certain Callings to reflect situations where getting out and keeping busy is better than sulking indoors.

Example: Freida is a Poet (4) and Object of Adoration (3) whose prestige and self-esteem have suffered as the result of being outmaneouvered by a sloe-eyed Iberian hussy - first, professionally, and then in the bed of her lover. The resulting contestations, which have taken place at the rate of one round a day for the last week, have left both of these Callings at zero. The time unit for recovery is the same as the time unit for the contestation: days.

Frieda will thus take 1d6 days to begin recovery of her lost Callings, and will then begin to regain them at the rate of 1 level every day if she stays cooped up in her inn room, pacing and hurling crockery. If her initial roll was 4, she will be her usual self again once 8 days have passed. If she decides to get out of town for a week instead, and rents a cottage on the coast, the time it takes per recovered die will be halved; in other words, she will be penning vitriolic sonnets again in four days, and making village lads trip over

their rods by the afternoon of the third day. If her friend and confidante Svensen is around to keep her company and lug her writing desk around, this time will be halved again, but he can only concentrate on getting one of her Callings back to its initial level at a time.

Svensen, as it happens, is recovering from being beaten senseless by his Patron after presenting him with an unflattering portrait. The calling he used as the basis for his defence in this confrontation, Streetwise Gutter Artist (5)*, would have recovered at the rate of four dice an hour while staying at the cottage under Frieda's care - 2 dice every hour for resting, doubled for the presence of an assistant. As soon as his Life Points are all back, Svensen will be well enough to settle the score with his Patron.*

14. The Effects of Old Age

Whether through character concept or the progress of campaign time, it may become important to be able to exactly determine the effects of advancing age on a character's health, Callings, and performance in various fields. In *Ironsides*, Age is treated exactly like a Calling; in other words, it has a level, and can be expressed as a variety of different conditions, all with the same effects, such as *Wheezing* (4), *Spry* (3), *Middle-aged* (2), *Doddering* (3), and so on. This Calling should be recorded seperately on the character record sheet, so that it is not confused with regular Callings.

The number of dice in a character's *Age* Calling is subtracted from all a character's existing Callings; when the character has as many Age levels as they have levels in their highest Calling, they succumb to old age and die. Each Age level gained also causes the loss of 1d6 Life Points; if this loss causes a character's Life Points to drop below 6 or even to 0, the normal penalties and rules are applied. At the GM's discretion, Age may also be used as an actual Calling or even a booster, to represent the experience and wisdom of characters who have 'seen it all'.

Age level is calculated as follows:

- For every 5 full years of life after age 30, a character has a cumulative 1 in 6 chance of picking up their first *Age* level.
- Once they have gained this level, they will get another level every 1d6 years.

Hence, it can be seen that old age will claim characters at ages anywhere from 40 to 96; in addition, the system allows for increased life expectancy among the active and skilled.

Example: After many years on the road, Werner has reached the age of 35, and has his first 1 in 6 chance of accumulating his first Age level. Fortune smiles on him, however; he rolls a 4, and is thus unaffected. Five years later, now aged 40, he rolls again, this time with a 2 in 6 chance; again, he succeeds. At age 45, he rolls under the cumulative chance (now at 3 in 6); he gains his first Age level, and records it as Stiff Joints *(1). All Werner's Callings now lose 1 level; his* Highwayman *Calling, for instance, is recorded as (5/4), to reflect that while its initial level is 5, he can only roll 4 dice for it. Werner then gains another Age level each 1d6 years. The GM rolls the dice to see when the next few Age levels will appear, and rolls 2, 2, 5, 3. Werner will gain another level at ages 47, 49, 54, and 57. At 57, he will have 5 Age levels, as many as his highest Calling, and will pass away at some time during that year.*

15. Religion, Sorcery and Witchcraft

The use of these rules is optional, and only appropriate to campaigns whose themes include the supernatural. Please read the disclaimer at the foot of this document if the material below offends your moral or religious beliefs.

