



# PALADIN

by Clinton R. Nixon

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# Introduction

*Paladin* is a variable-setting role-playing game in which you play holy warriors: men and women given extraordinary gifts by a benevolent supernatural force, gifts that they use to fight back evil while trying to maintain their own purity. This archetype is found from myth to pseudo-history to modern movies: Knights Templar fighting the heathen hordes and their sorcerers, Shaolin Monks keeping back English invaders in the Boxer Rebellion, Buffy and pals kicking vampire ass, or *Star Wars*' Jedi against the Empire and the Dark Side of the Force.

The mechanics and philosophical concepts presented are obviously heavily influenced by *Star Wars*' Jedi. *Star Wars* is one of my favorite phenomena because it does contain myth – a very modern sort of myth with liberal blending of a little Jung, a little Bible, and a lot of pop culture. This is not a *Star Wars* role-playing game, though – it is much, much more.

The name “Paladin” is taken primarily from *Dungeons and Dragons*. I'm sure I've heard it elsewhere, but to be honest, that's certainly where I heard it first. When I hear the word “paladin,” I usually think of a big, armored knight with glowing sword and white horse, but this game is meant to address more characters than that guy. It addresses any fictional character with the question, “Can I hold on to my ideals in the face of temptation and trials?”

## Credits

Written by Clinton R. Nixon.

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The idea for *Paladin* comes from several May 2002 threads on The Forge (<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>) forums, specifically “Characters falling into corruption and player choice” (found in RPG Theory) and “Star Wars Pre- and Post-game Report” (found in Actual Play). Ralph Mazza especially brought up some good points, and this system is influenced by a few of his ideas on the former thread.

Additional development ideas came from Jared Sorensen, Blake Hutchins, Zak Arntson, and Ron Edwards. Extra special thanks go to Rafael Chandler (<http://www.dread-rpg.com>) who provided me with an incredible amount of feedback on this game.

Playtesters, who I thank heartily, were: Adam Burke, Rafael Chandler, James Cunningham, Dan Root, and Jon Schweitzer.

## Other inspirations

*The Riddle of Steel*  
(<http://www.theriddleofsteel.com>): An excellent RPG, its system of Spiritual Attributes was a strong influence on *Paladin* character creation.

Vincent Baker's *Otherkind*  
(<http://www.septemberquestion.org/lumpley/other.html>): His Connection to Life mechanic was an influence on the use of Dark Animus in *Paladin*.

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# Chapter 1: Creating the Setting

Although *Paladin* comes with a default setting (“The Sword of Heaven,” found in Chapter 2), players can create any setting they like that fits the theme of *Paladin*. The setting creation process is described first so you can understand the default setting better.

When creating your own setting, you first need to decide if it will be a group process, or if the GM will create the setting before play, leaving only the individual characters in the other players’ hands. Both methods have pros and cons:

**Group process:** Everyone has input, and so the game created may be more satisfying. However, groups of people can devolve into hours of muttering and arguing points and such.

**GM process:** A clear, coherent vision comes forth. However, it might not be the same vision as the rest of the players want.

The following items must be created before play:

## Backdrop

Where and when is your game set? Is it pseudo-historical? Is it swashbuckling space fantasy? Is it edgy and modern?

You need to define, at a minimum, what your in-game culture is like, what sort of technology they have, and what sorts of things people do on a daily basis. Think of books, movies, and art that inspire courage and conflict, not only of a physical nature, but of an emotional nature as well.

Foremost, you need a conflict. It does not have to be world-spanning - it could be that the local duke is conspiring to eliminate the king and take his place. In experience, though, the conflict should be large and overwhelming, with the fate

of the characters literally resting in its resolution. The action in this game comes from putting intense pressure on the characters, forcing them to make moral decisions while saving the world.

## Organization, Faith, and Charter

The characters all are members of a holy order: an order that has access to a supernatural power through their faith. This power may be called different things according to your background. In this game text, we call it Animus (loosely meaning “Force” in Latin, which is less copyrighted than calling it The Force.)

Animus is a supernatural energy that lives in and touches all things. The holy order you create must believe this - even if based on something pseudo-historical, this gnostic sort of view of God is necessary. Animus is a dualist philosophy - there is a definite good and evil (or “light” and “dark” side) to Animus, and it can be used for either purpose.

Before the game begins, you must define, at a minimum: What does the order believe? Do they believe in a God, or in a nameless benevolence? What is their organization? Are they close-knit or are they a very loose organization? What is the traditional method of training new members? What is their charter, and how does society see them? What does Light Animus represent? What about Dark Animus?

Orders of this type, in both history and in the source literature, are normally associated with a government or social institution. Even when fighting the ruling government, they are associated with an underground order determined to wipe away the corruption of the current regime. The orders follow strict laws. When creating your order, you should keep this

in mind: an order that follows chaos or believes in anarchy is rarely, if ever, acceptable.

### Code

Every faith has its set of laws and taboos. You must create a code for the order, listing 3 to 10 laws every member of the order must follow. These laws fall under the ranks of Minor, Major, and Unbreakable. A good number to start play with is 3 Minor Laws, 2 Major Laws, and 1 Unbreakable Law.

An example:

#### *Minor Laws*

A member must base his decisions on wisdom, not feelings.

A member must never be arrogant.

A member must never use his abilities for personal gain.

#### *Major Laws*

A member must respect life in all its forms.

A member must never act out of love, fear, or hate.

#### *Unbreakable Law*

A member must never strike down another fueled by emotion.

As you can see in the example, the crimes do not have to be specific, and they may overlap. (Making decisions based off of feelings is a Minor transgression; acting on strong feelings is Major; while killing someone fueled by emotion is Unbreakable. All three are wrong, but killing someone is much worse than, say, draining their fuel tanks because you think they're a dick.) This

sort of overlap is an excellent way to show the core of your order's values.

### Arms

Every order has a weapon associated with it: this weapon is the talisman of their power, and the focus of their energy. The weapon is symbolic of the danger of their power, both to others and themselves. All members use this weapon, and it must be chosen before play. *Star Wars*' lightsaber is an obvious example. Other good items to use would be nightsticks, flaming swords, or the characters' own tattooed fists.

If the GM feels it is necessary, the weapon can be made vague in order to allow for variation, but this is not recommended.

### Power

*Paladin* does not restrict what your character can do with Animus. If you want her to jump a chasm, go ahead. If you want her to throw lightning bolts, that's fine, as well.

When creating your setting, though, you should define what common uses of Animus are and what they look like. Throwing fireballs might be fine for Shaolin Monks, but would not be appropriate for a *Star Wars* themed game.

Think of 4-6 things that characters can do with Animus and write them down. They do not have to be very specific ("can make fists burst into flame"). Something more generalized ("can command flame") leaves more room for interesting color during your game as the players think of new ways to use their power.

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# Chapter 2: The Sword of Heaven

“The Sword of Heaven” is the default setting for *Paladin*. It covers familiar ground – pseudo-historical knights imbued with the power of heaven – but takes everything you’ve ever thought about those stuffy, annoying guys called “paladins” and turns it on its head. Ready?

## Backdrop

“The Sword of Heaven” is set in a fantastic, medieval land called Castillia. Castillia is a high plateau teeming with life that rises far above the dark and blasted world below. The plateau is large enough to support a variety of landscapes, from the grey-and-green plains of the south, flat and arid; to the lush forests of the north, thick with moist life; to the wondrous mountain ranges of the west, filling the horizon; to the deep green seas below the western cliffs.

