

The background of the entire page is a dark, textured stone tablet. At the top and bottom are decorative borders of interlocking knotwork. A large, circular archway is carved into the center of the tablet. Inside the arch, the word "RUNE" is written in large, white, serif capital letters. Below it, "JUMP-START RULES" is written in a smaller, white, serif font. Further down, in smaller white capital letters, is the text "A FREE REFERENCE GUIDE FOR BEGINNING RUNE PLAYERS". At the bottom of the arch, there is a circular emblem carved into the stone, depicting a bird with its wings spread, perched on a branch. The text "Welcome, young one. You stand on the threshold of a grim but heroic world, one made for mighty warriors. Against Loki you will battle, and against his demonic brood, who have declared grim and blood-spattered war upon us. As you do this, you will rise from your present station as a scrawny youngling into the ranks of our mightiest heroes. As you prove yourself in battle, you will win the favor of the gods, who will gift you with ever-greater abilities. So step forward, young warrior. Seize this sword by the hilt. Place this helm upon your head. Ready yourself for your hallowed destiny. For in mere moments, you will be smiting our foes!" is carved into the stone below the archway.

ATLAS GAMES PRESENTS

RUNE

JUMP-START RULES

A FREE REFERENCE GUIDE
FOR BEGINNING RUNE PLAYERS

Welcome, young one. You stand on the threshold of a grim but heroic world, one made for mighty warriors. Against Loki you will battle, and against his demonic brood, who have declared grim and blood-spattered war upon us. As you do this, you will rise from your present station as a scrawny youngling into the ranks of our mightiest heroes. As you prove yourself in battle, you will win the favor of the gods, who will gift you with ever-greater abilities. So step forward, young warrior. Seize this sword by the hilt. Place this helm upon your head. Ready yourself for your hallowed destiny. For in mere moments, you will be smiting our foes!

OVERVIEW

Anyone with any lengthy experience of roleplaying games knows that gamers display a wide variety of different tastes. Some people like to carefully simulate real forces in an imaginary world, to cooperatively create thrilling adventures, or use roleplaying as a vehicle for detailed psychological exploration of the characters they create. And a whole lot of players just like to tromp through mazes filled with dangerous creatures and hack down anything that moves. You don't have to be one of the all-seeing Norns of Viking mythology to have guessed by now that **Rune** caters to this last group.

The problem you face as a hack & slash player in a conventional roleplaying game is that your Game Master will eventually get bored with the style before you do. **Rune** solves that problem for you by distributing the GMing duties to multiple **runners** throughout the course of an evening. Each player, called a **pillager** in **Rune**, comes to a session with an **encounter** created ahead of time that he plans to GM. The biggest part of the **Rune** rulebook is our "Encounters" section, which provides a long list of elements you can build into encounters, from piles of treasure to fanatical opponents to nasty traps. Each element comes with a specific **encounter point** cost or gain, and **designers** balance these in creating an encounter. The idea of encounters constituting a story is one we Vikings accept only grudgingly, with narrowed and suspicious eyes. Although advanced **Rune** adventures have set-ups, developments, and climaxes, individual scenes are better seen as an obstacle course through which your heroes must barrel, bloody axes held aloft.

As an encounter progresses, you may do something that qualifies you for **victory points**. This is true whether you're running the encounter or acting as a member of the **Horde**. For instance, it's in the runner's best interests for pillagers to fail rolls and take a lot of damage, since runners get victory points when this happens. Of course, the pillagers also get victory points for rolls they succeed at, damage dealt to foes, and loot they give to their community, among others. At the end of a session, everyone counts up their victory points and a winner is declared, making **Rune** a truly competitive game guaranteed to stir Loki-like bloodlust.

A HERO IS MADE

As an experienced roleplayer, you may be expecting the typical arrangement whereby each player chooses from an array of very different, but complementary, character types. Forget that errant nonsense! Here we will all play stout and well-armored warriors, our abilities all honed in the forge of bloody combat! Warriors, we say! Warriors, warriors, warriors!

