A ONE-SHOT FOR BAND OF BLADES

FLIGHT FROM ETTENMARK

A simple introductory mission to the game for convention use.

When you pitch for the game, keep it short and touch on the core fiction and style of the game; be clear about potentially triggering topics. An example:

> *Band of Blades is about a shattered mercenary company engaged in a fighting retreat from an army of undead—and more disturbing monsters—led by corrupted avatars of the gods. It is about war, sacrifice, and inevitable loss. We will focus on the survivors' retreat from Ettenmark, and their attempt to protect the Legion Commander from capture. This game involves violence, body horror, and zombies.*

Once the players have gathered, ask the following:

- Has anyone played BitD games before? (How familiar are you with the system?)
- Is anyone familiar with Band of Blades? (How much do you know?)

These questions make it easier to tailor how you're going to proceed. If all players have a lot of experience with one, either, or both, you don't need dwell on those particulars.

THE BASICS

If anyone is not familiar with BitD games, explain the basic mechanics:

> *You roll a number of d6s to determine what happens when you take an action. The result is based on your highest roll. A 1-3 is a total failure. A 4 or 5 is a success with a complication. A 6 is a complete success. If you roll two 6s, you succeed and you gain an additional effect!*
>
> *Before we roll, I will tell you how dangerous the action you want to take is and how much effect you will have if you succeed. And since Band of Blades is a fiction-first game, before rolling, you should always detail what your character is doing to accomplish their goal, because that might make what you're doing less dangerous or more effective!*
>
> *There are additional mechanics that I will point some of those out during character creation, and the rest as they come up in play.*

THE SETTING OVERVIEW

Reiterate the pitch, and then, if everyone is not familiar with the core details of BoB, give a brief overview of the setting, then check to see if there are any questions.

> *The setting is comparable to an early-Renaissance age with some fantastical elements. Gunpowder, muskets, and crude explosives exist on the battlefield alongside swords, armor, and archery; there are also clockwork contraptions and weird alchemical science. There are no elves, dragons, wizards, or similar high fantasy trappings, but there are strange beasts, and places of divine power or weird effect. These are often due to the actions of the Chosen of the gods—the Chosen are powerful individuals who have been given the ability to create miracles at the cost of their humanity and lifespan.*
>
> *In the current era, former champions of the gods, now known as the Broken, were corrupted by a being known only as the Cinder King. The Broken lead vast armies of the undead and other monstrosities in a campaign to destroy all life. Against them stand the armies of the Eastern Kingdoms, who have recently discovered an alchemical substance known as 'blackshot' capable of destroying the undead. With blackshot, and the surviving Chosen of the gods, the Eastern armies managed to push the undead back...but no one was prepared for the horrors the Broken had been creating and unleashed against them at the Battle of Ettenmark Fields. The Eastern armies were slaughtered and its few survivors are now in full rout.*

SAFETY TOOLS

Decide what safety tools to use during the game: lines & veils, the x-card, or others. Discuss to find out if there are any particular subjects players would prefer to avoid or gloss over.

Describe these if players are unfamiliar with them.

- **Lines** : things that are not acceptable and will not be included or referred to.
- **Veils** : things that may be included, but only if referred to and never shown.
- **X-card** : hold up the card to stop a scene to remove personally triggering elements.

WHY A ONE-SHOT?

The usual first missions in the book can be used for convention games, but they do not introduce all the varied parts of the game. While showcasing the full complexity of the campaign phase is not achievable in this format, it is still possible to give players a taste of it while also making that phase meaningful to the circumstances of play, rather than postscript.

CHARACTER CREATION

This step proceeds similarly to the first missions in the book, with a few key differences. Before helping the group create characters together, explain the situation in which they will find themselves.

> *You will be playing members of the Legion, a centuries-old mercenary company. The Legion was thousands strong, but in the aftermath of the battle here at Ettenmark, you fear that you handful are the last.*
>
> *The Legion has been broken in the past, even destroyed, but the Legion's Annals—their written records, which any legionnaire would die to protect—have always been carried forward by a survivor, and the company reformed.*
>
> *Perhaps, if you can reach the Western Front, there may be others to regroup with. Hopefully, one of them has carried the Annals to safety. Your more immediate concern is the undead closing in on you, seeking to kill you, and to capture the Legion's Commander.*

The main goal is to finish character creation in fifteen-to-twenty minutes maximum. Encourage players not to spend too long or invest a lot of thought into who the character is during creation—we don't need to know these things *before* we start playing. Instead, as is the BitD motto, we play to find out.

PICK A SQUAD: The players are the surviving members of a specific Legion squad. Briefly tell the players about the nature of each of the Legion's squads and ask them which squad they think sounds the most interesting to play.

