Talisman Card Evolution:
THE HORSE
By J.C. Hendee

Introduction

This intermittent series will look at the forward evolution, backward devolution, and even sideways development of select *Talisman* cards over the game's various editions, ranging from 2nd edition (2E) through to the current revised 4th edition (4ER). While examining the differences in comparison to game mechanics, fiver considerations or criteria of comparison emerged: Choice, Control, Range, Speed, and Verisimilitude.

- **Choice** is a matter of external and/or internal, the difference being *when* or *if* versus the potential *how* to use the card.
- **Control** was found within "internal" choice, so in some respects it is a subconsideration of Choice, though perhaps not always with other cards.
- **Range** applies mostly to movement altering cards, like the horse. It is always a matter of "distance" potential in spaces. It might also apply to other cards in where shift between regions and/or realms is considered, though this doesn't directly apply to the Horse.
- **Speed**, contrary to be assumption, is about time not distance. It reflects how long it takes to get to a chosen destination, as opposed to a an ultimate stopping point or a space that allows one to stop short of a full movement roll (and such locations are few).
- **Verisimilitude** is the aspect of parallel realism maintained within the mechanics of its card as compared to how it is title, illustrated, and/or described. Too much deviation between descriptive elements vs mechanics (for the card and/or the game as a whole) creates a fracture in the sense of a cohesive "world" in game, even for that world's simplicity. The cards title and illustration become pointless, and it is loses its uniqueness.

Lastly, any conclusions after comparison and review *may* lead to alternative cards for 4ER, which I will label as 4th edition revised "retro" cards (4ERR). If enough come about over time, I'll package them together for standard download. With that said, let's begin by looking at *Talisman's* "Horse" card.

THE 2E HORSE

To my best knowledge, the Horse first appeared in the 2E expansion *Talisman the Adventure* (1986). At that time, it was classified as an "Object." This affected it in various ways, including that it could be stolen through Object-oriented Spells and Special Abilities, or taken as a victory prize in inter-adventurer Combat or Psychic Combat. In this, it lacked verisimilitude in both one important descriptive element as a a living creature, and subsequently how it interacted through game mechanics. The following description is taken directly from the card.

"The Horse allows you to add up to three to your die roll for movement after you have rolled the die. Followers are restricted to the normal movement indicated by the die roll. If you leave them behind by using this extra move, on your next turn you can ride back to them without rolling the die, instead of your normal turn."

The chance of rolling a desired number on one die with a range of 1 to 6 is 16.7%. Given choice of optionally adding up to 3, the range increases to 1 through 9. But also by choice of modifiers, the isolated (not cumulative) chance of creating (not just rolling) a desired number is increased for all but 1 and 9. Have a peek at the tables below.

		Die Roll (random)					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Modifier (chosen)	+0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	+1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	+2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	+3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Desired Total								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Probability to achieve (not just roll)	16.7%	33.3%	50%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	50%	33.3%	16.7%

This combined roll and optional modifiers gave an adventurer both increased Range (of travel) and Internal Control over getting to a chosen location aside from any ultimate or optional stopping space. Some might argue that the range of modifiers of choice were a bit much. That may be legitimate in its own right, though we should hold off until ultimately comparing it to other editions. But the principle structure of the 2E horse offered at least shadows if not concrete representation of all that would be expected of a true horse represented in Talisman's simplistic world. And it fulfills to some degree the concepts of Choice (internal), Control, Range, and Speed for a trained mount responding to a rider. Hence, against incorrect card classification, it maintained some sound Verisimilitude as well.

To balance the potentially powerful advantages, use of the Horse saw restrictions or deficits where other Followers were concerned (see its description). That itself was also realistically handled, or at least maintain Verisimilitude even more. It does also offer the chance to recover other Followers left behind, but again a sacrifice. There is also the risk that those Followers might be encountered and picked up by another adventurer before they could be

covered; another fair trade off. Additional limitations were later introduced in rules for the 2E version of *The Dungeon* (1987).

> "5.3 The Horse, the Warhorse and the Horse and Cart may not be taken into the Dungeon; you must discard these cards when you enter the dungeon."

That the Mule card wasn't included (being close to the size of horse and not to be imagined as donkey/burro) was a bit strange. Doubly so if we think of that Mule loaded down with up to 8 Objects. But its implied exclusion from this new rule didn't radically affect game play in most cases.

Regardless of questionably imagined huge passages, and ignoring what a dungeon really is, a dungeown would have rough spots, stairs, chutes, and/or just narrow ways — if imagined fairly and not in a self-serving exaggeration. A horse couldn't possibly navigate such, whether riding it or not. Most certainly one couldn't kick it into a canter or gallop for that 3 extra spaces by Choice. The 5.3 ruling was a good one. Aside from serving verisimilitude, it made the *Dungeon* more challenging for its potential shortcut to the Crown of Command or other optional endgames.

The specific wording in the *Dungeon's* 5.3 rule also required that such equine cards be placed in the Adventure (or other) discard pile — *not dropped on the entrance board space.* This part didn't make sense to many players groups that I encountered, though certainly for Verisimilitude it might be rationally reasoned either way.