The hero creation process is as follows:

STEP 1: NAME YOUR HERO

Your hero needs a suitably Norse name. Odin will not smile upon a Fred or Jimbo. He must be a Thorleik or Ansgar to earn the favor of the gods.

STEP 2: BUY CHARACTERISTICS

In this step, you'll juggle the numbers to give your hero his basic talents. There are eight of them: **Strength, Stamina, Dexterity, Quickness, Perception, Intelligence, Communication** and **Presence**. **Characteristics** can range from -3, the absolute worst possible score for any living human being, to +3 as the apex of mortal possibility. You start with 60 creation points, and the following chart shows you what it costs to buy each possible rating in each Characteristic. The negative ratings for Characteristics below zero mean that you actually gain creation points by picking a lower than normal rating.

Char.	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Strength	-12	-8	-4	0	4	8	16
Stamina	-16	-10	-6	0	4	8	16
Dexterity	-12	-8	-4	0	4	8	16
Quickness	-12	-8	-4	0	4	8	16
Intelligence	-6	-4	-2	0	2	4	8
Perception	-6	-4	-2	0	2	4	8
Presence	-2	-2	-2	0	2	4	8
Communication	-2	-2	-2	0	2	4	8





STEP 3: BUY ABILITIES

You are limited to a rating of 3 in any single **Ability**, which are the skills your hero has learned. Abilities divide into two categories: **primary** and **secondary**. These categories determine the cost of the various possible ratings in each Ability; since primary Abilities come up in play much more often than secondary ones, each point of a primary Ability costs 2 creation points while each point of a secondary Ability costs only 1 point. Your roll to try to accomplish an action faces a substantial -3 penalty if you don't have the relevant Ability, so don't short yourself on Abilities when designing your character. Listed to the right are the Abilities that tend to crop up repeatedly in basic encounters. The Rune rulebook has a more extensive list of Abilities for you to choose from.

Ability	Category	Gov. Char.	Load
Awareness	Primary	Perception	NA
Brawling	Primary	Dexterity	NA
Divine Awareness	Primary	Presence	NA
Dodge	Primary	Quickness	NA
Jump	Secondary	Strength	NA
Sprint	Secondary	Strength	NA
Stealth	Primary	Dexterity	NA
Traps	Primary	Dexterity	0.5

STEP 4: CHOOSE YOUR WEAPONS

Outfit yourself with as many weapons as you can carry. On second thought, you should perhaps leave some space in your pack for other useful items. Still, it is good to have a great many weapons, so pick up to three of the following common weapons.

Weapon	Init Rating	Atk Rating	Dfn Rating	Dam Rating	Load	Ability	Availability
Dagger	+2	+1	+2	+3	0.25	Single	Common
Fist/Kick	+1	+0	+0	+0	NA	Brawling	—
Flail (2 handed)	+2	+7	+1	+7	0.5	Chain	Common
Hand Axe	+3	+1	+2	+6	0.5]	Single	Common
Mace	+3	+2	+3	+5	0.5	Single	Common
Net	+0	+4	+2	+0	0.5	Chain	Common
Puny Knife	+1	+0	+1	+2	0.15	Single	Common
Quarterstaff	+6	+4	+8	+3	1	Great	Common
Rock	+4	+0	n/a	+2	0.0	Thrown	Common
Sap	+1	+0	+1	+2	0.15	Single	Common
Short Bow	+0	+0	n/a	+6	0.5	Bows	Common
Shortspear	+5	+1	+2	+3	0.5	Single	Common
Shortsword	+4	+2	+3	+3	0.5	Single	Common
Shortsword + Dagger	+6	+5	+6	+5	0.75	Two Weapons	Common
Sling	+2	+2	n/a	+3	0.1	Thrown	Common
Spear (thrown)	+0	+2	+0	+6	1	Thrown	Common
Spear/Lance	+5	+6	+4	+6	1	Longshaft	Common
Throwing Axe	+1	+1	+0	+4	0.5	Thrown	Common
Throwing Knife	+1	+1	n/a	+3	0.2	Thrown	Common
Two Hand Axes	+4	+5	+3	+7	1	Two Weapons	Common
Two Short Swords	+6	+3	+5	+7	1	Two Weapons	Common
Viking Axe	+5	+3	+4	+10	1.5	Great	Common
Viking Broadsword	+5	+3	+4	+6	1	Single	Common
War Maul	+5	+2	+5	+10	1.5	Great	Common
Whip	+0	+6	+0	+2	0.5	Chain	Common

