

# Solving The Riddle

An epic expansion for  
The Riddle Of Steel

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## Introduction

This supplement to The Riddle of Steel expands the game into a more heroic and epic direction, increasing the importance of The Riddle and of related elements such as oracles, prophecies and destinies.

Using the additional rules herein will make the characters – and some NPC adversaries – more powerful. It does not, however, turn them into super heroes.

The main game-mechanics element of **Solving The Riddle** is the addition of Riddles. These new game elements work similar to spiritual attributes, but on a somewhat grander scale.

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# Riddleseeking

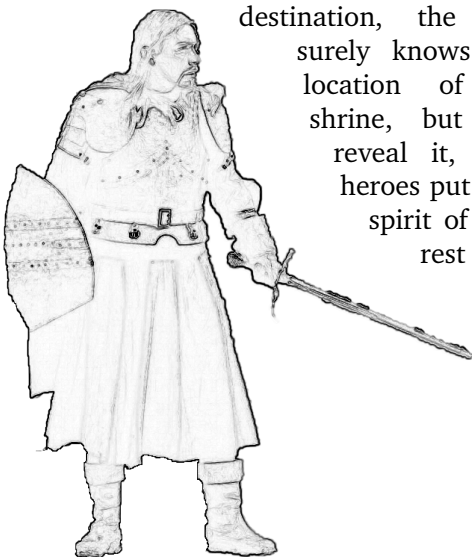
Once a character engages seriously on the path of Riddleseeking, he can find, quest for and solve lesser riddles. That is what **Solving The Riddle** is about. These lesser riddles not only mark the progress of a riddleseeker on his way, they also provide him with aid in his quest, and along the way the character will grow.

## Riddles

In game mechanics, riddles are simply quests or adventures, though they do not have to be the kind of adventure you sit down to specifically play out – a riddle can well extend as a sideline story over multiple sessions where other adventures are played. A riddle is especially suited to link various adventures together, if each adventure contains a part of the riddle, and solving the riddle makes the heroes stumble into each of the adventures, much like most movies do it (main plot plus many distractions).

### Example:

The riddle is to find out what happened to the Shrine of Yagora. It consist of several sub-steps the first one likely being to find out just what Yagora is and where the Shrine is or used to be. Unless it is right around the corner, the heroes will have to travel there. During those travels all sorts of adventures can happen, and at their destination, the old man surely knows the exact location of the old shrine, but he won't reveal it, unless the heroes put the restless spirit of his wife to rest first.



## Finding a Riddle

The first step along the path is finding a riddle to solve. The problem with riddleseeking is not so much the answers as the *questions*. Not any question will do, of course. Proper riddles are not easily found.

A riddle can be found either by intentionally searching for it, or by stumbling upon it, through fate.

All riddles are contained in the same kind of source – in ancient prophecies, the saying of oracles, quests issued by wise men or through miracles and in the voices of the gods. They are, in a word, not so much found as given. It is not so much the riddle that is searched for, it is the sources of riddles. Once the oracle or the old hermit or wherever the riddleseeker is hoping to find his riddle has been found, there is still no guarantee for a riddle there. In other words: Riddles are always given out by the Seneschal if and when he is ready to guide his group through riddleseeking.

When giving a riddle, the Seneschal must decide whether to give it to one character, or to the group as a whole. If a group shares a riddle, they will all share any progress being made. Sometimes, there will be a favour asked, or a gift required even before the riddle is given, though that is the exception rather than the rule.

A riddle is, at its core, a quest. It may be a quest for an artifact, or for wisdom. It might be the finding of a long-lost document but it may well be a more complicated matter, involving the overthrowing of a king or the destruction of a haunted tower. A small riddle can be a single adventure, but most riddles should reside in the background of an entire campaign, tying the adventures together and adding more depths to the characters actions.

A well-constructed riddle will only hint at its solution, and require the riddleseeker to follow it step by step, because each step is needed to reveal the next one. Each step is worth 1 point of progress.

Riddles come in three sizes;

- A minor riddle consists of 3 steps
- A major riddle has 6 steps
- The rare epic riddles take 9 steps to solve.

Sometimes, the characters will know the size of the riddle they have been given, sometimes only the Seneschal knows for sure and the characters (and players) have to guess.

**Example:**

The group encounters a hermit in the depths of the stahlisch mountains, who gives them a minor riddle. A visit to a nearby abandoned mine to acquire some gems is the first step, quickly concluded by the characters. They all now have one point in this riddle, and two more are needed before the riddle is solved.

## Following a Riddle

During the quest, the characters will come closer and closer to the solution, and by doing so they become more and more entangled in its web. It becomes their fate to solve the riddle, or die trying.

