

At Sword's Point

A game for two

Inspired by conversation between @EricColossal and @JessFink

<https://twitter.com/EricColossal/status/1415905813399580673>

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Two characters in love, at odds, at peril.

You and the one you love face each other at the end of your blades. You've known this moment would come. Fought to avoid it. Watched its inevitability inch towards you. Your heart is claimed, owned and united with theirs. You've never said so in words. You have struggled to hide the depths of your emotions. But the pulse of your blood is a tide that drags you ever to them. The sunlight in their hair ignites you. Their smile is home.

You've shown your hand in countless small ways, and a few unmistakable gestures. In the deepest of night you pray they have understood. But in the light of day you know they will never acknowledge.

And now all that is over, for soon, one of you will die by the other's sword.

Either way, you know, you too will be destroyed.

The Game:

Two players set aside an hour or three. In person or remotely.

Each person takes a blank piece of paper, standard letter size for wherever you are. You'll need a writing utensil of some type. Pen or pencil preferred.

Create two characters who are in love. Pick one from each set of options below for the history of your relationship. Choose together, alternate making choices or choose each randomly.

You met

- At play in the great outside when you were almost young
- On your sword master's practice grounds
- In battle by each of your liege's side

and fell in love

- Over spirited cries, rough and tumble
- In a quiet corner, hurt and alone together
- Over a long wearisome time, working in tandem

but

- Your families are at war
- Your nations are divided
- Your leaders are embattled

and ...

- You each wear the circlet of champion
- You each drank the rosemary wine of remembrance
- You each spoke the words of deep questing

which keeps you apart.

Today you are in single combat at ...

- The Ruins
- The Empty Feasting Hall
- The Meadow

because ...

- You have been sent to kill one another
- Your mentors are dead
- You keep the other from rejoining the battle

Each choose an option separately:

Before you die, your fondest wish is the for one of the following ...

- to kiss their wrist
- to taste their lips
- to feel their heartbeat against mine
- to see all the love I hold for them in my eyes
- to hold them in my arms
- to hear them say my true name

Each player chooses among these, or freeform options you create, for your character's appearance:

Hair: midnight black, twilit brown, sunset ruby, noonday golden, dawn pearl

Eyes: Starlit grey, Endless black, Molten brown, Glowing amber, Dewy green, Cloudless blue.

Skin: deep, rich, wan, speckled

In my off hand I carry: a cape, a chain, a net, a flower, a scroll, a dagger

My blade is: shining, battered, flexible, massive, ornate, brutal

Playing the Game:

On one side of the blank sheet of paper you will write words scattered across the page with space between them. These words are from the following lists: Their Body, and Your Confessions

Their Body –

In large letters, write all of these words on the sheet:

Arm, Leg, Torso, Face, Hand, Clothes, Armor, Weapon, Heart.

Place the word "Heart" towards the middle of the sheet.

Your Confession -

In small letters, far apart from one another, write “I love you” and two others of your choice from this list on the sheet:

- *I love you (required)*
- I see you in my dreams
- I kept your token
- I kept your secret
- I saved you
- I protected you
- I wept for you

These will be invoked if torn during a Turn of the Duel. See Making a Confession rules below.

The Duel:

The fight between the two characters. These are the events occurring during the game.

Location

At the start of play, together chose a location for the Duel. Each has places or objects within in it:

The Ruins: the arch, the broken stair, the melted throne, the cliff's edge, mossy walls, slippery cobbles, the tower's remains, rusty workings

The Empty Feasting Hall: the food-strewn banquet tables, sturdy benches and stools, half-full pitchers of hearty drink, jewel-tone spun glasses, the grand stair, the chandelier, the balcony, heavy curtains, ropes and pulleys

The Meadow: bright flowers, leafy grasses, spongy moss bed, sun-bright saplings, foot-sucking mud, a sinking seep, merry brook, fluttering birds, scurrying rodents, gamboling deer

Turns

You each take turns describing your attack. Begin in media res, in the middle of action.

For each turn one player begins, and the other responds in the following steps:

- 1) For the player whose character is attacking, describe where your character is in the location, how are you interacting with the objects and terrain there
- 2) Describe how your character attempts to land a blow on the other, or takes a rest in a lull in the fight.
 - No rest is allowed during the first or second Turns of play. (See Rest rules below.)
- 3) Speak what your character may say to the other, if anything. Confessions are revealed now if they were invoked during the prior Turn. (See Making a Confession rules below.)
- 4) Take the sheet, Holding the blank side up to obscure the markings on the other side and DO ONE of the following:
 - Make a tear from one to five inches (or 3 to 12 centimeters) long, keeping all portions of the paper connected (even by the smallest amount)
 - If your character is taking a rest, make no tear at all (See Rest rules below.)
 - Optional only after six turns have elapsed: Sacrifice your character and tear all the way through the sheet. (See Sacrifice rules below.)
- 5) Turn the paper over to discover...
 - Does the tear cross a word or words?
 - If the word was from Their Body List - The blade landed a blow.
 - If the word crossed the word "Heart" – See the Heart rules below. A blow landed.
 - If the word was from the Confession List – See Making a Confession rules below. If only a Confession is torn, no blow has landed.
 - Does the tear cross blank space only? No blow landed
- 6) The other player describes how their character responds
 - If a blow landed, describe one or more of the parts of the body or belongings which were cut. The severity of the wound is up to you. See Landing a Blow rules below..
 - If no blow landed, describe how the character avoided it – did they block with their own blade? Did they nimbly leap out of the way? Did they use the terrain described near them to get in the way? Or something else?
 - If there is a pause in the fight while the first character took a Rest, your character does so also. How energetic are they now? Are they readying for their next attack? See Rest Rules below.
- 7) The first character responds by their player describing:
 - An emotion on their character's face
 - A gesture their character makes
 - How nature or the environment affects or is reflected on their character's body