As shown on the chart, you must also have the correct Ability in order to wield a weapon, so hopefully you have a few points left. Single Weapon, Chain Weapon, Great Weapon, Two Weapons, and Longshaft Weapon are all primary Abilities with Dexterity as their **Governing Characteristic**. Thrown Weapon and Bows are primary Abilities with Perception as their Governing Characteristic. None of these have a Load value.

Although you, as an eager warrior yet to be bloodied, may have visions of running shrieking into combat, protected only by your screaming blades and the valor of your heart, veteran Vikings will tell you that there is no substitute for good armor protection. Someday a treacherous foe will jab past your parrying sword or blocking shield, and on that day you will be glad you wrapped your hide in as much protective gear as you could muster.

You can start the game with any one type of common armor, and one common shield of your choice (listed below). Shields add their **Init**, **Atk**, **Dfn**, **Dam**, and **Load ratings** to the ratings of the single weapon with which they are paired. Again, be sure you take the Single Weapons Ability to be able to use your shield!

Armor	Prot Rating	Init Rating	Load
Quilted/Fur	1	-0	1.0
Heavy Leather	3	-1	1.5
Studded Leather	5	-3	2.0
Chain Mail	7	-5	2.5

Shield	Init Rating	Atk Rating	Dfn Rating	Dam Rating	Load	Ability
Buckler	+0	+0	+2	+0	0.25	Single
Round Shield	+0	+0	+3	+0	0.5	Single
Kite Shield	-1	-1	+4	+0	2	Single



STEP 5: OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS

A fight where a Viking warrior does not get bloodied is hardly a fight at all. Your hero begins the game with a number of **hit points**, which are determined by your combined Strength and Stamina Characteristics, as per the chart below.

Strength + Stamina	Starting Hit Points
-4 or less	37
-3 to -1	40
0	44
1 to 3	48
4	52
5	56
6	60

You can buy additional hit points by spending creation points; these vary according to your Stamina, as shown below.

Stamina	Extra Hit Points
-3	+1 hit point
-2	+2 hit points
-1	+3 hit points
0	+4 hit points
1	+5 hit points
2	+6 hit points
3	+7 hit points

Especially nasty hits are called **Wounds**. You suffer a Wound when the damage you take from a single blow, after your Soak has been taken into account, equals or exceeds your **Wound Threshold**. The value of your Wound Threshold depends on your Stamina, as per the chart below.

Stamina	Wound Threshold
-3	2 hit points
-2	4 hit points
-1	6 hit points
0	9 hit points
1	12 hit points
2	15 hit points
3	18 hit points

Encumbrance measures the degree to which the weight and bulk of the things you carry slows you down. There are five degrees of Encumbrance. From best to worst, they are: **Light**, **Loaded**, **Overloaded**,

INITIATIVE SCORE (ARMED):

Qik Characteristic + Weapon Ability + Weapon's Init Rating + Init Ratings of Armor & Shield - ENC Decrease

INITIATIVE SCORE (UNARMED):

Qik Characteristic + Brawling Ability + Fist/Kick Init Rating + Init Rating of Armor & Shield - ENC Decrease

INITIATIVE SCORE (NON-COMBAT):

Qik Characteristic + Sprint Ability + Init Ratings of Armor & Shield - Your ENC Decrease

ATK SCORE (MELEE WEAPONS):

Dex Characteristic + Weapon Ability + Weapon's Atk Rating + Atk Rating of Shield - ENC Decrease

ATK SCORE (MISSILE WEAPONS):

Per Characteristic + Weapon Ability + Weapon's Atk Rating + Atk Rating of Shield - ENC Decrease

