

# Magic Realm Strategy for Beginners

Steve McKnight

## A. Introduction

Magic Realm is a hard nut for a beginner to crack. It's not just the complexity, the lengthy rule set, and the cryptic rulebook – it's also a question of once you know (sort of) how to play, what in the world are you supposed to do with your character? In this article, I have described which of the 16 characters are, in my opinion, easiest for beginners to play and what strategies the beginner should employ to get the most out of his or her character. The discussion assumes basic Second or Third Edition Magic Realm rules with no Optional or Advanced Rules unless otherwise mentioned. A useful summary of the Second/Third Edition Rules is my eight-page outline, "The Least You Need to Know to Play Magic Realm," which can be found on the Magic Realm page on [www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com) or on other Magic Realm websites.

The best way into the game is probably Joel Yoder's Magic Realm in Plain English, which you can also find on Boardgamegeek. Joel presents the Magic Realm rule compendium in paragraph form, but maintaining the structure of the Second Edition Rulebook where the fundamentals of movement, searching, and trading are treated first, followed by combat with monsters. Hired natives and the magic system are relegated to sections at the end, under the well-founded belief that hired natives and magic add greatly to the complexity of the game. The best characters for beginners, therefore, are those that can be played without magic and with minimal use of hired natives.

There are eight non-magic characters, which are best for beginners.

*Roughly in order of ease of play, they are:*

### **1. Amazon, Dwarf, Swordsman, Woods Girl**

(These can be played without hiring any natives.)

### **2. Berserker, White Knight**

(These two are probably the most fun right out of the box, but you'll want to hire an underling Rogue or Order)

### **3. Black Knight, Captain**

(These two may want to hire a whole group including a hired leader.)

I don't recommend magic characters for pure beginners – the White Knight and Woods Girl have one magic chit each, but to first order you can ignore their magic capabilities.

*The easiest magic users to play are probably:*

#### 4. Wizard, Pilgrim

(Can almost be played as weak fighters, but they are very vulnerable, even with their spells, unless they are part of a group.)

*More difficult to play:*

#### 5. Sorcerer, Elf, Druid

(Major magic users!)

*Forgetaboutit:*

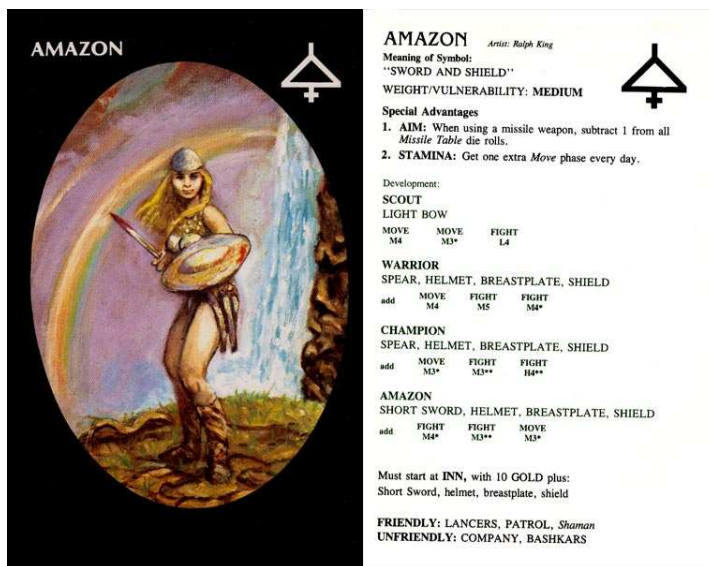
#### 6. Witch, Witch King, Magician

(Leave these for the experts!)

### B. Character Strategies for Beginners

#### 1. Fighters and Wanderers without Hirelings

##### a. Amazon



**AMAZON** *Artist: Ralph King*

Meaning of Symbol: "SWORD AND SHIELD"

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: MEDIUM

**Special Advantages**

1. **AIM:** When using a missile weapon, subtract 1 from all *Missile Table* die rolls.
2. **STAMINA:** Get one extra *Move* phase every day.

Development:

**SCOUT**  
LIGHT BOW

MOVE	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
M4	M3*	L4	

**WARRIOR**  
SPEAR, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	M4	M5	M4*

**CHAMPION**  
SPEAR, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

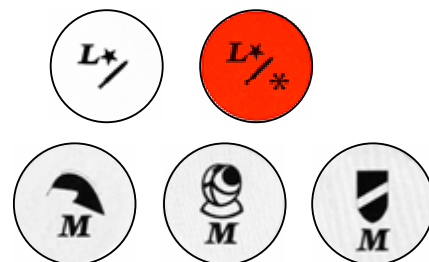
add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	M3*	M3**	H4**

**AMAZON**  
SHORT SWORD, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

add	FIGHT	FIGHT	MOVE
	M4*	M3**	M3*

Must start at INN, with 10 GOLD plus:  
Short Sword, helmet, breastplate, shield

**FRIENDLY:** LANCERS, PATROL, *Shaman*  
**UNFRIENDLY:** COMPANY, BASHKARS



The Amazon, with her full armor, extra move phase, and fast Move chits, can move around the board with relative impunity. She is usually fast enough to run away from any trouble that she can't chop her way out of (watch out for the H Serpents, though!) But she doesn't seem to be able to pile up many Victory Points. She tends to end up serving as a guide for a group of character followers but never really ringing up much benefit for herself.

The problem is that she is seriously underpowered with her original equipment. With her L\* Short Sword and her Medium Fight chits she can kill only Medium and unarmored Heavy denizens (Light harm + overswing bonus + one sharpness star vs. a non-armored target = Heavy harm). She can kill off the Heavy Spiders which don't carry much Fame and Notoriety, but every location that she wants to loot seems to end up cluttered with Tremendous monsters or with Heavy Trolls, Serpents, and Dragons that are all armored and invulnerable to her Short Sword. She can handle Goblins but they tend to come in large numbers and can mess up her shiny armor or, with bad luck, kill her. She can kill many of the natives but rarely the native leaders that are in charge of the natives' goodies.

