

FIREBORN

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



Be the DRAGON



THE MODERN

They weren't sure what they were hunting, but they knew it was *big*.

The maimed bodies of a half-dozen crusties, street people, had been found near a sewer entrance on the Thames. The bloody footprints of the creature that supposedly did the deed were touted as a hoax, but the police were only too happy to turn the brood — Claude, John, and Moira — on to events around London that looked like they might be related to the supernatural. In other words, to taint and the Dwellers. Only chalk, blood-spatters, and police tape remained to connect the dots at the scene.

As they entered the sewer, the three scions immediately noticed the unmistakable reek — you couldn't smell it, but all three of them thought of it as a scent nonetheless — of taint. They got right to work, the sooner to get out of the unhealthy atmosphere.

Moira found the trail of bloody footprints, about a foot and a half long with seven toes and a giant claw in the heel. There was still human tissue in the cracks in the concrete, left behind when the medics had peeled the corpse off the ground. The trail led to a rift in the tunnel, opening into a vast, dark, underground space. With a flick of her wrist and a few muttered words of power, Moira took a step off the edge of the concrete slab. She calmly stood on nothing at all while she waved her fingers deftly and spoke a few more words. A soft light appeared below her, illuminating the darkness and casting her shadow on the tangle of beams and catwalks that held up the roof some forty feet above them.

"*It's huge,*" Moira thought to her brood-mates, seeing that the chasm opened on a natural underground cavern easily as large or larger than the whole extent of the above-ground sewer-works.

John still thought that the words of power Moira used sounded French, but he knew — that is to say, Moira constantly remind him — that the language was far more ancient than anything spoken in Europe. He was about to crack the predictable joke to lighten the mood when the ceiling collapsed.

Claude had a pair of Glocks in his hand before the first piece of rubble hit the floor.

John's eyes flashed fire and his fingers sprouted claws as he saw the creature they were looking for, riding a chariot of rubble and rebar from the ceiling to the floor.

Moira shrieked and disappeared into the chasm under the avalanche of iron beams and concrete.

"*Moira!?*" John thought in a flash.

It was amazing the way their thought-link could convey emotion as well as meaning; John could sense Moira breathing hard as she reported back, "*I'll live.*"

John was pissed, and more than a little worried, but he'd never admit to that. He and Claude were going to have to fight the thing without Moira's considerable magical talents.

And the mofo was big. About fourteen feet tall with fangs the size of steak knives and claws that hadn't seen a manicure since the first Christmas.