A riddle works similar to the Destiny spiritual attribute while it is being quested for. It grants a number of bonus dice equal to the progress value to all actions that are part of the way towards the next step.

The dice from riddles *do* add up with dice from Spiritual Attributes.

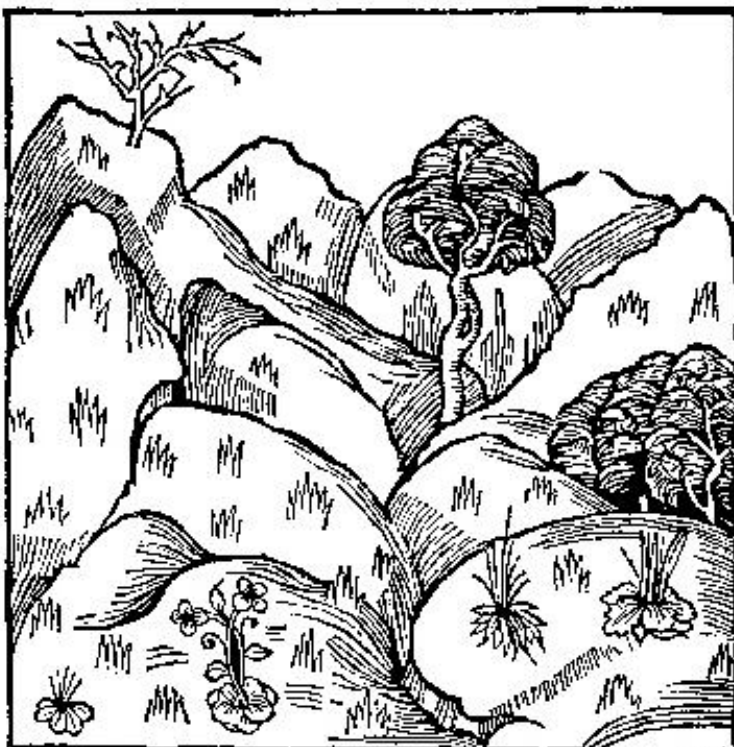
Different from spiritual attributes, the riddle also draws the characters in. They receive dice *penalties* for actions that go – whether intentionally or not – contrary to their quest or away from the riddle. These penalty dice are often subtle, as they represent the invisible hand of fate.

**Example:**

The group still has their unsolved riddle, though 3 steps are already completed. Losing patience, they are trying to travel further south, even though the next step would involve another trip into the mountains, not across the sea.

Negotiations with ship captains to buy a passage are not going well, however. The Seneschal is applying a 3-dice penalty to every social roll involved.

Near the end of a major, or even more so an epic, riddle, the characters become near-unstoppable forces. Likewise, it will be next to impossible for them to pack up and leave. This is the stuff of heroic legends, this is the atmosphere that the Seneschal needs to create. The wheel of fate has been set in motion, and will not be stopped.



## Solving a Riddle

Every riddle ends with a solution. The solution is the final step, and will usually be the most difficult to complete. But once it is completed, the riddle is solved, and the Prize is taken.

The Prize is what a character or a group of characters gain for solving a riddle. It is also a compensation for the loss of the many riddle dice, because once a riddle is complete and solved, the riddle dice do not apply any longer.

Prizes take the form of special abilities. These are like gifts, except often larger and not limited to the naturally possible. Prizes are the mystic abilities of the grandmasters of martial arts, the legendary and unique capabilities of ancient heroes, the unexplainable powers of the riddleseekers.

Every riddle brings a specific Prize as its gift. Prizes are not chosen, they are determined by the riddle solved, much as the earth in which a mine is dug determines which ores the miners will find.

Different characters who solve the same riddle can nevertheless receive different Prizes as their reward.

As Seneschal, you should decide about the Prizes when designing the riddle.

The actual events surrounding the riddle solution should be the climax of the game evening, and a point of high tension. It is important to set it up properly, just like the climax of an adventure or a campaign.

## Prizes

Solving a riddle brings a character closer to The Riddle of Steel, and grants him insights that allow him a deeper understanding of life and the laws of nature. In other words, he gains a Prize, an ability beyond that of normal humans.

Note that Prizes are *not* magical in nature. No natural laws are broken by Prizes, they are merely bend to their limit. Most importantly, they are not spells and thus can not be dispelled, countered or otherwise fall under the magic rules.

As Seneschal, feel free to add your own Prizes to the examples given below. These are really just ideas and you should not consider the list closed. On the contrary, Prizes specifically designed to fit to the riddle solved to gain them add greatly to both the campaign and the characters.

### Minor Prizes

The Prizes for minor riddles should be roughly on the level of gifts – something that is not easily copied with just better skills or higher attributes, but not supernatural in any way, and not “magical” to the eyes of common folk. Most of these Prizes are rather subtle, making the character appear to be lucky or just especially good in something.