What the Amazon desperately needs is an M\* weapon which she could use with her Fight H4\*\* chit to deal with Heavy or unarmored Tremendous foes (Medium harm + overswing bonus + one sharpness star vs. non-armored target = Tremendous harm!) Give her an M\* weapon and she can pile up Fame and Notoriety by killing Heavy and (unarmored) Tremendous monsters, she can loot treasure sites and kill monsters as they arrive, or she can prey on native groups – taking down the leader HQ and running away, only to come back later and pick up the natives' possessions scattered across the ground. Her layers of armor give her a nice insurance policy if she takes a hit or two from multiple foes. (Note that a Heavy weapon does her no good – she can't overswing it to increase her damage, and, lacking an H Move chit, she couldn't carry it in any case.)

So, from the beginning of the game, the Amazon should be thinking about where she can obtain an M\* weapon. There are two possible sources. Her friends the Lancers have four Spears for sale. If she can find them on the board, she can trade in her Short Sword in addition to her starting 10 gold and get herself an M\* Spear on a Price x2. A Spear is a little awkward to use because it doesn't do anything unless it is alerted. But the Amazon has lots of fast Fight chits that she can use to alert the Spear as an Action in the Encounter Step of combat even if she's neglected to record an Alert Phase during the day.

But there are certainly times (Goblins!) when it would be nice to have her trusty Short Sword which doesn't need to be alerted to be effective. If she can score two gold pieces to be able to buy the Spear without giving up the Short Sword, she should definitely keep both weapons. She can keep the Spear active to deal with the Heavy and Tremendous monsters (for example, the alerted Spear with the Fight H4\*\* undercuts the Giants and outreaches their clubs for a guaranteed kill). If she ends up with smaller, faster foes on her sheet, she can inactivate the Spear and activate the Short Sword as an Action in the Encounter Step, regardless of the speed of the denizens on her sheet.

The only problem with this plan is that the Lancers don't start on the board, and it can sometimes be a very long wait hanging around the Chapel, dodging the Order whenever they feel like battling, until the Lancers finally show up. The alternate source of an M\* weapon is the Guard who have all the other unused Medium weapons. The problem is that the Guard don't have any particularly friendly feelings for the Amazon and are unlikely to part with their M\* Ax or Broadsword for less than Price x4 – more than the Amazon can afford without a significant transfusion of gold.

The solution here is to make an alliance with a character who is Friendly with the Guard and can start at the Guardhouse. The Wizard and the Dwarf are good candidates; they could both use a tough, fast, armored friend. The Dwarf might well consider it worthwhile to bargain with the Guard to buy the Ax for Price x2 (8 gold) while the Amazon motors over from the Inn to the Guardhouse. Then the Dwarf can sell the Ax to the Amazon and follow her at five clearing per day to the caves, where he longs to be. The Amazon might even find it profitable to stick with the Dwarf and benefit from his Cave Knowledge in exchange for serving as multiple-monster insurance.

The Amazon and Wizard are also a good team, flying across the board through the hidden paths and secret passages. With the Amazon's M\* weapon and the Wizard's "Fiery Blast," any monsters that they can't kill they can run from with the Amazon's Move M3 speed. (Well, with the exception of large numbers of Bats – but large numbers of Bats are a problem for just about any set of characters.) They are also well equipped if they decide to prey on natives. And if the Amazon happens to come into possession of a Medium Bow or the M\*\* Truesteel Sword, she can become a true killing machine.

## b. Dwarf



**DWARF** Artist: Chris White

Meaning of Symbol:  
"OPPOSITION"

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: HEAVY

**Special Advantages**

- SHORT LEGS:** You cannot use "sunlight" phases, you rest one extra effort asterisk per *Rest* phase, and you can play the DUCK chit to *Duck*. See page 61.
- CAVE KNOWLEDGE:** When in a Cave clearing, roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Search*, *Hide*, and *Meeting* die rolls.

**Development:**

**YOUNGSTER**  
AXE, HELMET  
DUCK MOVE FIGHT  
T3\* H6 H5\*

**SMITH**  
AXE, HELMET  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
T6\* H6 H4\*\*

**WARRIOR**  
GREAT AXE, HELMET  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
H5\* T6\* H4\*\*

**DWARF**  
GREAT AXE, HELMET  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
T5\*\* H5\*\* H5\*\*

Start at INN or GUARD house, with 10 GOLD plus:  
Great Axe, helmet

**FRIENDLY:** COMPANY, GUARD, *Scholar*  
**UNFRIENDLY:** WOODFOLK, BASHKARS





The poor maligned Dwarf! With only being able to use two phases per day, his disadvantages are so obvious, it's hard to see the good side. If you need to hide and move, he has a range of one clearing per day – it can take him forever to get across a tile. Some groups feel it necessary to reduce his "Short Legs" disadvantage by special house rules, and many players avoid him like the plague.

On the other hand, the Dwarf is the most accomplished monster fighter on the board – better than the Berserker and White Knight, neither of who have the capability to maneuver at speed 3 that the Dwarf's Duck counter gives him. His alerted Great Ax is fast enough to undercut many of the

big monsters, and if not, he need only use his Duck T3\* chit to maneuver and attack in Smash with either his Fight H6 or Fight T6\* – depending on the vulnerability of the monster and whether he wants to fatigue a chit to keep combat going. Almost none of the monsters will undercut the speed 3 maneuver, and when they line up with the Duck maneuver, the Great Ax will nearly always outreach the monsters and kill first.