Types of Faith	Creating Effects	Effect Modifiers	Trappings	Ingredients
Recovering Faith	Conflicting Effects	Spiritual Combat	Agents	Sorcerous Mishaps

The mechanics for supernatural actions in *Ironsides* are the same for each of the three branches of belief, and operate using a single Calling - *Faith*. Faith may be developed as a single- or double-pump skill, but characters posessing Faith must choose one of three things to have faith in: *Religion*, *Sorcery*, or *Witchcraft*. Anyone may have these Callings, given an appropriate character background, but they may only have one Faith at a time. The single exception to this case comes in the case of characters with the *Sorcery* Calling, who are known as Sorcerors.

Sorcerors *may* also have either of the other types of *Faith*, as long as this Calling is developed to the same level as their *Sorcery* and remains at the same level throughout the character's life. Sorcerors who also have *Religion* are so-called 'white wizards' like Roger Bacon, who regard their mastery of magical spirits as a gift from the Almighty. Sorcerors who also practice *Witchcraft* are so-called 'black magicians', who have sold their souls to Satan but who hold more powers over the denizens of Hell than the average Witch does. This exception applies only to Sorcerors, and is an optional, and fairly expensive option for them to take - the additional *Faith* must be purchased using the player's pool of character creation dice as if it was a separate Calling.

In this setting, the overwhelming majority of supernatural powers affect living creatures in some way, and are usually subtle in appearance. While a Warlock may summon a ball of infernal hellfire into his hand and hurl it at an enemy, most supernatural effects are only noticeable through their effects on the target. Good examples are the blessings and curses used by Priests and Witches.

All supernatural activities and constructs are called **Effects**. Effects are treated similarly to Callings in that they are expressed as a number of dice. These Effects are added to the profile of the character, area, or being they are cast upon. Examples of stand-alone Effects are: *Pious Resolve* (1), *Fertility* (3), *Ghostly Tutor* (2), *Chill Wind* (2), *Bad Luck* (5), and so on. Effects can also be used to modify Callings; a Sorcerer might enchant an underling so that her *Bodyguard* (4) Calling increases to *Bodyguard* (7), for instance.

Priests (characters with *Religion*) achieve their Effects by beseeching the Almighty for aid, or by invoking the power of Saints or angelic beings. Their Effects are biased towards beneficial results; Priests wishing to harm, injure, or debilitate their foes may still do so, but at a two dice penalty to the Effect Total (see below). For example, a Priest wishing to use Divine Power to aid a companion in sneaking past some guardsmen, would suffer this penalty if he or she attempted to cloud the guardsmen's vision, but not if he or she was trying to increase the companion's Active Calling.

Witches or Warlocks (characters with *Witchcraft*) achieve their effects by use of powers granted to them by Satan. No prayers or invocations are required. The Effects generated by witchcraft are biased towards destructive and evil results; witches may still create benevolent Effects, but at a two dice penalty to their Effect Total. A common tactic among witches to circumvent this restriction is to create Effects which appear to have a benevolent result, but are in fact destructive in some subtle way. A Love potion may inspire great love in the drinker but also change their personality from sunny to unkind and cruel; a fertility spell may make the recipient incredibly fecund, but make all the babes born resemble anyone but the father. Witches alone may create Potions; these are handled exactly like normal Effects, with another set of Duration modifiers for the length of time the witch requires the Potion to be potent and drinkable.

Sorcerers (characters with *Sorcery*) achieve their miraculous effects by commanding magical spirits to do their bidding. These spirits typically manifest as 'invisible hands' when a physical Effect is created. Sorcerers are under no restriction in terms of the 'goodness' or 'evilness' of their Effects because they do not receive their powers from any higher being. Instead, Sorcerers use the guidelines and techniques laid down by wizards and necromancers of ancient times, from the days of Solomon onwards, to force spirits to do their bidding. They run the risk, should their invocations fail, of being attacked by the spirits; this event is covered in [Sorcerous Mishaps], below.

