

the official magazine of Silven Crossroads

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Editor's Note April 1, 2005

Hello and welcome to the 20th issue of the *Silven Trumpeter*!

I think one of the neatest things about the *Trumpeter* is the fact that its nature as an online publication means that it is entirely dynamic. The writers publish their articles, but a big part of each article is the forum connected to it. If you have a Silven handle, you can add to an article, give voice to your thoughts, present a counterargument, or even just let your favorite author know that you really like what she's written.

This interaction is the kind of thing that big publications like *Dragon Magazine* just can't offer. Their writers are the high 'untouchables' of the gaming industry, and seldom have the time to really interact with their readership to the same extent that our community can.

So enjoy all the features that the *Silven Trumpeter* has to offer you! Take part in the discussion forums for your favorite article, or just let someone know that you enjoy his work. We're introducing a lot of new writers this month, and they'd love to hear from you – as would the writers who have been with us all along!

You'll find in this issue a wide variety of material. We have reviews of the *World's Largest Dungeon* and the *D6 Fantasy* system, plenty of advice and gaming material for GMs and players. Enjoy fiction from your favorite authors and from writers new to the Silven community, and see samples from one writer's intense personal project!

And, as the search for a tagline continues, may the dice roll in your favor!

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell
Editor-in-Chief
Silven Trumpeter

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

by Matthew J. Hanson

Life Insurance

"We have reviewed your application, Mr. Starlanko," said the clerk of Hadarus. His chair was built into a podium so high that Starlanko the Magnificent was forced to crane his neck upwards to look at the man. "We have reviewed your application, and decided to deny you coverage."

Starlanko had decided that he needed a life insurance policy after an all too close scrape with the Bandit Emperor. He had tried first at the church of Leolus the Sun Lord, who was also patron of learned magic. Despite the fact that Starlanko made regular contributions to the church, he had been denied there also. Most churches simply did not cover adventurers because they were just too high a risk, unless, of course, they served the church's interests directly. Trying to find life insurance was one of the rare occasions that Starlanko the Magnificent regretted not becoming a paladin.

"Is there any chance for an appeal?" Starlanko asked. "Perhaps if I were make a contribution to the holy coffers. We could call it pre-deductible."

"I'm afraid not," the clerk replied.

Starlanko thought the Church of Hadarus was his next best chance. Being that Hadarus was both the lord of the dead and the patron god of contracts, it seemed a natural fit. Ironically, followers of Hadarus never took out life insurance policies of their own. It was against their religion.

Starlanko was still not willing to give up. "Perhaps there is some service I could provide to tip the scales in my favor. I realize that there are often certain circumstances when the church would like results achieved, but its hands are tied for one reason or another."

The clerk chewed on the feathered tip of his quill pen. "Yes, Mr. Starlanko. Perhaps there is something you can do. Follow me." The clerk climbed down from his podium. On the ground, he was almost a foot shorter than Starlanko.

The clerk approached a blank stone wall. "Don't look," he commanded. Starlanko averted his eyes. And when the clerk allowed Starlanko to look again, a doorway had opened in the wall were none had been before.

The clerk led through a narrow passage to a bleak room whose only furnishings were a plain wooden table with a bench on either side. The air hummed with magic. Starlanko recognized several abjurations in effect around him. Undoubtedly this room was protected from any sort of magical spying. In addition to being lord of the dead, and patron deity of contracts, Hadarus was also the god of secrets.

"You see, there recently developed a situation with one of our members. It seems he had a slight conflict with a cleric of the church of Rorstroth in which the member in question lost one each of his upper and lower limbs."

"An arm and a leg?"

"Precisely."

"So why don't you just cast regenerate?" Starlanko asked.

"Because," the clerk replied, "regenerate only works on the living. The cleric of Rorstroth killed the member in question, then desecrated his body so that he would be forced to hop his way through out the afterlife. It would take a miracle to regenerate the limbs at this point."

"The why don't you just have somebody cast miracle?"

"We've considered that, but as I'm sure you're aware miracle is a very taxing spell. We'd like to exhaust all other options before we resort to that."

"Okay, how about this," Starlanko said, "you raise him,

cast regenerate, and then after his limbs are regrown he could commit suicide. It might not follow the letter of the doctrine, but it follows the spirit."

Without speaking or blinking, the clerk stared at Starlanko far too long for the wizard to remain comfortable. Finally the clerk broke the silence. "You were not asked here to brainstorm, Mr. Starlanko, you were asked here because the church has a favor to ask of you."

"You want to me retrieve the arm and the leg?"

"Precisely."

"Why don't you alert the authorities?" Starlanko asked.

"Let it be sufficient to say that there are certain circumstances involved in the death that we would rather not discuss in a public forum."

"Was he an assassin?"

"I will answer like this. All you need to know is there are assassins among the order of Hadarus, and the order would have no qualms about sending them after a nosey wizard who blabbed to the improper crowd."

"I see. But if your assassins could not dispose of this Cleric of Rorstroth, and you're relying on me to deal with the situation..."

"The slain individual in question, if he was an assassin, which no official source has claimed, if he was an assassin, was far from our most efficient killer. The reason we are sending you rather than one of our own men is not because we perceive any particular skill in you, it is because our assassins are a valuable resource. Frankly, nobody cares if you die."

"I think my mother would care." Starlanko the Magnificent took a moment to weigh his options. "Could I have the insurance plan come into effect before beginning the mission?"

"I'll have to check with my superiors," the clerk replied.

When Starlanko the Magnificent returned to the inn where he was currently staying, he explained the situation to his associates, who now seemed to number one and a half. A former associate of Starlanko's, a wizard named Candessa Voliar, had recently decided that "she needed a break from adventuring." Starlanko suspected that her choice to leave might have been more personal.

His one associate was Redreck the Fierce, a brave warrior and accomplished swordsman. Redreck seemed different after returning from a concert he recently attended. He seemed less stoic, as though he had gone from an expression of granite to one of limestone. Starlanko suspected that it had something to do with a certain bard, but the only comment Redreck made was that the trip was "good."

The half associate was Funbane, the sword that Starlanko wore despite not being proficient with martial weapons. The sword counted as half because it was not entirely useless, just mostly so. Funbane was only a +1 longsword, but he did know an awful lot about history and nobility.

Starlanko was going to retrieve the missing limbs for the Church of Hadarus, but he did not feel the need to jeopardize Redreck's life, and he told Redreck so. Not surprisingly, Redreck volunteered to assist Starlanko regardless of the dangers. Plus, Starlanko knew that Redreck had no love for the church of Rorstroth, a faith known for promoting violence and destruction.

Since Funbane did not have the life to risk in the traditional sense, Starlanko would decide whether or not the sword accompanied him. Right now Starlanko was leaning towards not. Funbane had a habit of voicing its opinion at the least opportune moments.

Having decided that he was going to attempt the theft, Starlanko the Magnificent decided that if there was

"Did she obtain an ancient artifact of ludicrous power and use it to enslave the entire planet?"

thieving to be done it should be done properly, and he knew just the person to help him do it properly.

"Vox? Yeah I've heard of her," said the unsavory barkeep of the unsavory Blind Balor tavern. There was a rancid stench in the air, as though somebody had vomited in a corner and left it for days. Starlanko suspected it was because somebody had vomited in the corner and left it for days. The tables, walls, and support beams all were splintered, having been often caught in the cross fires of drunken brawls. The barkeep showed similar signs, having a large scar above his right eye and at least two golden teeth that presumably were not originals. The barkeep spit slightly when he talked. "But don't know why you're looking for her. Vox's a double crossing, two-timing ungrateful maggot spawn."

"I know, that's exactly why I'm looking for her," replied Starlanko the Magnificent.

"No, you don't understand. She's turned her back to her ilk."

"Did she rat somebody out to save her own skin?" Starlanko asked.

"Worse than that!"

"Did she go in on a job with a partner, then skip out the last minute with all the loot?"

"Worse than that!"

"Did she obtain an ancient artifact of ludicrous power and use it to enslave the entire planet?"

"Worse... okay, not worse than that," the barkeep admitted. "But still, it's pretty bad what she done."

"What did she do?"

"She turned... She's become... She.... I can't say it. It's just too unspeakable. You'll have to ask her yourself."

"So you know where she is then?" Starlanko asked.

"Yes, I can tell you where she is, but you are warned. Only the bravest or most foolhardy venture down the path she has chosen."

"Hello and welcome to Lendy's. How many in your party?" A young man greeted Starlanko.

"Two," Starlanko replied.

"Smoking or non?"

"Non, please."

"Right this way."

Lendy's was clean, polished, and double sanitized. The walls were covered with odd paraphernalia, like posters used to promote bards of Starlanko's youth, toys that had once been popular, and replicas of artwork produced by the ancient civilization that had disappeared millennia ago. The young man who greeted Starlanko had bright white teeth, which he felt compelled to display in as broad a smile as he could possibly muster. The rest of the staff, buzzing from table to table, seemed equally chipper, except perhaps for the elven woman that came to Starlanko's table. She was dressed all in black, and though she said all the proper lines, she did it with the enthusiasm of a prisoner confessing after days of torture.

"Hello. Do you want anything to drink like a Lendy's Mead, or can I start you off with a Lendy's appetizer sampler?"

"Hello, Vox. Funny meeting you here."

"I'm sorry, there's nobody here by that name," said the woman who looked surprisingly like Vox, a thief who Starlanko had worked with twice before. "May I recommend the Lendy's super sandwich."

"So, what is it? Are you casing out the place? Is it built directly above an ancient treasure vault, because I don't think that Lendy's itself is a particularly valuable target."

"I'm just a hard working waitress doing my best to ensure the customer is satisfied."

"Is it one of the neighboring locations? I didn't really think to check them out."

"I'm trying to become lawful," Vox admitted.

"A joyous occurrence indeed," spoke Funbane from Starlanko's scabbard.

"The heat finally become too much for you?"

"No. I have nothing to fear from the heat."

"What then?"

"I've got a new bow. I have to be lawful to use it."

"That's not much of a reason." Starlanko said.

"It's a keen vorpall bow."

"Forgive me, but I didst think that a bow could be not keen nor vorpall."

"Yes it can. I've got one," Vox insisted.

"No, he's right. Only melee weapons can be keen, and only slashing melee weapons can be vorpall," said Starlanko.

"No, ranged weapons can be keen or vorpall. They just don't show up randomly."

"I think I know more about arcane than you do."

Vox squinted at Starlanko. "Do you know keen edge?"

"Yes."

"And you can cast that on ranged weapons right?"

"I can cast it on ammunition. I can't cast it on a bow and have it transfer to ammunition."

"You have a dagger. It's a melee slashing. It can be vorpall. You can throw a dagger. Does it lose its vorpall?"

"It's slashing or piercing. If it's thrown it's piercing, and piercing weapons can't be vorpall."

"Fine. Say it's a throwing axe. You can fight with it in melee or throw it."

"It doesn't matter. A bow is still piercing."

"I have a keen vorpall bow."

"Could you demonstrate it?"

"No, I can't use it. That's why I have to become lawful," Vox said.

"That also seems inconsistent to me. Normally, aligned items just make you less powerful if you're of the improper alignment."

"Maybe it's intelligent."

"That doth be possible," said Funbane. "There do be items of powerful will that can force their wielder to act or to not act as the item deems fit."

Starlanko recalled an instance when he had wielded Funbane as if he was an expert swordsman. It was as though somebody else had been controlling his body. It had saved his life, so he had not complained, and Funbane had never brought it up. It made Starlanko wonder.

"Just where did you get this bow?"

"... I stole it."

"Wouldn't the lawful thing to do be to turn yourself in for the crime?"

About the Author

Matthew J. Hanson is an aspiring writer, as well as a long time gamer. He normally lives in Minnesota, but is currently finishing his senior year of college in Beloit, Wisconsin. Recently, his 10-minute play *Who is Ruth* was selected as the winner for the American College Theatre Region III winner, for their 10-minute play competition, and it will be advancing to the national competition in April. If you would like to learn more about Matthew J. Hanson, please feel free to visit his website at www.matthewjhanson.com.

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"I'm trying to become lawful. Now I'm only neutral."

"The person we need to steal from is a priest of a chaotic deity, and it would be at the behest of a lawful church. Couldn't that score you some lawful points?"

"I could steal something and still be lawful? I'm in."

Starlanko the Magnificent, Redreck the Fierce, and Vox the Lawful soon found themselves traveling through a sewer tunnel, which reportedly led to the hideout of Greckle, a powerful cleric of Rorstroth. The three were all invisible thanks to Starlanko's magic, but because he was conserving spells, they had to stay close together or the spell would fall apart. In order to minimize sound, Starlanko had also cast what's-his-name's telepathic bond, allowing the three to communicate mentally. They followed directions provided by the church of Hadarus, and just as the directions predicted, they soon came to a door. Vox examined it.

"Trapped," she thought at them. "Hang on."

Vox fiddled with the door, then opened it as stealthily as she could and slid through the opening. Starlanko and Redreck followed.

They found themselves in a many-sided room. Ten, Starlanko guessed, but did not bother to count. Directly across from the door they entered was a second door, and

there were small alcoves in each of the other walls. In the center of the room was a stone sarcophagus, which Vox was searching.

"No traps," Vox thought. "A little help with the lid?"

Redreck pushed the lid aside. Starlanko felt a ripple of magic energy, and the telepathic link between himself and the others was severed.

"No traps?" he said, but then noticed that Vox had disappeared.

Starlanko had hoped it would be easy. He had hoped that there would be two limbs just sitting in the sarcophagus waiting to be rescued.

As it turned out, there were limbs in the sarcophagus, but they were attached to a zombie, who was sliding the lid the rest of the way off. Similar zombies appeared from secret caches in the various alcoves in the room, and lurched to attack.

Redreck quickly chopped the sarcophagus zombie in twain, then stepped to face another approaching zombie.

"It's a delay," said Starlanko. "Greckle wants to stall us with these so he has time to cast buffing spells on himself."

"Do it," Redreck said.

Starlanko the Magnificent waved his arms, and spoke a magic incantation. A ball of fire exploded, burning all the zombies to a crisp, but Starlanko and Redreck were also caught in the explosion. Starlanko was protected from most of the blast by a magical ring he owned, but Redreck absorbed the blast full on. Since Vox was still nowhere to be seen, Starlanko assumed she had survived unscathed.

"How are you?" Starlanko asked.

Redreck was in the process of quaffing a potion. "Fine," he sputtered as he tossed the empty bottle to the ground. "Let's go." But as Redreck approached the door, it burst open. Apparently the evil cleric was not satisfied to simply open the door and politely step through. No, he needed to destroy something in the process.

The figure who stepped through the door, who Starlanko had to assume was the evil cleric Greckle, was twice the size of a normal human, doubtlessly under the influence of a spell, and he was shrouded by a dark aura of unholy protection. Even with Starlanko's quick action, it seemed Greckle had buffed himself quite well. The evil cleric was clad in heavy plate armor, and wielded a massive sword with both hands, while a shield floated nearby under its own power.

Thwenk. An arrow seeming from nowhere pierced Greckle in the neck, and he let out a cry of rage. The cleric scanned for the source of the arrow, but it could not be seen. Evidently Vox's hiding was going to a good purpose.

Redreck charged the giant cleric. Swords clanged against armor. Redreck looked as though he had taken a slight blow, but nothing to worry about.

Thwenk. Another arrow struck the evil cleric, this time piercing his eye. He screamed in terrible pain. Unfortunately for Vox, with his good eye Greckle saw from where she was shooting. He cast a spell, and a pillar of unholy flame stuck right where Vox was crouching. Fortunately for Vox, it was the wrong sort of spell to use against her. She rolled out of the area unscathed.

Starlanko, meanwhile, was casting spells of his own. He started with a haste spell, to aide his friends, then he tried a dispel magic on Greckle to weaken his defenses. Starlanko managed to do away with the unholy aura that surrounded the cleric, but the spell that kept him in giant form remained.

Redreck landed a blow against Greckle, but the cleric seemed to be focused on Vox. He cast another spell, this time choosing one less apt to be shrugged off by Vox. In fact, she was not able to shrug it off, and as a result was paralyzed where she stood.

Starlanko wished he had not just used his dispel magic for the day. "Don't let him get to Vox," he said, then moved toward the paralyzed rogue.

Greckle was gravely injured. He had been pierced, battered, and broken. Blood mixed with aqueous humor leaked from his eye. But that all went away as he cast a powerful healing spell upon himself. His wounds closed and he was as fresh as he had been before the fight began.

Just after Greckle cast his healing spell, Starlanko cast a different spell to erect a wall of stone separating Greckle from our heroes, though he doubted it would hold long. The wall resounded as Greckle's sword clashed into it.

In addition to the shortbow that Vox still clutched in her paralyzed hands, there was another one strapped to the back of her pack.

"You're lawful right?" Starlanko asked. Redreck nodded. "Well, let's give this a try." He tossed the bow to Redreck.

Greckle burst through the stone wall.

Thwenk.

Pop.

"I guess you really can make a vorpal bow."

No Requiem for the Shadows

by Chris McCoy

Just a little longer...

Sairalinde's rapier barely managed to catch her opponent's magically enhanced short sword, leaving a bright score mark upon the blade's basket hilt. The silver-tressed elven woman danced forward for a quick riposte with her dagger and sent the rapier flying in at her ebony-haired rival's chest. Her opponent's twin swords blurred as they moved through the air, denying the strike. The feint would have worked, should have worked, but those enhanced short swords blocked Sairalinde's rapier and forced the elven bladeswoman to go back on guard.

Where is he?

Sairalinde cursed softly under her breath. The short swords came across too quickly for Sairalinde to follow, inflicting another series of minor cuts upon her already battered body. The wounds stung, but Sairalinde had no choice but to fight on. She worked her rapier and dagger furiously, driving her rival back into the alleyway. The cacophony of screeching metal echoed upon the mildew-streaked walls, combining with the heavy breathing and cursing of both elven women to create the music of their duel. Dueling in the back alleyways of Carthas was not exactly the best way to get in the good graces of the guards. The last thing she needed was to be arrested, let alone killed by Vадania's blades.

Vадania...she tasted bile at the mere thought of her enemy's name. Gods, she hated this woman, the one who violated everything she believed in, a servant of a

dark goddess who killed all that she touched. How long had it been since they first raised a blade to one another? Twenty years?

In the lifespan of two elves, a twenty-year duel was just the beginning of a lifetime of hatred. A lifetime of vengeance.