ATK SCORE (UNARMED):

Dex Characteristic + Brawling Ability + Fist/Kick Atk Rating + Atk Rating of Shield - ENC Decrease

DFN SCORE (ARMED):

Qik Characteristic + Weapon Ability + Weapon's Dfn Rating + Dfn Rating of Shield - ENC Decrease

DFN SCORE (UNARMED):

Qik Characteristic + Brawling Ability + Fist/Kick Dfn Rating + Dfn Rating of Shield - ENC Decrease

DAM SCORE (MELEE WEAPONS ONLY):

Your Str + Your Weapon's Dam Rating

SOAK SCORE:

Your Sta + Your Arnor's Prot Rating

Better Put Something Down, and No One Will Take This Much Encumbrance. To determine your level of Encumbrance, use the chart below to compare your Strength with the total Load of everything you're carrying.

Strength	Light	Loaded	Over-loaded	Put Down	No One Will...
-3	< 0.5	0.5	1	2	4
-2	< 1	1	2	4	6
-1	< 2	2	4	6	8
0	< 4	4	6	8	10
1	< 6	6	8	10	12
2	< 8	8	10	12	14
3	< 10	10	12	14	16
4 +	— Add 2 per additional point —				

When you are Loaded or worse, you suffer an **Encumbrance Decrease** to all rolls in which Strength, Stamina, Dexterity, or Quickness are components. The decreases are as follows:

Degree of Encumbrance	Decrease
Light	0
Loaded	1
Overloaded	3
Better Put Something Down	5
No One Will Take...	8

Your **Move** is derived from your Sprint Ability (or lack thereof). Use the chart below to find yours.

Your Sprint Ability	Full Move
0	15 paces
1	20 paces
2	25 paces
3	30 paces

Your **Response** score is used by runners in creating game statistics for your foes. You'll need to write it down for the runner at the beginning of each encounter. It is your highest overall modifier (that is, both governing Characteristic and Ability rating) of any of the following: Awareness, Balance, Bravery, Dodge, Sprint, or Engagement. For this purpose, **Engagement** is your Str + best melee weapon Ability.

Now figure out the rest of your stats according to the formulae listed in the box above.

STEP 6: START PLAYING!

To restate our point, character differentiation in **Rune** happens in play, when you spend your victory points on special powers and such, not at the start. The sooner your character gets out into the world of adventure, the sooner you can make him the envy of all of your opponents!

RULES BASICS

The most important element of a combat-oriented RPG is, of course, rolling dice.

You are one of the pillagers. Your hero is deep in the underground, in a strange cavern that seems to swallow up and feed upon the light from his torch. He steps carefully forward. Suddenly, a net falls upon him! Can he avoid the net, or will he be trapped?

Of course he can avoid the net! He is a hero, and heroes make their own luck by the strength of their backs, the speed of their feet, and the quickness of their wit.

NON-COMBAT ROLLS

When you try to do something in the game, and the outcome of your attempt is uncertain, you roll a ten-sided die and add it to your bonus, a number derived from some combination of your hero's Characteristics, Abilities, and **Gifts** (the special powers from the gods that you can buy with victory points; these are listed in the **Rune** rulebook). The runner then compares it to a **Difficulty** number listed in his encounter notes. The tougher the task, the higher this number will be. For example, a Difficulty of 5 would be very easy, while one of 16+ is superhuman. A Difficulty of 6 is the average. If the total of your roll beats the Difficulty, you succeed at whatever you're trying to do. Again, for **Standard rolls** the formula is as follows:

STANDARD & SINGULAR ROLLS

Ability + Governing Char. + Gifts + 1d10 vs Difficulty

In Standard rolls each hero rolls once; successful heroes gain a benefit (like a bonus to their next roll) or avoid a negative consequence (like a trap); unsuccessful heroes lose the benefit or suffer a negative consequence. However, as you probably deduced from the above formula's title, the designer can also pay for a **Singular roll**, in which only one hero rolls; if he succeeds, all the heroes enjoy the benefit or suffer the negative consequence. The formula is the same for Singular rolls as for Standard ones.