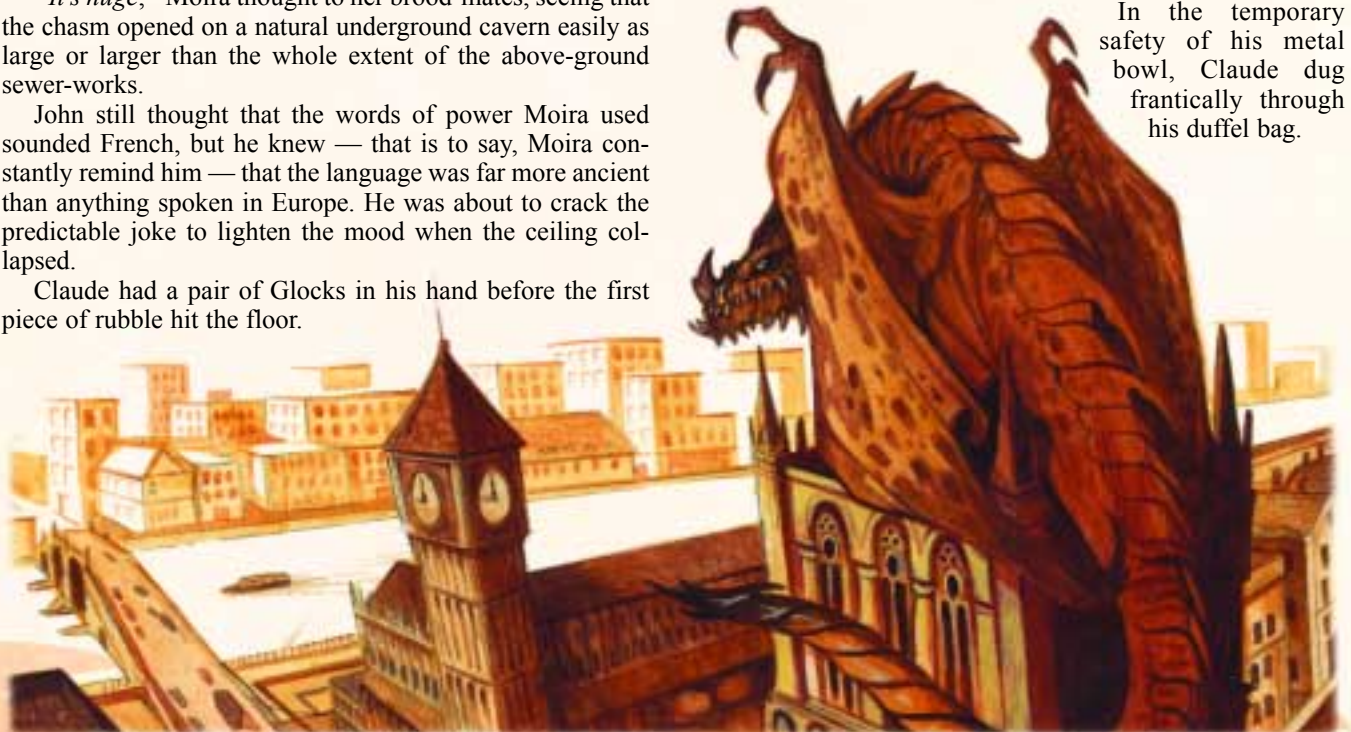
Claude launched himself into the air as the creature advanced on him, somersaulting in an arc that took him over the creature's head and outstretched claws. He passed above his enemy while upside down, and opened up with his hand-cannons as he flew. Both magazines were empty before he landed in an empty metal vat thirty feet from where he had begun his leap. Unfortunately, the .45 caliber slugs had done sod-all against the monstrosity.

John roared to get the creature's attention, fire erupting from his mouth to surround him in a nimbus glow that would shield him — to some extent — from the creature's attacks. John and his enemy took slow steps toward one another, each taking the other's measure.

Then their eyes met, and in a hundredth of an instant they went from fifteen yards apart to directly on top of each other.

It was a dogfight, the pair snarling and fighting for the top, their bodies twisting in a blur of claw, fangs, and fire.

In the temporary safety of his metal bowl, Claude dug frantically through his duffel bag.





In the melee, blood flowed freely from both combatants' wounds. John twisted his body and managed to wrap his arms around the creature's head; he wrenched its neck unnaturally with a vicious jerk . . .

. . . to no appreciable effect. John felt the creature's skeleton and muscle shifting beneath the surface of its scaly skin to adopt a new shape. Probably an even meaner one.

So John exploded like a napalm strike, a white-hot tear of light engulfing both their bodies. He didn't normally burst with such intensity when his brood-mates were near — the heat was too much for them — but he was pissed off, and figured that with Moira trapped under about a ton of concrete and Claude—

Where was Claude, anyway?

John suddenly felt sick. Had he immolated his brood-brother? But then he heard a familiar voice in his head:

"Jump clear!"

John launched himself through the air, rolling and spinning to escape the creature's grasp, as Claude popped up from inside the metal vat that had protected him from the inferno's eruption. Mounted on his shoulder, Claude bore the biggest damn gun John had ever seen.

No sooner had John leaped than a missile's white trail of smoke stabbed out from Claude's weapon and slammed against the creature's chest, knocking it twenty yards across the chamber. For a split second, it howled defiance before it exploded in a burst of fire, acrid flesh, and taint. Claude was already back under cover, but John stood in place, soaking up the explosion's warmth like a lizard on a sunny day.

After the air had cooled to tolerable — that is, survivable — levels, Claude clambered out of the vat.