Once in Castillia, there was great peace. The natural barrier of the plateau walls protected the land from the murder and darkness that covers the rest of the world. Even now, people try to keep the peace: the king is still a decent man, the people are usually law-abiding, and life is given the utmost respect. The people are polytheistic, worshipping a variety of gods: the god of the sun, the god of fertility, the god of water. There is a god for everything, for everything is connected by Animus, the bit of divinity that the smallest rabbit and greatest of men have in common. Ancestors are respected, and in some families, treated as small gods.

The greatest crime in Castillia is to steal life. People hunt animals, but for food only. People harvest plants, but for food and shelter. People never take the life of another, though, for in life lies power, and Animus can be twisted and hoarded by stealing life. The act of murder gives the murderer an unholy power. The world outside Castillia fell into this dark cycle years ago

– Witches murdering innocent people, then each other, to gain another drop of power; armies of Unliving – mindless animated dead creatures – created by their infernal magic; and a blasted landscape raped by unstoppable darkness.

Castillia has held strong until now. The outside world grows ever bleaker, and every day, more twisted beasts and unholy Witches are seen infiltrating through valleys and gorges, threatening to take the world’s last bastion of Light for their own.

The Sword of Heaven is the weapon to strike down those who would steal life.

## Organization, Faith, and Charter

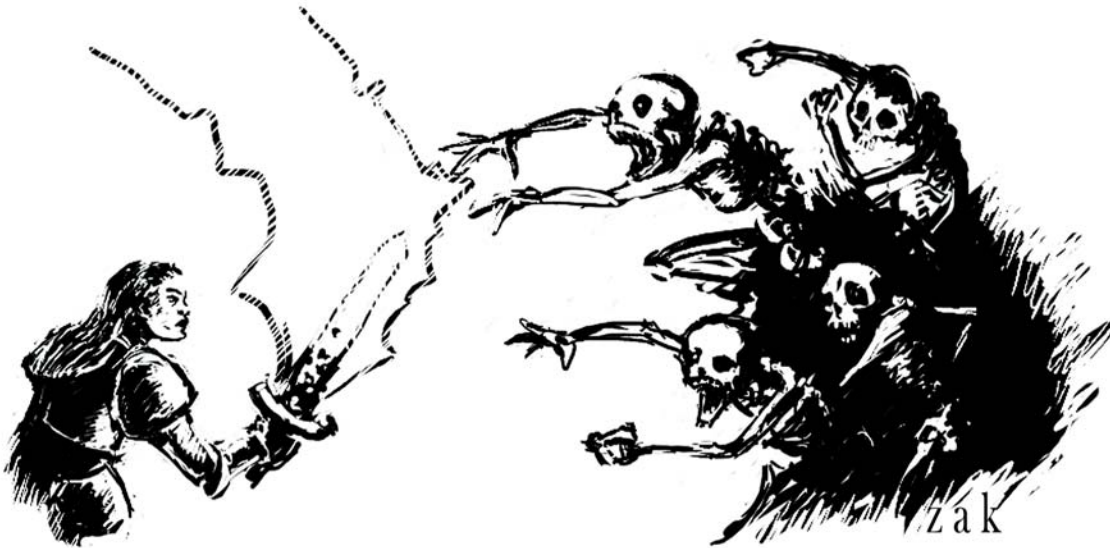
The Sword of Heaven is a martial order – *the* martial order – dedicated to preserving peace, protecting Castillia, and fulfilling the will of Ai, the ur-god over all, the Giver of Life.

The Sword of Heaven is made up of strong men and women, people of a transcendent faith that lets them tap into that Animus that binds all people. These men and women are the only people in all of Castillia given the charter to take life of other humans.

The Sword of Heaven is the razor-sharp edge between good and evil, life and death, and fate is balanced like a hair on their blade.

The Sword of Heaven is mandated to hunt down murderers, or *Witches*. Murder gives men awful power, letting them hoard Animus to give themselves supernatural powers and to animate the foulest of creations: the Unliving. While Castillia has remained relatively free of such transgressors, their numbers increase every day now. With dark times come dark responsibilities,





and the Sword is mandated to hunt down evil wherever it sneaks into Castillia and smite it.

The Sword of Heaven maintains one house of worship on Mons Calpe, the highest mountain in Castillia. There they train their members and focus their Animus into a keen blade that would strike down those that would transgress the will of Ai. Once members are ready, they wander the roads and forests of Castillia, bringing peace to the good-hearted and death to the wicked. They travel light, wearing no armor – it's nearly unknown in Castillia. Their swords, an incredibly rare sight in a land that was once filled with such peace, tell people all they need to know.

## Code

### *Minor Laws*

You shall not suffer an Unliving creature to maintain its semblance of life.

You shall not tell an untruth, for truth is life.

You shall never ignore a request for help.

### *Major Laws*

You shall not kill an innocent.

You shall never put your own safety before the will of Ai.

### *Unbreakable Law*

You shall not suffer a Witch to live.

## Arms

The Sword of Heaven is represented by a flaming broadsword (a 2 dice weapon – see Chapter 4, “The Paladin in Action”), the weapon each member carries as a symbol of his office. Members need no other protection from evil or symbol of their office.

## Power

The Sword of Heaven is given the following gifts by Ai:

- The ability to discern truth.
- The ability to soften men's hearts.
- The ability to perform prodigious feats of physicality.
- The ability to sense and ward away death.
- The ability to bring Ai's holy white cleansing fire.

In addition to all normal Animus rules, there are special rules for “The Sword of Heaven” that give Dark Animus for killing innocent people, Light Animus for defeating evil, and allow Witches to create heinous Unliving. We'll return to the setting in Chapter 5, “The Flow of Animus.”

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# Chapter 3: The Paladin Born

## Attributes

Characters are defined by a 3x3 matrix of attributes. The columns of the matrix represent Flesh, Light, and Dark, while the rows represent the answers to the questions “What is your strength?” “What protects you?” and “How do you influence people?” (In a traditional role-playing game, these would be a Combat Attribute, a Defense Attribute, and a Social Attribute.) Answer these as your character would answer them.

First, you must answer these questions for Flesh, the actual meat-and-bones of your character, each with a one-word answer. (An example using the sample campaign above will follow each step.)

---

My character, a beautiful and proud member of the Sword of Heaven, Gloria, derives her strength from her Quickness, is protected by her Stamina, and relates to people through her Charm.

---

Next, you answer the same questions, but in terms of the Light. These are the positive or benevolent spiritual qualities of your character. These are not supernatural powers, or skills, but human qualities.

---

Gloria derives strength from her Instinct, is protected by her Balance, and relates to people through Honesty.

---

Next, choose Dark attributes. Answer the three questions again, but instead of describing your character's good spiritual qualities, describe the negative qualities that lay dormant within her.

---

Gloria could derive strength from her Cunning, could be protected by her Rage, and could relate to others through Seduction.

---

Attributes are ranked on a scale of 1-5, with 2 being human average.

Distribute 9 points among your Flesh attributes, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5 in each.

In your Light attributes, distribute 6 points with a minimum of 1 in each attribute.

In your Dark attributes, distribute 3 points with a minimum of 0 in each attribute.

---

I choose to distribute Gloria's points like so:

*Flesh:* Quickness 4, Stamina 2, Charm 3

*Light:* Instinct 2, Balance 1, Honesty 3

*Dark:* Cunning 0, Rage 1, Seduction 2

---

## Abilities

You now choose two abilities for your character, in addition to the character's automatic skill in Arms (Arms being what you defined at the beginning - for the example character, Gloria, it represents her skill with her sword.)