Either mistakenly or by choice, players groups often altered this in two ways. Most often adventurers entering the *Dungeon* had to leave these equine cards on the entrance space. That space could be many places, for entering the 2E *Dungeon* was done by drawing a "Dungeon Door" card from the Adventure deck. That card was left on the space where drawn, so anyone coming along might find a Horse left behind and be able to snatch it up. The alternative, less used and highly questionable for subterranean travel, was that the an adventurer could "keep but not use" a horse in the Dungeon. Ultimately counter arguments ensued when this ruling was used. Either the first option was returned to, or any adventure trying to lead (not ride) a horse through took a -1 (min. of 1) on movement rolls in the Dungeon.

Overall, the 2E Horse gets good if not excellent marks in the five described criteria of review. Perhaps most important it required actually though in how to use it versus if to use it, hence its Control for an adventurer was its greatest feature. We'll see later why this is the central criteria of importance. It made the 2E Horse a coveted "Object" attracting a lot of player attention and interaction.

THE 3E HORSE

To my limited knowledge, this evolutionary step first appeared in 3E's *City of Adventure* expansion (1994). The 3E Horse might have been released earlier in the standard game, but in never purchasing anything 3E, I had only scant inventory sources that sometimes conflicted... not that it really matters.

Considering how little there is to alter on a *Talisman* card, the Horse saw strange changes for a supposedly trained mount and big animal. Foremost, and a better choice, it became a "Follower" rather than an "Object." This eliminated affecting it by Objected-oriented Spells or Special Abilities or as a victory prize in player vs. player Combat or Psychic Combat. Instead it was more correctly (by game mechanics) affected by Followere oriented Special Abilities and Spells. Much more sensible for a living creature, and so a bit of Verismilitude was picked up. In addition...

> "If you have the horse you may roll two dice for movement and use the highest roll. If you decide to roll two dice, you must use the dice with the highest score for your movement."

Poorly worded, and breeding potential confusion between "may" choose and "must" use, we now see the Horse hobbled, as was the adventurer using it. Gone was increased Range, which is now reduced to that of an adventurer on foot. Gone is Internal Choice, leaving only External Choice as to *if* or *when* (and not *how*) to use it.

In place of these was an increased probability of a higher movement roll, though this can't be equated to Speed for getting somewhere desired other than a forced or optional stopping space, like the Portal of Power. Without Control, there was no way use it with more advantage for achieving a specific space along the. And the forced use of the higher die (not dice) had an additional hidden catch.

The probability of rolling one desired number on one die is 16.7%. When rolling two and choosing one, the probability is higher. But when the higher die roll is forced, a desired low roll becomes less likely. Let's consider dice A and B for movement with the 3E Horse with the assumption that an adventurer desperately needs to roll a 1.

If die A rolls a 1 (16.7%), then die B will beat that 1 on 5 out of 6 possible numbers rolled. This means a 1 is superseded 83.3% of the time. Though it may seem that to get a 1 is like rolling two 1s, or "snake eyes," which is roughly a 2.8% chance, that's on a range of 2 to 12, not 1 to 6. The rest of the possible number probabilities are not the same as for 2D6. Below is a visualization showing the roll you *must* accept based on the separate rolls of dice A and B.

		A					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
B	1	1	2	3	4	5	6
	2	2	2	3	4	5	6
	3	3	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	4	4	4	5	6
	5	5	5	5	5	5	6
	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

Here are the actual percentage chances of rolls on 1d6 versus the 3E Horse's forced higher of 2D6.

	1D6	Higher of 2D6
1	16.7%	2.77%
2	16.7%	8.33%
3	16.7%	13.9%
4	16.7%	19.4%
5	16.7%	25.0%
6	16.7%	30.6%

The 3E Horse is an obvious disadvantage over normal movement when a roll below 4 is desired. Once again we see that in lack of Control, the only Choice is External, not Internal. Within a range of 1 to 6 spaces (equal to movement without a Horse), 50% of the time the Horse won't be used by any adventurer with common sense. It's only advantage is higher probability of traveling farther, which is not the same as faster when trying to get somewhere specific. Yes, if one needs a roll higher than 3, the Horse is better than walking. But since movement to the endgame inside the Inner Region is one space per turn, the only time the 3E Horse is of advantage is racing to the Portal of Power or other space with the option to stop short of using a full movement roll.

Its only other advantage (not really) is implied in the rules for the 3E *Dungeon of Doom* (1994). There is no mention of disallowing equines as there was in the 2E *Dungeon*. It's true that getting through either dungeon quickly is what many players are after when focused primarily on taking the shortcut to the endgame. In this perhaps the not-explicitly-banned 3E Horse may serve, but it certainly chucks Verisimilitude out the barn window. And higher still limited to 1 through 6 does not offer a stable chance to avoid visible hazards, which in turn can slow an adventurer down. So Speed really isn't there either. Control was mostly turned over to the game itself with less than half the need to use the horse as compared to the 2E version.