Landing a Blow

During a Turn, if a blow is landed that means the attack was successful.

The player whose character was attacked describes how that part of their body or possession is affected.

They may say it is cut or scratched.

They may say it is bleeding profusely, or destroyed.

They may say it is out of action, or lost.

Or other combinations of these, or degrees in between. Elaborate more details as desired.

Rests

On your character's Turn, from the third turn on, you may opt to have them take a Rest.

- Describe where they are, what they do and what they say
- Do not tear the paper
- Other character takes a Rest as well, may speak, respond, and/or prepare for their next attack

May not take a Rest if

- It is your character's first Turn (ie one of the first two Turns of play)
- Either of the prior two Turns was a rest

During a Rest, the responding player may describe

- How their character catches their breath or is protected for a moment
- How a damaged body part is briefly tended to
- They pick up or regain a dropped possession
- How wounds or damaged possessions get in their way

Making a Confession

If during a Turn of the Duel you tear one of the items from the Your Confession list are torn, you must Make a Confession during your next turn.

When it is torn, circle a Confession.

During the next turn, your character tells that to the other character. Make a check next to the Confession.

If two different Confessions are torn in one turn, choose one to circle. Write the other on another blank part of the page and apply the rules as for the original Confession written down. Two or more of the same Confession count as just one.

When you make the Confession, you may talk about something the other character did or said. For example, if you kept their secret, what is the secret you kept? Look for opportunities to build on things that have been introduced in prior play. Introduce new things that fit with what has been said before. Look to the other player for buy-in, and you may ask them for details or to brainstorm what might have occurred.

Also, pay attention to what Confessions the other player has written on their sheet. Use these as prompts and jumping off points for what your character says or does to provide handy prompts for your fellow player to make their own Confessions.

Blow to the Heart

During a character's attack, the blade homes in on the attacked character's heart. What happens?

When the paper was torn, was any other word touched?

If yes, the player may opt to Deflect, and have that other part of the body or object be hit instead. and it is not a mortal blow. If more than one other word was touched, choose from among them. The blade was intercepted somehow on its course to skewer the heart. How was it deflected?

If Heart was the only word torn, the character is stabbed in the heart. They now lay dying with a mortal wound. The fight ends, and the two characters may speak what they wish before the end. They are alone. These are their last moments together. What will they say? What will they do? When all has been said and done that may be desired, the character who is dying slips into unconsciousness. The other player describes what their character does now and play Ends as described below.

Sacrifice:

After six turns have passed (three for each character) either player may opt to Sacrifice their character to end the fight in the other's favor.

To do so, tear all the way through your page.

Does the tear go through the word Heart? If so, as you mounted your attack, the other character counter attacked and their blade now pierces your heart, causing a mortal wound. Resolve as in Blow to the Heart, but the blow may not be Deflected.

Does the tear not go through the word Heart? Follow rules for a Blow to the Heart. It may not be Deflected. However, either player may opt for a Miraculous Recovery, see below.

Miraculous Recovery

If chosen by the player whose character Sacrificed – after the other player says what they do after the other dies, their character awakens. They find that they were protected in some way – a book in the pocket, a piece of armor well-placed – and though they are battered and shaken, they will live on.

If chosen by the other, describe a dramatic way that the Sacrificed character was saved: was a fairy moved by your love? Was the magic of this place invoked by the hearts blood of True Love? Was heaven and earth moved to bring them to medical care? Was the heart replaced with a beating half of the left behind beloved's own heart? Was time turned back on itself?

After the Miraculous Recover has been described, the game Ends as described below.

Ending the Game

After a character has died (or Miraculously Recovered) each player gives a brief epilogue. They choose one from the appropriate list shown below.

Character who died:

- The site of their grave or place of remembrance
- A token of love left behind or given to their beloved
- Someone who brings proof of their love to their beloved, many years later
- A moment of gratitude for their love towards the end of their life, or expressed by someone who heard their tale

Character who was not killed:

- Visiting their beloved's grave or place of remembrance
- Something they carry or use in their life that reminds them of their beloved

- Someone they tell about their beloved, many years later
- A moment of gratitude for their shared love towards the end of their life

Thank you for your interest in the game! This is an unplayed draft. Version 0.1

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