One-on-one, the only monsters that he has to fear are a bad roll on the Power of the Pit against a Demon or a head hit from the Tremendous Flying Dragon. Only multiple monsters should give him pause since he may be hit by a Smashing monster other than the one he has targeted. In this case his helmet is good insurance, and buying a second helmet from the Guard to activate if his first is destroyed is prudent.

Since killing monsters is the quickest way to accumulate Victory Conditions (Fame and Notoriety at the same time!), this strategy alone gives him a step up – if he can get to the monsters before the Berserker and White Knight. He can take Fame and Notoriety Victory Points in a two-to-one ratio and bag enough monsters to cover the requirements.

And we haven't even talked about the Cave Knowledge yet. Rolling one die on the Search Tables makes it easy to find sites and allows him to loot down to the bottom of the treasure pile in a cave. He doesn't even have to find the locations first, because most characters give up trying to loot the last two or three treasures with only two rolls per turn, leaving valuable large and Great Treasures remaining for the Dwarf. So it's also reasonable for the Dwarf to mark down a Great Treasure or Gold Victory Requirement.

The Dwarf's biggest problem is other characters. It's not wise for the Dwarf to accumulate a big hoard of treasures without improving his defenses. With the Move H5\* as his fastest Move chit, it's relatively easy for another character (even that helpful Amazon!) to charge and keep him from running away. Then they can just keep Smashing away until the helmet is destroyed and the Dwarf succumbs. A Move H4 counter (the Power Boots) brings him almost to parity with the other heavy characters in combat. Failing that, a breastplate and shield or hiring the Company or Guard should keep other characters at arm's length.

### c. Swordsman



**SWORDSMAN** Artist: Kim Cronoll

Meaning of Symbol:  
"WOLF'S HOOK"

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: LIGHT

**Special Advantages**

- BARTER:** Roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Trade* die rolls.
- CLEVER:** During *Daylight*, choose when to take your turn. See page 61.

Development:

**WANDERER**

MOVE	MOVE	FIGHT
L4	L3*	L3*

**THIEF**

add	MOVE	FIGHT	MOVE
	L3*	L2**	L2**

**ADVENTURER**

**THRUSTING SWORD**

add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	M4*	M4*	M3**

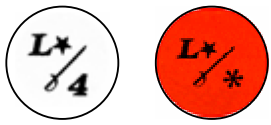
**SWORDSMAN**

**THRUSTING SWORD**

add	FIGHT	FIGHT	FIGHT
	L4	M5	L2**

Must start at INN, with 10 GOLD plus:  
Thrusting Sword

**FRIENDLY:** ROGUES, COMPANY, *Warlock*  
**ENEMY:** PATROL



The Swordsman is a good character if you like living by your wits rather than brute strength, and don't mind becoming unpopular when you do. The Swordsman's lifeline is his Move L2\*\* that will nearly always get him out of trouble. He doesn't need to worry overly much about monsters since he can run away from any monster with a move speed greater than 2, and the few characters fast enough to keep him from running away would be seriously compromised in combat with Inigo Montoya if they had already expended enough asterisks to keep him in the clearing. So survivability is not too much of a problem, if he stays clear of the Octopus and Bats.

The question is, what kind of Victory Points can he pick up? Fame is going to be hard to come by because the only monsters that he can down are Medium or Heavy/unarmored, and they don't yield much Fame. Multiple monsters are too dangerous for a Light vulnerability character – one hit and the game is over! Without a Heavy Fight chit it doesn't pay to upgrade his weapon like the Amazon, and, in any case, he can't use his Light Move chits while carrying a Medium weapon. For the same reason, adding armor actually makes him less safe since he can't run away from anything faster than speed 5 while carrying a Medium-weight helmet, breastplate, or shield.

Notoriety is a possibility if he decides to hunt down magic-using characters after they have piled up Notoriety and fatigued their Magic chits by slaughtering the natives. The Witch King despite his fearsome appearance is particularly vulnerable since, lacking Move chits, he can't maneuver in combat. If his Broomstick chit is fatigued, he's easy pickings for the Swordsman. Even a warrior character can be prey for the Swordsman if they've fatigued a lot of chits and lost their armor in a tough fight. Since the Swordsman can move first and block a character before they have a chance to move or hide or rest, he can be a terrifying adversary to a weakened character without armor.

But the Swordsman is at his best as a treasure hunter, collecting Great Treasures and Gold. His Clever advantage is a real benefit. If he's with a group at a treasure site, he can either move first to grab his treasures off the top (or bottom as the case may be), or if he hasn't found the site he

can wait, spy on the next character to loot to learn the location, and then take his loots. When there are multiple characters at a treasure site, the Swordsman always gets the lion's share of the goodies – and earns the resentment of the other characters. Not that they can do much about it – if they block him when he moves first, he can just block everyone else and stalemate the whole group. If you want to get into extortion, the Swordsman can drive a stronger character crazy by moving first, blocking him, and running away, turn after turn, until the other character gets tired of it and pays the Swordsman off.


Since Medium and Heavy treasures are a problem with the Swordsman's limited carrying capacity, a workhorse is a valuable accessory for his treasure hunting. The way the rules are written he can use a packhorse for all his inactive items and still play his own fast Move chits to maneuver or run away – the horse will automatically follow him. He can get a workhorse either by gathering up a little gold and using his Barter advantage to buy a horse from the Rogues, or he can grab an abandoned workhorse by taking his turn first after a group of characters massacre the Rogues on Day 1.