Sairalinde's rapier came in suddenly, thrusting through a gap in her opponent's guard, and scored her first strike of the evening. The slender blade plunged through Vадania's thigh, causing her opponent to curse viciously. Sairalinde gave the blade a twist and pulled it out, leaving a streak of crimson in the air as her dagger just managed to block a savage strike from Vадania's blades. The ebony haired woman glared at her opponent and spun her swords downward in a spiral, forcing Sairalinde to retreat once again. The moonlight pierced the shadowy gloom of the alley for a scant moment as it slipped out from under a cloud, illuminating the infuriated Vадania in its silvery light.

"You bitch... is that the best you can do? I would think after all these years you would have learned my style a bit better..." Vадania sneered, deftly deflecting an oncoming rapier strike. The moon's rays were once again shrouded by the clouds, plunging the alleyway back into shadow.

The shadows were also growing stronger in Sairalinde's heart. The light of hope was fading.

Sairalinde parried desperately, her mind focused on keeping her own sword arm moving to deflect the onslaught of Vадania's blows. She could feel her blood slowly seeping from a dozen minor wounds, slowly but surely draining her of much needed strength. She wished she could hold out long enough to vanquish her foe...or at least until Phoenix arrived...

Come on, Phoenix!

Where was he? Phoenix, her prince and friend, had always come to her aid when she needed it. Why wasn't he answering now? The illusionist was flighty, always light-hearted and carefree, unlike the serious manner in which Sairalinde chose to address the needs of life. Had he indeed run off, finally fed up with her recklessness and furious anger towards Vадania? She prayed she had not disappointed him, for she needed him now more than ever.

Her mind screamed out in panic. She was going to die here if she didn't do something.

Something that may very well end up killing her.

Sairalinde worked her rapier through a quick series of strikes and counterstrikes, bringing her within dagger range of Vадania. Vадania, not expecting the sudden onslaught, tried to match her opponent blow for blow. Sairalinde dropped her defensive guard and charged straight into her opponent. She drove her rapier in low, leading with a one, two feint and stabbed forward with her dagger. She prayed to Corellon that the move would work and not impale her on the ends of her rival's wicked blades.

The feint worked.

Sairalinde smiled in grim satisfaction as she buried her dagger up to the hilt in Vадania's shoulder. A cry of genuine pain escaped her lips as one of her short swords clattered to the ground. Sairalinde fell back, pulling her bloodied dagger out of Vадania's shoulder. Vадania's azure eyes narrowed and she raised her remaining short sword, shouting out her rage. She ran forward; her blade suddenly flared up with a sickly purple light.

Sairalinde raised her rapier in defense, brandishing the blade high to intercept her rival's descending sword.

Vadania's short sword struck Sairalinde's rapier and the slender elven blade shattered, showering both combatants with razor sharp fragments of silvery metal.

Sairalinde stumbled backwards, stunned, as her ancestral weapon broke apart in her hands. Vadania then slammed the hilt of her short sword into Sairalinde's stomach, causing the elf to double over and fall down upon the ground. Sairalinde lost her grasp on her dagger as she fell upon the cold flagstones and it landed just out of her reach. Vadania laughed coldly, bringing her glowing sword to her fallen opponent's throat.

"So it finally ends. I knew that you would die by my hand but it is so satisfying to know that Phoenix never came to your rescue. You know why, don't you? He fell to my blade... I killed him. I shall enjoy the reward for killing you. I know Lolth is going to enjoy this offering..."

Vadania pressed her blade closer to Sairalinde's throat, drawing forth a bit of blood. The moon elf smiled sadistically at this, enjoying the pain that was making itself evident on Sairalinde's face. Vadania used her free hand to bring a satchel from her side and dropped it in front of Sairalinde. Vadania used her foot to open satchel and out rolled something that destroyed the last bit of hope within Sairalinde's heart.

It was Phoenix's severed head, a look of horror frozen upon his dead features, no longer handsome, no longer alive.

Sairalinde's eyes flooded with tears, tears that she did not shed immediately. An eternity of realization passed before she cried forth a wail of pure anguish and grief. It was a scream that echoed all her failures; all her shortcomings. Her prince, her beloved friend, had fallen to the very blade that would now claim her life? It mustn't be true. The dead look in his eyes shattered her hope of rescue. Sadness finally claimed her last shard of hope and she wept. There was no reason to live anymore

with Phoenix dead. So many things she wanted to tell him, so many memories she wanted to create with him. But now...

Vadania grinned victoriously as she leaned forward, her blade poised for the final strike. She closed her eyes as she offered a prayer to her goddess, Lolth, the goddess she had come to venerate after turning her back on her

I would think you would remember I am an illusionist... I merely tricked her into thinking she had killed me. Do you honestly think I could be so easily felled?

own people. Vadania laughed darkly as she finished intoning the ritualistic chant.

"Die and greet the darkness, for it now owns your soul."

"You first."

A lightning bolt flashed across the shadowy alleyway, dancing along Vadania's body before sending her crashing into the far wall. Her dark-cloaked form crumpled amongst the refuse that littered the alley, her body smoking and hissing from the aftermath of the spell. Sairalinde looked up through tear-filled eyes at the approaching savior and cried out in relief and stunned realization.

"Phoenix..."

Pushing his cloak hood back, he smiled and extended a gloved hand. Sairalinde graciously accepted and pulled herself to her feet, wiping the tears of sorrow and disbelief from her eyes. Phoenix shook his head with amusement and a slight smile fell upon his lips. "You know I would never desert you. A prince never deserts his people when they need him the most. I merely arrived fashionably late, as any noble with class does."

"She said she had killed you... she said..."

He chuckled softly and ruffled his friend's silvery hair.

Sairalinde only stared at her rescuer with astonishment and took him by the shoulders, making sure that he was real and not conjuration of her imagination.

"How?" she whispered hoarsely, pointing to the head that lay upon the ground.

Phoenix picked the severed head, his head, off the ground and snickered. He waved his hand through the

arcane motions of a spell and the head disappeared into nothingness.

"I would think you would remember I am an illusionist... I merely tricked her into thinking she had killed me. Do you honestly think I could be so easily felled? My dear Sairalinde...I am such the impervious gentleman!"

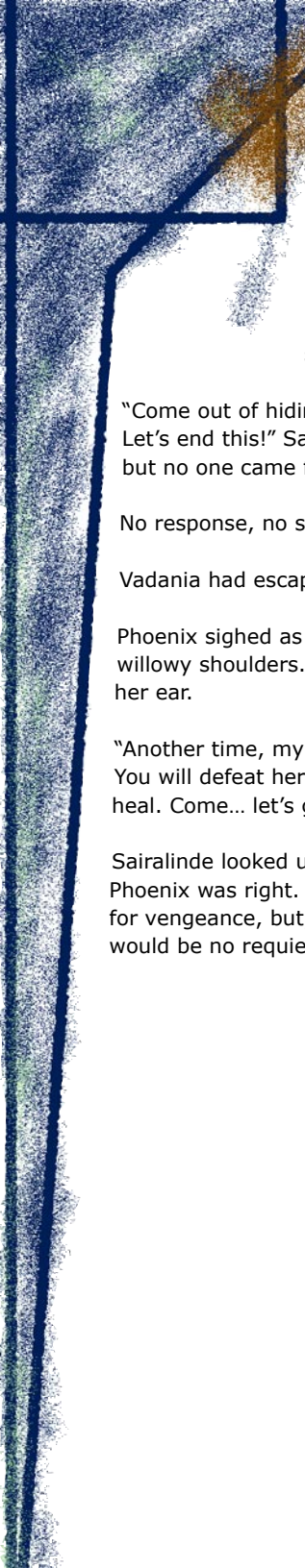
Sairalinde could only embrace him and kiss his cheeks repeatedly. He was alive! She had not failed him. Relief washed over her, a feeling of wordless tranquility. Sairalinde nearly barreled him over as she buried him in a bear hug. Phoenix could only chuckle and hold onto her all the more tightly.

She cursed softly as she realized just how wounded she truly was.

She winced as her wounds reopened and she fell into his arms, her strength threatening to fade away once again.

"I think you might care to drink this." Phoenix handed her a small vial and she eagerly drank the potion of healing Phoenix offered her. Her wounds mended as the healing potion worked its magic. With the flow of blood staunch and the majority of her cuts healed, Sairalinde turned her attention to the fallen form of her enemy, Vadania.

She was gone.



Sairalinde looked about for the elven assassin. The thought of Vadania bearing down on them with her deadly blade readied to strike flashed in her mind and made the search all the more frantic.

But Vadania was nowhere to be seen.

"Come out of hiding, you damned wretch and face me! Let's end this!" Sairalinde shouted into the shadows but no one came forth.

No response, no shriek of vengeance save her own.

Vadania had escaped.

Phoenix sighed as he placed a hand upon his friend's willowy shoulders. He squeezed softly and whispered in her ear.

"Another time, my dear. She must've teleported away... You will defeat her in time but for now, you have to heal. Come... let's get you back home."

Sairalinde looked up into her prince's eyes and nodded. Phoenix was right. There would always be another time for vengeance, but, for now, it was time to heal. There would be no requiem for the shadows tonight.

Three Drabbles

by Nghi Vo

What is a drabble?

A drabble is a story written in exactly one hundred words. Some time back in October, in the midst of post-graduation unemployment, I decided that I wanted to write one hundred drabbles. From October until February, I more or less successfully cranked out a drabble a night. Some of them I can't stand to look at now, and some of them I'm still rather proud of, but the fact remains that they exist, all 10,000 words of them.

When I think the drabbles as a whole, I think of how much my life has changed since I started writing them. I've gained a job, lost some friends, gained some other ones, lost my mind and my dignity, had my sense of humor tested, got into a nasty car accident, written half a novel, and more or less survived. The usual run of things, I imagine.

He smiled politely at me, not understanding, or trying not to.

"Miss must be mistaken," he murmured. "No such things go on here." He tapped the scarred wooden counter for emphasis.

"Taipans," I said firmly, "Or if you don't have them, a breeding pair of black mambas."

A woman, stately in her turquoise sari, parted the curtain and peered at me from the back room.

"What need have you for snakes such as these?" she asked curtly.

"Vengeance," I admitted, and she nodded.

"That is the only thing we sell them for," she agreed, holding up a slender hissing head.

They married my aunt to the river on a year of terrible flooding.

Our wise woman shook the bones and finally told the villagers that the river was a young bachelor come courting. The flooding grew worse, until my aunt was dowered by the headsman and dressed in bridal red.

All weeping, they sewed smooth river stones into her hems and set her on a flimsy raft. We watched as the fierce river took her, and my grandmother wailed at the loss of her only girl.

The river is a jealous husband and we have not seen my aunt since.

"You? You're the dragon?" Raenulf stared in unwilling disbelief.

The young girl shrugged carelessly. "Enough of a dragon for most people."

She opened her silk robe and he saw what made people call her the Dragon of Clock Hill.

The tattoo stretched across her chest, beautifully green and gold. The wings spread up towards her shoulders, the dragon's head twisted so it rested on her right breast. She drew a deep breath and it seemed to breathe.

Disappointed, Raenulf turned to go, not seeing her skin turn hard and shiny and her bones begin to twist under her suddenly-hot flesh.

Interview with Shawn S. Altorio

by Dana Driscoll

Shawn S. Altorio, the creator of the SSA-X2 Character Sheet, offers some of his time to answer a few questions from Silven Crossroads. The SSA-X2 Character Sheet is featured in the Reviews section of the Silven Trumpeter.

Please tell us a little about yourself.

My name is Shawn S. Altorio (aka Pasmus Nauran), and I'm a 24-year-old graphic artist for Lee Valley Tools in Ottawa, Ontario (Canada). I've always been pretty creative. I took TV Broadcasting in college here in Ottawa, and started my company Dark Side Productions. Initially the company was to be focused on video production, but that didn't really pan out. A few years ago I lost my job in computer sales, and I spent some time jobless. A couple of opportunities came along to design some logos and a CD cover for some friends and family, and eventually I found my way into the graphic design field, which I really enjoy.

After releasing several versions of my D&D character sheet through my personal website, I decided that with my long-term plans, establishing a product design "company" wasn't a bad idea. With SSA-X2 as the character sheet's name, it only made sense to stick with that. SSA-X2 is not really a company, as all my work right now is free, and I'm the only "employee", but it provides a more recognizable platform for me to launch products from.

Can you tell us about the SSA-X2 character sheet?

Well, I've noticed that among the plethora of character sheets available online, there are two distinct categories. You have Excel character sheets, which are incredibly interactive and customizable, thanks to the capabilities of Microsoft Excel. Unfortunately, these sheets don't generally tend to be particularly printable, and users are required to have Microsoft Excel to use them. On

the other side of things are PDF character sheets, which look beautiful and print perfectly, but tend to lack much interactivity (if they have any at all). I've attempted to bridge that gap, giving the best of both worlds in an extremely interactive and customizable PDF character sheet.

I strived to make the SSA-X2 D&D Character Sheet the most extensive PDF character sheet available. You can enter your character data and the sheet calculates all derivative values. A customizable layout allows you to use only 4 pages, or expand to a colossal 27, so you only see the pages you need. And your form data can be saved to the sheet or exported into a small FDF file for convenient transport – even from Acrobat Reader – which is something I don't think any other PDF character sheets can claim.

One of the greatest enhancements to version 2.5, and what makes this sheet really powerful, is the addition of scripted commands that let you manipulate data in all sorts of ways. In most lists you can move entries around as you like. You can move weapons from your equipment list to your active weapons list, for example. Or you can choose a spell you have in your spellbook and copy it into your prepared spell list. The sheet does all the work for you. There are sort commands in all lists, so you can sort your data in a way that makes sense to you.

One of the favorite features of those I've talked to, are the new "Populate" commands I've added to the spell and powers lists. You can now enter a spell or power name and level, and then by simply choosing the "Populate" command, all the specifics (spell components, range, duration, description, etc.) are entered for you. This works for any spell listed in the Player's Handbook or SRD, and any power listed in the Expanded Psionics Handbook or SRD.

The feature I'm most proud of is the new "Bonus Breakdown" dialog. When this feature is turned on (via a checkbox at the top-left of some pages), if you enter a field for miscellaneous or temporary values (as well as specific others), a small dialog shows up, allowing you to enter individual modifiers and label them. The total of the modifiers is automatically entered into the sheet field. This allows you to track where your modifiers come from, without using up a ton of space on the sheet. It's a feature that really has to be seen to be appreciated.

Where did you get the idea to work on the character sheet?

I've been a big role-playing fan for many years, though I didn't really have a chance to play Dungeons & Dragons until about 3 years ago when I met some friends of mine who were lifetime role players. One of my buddies was attempting to edit Mad Irishman's fantastic character sheet to suit his needs, and asked me for some help. It was then that I realized PDF files aren't really designed to be edited (that is the point, after all), and so I began work on my first character sheet.

As I tend to do, I dove into the project headfirst. It took several weeks to come up with a workable layout within Adobe InDesign. I exported the sheet to PDF, added form fields, and began teaching myself JavaScript (which wasn't as hard as it could've been, thanks to some programming experience from high school). That initial sheet was less than stable. But as time went on, I was able to deal with the bugs and smooth out the sheet. Version 1.13r1 of "SSA's Auto-Calc D&D 3rd Edition Character Sheet" (what a name!) is still available on my website as well as RPGSheets.com (where it enjoys a respectable 8.8 out of 10 rating, and over 9000 downloads).

At some point, after I had released version 1.13 my computer crashed and I lost all my layout files. With the next version – which ended up coinciding with the release of the D&D 3.5e rules – I decided I'd redesign the layout from scratch (not that I had much choice). This time, I knew what I was doing. With the plan to eventually make a suite of D&D-related products I decided that I needed a generic name for the product line, and thus SSA-X2 was born.

The character sheet is amazing. How many hours do you think it took you to produce?

Well, I appreciate the compliment.

That's a tough question. I really wish I had tracked the time I spent working on the character sheet. If I had to estimate, it'd probably be a couple thousand hours just on version 2.5. The layout of the sheet is a small percentage of development time. The really intensive part is writing all the JavaScript code that drives the calculations and commands. There's about 30,000 lines of code, all of which was re-written from version 2.1 to speed things up, and some of it was re-written multiple times as I found more efficient ways to do things. Transcribing all the spell and power data for the "Populate" commands was also very time intensive. I spent 3 weeks on that alone.

When I start a project, I tend to really get into it. I'd get home from work around 5:30, and work on the sheet until I went to bed around 11:30. I did that for months, and some of my weekends were spent doing nothing but. It was really almost like a second job, but even though it was frustrating at times, I loved doing it.

Originally, what ended up as version 2.5 was slated to be version 2.2. I began work on it in January of 2004, and expected it to be done by March. Part of the reason the sheet took a year instead of that original three-month estimate is that I was having too much fun, and kept thinking up great new features to implement. I have a tracking sheet in which I keep a listing of all new feature ideas and changes I'd like to implement. It still has a bunch of ideas in it, even now that I've released the sheet. I don't know how many times I told my friends and beta testers that the sheet would be done, only to keep going with it because I had more to add. One of my testers even joked that I should forget about ever releasing a final version, and just regularly release betas. I eventually had to cut myself off and release the sheet.

Can we look forward to any other products from you?

Most definitely. I've got several concepts I'd like to pursue, as part of an SSA-X2 D&D suite.

After I released my original version 1.0 character sheet, I created a companion sheet for keeping track of stats for familiars, animal companions, pet and mounts. I used the character sheet as a basis on which to build the companion sheet, which ended up proving to be a problem. Because the original character sheet was so buggy, it meant that I would have to upkeep two separate versions of the same basic code. I quickly dropped the companion sheet after releasing version 1.0 of it. I'm now looking to resurrect the idea of that old companion sheet as a SSA-X2 product, using the stable and feature rich core of the current character sheet as a basis. I've had several requests for such a product, and I think it's something that's somewhat unique.

I have other ideas that I haven't completely fleshed out. I'd like to do a character generator that can export generated characters to the character sheet. I'd also like to do a DM tracking sheet, which could potentially import vital stats from the party member's character sheets, and summarize it for easy reference. And my friend who's DMing the campaign I'm currently in would love to see system for generating monsters with templates and class levels. The main goal is to create a suite of independent products which can share data, and can operate on any operating system.

And I'm not at all done with the character sheet. I've still got a plethora of ideas for it, so another update is imminent (though not right away).

Are you planning on releasing a commercial version of the sheet?

That's a complicated issue. There are a lot of great character sheets available for free on the web and then there are the legalities. I've seen a few character sheets that are shareware, and frankly I don't think that's the way to go. People question why they should pay for a character sheet when they can get so many for free. Even with a great feature set, they'll likely decide to go with a slightly simpler sheet for free, rather than pay for extras.