All supernatural Calling use is based on the caster deciding how many dice he or she wishes to **use up** (in other words, temporarily discard) from his or her pool of Faith, modifying this number based on the desired area of effect, duration, and local circumstances, and then applying the resulting number to the target(s) of the Effect as a Calling. This number - *Faith* plus all modifiers - is called the *Effect Total*. The creation of effects is not an instantaneous process; it may take anywhere from a minute to several days. This should be decided by the GM and the player in advance.

Modifiers due to *Area of Effect* and *Duration* are as follows:

Number of Targets to be Affected	Mod	Desired Duration of Effect
One person	0	A few hours
A handful of people	-1	A day and a night
Up to 50 people	-2	A week and a day
Up to 100 people	-3	A lunar month
Everyone in a town (1 000 people)	-4	Six lunar months
Everyone in a small city (10 000 people)	-5	A year and a day
Everyone in a large city (100 000 people)	-6	A generation (25 years)
Everyone in a district (1 mil. people)	-7	A lifetime (2-3 generations)

Certain modifiers also apply to each of the three branches of supernatural characters; these are known as *Trappings*. Trappings represent Ingredients (see [below]), ritual invocations, the presence of assistants, and other factors which boost the character's Faith. Each condition that applies to the caster adds 1 to the Effect Total. These modifiers are as follows:

Religion	Sorcery	Witchcraft
Chanted psalms and prayers	Mystical invocations in ancient tongues	Dire and blasphemous utterances
A congregation of worshippers	An apprentice or homunculus	A coven of witches or warlocks
Relics, holy water blessed by a Bishop	Esoteric alchemical compounds	Evil herbs and human body parts
Consecrated and holy ground	A summoning circle	Blasted heaths and other evil places

It can thus be seen that Trappings can add up to 4 dice to the Effect Total.

One final modifier is applied to the Effect Total: any Effect which is attempting to modify a target's existing Callings rather than create a new one must lose 1 dice from the Effect Total before it is calculated.

Once the Effect Total is generated, that number of dice is rolled to determine whether the Effect is successfully invoked (and if so, then applied to the target(s) of the Effect as a Calling). No Target Number is calculated; instead, any dice showing 1's are removed from the Effect Total, leading to a reduced result. If a Mishap is indicated on the roll, the Effect fails entirely. All ingredients used are still consumed and dice allocated from the caster's Faith Calling are still gone and must be recovered normally. If the caster is a Sorcerer, a Mishap indicates that he or she is attacked by the spirit commanded; this is detailed in [Spiritual Combat], below.

The **ingredients** mentioned above come in two forms; consumable and non-consumable. Consumable ingredients are scattered, burned, or otherwise used up in the creation of the Effect, and are measured in terms of 'uses', where a bottle of holy water might have five 'uses' of holy water within. Non-consumable ingredients are used as 'props' for the rituals associated with the caster's Faith. Each such item is assumed to have the same effect as a single 'use' of a consumable ingredient; the advantage, of course, being that it is not used up during the creation of the Effect and may be used for an indefinat number of Effects. A character who wishes to gain the bonus indicated under Trappings, above, for having all the right ingredients, must have as many ingredients as the combined negative modifiers to the Effect Total as specified above.

Example: A witch's spell cast on 50 people, lasting a week and a day, which has an unadulteratedly beneficial effect and is intended to modify their existing Callings rather than create new ones, would be under a total negative modifier of -7. If the witch has three enchanted stones which count as non-consumable ingredients, she must still find four 'uses' of consumable ingredients - baby fat, hemlock, powdered mandrake, bat's blood, or whatever - to gain the Ingredients bonus.