A workhorse also makes a character completely invulnerable to Bats, the "sharks with wings" that, in pairs or greater numbers, can wound a heavy character to death in no time flat. The workhorse's Heavy vulnerability is not affected by the Bats' Medium attacks - they bounce harmlessly off the horse while the rider takes free swings at the flutterers. The Swordsman with a workhorse can ride past the cowering White Knight into a clearing with multiple Bats and hope to pile up some serious Fame and Notoriety with his M Fight chits and L\* Thrusting Sword. (Light Sword + sharpness star + one level for Fight chit exceeding weapon weight = Heavy harm = Bats' Bane.) If he has good luck in matching directions (or if he has gotten his hands on the speed=2 Living Sword to undercut the Bats on their light side) and takes out three Bats in one evening, he nets 18 Fame and 18 Notoriety from the multiple-victim multiplier - more Fame and Noto than any single Tremendous monster.

Unlike other characters that are friendly with the Rogues (such as the Berserker) the Swordsman is unlikely to hire Rogue underlings. Since his hirelings cannot run out of the clearing, the first time he needs to run away from a monster he will have to abandon any hirelings to their fate.



## d. Woods Girl



**WOODS GIRL** Artist: Ralph King

Meaning of Symbol:  
 "EROSIA": Love and Earth  
**WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: LIGHT**

**Special Advantages**

- TRACKING SKILLS:** When on any tile labelled "WOODS", roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Search*, *Hide*, and *Meeting* die rolls. See page 62.
- ARCHER:** When using a bow or crossbow, roll 1 die instead of 2 on the *Missile Table*.

**Optional Advantage** (see Optional rule 1.4)

- EXPERT WOODCRAFT:** When on a Woods clearing (except on the **RUINS** and **VALLEY** tiles), roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Search*, *Hide*, and *Meeting* die rolls.

Development:

**MAID**

MOVE	MOVE	MOVE
L3*	L4	L2**

**SPRITE**

*Spell* (VII)

add	FIGHT	MOVE	MAGIC
	L4	L2**	VIII**

**HUNTRESS**

LIGHT BOW, *Spell* (VII)

add	FIGHT	FIGHT	FIGHT
	L3*	M5	L4

**WOODS GIRL**



LIGHT BOW, *Spell* (VII)

add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	L3*	M6*	L3*

Start at **INN** or **HOUSE**, with 10 **GOLD** plus:

Light Bow  
 one *Spell* (type VII)

**ALLY:** WOODFOLK  
**FRIENDLY:** LANCERS  
**UNFRIENDLY:** SOLDIERS, Warlock  
**ENEMY:** BASHKARS

Some of the comments about the Swordsman are also true of the Woods Girl. With her Move L2\*\* chit, she has a high survivability against monsters or characters. But since her Light Bow and Archer advantage allow her to down monsters even as large as Tremendous, she can take Fame and Notoriety for Victory Requirements. Alerted Bows with attack speed 1 will undercut and automatically hit just about any target, and the Missile Table gives her one chance in three of killing an unarmored Tremendous monster. If she rolls poorly on the Missile Table, she can run away during the next round of combat. Note that, even though she's allied with the Woodfolk, the Medium Bow is not an alternative for the Woods Girls because she doesn't have a Medium Move counter, so she can't carry or maneuver with it.

If you are using the optional Ambush rule, the Woods Girl becomes a significant threat. She can pick off most unarmored native groups, one by one, and as long as she's successful at killing the fast ones, she can run when she fails the hide roll. She's especially formidable at ambushing in the Woods, where she only rolls one die for her Ambush hide roll. Ambush doesn't work against a cautious character, because you can't be hidden and prevent the other character from running. Even without the Ambush rule, though, more than one unarmored character has discovered to their regret that if they neglect to run in the Encounter Step, there's nothing they can do once she targets them in the Melee phase – the Bow is longer and will automatically undercut and hit if alerted. If they move after her in the Encounter Step, they don't even get the warning when she alerts her bow. All they can do is try to make themselves as small as possible when she rolls on the Missile Table, and hope to have a chance to fight back if the Bow misses.


Her Tracking Skills advantage gives her an opportunity to score some treasures if there are any treasure sites in Deep Woods, but, again, her lack of Medium Move chits limits the treasures she can take away. For a player who isn't intimidated by the rules for hired natives, the best use of her tracking skills is probably to collect some gold, use one die to hire the whole Woodfolk or Lancers group at a Campfire, and then have the HQ help you find and loot treasure sites.



The spell is not worth much because she can't make any color magic to use it. If you're a beginner, you can just ignore it without losing much. The best bet is probably "Control Bats" which she can use with any color magic that happens to be around and which can protect her from Bats, one of the few monsters that she might not be able to run from. She can also use them to fly across difficult boards. Be careful, though. Control Bats is a Day Spell. It expires at Sunset, at which time you have hostile bats in your clearing for combat. You'd better be hidden, or have some color magic and an alerted magic chit, if there's any chance the Bats will be fast side up.

## 2. Fighters with Friends

### a. Berserker



**BERSERKER** Artist: Chris White

Meaning of Symbol:  
"LETOPHORO": Death and Destruction

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: **HEAVY**

Special Advantages

- ROBUST:** Get one extra *Rest* phase every day.
- BERSERK:** Increase your ability to take damage to *Tremendous* by playing your BERSERK chit during an *Alert* phase or an encounter step. See page 62.