My goal isn't to get rich from this. I did it because it was a challenge, and it was something that was useful to me. I've always been of the mindset that I'd rather do something I love and make ends meet, than make lots of money doing something I hate. My job pays the bills, and the actual cost of producing this sheet wasn't all that

much. I prefer the concept of donation-ware. If people like my sheet, they can freely choose to donate whatever they'd like to show their appreciation. I've got a PayPal donation button on my website for just that purpose. Any money I receive I'll use for buying D&D books and software to keep things up-to-date, as well as for keeping my website up and running.

If a publisher came to me and offered a contact to do a sheet for them, I'd of course consider it. But for now I'd rather reward the online community with a great free product.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

I'd like to thank the online D&D community for the great feedback. It's because of all the comments and suggestions I've received for past versions of my sheet that version 2.5 is what it is. And I welcome everyone's comments and suggestions on this version. I'm always striving to improve.

I'd also like to express my thanks to everyone who helped me with the development of this sheet. Specifically my beta testers, and the Gang. You all know who you are!

Lights, Camera, Action!

A Platest Review of d6 Fantasy

by J. Carpio

Welcome back to "Lights, Camera, Action!," my monthly rant on cinematic game systems, minimalist role-play, and indie RPGs. It is amazing how fast the year moves on, events come and go, and one campaign crashes into another, forming chaos and an interesting flow.

For myself, time brings about changes in the way I want to play a game. One month I tend to want crunchy mechanics with a very stable and rigid structure, and the next I am looking for the system that will cater to my narrative style of play. Then I start to wonder why I agreed to play a game in one system over another. Do I have some sort of gamer ADD?

Honestly, I change systems like I change articles of clothing. I can be raving like a mad man about one system, and in the same breath go on to say how I like another one even better. Last year I went on about how the d20 system was completely useless as a cinematic system, and then last month I showed how it could be used by a GM to create an action movie masterpiece.

Part of the problem is that I like the idea of crunchy rules. The more I have explained to me in rules, the less guesswork I have to do during a session. I do need some structure in order to give the players and myself a challenge, but to have a system where you need to hire a legal assistant to sit and mediate is going a bit too far.

This month's article serves two purposes. The first is to review the new D6 system by West End Games(WEG), which I have found to be a new Messiah in my life-long search for a "dream" system. Second, I want to show how I used the system in the ultimate test of buying the book and running it with only about 45 minutes of prep.

In writing this I also have to tuck away a good amount of bias. At the end of January, I had the honor of playing in a D6 Adventure game with the owner and editors of West End Games, and was able to chat with them about the system for a good couple of hours afterwards. WEG is an awesome company that actually cares about what their players think and goes out of its way to accommodate them. This is a major bonus in my book and to all of them (Eric, Nikki, and Stephen) I say thank you for a wonderful experience. But even with all of that, it would be only fair to be truthful about my experiences with the system, so you can make the decision to plop down your hard-earned cash on this game...or not.

This was truly an experiment in how a game system can go from the shelf right into play. In my large collection of RPGs there lives box after box of books. I have made many impulse buys in my 20 years of gaming, and the number of boxes just gets bigger and bigger. Most of these games I bought because I knew deep in my heart that someday I would just yank them out of the closet and run them. In theory, this sounds like a great idea, but in practice, we have always given up the attempt at running the new game or system and gone back to whatever game we had been playing at the time.

Not many role-playing games have the ability to just be picked up and run. Most of the time, the GM has to read the rulebook several times before getting the results he is looking for. It would be nice if the GM could just pull a new mechanic out of thin air whenever he needs it, but I

assure you that this will always come back and bite the GM on the bottom as the mechanics crumple further on down the road.

About a month or so ago, we were taking our usual 10:00 p.m. snack break at my Friday night game. The nice thing about where I play is that it is also my Favorite Local Gaming Store, so when I am bored I can grab a book and start to read. Well, this particular night I picked up a copy of *D6 Fantasy* and started to go over it. The system jumped out and grabbed me by the shirt collar and screamed, "Play me!" It was designed to be a tool kit more than a book of mechanics, and just from the brief 15 minute glance-over I knew I needed to own this book, and about 10 minutes after that I knew I wanted to run it.

The following Friday, I bought the book and brought in my gaming group plus two other people for a demo of the game. I call it a demo because it was at the gaming store, it was during a time where there was traffic in the store, and my intention was to get passers-by to see the game being played, take interest and to buy a copy themselves. We had a great group of players that night, each with various levels of roleplaying experience and ability. We were even lucky enough to have the Silven Trumpeter's own former editor in chief Dana Driscoll rolling the dice with us.

Before I get into the details, I will say that I have had some solid experience with the D6 system back when it used to power the Star Wars RPG. Although the rules have gone through a lot of changes, I would be lying if I said that I was running the system blind. During the week I also went to the WEG website and read all the promo files and FAQs to bring myself up to speed. Two of my other players did this as well. Star Was D6 was a well-known system, so understanding the mechanic concepts was not very difficult for anyone.

This run was quite interesting. I started by directing everyone to "choose a template," gave everyone the standard rules on template modification, and all went pretty smoothly. The book only had to be referenced twice during character generation and that was to see how racial packages were added to templates. We modified the Monster Hunter with the Dwarf Racial Package and it was pretty simple to do. The next hurdle that only took about 10 minutes was to figure out how

magic worked. Again, it was pretty simple. The lack of pre-generated spells made the wizard weak in some regards, but she found that dropping huge boulders on top of enemies made her feared indeed.

All character generation questions were answered with little effort and no flipping back and forth within the book to get the information we needed. About an hour later (there was only one book to go around) all the characters were finished and ready for adventuring.

Before I go further, I think I should explain the simple mechanics of the D6 system. The heart of the skill and combat systems are simple enough: roll a number of d6s that are assigned to that attribute or skill, total up the numbers, and beat the GM's difficulty. The D6 system also gives an interesting mechanic called the Wild Die. The Wild Die is a great built-in system of determining the cinematic aspect of the skill attempt, or to throw in a random factor that can make the character look like a total genius or send his abilities crashing. When rolling your dice allotment, you will choose one die to be your Wild Die (the rules suggest a different color die so it does not get confusing). If your Wild Die comes up with a number between 2-5, you add that number to the total and go on with the scene. If you roll a one or a six, things can become fun for the player or the GM.

In one variant, the six indicates a critical success and the one indicates a critical failure, no further rolling required. This is an awesome variant if you are running a over the top Pulp game, but otherwise it can be too restrictive for more gritty level games.

In a second variant, the Wild Die is open ended. If you roll a six, you roll the die again and add the new number rolled, and keep on rolling if the die keeps coming up with sixes. On the other hand, if you roll a one you roll the die again and subtract the total (including the initial one), and keep on subtracting if the die keeps rolling one. I prefer the more simple of the two methods myself. I like to describe failures and successes almost as if I was directing a movie. Number crunching has its place, but not when you are trying to make a scene work. As gamers, I would like to think we have moved beyond tactical rolls and finally moved on to interactive storytelling.

In the D6 Fantasy game, the players have six attributes (Agility, Coordination, Physique, Charisma, Intellect, and Acumen), a metaphysical attribute called Extranormal, and a series of skills attached to the attributes. To make things simple, the game gives an ample number of templates so the GM can just hop into the action. Each template already has all the attributes, skills, and special abilities all figured out for you. The player, after choosing the template, then gets a number of character points in order to customize the character to his liking, and the ability to add a racial package, so no characters are quite the same. If the GM is looking for more of a campaign feel and wants the players to build a character, then the rules allow the GM to give the players a series of points to buy attributes, skills, and special abilities.

Combat in the D6 system gives a game master multiple options on how to flesh out the exchange. Depending on what the GM is looking for, the rules can either be very free-form, giving the option for a more cinematic and narrative play; or they can be a set of rules that can give even the most picky GM all the crunchy rules that he wants. For Initiative, I went the simple route. I had the players all roll their Agility attribute and give the total, and went in an initiative order from highest to lowest. The system allows for other methods based on weapons used, or who was first in the scene, but the rolling is an old staple that I feel comfortable with.

The actual confrontation of combat is quick and lethal. The GM does not have to worry about all the tactical nonsense of other systems; it follows a logical flow and the players found that combat was both in their favor and without much restriction. All characters have a passive defense of 10: no matter what they do, they always have this assumed reaction to harm and attack. Certain attributes can make the odds a little better, but unless the character is a circus acrobat or someone who dodges boulders for a living, 10 is going to be standard. The attacker has to beat the 10 on a number of d6s equal to his Agility attribute or Melee skill. Equal to or less than the 10 will hit. The player, if he wishes to lose an offensive action for the round, can initiate an active defense. This allows the player to roll the appropriate skill or attribute and add the total as the new difficulty. Sounds like an awesome thing, but if you roll lower than 6 you become a serious punching bag. Sometimes you just cannot win. Modifiers can alter this fate, but in most cases the combat is pretty cut and dry.

Other Books in the D6 line

As of writing this article, I have so far picked up *D6 Space* and *D6 Adventure*. I am currently using the latter in a campaign that I had been unhappily running with the *d20 Modern* rules. Each of these books offers excellent genre-specific rules and abilities that are priceless to any campaign or story line. Yes, there is some repetition between the books and a lot of rehashing, but there is still enough material from book to book that would justify my spending. The one major improvement in the other two books is that they learned from their bad art experience in *D6 Fantasy*. All the artwork in these books is uniform and nicely done, and they also avoided the horrid dark page borders that made some words in the margins impossible to read.

I won't bore you with the story; it was pretty textbook, and since it was a demo the game served its purpose. The players were exposed to the new D6 system and had a chance to test it out on many levels, and I managed to prove that the system is easy and it can be run right out of the book without tons of prep.

The system does not have a lot of bells and whistles. You are not going to find innovative mechanics that defy reason and make you think about past life experiences. This system is far from that. The D6 books are going to give you a solid meat and potatoes system that allows you to add all the fixings if you need them, but doesn't force them on you because it's the only way to play. West End Games took the tool kit approach with the system, giving the GM and players a take-out menu of options, special abilities, combat rules, skill and attribute variations. Take what you need to play the game you want, then just forget the rest, or leave for when your campaign calls for it. A lot of systems claim to give you this in their hallowed tomes, but once I looked over D6 I was sold hook, line and sinker.

Overview

Now that I've droned on about the playability, let me give an overview of the game. For the simple purpose of trying to rate each of the sections, I will give each a rating between 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), and of course a word or three to back up my views.

Art (Rating 3)

I think this is what drew me to the book to begin with. The cover is nicely done, with a very cheesecake female fantasy character posing with her dragons. As far as covers go, it's not bad. Most RPGs today try to go for that "Elmore" look and cram about 10 fantasy characters into some sort of unrealistic pose or combat scene. My only complaint is the character looks too much like a character generated in the Poser program. It is common practice to use Poser to create figures, but at least they could have filtered it a few times to make it look less CGI. The dragons, the fire, and the little city in the background were wonderfully rendered (or drawn), and every time I look at it I want to re read my Elric books.

Inside is a different story. The artwork is all black and white, and placed very well in the layout. The graphic designer deserves kudos on a job well done. My problem with the art, however, is the fact that it is not consistent,

almost to the point where it reminds me of the first edition of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. This does not seem to be the issue with the other D6 products, as all the artwork there looks very uniform, but *D6 Fantasy* looks like some one mixed their child's 6th grade class project with the professional freelancer pieces. Maybe it's just a pet peeve of mine, but if you don't have a lot of art its best to use the negative space more creatively and not try to push a lot of 3rd rate art.

Content (Rating 5)

This is where the book really shines. A lot of people might complain that the book is thin for the \$29.95 sticker price slapped on it, but all one has to do is pick it up and flip through the pages to see that it is well worth the price. If it is setting you're looking for then, move on; there is a small chapter in the back that gives you some tips on creating campaigns and running games, but that is about it. The rest of the pages are packed with tons of character generation options, combat and skill options, rules for movement, an easy-to-learn magic system and even a chapter to make better use of your skills and how they work within D6's difficulty system.

In the back are more than a handful of character templates that can have your game up and running in no time. I am always on the lookout for a game that I can play with my 13 year old, something easy to learn with oodles of examples and templates. So when I saw all the templates in *D6 Fantasy*, I was sold. As I mentioned earlier, the book itself is an RPG tool kit: it's not a straight set of rules to live by, but a book of options that a GM can choose from to tailor the system to his needs. This, I must say, is quite refreshing. So many times I have bought a role-playing game and was force-fed rule after rule that I had to play as is, and most of the time the rules would bore me to tears. Yes, I could have made house rules, but why? If I am paying a company \$40.00 a pop on average for a players' guide I want to be told that these rules were made to be changed and here are some examples of how to change them. I think this is why I also have a fondness for Unisystem and Fuzion, two games that encourage you to play with the rules differently and don't give you mechanics that break down if you try to change them.

Playability (Rating 4)

The core mechanics for the D6 system are nothing new. It's the same mechanic that was used years ago in the

Star Wars RPG, in the D6 core book, and in the slightly different Legends system used in some of West End Games' licensed products like Xena and DC Universe. What makes this edition a cut above the other versions is that WEG learned from their past mistakes. Editors Nikola Vrtis and Steven Marsh took their time and went over the rules with a fine tooth comb to make sure the inconsistencies were taken out and a solid product was left. How simple can you get? Roll d6s and add them up; it's not very difficult at all. I would have given playability a full 5 rating, but the lack of a developed magic system was kind of a disappointment. As much as people whine about the cost of RPG's, it is worth the extra \$10.00 to me if the author had taken a few thousand words and written out a few more spells. I understand that WEG will be coming out with a magic supplement in the near future, but not soon enough to please the average Joe gamer.

Overall feeling

Money well spent is how to put it. Over the past year I have forked out about \$500.00 or more in gaming supplies and books. Honestly, most of them have seen the old eBay exodus, or sit dormant in my closet because I thought they were too cool to put on the block. I have been actively reading and using the D6 books. This system excites me and makes me want to game!

The Art of Concealing Your Sources

By James Shelton

James Shelton crawled out from under a rock in the latter portion of the year 1983. Since then he's caused enough collected mayhem and chaos, in his years of being home-schooled and attempts to get into college, that it won him the attention of the Elder Gods. They blessed him with the curse of being unable to finish any project and the insatiable drive to try anyway. Current goals include, but are not limited to, a world all his own and a woman to be his queen. He currently resides in the dimension of Illinois.

Plagiarism.

The word brings to mind copyrights and laws, fees and lawyers. To plagiarize is criminal...except to the Dungeon Master (DM). When it comes to DMing, stealing other people's creativity can be a campaign's salvation...or its doom. There are ways that thieving an idea can enhance game play, and ways that it can drag it down into the mud. That's what I'm going to cover here.

What was that? Did you say that there are no original ideas? True enough. It's so easy to borrow a character, or a story, or an idea from something else that sometimes you don't even realize you're doing it. As a DM, you know it's easy to trap yourself into believing there are no new stories and, so, settle for a cliché plot instead of putting real thought into it. After all, what's the point of taking the effort to invent a new story if it's been done before? But the Dark Side's temptation must be fought! There may not be ideas that have never been thought of, but you can always put an original twist on old ideas and make them your own. After you make them your own, however, comes the hard part. How do you fit them into the game?

The key to successfully applying stolen ideas can be summed up into two words: subtlety and flexibility. In order to appropriately steal something and use it for your own benefit, you will need to do it subtly. Otherwise, your players jump up and shout "Hey I saw that in...;" or the one I hear most often, "Hey, isn't that so-and-so from that one movie?" The more subtle you can be in working in stolen ideas, characters, and even stories, the better. But you have to remain flexible, adapting what you've copied so that it fits the needs of your campaign and can survive contact with the players.

Plagiarism can occur in one of three different ways when it comes to a game. You can steal a character, steal the story, or simply steal an idea. It's very easy to steal a cool character. I mean, who doesn't want his favorite comic book villain or hero to show up in his campaign? While borrowing a character might be the easiest, stealing the story is the most common. Whether you've recently watched a movie that you loved or read a book that you thought was incredible, it's very easy to apply the interesting aspects of whatever story you have encountered to your own campaign as you lay it out for the players. Ideas are the most rewarding thing to steal, and the best in my opinion. The very nature of an idea embodies subtlety and flexibility.

Stealing a character from any form of media can get you a basic skeleton. Flesh the character out with your own details, and every character will be an original one...just one with some of the things you liked about a similar character. They need not be exact duplicates. Lifting characters is also an easy out if you don't have the time or inclination to prepare NPCs ahead of time. Just be prepared to take your players by surprise when they make assumptions about them. Give them a character they have seen in other situations and you'll throw them for

a loop when he acts completely different. As a DM, you understand that the character's personality is the most important part. Fudging on history and appearance is easy to do, and it's a quick, painless way to gain masses of NPCs. Of course if you just *have* to have the appearance, you can just as easily switch the other aspects.

There may be no new stories, but when it comes down to it, plagiarizing a story in its entirety is almost always disastrous. A general knows that his battle plans will never survive contact with the enemy. If he plans out a detailed engagement that requires the enemy to do specific things in order for it to work, it will fail. A story stolen with all of its details still intact is like that battle plan. Have you been in that situation where your players murder the NPC that was supposed to help them draw the conclusions you want? Frustrating, isn't it? Its disastrous as well if the NPC in question is a vital role in the stolen story you're using and you're not ready to maneuver around it. Or the players could ask questions you have no prepared answers for. I, myself don't enjoy stammering out responses for questions I wasn't expecting. (Why don't the players just ask the right questions already?) So while a basic storyline can be easy and helpful to steal, a complete story will end in frustration on both sides as you try to herd your players and they chomp at the bit.

While you don't want to steal stories word for word, you can always tell them in your own way. For example, take a favorite story of your own and put the players into the roles of the side characters. Everything in the story may be happening around them, but they don't necessarily have to be around for all of it, just the key points. Or, you might try stealing the story as an idea instead.

When it comes to ideas, you get the best of all worlds. It takes careful work to make any stolen idea fit into your planned campaign without leaving the players feeling like it was approached in a ham-handed fashion, but it's almost always worth it. The trick is to make the idea as basic as possible and flesh it out with your own details. That way, you can keep the structure of the idea sound while not going off on a tangent that will break away from the integrity of your campaign. When you can pull it off, it adds to the overall experience and makes it much more enjoyable for the players. Everyone ends up happy.

Now that we've covered some of the ways that plagiarism can be wielded in a campaign, let's take a look at some

examples. I can give you a good example and a bad example, both using similar scenarios. Here's the plot:

A Kraken chases your players into a dwarven mine where they find everyone dead (including one of your character's cousins) and then someone makes a loud noise to rouse goblins, which chase them into the arms of a massive burning demon that drives them out of the mine on the other side and to their destination where they will be safe.

