

Knucklebones

Several years ago, a friend of ours who is known among those who go to Pennsic, Mistress Christianna MacGrain, invented a game based on her knowledge of medieval life.

It happened as she visited our neighbors, Tuatha de Bhriain. Colin had pulled out his box of baubles that he claimed he liked to use for gambling. "You like to gamble?" she inquired, as she looked longingly at the contents of the box. "Yes!" came the enthusiastic response from Colin and several other Celts present.

Christianna pondered this as she fingered the knucklebones she had just purchased in her pouch. "Would you like to play knucklebones?" she asked, "a friendly wager? I could teach you the game, it's pretty easy..." and the game was born.

This is the game she invented, that soon became an obsession among the Celts on the block (men from Clan Preachan have been seen betting the torcs and amber jewelry from around their necks...)

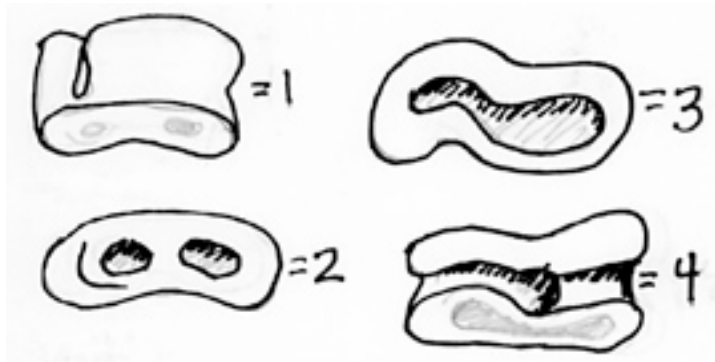
At Samhain, there were five people vying for a pile of hand blown glass beads, as antes increased. Later I saw a thor's hammer, silver coins and a large Celtic medallion in the pot. It is all the rage!

This is what you need:

- 3 knucklebones
- a flat surface to cast the bones
- a paper or fabric square with 9 blocks inscribed with the numbers 1 through 9
- and 9 markers... chips or pebbles

How to play:

There are four sides to each knucklebone. Each side represents a number 1 through 4, that are thrown like dice. See illustration.



Each player who contributes to the betting pot has an opportunity to throw the knucklebones. You can determine the order of the play by having each player throw the knucklebones – the highest number is the first to throw, then pass the bones to either left or right from there. The person with the lowest score wins.

Each player gets to throw the knucklebones in turn per game. The idea is to place a marker on each number on the square, based on the numbers you have thrown. The player continues to throw the bones until he/she has failed to throw a number that remains uncovered. When you can not cover a number, your turn ends.

Whatever numbers are left in the box uncovered are added up for your score. If during your turn, you covered up all the numbers in the box your score is zero.

The player with the bones chooses which square they want to cover with a marker based on the numbers they have thrown.

How a player chooses the number to be covered:

The player with the bones casts them on the table, and then you count the numbers that are face up. You can take a single bone at face value, or take a combination (the added sums of the numbers represented – adding to the value of two or all three bones). However you get to choose only one number per throw.

Example:

You cast three bones and a "1," "3" and "4" landed face up. You can take 1, 3, 4 at face value, or 5 (1+4), 7 (3+4), or 8 (1+3+4). Since the lowest score wins it makes sense to try to claim the higher numbers first. So if this were your first for your turn, it would be prudent to select the highest number value you have, in this case 8, you would place your marker on "8."

Now, say you have covered all the numbers on the board but one, and it is a "2." Your next throw you have cast a "1," "3" and "4," there is no combination that will give you a two. Your turn has ended and your score is "2," the bones move to the next player.

You repeat this process until everyone has had a turn to score. In the case of a tie, there will then be a face off between those individuals that share the lowest score, until you have a winner. You can ante up and increase the betting pot any time. The other players can continue to add to the pot or drop out, much like you do with any other gambling game. The winner gets the pot. *Enjoy!*