---

Gloria starts with Arms, Leaping, and Animal Empathy.

---

These abilities do not have to be learned skills. They can be natural or supernatural qualities about your character. This is how you differentiate between species in a high fantasy or science-fiction game.



In a different game based off the “Knights of the Void” setting in the Appendixes, I want to create an alien paladin. I call his race Norox, and say that they are lizard-like, with a mouth full of pointy teeth and an ability to change color. I would end up with the abilities of Arms, Razor-Sharp Teeth, and Chameleon Skin.

---

### **Animus Points**

Lastly, you write down your Animus points. You start with 6 points to split between Light Animus and Dark Animus. You may not have fewer points in Light Animus than Dark Animus at the beginning of the game.

---

Gloria begins the game with 5 points in Light Animus, and 1 in Dark Animus.

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Nicole Cardiff

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# Chapter 4: The Paladin in Action

All resolution in *Paladin* is done with the same system.

**Step 1:** Choose the pertinent Flesh attribute and any pertinent abilities your character has for the task she is attempting to do. Add this Flesh attribute to the number of pertinent abilities.

The pertinent Flesh attribute is determined thus:

- Is your character doing something active? Use the first attribute, also called the *active Flesh attribute*. Active actions would be climbing, attacking, or actively looking for something or someone.
- Is your character doing something reactive? Use the second attribute, also called the *reactive Flesh attribute*. Reactive actions would be dodging, trying to steer a star-freighter when it is buffeted by solar winds, or perceiving something hidden or obscured. (A good way to tell the difference between active and reactive perception rolls is whether you, the player, asked for the roll, or the GM asks for the roll. If you said something like “I’m looking around for suspicious types,” it’s active. If your GM said, “Roll perception,” and grinned, it’s reactive.)
- Is your character doing something social? Use the third attribute, also called the *social Flesh attribute*. Social actions would be bartering, trying to get information, or seducing someone.

**Step 2:** The GM should set a difficulty for the action, as shown in the Resolution Table. This difficulty must be stated to the player. Even if the difficulty is Easy, and needs 0 successes, you will still need to roll if your character’s action is

| Resolution Table   |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Difficulty</i>  | <i>Number of successes needed</i> |
| Easy               | 0 successes                       |
| Medium             | 1 success                         |
| Hard               | 2 successes                       |
| 2x human potential | 3 successes                       |
| 3x human potential | 4 successes                       |

The GM can keep increasing the number of successes needed based off the progression above. However, the GM may set a hard limit as to the maximum difficulty PC’s can attempt. If so, the players should be aware beforehand.

Normal people (non-Paladins) can only attempt Easy, Medium, or Hard tasks.

*contested* (someone is trying to stop or beat the action.)

**Step 3:** Choose whether to spend any Animus points for extra dice.

Light Animus and Dark Animus are pools of points, and when you spend Animus, the points spent are used up and lost. You can spend Light or Dark Animus on a one-for-one basis for more dice. You cannot, however, spend both Light and Dark Animus on the same task.

**Step 4:** Roll your dice pool in d6’s. Every 5 rolled is one success; every 6 rolled is two successes.

**Step 5:** Choose whether to *activate* an Animus attribute. This is the true power of using Animus. You may activate *any* Light or Dark Animus attribute that is applicable to the task. Each

activation or re-activation signifies some advantage your character is trying to get on the situation, whether mental, physical, or supernatural, and should be role-played. Feel free to activate your active or reactive Light Animus attributes on a social roll – but you’ll have to describe what your character is doing. Activating Animus attributes involves your character using her Animus, whether it is to increase her strength, telekinetically rip a sword from her opponent’s hand, or create a warm fire to seduce a fellow in front of.

When activated, you may re-roll any dice equal to or less than your Animus attribute. This activation is free – it costs you no Animus points.

If you’ve spent Dark Animus for more dice in Step 3, you may only activate a Dark attribute.

You may *re-activate* an Animus attribute (in order to re-roll again) as many times as you want: it costs one Animus point to re-activate the attribute each time. This should be a Light Animus point for a Light Animus attribute, and a Dark Animus point for a Dark Animus attribute. Once you have activated a Dark Animus attribute, though, you may not activate any Light Animus attributes for the remainder of the conflict.

**Step 6:** Compare your number of successes to the difficulty set for the task. If your character’s task was *contested*, you must also beat her opponent’s number of successes. If the amount you beat someone by (or are beaten by) matters, subtract the loser’s number of successes from the winner’s for a *margin of victory*. Note here that your character can *always* succeed at an Easy task if it is not contested – you don’t even have to roll. If contested, though, rolls are necessary.

---

Example 1: Gloria is trying to climb to the top of a wall. The wall is made of brick, so it is of Medium difficulty, and requires only one success. Her strength is necessary here, so she rolls her Quickness (no ability applies). She rolls 4 dice total and gets 1, 3, 4, and 6. With the two successes, she climbs the wall.

---

Example 2: Gloria needs to leap a river to intercept a group of Unliving about to attack a local villager. The river is 30 yards wide. This is beyond human ability, and requires 4 successes (3x human ability). She spends 3 Light Animus points, adding 3 dice to her pool. Her pool is 8 = Quickness 4, Leaping 1, and 3 Light Animus points. She rolls 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, garnering three successes. She chooses to use her Instinct Light Animus attribute in this situation, and the player explains it as her animal instincts helping her to jump correctly and find the best wind current. She activates it, focusing her energies in the form of a raven to keep her in the air long enough to save the villager. Since her Instinct is equal to 2, she gets to re-roll everything equal to 2 and under - 4 dice. She needs one more success and rolls 1, 2, 4, 5 – one success. With a running leap, she flings herself through the air and lands between the Unliving and the fleeing villager.

Example 3: Gloria and a Witch are both running towards her sword, which is about 100 feet away after being slapped aside by the Witch. Gloria rolls her Quickness 4, and spends one Light Animus point to add another die, rolling 5 total. The Witch rolls his Strength 3. The difficulty is only Easy, so they need no successes in order to successfully run. Gloria rolls 1, 2, 5, 5, 6, getting four successes, and the Witch rolls 3, 5, 6, getting three successes. Gloria barely beats him to the sword.

---

### A note about contested actions

In contested actions, both sides follow the process described above. However, the *aggressor* (the person who initiated the action) always declares how much Animus she is spending first. This gives the defender a slight advantage.

When activating and re-activating Animus attributes, the aggressor always has the chance to activate first. The defender then has a chance. Re-activation continues until the aggressor declines to re-activate, and the defender also declines.

Example: Gloria and Vincent, a member of the Sword turned Witch, are racing down a river, running on top of the water, a task that requires 3 successes. Vincent is the aggressor, as he fled from Gloria, who is trying to catch him.

Vincent rolls his Skill 3 + 1 die for the ability Running. He chooses to spend 4 Dark Animus to roll 4 more dice, giving him 8 total. Gloria rolls her Stamina 2 + 1 die for the ability Leaping. She chooses to spend only 3 Light Animus, giving her 6 dice total.

Vincent rolls 1, 6, 1, 6, 6, 1, 5, 3 – 7 successes.

Gloria rolls 6, 1, 6, 1, 4, 5 – 5 successes.