Sound familiar? Of course it does.

Here's how DM number one goes about it:

The players come to the entrance. The horribly overpowered kraken appears and attempts to chase them into the mine, and they turn to fight it. One of them rolls horribly and the kraken has a snack. The player storms away from the table disgusted. He didn't have a chance against the kraken that grabbed his leg before he knew it was there, and his friends just didn't cut it in getting him free.

The survivors limp into the cave. They find everyone dead and turn around to fight the kraken again. Another dead character and another angry player later, the other players decide they're going to chance that hole in the ground with all the dead people in it.

Several grueling hours of game play later, they finally come upon the planned tomb of one of the players' cousins (we'll assume the player involved is not one of the dead ones). But the player decides, maybe out of spite, that he hated his cousin. Instead of the planned mournful scene, he starts dancing on the tomb and doing rude things. The other players sit there and laugh, then move on. No one does anything that causes a loud noise. But the goblins come anyway, though it's not explained why (after all, it's in the story). The players flee, the demon comes, and they stop and stare at it (and the DM, probably) with consternation. And then they charge at it, tired of being tossed against things they can't fight. Everybody dies, and the DM loses his campaign.

Okay, so how does DM number two go about it? How can things be done differently to make the experience not a disaster?

First, the DM throws a kraken at the party that they can beat. It's not exactly true to the story, but if pressed, the players can still fight the beast and conceivably win. They don't *have to* run away. Second, he plans out other paths to their destination that don't require going through the mine just in case they decide they're not going in there even to save their lives.

If they do go in, he picks the most compassionate character (even if it's not the one the original story calls for). Lawful Good or Neutral Good characters are good for this. Then decides that it's one of their family members, that they may have foolishly mentioned they were close to in the game, and makes the poor, inoffensive NPC dead in the mines for whatever reason. Now the DM has his mournful scene, not by rote mind you, but effective nonetheless.

Then our conscientious DM rigs it so the goblins have scouts, so just in case the party doesn't make a loud mistake, he still has a reason for goblins appearing. The DM sates his players' appetites for mayhem and slaughter by giving them a manageable force to go up against so that the party can kill them all. Only after that's through does he send the force that they have to run from. The party will be weary and bruised, and ready to split the scene.

After that's done, the DM can bring in the part about the demon. But he makes sure to mention it first, giving the characters warnings so they can start planning for it and not be taken completely by surprise. Again, DM number two makes the opponent manageable in case they decide they're going to turn and fight. Who knows, maybe they'll even kill it. He ensures ahead of time that they don't have to run away if they aren't inclined to. He doesn't drop a deity on their toes; that'll just frustrate them.

After all is said and done, the worst that has happened to the party is that it's shaken, bloodied, and tired. Meanwhile, the players have had an enjoyable time and the DM has successfully plagiarized a well-loved fantasy sequence to further the plot, while not being so exact as to annoy or kill his players' characters.

See how the same borrowed storyline can be worked out to your success? If you want to twist it even further, have the demon be the dear relative that's dead in the mines, and your players coming upon the results (remains?) of heroes fleeing from goblins. Or perhaps your players are the ones that caused the loud noise, drawing the goblins to attack a

different band of adventurers. The same stolen story can be worked over from any angle, just as long as you're not fixated on every detail of the story.

As you can tell, plagiarism can be quite useful. If done incorrectly, however, it will do more harm than good. Remember also that subtlety and flexibility are the names of the game when it comes to plagiarizing. Try to twist whatever you steal so that from their angle, the players don't even know what the original was. Turn a Rembrandt into a Picasso! And be ready to change it back if the players' actions call for it. Soon enough, your stolen idea will feel original, because even you will lose sight of the source it was taken from. And if done correctly, the players will never know it didn't come from your own mind.

After all, originality is just the art of concealing your sources.

The Thematic Campaign Guide: Campaign Archetypes

By Dana Driscoll

Introduction

Welcome to the Thematic Campaign Guide. This guide was created to assist GMs by providing them with a list of campaign themes or archetypes that can be used to help structure their campaigns. The guide also gives a list of hints, warnings, and basic plotlines for each theme. This list is not exhaustive, so feel free to add your own additional archetypes in the comments section of this article!

Why a Thematic Campaign?

Thematic campaigns, much like good tales, have a theme or central focus that weaves its way throughout the majority of game sessions. Thematic campaigns can help keep a game consistent and at the same time provide a deeper level of role-play as the characters clash again and again with elements of the theme. It can also help a GM with preparation and keep a campaign cohesive. A campaign theme does not necessarily have to be the main focus of the story, but the plot should relate in major ways to the campaign theme or archetype. It is very possible to have multiple archetypes within a single campaign or elements of several themes working their way into a campaign.

Presented here is the list of major campaign archetypes: fate, time, alternate reality, history, journey, revenge, nemesis, good vs. evil, religion and ethics, and mystery. After the major campaign themes, a short list of possible minor themes is presented.

Campaign Archetypes

Fate

The *Star Wars* series comes to mind when thinking about stories relating to fate. A campaign with a theme of fate questions the nature of personal choice vs. a pre-determined destiny. This may also lead into the interplay between gods and mortals and how much control one really has over one's actions. A "fate" theme may also involve prophecies, divinations, destiny, and a host of foretold events to move the plot along. While elements of fate seem to work their way into many a campaign, remember that a good game gives players a least some freedom of choice when determining their characters' actions!

Plots:

- 1) A long-forgotten prophecy is rediscovered and opposing factions scramble to find a way to use the prophecy to push their agenda. The characters find themselves in the middle of the unfolding events or belong to one of the groups attempting to use the prophecy for its own benefit.
- 2) The gods have long warred over whether they should allow mortals to dictate their own actions, or keep the choices within divine hands. Finally, a group of mortals are put to the test and requested to make the choice of fate vs. freewill for all.

Time

Who can forget such stories as H. G. Well's *The Time Machine*; Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*; Michael

Crichton's *Timeline*; *The Butterfly Effect*; or the *Back to the Future* movie series from the 1980s? A campaign devoted to time can actually come about in many ways. Most often these involve the manipulation of time (unknowingly or knowingly by PCs or NPCs) and the resolution of such manipulations. Time travel, time machines, or the bending of space and time can all be elements of a "time" themed game. Note that the PCs don't necessarily have to be able to control moving through time to be part of a time-themed game. They can be moved through time by third parties or have changes in time enter their own timeline.

One thing a GM must decide before running this type of game is whether time is "static" or "elastic." In other words, he must decide whether time will continue on and is unable to be changed (a very "fate" centered viewpoint); or whether the manipulations or actions of individuals traveling in time can forever alter their own pasts and futures! A second consideration is the idea of other possible worlds or timelines—is there only one timeline/reality, or are there multitudes of reality and time that one can travel to?

Plots:

- 1) The PCs are removed from their own timeline by a group of beings from the future, who request that the PCs endeavor to change happenings in their current time in order to save the future for all.
- 2) Mysterious structures begin appearing all over the world; it is later discovered that these structures are the work of beings from the future who are intent on the world's enslavement.

Alternate Reality

The *Sliders* TV series and the movie *The One* are good examples of an alternate reality theme. Closely mirroring the "time" themed game is a game with an alternate reality theme. In some ways more doable than the time themed game, the alternative reality game is one in which the PCs face multiple versions of their living reality. This type of game could have a single alternate reality where the PCs find themselves trapped, or perhaps multiple alternate realities that they PCs can access for various reasons. Note that the alternate reality doesn't have to be directly connected or similar to the main reality—dreamworlds, past lives, alternate histories,

previous worlds, and future worlds are all potential alternate realities.

Plots:

1) Seemingly altruistic actions of the PCs cause a cataclysmic event where they are thrown into a darker alternate reality of their own world. The PCs have a choice of attempting to escape back to their home or working to make the alternate reality a better one.

2) Special individuals in the world are known as "dreamers." These "dreamers" experience very vivid dreams in which they claim to live out other lives in a totally different world. But the dream world is connected to the real world, and when a cataclysmic event takes place in the dream reality, it puts both realities in jeopardy!

History

The *Indiana Jones* series and the *Stargate* franchise (*Stargate*, *Stargate SG-1*, *Stargate Atlantis*) are perhaps the best examples of a "history" themed story. Past events create present problems and can explain current events. A theme focusing on the past could focus on character's own personal pasts, the integration of such pasts, or the larger history of the region and world. It could also be an archeological style campaign—the search for ancient artifacts or civilizations and the power they bring. The classic "memory loss" campaign is yet another rendition of the past or historical theme. Past is a great element to throw into the mix with some of the thematic archetypes, as a good character history or area history will always make for a more rich campaign world.

Plots:

1) The PCs are hired to procure minor relics from long-abandoned temples in many parts of the world. It is only much later they discover that they have been helping construct a weapon of great power. How they choose to use this knowledge is yet undecided!

2) The PCs wake up without a single idea of who they are or how they got to where they are. It is only through their own determination and will that they will discover the events that led up to their memory loss and who they really are!

Journey

The journey motif has been used in many past great works of literature; Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* used the journey as a frame for the individual stories told by the travelers. Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise* had travels into the pit of hell, to purgatory, and finally, to heaven. And who could forget Odysseus' long and trial-filled journey home in Homer's *Odyssey*? The theme of a journey is a classic one and one that is well suited for tabletop gaming. It allows a GM and players to explore a world, participate in many side quests, and yet continue to further some distant goal or plan. The other variant on the journey campaign is the "coming of age" story, or the story of personal growth. Personal advancement is often the theme of the more self-reflective and inner-directed character types and can be subsumed within the journey theme. Of utmost importance in a campaign with a journey motif is a solid reason for the journey to begin and continue.

Plots:

1) Extended periods of famine and drought are rendering the PCs' homelands uninhabitable. Chosen as representatives of their people, they must take a journey to find a new home for their people before it is too late.

2) Old texts tell of a spring that cures all disease and plague. When a close family member becomes ill and all other healing methods or medicine have been tried, a journey to find the spring seems like the last hope of the PCs.

Revenge

The recent *Kill Bill* movies are perfect examples of a revenge themed story. Other examples include *Blade*, *Gladiator*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Revenge-themed campaigns might not begin as such—but events that occur within early sessions could change the overall goals of the characters towards that of revenge. Alternatively, a character could be created with a back story that focused on some revenge or vendetta. Revenge does not necessarily have to only be against a specific person—a group, a family, or an entire race can all be foci of a character's revenge needs. Terms associated with a revenge game include trust, betrayal, loyalty, lies, deceit, and ultimate payback! Key to a revenge game is making sure there is still something to be done when the revenge actually happens!

Plots:

1) A group of PCs with a special power are hunted and terrorized by a specific organization. After watching their close friends and/or family be killed, the PCs decided to take out the organization and plot their revenge.

2) During the last great war, two households were pitted against each other for power. When the heir of the house betrays his kin (and loses the war for them) the kin seek revenge at all costs to reclaim their broken house and family name.

Nemesis

Going hand in hand with the revenge theme is the nemesis theme. Examples of tales within the nemesis genre include the movies *Star Trek: Nemesis* and *Face Off*. A nemesis theme is perhaps not the most major of themes, but can be a very important driving element of a game, especially when coupled with revenge. A nemesis is not just a common foe, but rather an individual who is somehow deeply connected, often personally connected, to the party members in some way. In order to get the most out of this theme, it is important for the characters, both PCs and the nemesis, to be very developed and three-dimensional.

Plots:

1) The PCs rise to a position of power within an organization, only to be usurped by a group of close friends. The PCs are then in a power struggle with leadership of the organization as the prize.

2) Dark, twisted copies of the PCs are created by their greatest nemesis. The PCs must now not only battle their greatest foe, but also themselves! They must also work to undo the damage that their other selves have done to their reputations.

Good vs. Evil

J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series is a great example of a cut-and-dry good vs. evil plot. In these books there is no question as to who is good, and who is the ultimate evil (with the exception of Gollum, perhaps). And while this seems to many fantasy gamers a "been there, done that" theme, the good vs. evil theme can still be done quite effectively and be a very enjoyable game. Much of your "epic-save-the-world-stuff" falls into this

category. The problem with good vs. evil games is that many times it is too black and white—there are no shades of gray and everyone falls neatly into one side or another. The more interesting games are the ones that blend the lines a bit and take good vs. evil beyond such binary terms.

A variant of the good vs. evil game is a game with a “corruption” theme. Corruption can spread between individuals to organizations that appear good on the surface. Individual PCs may be faced with difficult decisions which could lead to their ultimate downfalls.

Plots:

1) An artifact that is capable of great destruction falls into the hands of the lord of the dark army. It is up to the PCs to recover the artifact before it can be used against the kingdoms of the light. Unbeknownst to the PCs, the lord of the dark army has been turned into a being of evil from a humble king.

2) Rumors of vampires stealing away children in a nearby village has the whole region up in arms. The PCs are called into investigate, and soon discover that the vampires themselves are not as evil as they first thought.

Religion and Ethics

Movies such as *The Order* or the *Prophecy Series* heavily focus on religion as a central theme. Religion and ethics themes can call into question what it is that separates divine beings from mortals, how divine beings receive their powers, or even if divine beings exist at all! Most plots dealing with religion will have some form of organized religion structure and may include a pantheon or overlord. Plots may also include being “chosen” by a deity for a specific purpose. Note the parallels here with a fate-themed campaign.

A variant of the religion theme is one based on morality or ethics—exploring the nature of what it means to be a moral person and make the “right” choice. Campaigns exploring basic human nature may also fit into this type of theme.

Plots:

1) The PCs are new initiates in a large religious institution. When they are sent by the church to investigate a series of incidents, they find evidence linking back to the church itself!

2) A Norse-mythology themed game could have PCs chosen at the time of their deaths to be Einheriar, holy warriors chosen by the Valkyrie to fight in the ultimate battle of the Gods.

Mystery

Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* series, the recent *National Treasure* movie and, for a younger audience, the *Nancy Drew* series are good examples of mystery-based books. Many popular television dramas such as *Law and Order* and *CSI* also focus on a mystery motif. Uncovering lost secrets, solving crimes, discovering the true meaning of riddles—these are all part of a “mystery” themed campaign. A mystery campaign can be more “episodic” in nature, where PCs belong to an organization that works to solve mysteries and fight crime; or it can be a larger theme where a single riddle or mystery is central to the overall plot. These games can be quite enjoyable for most, but beware that when using a lot of puzzles or riddles, some players are just better at solving them than others (regardless of what their characters’ scores say!).

Plots:

1) The PCs have uncovered an ancient riddle that they believe holds the key to great treasure! They must now work to piece together the ancient puzzle and uncover what they hope will be the find of their dreams. They soon discover that they aren’t the only ones attempting to solve the riddle and encounter some serious competition and setbacks.

2) The PCs are investigators that belong to a local police organization. As they work through a series of unrelated crimes, a pattern begins to emerge. Can the PCs crack the case before the next crime takes place?

Minor Themes

Minor themes are usually tied in with larger ones and can be used to help drive the story forward. Some minor themes may be specific motivations only for certain characters or at certain points in the game.

Military: Will you question your orders? A military theme most likely has PCs involved as members of a military organization, completing quests in service of their liege or country.

Loyalty: How far will you go to save another? A loyalty theme will test the bonds of friendship and family with trials and troubles.

Treasure & Greed: What will you do to get what you want? Treasure, monetary wealth, and greed can in many ways be a major campaign theme. As treasure hunting alone usually doesn’t make the best plot, attempt to supplement it with something else!

Exploration: What will you find over the next hill? While exploration in real life is a lot of fun, exploration in game terms isn’t quite as glamorous. Still, this minor theme is very much a part of many games, and for good reason!

Defense: How can you protect your lands? Defending one’s home and family can be a central focus or a periphery one. While it is possible to work this as a major theme in a game, usually additional thematic elements are needed for a complex and deep story.

Love: Who is it that you love? Love is a theme that is often overlooked in games (especially if the majority of the players are of the same gender). Still, a theme of love can be a great chance to deepen a plot or enhance the role-play experience.

Mythology: How did we come to be? Mythology is another area that broadens and deepens any campaign in which it is used. Its a minor theme in the sense that it has a large part in the History or Religion themed game but can also be part of many of the major themed games.

Psychology: Where does sanity end? Psychology themed campaigns focus on the inner workings of individuals and their strange psyches. It may include asylums, mentally instable individuals, or other mental weirdness.

Justice and Law: How do you interpret the law? What is just? A game with a law or justice theme is often associated with the Religion, History, or Military themed games. How to define law and justice may change based on the individual or the society in which one finds herself.

Entropy: Who can reverse entropy? In an entropy-themed game, it seems that the world is falling apart, and the characters with it. Elements of decay and destruction abound, and a general “End” appears in sight.

Rebirth: When will we be reborn? Before we get too depressed with an entropy-themed game, it is good to cover entropy's opposite—rebirth. A rebirth campaign could focus on some sort of reversal of entropy, some new beginning, some new life. But keep in mind that the ideas of death and life go hand in hand—for something new to occur, something old must pass on.

Anti-Hero: Why me? The anti-hero is a rather common tale. Anti-heroes come in two shapes—those who are truly unheroic (think Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*) or those who are viewed as a hero but do not want the fame. This theme is usually specific to a single character, but may also be present in NPCs or organizations.

Underdog: Who the hell are you? The underdog can represent many different values or systems, but in all cases the underdog represents the "little guy." The underdog is an individual who almost everyone believes has no chance of success or winning, but somehow in the end manages to come out on top.

Conclusion

While this list is not comprehensive, it is my hope that it has inspired you in the creation of your next great campaign! Remember that campaign themes can be a way to solidify and unify a game, provide a larger overall structure, and overall make for a more complete and enjoyable gaming experience. Have fun and happy gaming!

Xeniform Invasion: Invasion of the Templates

Trolls

By Jerel Hass

CSX Case File #5: Trolls

"It wasn't the bogeyman, Mom! I've never seen the bogeyman drool that much."

Fear feeds their hunger while the agony of their victims quenches their own pain. They have lain sleeping within their shadows for decades long forgotten, banished by the Brilliant Light. However, their prison walls fail as the divider between the truths once again begins to fade and die.

Combat

Light Sensitivity (Ex): Any light brighter than the half moon causes extreme discomfort to Trolls. When exposed to this much light, Trolls suffer half their HD in negative levels. The negative levels gained by exposure to light wear off after an hour spent in complete darkness.

Natural Camouflage: A Troll's natural fur, like its brother the Weren, changes color to match its background. As long as a Troll does not take more than a 5-foot step on his turn, it gains a +4 bonus on its Hide checks.