Development:

**YOUTH**  
AXE, HELMET

MOVE	MOVE	FIGHT
H6	H5*	H4*

**RAIDER**  
AXE, HELMET, SHIELD

add	MOVE	MOVE	FIGHT
	T6*	H4**	H5

**VIKING**  
AXE, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

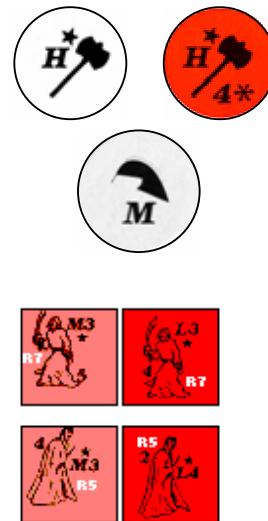
add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	H4**	T6*	T4**

**BERSERKER**  
GREAT AXE, HELMET

add	BERSERK	FIGHT	FIGHT
	T4**	T5*	T4**

Must start at INN, with 10 GOLD plus:  
Great Axe, helmet

FRIENDLY: ROGUES, LANCERS, *Shaman*  
UNFRIENDLY: PATROL, GUARD



The Berserker is easy and fun to play. Hire a Rogue or two to lure the monsters and let you alert your speed 4 Great Ax in the Encounter Step, and go off hunting the big ones. If you get into trouble, you can let your young men take the consequences! Take twice as many Fame points as Notoriety, and just forget about the treasure locations unless you stumble across them. Your goal is to find monsters (as long as they aren't too fast and there aren't too many of them.) If you do stumble across some valuable treasure, buy drinks for a native group and buy yourself some serious armor. Or maybe a Morning Star to give yourself a speed 3 Tremendous attack.

The first question that beginners ask is, "When do I get to go berserk?" Well, the technical answer is that you can play the Berserk T4\*\* chit during an Alert phase during Daylight and it makes you berserk for the rest of the day, including combat – but the Berserk chit fatigues (all two asterisks) as soon as you play it. Or you can play the Berserk chit as an action in the Encounter Step, fatiguing a single asterisk, subject to the usual conditions:

a) you can't do any other action during that Encounter Step,

b) it uses up your entire two-asterisk limit for that combat round, and

c) you can't play it if you have a denizen with a move speed less than or equal to 4 or if you are being charged by a character with a Move chit less than or equal to 4.

Since denizens with a move speed 4 or faster are common, it's often worth using an Alert Phase and fatiguing the extra asterisk to go berserk during the day – unless you're sure that you'll be hidden. Recording an Alert Phase and using it to go berserk only if the Monster Roll looks threatening is often a good Berserker tactic (otherwise, just alert you Great Ax which doesn't cause any fatigue).

Once you're berserk, whole classes of monsters become merely annoyances. The pairs of Heavy Trolls or Heavy Dragons, for example, can only wound you, so have at them. You just suck up the wounds until eventually you line up and kill them both. You can get the wounds back quickly enough with your extra Rest Phase. You might as well inactivate your helmet because a Medium or Heavy blow will give you a wound whether it hits armor or not, so why risk getting your helmet damaged?

Now a word of caution about Tremendous monsters and why you need those hired Rogues. The Berserker doesn't have much to fear from single unarmored T Monsters. He can maneuver with one of his Move H4\*\* chits and cover his maneuver with his Great Ax and Fight H5 (maneuver in Dodge and attack in Swing, for example) until the monster matches direction and they both hit. With its sharpness star, the Great Ax is sufficient to kill unarmored Tremendous monsters with just an H Fight chit. When the T Spider (for example) matches directions and hits, the Great Ax is longer on Round 1 and equally fast and longer once it is alerted on Round 2 and following.

The same reasoning holds for the Octopus and (if you survive the Power-of-the-Pit attack) the Demons. The Giant is a little tricky with that extra Club attack, but once the Great Ax is alerted (at least by Round 2 if you miss in Round 1), you will undercut and kill. The Club is longer than the Great Ax, though, so if it flips to the T4 side it could be a problem.

But when the Berserker runs up against armored Tremendous monsters, things get a little dicier. Since the armor cancels out the sharpness star on his Ax, he needs to swing his Great Ax with one of his T Fight chit to get a Tremendous blow. The problem is that all his T Fight chits have at least one asterisk, so he can't use them and maneuver with his Move H4\*\* at the same time (two-asterisk limit!)

To have any chance of killing an armored T monster, he's going to have to play a slower Move chit, and the T Serpent, T Troll, and T Dragons will undercut, hit, and turn red-side-up if he doesn't match directions with his attack. Once the T monsters are red-side-up, some of their attacks slow down and make it easier (the T Serpent, for example – the T Dragons have their own challenge with their separate head attacks). On the other hand, nobody is going to stand much of a chance against the red-side-up Tremendous Troll with an attack speed of 2! Your only hope against this baby is to match directions in Round 1: one chance in three.

So the moral here is, if you run up against the T Troll you need have someone else along – a buddy or a hired Rogue – to lure the Troll so that you don't have play a Move chit to maneuver and can use your asterisks for the T Fight chit. Having a single hired Rogue to lure the Tremendous Troll and let the Berserker alert his Ax and use his T Fight chit changes the odds from 2 in 3 of dying to a virtual certainty of killing the Troll. If you cover the Rogue's maneuver with the attack (Smash with the Great Ax while the Rogue lures in Duck, for example), there's no risk to your hired help.

A few hired Rogues will help give you a chance against Goblins and Wolves, the scourge of the Heavy characters, as well. The Rogue Swordsmen and Assassins match up well against Goblins, and the Berserker should be able to survive a tussle with the Ax Goblins if he has the R6 and R7 Swordsmen hired underlings to lure two of them away. The Spear and Great Sword Goblins are another story – with the Spear Goblins it's best to lie low and hope that combat will end when they don't attack for two rounds. Without a "Fiery Blast" there's no good way to deal with the Great Sword Goblins.

## b. White Knight



**WHITE KNIGHT**

Meaning of Symbol: "CROSS POMMEE": Potent Cross  
WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: **HEAVY**

**Special Advantages**  
1. **HEALTH:** Get one extra *Rest* phase every day.  
2. **HONOR:** Subtract 1 from all *Meeting Table* die rolls.