Vincent activates his Dark Animus attribute Craftiness 3 – it's free the first time – and smashes his feet into the water, creating a splash that he hopes they will hit Gloria in the face and slow her down. He gets to re-roll 4 of his dice and gets 4, 4, 5, 4 – one more success for eight total. Gloria also activates her Light Animus attribute Balance 1 – she's trying to make a side-leap onto a rock and back - and gets to re-roll 3 dice – 2, 6, 6 – four more successes, for nine total.

Vincent cannot re-activate Craftiness 3 – all his dice are above 3 – and so Gloria manages to catch up to him.

---

If the action being attempted has a difficulty above Easy, and either side in a contested action does not meet that difficulty, they are treated as having no successes whatsoever when determining the margin of victory.

---

Gloria is attempting to hold up a temple wall that Vincent is trying to batter down. This wall is made of marble, and is extremely heavy – pushing it over, or supporting its weight, is a “4x human potential task” and requires 5 successes.

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After rolling dice and activating Animus attributes, Vincent has 5 successes, while Gloria only has four. However, since she did not meet the difficulty of the task, she is counted as having no successes, and Vincent's margin of victory is 5.

---

## Supernatural actions

There is only one restriction on characters committing supernatural acts in *Paladin* - there can be no permanent effects. For example, a character could not make herself permanently stronger. A character could, however, make her next blow much more damaging. Players may want to restrict their character's acts based on the color of the game (no fireballs in *Star Wars*), but the game gives no more restrictions.

Supernatural acts are resolved in the same way as everything else in *Paladin*. Most of the effects are extensions of normal human acts - leaping, jumping, attacking - but when an act is not, it can still be resolved on the chart above. Measure the effect the act attempts to accomplish, and use that as a guide: if a monk wants to summon the wind to knock down a wooden wall, knocking down a wooden wall seems like a Hard task for a human to normally



accomplish. If the monk wants to knock down a thick brick wall that it would take three men to knock down normally, then that would be “three times human potential.”

If the task cannot be quantified in any way, but fits the color of the game, three successes should be required.

When an action is not an extension of normal human activity, all the dice for the initial dice pool must come from spending Animus for dice.

Gloria is trying to bash through a door. She knows she’s not strong enough to knock it down – it’s thick wood, and locked – but takes a running dive at it, using her Quickness 4. She also spends four Animus, gaining supernatural strength, to increase her dice pool to eight.

If she had wanted to blast down the door with holy fire, she would have not been able to use a Flesh attribute, and all her initial dice would have come from spending Animus.

### Multiple participants in an action

If more than one character is attempting an action, all helping towards one goal, all participating players roll their dice pools. This dice pool is made up of their pertinent Flesh attribute, plus all bonuses from their abilities, weapons, and armor. The players then choose a number of dice out of all their rolls equal to the lowest dice pool among the characters helping.

Anyone, however, can spend Animus points to add to the group dice pool. The amount of Animus spent must be declared before rolling.

Only one person at a time can activate an Animus attribute (paying 1 Animus point to do so *every time*, including the initial activation), but any one of the participants can do this.

Example: Gloria, Paul, and Ulysses are fighting two Witches, Vincent and Sophia. Gloria, Paul, and Ulysses started the fight, so they choose their appropriate Flesh attributes and amount of Animus to spend on the dice pool. Gloria’s Flesh dice pool is 3, Paul’s is 2, and Ulysses’ is 4. Gloria, Paul, and Ulysses all have the ability Arms (+1 die each), and all have their flaming swords (+2 dice each.) Gloria, Paul, and Ulysses all spend 1 Light Animus point each for extra dice. Gloria rolls 7 dice total, Paul rolls 6, and Ulysses rolls 8. The amount of dice they get to use is equal to 6 (Paul’s Flesh dice pool, which is lowest) + 3 (bonus dice from spending Animus), equaling 9 total. They choose their 9 highest dice.

Vincent and Sophia then go through the same process. Vincent’s Flesh dice pool is 3, and Sophia’s is 5. Vincent is an ex-member of the Sword, and has the ability Arms, and a blackened, twisted version of his sword for 3 extra dice, totaling 6 for him. They spend 4 Animus points total on extra dice: the final amount of dice they get to use is 5 (Sophia’s Flesh dice pool) + 4 (bonus dice) equaling 7.

Next, Animus attributes can be activated. Either Gloria, Paul, or Ulysses can activate an Animus attribute – but only one of them can. Vincent and Sophia then get a chance to activate an Animus attribute, and only one of them can, as above. The process repeats until both sides are done.

### Combat

Combat in *Paladin* is resolved like any other action. The participants in combat each decide

| Combat table          |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
|                       | <i>Winner/Active</i>  | <i>Winner/Reactive</i>  |
| <i>Loser/Active</i>   | Loser takes 2x margin of victory physical damage. Loser decides distribution. | Loser takes 2x margin of victory Flesh penalties until next scene. Winner decides distribution. |
| <i>Loser/Reactive</i> | Loser takes 1x margin of victory physical damage. Loser decides distribution. | Loser takes 1x margin of victory Flesh penalties until next scene. Winner decides distribution. |

their characters' applicable Flesh attributes (whether active or reactive) and then add any appropriate abilities they have in order to find their total pool. When the winner is using their active Flesh attribute, the loser will take physical damage; when the winner is using their reactive Flesh attribute, the loser will receive a temporary lessening of abilities with no physical damage. (See the Combat Table for a mechanical explanation.)

The activation and re-activation of Animus attributes should be especially role-played here, showing the ebb and flow of battle. When a participant activates his Animus attribute, what is she doing? Is she merely blocking or dodging a blow? Is he using her Animus to fling debris at her opponent? Is she using Animus to lift herself into the air, gaining an advantage? Is she trying to wrench her opponent's weapon away, either physically or supernaturally? All of these are possible actions, and they can all take place within one bit of resolution.

When the roll is finally resolved, find the margin of victory. If the winner was using his active Flesh attribute, the loser must subtract a number of points from his Flesh attributes as shown on the table above. The loser chooses how these points are split between the attributes, unless the winner was using his reactive Flesh attribute.

When the winner was using his active Flesh attribute, this damage is very physical and real and can result in death. When all Flesh attributes reach 0, and a character has no Animus left, he is dead. When the winner was using his reactive Flesh attribute, he has put the loser in a compromising situation – hanging over a cliff, lying at the tip of the winner's sword, or his weapon knocked away. However described by the winner, the points subtracted from the loser's Flesh attributes last until the next scene, or if the winner wants, earlier. The loser cannot die this way, however.

Group combat can be resolved with the group action rules above. If even one person on a side of a conflict uses their active Flesh attribute, the

side is counted as attacking offensively. Damage and penalties are distributed among the all the participants of the losing side.

### *Weapons and Armor*

You can use weapons in combat, obviously. Most weapons add one die to the initial die pool. Larger or more powerful weapons may add more to the die pool, but require an additional amount of successes to be used (a 2 dice weapon would require 2 successes to win in combat.) For example, a heavy blaster might add two dice to the initial die pool, but it requires two successes to be used.

Likewise, armor normally adds one die to the initial combat pool. It can even give you one die to oppose an attack you would otherwise be unable to. Especially heavy armor may add more dice to the pool, but requires an additional amount of successes to win in combat.

---

Gloria has traveled into the wastelands outside Castillia, and is fighting a bizarre four-armed sentient Unliving thing called Mantos, Scion of War. Mantos is using a giant two-handed sword with two arms (+2 dice weapon) and carrying a huge shield with another arm (+1 die armor.) This means he gets three extra dice to roll in combat, but *must* get a minimum of three successes in order to have any chance of winning.