- **Shattered Lions** : The elite; the standard-bearers. "Pride of the Legion."
- **Ember Wolves** : The shock troops; fearless volunteers. "First into the Fray."
- **Grinning Ravens** : The second wave; overtake and hold. "We Laugh at Death."
- **Ghost Owls** : The spec ops; quick and quiet. "Calm Before the Storm."
- **Silver Stags** : The rear guard; when the line cannot fall. "No Matter the Cost."
- **Star Vipers** : The weirdos; trained to face the supernatural. "In Darkness We Shine."

SPECIALISTS: Explain these roles quickly. Use common gaming parlance (tank, healer, tactician, sniper, sneak, rookie) for ease of understanding. Let the players know that for this game, two people will play Specialists and the others will play Rookies. One person may play a Medic. Ask if any of those roles immediately appeal to anyone.

If someone balks at playing a Rookie, explain they are just as capable as Specialists, but haven't been with the Legion long. They can play them as green recruits, or aged experts.

Provide players with the heritage handouts. Then walk through these exact steps *together*. Have everyone say what they've picked.

1. Pick your playbook.
2. Choose a heritage.
3. Give your character a name.
4. Choose two heritage traits. (Good time to answer more questions about the system.)
5. Pick a Special Ability. (Mention the first ability is always a good choice.)
6. Put four dots in your actions. (Explain what actions are and the Specialist action.)
7. Fiction check. (Ask about and have players add heritage details if they have not.)
   - "What kind of mask does your Orite wear?"
   - "What is your Panyar's animal feature?"
   - "What sorts of jewelry does your Bartan wear?"
   - "What blood-oaths has your Zemyati sworn?"

You may instead distribute pre-generated characters—excepting name and heritage.

SUPPORTING CAST

The Squaddies: Write the names, heritage, and a single detail about each of the Rookies on notecards and put these where everyone can see them. Explain the bonus that squad receives if all the Rookies are acting together in an appropriate circumstance. Tell them if anyone loses their character, they can then play one of these Rookies.

The Commander: Ignore the other command roles, but walk through the process of describing the Legion Commander. Ask what the Commander's heritage is, their name, and pick their looks and attitude, as would be normally done. (You don't need to explain this yet, but the Commander will count as an oath-sworn NPC. Give him a small clock.)

The Map: The map is deliberately vague regarding distances, areas, and locations. Explain the key setting details here regarding the nature of Dar and the Gap. Otherwise, let the players tell you what the items on the map really mean as the details come up in play. This helps show off the co-authoring nature of the game. Examples:

- "What is happening in the village right now? How big is it?"
- "Is the rear camp still free? Who is still fighting there?"
- "Is the fort defensible? Is it currently occupied?"
- "What are the barrows?"
- "How far is it to the citadel?"

THE DIVINE

The Chosen: Provide the players a one-to-two sentence overview of each Chosen. Ask the players which Chosen's army they would like to have been marching and working with.

- *Shreya is a cold, calculating, consummate Bartan general, Chosen of Asrika, the goddess of Mercy.* Her forces are in the north, using the village as a rally point in defense the farmlands—a breadbasket for the kingdom of Aldermark.
- *The Horned One is a strange, angry, shapeshifting Panyar girl, Chosen of the Horned One.* Her forces are scattered across the western plain and hills, formed into hunting groups using guerilla tactics to harass and distract the Broken's undead.
- *Zora is a valiant, personable, (literally) fiery Zemyati warrior, Chosen of the Living God.* Her forces are in the south, riding through the old barrows and deserted lands, making a push towards the border of Dar and the heart of the Cinder King's power.

Explain that in a full campaign, the Legion would gain a beneficial blessing due to the Chosen with whom they travel, but the circumstances that lead to this haven't occurred yet. While the Chosen will (probably) not be involved in this mission, this will still provide an important choice for the players: the narrative details of the current situation, such as the location of the survivors and the various paths of retreat available.

The Broken: As with the Chosen, provide a one-to-two sentence overview of each Broken. Have the group choose one Broken whose forces they faced during the battle, and another whose forces were closing in. Describe the two basic types of enemy for each Broken and have them pick one from each. If they can't decide, just pick a couple yourself!

- *Fleshblighter the Foul, Plaguebringer, is a macabre Bartan alchemist with a dark sense of humor, once Chosen of the Crafter god, former lover of Shreya.* Her Crows wear black cloaks and plaguemasks and are utterly silent. Her Rotters are once-living beings forced into undeath, and bear a savage hate for the living.
- *Stormbreaker, Weather Witch, the Bringer of Thunder, is a perverse, murderous Bartan mystic who twists the natural order and the senses, once Chosen of Vazara.* Her Burned are undead whose blackened bodies still burn inside. Her Hexed are people whose minds are dulled and dominated by hexes carved into their flesh.
- *Bonerender, the Burned One, the Hollow Knight, is a black-armored, hate-filled, brutal warrior who stands seven-feet tall, once Chosen of the Living God.* His Gaunt have armored plates bolted-and-fused to their flesh. His Hounds are blinded, mutilated people with chains fused to their bones, and smell living breath.