### Pressure Points

Intimate knowledge of the human body grants the character the ability to hit sensitive spots on the human body in unarmed combat. By paying an activation cost of 1 die for a punch maneuver, the character can choose to attempt either a knockout strike, dealing double shock damage, or a killing strike, doing +2 damage (i.e. ST bashing).

## Awareness

The character has gained an intuitive awareness to danger and threats. Add +2 dice to all Perception rolls that involve the spotting of danger, hidden enemies or other threats. Do not add dice to rolls of investigation, search or other non-intuitive uses of Perception.

## Armour Skills

Movement in armour is easier for the character, who has become accustomed to it and has learnt to view armour as a second skin. Reduce all CP and Move penalties from armour by -1 (can not be negative, of course, minimum is 0).

## Learning

Knowledge now comes easier to the character. Whenever he rolls MA to raise a skill, he rolls against a TN of 12-(current rating) instead of the normal 15-(current rating).

## Major Prizes

These Prizes should have considerable power, equal to or slightly stronger than major gifts. They go beyond the natural and over use of them might be seen as magical or at least very unusual by common folks.

## Ancient Healing

Using long-forgotten arts of healing and detailed knowledge of the human body, the character is an excellent healer, and can even surpass the medicine of his time. Add "Ancient Healing" as a skill to the character sheet, starting with a skill value of 9, like all new skills. This skill can be used instead of First Aid *and* Surgery and is twice as effective. It can not, however, be taught to anyone who has not solved an appropriate riddle.

## Resilience

Having steeled his mind and body, the character can resist damage to his body more easily, especially the mental effects of shock and pain.

Reduce all shock and pain penalties by 2 points and any blood loss by 1 point.

## Cold Eyes

The character has found internal peace and is resting in himself. He radiates self-control and inner strength. Add 2 dice to any appropriate social rolls and 4 dice to any rolls where the character is resisting attempts to intimidate the character or read his inner feelings.



## Friend of Animals

While he can not exactly talk to them, the character has an exceptional understanding of animals and all but the most distrustful consider him a friend. Add 3 dice to any rolls where he deals with animals (handling them, riding them, befriending them, etc.) and allow the character to

attempt even unlikely tasks (such as befriending a wild animal on the spot). In addition, add 1 die to any and all other rolls involving animals, including sneaking up to them, hunting and trapping. Note that these last two points make this Prize more powerful than the Animal Kin gift. If a character possesses the gift as well, add the bonus dice up.

## Epic Prizes

These are truly powerful abilities, surpassing even major gifts easily. These abilities leave no doubt that their owner knows something that common men does not comprehend.

### Double Combat

Multiple opponents are no longer a problem for a character who has a deep understanding of combat. The character can use his combat pool twice if fighting more than one opponent. The pools do *not* combine, so against each opponent he still only has one pool, but if he is fighting two enemies, he can use his full pool against both instead of having to split it up. Fighting three enemies means he can fight one with the full pool and has another full pool to divide up between the other two, and so on.

### Vitality

Aging does not affect the character as badly anymore now that he understands the workings of life and death.

While the character is not immortal and will still die of old age one day, he does not degenerate as quickly as his fellow humans. Add 3 dice to all aging rolls.

### Deep Understanding

The character has gained a deep understanding of the workings of the world and its workings. He gains +1 MA and two knowledge or lore skills at an SR of 6 immediately. In addition, this Prize works like the Linguist gift, except for knowledge and lore skills.

## Seneschal Instructions

Riddleseeking is a challenge for the Seneschal, as an interesting riddle is even harder to create than a good adventure. Here are a few hints to help:

### Difficulty

Riddles should start easy and grow progressively more difficult. Each step should be harder to solve and more complicated than the one before. However, difficulty needs to be a gentle slope. The difficulty should not suddenly jump from easy to almost impossible.

### Traits

Challenge various aspects of the characters, related to the riddle's nature. Not all steps should be solveable by the same approach. One step may require combat while another one requires stealth or etiquette and diplomacy.

### Groups

When you hand out a riddle to the entire group, do not forget that all characters will receive the riddle dice – and a Prize. Be careful not to hand out too much power for free. A group riddle should be very challenging and take a long while to solve, even if it is a minor riddle.

At the same time, group riddles are excellent ways to tie a group together if the SA or other character interests don't do it.

## A Full Example

The characters encounter an old sage in a small village where they stopped on their way to new adventures and foreign countries (and somewhat on their way away from the town downriver where they are wanted for a good dozen of crimes).

The sage tells them of an ancient king who is buried in the village graveyard, and who once knew the secrets of the human body. His knowledge, his kingdom and he himself have long since been forgotten. But he who finds his body and can trace his cause of death may yet uncover the secret.