"You can come out, it's dead,"

John thought out in Moira's general underground direction. *"No thanks to your expertise in French,"* he added sardonically. He smiled and winked at Claude while awaiting the predictable rejoinder.

Which didn't come.

"Moira?" Claude thought at her.

Nothing.

"Moira!" Claude shouted via their mindlink.

Silence.

"Shit," said John and Claude, simultaneously and aloud, as they dug with superhuman strength into the rubble that blocked the hole she had disappeared into.

THE MYTHIC

She recovered slowly, dim torchlight seeping in through several layers of eyelids. The shadow dragon, with shield-sized scales the color of slate and shadows, stretched her mighty wings and looked about her. Had she blacked out? Perhaps a spell? No time to wonder now. She had been roaming the dirtborn's warrens. Her brood-mates patrolled the skies above to make sure she would not be sealed in. These creatures' shamans had some power over earth, and when they combined their efforts, could equal even an abyssal wyrm's talents.

She spat a venomous glob into the cavern floor, sneering in disgust. The dirtborn. A loathsome people that refused to bow to any master, instead pillaging those who tried to live above their lands. The dragon, full of pride and importance since her hatching centuries ago, could not abide the existence of such a people.

Then they came. They boiled forth from the caverns below, their shapes only vaguely man-like. She lashed through their front ranks with her razor-sharp tail. Several dove beneath her, stabbing with burning-bright spears at her soft underbelly, but she managed to leap sideways and up, twisting and lashing as she launched through the air, before they could do much damage. Her arc ended high up on a nearby wall, and she clung there with her claws deep in the stone, hurling spells at her foes.

Then she realized . . . there was something else coming. It loomed above the back rank of its minions, an unnatural light from below reflecting off its slick, alien flesh. It was evil where the dirtborn were only pathetic, it was dangerous where they were only a nuisance, and it was older, far older even than her . . .

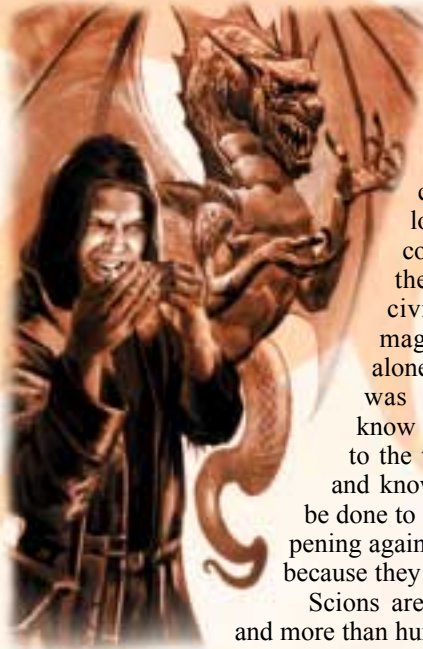
Moira's eyes snapped open. She was herself again, and once more in the tunnels near the Thames. Everything had returned to normal, except for the howls of the dirtborn. They had followed her through the ages, echoing in her mind. Then she realized with alarm that the echoes were not in her mind at all, but rather in the tunnels all around her. They were coming, and if her flashback was accurate, as it usually was, something pretty damn scary was coming with them.

"Guys," she thought forcefully to her brood-mates, the sound of whose desperate digging was reaching her, *"You'd better either hurry up and get me out of here, or blow this joint and seal me in with the roaches. Something's coming . . . something way worse than us."*





OF MEN & DRAGONS



Fireborn is a world on the edge of a storm. One it has weathered before at the cost of great losses: the loss of countless lives, of the world's great civilizations, of magic. The scions alone know that there was a mythic age, know what happened to the world at its end, and know what needs to be done to stop it from happening again. They know . . . because they were there.

Scions are at once human and more than human. While born of flesh and blood, their souls are far older. Within their bodies are the reincarnated spirits of dragons from an ancient past. Throughout the ages, scions have been reborn in human form, each time remembering less and less of their former selves. As magic fled the world at the end of the mythic age, so did the wyrms' strength of spirit. As the last ice age receded and the modern age began, the memory of the mythic age was all but gone.