Ingredients are fairly difficult and time-consuming to come by. Any character with the appropriate *Faith* can manufacture, prepare, or otherwise acquire 1 consumable ingredient per week. If the character has a profession of calling that keeps him or her too busy to spend all week working on ingredients, and they have no assistant or apprentice to do the work for them, they will have to hire intermediaries to do some of the searching on their

behalf, and purchase some materials rather than make them up. These efforts cost the character 1d6 shillings per ingredient 'use'. The intermediaries need not have the *Faith* Calling; in fact, they usually do not even know what the relevance of the items they search for is, although some ingredients - notably, the ones used for witchcraft - are unconcealably gruesome and will alert all but the most calloused or naive scroungers as to the their patron's motivations. The pool of suitably skilled intermediaries is also a small one; a character cannot simply pay 6d6 shillings to have 6 ingredient uses brought to him or her at the end of the week. Instead, every additional ingredient sought for in a week *doubles* the cost to the character, as he or she is forced to pay transport costs, incentive and danger pay, and grease the palms of officials or coachmen. A Priest who needed six ingredients in a week, therefore, would have to pay at total of 32d6 shillings. Of course, if he or she had the time or access to suitable acolytes, anyone with the *Religion* Faith could manufacture one of these ingredients in a week.

Often, a character will encounter potent ingredients which yield a large number of effective 'uses', even though they are used up in the creation of a single Effect. A drop of martyr's blood, for instance, can only be used once, but might be judged to be as effective as a full vial (five uses) of holy water. Specialised ingredients of this type can rarely be costructed; instead, they must be discovered in the course of the character's adventures. If rules for their creation are required, it is suggested that 1d6 weeks be added to the time taken to find them, and a further 1d6 to the transit time required for them to arrive or be prepared, incurring extra costs as the GM deems appropriate.

Non-consumable items can only be created or prepared by the most skilled practitioners of each Faith (those with a dice type of d8's or higher); even these skilled individual will require 6d6 weeks per item. These items often have 1-2 Bonus Dice to reflect their potency; only one such Bonus can be added to the Effect Total at a time, although the other bonus items may still be counted as ingredients.

As mentioned briefly above, Faith does not follow the usual rules for recovery. Instead, the scale below is used:

Faith is recovering from...	Time taken
0 to 1	1 lunar month
1 to 2	One week
2 to 3	One full day
3 to 4	Twelve hours
4 to 5	Six hours
5 to 6	One hour

The process of recovering *Faith* runs smoothest when the character is spending their time in rest, meditation, and study. If he or she uses her Faith while recovering from earlier spiritual exertions, any benefit he or she would have gained from that particular period of rest is lost, and he or she must begin it afresh.

Several instances may arise where Effects are **opposed against one another**, such as in the case where a Sorcerer or Priest attempts to remove a curse laid by another Sorceror or a Witch. If the characters in question are facing one another head-on, in a contest of wills, the situation is handled as [Spiritual Combat,](#) which is detailed below. If one character is simply trying to undo the work of another as in the example above, the process is much simpler. All Faiths may remove dice from an Effect created by another Faith simply by contributing Effect Dice towards such an endeavour. If the population of a tiny hamlet have been cursed with *Ill health* (2), anyone trying to undo this Effect simply has to match the final Effect Total of the enchantment they are trying to dispel - in this case, 2 - with an Effect of their own. If they only manage to come up with a single Effect die, the strength of the curse drops to *Ill health* (1), and so on. The counter-Effect should match the original effect in terms of duration and area of effect; if this does not happen, the relief will either be temporary, or limited to only some people within the targeted individuals.

Any character attempting to dispel an effect created by another character of the same Faith finds this process easier than other would; they get a Bonus Die towards their efforts.

Followers of the Christian religion, the dominant faith of the time, gain several bonuses as the result of their faith's strong physical presence across the land. For one thing, Christian holy sites - churches, cathedrals, sites of pilgrimage, and so on - 'lend' anyone inside them the same number of *Religion* dice that a priest would gain from the Trappings of such a site, and these dice may be used to resist or dispel any Effects a character is currently suffering from.