*The characters have stumbled on a Riddle. The Seneschal has prepared this Major Riddle for them, so he already knows it will have 6 steps, but the players do not. They will soon find out, as the first step seems to be not far away.*

The characters proceed to the village graveyard and find there several very old and unmarked graves, any of which could belong to the ancient king. They have various ways to find out which is the correct one, including old folk tales which contain the information, albeit in distorted form. They choose the easy way and open all the graves, finding one in which the skeletal form of a knight in full armour and other trappings lies – this must be the ancient king.

*The characters have just solved the first step of this Riddle. Not all first steps are as easy as this one, but for the sake of example, we shall ignore all the potential complications. They have now each gained 1 point in this Riddle, which they can use similar to SA points when it comes to pursuing the Riddle further. At the same time, they will have to deal with a 1 die penalty on all rolls if they try to evade the Riddle.*

Examination of the skeleton does not reveal a likely cause of death. There are no smashed bones or other indications of violent death, though of course an arrow through the heart would not leave any traces on the bones unless it chipped them first.

The heroes turn to the folk legends now, learning along the way that they could have found the grave by looking for the old elm tree, without disturbing the other dead. As far as the death of the ancient king goes, the folk tales only say that he did not die in battle but “of a women's hand”. The women is alternatively a whore, sorceress or spy – but all leads indicate she was from the very realm the king was fighting at that time.

With the village knowledge exhausted, the heroes turn towards the nearest city in the hopes of finding a historian. Many days and difficulties later, they are successful and gain access to the church archives, where the old documents are stored, including diaries of priests from long ago. Through these diaries, the heroes learn the entire saga – the timeframe and name of the kingdom, the king's name and the names and locations of the other kingdoms of that time.

*The characters have just completed the second step of the riddle, learning the forgotten names of the king and his kingdom. They gain a 2<sup>nd</sup> point in this Riddle. Note that they did not know exactly what this step required them to do.*

The heroes travel north, towards an ancient castle which used to be the seat of the very kingdom the ancient king warred when he died. There, they hope to learn more.

Again skipping the dangers of the travel and of getting admittance to the court, they finally piece together local folk lore with some portraits and trophies in the castle to learn who the mysterious woman was – a masterful spy and poisoner of her time, not below sleeping with men to gain access to their secrets or murdering them while they slept.

She was denounced as a witch by her enemies, but apparently died in this very castle of some disease. A tomb is quickly found where she lies buried with all her possessions, which nobody dared to touch for fear of traps, poison or curses.

Among these trappings are several locked chests. One of them contains her diary and

letters. It is locked with a very good lock and trapped. The characters manage to open it.

*This completes step three of the riddle, raising each player's riddle score to 3. Note that this bonus is applied before the characters read the diary. Ignorance will not allow them to withdraw from the riddle easily, reading the diary is in their own interest now.*

Parts of the diary are faded and unreadable, but fragments of the affair with the ancient king can be deciphered. Unfortunately, the page where she apparently describes how she killed him is among the faded pages. However, the page just before tells how a meeting with someone (a name and even a street is given) from a town to the east of the old kingdom was very important. Maybe a poison maker? The characters will have to track him down.

They leave towards that town and reach it several days later. The former town has grown into a small city in the present day. The heroes don't take long to learn that someone with the same last name as in the diary is the head senator of the city. Further research makes it clear that the family considers whatever they were a few centuries ago to be a shame and refuse to give up any information, especially to strangers.

The heroes find out after a long time and much frustration (during which they tried to simply drop the matter but found it impossible to do so due to the 3 dice penalties now arranged against them), the heroes finally learn that the senator's family still follows their old trade of poison makers – only that they nowadays work in secrecy and for their own gains. Armed with this knowledge, the heroes find the other senators much more talkative and after a few days of chaos and a little bloodshed, their second interview with the poisoner family is conducted in the city dungeons.

*The unearthing of the family secret gains the heroes their 4<sup>th</sup> point in this riddle. It was not strictly necessary to reveal the secret and get the poisoner family imprisoned, and while this act causes major political changes in the city, it is not part of the riddle and thus is not rewarded with riddle points. It may, of course, gain the heroes all sorts of SA points depending on what SA they have.*

To abbreviate the story at this point, the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> (and final) steps of the riddle are:

- Learning from the poisoner family what exactly happened to the ancient king those many years ago and from that information learning about his secret laboratory in the cellars of an old monastery, which has since been turned into an orphan home.
- And finally breaking into that laboratory and finding the ancient king's tomes about the healing arts.

As a reward for this riddle, each of the characters is rewarded with the **Ancient Healing Prize**, an ability that not only grants them a deeper understanding, but also will help them considerably in their future travels.