---

### *Healing*

Flesh Attributes that have lowered due to physical damage are recovered at the rate of one point per session. They may be healed faster by spending Animus. It costs a number of Animus points equal to the new level of the attribute to heal one point of damage.

---

Gloria has taken three points of damage: one lowering her Quickness to 3, and two lowering her Stamina to 0. It would cost 4 Animus to raise Quickness back up to 4, 1 Animus to raise Stamina back to 1, and another 2 Animus to raise Stamina to 2.

---

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# Chapter 5: The Flow of Animus

Advancement takes place through the accumulation of Animus points. Animus points can be spent to help your character in a conflict, as outlined in Chapter 4, “The Paladin in Action,” or they can be spent for advancement.

No character can have more than 20 total Animus points at any time.

## The Interaction of Light and Dark

Dark Animus impedes the usage of Light Animus. The accumulation of Dark Animus is a taint on the soul of the character. If a character has more Dark Animus than Light Animus at any time, the player may not spend Light Animus, except to purge that Dark Animus. Dark Animus can be *purged* (gotten rid of) on a one-for-one basis by spending Light Animus.

This may mean that a character that spends too much Light Animus finds herself unable to access it suddenly. This is the stuff of great stories, and is definitely a feature, not a bug: in the middle of a terrible combat, you’re down to your last bit of resources, and suddenly fear and hatred overcome you. Do you access that fear and hatred and use it, or do you suffer?

---

Example: Gloria has 5 Light Animus and 3 Dark Animus. She spends 3 Light Animus to give her 3 extra dice on a roll. 3 points are subtracted from Light Animus, bringing it to 2. She can spend no more Light Animus until it exceeds her Dark Animus. She can, however, spend those three Dark Animus and perhaps win the fight: the acts involved in spending Dark Animus often build more Dark Animus at simultaneously.

---

When you spend Dark Animus points, both pools are affected. Unless specifically stated otherwise,

every time you spend Dark Animus, you lose an equivalent amount of Light Animus. You can spend Dark Animus even when Light Animus is at zero, though: the pools never go into negative numbers. You may never spend both Light and Dark Animus at the same time.

## Light Animus

The main accumulation of Light Animus points comes from one source: facing adversity. Anytime a character faces danger in pursuit of the goals of their Order or Code without using any Dark Animus, she receives Light Animus points. Adversity can be classified as Minor, Major, or Unthinkable.

---

Leaping through a first story window, leaping out from a moving chariot, taking on a lesser opponent with Animus, ignoring the needs of a loved one temporarily because of responsibility, or taking any action with some physical or emotional risk counts as Minor Adversity.

Walking into a burning building, crashing a speeder into a platoon of troopers, taking on an opponent equivalent to yourself with Animus, taking a responsible action at the direct protest of a loved one, or taking any action with significant physical or emotional risk counts as Major Adversity.

Leaping from the top of a building, covering a bomb with your body, crashing a starship into an enemy base, taking on a superior opponent, severing a relationship with a loved one for responsibility, or taking any action with certain physical or emotional risk counts as Unthinkable Adversity.

---

When faced with Minor Adversity, gain one Light Animus point. When faced with Major



Adversity, gain 3 Light Animus points. When faced with Unthinkable Adversity, gain 7 Light Animus points. No Dark Animus can be used when confronting the adversity. If it is, the Light Animus points gained will be taken away.

Your character also receives Light Animus for defeating a foe that is primarily Dark. (That is, he has more Dark Animus than Light Animus at the beginning of the conflict.) Your character receives a number of Light Animus points equal to the foe's highest Dark Animus attribute. She must not use Dark Animus in defeating this foe. Defeating is left intentionally vague – there are many ways to defeat a foe without killing them.

### **Dark Animus**

Dark Animus is much easier to get: break the Code and receive Dark Animus points. If your character breaks a Minor Law, receive 2 Dark Animus points; if she breaks a Major Law, receive 5; if she breaks an Unbreakable Law, receive 10. Mark a check beside this stricture on your character sheet.

### *Gaining Marks*

When you check off a box that has a number (called a Mark) in it, you will need to roll whenever your character breaks the same stricture again in order to receive the Dark Animus. You will roll a number of dice equal to your combined Dark Animus attributes, and you must roll a number of successes equal to the number of your Mark in that stricture. You can activate your lowest Dark Animus attribute on this roll by sacrificing one point from a Flesh attribute.

When you gain a Mark, though, two more things happen. You must immediately lower your character's highest Light Animus attribute by 1. You also must choose a deformity – your character's physical appearance twists to reflect her growing Darkness. A Level 1 deformity (when you gain a Level 1 Mark) would be slight, and not necessarily noticeable to the casual observer – she might get a strange growth on the back of her hand, or her tongue becomes pointed.

As the deformities increase in level, they get much worse – someone with a Level 5 deformity would not even appear human.

When your character transgresses the Code, she separates herself from Light Animus as well. When your character has any Marks, you will need to roll whenever she should gain Light Animus as well. Roll a number of dice equal to her highest Light Animus attribute, and you must roll a number of successes equal to her highest Mark. You may not activate any Animus attributes on this roll.

Your character receives Dark Animus any time she breaks a law, not just when you as a player decide you want more Dark Animus.

Your character also receives Dark Animus for killing a person that is primarily Light. (That is, he has more Light Animus than Dark Animus.) She receives a number of Dark Animus points equal to the foe's highest Light Animus attribute. She must not use Light Animus in killing this person.

### *Removing Marks*

Removing Marks is a tricky affair. One can't remove them if they're focused on the Dark, and just want to get rid of them to make gaining Animus easier. One must be focused on the Light. Mechanically, if you have more points total in Dark Animus attributes than Light Animus attributes, you can't remove a Mark.

In order to remove a Mark, your character must perform an act of contrition. The easiest way to perform an act of contrition is to fix the wrong done by breaking the Code. If, for example, you're playing with "The Sword of Heaven" setting, and your character breaks the Minor Law that states that you may not tell an untruth, she must find the person she lied to, tell them that she lied, and fix any pain or suffering caused by her lie.

Often, things are not this easy, though. For example, if she has killed an innocent, she cannot restore that person to life. In cases where she



cannot rectify the wrong she has done, she must perform a symbolic act of contrition. She must find a way to reinforce the Law she broke at great personal risk to herself. In order to find this way, you, the player, must discuss what your character intends to do with your GM, and get approval for it. You'll note in the examples below, the act actually causes an adventure – in a way, your character's original sin is a way for you, the player, to add to the story.

In order to remove a Mark from a Minor Law, one must perform an act that takes a moderate amount of time (one game session, minimum) and poses some physical or emotional hardship.

---

If a character received a Mark for ignoring a request for help, she could defend the village in which the requester lived until she had a chance to fight off a threat to the village.

---

In order to remove a Mark from a Major Law, one must perform an act that takes a significant amount of time (more than one game session) and poses great physical or emotional hardship.

---

If a character received a Mark for killing an innocent, a farmer, for example, she could go to the man's family and not only let them vent their anger, but make certain that they were well taken care of permanently.

---

In order to remove a Mark from an Unbreakable Law, one must perform an act that takes a tremendous amount of time (an entire story arc focused solely on the act of contrition) and poses very certain physical and emotional hardship. In order to perform an act of contrition for breaking an Unbreakable Law, the player must have the permission of everyone in your game group, as it will take a

significant amount of their time, and your character must gain, during the act, the in-character forgiveness of all their characters.

---

If a character suffered a Witch to live, she could descend into the world outside Castilia and travel by foot for a hundred miles to destroy the fortress of an extremely powerful Witch.