Spell-like abilities: At will—*shadow walk*, 3/day—*cloak of dark power* 1/day—*shadow conjuration* (DC 18), *shadow evocation* (DC 19).

Troll King

Combat

Light Sensitivity (Ex): Any light brighter than the half moon causes extreme discomfort to Trolls. When exposed to this much light, Trolls suffer half their HD in negative levels. The negative levels gained by exposure to light wear off after an hour spent in complete darkness.

Natural Camouflage: A Troll's natural fur, like that of its brother the Weren, changes color to match its background. As long as a Troll does not take more than a 5-foot step on his turn, it gains a +4 bonus on its Hide checks.

Spell-like abilities: At will—*shadow walk*, 3/day—*cloak of dark power* 1/day—*shadow conjuration* (DC 18), *shadow evocation* (DC 19).

Cleric Spells: (5/3+1/3+1/2+1); Save DC 12 + spell level. 0—*resistance* x3, *detect magic* x2; 1st—*bane* x2, *bless*, *obscuring mist*; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *desecrate*, *eagle's splendor*, *blindness/deafness*; 3rd—*deeper darkness*, *contagion*, *blacklight*.

Description

Trolls are 7-8 ft. and 400 pounds of rippling muscle. Their light fur covering, only a few inches long, is gray when not blending into the surroundings. They have jagged claws and a viciously toothed maw. They are deformed-looking, usually with a hunch or one arm longer than the other. Their faces and appendages are very close in appearance to the Sasquatch.

Encounter

Remember, agents, next time you are walking down some dark, lonely alley and you feel ominous eyes on you and misplaced footsteps behind you: trolls live and breathe in the shadows. Luckily, like all creatures of the Shadow Realm, they hate light and will very rarely be found outside the darkest shadows. The only thing that brings a Troll out of its shadowy home is the taste of pain and agony.

Even with their ungainly size and deformities, Trolls move with dexterity and are quite adept at the delicate art of

Template: Troll

Large Undead

Hit Dice: 3d12 (36 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30ft.

Armor Class: 12 (-1 size, +3 Natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+11

Attack: Claw +7 melee (1d6+6), Weren Dire Axe +7 melee (3d6+8), or Flint Lock Musket +2 ranged (2d8)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +7 melee (1d6+6), Weren Dire Axe +7 melee (3d6+8), or Flint Lock Musket +2 ranged (2d8)

Space/Reach: 10ft./10ft.

Special Attacks: Spell-like abilities

Special Qualities: Blind sight, Fast Healing 5, Natural Camouflage Spell Immunity (Shadow), Scent, Light sensitivity

Saves: Fort --, Ref +6, Will +9

Abilities: Str 22, Dex 9, Con 0, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +8, Hide +12

Feats: Sadist, Martial Weapon Proficiency

Climate/Terrain: Shadow Realm

Organization: Squad 1-4

Challenge Rating: 3

Alliance: Shadow Realm, Troll King

Advancement: By class

causing pain. If you are seeking out Trolls, the greatest chance you have of encountering one is in shadowy alleys or a similarly dark place. They have been known, however, to prowl streets and houses on nights of the new moon or eclipses. Trolls appear to be most active during wars, riots, and natural disasters, when the chance of finding weak, fear-filled people is at the highest. On these nights, the only defense one has is to turn on as many lights as possible and stay in large groups.

When encountered directly, Trolls will only engage in battle if they feel they have the superior numbers. It is best when engaging Trolls to remember that they do not attack to kill; they attack to torture, to hurt, and to maim, and only then to kill. When a Troll does choose to hunt, it subdues its victims and drags them off to a more advantageous location where it can feast on their suffering in relative peace. When attempting to capture or destroy a Troll, you must keep in mind that Trolls are incredibly elusive targets. They fear nothing except light and will use their Shadow Walk if they feel outmatched.

Habitat/Society

Trolls are not native to Earth. It was the Greys, and their constant meddling, that accidentally allowed them access to our world. Trolls originated on the Weren home world of Kurg, and are specters of the Weren past they would like to forget. When the Greys brought the Weren to Earth and awoke them, they also allowed the Trolls' entrance. On their home world, Weren were able to banish the Trolls and force them into a hibernation sleep in another dimension. However, the Weren on Earth (better known as the Sasquatch) have regressed too far, and with their low numbers they do not have the forces that are needed to once again banish the Trolls.

Before the Weren became the warrior poets they are today, their home world was plagued with wars. These wars were created by the 23 warlords who ruled Kurg, constantly struggling to destroy one other. In an attempt to empower himself and finally be the victor of the wars, one of the Weren warlords sold his soul and his followers' souls in exchange for the ability to manipulate shadows. With his new power, the self-proclaimed Troll King began to dominate the battle field, launching entire battalions of Trolls through the shadows and into the sanctuaries of his enemies. As a result, the Weren warlords were forced to enter into an alliance against the one warlord.

Adventure Hook

The PCs are caught in a sudden outbreak of rioting due to a judge's unpopular ruling on an incredibly publicized court case. After the night's rioting, a large number of children are reported missing, some even from parts of the city not touched by the rioting. To complicate matters even more, several eyewitness reports are circulating about an Urban Sasquatch. Investigation into the missing children reveals a startling pattern with occult implications. However, none of these problems quite compare to the next: the undeniable proof that Bigfoot is alive! A dead Sasquatch has been found; however, the story is currently being suppressed. What would draw a Sasquatch into allowing its own discovery? And what killed the Sasquatch, butchering its body?

After his death, that warlord and his followers were trapped within the shadow realm they served. With in the realm, the Trolls' souls were forced to remain in a torturous sleep, due to the strong faith of the New Weren Nation that had bound them. Within the realm, the warlord and his followers suffer pain which can only be extinguished by inflicting pain upon others. This history was suppressed by the Weren people, who considered it a sin to even acknowledge the existence of the Trolls.

After the first Weren slave died on Earth, its soul opened a gateway from the Trolls' shadow prison to Earth. Light constantly pours in through the gate, further tormenting the already tortured Trolls. The Trolls do not understand the reason for the light; however, the Troll King believes that if enough horror and pain is inflicted on Earth, the light can be extinguished.

Trolls appear to be immortal. Even after death, they just reappear within the shadow realm. After a regrowth period of takes an entire moon cycle, they are again ready to inflict pain. They do, however, have a great vulnerability to bright lights. It is believed, but unproven, that exposure to the sun may completely kill a Troll. This is hard to prove due to the Trolls' ability to *shadow walk*.

CSX Case File #6: Uula

Based on David Tormsen "Uula"

The next statement that we will make will be the "Big Tester," the one that the "lower forces" would use to clearly have you discredit or disregard us. That statement is: Unless you are currently an active student or are attempting to become a student of the present Representative from the Kingdom of Heaven - you ARE STILL "of the world," having done no significant separation from worldliness, and you are still serving the opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven. This statement sounds - to humans who have been so carefully

Large Undead, Ftr 6, Cleric (Darkness) 6

Hit Dice: 3d12+6d10+6d8 (135 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 40ft.

Armor Class: 22 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +9 full platemail, +3 Natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+24

Attack: Claw +20 melee (1d8+8), MW Weren Dire Axe +21 melee (3d6+12), or Flint Lock Musket +13 ranged (2d8)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +19 melee (1d8+8), MW Weren Dire Axe +21/+16/+11 melee (3d6+12), or Flint Lock Musket +13 ranged (2d8)

Space/Reach: 10ft./10ft.

Special Attacks: Spell-like

Special Qualities: Blind sight, Spell Immunity (Shadow), Scent, Light Sensitivity, Fast Healing 5

Saves: Fort --, Ref +18, Will +21

Abilities: Str 27, Dex 13, Con 0, Int 9, Wis 15, Cha 15

Skills: Listen +12, Spot +14, Hide +18, Concentration +8, Balance +8, Diplomacy +8

Feats: Sadist, Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush, Greater Rebuke, Leadership

Climate/Terrain: Shadow Realm

Organization: With 4-8 Trolls and Cohort

Challenge Rating: 14

Alliance: Shadow Realm

Advancement: By Class

programmed by the "lower forces" - arrogant, pompous, or egotistical at the least - as if by taking this stand we had something to gain - as if we were seeking recognition as "Deity" or as self-appointed prophets. – Heaven's Gate Cult Scriptures

Millions of years ago, there was a species with such huge psionic power that individuals were able to psionically transfer themselves between worlds. They traveled throughout the universe, exploring, trading and conquering. Then, one day, they disappeared from our galaxy, never to return. Where they have gone is unknown. The only remnant left of their existence is

Medium Undead Psionic Ghost

Hit Dice: 18d12 (108 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: Fly 60 ft. (good)

Armor Class: 13 (+3 Dex)

Base Attack/Grapple: +9/--

Attack: Incorporeal touch +9 melee

Full Attack: Incorporeal touch +9 melee

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Psionics

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., incorporeal traits, +6 turn resistance, undead traits, ~~unnatural~~unnatural aura

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +11, Will +9

Abilities: Str --, Dex 17, Con --, Int 24, Wis 8, Cha 22

Skills: Bluff +22, Diplomacy +26, Intimidate +26, Search +22, Sense

Motive +20, Spot +14

Feats: ---

Challenge Rating: 18

Alliance: Insanity

Advancement: 18-26 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: ---

the Uula. Occasionally, when one of these entities tried to transfer themselves between worlds, an accident occurred. Sometimes they would appear in the middle of deep space, and die horribly. On other times, their physical forms would appear on their destination world, but their consciousness would somehow be left behind during the journey. They would become psionic forces barely clinging to corporeality, left to float, intangible, in the darkness of space. They became similar to the demon Iscii ba Fan in this respect; they were consciousness without bodies.

Adventure Hook

The heroes are tipped off that a secret NASA deep space reconnaissance probe has returned to Earth after three decades in space and crashed off the northern coast of Australia. They soon receive reports of the Australian Navy discovering a boatload of asylum seekers and Indonesian people smugglers, all dead except a single man who has gone completely mad. Soon after, an Australian frigate disappears after a single panicked distress signal, then several Indonesian fishing trawlers fail to return to port. The trail of disappearances seems to be heading straight for the fledgling nation of East Timor. Can the heroes discover what is causing these sea disasters and somehow put a stop to it before whatever it is reaches land?

Over time, these entities were driven mad by their new existence. Forced to float alone in blackness, surrounded at all sides by the glow of stars too far away to reach, tortured by memories of their former lives, they changed. They strived constantly to reach a solar system – any solar system – and to contact another mind – any mind. They found none. Eventually, they began to feel that perhaps the entire universe was just an illusion, as if there were no other beings other than their individual selves.

When the Greys first expanded out into space, they explored in huge, sub-light speed generation ships. En route from their own solar system to another, 2.5 light years away, one of these generation ships encountered a psionic entity so powerful and so malevolent that it was dubbed thereafter an Uula, a spirit of the darkness between the stars. As the Greys explored, they occasionally encountered other Uula. They were all the same: psionically powerful, incredibly arrogant and completely intolerant of all other life forms. An Uula would consider any life form that was not itself as an illusion brought on by the madness of eternal solitude, and attempt to destroy it so as to preserve its own "sanity."

When the Greys came to Earth, they found our solar system to be surrounded by Uula, who propagated especially in the Oort cloud. Some theorists have suggested that the Uula seek the tiny black hole said to exist in the Oort cloud so as to destroy themselves inside it. Eternal solitude can generate a peculiar form of nihilism. However, the fact remains that a single Grey report suggests that some of the Uula near our solar system have reached a proximity to one another to allow limited communication, perhaps bringing some of them

back from the brink of madness. However, they are still stuck in space, and at their maximum speed of movement will be unable to reach Sol for millennia. While the Greys have not had a problem with the Uula for years, other species able to cross the gulf between the stars, such as the Goblins, have a much closer relationship with the species. Many of these species either use Faster-Than-Light travel or at least have some form of defense against these entities. There is a story circulating about a Goblin smuggling ship that has laidlain abandoned in the orbit of Neptune for the last 30 years, following a single short and horrifying distress signal received by both the Greys and SETI¹. Whether this has anything to do with the Uula is unknown.

However, there is one way in which an Uula can get closer to the Earth, or anywhere else, for that matter. The Uula are able to latch themselves onto large objects moving through the darkness of space. In the past, they have been able to maneuver themselves into the gravity field of both sub-light interstellar spacecraft and long period comets. Through these they are able to get closer to a solar system faster than they would be able to on their own.

Comets have always been known as the harbringers of doom, for good reason. Long period comets can take centuries to orbit the sun, leaving the solar system completely for extended periods of time. They then come back, almost impossible to detect and defend against. Not only do they present the risk of colliding with the Earth and causing terrible disaster, but there is always the chance that one of these comets has a tag-along in the form of an Uula. The Center has reason to believe that the comet that killed off the dinosaurs had such a passenger, who then laid waste to the Earth for years before being destroyed itself by some unknown force. Another is known to have been riding alongside the Hale-Bopp comet that passed by Earth in 1997. It contacted several Center members briefly, before contact was lost with the Heaven's Gate cult² suicide. This entity was rather more sane than that which killed the dinosaurs, but has been positively confirmed as the influence behind

the Heaven's Gate cult. Whether the mass suicide was part of its ultimate plan or an unexpected event is still unknown. Whether the entity descended upon the Earth or is still stuck to the Hale-Bopp comet is also unknown. With the rise of the Shadow, these entities have grown in power, and have been increasingly successful in their attempts to reach Earth. The Center and other groups know the threat that the Uula present, both the psychotic narcissist and sane intriquer varieties.

Combat

Psionics (Su): The Uula as a race are naturally psionic. An Uula manifests powers as a psion (Kineticist) of 18th level. The saves are Intelligence based. Typical Powers known (power points 343, save DC 10 + intelligence modifier + power level) 1st—Charm person, Mindlink, Control object 2nd—Aversion, Brain lock, Control air, Energy missile, Read thoughts, Suggestion 3rd—Crisis of breath, Empathic Transfer, Energy cone, False sensory input 4th—Control body, Dominate, Energy ball, Inertial barrier, Mindlink, Modify memory, Schism 5th—Energy current, Metaconcert, Mindprobe 6th—Dispelling buffer, Mindswitch, Null psionics field 7th—Crisis of life, Reddopsi 8th—Mind seed, Telekenetic sphere 9th—Tornado blast, Mind switch, Psychic chirurgery

Unnatural Aura (Su): Corporeal creatures can sense the unnatural presence of an Uula at a distance of 60 feet. Animals will not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

Weakness

Insanity Vulnerability: The Uula automatically reaches out to any mind near its own. This instinctual process brings about a very exploitable weakness. Naturally all Uula are insane; however, it is an alien insanity. There is very little difference in the Uula insanity and human insanity, except that Uula insanity projects outward, affecting others around it, while human insanity draws in, bringing others into the insanity. The resulting effect is that when an insane Uula's mind touches the mind of an insane human, the Uula is drawn in and is stunned for 1d4 hours. A rare side effect of this process is that an severely psychotic human who is "sensitive" may absorb most of an Uula's psionic abilities, using them at the Uula's manifester level.

Description

The Uula is a mass of pure consciousness, invisible and incorporeal in its natural form. It can, however, use its illusion skill to present any visage it feels like. Those of the relatively sane variety tend to choose a form that will appear as non-threatening as possible: a familiar face or a vague acquaintance. Those of the more insane variety will delve into the mind of the viewer and choose a form designed to be the most horrifying possible. To those scared of spiders, for example, the Uula will appear as a huge tarantula, or perhaps as a seething pile of black widows and web. Those beings and devices capable of "seeing" psionic entities describe the Uula as a large mass of energy, often taking up an entire room. This mass of energy can move through solid objects, fly through the air, and can even disappear entirely into some poor soul's brain.

Encounter

If you are reading this, it is because you must enter into the field against what the CXS considers one of the most dangerous Xenofoms to share our plane of existence. Facing an Uula is like staring down the barrel of a loaded gun: one blink and you're already dead. First off, if you have not completed your training on dealing with psionic beings, you should not be dealing with the Uula. However, if you have finished the training, then this guide holds some tips for you. An Uula is insane and alien, which means they do not follow any logic or standard psychological thinking. You must enter this assignment with an open mind (not too open, mind you) and the ability to react to anything with a rational, calm mind.

An Uula has no fear of death. In fact, most Uula seek death hoping to end their suffering. They must be dealt with in as direct a manner as possible. Also, if you are not a PSI, you must bring one along if at all possible. If nothing else, more PSIs make great bait in attracting a Uula to a direct confrontation. If you do finally manage to get direct confrontation, you're going to need something to put the Uula down with. Do not attempt to capture it, talk with it, or any other course of action other than immediately killing it to stop everyone's suffering. Since an Uula exists between dimensions, you're going to need a not just a big stick, but a big, dimensional-crossing stick. Once again, if you are reading this, you should know where to find this stick. Don't hold back: the Uula may even look like your dog Sparky, but believe me, it ain't. And if you stopped to wonder if it is, you're dead.

Habitat/Society

The original society and habitat of the Uula is unknown, but what is certain is that the species in which they used to be members was at one time an extremely advanced and viable culture, with technology to rival even the Elohim. However, that species has long since gone, and the Uula have been cut off from them long enough that any memories they have of their former lives are dim and barely relevant anyway. Today the Uula are scattered around space, mostly within a light year or so from an inhabited solar system: tantalizingly close, but still so very far.

There is a larger than normal proportion of Uula around our solar system, for unknown reasons. The ones farthest away are the least of our worries, but they are also the ones that have descended the most into madness. The majority of the Uula around the Sol system are homicidally insane. There are some Uula, however, that have made it closer to the solar system than others, and have made contact with one another. There are around a half-dozen such entities, all clustered loosely around an undetectable black hole in the Oort cloud. Like all Uula, they are insane, but lean more towards the "diabolical archvillain" variety of madness rather than the "psychotic maniac" variety. One of these Uula was riding along with the Hale-Bopp comet, and the possibility remains that another of these Uula could be riding towards the Earth onboard another comet, so far undetected.