Development:  
**SQUIRE**  
BROADSWORD, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD  
MOVE MOVE FIGHT  
H5\* H6 H5\*

**KNIGHT-ERRANT**  
BROADSWORD, ARMOR, SHIELD  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
H4\*\* H6 H4\*\*

**CRUSADER**  
BROADSWORD, ARMOR, SHIELD, *Spell (1)*  
add FIGHT FIGHT MAGIC  
H4\*\* H5\* H5\*\*

**WHITE KNIGHT**  
GREAT SWORD, ARMOR, *Spell (1)*  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
T6\* T4\*\* T5\*

Start at **INN** or **CHAPEL**, with 10 **GOLD** plus:  
Great Sword, suit of armor  
one *Spell* (type 1)

**ALLY:** ORDER  
**FRIENDLY:** LANCERS  
**UNFRIENDLY:** BASHKARS, *Crone*  
**ENEMY:** COMPANY










So now we get to everybody's favorite character: the White Knight. Play him as a monster-killer, the same as the Berserker. Being well-armed in every direction makes up for the lack of the Berserk chit. Unless he gets very unlucky, he can handle any of the non-armored Tremendous monsters, although it's always best to be hidden so he can enter the battle on his own terms with his sword alerted and using his Fight H4\*\* or Fight T4\*\* chit.

The White Knight's Achilles heel is that his legs tire quickly, and that can be fatal against multiple fast opponents. The White Knight only has one Move H4\*\* counter and only three move counters with asterisks, which means after three rounds of combat the Move H4\*\* has to fatigue and then everything starts to hit by undercutting. This is problem if it takes more than

three rounds to match directions with unarmored T monsters or one of the pairs of Heavy monsters, and it is devastating if your opponents are Goblins or Wolves. Watching the White Knight get wounded to death by Ax Goblins will send you back to a Light character in a hurry. When you compare the White Knight to the Berserker and see what a difference the Berserker's extra Move H4\*\* can make, you start to realize the depth of the Magic Realm combat system. The White Knight also has exactly the same problem as the Berserker against armored Tremendous monsters: against the T Troll it's one chance in three to kill first on Round 1, and then it's curtains.

So the White Knight's problem is to find a way to protect himself against multiple monsters while he goes around cherry-picking vulnerable Tremendous monsters. A traveling partner will often do the trick: the Woods Girl with her Move L2\*\* or the Pilgrim with his fast Fight M2\*\* will do fine. If you're operating alone, though, you're going to be looking at starting at the Chapel and hiring one of those burly Knights of the Order. Being allied with the Order and having the Honor die roll modifier to boot is almost an unfair advantage. It shouldn't take you more than a turn or two to pick up O3 as a bodyguard, and with some lucky rolling you could get O2 as well on a boon. Having one of the Knights of the Order following along fixes any problem with the T armored monsters or the Heavy monster pairs.


If you can bear the thought of parting with your suit of armor, there is another solution. Sell the armor to the Order and use the gold to buy a warhorse. This gives the White Knight tremendous vulnerability and, if he picks the right horse, the ability to move at speed 4 without fatiguing. Of course, if you ever enter a cave where the horse has to be inactive, the White Knight without his armor is a little like an oyster without a shell.

Another equipment upgrade could be to sell your Great Sword and buy a Morning Star that gives you a speed-3 attack if alerted. This massive up-arming made possible by the high probability of rolling a Price X1 is what convinced me that the White Knight needed a downgrade. If you find that Whitey is just too powerful, you can try playing with the Third Edition's optional "Knight's Adjustment" that reduces his trading relationship with the Order to "Friendly" rather than "Allied."

The White Knight's spell isn't much use except at the Chapel or on Day 7 where the White Knight can find White magic. The best spell is probably "Make Whole" which will repair a damaged suit of armor.

### 3. Fighters with Armies

#### a. Black Knight



**BLACK KNIGHT** ♂

**BLACK KNIGHT** Artist: Kim Cromoll ♂

Meaning of Symbol:  
"MARS": God of War

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: MEDIUM

Special Advantages  
1. **AIM:** Subtract 1 from all *Missile Table* die rolls.  
2. **FEAR:** Roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Meeting Table* die rolls.

Development:

**SPEARMAN**  
SPEAR, HELMET, BREASTPLATE  
MOVE MOVE FIGHT  
MS HS\* HS\*





**MERCENARY**  
CROSSBOW, HELMET, BREASTPLATE  
add MOVE MOVE FIGHT  
H6 M4\* H6















**HEAVY FOOTMAN**  
MACE, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD  
add FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT  
M4\* M4\* MS

**BLACK KNIGHT**  
MACE, ARMOR, SHIELD  
add MOVE FIGHT FIGHT  
H4\*\* H4\*\* M3\*\*

Must start at INN, with 10 GOLD plus:  
Mace, suit of armor, shield

ALLY: COMPANY  
FRIENDLY: SOLDIERS, Crane  
UNFRIENDLY: LANCERS  
ENEMY: GUARD

Beginners often pick up the Black Knight thinking he is some sort of evil twin to the White Knight, but it doesn't take long to figure out that he doesn't play at all like the White Knight. First, since he lacks a Tremendous Fight chit and is only armed with a Medium Mace, he is helpless against Tremendous monsters with his original armament. He can't run away from any of them except the T Dragon and the Giant, and he can't even try to dodge the monster for two rounds until combat ends because when he plays his Move H4\*\* to avoid being undercut, he has to fatigue a Move chit and that keeps combat going. His only chance is to abandon his Heavy suit of armor in Round 1 and try to dodge the monster for two rounds with his Move M4\* chit – which he can't play while carrying his suit of armor.

The first thought is to get a heavy weapon for him, but lacking a Tremendous fight chit, an M\* weapon actually works just as well. Like the Amazon, a small Ax or Spear would let him handle the unarmored tremendous monsters. But then you discover that the devious designer has made the Black Knight respectively "unfriendly" and "enemies" with the Lancers and the Guard who are the only keepers of Medium weapons on the board! With his Aim advantage the Black Knight is made for the Medium Bow, but the elusive Woodfolk are hard to find and they're going to charge a pretty penny for that nifty weapon.