Singular rolls can also be **No-Fault rolls** — all the characters can roll and they all gain a benefit or avoid a negative consequence if even one hero suc-

ceeds — or they can be **Rush rolls** — only one hero need make the roll, and only he enjoys the gain or suffers the pain.

In some cases, the hero might try to exceed a supporting character's roll instead of rolling against a flat Difficulty. For this kind of **Opposed roll**, the formula is as follows:

OPPOSED ROLLS

Ability + Governing Char. + Gifts + 1d10 vs Opponent's Ability + Governing Char. + Gifts + 1d10

Various circumstances set out in the rules may change your die roll either upwards or downwards. A number added to your die roll is called an **increase**. A number subtracted from your die roll is a **decrease**.

Sometimes something bad will happen to your hero and he will suffer a decrease to every roll he makes until the problem is rectified, either by your actions or through the simple passage of time. This state is known as **Impairment**. Each point of decrease is called an Impairment point. The opposite of this is **Invigoration**, which gives your hero an increase for a certain amount of time.

EARNING (& LOSING) VICTORY POINTS

The goal of all this rolling of dice is, of course, to earn the most victory points and win the game. Some ways a pillager can earn victory points include:

- One victory point for every point of damage his hero deals to a foe.
- 50% of the foe's Might rating when his hero deals the final death blow.
- Every time a hero succeeds at a roll specified in the encounter notes, his pillager gains victory points equal to three times the difference between the Difficulty and the result of the roll.
- One victory point for every ounce of silver the heroes return to their families or communities.
- If you play the runner's hero for him, you get 50% of the victory points for the things he did.

But pillagers can also lose victory points just as quickly as they rack them up. They can lose points in the following ways:

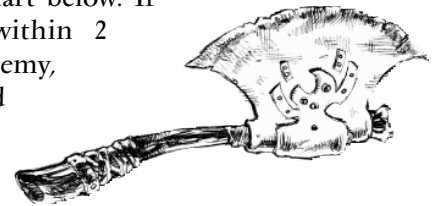
- One victory point for each point of damage their heroes suffer.
- If a pillager's hero dies, his score is automatically 0.
- Sometimes encounters penalize heroes for dishonorable behavior, subtracting victory points as a loss of status.
- If a pillager deliberately chooses to have his hero attack another, he deducts five victory points for every point of actual damage dealt to his victim. If the hero he attacks dies, the aggressor's score is automatically 0.
- Pillagers suffer a penalty for each hero, other than their own, who died in the course of the encounter; 75 points from the winner, 45 from the runner-up, and 30 from the second runner-up.
- 50% of your victory points for not running an encounter when it's your turn, as well as 50% of all victory points you earn until you actually do it.

GLORIOUS COMBAT!

Of course, in order to earn all of these victory points you've got to know how to bash Loki's minions! Each pillager rolls to see who goes first, applying his hero's **Initiative score** for the weapon he plans to use (or his unarmed INIT score if the pillager wants to just beat someone to a pulp) to this roll as a bonus. Pillagers who intend to engage in activity other than combat roll their heroes' non-combat Initiative score to determine the order of action.

Each hero gets to act in the order of his Initiative total, from highest to lowest. When your turn comes in the Initiative order, the runner asks what you want your hero to do. You can answer by using the flowchart below. If

your hero is within 2 paces of an enemy, he is considered **Engaged** with him.



COMBAT FLOWCHART

A. TO HIT, OR NOT TO HIT?

If your hero is trying to hit a target, you must specify who or what the target is, and which weapon will be employed in the smiting. Go to Question B. If you want your hero to do something other than hit a target with a weapon, you must specify what this other action might be. Skip to Question G.

B. IS YOUR TARGET IN RANGE?

If your target is already within range of your hero, he has some extra time in which he can make other choices. Go to Question C. If your target is not within range, go to Question E.

C. IS YOUR WEAPON READY?

If your hero's weapon is not ready, he has no choice but to ready it. Then he hits as normal. If his weapon is ready, he has more options available to him. Go to Question D.