(Footnotes)

¹ SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, is an exploratory science that seeks evidence of life in the universe by looking for some signature of its technology. Our current understanding of life's origin on Earth suggests that given a suitable environment and sufficient time, life will develop on other planets. Whether evolution will give rise to intelligent, technological civilizations is open to speculation. However, such a civilization could be detected across interstellar distances, and may actually offer our best opportunity for discovering extraterrestrial life in the near future. - <http://www.seti.org/site/pp.asp?c=ktJ2J9MMIsE&b=179781>

² Heaven's Gate was a [destructive, doomsday cult](#) centered in California. 21 women and 18 men voluntarily committed suicide in three groups on three successive days starting on 1997-MAR-23. Most were in their 40's; the rest covered an age range of 26 to 72. Two months later, two additional members, Charles Humphrey and Wayne Cooke attempted suicide in a hotel room a few miles from the *Rancho Santa Fe* mansion; Cooke succeeded. Humphrey tried again in the Arizona desert during 1998-FEB and was successful. - http://www.religioustolerance.org/dc_high.htm

Ithrae Navan

Landon J. Winkler

History

Legends say the elves discovered what is now called arcane magic. As other races began exploring this type of magic, some elves fought to keep arcane magic a secret, killing the other races' researchers and slaughtering their earliest wizards and sorcerers. Eventually, however, the knowledge spread beyond elven control.

Navan, an elven general at the time, launched a crusade against the "lesser races" to reclaim what he saw as the elves' birthright. Eventually, after terrible casualties on both sides, the elves were driven back to lick their wounds. Although Navan died in the final battle of that war, his followers in the elven lands were still numerous. They gathered in secret to research magic powerful enough to fulfill Navan's wish. As years passed, they began referring to their order as *Ithrae Navan*, translating roughly as Navan's Dream.

Present Activity

Several elven generations have passed since then, and the other races have all but forgotten the terrible war. The elves have not, and a new generation of leadership has come into power over *Ithrae Navan*, bent on putting their long years of research into action. The society still works in secret among the elves, quietly recruiting promising wizards and striking against its enemies when it can. The order recruits most of its members from the military, especially those soldiers stationed near the lesser races.

For now, the order prefers to target the transmission of arcane power. Wizard instructors are targets, as are sorcerers intent on having children. Individual adventurers are usually ignored in favor of attacking the source. Only those spreading magic among the lesser

races are in danger, and elves that teach wizardly magic to outsiders and elven sorcerers with half-elven children are treated especially harshly.

The organization's preferred method of dealing with targets is by drugging them, taking them while unconscious to a secret location, and using *extinguish the spark* (below) to remove their magical talent. When that isn't possible, the order's wizards will simply kill them.

Although *Ithrae Navan* has members spanning all levels of power, only the strongest are sent to deal with specific threats. Most field agents are wizards who are often also trained as fighters or rangers. A handful of agents are sorcerers instead, but these elves tend to work alongside the wizards rather than operating on their own.

Ithrae Navan considers its mission a holy quest and will go to any length to see it through. They've proven their willingness to kidnap or kill children with magical talent. Recently they went so far as to kill a silver dragon responsible for spawning several sorcerous bloodlines among the humans. The order's leaders have even been secretly working with the drow, whom they see as elves and therefore legitimate users of magic.

On the large scale, the order's members have been working on several projects: creating a disease that would prevent non-elves from casting spells, agitating for a war against the lesser race with the most arcanists, destroying schools of wizardry, gathering arcane knowledge to conceal it from the lesser races, and eradicating families with talents in sorcery.

Landon J. Winkler has been gaming for about fifteen years and GMing for almost all of that. He blames his long-time interest on secret societies entirely on the shiny letters from the cover of *GURPS Illuminati*. In his spare time, Landon is training to become a Certified Ethical Hacker, among other far less interesting things.

Ithrae Navan Feats

These feats have been developed by *Ithrae Navan* to help achieve its goals. Typically, they are taught to its wizardly members. Active members usually learn Magebane Spell as soon as possible, but many agents in the military prefer to learn Fey Spell.

Magebane Spell [Metamagic]

You can cast spells that deplete other arcane casters' daily spell casting.

Prerequisites: Trained by members of *Ithrae Navan*, one other metamagic feat

Benefits: You can alter a spell so that it removes wizards' prepared spells or reduces the number of spells per day sorcerers can cast. For every ten full points of damage an arcane caster takes from this spell, she must choose either to lose one prepared arcane spell or have one arcane spell slot used up for the day. The target cannot use 0-level prepared spells and 0-level spell slots to satisfy this effect.

For example, if a wizard just took thirty-six points of damage from a *magebane lightning bolt*, she would have to choose three of her prepared spells to abandon for the day, as though they had already been cast.

A magebane spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level. Spells that deal no damage are not affected by this feat.

Fey Spell [Metamagic]

You can cast spells that ignore elves and the fey.

Prerequisites: Must be an elf or a fey, one other metamagic feat

Benefits: You can manipulate a spell such that it ignores all elves and fey within its area of effect. For example, a *fey fireball* will not damage any elf or fey but will deal normal damage to others. Druids with the Resist Nature's Lure class feature gain a +4 bonus on saving throws against fey spells. Half-elves take normal effect from these spells, although drow are ignored like other elves.

A fey spell uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level. Spells without an area of effect cannot be changed with this feat.

Ithrae Navan Spells

The society has developed a large number of spells over the years, but only a few are known to all its members. Almost every *Ithrae Navan* agent able to cast these spells will be taught them.

Extinguish the Spark

Necromancy

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting Time: One Hour

Range: Touch

Target: One humanoid

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Will negates (special)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell permanently destroys the target's ability to use arcane magic. In the case of sorcerers, their magical bloodline is severed, and their children will have no special capacity to use magic.

The spell requires one hour of chanting, during the caster must remain in physical contact with the target. If contact is broken at any time, the spell fails. A target with levels in wizard or sorcerer can make a Will save to retain spellcasting abilities. The caster of this spell will know if the roll succeeds.

The only known way to reverse this spell is through the use of *wish* or *miracle*.

Spellbind

Abjuration

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: 24 hours or until triggered (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

You can reflect the target's next spell inward, turning it into uncontrollable bolts of crimson energy that tear at the target. If the target fails his Will save, he doesn't notice any effect until he next casts an arcane spell. That spell is countered and converted to crackling energy, dealing 1d8+1 force damage for every level of the countered spell.

If spellbind damage isn't triggered in 24 hours, the effect fades harmlessly. Targets without any ability to cast arcane spells can ignore the effect completely.

Stifling Mists

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: mist fills a 30-ft. radius sphere

Duration: 1 minute/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

The entire area is filled with a thin silvery mist, conjured from some unknown plane. Targets more than ten feet away in the mist have concealment (attacks have a 20% miss chance). The mist moves with its own rules, ignoring any winds in the area.

Every arcane spell cast within the mist is countered unless the caster sacrifices prepared spells (if a wizard) or spell slots (if a bard or sorcerer) of a total level equal to the level of the spell he wishes to cast. Arcane spells targeting something within the mists are affected in the same way.

Material Component: Requires a cut smoky quartz worth at least ten gold pieces.

Diseases

Ithrae Navan wizards have been working for years on a plague that would prevent non-elves from using magic. The closest they've come up with so far is Spellrot, which only infects those of human blood (including half-breeds).

Spellrot is normally inflicted with the *contagion* spell, but can also spread by contact with bodily fluids. The disease lies dormant until the infected individual casts an arcane spell, at which point she must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or take 1d6 Constitution damage.

If the character ever drops below eight Constitution due to the disease, weeping sores (-4 Charisma) appear on their flesh that will not heal until the disease has been removed. The disease can only be cured through magical healing.

Example Member

Commander Eromis; Elf Wizard 5/Eldritch Knight 5/Ranger 1; CR 11; Medium humanoid (elf); HD 5d4+5d6+1d10+11; hp 46; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15, touch +3, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +8; Grapple +8; Atk +12 frost rapier (2d6+1, critical 18-20); Full Atk +12/+7 frost rapier (2d6+1, critical 18-20); SA -; SQ elf traits, favored enemy humans +2, wild empathy; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 12

Skills: Concentration +15, Decipher Script +13, Heal +3, Hide +7, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (nature) +7, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Search +9, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +13, Spot +5, Survival +3

Feats: Magebane Spell, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Empower Spell, Improved Initiative, Fey Spell, Scribe Scroll, Track, Weapon Finesse (Rapier)

Elf Traits: Immune to magical sleep; +2 racial bonus to save against enchantment spells and effects; low-light vision; +2 racial bonus to Listen, Search, and Spot; automatically check when within 5 feet of a secret door

Favored Enemy (Ex): Eromis has a +2 bonus on his Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against humans. He also receives a +2 bonus on weapon damage rolls against humans.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Eromis can improve the attitude of an animal as Diplomacy would with a humanoid. He is +2 to these rolls.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/5/5/4/2/1; Save DC 13+spell level): 0- *acid splash, detect magic (2), read magic; 1st- color spray, identify, mage armor, magic missile (2); 2nd- cat's grace, invisibility (2), resist energy, see invisibility; 3rd- magebane magic missile, lightning bolt, spellbind (2); 4th- contagion, stifling mists; 5th- magebane lightning bolt*

Spellbook: 0- *acid splash, dancing lights, detect magic, mage hand, ray of frost, read magic, resistance; 1st- color spray, detect thoughts, identify, mage armor,*

magic missile; 2nd- *cat's grace*, *invisibility*, *resist energy*, see *invisibility*; 3rd- *dispel magic*, *lightning bolt*, *spellbind*; 4th- *contagion*, *dimension door*, *stifling mists*; 5th- *baleful polymorph*, *teleport*

Possessions: +1 frost rapier, cloak of resistance +2, three scrolls of *dimension door*, amulet of natural armor +2, spellbook, 5 cut smoky quartzes (10 gp each), 3 pearls (100 gp each), bottle of fine elven wine (500 gp), 100 gp in loose change

Like most members of *Ithrae Navan*, Eromis is a current member of the military. He has used his authority to gather several new recruits and has just begun leading forays outside elven lands. On difficult missions, Eromis will usually be found with a few lower-level elven wizards from his unit.

Eromis is so consumed by the society's ideology and his own hatred of humans that he doesn't consider other races people anymore. He keeps this hidden from most of his fellow elves, but other members of *Ithrae Navan* welcome him with open arms.

For Eromis, preparing for a major battle involves *mage armor*, *cat's grace*, and *invisibility*. He'll attack from *invisibility* if possible, trying to end the battle quickly. Keep in mind that *cat's grace* will also increase his attack bonus with his rapier.

When battling arcane casters, Eromis usually starts off with *spellbind*. He uses *magebane magic missiles*, *magebane lightning bolt*, *spellbind*, and other damaging spells to kill the target as quickly as possible. If he's forced to flee, he'll use *stifling mists* followed by *dimension door* from a scroll along with another *invisibility*.

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His Greatest Mistake

By Øivind Stengrundet

The inn seemed unusually quiet as Berot pushed his broom around the floor, sweeping up the remnants of last night's escapades. But then again, perhaps it was just the stark contrast to the night before, which had been anything but quiet. Berot almost shuddered at the thought of how much it would eventually cost him, as he knelt down to scrub furiously at a dark red stain on the floor. And all because of that wretched bard...

The sun slowly hit the horizon, spreading its golden wings out to engulf the mountains and the hills just below the skyline. The last birds chirped their farewells to the day, as foxes and rodents trotted out of their dens to go hunting for food. Gradually the forest descended into silence, only disturbed by the occasional nocturnal straggler.

Finally, Filather rose, and sighing mournfully, he gathered his lute and his backpack, and strolled down the hill towards Birchenhome. He was travelling lightly, as bards often do, preferring to earn his living by playing in the small towns along his route. And, to his knowledge, Birchenhome was just that kind of place. So, having been given directions by a local herdsman, he set out to reach the Roaring Lion Inn.

The inn was already noisy, filled to the brim with the kind of rowdy crowd often associated with country inns. There were farmers, herders, fishermen, hunters, trappers, weary travellers and the odd blacksmith and fletcher, all talking joyfully to each other, swearing, cursing, laughing and, of course, drinking. All in all, it seemed to Filather the prototype of a wayside inn. He managed, after some effort, to find himself a place to sit, and ordered a glass of mulled wine

from the passing maid. Then he started waiting for the right moment, as timing is always of the essence when it comes to performing.

Finally, he saw his opening. Deep into his second glass, he registered a burly fellow, a blacksmith, to judge by his apron, making a rude joke loud enough for everyone to hear. As laughter rang out, Filather unhooked his lute and got ready to jump up in the short silence that was bound to follow. And, sure enough, everyone stopped to catch their breath after the laughter died. Not the one to wait around for a second chance, Filather leapt on to the tabletop, lute in hand.

"Fellow taverners, good men of Birchenhome, hear me now, as I bring you tales of far-away lands." He could see he had their attention straight away. If there was anything countryfolk such as these appreciated more than ale, it was a tale well told.

"I am Filather, and I have travelled the world from sea to hill, searching out stories to bring back to you. And though the road has been long and hard, now I stand before you singing of such things as you have probably never seen. Hear now the tale of The Foolish Wizard." He could see the light in his audience's eyes as they gathered around him, eager to hear his story. He strummed his lute slightly, cleared his throat a couple of times for dramatic effect, and started singing.

In Talamere, there lived a man
Who some would say was mad,
But no one there could ever doubt
The powers that he had.

So far so good. The audience seemed thoroughly in thrall, apparently waiting with bated breath to hear more. And Filather wasn't one to keep a good audience waiting for too long.

He was their greatest hero,
In each and every sense,
Whenever there was danger near
He jumped to their defense.

He fought with dragons, fought with kings
Out to claim their land,
He cast his spells of death and rage
And still had more in hand.

He could actually see the crowd cringing as he sang of the power the wizard had wielded. Only the burly blacksmith and some of his companions seemed as yet unperturbed. Time to add some new elements, then...

But even mighty wizards,
With power in their hands,
Can never change the stories
That are told in distant lands,

For it is said that Mazziko,
The name of this old man,
Was set upon by enemies
While sitting on the can!

Something seemed awfully out of place. People should have been laughing by now, or at least snickering. But, instead, they seemed to be frowning, or even afraid, at what he was singing. Oh well, perhaps they just were slow to take the point. Filather kept up his smile and sang on: the last mistake he ever made.

So when the battle started,
With spells as the prelude,
His enemies doubled over
To see him in the nude,

So, too ashamed to stand and fight,
He turned and ran away

And that's the last's been heard of him
From then until this day.

Filather finished off with a flourishing smile, took his bow to the audience, and prepared to fend off requests for more, when he noticed they weren't applauding. They weren't even laughing. Not a smile to be seen, not even a grin. As fear started to tap its icy fingers on Filather's shoulder, a voice boomed out from the back.

"THAT IS A LIE!! I left Talamere of my own free will, having grown tired of the tinyness of the place, AFTER I dispatched my enemies. So, it's you who has been spreading these evil rumours about me. Finally I get to meet you. Here, take this little token of my appreciation, and bring it along TO HELL!!"

Filather only managed a glimpse of a tall, white-haired man in dark blue robes waving his arms, with lights dancing around his hands as he traced strange patterns in the air, before the world exploded in crackling, magical energy, blood, jostled joints, screaming and pain, agonising pain.

Berot sighed. Well, it didn't seem as though the spot was willing to give up the fight against the scrub, so it would have to remain there, as a memory of Filather the bard's last and greatest mistake...

Reviews, Reviewsreviews!

This month we take a look at...

d20

The World's Largest Dungeon

Still pining for the dungeoneering days of your youth? Yearning for one epic adventure that can take your party from lackey to legend?

The ultimate challenge has finally arrived...

SSA-X2 D&D Character Sheet

Find out if this is the sheet you need to aid your gaming group

Mystic Secrets: The Lore of Word and Rune

Magic means power in the world of the Diamond Throne. Witches, runethanes, and magisters can dictate the course of history with the spells and runes they wield. They jealously guard their secrets — but this book unveils them all for use in your campaign.

Masque of the Red Death

A Century Ends...and Horror Begins

Long ago, the Mists of Ravenloft parted for a brief moment in time, and a terrible force invaded the Earth. Now, in the waning years of the 19th century, its carefully woven plans come together. Only a few brave souls risk their lives to prevent the conquest of darkness.

d20 Modern

The Qalashar Device

The Qalashar Device begins with the party, based on information found during their work in *Raid on Ashkashem*, being directed to a terrorist camp that has an operating biological weapons lab.

Non-d20

White Wolf – Exalted: Savant & Sorcerer

The first book to make another in the line obsolete does it for a reason. *Savant & Sorcerer* is a high quality book that is a must read (if not a must own) for any fan of the *Exalted* series.

How we rate

Scoring definitions for d20 products:

18 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
16 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
14 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
12 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
10 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
8 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
6 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
4 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:

12 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
11 = Excellent. *Just a hair from perfect.*
10 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
9 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
8 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
7 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
6 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
5 = Poor. *Some gamers would dislike this.*
4 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
3 = Very Bad. *Among the dirty dozen.*
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

read on...



The World's Largest Dungeon

About: 840 pages, hardcover, \$100

Author: jim pinto, et al

Publisher: Alderac Entertainment Group

Reviewed by: Eric L. M. "Lord Xeen" Wills

Review Date: 03/09/05

Reviewer's Bias: I had anticipated playing the World's Largest Dungeon since it was first announced back in March of 2004. I received it in September of the same year and have been running a campaign since October. This is not a playtest review. This review does not contain spoilers of the adventure. I'm a total rules lawyer and I favor dungeon based adventuring.

From the Back Cover

Prepare for the adventure of two lifetimes!

Still pining for the dungeoneering days of your youth? Yearning for one epic adventure that can take your party from lackey to legend?

The ultimate challenge has finally arrived...

Over 1,600 Encounters - A mammoth dungeon unlike any other!

Every monster in the SRD - And a few you've never seen before!

16 poster-sized maps - Enough to cover an entire gameroom wall!

840 pages of fantasy entertainment - Enough for an entire party to grow from levels 1 to 20, or to enjoy 15 challenging dungeon adventures.

Introduction

As you might suspect from the name, The World's Largest Dungeon is just that. It is an immense dungeon crawl, the span of which exceeds all boundaries of sense and decency. This book is an adventure module containing fifteen regions, each a complete and challenging dungeon on its own, that combine to form an immense underground complex. The main purpose of this book is to be a campaign setting without any of those annoying civilization encounters getting in the way of the dungeoneering.

Presentation

The book comes packaged with 16 poster sized maps, and the book itself is a hardbound wonder. The text is legible and clearly laid out in two columns per page. The borders are artistic, yet simple, and illustrations are used sparingly. The formatting is efficient, using a standardized set of statistics for each room. The writing and editing are both excellent.

The cover features a large raised wooden portcullis set into a stone arch. A red dragon looms menacingly just beyond the gate. To either side of the dragon stand an assortment of dungeon 'critters' including a minotaur and a green ooze. The artwork is not especially impressive but the appeal of this book doesn't lie in its aesthetic appeal.