Nevertheless, the Black Knight usually seems to work out OK. I've seen him played by a number of folks and never seen a bad outcome. (Well, except for one unfortunate encounter with a Tremendous Troll, but that could happen to anyone.) With a shield on top of a suit of armor he's the best defended character in the game, and the speed 3 on the alerted side of the Mace makes him tough on the Heavy monsters, even in numbers more than one. He can ring up the pair of Heavy Trolls handily, particularly if he can start hidden and kill the first one by undercutting before he even has to maneuver. Bats are an exception as always – in numbers greater than one they can wound the Black Knight to death in a hurry. But if he can get his hands on a workhorse

(more about that below) he can let the Bats beat their wings against the workhorse's Heavy vulnerability until they get tired and give up.

While he's wearing his H armor he has the same problem that the White Knight has with his legs: only one Move H4\*\* and only two other move chits with asterisks. So after three rounds of dodging, the Move H4\*\* has to fatigue and he slows way down. But somehow it doesn't seem to be as dangerous for the Black Knight as the White Knight. The speed 3 Mace has something to do with it, I think. He can actually wade into a pack of Wolves or Ax Goblins and maybe live to tell about it by hiding behind his armor and undercutting one every other turn with his Mace.

But the Black Knight's real forte is attacking humans. Put him up toe-to-toe with any other character except a berserk Berserker, and he's going to come out ahead. Even the noble White Knight won't be able to cut through two layers of armor before the Mace undercuts three times, removing the armor and then applying the coup de grace. Running away is the wise move for any character in a clearing with a hostile Black Knight – without help he usually doesn't have enough fast Move chits to charge and keep his quarry in the clearing.

And against the natives the Black Knight really comes into his own. He can make a living by killing HQ's and picking the natives' abandoned possessions off the ground. You needn't feel guilty attacking the natives – it's what the Black Knight is designed for. The alerted Mace with any Heavy Fight chit will undercut and kill the Great Swordsmen, Axmen, and Pikesmen, and most other natives can only wound him through his Heavy suit of armor. The exceptions are those troublesome Lancers - and the Knights of the Order (which is a good thing to keep the Crossbow out of the Black Knight's hands!)

He needs to pick his fights carefully to avoid tiring out and being wounded to death, but with some luck or a little help he can take out the Guard, Soldiers, or Patrol. If someone has hired a few Rogues away, the Black Knight may even be able to take out the remainder on Day 1 and pick up an abandoned workhorse or two to enhance his defenses. If he can persuade another character or two to help him out, the Rogues don't stand much of a chance of seeing sunrise on Day 2. In fact this can become such a common opening that you may want to look up the "Watchful Natives" optional rule which the game designer, Richard Hamblen, intended to be included in the Second Edition Rules. If you get tired of watching the massacre of natives all over the board, "Watchful Natives" will give the natives a fighting chance to survive.

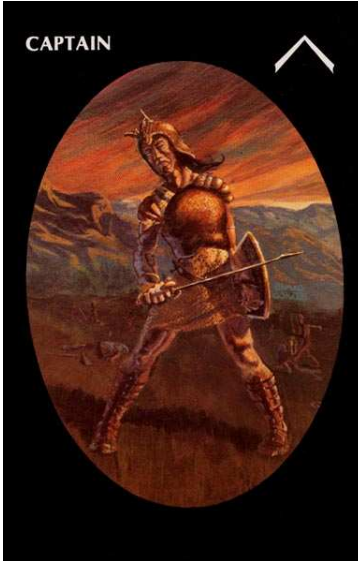
So where does the Black Knight's army come in? While he is picking through the Rogues' abandoned goods, there is a good chance that his allies, the Company, will show up at the Inn. Rolling one die on the Meeting Table due to his "Fear" advantage, the Black Knight has a 1 in 3 chance of hiring the whole troop at Price x1 for the cost of a workhorse plus change – and 1 chance in 6 of getting them for free on a Boon. (This is even better than the White Knight's "Honor" advantage which gives Whitey a 1 in 4 chance of getting a Price x1 from the Order and a 1 in 9 chance of a Boon. If this bothers you, you can add the Black Knight to the "Knights' Adjustment" optional rule – make the Black Knight "Friendly" instead of "Allies" with the Company.)



If the Black Knight succeeds in hiring the Company – and it shouldn't take him long: 52% chance of Boon in one day and 77% chance in two days – he becomes the most powerful character on the board. The C5 Great Swordsman, skillfully deployed, fixes the Black Knight's problem with Tremendous monsters. There isn't a native group on the board (excepting, as always, the Order) that can stand up to him and his hired thugs, and if the Black Knight decides to go character-hunting all the characters who can't run away with a speed-3 Short Swordsman on their sheets had better develop eyes in the back of their heads!

The Black Knight requires more expertise than the previous characters since battles with natives need to be carefully choreographed to avoid disaster. If you are successful in finding and hiring the Company you're going to need to study up on how to play a hired leader and how to manage hired natives in combat. But if you're up to the challenge, you're almost guaranteed a good game. Victory conditions are obvious: Notoriety from killing off natives, Gold from sacking the dwellings or looting treasure sites with help from CHQ, maybe some Fame from those Heavy monsters or whatever monsters your hired army can kill. And, of course, having a fearsome reputation so that all the other characters sidle away whenever you get near can be gratifying in itself.

## b. Captain



**CAPTAIN**

**CAPTAIN** Artist: Chris White

Meaning of Symbol: "CHEVRON": Military Leadership

WEIGHT/VULNERABILITY: MEDIUM

**Special Advantages**

- AIM:** Subtract 1 from all *Missile Table* die rolls.
- REPUTATION:** When at a Dwelling, get one extra phase. Limit one per day. See page 52.