Now, that's changing. None are sure why . . . a prophecy fulfilled, the stars aligned, a ritual completed? Regardless, karma, the force that Westerners call "magic," that wise men of the East call "ki," and that the ancient Egyptians called "ka," has returned. And with it all manner of beasts and wonders.

But magic is dangerous and unknown, and the modern mind is far from accepting of the impossible. That, after all, is what monsters, magic, and myth must be: Impossible. Everyone knows that. We've been told that from the beginning. And surely, if anything was out there, the police and the government would know. They'd tell us how to protect ourselves.

So magic remains hidden from the light of day. No one talks about it. Second-class citizens are hunted by beasts in the slums. Superstitious drifters draw pentagrams in railyards to keep the rain and the dogs away. Tales of werewolf maulings appear in the tabloids with alarming regularity and amazingly clear photos, and most folks don't talk to their neighbors anymore.

And amidst all this, the scions begin to remember that there's something else beneath the magic and the beasts and the fear. Something older than man and dragon alike, something that, in an age of myth and legend, almost consumed the world.

The scions grow in power, one flashback at a time, and hope that they'll be able to remember, in time, the secrets that their enemies never forgot.

DUAL-ERA ROLEPLAYING

As represented in the fiction vignettes found earlier in this preview, the action in *Fireborn* takes place in both the modern day and a mythic age. The base setting for campaigns is modern London just a few years from now, a place of cosmopolitan dealings, venerable age, and dark mysteries. Characters in the modern age may have many directions and goals, including monster hunting, political machinations, treasure seeking, avoiding the authorities, and anything else the Game Master throws at them. Between and during adventures in the modern age, however, comes every scion's main priority: rediscovering who and what he was.

This re-discovery occurs via a game mechanic called **flashbacks**, in which players remember and play out, collectively, a dramatic event that occurred to their previous selves in the mythic age. During these flashbacks, the characters take the role of immensely powerful dragons of all shapes and kinds. The times and locations of the flashbacks can be spread throughout several aeons and across many lands, all collectively known as the mythic age. During these visions, the players control their dragons as if playing them in the here and now, slowly learning more about their capabilities and the world they used to inhabit. Mythic age flashbacks may give their modern age selves clues to important events occurring in the modern day, a chance to meet and interact with figures that may play roles in their futures, or even an opportunity to leave behind powerful items for their human selves to find and use. With every flashback, the scions in the modern age remember more of their previous powers and can access greater amounts of draconic strength.



BOUND BY FATE

In both ages, the players are part of a group called a **brood**. Brood-mates are more than family; they are bound to one another throughout all time. Broods learn from one another, protect each other, and in some cases limit each other. The bonds





created within those broods were forged through long aeons of growth, change, experience, and even death and rebirth. Because of the brood, a dragon's spirit is never alone. In essence, the souls of a brood grow and merge to become facets of a single being, greater than the sum of its parts. Throughout the centuries and into the modern age, that connection remains. Scions may slumber for most of their lives before finding their brood-mates, but once the connection is made, it can neither be ignored nor forgotten.

With this history to bind them, the players have a motivation, a necessity, to work together to survive and grow. Some brood-mates support one another and work together as a well-oiled unit, while others may work at cross purposes, and some may even find themselves undesirably allied with hated enemies.

THE FORCES OF NATURE

Earth, Air, Fire, and Water: the four cornerstones of all the worlds of *Fireborn*, whether spiritual or physical. Every creature in *Fireborn* is a composite of these elements, called their **aspects**. Of course, we're not suggesting that living beings are actually made up of these four substances. However, there is something intuitive about the four elements and the roles they play. Likewise, this is a game about dragons. The dragons are, above all else, forces of nature given living form. What better way to represent them than via the most primal elements from myth and legend?

While many roleplaying games try to define portions of human ability in rigid categories, such as strength, reflexes, intelligence, wisdom, and so forth, *Fireborn* takes a more holistic approach. Your aspects are not concrete stats reflecting your character's exact capabilities; rather, they represent potential, focus, and natural talent. They are a reflection of a character's inner nature, and represent how much of his focus and energy can be directed to accomplish a specific task at hand.