The map, in all of its full color glory, spans 16 full size posters for a combined area of over forty square feet. The map can be viewed on the AEG website The map is divided into 15 regions (one unusually large region takes up two map posters), each of which is a complete dungeon in and of itself for those who are daunted by the sheer scale of the complete dungeon. It's worth noting that the map does not come with any sort of binder or folder for easy storage.

Content

After a brief introduction explaining basic assumptions of the setting and introducing the storyline, the book is promptly divided into regions and subdivided by

encounters corresponding to numbered markings on the map. Each region chapter begins with an explanation for the DM about the politics and activities of the region in question. This will explain who the major players are, what their plans and motivations are, what purpose the region serves in the grand scheme of things, and other important information.

Encounters

Each encounter follows an orderly and tidy format. The layout is as efficient as can be expected with a text this immense. First, there is an explanation of the purpose of the room, usually accompanied by a description for the PCs. Next the initial attitude, encounter and encounter conditions follow, explaining what, if anything awaits the players and what modifiers there might be. Suffice it to say, as much information is provided as possible in a clear and concise format.

The encounters and regions all interconnect in remarkably effective ways. For example, entrance to one of the more deadly regions requires a key placed far away from the actual doorway but guides and subtle hints point players in the right direction while allowing them to gain the levels and equipment necessary to survive the dangers of the sealed-off area.

Generally speaking, the further Northeast the adventurers travel, the more difficult their lives become. While a large portion of the World's Largest Dungeon is 'man-made,' there are some regions that are natural caves. One region is even almost completely underwater. Each major region has its own plot, with various factions and powerful NPCs vying for whatever particular goals they have. In one region, goblin tribes war for supremacy and litter the halls with devious traps. In another region, a stalwart band of elves strive to protect an ancient tree cast into the depths of the underground.

Challenges

On the subject of equipment, since there is no turning back once the party enters the World's Largest Dungeon, the party will face an interesting set of challenges since the conventional 'return to town, rest, and resupply' strategy is not an option. Finding a safe place to rest, a clean source of water, and a reliable supply of food will quickly become a major concern to haggard, hungry

adventurers. The dungeon provides a reasonable array of practical 'treasure' (pickaxes, rope, and other useful stuff) as well as increasingly huge mountains of good old-fashioned swag. What to do with all this plunder is a curious question since there are no shops, at least not in the traditional sense.

Certain classes are crippled within the World's Largest Dungeon. Wizards will face a lot of trouble without access to new spells provided by regular visits to the Ye Grande Shoppe of Magicke in town. Druids just get hosed. Without using underground druidic variants, there will be very little opportunity for a druid to use her wilderness-based powers. This is, after all, an immense artificial complex carved deep underground. Add to this the fact that summoning spells don't work within the World's Largest Dungeon (I'd tell you why, but it's a big plot point) and playing a druid becomes an exercise in frustration.

New concepts

Although there are not many new concepts introduced, there are some interesting ideas scattered here and there. One example is a new monster type called a horde. A horde is similar to a swarm but made up of larger creatures. Like swarms, they are almost certain to hit but they deal damage based on the number of creatures in the horde. In this way, creatures like goblins and orcs can still pose a threat to adventurers, even at higher levels when the PCs should be able to squelch dozens of them effortlessly.

Another addition is a material called Truesilver, a rare alloy of silver and mithril with fantastically useful magical properties. Of course, without access to proper smithing materials and professionals, the usefulness of the raw ore might be somewhat diminished.

Adventure Scale

In case the ludicrous scale of this dungeon haven't set in yet, five of my bold adventurers have been trekking through this monstrosity for over two full months and are only barely finished with the first of the fifteen regions. The variety of the encounters keeps the players interested and on their toes, and there is a significant degree of freedom left to the DM's Discretion. For those who are wondering if the World's Largest

Dungeon really has every single monster in the SRD, you might be a little disappointed. They stretched some definitions there, for example they decided that one dinosaur was enough to say that dinosaurs were included. I admit that this is a better solution than having a bizarre Jurassic Park™ region. Does it have every single monster from a dire badger to the great wyrms blue dragon? No, but it does it have enough baddies to keep your players fighting for their lives for a long, long time.

If run in its entirety, the bold (foolhardy?) adventurers who wander in as 1st level should emerge as Epic heroes some two years later. That's right, years: real-time years. You may well have graduated from college or moved on with your life and left your role-playing group behind by the time you've finished with this subterranean world. There is, in fact, a text box near the end that reads "If you're reading this as the conclusion of a campaign, it's probably 2006 or later. If not, you cheated."

Conclusion

There's no two ways about it, this is meant to be the biggest dungeon crawl you will ever experience. You and your adventurers have to be just the right kind of crazy to attempt to storm through this extraordinary creation, but you're going to have a lot of fun on the journey.

Class: Adventure Module (Possibly campaign setting)
STR: 16 (*Physical*) Excellent hardback binding, paper on par with products from AEG.
DEX: 16 (*Organization*) Easy to navigate, well-organized layout despite size.
CON: 18 (*Quantity of Content*) It's HUGE! This probably deserves a CON of 20 or more.
INT: 12 (*Quality of Content*) There's not a lot of new ideas, just skillful use of existing ones.
WIS: 12 (*Options & Adaptability*) There's a good amount of freedom left to the DM.
CHA: 14 (*Look & Feel*) Neat presentation, efficient design.

SSA-X2 D&D Character Sheet v2.5

About: 27 pages, Color PDF, Free.

Publisher: SSA-X2.com

Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*

Review date: 3/24/05

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

Introduction

Back when I used to play the red-box Basic D&D set, character sheets were not an issue. The pertinent information all fit on one side of a sheet of lined paper, and organization wasn't that big a deal. Using the front and back of the sheet, my friends and I could fit everything we needed for AD&D 2nd Edition, Champions, TORG, and all the other games we wanted to play. When I came back to the hobby after a ten-year break, I quickly found that fitting everything onto lined paper was a royal pain when it came to characters in D&D 3e. Since then, I've been searching for the perfect character sheet — something compact but not crowded, complete but not overwhelming, something attractive yet functional.

Online, I've found that function takes place over form and that most of my characters pop up in statblocks. In my real-life games, I've printed out blanks of Mad Irishman's Forgotten Realms Character Sheet and a Midnight character sheet. They're both nice, but between my sometimes sketchy handwriting and constant erasing, they really take a beating. Finding a good, fillable PDF character sheet has become a must for me. So when I received the SSA-X2 Character Sheet, I was intrigued, even more so when I found out that there was a Reader-Save edition that allowed me to save my characters with just Acrobat Reader.

The Sheet

I'm forgoing the usual headers that I use in my reviews here at Silven, as I feel that presentation and function aren't all that separable in a character sheet. The presentation is, to a large degree, the point; how it's arranged will determine how useful and useable it is. So, I'm going to consider two things: how it looks and how well it works.

Aesthetically, it's an attractive sheet, with a layout similar to the official WotC character sheet. It uses some color,

mostly a blackish-grey red for solid bars and a multi-color version of the D&D logo in the upper right of the first page. The Reader-Save sheet has a very prominent watermark on each page ("Preliminary Draft, Not for Production Use"), which might make it less than useful for printing out, unless you have a solid printer. The text used for filling in labels appears in Times New Roman and a strange blue, which looks funny against the white background, but shows up well against shaded fields.

The main sheet numbers seven pages (minus the supplemental inserts, readme, and so on) and breaks down nicely. The first page has stats, AC, saves, and weapon information on the left and skills on the right. Page two has movement, carrying capacity, languages, class abilities, feats, and racial abilities. The next pages, in order, cover equipment, magic, psionics, spellbook, and description. Obviously, they're not going to be useful to everyone, but they are necessary. Finally, there are also a number of inserts which can expand on sections in case you run out of room (for example, one insert expands on the racial abilities/feats/class abilities section). A good touch and sure to be useful for abilities that have a lot of different details and rules that you'd want to remember.

How does this layout work? I like it. It's not revolutionary, but it is practical, which is more important. One thing that does give me a little bit of pause is that the movement information is on page 2, instead of on page 1 with the rest of the combat information. The rest is clear and clean. The thing I liked the best was the way psionic powers and spells were detailed, allowing space for range, duration, area-of-effect, and all that good stuff right on the character sheet. I can even list a sourcebook and page numbers for my spells, which is tremendously helpful. Mind, I had seen this before, but only as a separate PDF from the Mad Irishman, not as a fully integrated part of a character sheet. Another highlight would be the inserts. The opportunity for an exhaustive detailing of class abilities/racial abilities/feats — you could even cut and paste the rules right from the SRD or another PDF — is excellent. It could, if a player is thorough, help keep the game running, eliminating some of the rules research that can go on during a game.

Conclusion

So, it looks good, and it looks functional. No problem, right? Well, not quite. I found the sheet hard to use on my computer. Now, admittedly, my machine needs to be replaced (the specs are as follows: a Compaq Presario 5000SR, PIII 900 mHz, 128 MB RAM, Windows XP, running Acrobat Reader 7.0), but I did find the sheet to be slow to the point of being unuseable on my PC. I had to wait between half a minute and a minute for it to calculate things, and there was a slight drag even as I moved from field to field with the TAB key. For users with lower end computers, like me, the sheet's probably more hassle than it's worth — I can stat out a first-level character in a statblock in Notepad or MS Word more quickly than the sheet can do it in Acrobat Reader, which means that, despite my wanting to use it, it's not a good choice for me. For a computer with more memory and a faster processor, the sheet should be excellent. It's simply a well-designed piece of work.

CLASS: Game Aid

STR: -- (*Physical*). This score does not apply to this product.

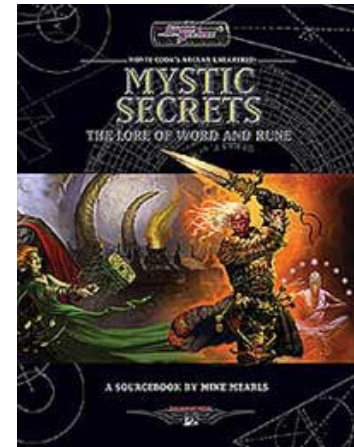
DEX: 14 (*Organization*). A bit unsure about movement being on the 2nd page, given that all the other combat material's on the first.

CON: 16 (*Quantity of the Content*). It's all here, and the inserts make this sheet very expandable.

INT: 16 (*Quality of Content*). Extremely thorough.

WIS: 18 (*Options & Adaptability*). The inserts make a huge difference.

CHA: 12 (*Look & Feel*). Nothing revolutionary, nothing bad. Standard D&D 3e character sheet layout.



Mystic Secrets: The Lore of Word and Rune

About: 72, perfect-bound softcover, \$16.

Publisher: [Malhavoc Press](#) (2004)

Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*

Review date: 2/19/2005

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover

Magic means power in the world of the Diamond Throne. Witches, runethanes, and magisters can dictate the course of history with the spells and runes they wield. They jealously guard their secrets — but this book unveils them all for use in your campaign.

This sourcebook expands the magical options available to all characters in *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed*. Original ceremonies allow characters to forge mystic bonds with allies and even weapons. Additional rules for runes expand their abilities while revealing the secrets behind their true nature. New spells and magic items enhance any character's abilities. And unique mystic sites provide intriguing new vistas for magical experiments and adventure.

Introduction

Note: This is not a playtest review.

A sizable expansion to *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed*, Mike Mearls's *Mystic Secrets* functions, in a way, like a *Book of Eldritch Might* for the lands of the Diamond Throne. It gives players and DMs options and ideas that they can drop into their campaigns and reinforces some of the main design tropes of Mr. Cook's *AU* line, including its emphases on rituals and ceremonies, runes and writing, and player and DM choice.

Presentation

Mystic Secrets looks like most of Malhavoc Press's other products, with the same clean layout and the typical *Arcana Unearthed* trade dress. The cover art, by J.P. Targete, depicts, in montage, a number of different ceremonies, including a mojh meditating and a horse-like sibbecai becoming blood brothers with a human. It's a solid cover, but it feels very different from Sam Wood's covers for *The Diamond Throne* and *Legacy of the Dragons*. I'm not sure this is a good or a bad thing, but it did change my impression of the book slightly. The interior art is mostly by James Ryman (including a very nice drawing of a verrik herald of annihilation on page 38), save for a few reprints from the cover, which appear throughout the book. I'm used to seeing pieces of art reprinted throughout books (*Arcana Unearthed* itself does this here and there, mostly details placed at chapter headings), but the reused pieces here felt jarring — even though they did the same thing, I noticed them.

Part of this could have been that the book seems to move away from the normal *Arcana Unearthed* trade dress in odd places, such as the larger chapter titles, the italicized summaries under these headers, and the elimination of the zodiac-style margins in the first pages of a chapter. In the place of the latter, there's a large detail from either the cover or some of the interior artwork. This, combined with an impression that the book has a lot of white space (I've checked it against other books in the line and the *Book of Iron Might*, which has ended up being inconclusive), made me feel like the book was padded — the material was too much for 64 pages but not quite enough for 72. Aside from this impression, I found the book to be sharp-looking and free of typos and other intrusive mistakes.

Rituals and Ceremonies

I liked this chapter a lot, as it reinforced the ceremony/ritual theme introduced in the main book, but didn't relegate the ceremonies to being ways to access different feats. Instead, it offers a number of ceremonies that are commonly used throughout the land and that can be accessed without using a feat slot. Instead, characters know a number of ceremonies equal to 1 + Intelligence modifier and can learn more by putting ranks into Knowledge (ceremony) or by simply devoting time to their study. Although this might seem slightly unbalancing, the material presented isn't extremely powerful — for instance, the Giant ceremony Homage to the Eternal grants a +1 insight bonus to one attack, save, or check selected by the DM for a cost of 50 gp plus the time invested in the ritual. Most parties won't have time to perform tons of rituals, and a lot might not even want to spend the money on such a minor boon. But they can if they want to and at any time. This is the other thing that I liked — by not using feats as a prerequisite, Mr. Mearls makes it far more likely that the commoners of the Diamond Throne will use these ceremonies. They become the provenance of everyone as opposed to only being the stuff heroes.

Bonds of friendship and item bonds, detailed in the back half of the chapter, grant more substantial abilities, but require far more of the participants in the ceremony. For instance, in order to even start one of the rituals that form a bond of friendship, the members of the party must meet certain in-game, story-based criteria, such as each having saved the life of at least two of their allies and having adventured together for at least one year. After performing the ceremony, the party might gain, as in the Ritual of Friendship, a +4 to saves against fear effects while their friends are in sight but would also have to deal with potential penalties if someone betrays them (in the case of the same, a curse in the form of a -1 to saves, attacks, and checks for one year and a day). The Ritual of Item Bonding is similar in its design, and both types of bonds can be improved through the performance of further rituals. In the case of item bonds, this can cost similar amounts to the purchase of magical items and abilities.

I liked the material here, not only because of its expansion of options for all characters (by using these rituals, a warmain could "enchant" his weapon), but also

because of its emphasis on the campaign's story and mechanics. Players are rewarded for becoming in play, and the mechanical benefits offered by the rituals are a direct function of the ritual's place in the game world.

Runes of Might

On some level, this chapter was kind of like a mini-splat book for runethanes and runechildren, which was nice, as I liked the class and race in the core book and wanted more material. It opens up with a number of new runes (lesser, advanced, greater, and runes of power) for runethanes, which means that the opening section of the chapter is really nothing you haven't seen before — it's almost like having a bunch of new spells here. I didn't find any of them truly exciting, but I did find the *runes of the ram* and the *runes of the feather* to be intriguing, with well-shaped effects.

The rest of the chapter grabbed me right away. Rune manifests, which originally appeared in *Legacy of the Dragon* are sentient runes (the living embodiment of an idea — kind of like the sign and the signifier come alive); the more intelligent of them are described in the other source, but *Mystic Secrets* does expand nicely on minor rune manifests, which almost seem analogous to familiars and psi-crystals in a way, although more transient than either. The minor rune manifests are summoned via a small ceremony, which players can learn just as they learn the ceremonies in the first chapter. I particularly liked the calm (+2 to Will saves, +5 to Concentration checks for one hour) and greed (determine the exact gp value of one item) manifests.

Finally, the chapter concludes with some new ability packages and feats for runechildren and an examination of their opposite number (with new feats), the heralds of annihilation. I liked this material because it provided the runechild template/race with some flexibility — it allows each runechild in the game to be somewhat unique (and, I suppose, if the DM wanted to design new packages, every one could be unique, although what's described here should be sufficient for most games, unless they're crawling with runechildren). I didn't find any of the feats particularly exciting here, but they're all well designed and unique enough that all runechildren or heralds of annihilation probably won't want to take them.

Mystic Sites

This chapter reminded me of the material in *The Book of Eldritch Might III*, *The Book of Hallowed Might II*, and *Beyond Countless Doorways* in that it's a collection of unique locations ready to be dropped into a campaign. The difference here is the power running through the sites — these locations feed on their histories, creating palpable in-game effects based on their past. I run hot and cold on these types of collections — I wasn't wild about the material in the *BoEM III* at first, but I loved the *BoHM II*'s stuff when I saw it; lately, I find that I've reversed course and have warmed up to the former and cooled off about the latter. For me, this part worked well on a first read, with two of the three locations looking really interesting to me.

I liked the Bone Cathedral and the Roof of the World very much (I'm sure the excellent cartography by Ed Bouelle didn't hurt this), particularly in the way that Mr. Mearls has riddled them with plot hooks that imply a greater depth, while not wasting too much time revealing all possible secrets or ideas. I feel like a visit to either of these locations would be strange, interesting, and, most importantly, exciting to a group of adventurers (and their players). The Infinite Library, on the other hand, felt like an idea that works better on paper than in play. It's a neat idea, but there are few problems that I can see immediately. Finding it's an adventure, but if the players are there simply to research, the game could grind to a halt for the interim (which could take days, weeks, or possibly months), which'd basically make the DM kind of gloss over the time spent in the Library ("...after six weeks of focused research, you find..."). The other catch is, if you make the location too dynamic — by inserting a competing team of researchers, for instance — the players might not even get to research what they're looking for or might find that's ended up being destroyed. As a "repository for the akashic memory," this could have some completely boggling effects on the game world's nature (what are the ramifications of something being purged from the akashic memory?). In short, it's a great idea that could be very difficult to implement well; it could be tremendously exciting, overwhelmingly anticlimatic, or just plain frustrating.