---

When you remove a Mark from a Law, erase all checks from beside that Law. However, you must circle the level of the Mark you just removed. If your character ever breaks that Law again, you fill the boxes with checks back up to that Mark – the sin is forgiven, but not forgotten. In addition, any deformities your character has from gaining Marks are not removed.

## Detecting Animus

Any Paladin can detect the use of Animus, or beings with a large amount of Animus. Whenever a character is witness to a non-obvious use of Animus, is in the presence of another Paladin or Dark Paladin, or a large use of Animus happens elsewhere within the framework of the story, roll according to the Detection Table.

More successes on this roll give you more information about the Animus:

You always know whether the Animus was Light or Dark. A margin of victory of 1 gives you an idea of where or who the Animus is coming from. A margin of victory of 2 gives you pinpoint information on where the Animus is coming from and what it was used for. If your detection is focused on one person, 1 success will let you know whether they are primarily Light or Dark, 2 successes will let you know the amount of one of their Animus pools, and 3 successes will let you know the amount of their highest Animus attribute. They may defend against this if their reactive Animus attribute is appropriate.

## Character Advancement

To increase Flesh attributes, spend three times the new level in Animus points.

---

If I want to raise Gloria's Stamina from 2 to 3, I spend  $3 \times 3 = 9$  Animus points.

---

To increase Animus attributes, spend three times the new level in Animus points (Light Animus for Light Animus attributes, and Dark Animus for Dark Animus attributes).

---

To raise Gloria's Balance from 1 to 2, it costs  $2 \times 3 = 6$  Animus points.

---

To get a new ability, spend two times your character's current number of abilities in Animus points. Check with your GM before gaining a new weird ability – although, if you've received a Mark of some sort and want to use your

| Detection Table  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Situation</i>   | <i>Successes needed</i>         |
| Around a Paladin of greater power                              | 1                               |
| Around a Paladin of equal power                                | 2                               |
| Around a Paladin of lesser power                               | 3                               |
| Animus is used nearby  | 2 - (Amount of Animus used / 5) |
| A large amount of Animus is used far away                      | 4 - (Amount of Animus used / 5) |
| Round down when dividing on this table.                        |                                 |
| "Paladin" refers to a Paladin or Dark Paladin when used above. |                                 |

deformity as a bonus, adding it as a new ability is a great idea.

---

Gloria would spend 3 (current number of skills)  $\times 2 = 6$  Animus points to gain Fishing as a new ability.

---

You may spend Animus to increase attributes or gain new skills at any time.

## Animus in "The Sword of Heaven"

There are a few special rules for using Animus when playing in the default setting, "The Sword of Heaven." The setting is centered around the fight against murder and the awful powers it can bring to murderers – called Witches in the setting.

### *Unliving*

Witches can use the Dark Animus they have collected by murder to create Unliving – awful dead creatures with a semblance of life animating them. In order to create an Unliving, a Witch must spend a number of Dark Animus totaling all the attributes of the creature, plus 1 Dark Animus per ability it will have.

## The Flow of Animus

---

An Unliving can only have Flesh and Dark Animus attributes. Most Unliving are mindless creatures, following only orders from the Witch that created them, and only have offensive and defensive Flesh attributes, but a rare few have a social Flesh attribute, and the worst have Dark Animus attributes. An Unliving with Dark Animus attributes is free-willed, and does not need its Witch master to give it orders in order to take action.

Unliving must have Dark Animus attributes in order to use Animus, and gain more Animus. They gather Dark Animus by killing people that follow the Light, using the rules above. They can also gain Dark Animus by convincing a living being to give them Dark Animus. There is no other way they can gain Animus, however. Unliving with Dark Animus can use it to reactivate Animus attributes, per normal, and can

attempt any difficulty level of task.

Paladins can feel Unliving as a sort of “empty bubble” in the flow of Animus. You need a number of successes to feel their presence as if they were Dark Paladins.



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# Chapter 6: Running Paladin

## Creating NPCs

Good non-player characters (NPCs) make or break any role-playing session, including a game of *Paladin*. Here are rules on how to create them.

### *Average folks*

It is quite likely your characters will meet or even face non-Paladins within the game. Non-Paladins still are connected to Animus, and so can still accumulate Animus and Dark Animus much like Paladins may. However, they do not have the mastery of it that Paladins do, so they have a few restrictions:

- They may only attempt Easy, Medium, or Hard tasks.
- They may not attempt any supernatural actions.
- They may only activate Animus attributes, and this *does* cost them one Animus. They are never allowed to re-activate them.
- They may not have more than 10 total Animus points, and will most likely have far fewer.

Non-Paladins *can* spend Animus for extra dice at the beginning of a conflict, just like Paladins.

Non-Paladins usually have much lower Animus attributes than Paladins: it is recommended that they have 5 points total to split among Light and Dark Animus attributes for an average non-Paladin.

For Flesh attributes, assign these as you feel appropriate. There is no “authorized” way to create NPCs. If you want to make a very normal, very physical threat to the Paladins, give him an active Flesh attribute of Strength 5, and a reactive

Flesh attribute of Toughness 5. In fact, this may be very fun to do, if not overused – it can be interesting to let the characters know that normal humanity can sometimes threaten even the will of the gods.

To create “mooks,” opponents that can easily be overcome, the GM can create characters with no Animus and no Dark Animus attributes. Paladins should be able to go through hordes of these guys.

### *Dark Paladins*

Dark Paladins are either Paladins who have betrayed their order, or people who have found a way to master Dark Animus. (In “The Sword of Heaven,” anyone who murders another immediately becomes a Witch, or Dark Paladin.)

Creating a Dark Paladin uses the same method as creating a Paladin player character, although you distribute 3-6 points for Light Animus attributes, and 6 or more points for Dark Animus attributes. Just like creating average folks, you can assign any numbers you want depending on how powerful you want the NPC to be.

When assigning Light and Dark Animus points, be aware that anything over 10 points in either pool is going to make the NPC a very formidable opponent.

### **The *Paladin* mindset**

*Paladin* is a rip-roaring, blade-slinging, ass-kicking sort of game. You learn about some bad guys, you hunt them down, and then you proceed to have the sort of battles where scenery gets uprooted and one man stands at the end, covered in blood. That’s *exactly* what you’re supposed to do with it.

*Paladin* is also about morals, though. The rules present a rigid moral universe, one where right and wrong are absolute, and you're definitely on the right side. We call this *moral absolutism*. This is quite a bit different from many games out there which present *moral relativism*, a world in which good and evil are not clear-cut, and the characters could end up on either side – or both – pretty quickly.

When designing *Paladin*, I was asked, "What if you're fighting other good guys – people who believe in something different than your characters?" The answer is: you're right; they're wrong. It's an unrealistic universe, but one fraught with adventure.

So, how do you run an adventure in such a world?

### *Moral absolutism*

The first and easiest sort of adventure to run is one that uses this moral absolutism to full effect. The characters find out that something bad is going on, they investigate it, they find the source, and they uproot it with their holy vengeance. It's an easy way to run things, and it's fun. Using the default setting, such an adventure might look like this:

---

While traveling, the characters come to the village of Zaragoza. They look for food and shelter, but soon find that the village has been emptied, bloodless corpses strewn through buildings. When they stay and investigate, they find that the corpses rise at night as Unliving with the slightest hold on this world – weak, but in masses. They must find the Witch controlling these Unliving and slay it in order to stop the rampaging hordes from moving on and attacking another village.