**Optional Advantage** (see Optional rule 1.3)

- LEADERSHIP:** Roll 1 die instead of 2 for all *Hire* die rolls.

Development:

**SPEARMAN**  
SPEAR, SHIELD

MOVE	MOVE	FIGHT
M4*	M5	H5*

**SOLDIER**  
SHORT SWORD, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

add	FIGHT	FIGHT	MOVE
	M5	M3**	M3**

**LIEUTENANT**  
SHORT SWORD, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD

add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	M4*	H5*	M4*

**CAPTAIN**  
SHORT SWORD, HELMET, BREASTPLATE, SHIELD


add	MOVE	FIGHT	FIGHT
	M4*	H6	M4*

Start at **INN**, **HOUSE**, or **GUARD** house, with 10 **GOLD** plus:  
Short Sword, helmet, breastplate, shield

**FRIENDLY:** PATROL, SOLDIERS, GUARD, *Scholar*

**UNFRIENDLY:** WOODFOLK

**ENEMY:** BASHKARS




The Captain appears to be a twin to the Amazon at first sight, but closer examination reveals subtle but important differences. The Captain is a little stronger and a little slower. On the face of it, that's bad. His extra H Fight counters don't do a thing for him with his original Short Sword, and his Move M3 has two asterisks, precluding any other effort and forcing him to fatigue a chit. In a pitched combat with another character, he's more susceptible to losing chits to fatigue. If combat goes longer than four rounds, he will have to fatigue his Move M3\*\* chit, and then he can't dodge faster than 4.



If the Captain can get a Medium weapon, he can swing it (albeit slowly) with a Heavy Fight chit (Fight H6) while still maneuvering at speed 3 with his Move M3\*\* chit, whereas the Amazon's only Heavy Fight chit has two asterisks and restricts her to maneuvering at speed 4 with her Move M4 chit. On the other hand, the Captain's Heavy Fight chits top out at speed 5 with his Fight H5\* chit, whereas the Amazon with her Fight H4\*\* and an M\* weapon can undercut the Giants and guarantee an equal attack speed and longer length against any of the speed 4 unarmored monsters.

But the most important difference with the Amazon is that the Captain is friends with groups that start on the board (Soldiers, Guard), *and he can start at the dwellings with them!* This gives him a chance on Day 1 to buy an M Mace or M\* Small Ax from the Guard if he likes. He only needs a roll of 3 or less to get a Price x2, 1 chance in 4. With a Mace he can be as deadly as the Black Knight against Heavy monsters or natives; with a small Ax he becomes a formidable killer of everything except armored Tremendous opponents.

Even better, if instead he sells his helmet and breastplate, he has enough gold to hire either the Soldiers or the Guard at Price x2. He can then start with a small army to tackle the Tremendous monsters and a hired leader to help him Search and Loot. Once he has hired a native group to lure and kill denizens, he's a match for most of the trouble on the board. His success is limited only by the player's skill at using the hired natives.

Having a hired leader is a great advantage. The Captain can send him off in another direction and explore twice as much territory, or stay together to help him find and loot treasure sites. The hired leader can take his own turn and record four Search Phases in addition to the Captain's own four, emptying out the treasure sites in a hurry. The hired leader can also loot the Pool or Cairns without fatiguing a chit and loot the Enchanted Meadow or Crypt of the Knight without being affected by any Curses.

So, which to hire, the Soldiers or the Guard? Beginners look at the Soldiers' H1 Crossbowman and figure they've got the world beat, but remember that Crossbowmen roll two dice on the Missile Table (unlike the Archers who roll only one die), so that H1 is more often an M1 or L1. The Crossbowman is best used as bait for the monsters while the Great Swordsman and Pikesmen try to kill it. If you're planning on tangling only with Heavy and unarmored Tremendous monsters – or with other native groups – the Soldiers are fine and may be even better since there's one more of them. But if you want armored Tremendous monster insurance, the Guard may be a better bet. An advantage of the Soldiers is they're less expensive. You could hire the Soldiers and still have just enough gold to buy the Ax from the Guard if you can get to the Guardhouse easily and are willing to trade in your Short Sword.

Whether he hires the Soldiers or the Guard, the Captain can usually count on getting one or two Fame and one Notoriety by disposing of monsters that get in his way. A point in Great Treasures and at least one in Gold are also reasonable, considering the looting capabilities of his hired leader. If he collects some gold early, he can go back and hire another native group and get into empire building.

The “Reputation” phase at dwellings is great for an extra Trade or Hire Phase, but the optional “Leadership” advantage gives the Captain too much help in his hiring. I generally don’t play with any of the optional advantages, and with his ability to hire a native group at the beginning of the game the Captain is actually one of the stronger characters in the game and doesn’t need any extra help!

### **C. Conclusion**

The wide range of characters is one of the highlights of Magic Realm. Each of them have their strengths and weaknesses, and all of these characters can be competitive if played skillfully. Characters can gain strength as the game goes on by acquiring new weapons, armor, or other items. Nearly all the treasures convey a significant advantage to at least one character, and learning why the Reflecting Grease is so valuable to the White Knight, the Garb of Speed for the Black Knight and the Deft Gloves to the Swordsman is part of the joy of the game. Hired natives can also tip the balance of power dramatically.

But the best way to enhance a character’s strength is by teaming up with another character. The Realm is a dangerous place, and having someone to watch your back can make the difference between life and death. Teams of characters with complementary strengths can be much more powerful than either character alone. There is probably another equally long Strategy Article that could be written examining the relative strength of character pairs. Heavy characters can benefit enormously from a friendly Light character’s fast Move chits, and there are many other excellent pairings. The best advice for beginners is team up, have fun, and figure things out for yourself. Into the Realm!

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