D. HOLD GROUND OR DUCK & WEAVE?

If your hero started his action already in range of the target, and with an appropriate weapon already in hand, you can choose between two advantageous maneuvers. By **holding ground**, you add 1 to your ATK score for the duration of the round. By **ducking and weaving**, you add 1 to your DEF score for the duration. The higher your INIT, the more advantageous it is to duck and weave.

Once you've gained an advantage from either option, your hero can't switch to an incompatible maneuver or attack form later in the round. He's stuck with your previous declaration.

E. CAN YOU MOVE WITHIN RANGE?

With the runner's assistance, you must determine whether it is possible to move within range as part of your hero's action. The number of paces he can move and still attempt to attack someone depends on your Sprint Ability rating. Heroes never have a move lower than a Sprint rating of 0.

If the distance between hero and target is equal to or less than the number of paces he can move, go to Question F. If not, your proposed attack is impossible. Select a new opponent, or forego an action this round.

F. ONCE WITHIN RANGE, IS YOUR WEAPON READY?

If you must move your hero to get within range of an enemy, you must have an appropriate weapon already at hand. Otherwise, you can't hit him and must either select an opponent already within range, or forgo your action this round.

G. WHAT IS YOUR NON-COMBAT ACTION?

If you choose not to have your hero hit something, you have a number of choices available. You can **Seize Ground**, **Seek Cover**, **Withdraw**, **Flee**, perform a **Reckless Move**, **Administer Healing**, **Change Weapons**, **Wait for Opportunity**, or some other action. See the **Rune** rulebook for more on each of these.

DAMAGE AND HEALING

Often the difference between your roll total and the Difficulty (or the roll of your foe) becomes important. This is also true when figuring damage.

MELEE ATTACKS

$\{[(\text{Attacker's Roll} + \text{ATK Score}) - (\text{Defender's Roll} + \text{DEF Score})] + \text{DAM Score}\}$
 - Soak = Hit Points Lost

MISSILE ATTACKS:

$\{[(\text{Attacker's Roll} + \text{ATK Score}) - (6 + \text{Attack Modifiers})] + \text{DAM Score}\}$
 - Soak = Hit Points Lost

When your hero suffers damage over and above his Soak, temporarily reduce his hit points by that number. When that damage is also equal to or greater than his Wound Threshold, he not only temporarily loses that number of hit points, but also gains a Wound.

He can take more than one Wound in a single hit. If the damage is equal to or greater than twice his Wound Threshold, he takes two Wounds. Unless, that is, it also is equal to or greater than three times his Wound Threshold, in which case he takes three Wounds, and so on.

For each Wound he suffers, he takes 1 point of Impairment. When his Wound total reaches 4, he becomes Incapacitated. He's still conscious, but in so much pain that he can't move (except to writhe in pain), think (except about the incredible agony he's experiencing), or speak (although horrifying groans are permissible).

The instant that his hit points reach 0, or his Wound total reaches 5, the character is in danger of immediate death. Unless healed instantly (see below), you cough up some blood, utter a final curse against your foes, loll your tongue out of your head, collapse like a sack of rocks, and die.

Luckily, heroes heal up between every encounter; they also shed any Impairment points they've gained due to circumstances arising from the previous encounter. However, sometimes heroes will find themselves sufficiently injured in mid-encounter that they'll want to crawl off somewhere and heal before continuing. Unwounded heroes return to maximum hit points after eight hours of sleep and eight hours of rest.

A Wound is an injury too horrible to recover from by merely sitting up against a tree for a while and giving voice to the occasional manly grunt. If your hero is wounded, a character with the Healing Ability must get to work on him with his kit of splints, bandages, medicines, and poultices. Bleeding characters can also benefit from a healer, but can, if needed, heal up purely via the aforementioned manly grunt method.



RUNE

BY ROBIN D. LAWS

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PO BOX 131233
 ROSEVILLE, MN 55113
INFO@ATLAS-GAMES.COM
WWW.ATLAS-GAMES.COM