Spells and Magic Items

I've lumped the last two chapters of the book together for two major reasons. One, they're kind of the same thing, on some level — unlike the rest of the book, they're not tremendously unique chapters in and of themselves (which, for an almost-splat book on magic that doesn't include prestige classes, is fairly noteworthy). Two, they felt like an afterthought, almost as though Mr. Mearls was saying, "But, wait! There's more!" Fortunately, the "more," in this case, is pretty good stuff.

The spells aren't tremendously notable in and of themselves, except that thematically, they open up some new ground by adding a lot of spells with the [Earth] descriptor, which tends to get shafted in most supplements. *Banish from the earth* and *blade anchor* stood out among these spells for me. The latter, which uses magnetism to pull a foe's blade towards the earth, is a nice spell based on an idea that I hadn't seen before (or that didn't, at least, impress me in the form I saw it in if I did).

I liked the magic item abilities, which focus on runes, better than the spells, in that they allow more people to enchant weapons (again, this is a more democratic design principle) but they don't allow just anyone to do it (runethanes, runechildren, heralds of annihilation, and folks that're savvy about runes can use that knowledge to alter things). One of the nice touches here is that the rune weapon special abilities function differently in the hands of a runechild or a herald of annihilation than in the hands of a normal adventurer — and sometimes very differently in the hands of one or the other. For instance, a rune weapon with the flaming quality does extra damage to undead in the hands of a runechild, but extra damage to the living when wielded by a herald of annihilation. It's little touches like this that make the material here more interesting and more valuable to me. The rune templates, which can be applied to any item, are neat, too, and they bring another level of options to a DM when creating magic items and outfitting NPCs, while reinforcing the rune motif present in the *AU* game world.

Conclusion

This is an excellent add-on to the material presented in previous *Arcana Unearthed* products, and it's useful to both players and DMs in an *AU* game (converting some of the material, such as the spells, to other d20 fantasy games may take some work, and the balance of just about everything else should be considered, as *AU* characters are slightly more powerful than regular *D&D* characters). The book feels like it's a bit long for the topic (again, it feels padded, with lots of white space and extra art), which makes me a bit wary of the price point — *The Book of Iron Might* is 64 pages/\$14; this one, 72/\$16. In any case, though, the material present is excellent and reinforces the concepts in the core book extremely well.

CLASS: Supplement

STR: 14 (*Physical*). Sturdy, well-made.

DEX: 16 (*Organization*). Excellent organization. Easy to navigate.

CON: 14 (*Quantity of the Content*). A lot of new stuff here, but maybe not enough for 72 pages.

INT: 16 (*Quality of Content*). Some excellent, unique material mixed in with some just solid material.

WIS: 12 (*Options & Adaptability*). Pretty specific to the *AU* ruleset.

CHA: 15 (*Look & Feel*). Superior layout and editing, but felt padded.

The Qalashar Device

About: 64 pages, full color PDF with printer-friendly and text-only versions, \$7.

Publisher: [Sword's Edge Publishing](#) (2005)

Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*

Review date: 02/07/2005

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product. Note: This review contains spoilers.

From the Back Cover

"Part Two of the Albenistan Series, a d20 Modern adventure supplement

Information gathered from a raid on a drug smuggling waystation near the village of Ashkashem has led Great Britain's Secret Intelligence Service to investigate an abandoned vehicle repair facility near the town of Qalashar along Albenistan's border with Afghanistan. It seems the abandoned facility is abandoned no more. Someone has occupied the base, but for what purpose? Worse, a letter recovered in the Ashkashem raid refers to a device or weapon that will 'strike fear in the hearts of the enemy and destroy their feeble resolve.' What kind of device could be hiding at the Qalashar facility? Fear of what this weapon might be and how it could be used has lead the SIS to reactivate the Increment unit that successfully completed the raid on Ashkasham. Their mission: discover who has occupied the Qalashar facility and neutralize any threat that might be posed by the Qalashar Device.

This 74 page, no-FX, Modern adventure for 4 characters of levels 9 to 11 from the Sword's Edge Publishing's Spec Ops line.

The Qalashar Device adventure supplement includes:

- the Qalashar Device adventure module
- plot hooks for non-military characters
- 14 generic NPCs, 4 unique bad guys NPCs with histories and 2 SAS NPCs
- 14 new pieces of equipment including surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles and Transport Erector Launcher vehicles
- the Special Operations Marksman Prestige Class
- A variant of the Craft skill, the Exotic Firearms Proficiency feat and 4 completely new feats

- information on the fictional Central Asian nation of Albenistan
- reports on the Increment, the HMA, and the NATO Special Actions Group including mission profiles and organizational information
- a glossary of military terms and equipment.

This product includes standard, printer friendly and text-only documents in the PDF format."

Introduction

I remember reviewing the first adventure in Sword's Edge Publishing's Albenistan Series, [Raid on Ashkashem](#), and being less than thrilled. Although it had tons of detail — the base described in the module felt real — a host of other things really had a strong negative impact on my opinion of the module's quality, including odd layout choices, a weak hook, minimal role-playing options, and poor use of the electronic format.

Despite this, my first reaction to its sequel, *The Qalashar Device*, was strongly positive. I was pleased to find that Sword's Edge Publishing has done some excellent work on their sophomore effort without losing the detail that was the strength of the first module.

Presentation

The Qalashar Device looks and feels better than *Raid on Ashkashem*; it's clear that Sword's Edge Publishing has re-evaluated how they design their products and taken steps to improve their presentation. The cover art, by Rob Wakefield, depicts three Spec Ops agents moving through the desert. It has a grainy, sketchy feel that reminded me of David Hende's work (some interior illustrations for Malhavoc Press's *Arcana Unearthed*) while still looking realistic. There are, aside from maps, only two pieces of art in the text, both of which appear to be photographs that have been tinkered with in Photoshop. They're nice, but they feel buried in the appendices. Using them in the adventure itself may have helped break up the text a bit, as this is an extremely text-heavy product.

The photo-maps on pages 6 and 7 are of the same high quality as the photo-maps found in *Raid on Ashkashem*. I liked these very much, particularly the Player's Map; these would just make cool player handouts. The other maps in the text are nicely made and functional, but use

non-standard scales; for instance, the Barracks map on page 17 uses 10-foot squares and the Building X map on page 21 uses 20-foot squares. With d20 relying on 5-foot squares for tactical combat and this adventure eventually devolving into a smash-and-grab operation, changing scales on the fly could be a major pain in the neck. That said, given the size of some of the buildings, the designers were clearly caught between making the maps easy to copy and making them readable.

The layout is crisp, with plenty of white space, clean margins, and excellent use of book-marking. The editing, however, leaves something to be desired. As I read it, I found numerous mistakes. For example, in the introduction, it refers to the Albenistan Series as the "Big Bang" series (a reference to Alternate Realities' Big Bang series, which is referenced a paragraph later). Other errors that I spotted included sentence fragments ("Based on information gained at included in this supplement"), missing or extra words ("Information from the raid revealed the existence some kind of weapon," "The truck proceeds to straight toward the largest building"), and typos involving homonyms ("The guards life the gate barrier...," "There schedule of movements is listed..."). These aren't crippling mistakes, surely, but they are bothersome enough to negatively impact the product's feel.

The Adventure

The Qalashar Device begins with the party, based on information found during their work in *Raid on Ashkashem*, being directed to a terrorist camp that has an operating biological weapons lab. They are sent to reconnoiter and, eventually, take the compound by force, eliminating the terrorists and finding the device — if the adventure's being played as part of the Albenistan Series, the device is missing, leading the characters into the third adventure in the series. It assumes that the players are part of a British spec ops group called the Increment (although the appendices provide hooks for non-military PCs getting in on the action and the adventure does allow for other groups, such as the CIA, being the powers behind the PCs).

The adventure's introduction leaves no doubt that there's going to be fighting (as a matter of fact, it presents fighting as the only option to some degree, with sentences such as "The complex is being used by

extremists, so the PCs are faced with a fight” and “Based on the information from the reconnaissance, an attack will be deemed necessary”). This initial impression is a little unfair, as there are opportunities for role-playing within the Increment in the field and with the terrorists (through the science techs in Building X), although this is a combat mission, first and foremost, and the players will have to fight. It becomes a question of “how and where” instead of “if and when.” Some PCs might feel railroaded, especially if they happen to be working for the Increment or a similar organization, but this is, of course, part and parcel of being in the military or under the jurisdiction of the military. Groups that have trouble dealing with NPC authority figures might have some difficulties with this adventure.

As in the first adventure, the detail work is brilliant. Fraser Ronald has spent a lot of time getting the details and feel of the base down, including when the men eat, what they keep in their closets, and what their coffee cups look like. Like the base in *Raid on Ashkashem*, there’s a lived-in feel to it, especially given small touches such as a TV playing a South American soap opera dubbed into Russian with Tajik subtitles. It is fantastic work and quite neat. That said, it occasionally runs the risk of becoming too much of a good thing. In the LAV port, does it make any difference that there are BRDM-2s, BTR-70s, and BTR-80s? Also, the shift schedules in the third part of the adventure are mind-numbing. Necessary detail, yes, but things could get extremely bogged down, depending on how long it takes the PCs to get through the base, as the shifts are broken down with NPCs moving through the base by the hour.

Appendices

There are eight appendices to the main adventure:

- Appendix One: Plot Hooks — This appendix contains five plot hooks designed to get non-military PCs into the action. The last two plot hooks contain options for tying *The Qalashar Device* into FX and Horror campaigns.
- Appendix Two: NPCs — Stats, backgrounds, and tactics for all NPCs are included here.
- Appendix Three: Equipment — Stats and descriptions for all new weapons and equipment are presented here. This is a nice touch for people that don’t have a strong familiarity with Soviet weapons and vehicles.
- Appendix Four: New Prestige Class — The Spec Ops

Marksman PrC is detailed here. This class looks okay on paper, although I do question the inclusion of a non-standard Reflex save progression (ends with +4 bonus at level 10).

- Appendix Five: New Skills and Feats — A new use for a skill (rules for Craft/Culinary) and four new feats appear here. I’m not sure that Gourmet really needs to be a feat, as the scope is so narrow, and Skill Focus serves the same purpose and can be chosen sooner. Other than that, the new feats look fine.
- Appendix Six: Albenistan — An in-depth look at the fictional country of Albenistan.
- Appendix Seven: Organizations — This appendix includes information on Holy Motherland Albenistan, the NATO Special Actions Group (a slightly different version of Department 7), and the SIS Increment.
- Appendix Eight: Glossary.

Conclusion

All of the complaints that I had with *Raid on Ashkashem* have been addressed and to good effect. The layout and page design are cleaner, it takes advantage of the book-marking feature of the PDF format, it provides optional hooks to get parties not involved in military action into the plot (a GM could even use these hooks to get a party that refuses to follow orders into the adventure), and provides opportunities for role-playing throughout the course of the module.

In the end, *The Qalashar Device* will appeal mainly to people interested in running a non-FX military/spec ops campaign. Its presentation and organization are much better than *Raid on Ashkashem*’s presentation, with a more professional look and more useful organization (the presence of all stat-blocks in the appendix rather than both in the text and in an appendix, for example, lends to a cleaner looking file), although it is still littered with small, slightly intrusive errors. It is portable to other genres, but it does best what it was designed to do, and gamers running that type of game will be happiest with the finished product, and they should be. It’s well done.

CLASS: Adventure

STR: NA (*Physical*). This score does not apply to this product.

DEX: 16 (*Organization*). Clear organization, nice use of the electronic format.

CON: 14 (*Quantity of the Content*). The level of detail in the product is astounding, and the appendices are extremely thorough.

INT: 14 (*Quality of Content*). More role-playing opportunities and a variety of foes and strategic choices.

WIS: 10 (*Options & Adaptability*). Adaptable to other genres (Modern FX, Modern Horror, maybe even future), but strongly rooted in non-FX Modern.

CHA: 13 (*Look & Feel*). Clean look with nice maps, although minor errors and typos plague the text.



Exalted – Savant & Sorcerer

Authors: Rebecca Borgstrom, Gareth Hanrahan, Brian Nisbet, Scot Taylor, Adam Tinworth, W. Van Meter, & William Wulf

Publisher: [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Reviewed by: *Nash J. DeVita*

Review Date: *March 18th, 2005*

Reviewer Bias: I have been playing and thoroughly enjoying Exalted for about three (3) years now. This title was received both for play and review.

The first book that outdates a previous title for *Exalted*, *Savant & Sorcerer* is a hefty 160 page paper back that makes *The Book of Three Circles* obsolete. Like all *Exalted* titles, this book is filled with anime style interior black & white art from quite a number of people. The artists

whose work appears in the book are Shane Coppage, Susan Luo, Stuart Ng, Stuart Ng, Raimundo Posada and, UDON (featuring Attila Adorjany, Greg Brown, Eric Kim, and Jim Zuvkavich). The (full color) cover work is provided by Hyung- Tae Kim this time around. Thanks to this, I have decided that I have to find more of his work. I have really fallen in love with his style.

From the Back Cover

"The ancient secrets of sorcery are known only to a few.

During the First Age, Creation swarmed with sorcerers, magicians, and savant- engineers. These Exalted and mortal miracle workers made the world a place of wonder. Now, at the sunset of the Second Age of Man, Creation is a place of ignorance, whose splendor lie in ruin and whose secrets are lost or forgotten. Yet, here and there throughout Creation, caches of lore remain for those daring enough to claim them. In the libraries of sorcerers and the ruins of bygone glory, what wonders yet wait?

Can you reclaim the power that list forgotten?

Savant and Sorcerer describes the intricacies of secret in the world of *Exalted*. The book details over 100 spells from all three circles of magic. It also provides information on Demenses, Manses, Hearthstones, magical summoning and the creation of artifacts. Finally, [this] details warstriders, the massive war machines of the First Age."

Presentation

The cover features a (lovely) thin, light skinned, young woman who is wearing a very skimpy white outfit. She appears to be casting my favorite spell, Obsidian Butterflies. She is set in a hallway that is lined with golden statues of soldiers. The title of the book, which appears above this character, looks as if was carved from stone.

Each page is bordered on the top with a collage of individuals. The outer border holds the 'high script' for the title of the book (I think that is what it is) on the left pages and the chapter number on the right.

Content

Savant & Sorcerer (S&S from here on out) is a very hefty book. The 160 page count is almost deceiving. I would highly recommend reading most of this book more than just once if it is going to be used. It is not because the material is written on too high a level or that it is overly dry. It is because there is so much important information found within. I would not want anyone missing anything.

As stated above, this book replaces a previous title in the *Exalted* line, *The Book of Three Circles* making S&S the primary 'magic' book for the line.

S&S is broken into five (5) well defined chapters with a single appendix. The chapters range from theory to spells and from quick cast spells to semi-permanent summonings.

Chapter one, Magical Theory, discusses exactly what it sounds like it should, the ideas behind magic. This is a fairly short chapter, thankfully. Some of the material in here felt a little dry though it was written properly, I believe. The basic ideas behind magic from one's beginning in the practice to the broad schools of thought behind it can't help but be straight forward. If it was anything else, it wouldn't be realistic (within the previously given canon). Being as that it is a very basic discussion, there are no game stats provided here.

Artifice and Enchantment, the second chapter, on the other hand is chock-full of game stats. Magical item creation is never easy in an RPG. *Exalted* is no different. There are a number of lengthy steps that must be followed to produce such a powerful object. *Dungeons & Dragons* requires experience be spent in creation of magical items. *Exalted* requires essence, the basis of all magical effects, to be spent.

Each of the five steps required in creation are detailed and possible modifiers are given within each applicable step. A few examples of materials that can be used as well as finished products are given for reference (or direct use if one sees fit).

What I found most interesting in the chapter were not the exact steps but the fine details that are used by each type of Exalt. No one group goes about artifact creation in the same way since each has a different outlook on existence.

Locations of essence gathering are important to Exalts. Those locations are called Manses and Demenses - hence the title of chapter three, Demense and Manse. These places act somewhat like funnels for essence.

Creation and use of these locations have been covered in previous titles but never in this level of detail. Everything from creation of one to its effect on the land and life in one to the battles fought over them (and plenty more) are covered within the pages of chapter three.

Hearthstones, a great source of power for many Exalts, are also once again covered within this chapter (since they are created in Manses and Demenses). Fourteen (14) never before seen Hearthstones are described and fully stat-ed here.

Practical Summoning (as opposed to impractical summoning?) is the fourth chapter. Summoning a being to do the dirty- work can be implemented by a skilled 'professional' within the world of *Exalted*. Depending on what needs to be done, a different creature can be summoned. These people are few and far between but it is possible for one to summon an elemental spirit or even a demon for long- term deals or just task- specific jobs. No, these creatures are never really very happy about being snared for someone else's work. This fact makes them very difficult to control.

Both summoning and dealing with these various beasts are covered in here. Actually, a number of possible summons are given and fully stat-ed along with what they can do for the summoner and what they can do TO the summoner.

What good would any 'magic' book be with out spells? None, in my opinion. Chapter five, Spells, fills that void. There are over one hundred (100) new spells listed for sorcerer's use here! These spells are broken down into their category of complexity, or circle. As the chapter progresses, fewer and fewer individuals can use the given spells (thankfully, since I would not want every Tom, Dick, and Harry casting spells such as Total Annihilation.)

The appendix covers a fairly new topic - Warstriders. These are massive humanoid engines of destruction. They are big, scary, destructive, and I can't wait to use them in a game! As is stated, they were the most powerful weapons of the First Age of Man. Only a relative few

remain which is a good thing knowing man's propensity for war and destruction of his own kind. I don't want to spoil this section for anyone but of you are doubting me when I say they are destructive – one of the ranged weapons one can carry does 20 damage while a particular melee weapon that one can carry does +18 damage!

Conclusion

If you play *Exalted* and like to include sorcery, this book is almost necessary. Yes, it will add a number of levels of complexity to the game but it is all well worth it! Some of *The Book of Three Circles* was broken. *Savant & Sorcerer* fixes it just about perfectly.

Just about all of the limits that were in place that kept creativity in a tight line have been increased. This does not allow players to break the rules but does allow for a much greater level of versatility.

The writing is great, the artwork just keeps getting better and the editing is spot on perfect. When I play *Exalted* I now carry three books with me at all times – the core book, the players guide, and this.

Archetype: Rules Supplement

Body 10 (*Game Mechanics*): The new rules fit well.

Mind 9 (*Organization*): Five chapters + one appendix = well organized.

Spirit 10 (*Look & Feel*): Absolutely beautiful artwork. Also well written.

Attack 10 (*Value of Content*): I would not want to be without this title.

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): New but well within cannon.

Health 9 (*Physical Quality*): Possible scratches and rips – it's a paperback.

Magic 10 (*Options & Adaptability*): New rules abound.

New options for players and GMs alike fill the entire book.

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