

Appendix A: Tournaments

Tournaments are an exciting new sporting event in which groups of knights fighting with blunted weapons try to knock each other off their horses. Tournaments, originally called *bastiludes* (“spear play”), begin as battlefield practice sessions for knights and squires. In time, the practice sessions became spectator events, attracting throngs of people.

Noble families, the clergy, and their retainers, always attend tournaments, as well as merchants, who set up market stalls, and diverse performers, who ply their various artistic trades. Commoners mob the sidelines, gawping at the spectacle, draining pints of ale, cheering for their favorite knights, and dancing to the music. Thus, a single tournament may be an adventure unto itself as roleplaying opportunities are plentiful. You never know who may show up. The presence of important lords, such as bannerets, counts, dukes, and kings, gives a participating knight a good opportunity to draw attention to themselves or their cause.

Every prospective participant must meet the following requirements to enter a tournament:

- ✦ Only knights may enter tournaments. Whether a vassal, household, or mercenary knight does not matter, but squires and cavalry may participate only in special events for them.
- ✦ Knights without honor or of ill repute may not participate.
- ✦ The rules allow participation in disguise.
- ✦ Participants must sometimes pay a fee.

The Invocation

On the morning of the tournament, the sponsor (usually a highly-ranked noble) gives a speech called the Invocation. The knightly contestants parade before the judges (who may be knights and ladies alike) and onlookers in an elaborate ceremonial procession. The heralds then present the Lady of the Tournament, who might be the sponsor’s wife or a marriageable lady whose hand may be offered to the victor. The sponsor then introduces the Grand Marshall, who is in charge of running the event; the judges, who are usually well-known veteran, lords, and ladies; and the many heralds who work on the melee field to ensure fairness and oversee the details. The sponsor also displays the prize or prizes they will award, and states the terms of capture and the ransoms the judges will enforce during the melee.

The Grand Melee

The grand melee is a mock battle. At the time of these scenarios, it is the major event of the tournament. The combat field is several square miles with vague boundaries, generally between two villages where the opposing teams are lodging. At either end, a *recet* (or recess) is marked out; these are the “rear areas” for each team. The recet is banked and surrounded by armed footmen whose job is to keep out opposing knights who may try to invade. Lords often bring large numbers of their retainers to help with the defense.

A grand melee may last from half a day up to several days, depending on size and sponsor.

Contestants divide into two roughly even sides and charge at each other with lances when they receive the signal, entering into melee as their lances break. The teams are sub-divided into conrois who provide mutual support and may share in the loot collected and in paying ransoms for captives.

It is possible for friends to rescue a captive before they enter the recet as a captured knight. The knights’ assistants are their squires and kippers, whose job is to lead or, if necessary, drag captives off the field into the recet where they are held. Sometimes, the judges even allow contingents of footmen on the field to help out their lords. During the fight, knights can retire to their own recet to receive First Aid, rest, or have a drink and snack, but they will rush back into the fight if they see their side is getting the worst of it.

Judges keep watch over the field, with heralds pointing out exciting combats for the spectators. At the end of the day, the judges determine the best fighter, who is awarded a prize. A grand melee may continue the next day or several days. The judges commonly give out an award each day.

At the end of the day, a feast takes place with music, dances, jongleurs, bards, and troubadours entertaining late into the night. Similar feasts occur every night of the event.

After the last event, or on the last day, the sponsor names the winners of the events and gives them their prizes, and then everyone acclaim the champion as the knight of honor (*chevalier d’honneur*). All combatants, unarmed and unarmored, meet in the lists before the spectators and embrace each other in friendship to prove they hold no grudges.

A final feast occurs; after this, the knights disperse. Those too wounded to travel remain until they are able, guests of their host.



Rebated Weapon Damage

A rebated weapon is not sharp and therefore less lethal—emphasis on *less*. Rebated weapons can still be deadly! Whether through edge blunting, point removal, or similar safety measures, the character deals half of their rolled damage with this kind of weapon. A critical hit adds +4D6 as normal, added before halving the damage.

Remember that for the purpose of determining Knockdown, always look at the full damage amount rolled before halving.

Characters may also choose to Withhold Damage (see *Book II* on p. 40) with a rebated weapon. In this case, roll the reduced number of dice from the Withhold Damage Action, calculate Knockdown, then halve it for the rebated weapon damage.

Tournament Melee Procedure

A melee pits one team against another. Player-knights must choose a team to join before the battle begins, along with a conroi leader, and fight with all the rules presented in the Battle system found in **Appendix B**, for that is exactly what a tournament melee is—a mock battle. The Gamemaster must assemble a list of Encounters appropriate for a tournament (i.e., exclusively knights). The melee size corresponds to regular battle sizes, but Intensity is only half.

Individual Glory awards may be won for defeating opponents as always, but because rebated weapons are used, the award is just one-tenth of the normal Glory indicated by the Encounter.

Heralds and judges keep track of deeds or prowess, and the tournament Grand Prize goes to whomever the judges decide was the most valiant, dashing, and effective in the melee (in game terms, this is usually based on Glory).

The rules for tournament melee are simple and few:

- ✦ Lances and sharp weapons are rebated.
- ✦ A knight is defeated when they are unhorsed, knocked unconscious, killed (accidentally, of course), or surrenders.



- ✦ When an opponent is defeated, their steed may be taken and becomes the prize of the winner if the knight or their squire can bring it to the safe area and leave it there.
- ✦ Knights on the same team, and especially in the same conroi, are expected to assist each other.
- ✦ Multiple opponents may attack an individual knight.

Peripheral Tournament Events

Tournaments are full of opportunities to roll Traits and Passions. Player-knights may indulge whichever of these that the Player desires. A great feast occurs before the contests start, followed by church the next morning. Player-knights wishing to feast check Indulgent, while those who abstain check Temperate. Likewise, the decision to attend church or not gives a check to Spiritual or Worldly, respectively. The presence of so many eligible partners gives an opportunity for a Lustful check, or if resisting them, a Chaste check.

Knights may have the opportunity to take part in social contests if desired. These are opposed Courtly Skill rolls of all the participants, with one winner. All Player-knights roll at once, and inferior rolls are eliminated. If there is a tie for the best roll, the participants must continue to roll until one of them wins.

What About the Joust?

The modern reader no doubt associates tournaments with jousting, and over the reign of King Arthur this sport does indeed rise in popularity, eventually eclipsing and even replacing the grand melee.

However, during the time period covered by the Starter Set, tournaments are still a brand-new phenomenon; the formal rules for jousting (the *joust a plaisance*) are yet to be developed, much less implemented on the field.

Jousts are not the only thing that appears in later tournaments, either. Displays of helms and shields, formal challenges, and general pageantry put on by knights and gentry alike turn the tournament into a true spectacle. Eventually, tournaments begin requiring entry fees and even wagers of horse and harness, making the event into a potentially lucrative source of income for skilled knights.

But that is a tale for another day...