Example: Consider an individual who is Marked for Death (3) *at the hands of invisible, flesh-rending ghouls as the result of a sorcerer's curse. If this unfortunate soul finds his way onto holy ground, he has a 'borrowed' Faith 1 with which to try and resist the effects of the curse - although, with only a single die, all he would be able to do would be to decrease the severity of the curse by one dice for a few hours. If he could find his way to Westminster cathedral, with a service in progress, his 'borrowed' Religion would be at level 4 - sufficient to completely negate the curse for a few hours or lessen it to 1 dice for a day and a night, and so on. With such a powerful curse, though, to be safe he would have to find a Priest in the Cathedral willing to bless him and remove the curse entirely.*

Sites of unholy power also exist, of course, though they are not as easy to find as village chapels. However, because of the evil aspect of the power found circulating there, they convey no benefit to non-witches entering them.

Characters who already have Faith, but of a different type to the site they are in, take a penalty to their *Faith* equal to half the site's Trappings value, rounded down. Hence, it is harder to invoke a benediction in a witches' grotto than it is to perform the same site on a village common.

Spiritual Combat is the term used to describe all supernatural contests, whether between characters of rival faiths, exorcists and possessing spirits, or when supernatural energies themselves are used as a weapon.

Spiritual combat is handled using the standard RISUS rules for contested Callings; the loser of each round of opposition loses a die from his or her Faith, and is defeated when this score reaches 0. Combat of this sort is modified by the Trappings of the area; hence, it is tougher to tackle a sorcerer

in his lab, a priest in her church, or a warlock in his lair than it would be elsewhere. The exact form of this confrontation, and the results of defeat, are up to the GM and players; it may be a simple and invisible contest of wills with the loser falling unconcious, or it could be a whirling melee of ghostly shapes striking at each other in the air between the combatants, with the loser dragged off to Hell. A character who is involved in a spiritual combat may not create any Effects; the sum of their concentration is being used up in the struggle for their survival.

Characters who are attacked physically may not use Effects to defend themselves - as mentioned above, Effects take too long to create. However, raw supernatural energy may be used if the character wishes, or is forced, to participate in a physical fight. The characters may summon their powers in visible or invisible form; streams of black flames, ghostly djinn sweeping massive scimitars through the air, and bolts of holy brilliance are all possibilites for visible Effects. This strategy is resolved by using the Inappropriate Cliches in Combat rules as presented in RISUS, opposing the character's *Faith* (as an inappropriate Calling) against the Active Callings of his or her opponents. Every round of combat thus engaged in drains the character's *Faith* by one level.

Agents are independent spiritual entities summoned by characters with *Faith* to do their bidding. Although this is largely the province of Sorcerors, other characters may also achieve this effect. Priests may summon angelic beings such as cherubim or serpahim, or even angels themselves; witches may summon imps, gremlins, or even demons. Agents are basically a collection of Effect dice which act as the being's sole Calling. The murderous spirits summoned to pursue and kill the fleeing unfortunate in the example above would thus use the Effect total that summoned them - 3 - as the basis for all the rolls they may need to make in the pursual of their task. Any alternation of this Effect total affects them too. The creation of an Agent is more taxing than a simple curse, requiring the loss of an Effect Die, but has several advantages. The agents will pursue their target(s) for as long as is necessary to complete the general guidelines specified during their summoning, and have enough initiative to be able to act on their own without needing to be constantly supervised by the summoner. A single agent can also be used to affect many individuals without having to broaden the definition of the effect to specifically include them when it is cast.

Example: Father Laslo summons a tiny Cherub to earth to watch over a family in his parish who are afflicted by bad luck and illness. His Effect Total is 6. His player decides to opt for a two-dice cherub who will be able to stay with the family for six lunar months. During this time, the cherub will be able to act independently, applying it's two dice to curing the baby's whooping cough and the cow's dry udders alike, as well as undoing the spiteful magics of the malevolent goblin that lives nearby. It can, of course, be harmed or even destroyed during the course of its duties, but until it is, it will use its powers in any way possible to fulfil the objectives of the one who summoned it.