Additionally, since the 3E Horse no longer moves farther than six spaces, concern for leaving other Followers behind was eliminated... or at least not mentioned. In this, the 3E Horse sacrifices more Verisimilitude. How does one account for other Followers keeping up, when 75% of the time the Horse moves faster than normal foot travel?

All in all, the 3E Horse fails on at least 4 out of 5 of the criteria established for evolutionary comparison. It comes off as a barely broken-in steed, rather than a trained mount, wanting to constantly to bolt every chance it gets, but not necessarily taking the adventurer very far or where it wants to go.

THE 4ER HORSE

Talisman 4E from Black Industries wasn't around long enough for the Horse to be added. The Horse didn't reappear again until 4ER's first expansion, *The Reaper* (2008). Once again it changed.

"You may roll 2 dice and add them together to determine how far you move."

Sometimes its nice to see things boiled down to direct wording, unless this produces or hides shortcomings, making a card no more than a picture and title with weakened connection to its mechanics. Like the 3E Horse, Control is still gone, whether through modifiers or otherwise. Still gone is the Choice as well on the Internal side. 2D6 may offer more Range, but at a sacrifice of true Speed to anywhere but a forced or optional stopping space. Still gone is the reasonable limitation of not using oversized beasts in places that make no sense, like the 4ER *Dungeon* (2009).

The 4E Horse is even less help than the 3E in reaching a chosen destination. It has even less game (versus adventurer) Control through mechanics because its Range is a random more widely spread. In some cases, taking two turns on foot to reach a destination beyond 6 spaces might actually be better than trying for that space in one roll of 2D6. Some players wouldn't stop to think about this, and some who do might not realize how bad the odds could be. The table below compares percentage chances of rolls on 1D6, the 3E higher of 2D6, and the 4ER cumulative 2d6.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1D6	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7						
3E	2.77	8.33	13.9	19.4	25.0	30.6						
4ER		2.77	5.56	8.33	11.11	13.89	16.67	13.89	11.11	8.33	5.56	2.77

For any sought roll below 7 (almost half the Range on 2D6), the 4ER Horse is the worst choice. Even the roll of 7 is almost half the chance of a sound 6 with the 3E Horse. It boggles the mind to reason what purpose this newest Horse could serve... until we narrow down to the only possibility. I'll take a bit of a deviation here, so those who don't care can skip to the heading below and the new cards that are waiting.

Overall, there's a pattern in the Horse's evolution. Range has step by step become the only focus at the loss of Control, Choice (by adventurer or the game for that matter), and a true sense of Speed during all phase of the game. Along the way, all Verisimilitude has been lost. Range and Speed now serve only one purpose, one destination, pulling the adventurer (or rather player, in this case) toward dominant focus on one goal versus sub-goals along the way. *Get to that endgame above all else!*

Talisman has been pushed away for the magical "quest," whether we consider that term's true meaning or it's shadow promoted via video games (solo and online). But if so, does it really matter? Is the endgame now the "all" for *Talisman*?

I can't answer that for others, but for myself, I hope not. It would mean the game has wandered far astray from where it started. It means we might might as well go play that FPS video game instead, where its openly about picking up items of advantage, not adventuring to build a character, and then whacking the end "Boss"... over and over... and over.

The only "props" left after the thousandth game won't be what happened along the way and how the victory was accomplished and the steps — the choices — it took. It will be, like the same video game play a thousand times, about who can do it record time. I have already seen players more often than before accounting who won a game of *Talisman* in how many rounds. So sad.

THE 4ERR HORSE (AND A SPECIAL CARD)

The first card below is obviously a "retro" based in part on the 2E Horse mechanics and 3E Horse's type classification. A slight change was made to modifiers for Internal Choice. Also included are new terms matching my *In the Balance* expansion; ignore these for standard play or look into the expansion at TalismanIsland.com to understand what these terms mean. This "4ERR" Horse is an optional replacement the Horse distributed in the 4ER expansion the Reaper. *Use it in exactly the same number / proportion in the Adventure deck.* Do otherwise and you'll unbalance the deck.

The second card below is an *additional* option of my creation, with features usable with *In the Balance*. It should *not* be used to replace the 4ER Horse, and only one instance of this card should be included in the Adventure deck. At most, one instance per 104 Adventure cards might be used but no more, as it is potent when its mechanics and probabilities are understood. Anything more would unbalance the Adventure deck and lessen this card's allure for adventurer interaction when it pops into play.

Both cards, though presented in reduced display dimensions, are 300dpi. Right-click and "Save As" to download a fully printable version. You can acquire card backs at TalismanIsland.com.

> **WARNING: These cards are for personal use only. They are not redistributable or reusable in part or whole by any means for any reason. The only authorized distribution points at this time are through this article's posting and later through TalismanIsland.com**

I'll be back with another a card history if and when I uncover something of interest. Should you have a suggestion for analysis of another card's evolution, feel free to drop me note. Try via the Fantasy Flight Games *Talisman* subforum or go straight to NobleDead.com and use the Contact form to drop me an email. So for now, enjoy the adventures along the way.