Ask the players which of the enemy type they chose is the imminent threat? Use these details when you begin free play and discuss what events led to the current circumstances.

INTRO AND FREE PLAY

Grab the mission sheet. Talk about the generic problems/obstacles faced by the squad, and establish the basic clocks (supplies, escape, the trap is closing). As a group decide:

- What were the characters doing when disaster struck?
- How did they find each other, or did they retreat together?
- Where have they gathered? Describe the place and situation.
- How do they know the undead are hunting for the Commander...or do they know?

Go into free play and focus the interactions on the Commander crouched in the mud with the Specialists, going over the pressing details of their situation, seeking input on how to proceed, while the non-player Rookies maintain a watch. Let everyone provide at least one piece of input, then have the watch announce: "THE UNDEAD ARE HERE!"

MISSION PREP

There are a number of set-up actions to run through. Grab the gear handout and briefly explain Load—that they have two Utility item choices, plus *all* the items from the Load they choose *and* any smaller Load—then have them choose.

- **Light** : You're fast and quiet.
- **Normal** : You're slow.
- **Heavy** : You're loud and slow.

To simulate the Quartermaster part of the campaign phase, ask what single Supplies the survivors managed to salvage nearby, took with them when they fled, or have immediately on hand, choosing from among: *blackshot*, *horses*, *food*, or *reliquaries*. You may also include an *Alchemist* or *Mercy* here as "supply" options if you wish. *Don't* talk about how this choice will affect the forthcoming Engagement roll.

- **Blackshot** kills (most) undead with one hit.
- **Horses** let you move faster and carry supplies you might find.
- **Food** guarantees the entire squad has enough to eat.
- **Reliquaries** protect you from the Corruption undead inflict.

Optional:

- **Alchemists** can create strange, useful concoctions.
- **Mercies** can heal wounds...by suffering those same wounds.

ENGAGEMENT ROLL

To simulate the mission choice element of the campaign phase, have the group decide what kind of mission it sounds like they are undertaking, based on some of the conversation from free play, and what they want their escape to look like.

- **Assault** : You're going to charge through and cut down your enemies, ending the threat to you to make your escape safer. Perhaps with abandon, or incisive strikes.
- **Recon** : You're going to carefully avoid engaging the enemy, and out-maneuver the threats to hide your escape and prevent pursuit. Perhaps careful planning, or stealth.
- **Supply** : You're going to gather supplies and information on your enemy, maybe even find allies, to survive after your escape. Perhaps other legionnaires, or civilians.
- **Religious** : You're going to seek out or call up an ancient power to protect you, to guarantee your escape. Perhaps the Chosen, or a site of strange power.

With all this decided, start the Engagement roll process. Explain how the roll works, and the positions the roll can result in. Explain how their previous choices have impacted this roll, and that the Marshal normally decides what sorts of supplies to send with on a mission ...but the current situation is dicey and there's really been no time for planning.

SIMPLIFYING SETUP

You may have more limited time to play through this mission than usual, or some convention tables might feel overwhelmed by the amount of choices offered here. The above set-up options can be simplifed by doing most of the prep work and making certain choices for the players before the game.

- Create five **Specialists** and five **Rookies** ahead of time. Fill out the action dots and special ability, but leave name and heritage open for the player to choose.
- Make five **notecards** with a name, heritage, and detail for each **NPC rookie**, but let the players choose which squad they are members of.
- Decide which **Broken** and **enemy troops** the group will face, but offer the players the choice of which troop is the immediate threat at the start of engagement roll.
- Detail the **Commander** ahead of time. Give him a name and descriptive traits.

One note of caution is that doing this can take away the "taste of the full experience" this one-shot is attempting to provide.

For play, please have the following available:

- The Mission Sheet
- 2 of each Specialist Playbook
- 5 Rookie Playbooks
- 1 or 2 Heritage Handouts
- 1 or 2 Gear Handouts
- The Large Map
- A stack of blank notecards
- 4 or 5 6-sided dice (plus some spares)
- 6-7 pencils & a sharpener
- Scratch paper or notebook
- The Band of Blades rulebook
- Character tokens (not required)

If you obtained this PDF by itself, you can find the necessary copies of the Mission Sheet, Heritage handouts, and the Ettenmark map—as well as a variety of resources and links with useful material for playing *Band of Blades*—at http://wildhunt.daegmorgan.net/blades/