Sorcerors, due to their facility with summoned beings, are able to create a special type of agent called a *homunculus*. This tiny, dwarfish creature may function as if it had the Sorcery Calling in terms of assisting the sorcerer with his magical tasks and creating Ingredients. A sorceror may only have one homunculus at a time; in addition, the intricate techniques associated with the creation process mean that the caster must subtract two dice, rather than one, from the Effect total of the summoning.

Sorcerous Calamities result when a sorceror rolls a Mishap during the casting process. In this case, he or she is immediately attacked by the angry spirit. The spirit has a *Might* equal to all the negative modifiers for Area of Effect and Duration of the desired Effect, plus one; hence, a spirit that was being summoned to affect 100 people for a day and a night would have a total Might of 5. The sorceror must engage the spirit in Spiritual Combat; using their initial Faith level as their pool of dice. Defeated spirits are banished back to the spirit world; victorious spirits will inflict their will on the defeated character in one of six ways before vanishing:

1d6 Roll	Results
1	The spirit causes the character to age 3d6 years
2	The spirit possesses the character for the intended duration of the effect
3	The intended Effect is applied to the sorceror; if this effect was intended to be beneficial, this is done in some way which causes distress or discomfort.
4	The sorceror is spirited away to some far-off or unimagineable location
5	The sorceror loses 1 level from half his or her Callings, chosen randomly
6	The spirit kills the sorceror, and his or her soul is forfeit

This table may also be used to determine (in the case of Priests) the effects of failed exorcisms or (in the case of Witches) the result of displeasing their demonic lords.

16. Designer's Notes

The rules laid out above were designed for use in my **Malleus Maleficarum** campaign, an as-yet-uncompleted project in which the players take the roles of a band of witchfinders in an AW setting analogous to England in 1648 - *X Files* meets *Restoration*, if you will. My work on this setting is not yet complete, but I will post a link to it on my Site News Page (which has an Update Notification feature) when it is. Meantime, several links on the history of this era are available through the Links Page hyperlink below.

I first encountered RISUS by clicking on the 'Try a Random Link' hyperlinks at RPGNET - it had been a long night's websurfing, and I was at that stage where you start following unusual, fuzzy-headed, trails that grin incriminatingly at you from your History bar the next day. I was immediately impressed by the simple and elegant concept behind the rules; I'd been fiddling with a d6-based, character-concept-driven system for a while, but after getting under the hood with RISUS, I felt like I could file my notes and stop the search - this was what I'd been trying to work out, although from another angle.

I fiddled around with some Bronze Age settings for a RISUS campaign for a while, and considered the pros and cons of a Conan game using RISUS (*Cliches: Reaver (6), Slayer (6), Thief (6),*etc.), but the dog finally barked when I picked up a book on the English Civil War at a pay-per-weight bookstore.

The rules I'm most proud of are the Religion, Sorcery and Witchcraft rules. These came to me in a flash of inspiration while I was waiting in an airport lounge in Cape Town. I was very impressed with the ease with which RISUS can accomodate the inclusion of entire paradigms not detailed in the basic rules. For a roleplayer like myself, who is constantly searching for ways to tinker up and customise the settings I use, this was a great relief.

My thanks go to Rene Vernon, for identifying some inconsistencies in the original document, and to Charles I, for making it all happen.

'Ironsides', for those who are unfamiliar with the term, was the nickname given to the heavily armoured troopers of the New Model Army during the English Civil War.

Back to the Modules page	Back to the Links page

Disclaimer

The rules for witchcraft, faith, etc., as specified above, are not meant to reflect in any way on the contemporary Christian or Wiccan faiths. I'm aware that the historical view of witchcraft as 'devil worship' is incorrect, and I'm more than aware of the evil nature of the witch-burning phenomenon as it occured in actual history. I also believe that the factors at the root of this practice were human hatred and hysteria, not any characteristic intrinsic to the faith the witch-hunters professed to follow.

If you're a rabid pursuer of this debate (and I know you're out there, I've seen your web pages), please be advised that I do not wish to enter into any debate concerning the historical or moral accuracy of the material on this page. So, chill out. That's an order.

Back the the Religion, Sorcery and Witchcraft section