Each character's aspects are individually rated with a score between zero and six. Zero represents a complete lack of capacity in the relevant area (such as a character who is crippled or suffering from a mental defect), three represents an average human's capacity in the modern age, and six represents the maximum capacity of a human . . . but not an animal, supernatural creature, or scion, all of whom can perform superhuman feats.

AIR

Reasoning, aggressive logic, awareness, insight, and planning are all governed by the aspect of Air. While predominantly an aspect that expresses itself mentally, not physically, Air can come into play during physical activities that involve careful thought and awareness, like attempting to move stealthily or when interacting with others. Leaders, scoundrels, and mystics all rely on Air, as it denotes characters with keen minds, slippery personalities, or intense demeanors.

FIRE

Action, movement, strength, and primal passions are the domain of the aspect of Fire. This aspect steers aggressive physical action like combat or contests of physical skill, as well as active exertion like lifting or jumping. If you want to smite your enemies and laugh over their corpses, Fire is your best bet. Individuals with high Fire are typically strong, ferocious, have good instincts in battle, and have the attitudes to match. They often resort to violence — and it works.

WATER

A character's stamina, resistance to disease and minor injuries, and defensive reflexes are controlled by Water. Just as a river flows around a rock in its path or absorbs debris and keeps flowing, so the aspect of Water protects its possessor by allowing him to absorb blows or dodge them. A person with high Water might appear robust and healthy or incredibly swift and agile; the hows and whys aren't as important as the fact that the aspect of Water is what keeps you alive.

EARTH

Willpower, concentration, and sense of self are all part of the aspect of Earth. Earth helps you maintain focus while remaining aware of your surroundings. Add to that the fact that Earth controls your resistance to being affected by spells, your ability to ferret out lies and deception, and the amount of karma you can utilize, and Earth becomes a potent aspect indeed. Individuals with high Earth may be reliable, balanced, wise, or stoically confident.





DYNAMIC D6

Fireborn uses a new dice system called **dynamic d6** to represent the constantly changing attention of participants in an action scene. Heroes in *Fireborn* don't just swing a sword *or* jump a chasm *or* cast a spell. They feint, dodge, grit through pain, and slash with a weapon, all at once. Combat and contests are fluid, dynamically changing exchanges, whether the battlefield is physical, mental, or social. The dynamic d6 system builds on and accentuates that rhythm.

As the name suggests, the system uses six-sided dice. When making a test, a character rolls the number of dice he has in the relevant aspect. So a character jumping across rooftops would roll his Fire dice, a character dodging bullets would roll his Water dice, a character intimidating a foe would roll Air, and a character resisting a mind-control spell would roll Earth.

SKILLS & STANCES

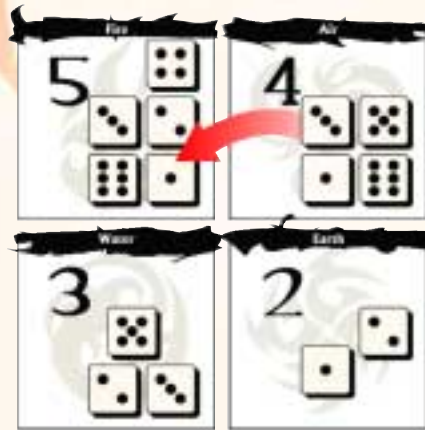
The dynamic part comes in when you add skills. Aspects are natural talent and potential, but one character with a high Fire might be an expert martial artist, while another has never been in a fight in his life but is hell on wheels in the driver's seat. To represent this training and experience, add skills.

To understand how skills work, keep this in mind: aspects are more than just talent, they also represent your resources, your attention, the amount of energy you can devote to any one act. If you are a trained athlete, yes, you may have excellent strength and agility, but your training comes into play when you use your sense of balance (Water), your timing and hand-eye coordination (Air), and your resistance to pain and weariness (Earth) to increase your performance.