---

You can see from just the start of the adventure that it provides a lot of room for an interesting game: creepy zombies, a sweeping battle scene of Paladins versus a horde of Unliving, a hunt for the Witch, and a climatic fight with it.

This sort of adventure can only be fun so many times before the point is made, and the game becomes tired, though.

### *Moral relativism*

So, where do you go from the sort of adventure above? How do you keep your game from becoming an Unliving thing of its own?

You introduce a moral quandary. While the world of *Paladin* is absolute when it comes to good and evil, no true human can be, not even the strongest Paladin. Everyone has a weak point, and testing that weak point can provide hours of play. An example:

---

Word comes to the Temple at Mons Calpe that great evil has been sensed in the east, centered on a large town called Cordoba. A member of the Sword, Gloria, is originally from Cordoba, so she and her partner, Philippe, are sent to investigate. They find an extraordinarily powerful Witch in the town, and follow him for many days to discover his weaknesses.

What they find is horrifying – this Witch is powerful enough to have created a strong, competent, self-willed Unliving, and he's used the body of Gloria's father. The Witch is too powerful for Gloria and Philippe to take on alone, but Gloria's father comes to her in the night, telling her that he wants to be free – that he will help them slay the Witch and Gloria and he can live forever if she helps him keep his power.

Does Gloria accept his help? And then does she turn her back on the Sword in order to remain with her father, or does she slay the Unliving thing?

---

If Gloria is to follow the code, she must kill her own father. Can she? This sort of story brings a drama to *Paladin* that isn't found in the more absolute side of the moral spectrum. Like salt, it should not be overused, but used properly, it greatly enhances the game.



You can take it further and present scenarios that make the characters question if they're even on the right side. In the above example, Gloria may feel a longing to be with her father, but it's plain that her father is actually no more – that she would only be helping a mockery of life. In the example below, things are not so clear-cut:

---

Word comes to the Temple at Mons Calpe that great evil has been sensed in the east, centered on a large town called Cordoba. A member of the Sword, Gloria, is originally from Cordoba, so she and her partner, Philippe, are sent to investigate.

What they find is appalling – disease has spread among the children of the town, and the numbers of dead increase daily. They find a renegade member of the Sword, Carlos, working with a local Witch, using their combined power to stave off the disease and save the children.

Do they kill the Witch, and leave the children to die of natural causes? And what do they do with Carlos, who is angry with the gods for allowing such a thing to happen?

---

GMs should be warned that this sort of scenario may radically change your game. When characters decide that they may have been on the wrong side all along, there is no impetus for them not to dabble in Dark Animus. This change can be welcome, though – a game that asks these sorts of questions can be very intellectually fulfilling.

### *Taking it over the top*

What do you do when your characters decide to break all the rules? If your players decided that their way wasn't the right way, how would you handle it? What if they decided that right didn't equal good?

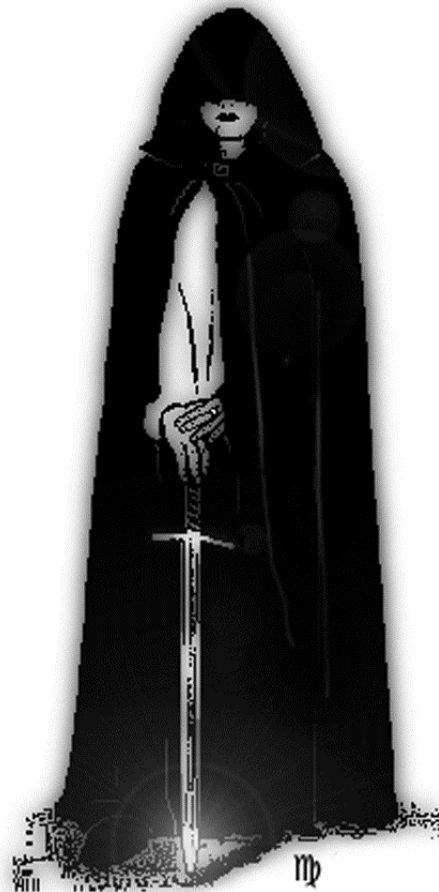
If they wanted to change their Code, how would you go about letting them? Is the god of their world an independent being that makes absolute rules, or is their god ruled by the collective

unconscious of men? Can you confront your god and change the world? And if you can, how do you stop the wrong people from doing so?

These are all adventure ideas for the very experienced *Paladin* group. There is no mechanic in the game for changing the Code, but that does not mean there's not a good story in it.

### **Last note**

As long as you follow the rules, there is no wrong game of *Paladin*. Do what you want with it, and have the best time you can. In a game that touches heavily on what it means to be good, remember that your players may have very different personal moralities than you – if subject matter comes up that makes someone uncomfortable, make sure that it's fine by them to continue going. And then, by all means, do so – you'll have a much better game for it.





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# Appendix I: Other Sample Settings

## The Fantastic Boxer Rebellion

### *Backdrop*

The English invaders have scoured China with their boats and their guns, bringing their imperial rule. They have subjugated the population with their soul-numbing opium, and steal China's tea and fortune from under the nose of glassy-eyed addicts. They attempt to destroy the balance that is China.

The Shaolin Monks are an order devoted to perfecting their martial skills through maintaining balance in their souls and minds, and studying the motion of nature. By emulating an animal in martial acts, and maintaining balance in their heart, they are China's best weapons against the cultural and military scourge that is the English.

### *Organization, Faith, and Charter*

The monks do not believe in one God, but that spirits lie within all things, and should be revered. They especially worship the spirits of their ancestors, and respect the martial masters of the animal kingdom: tiger, grasshopper, snake, and others. They are not sanctioned by the Chinese government, but are tolerated, and are thought of by the people as China's last hope.

The monks fight off the English invaders wherever they find them: in small Chinese villages, along the rivers the English gunboats come up, and anywhere they find the loathsome English lodge sorcerers, or even worse, Betrayers – evil Shaolin monks turned to the side of the English.

### *Code*

#### *Minor Laws*

One must always respect one's elders.

One must never kill a wild animal except to eat.

One must never act unless the spirit is calm.

### *Major Laws*

One must never endanger innocents with one's action.

One must never allow innocents to be harmed by one's inaction.

### *Unbreakable Law*

One must always obey one's elders.

### *Arms*

The Shaolin Monks are known for their skills with foot and fist. This is the only weapon they need. They wear no armor and carry no sword.

The monks tattoo the backs of their hands with pictures of the animal that has taught them the most about the fighting arts. It is said these tattoos impart amazing abilities to the monks.

### *Power*

The Shaolin Monks' inner peace and balance allows them to affect the world around them in a variety of ways. They can:

- Perform amazing feats of strength and agility.
- Ignore gravity for short periods of time.
- Affect plant and animal life.
- Change form into an animal. (This animal must be selected when making the character and is the animal tattooed on the monk's hands.)
- Create and control elemental substances – earth, wind, fire, water, and wood.

## Knights of the Void

### *Backdrop*

In the darkness of space, the light of freedom is dimming. Once, a great republic spanned galaxies, uniting all sorts of people of different shapes, sizes, and colors with their shared freedom. The guardians of that freedom were the Knights of the Void, men and women that accessed immense power by becoming one with the void of space, removing everything from their minds except the threads of Animus. In their ships, they traveled the starways solving problems and eliminating threats to the republic.