Skills take all that into account. Rather than the tired "Attribute + Skill" roll, *Fireborn* characters make a choice every turn. Any time you wish to use a skill as part of a test, you can roll that many more dice in the aspect being tested . . . but those dice have to come from somewhere else. When swinging a club at a dreaded

beast or a drunken brawler, you can move dice, say, from Water to Fire. The number of dice you can move is equal to your skill in, in this case, Melee. If you're a novice combatant, you may be able to move one or two dice to Fire to assist with the test. If you're an expert, you can go for the gusto, really pounding your foe by moving your entire pool of Water dice into Fire. But whether you're a newbie or a veteran, your attention to swinging that club has to come from somewhere; if you moved all your dice from Water, that means you just left yourself open to a counterattack.

Moving dice back and forth is done several times in a combat; where your dice are situated, whether offensive or defensive, physical or mental, is called your **stance**.



In the diagram above, the character has base aspects of Fire 5, Air 4, Water 3, and Earth 2. He is very aggressive and a clear thinker, but doesn't have a very strong will or a strong survival instinct. When faced with an opponent, he wants to roll more than just his base Fire. Let's say he has Melee 4 as a skill, so that means he can move up to 4 dice from any other aspect into Fire before rolling. He chooses to move 4 dice from Air, since he'd rather pummel his enemy than trick or outmaneuver him. That leaves him 3 dice in Water if his enemy swings back, and 2 in Earth if anyone tries to hoodwink him or cast a mind-control spell on him.

EDGES, POWERS, & LEGACIES

Aspects, skills, and stances are the heart of the *Fireborn* system, but there's much more beyond that simple and elegant kernel. Every character has **edges** like Aggressive, Daunting, Fluid Fighter, and Glory Hound. These are the tricks and talents that separate one street thug from the next, one mystic from another.

Creatures with abilities beyond the human norm, whether they be wild animals or supernatural foes, also have **powers**. Clarity, Mythic Leap, and Shadow Spinner are examples of these, things that should be impossible for any human to manage . . . but then, your character isn't just any human.

Finally, the realization of a dragon's true abilities lies in its **legacy**. Legacies are the tapping of a creature's deepest resources and most terrible self, whether to protect or destroy, heal or harm. These are the the signature effects, the abilities that become legends, the weapons that change the world. Legacies give you the power to turn your enemies to stone, to summon storms and lightning to do your will, to immolate your foes in flame or shroud their minds in fear.






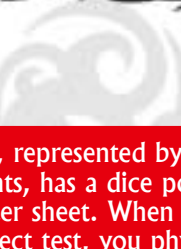
FIREBORN

CHARACTER SHEET


Fire




Water



Air



Earth



Karma

Current Karma	Max Karma
---------------	-----------

Health Chart

W	no effect
1/2 W	
W+	-1
2W+	-2
3W+	-3
4W+	-4
5W+	-5
6W+	-6

Damage

DMG	R

Attack

--	--

Edges

Name	

Powers

Name	Rank

Armor

--

Fighting Styles

Name	Max Rank

Karma lets you defy the whims of fortune and overcome the obstacles between you and your goals. It is a valuable resource . . . once you run out of karma, it becomes much harder to avoid taking damage.

Each character can take a different amount of punishment. The nastier the hits you dish out, the more penalties your foes have to their rolls. You can also inflict non-wound penalties, using team tactics to weaken and knock foes off balance while other brood mates close in for the kill.

Each aspect, represented by one of the four elements, has a dice pool area on your character sheet. When you apply a skill to an aspect test, you physically move the dice from one aspect's area to another, representing your change in stance.

Edges, powers, and legacies are the special abilities that give you a leg up in different circumstances, from hiding from your foes to burning them alive.

Each character in *Fireborn* has a fighting style (some have quite a few more than one). Each fighting style includes several attack and defense sequences. These are your signature moves, practiced and honed until they're nearly reflexive. Each sequence has a different payoff if you succeed at it, ranging from dealing additional damage with each hit to blinding, tripping, stunning, or throwing your foes.