In these dark days, though, a tyrant has risen. One Knight ventured too far for too much power, and destroyed an entire sun with his insane experiment, turning it into a black hole that he claims his newfound dark powers come from. The Knight, Ghalen, has declared himself God-King of the Universe, and the armies he commands have spread throughout the galaxy, enforcing his rule and killing all true Knights they can find.

### *Organization, Faith, and Charter*

You and your brethren are the last true Knights left that you know of. You believe in Animus as the life and the freedom that all sentient beings have a right to. Light Animus is freedom; Dark Animus is a chain to bind people.

The Knights have no organization to speak of – they have always been a body of equals. Even inductees into the Knights – apprentices – have an equal voice. Now that the numbers of the Knights have been so diminished, you and your brethren (the party of player characters) must make decisions for yourselves.

### Code

#### *Minor Laws*

A Knight must empty his heart and fill it with Void, rather than base decisions on emotion.

A Knight must never use his abilities for personal gain.

A Knight must respect life in all its forms.

#### *Major Laws*

A Knight must fight tyranny wherever he finds it.

A Knight must never act out of love, fear, or hate.

#### *Unbreakable Law*

A Knight must never exert his power in order to rule others.

#### *Arms*

Knights all carry *holo-swords*, lightweight rods that can, with the flick of a button, emit a holographic image of a sword. This image is reinforced with tremendous amounts of positive ions, charging the air enough to let it rip through metal, flesh, and bone. These swords are cannot be used by anyone but a Knight – without their control over Animus, the ions scatter freely and harmlessly.

The swords' characteristic hum is known throughout the galaxies, though, and is thought of as either the voice of freedom or the harbinger of death.

#### *Power*

The Knights' connection to the Void allows them to perform acts impossible to other beings. They can:

- Perform amazing feats of strength, agility, and endurance.
- Move objects (including themselves and others) using only their concentration.
- See the emotions that cloud hearts.
- Inspire others and release them from their bonds.
- Ignore the perils of the physical Void, space.

## The Badge of Justice

### *Backdrop*

It's today, but a bit dirtier and sleazier. Drug dealers kill each other all over downtown to expand their market, addicts mug citizens for a little more blow, murderers stalk lone women down alleyways, and cops stand in the way of all of them.

As civilization ignores law, and crime runs rampant, how can police officers stop a wave of violence, theft, and addiction? For this setting, turn to cultural and literary sources:

### Books

*White Jazz* by James Ellroy,  
*The Black Dahlia* by James Ellroy,  
just about anything else by James Ellroy,  
*The Killer Inside Me* by Jim Thompson

### Comics

The *Sin City* series by Frank Miller

### Movies and television

*L.A. Confidential*  
*Donnie Brasco*  
*Se7en*  
*The Untouchables*  
*The Shield (TV)*  
*Monk (TV)*

### *Organization, Faith, and Charter*

The characters are all police officers, working in the inner city, fighting crime wherever they find it. Light Animus represents belief in the law and its ability to keep civilization from killing itself, Dark Animus represents a lack of faith in and contempt for the law.

You can play “The Badge of Justice” in two different ways:

**Magic cops.** You and your brethren are a select unit of policemen, all inducted into a secret society. You've been taught techniques passed down since the founding of the United States, brought by Lodge members to protect the newfound country's freedom. You worship Lady

Justice, also known as Themis, the blind goddess with a sword and scales seen in courtrooms across America. Themis was her name as she appeared to the Greeks as a Titan, and as an oracle at Delphi. By following her command to bring divine justice to the streets, you are empowered with abilities beyond mortal man.

**Straight cops.** When you play “The Badge of Justice” this way, you play ordinary, everyday street cops trying to survive and get the bad guy. You have no special powers or abilities – but your courage and firm belief in justice does let you exert yourself beyond what you ever should.

When using this option, the following rules apply:

- Characters cannot commit supernatural acts of any sort.
- They can, however, perform acts up to 2x normal human capacity, fueled by adrenaline and training.
- They *can* perform amazing – but not supernatural actions – in accord with the Powers below.
- For character creation, distribute 8 points among Flesh attributes, 4 among Light Animus attributes, and 2 among Dark Animus attributes. Distribute 4 initial Animus points.
- Characters cannot have more than 10 Animus points, and must spend one Animus point to activate an Animus attribute. They cannot re-activate Animus attributes.

Either way that you run this setting, you can expect to see a lot more Dark Animus flying around. The conflict that is emphasized is “how do you protect the law while staying within the law?” Crooked cops are this setting's Dark Paladins, and the relationships between them and the player characters should be emphasized.

### *Code*

#### *Minor Laws*

Do not commit brutality against suspects.

Do not put your safety above the law.

Do not endanger innocent citizens with your actions.

#### *Major Laws*

Do not become a judge and inflict your own sentences. You are Justice's tool, not Justice.

Do not let transgressors of the law or suspected transgressors of the law go free, no matter what the reason for their crime.

#### *Unbreakable Law*

Do not use your position as an officer of the law for your personal gain. (Free donuts, coffee, and lunch do not count, obviously.)

### *Arms*

Unlike most settings, you do not have a special weapon in "The Badge of Justice." You can be expected to have a gun (+1 or 2 dice weapon), handcuffs, and maybe a nightstick (+1 die weapon). Your real power lies in your badge, though – as a talisman of your commitment to justice, it can be used for one bonus die in any situation where you are using it to intimidate or surprise others, and can be used as a focus for yourself during melodramatic senses to increase your own courage and will. All characters do have an Arms ability, which applies to using any standard police weapon. Many characters will have a Driving ability as well.

### *Power*

The cops' commitment to justice gives them the strength to perform deeds greater than normal men. They can:

- Perform feats of incredible physicality.
- Discern truth.
- See what is hidden.
- Calm and soothe the frightened.
- Drive like crazed men, and perform driving stunts that seem impossible.

Visit the *Paladin* website for more settings, sample characters, and news.

<http://www.anvilwerks.com/docs/paladin>

For more information on publishing your own role-playing game, check out The Forge.

<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>

Other games you should check out:

## **Donjon**

<http://www.anvilwerks.com/docs/donjon>

Do you remember the first time you played a fantasy RPG? *Donjon* is all about recapturing that sense of wonder and running with it, and promises more d20's, more classes, more monsters, more spells, and more everything than any other fantasy game.

Coming August/September from Anvilwerks.

## **Sorcerer**

<http://www.sorcerer-rpg.com>

When you're ready to explore the flip side of *Paladin*, try *Sorcerer*, the game that asks, "What would you do for power?" *Sorcerer's* a game of the cosmic outlaw, ready to give God and humanity the finger, take what he wants, and try and keep his soul in the process.

## **octaNe**

<http://www.memento-mori.com/octane/>

"The psychotronic game of post-modern, trash-culture America," octane puts you behind the wheel of a talking '69 Mustang, shotgun in hand, throws a mutant – but sexy – rollergirl in the passenger seat, and sends you out into the great Wastelands. Innovative mechanics, and a hell of a good time.

# PALADIN

## Character Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Player: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Setting: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Story: \_\_\_\_\_

### Attributes

What gives you strength?  
 What protects you?  
 How do you relate to others?

| Flesh |  |
|-------|--|
|       |  |
|       |  |
|       |  |

| Light Animus |  |
|--------------|--|
|              |  |
|              |  |
|              |  |

| Dark Animus |  |
|-------------|--|
|             |  |
|             |  |
|             |  |

### Miscellaneous

Abilities

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Light Animus  
Points

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Dark Animus  
Points

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

### Code of Honor

Minor Laws

|          | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Major Laws

|          | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Unbreakable Law

|          | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Notes