



Jeroen P. Broks

De Kronieken van Phantasar

The Phantasar Chronicles

Slyvina

Table Top RPG

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Slyvina Table Top RPG
Game Design: Jeroen P. Broks

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Introduction

Who or what is Slyvina?

Slyvina is a subseries to the main series “De Kronieken van Phantasar” (The Phantasar Chronicles), which the titular character, a young Elfish woman known as Slyvina, daughter of Edric, is a professional freelance detective in the Federal Kingdom of Aeria. The two native races of this kingdom are the Befindos (winged humans) and Vulpi (plural of Vulpus and anthropomorphic foxes). Slyvina was an experiment to combine classic murder plots with fantasy.

In the original Slyvina stories (written in the Dutch language) somebody gets killed and Slyvina has to speak with all the people who could be involved in order to find out who’s done it.

Now since I was at the time I wrote this an active Dungeon Master playing Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition. As an experiment I did use the story “De moord onder de sterren” (The murder under the stars) as theme for a session, with as blank rules as possible, and had Slyvina’s role replaced by the players. I was hoping for enthusiasm and the will to think up better rules to make a Slyvina campaign. This book containing the rules is the result of these discussions.

Basic flow of a Slyvina campaign

Just with any TTRPG, we have a game leader and the regular players. The leader we call the “Murder Master”. The murder master makes up a murder story in which a character gets murdered. During the game the Murder Master introduced several Non-Player-Characters (NPCs) and the players can interact with them, knowing that one of these NPCs is the actual Murderer. The players may also try to search the environment in order to find clues. After a certain period of playing the Murder Master will freeze the game and allow all players to write down the name of their main suspect secretly, and then the game continues. The Murder Master will from then on in a shorter interval resume the session in the same way, and once again freeze the game to allow the players to give up their main suspect. After 3 or 4 times (depends a bit on how players and Murder Master desire or to how much time is available to play), the Murder Master will eventually quit the game and then the players reveal their suspects, and after that the Murder Master reveals the actual murderer. Points can be given to every correct answer and these points can lead to a player’s character leveling up, which can lead to a little advantage in a new murder case.

Playing the game

Before you can play the Murder Master will (of course) have to prepare a story, players will have to prepare their character, of course, pre-made characters are always an option.

Both the Murder Master and all players do need to have a d20 (a twenty-sided die).

Murder Master's preparations

First of all the Murder Master will have to make up a story. This story requires:

- ◆ A victim: The one who gets killed
- ◆ A murderer: The one who did the actual kill
- ◆ Random suspects: People who could have done it, but didn't.

The desired number of suspects depends a bit on several factors. How much time do you have to play, how many players do you have. How difficult do you want this plot to be. Those sorts of thing.

Now in order to make it impossible for the Murder Master to change the murderer during playing, yet not allowing the players to sneakily check this when the opportunity arises, I recommend the Murder Master to write down the name of the murderer on a piece of paper, fold it, and tape it that way that you will need either a knife or a pair of scissors to cut it open once the time has come to reveal the killer.

Now since most of the NPC characters in a Slyvina campaign are suspects, there's a very good chance that players may lose track of who is who. To prevent that I recommend to make small snippets of either cardboard or paper and write down the name of the suspect on it and his or her general role, and to put this piece of paper on the table once this NPC is mentioned for the first time. For example, when a murder took place in a hotel, and the player speaks to a receptionist called Jill to start their investigation, put the snippet saying "Jill – receptionist" visible to the players. And the same for all the other suspects.

(Of course, you should NOT mark the murderer on these snippets).

Playing the game

Whether or not it's necessary to design an entire map of the place where the murder took place or the other places, lies completely in the style of playing of the Murder Master (similar to other TTRPGs).

Player preparations

In order to play a player needs a character. In a basic Slyvina setting the character can be either an Elf, a Vulpus or a Befindo. Murder Masters are of course free to bring Slyvina into a different setting with different races.

Unless the Murder Master decides otherwise for his/her campaigns/sessions, the players all start at level 1. Players can set up a character set up to the maximum number of their skill point pool. They can place modifiers to either one of the two base statistics “INVESTIGATION” and “INTERROGATION” or take on extra abilities (See character building chapter for detailed information).

A good way to go is to agree prior to the game with the other players and the Murder Master if you want to tackle the plots cooperatively in which you try to unmask the murderer together or if you want tackle each on their own and turn it into a kind of competition. In cooperative play it can be an option to adapt your character to those of other players, so you can perhaps do things others cannot. This is however up to the players to decide or up to the Murder Master to allow.

A character should have a name, a race, and the statistics and skills properly worked out. And then you can play.

Actual playing

The Murder Master will start telling a small story in which the victim will either get murdered or in which the victim's corpse has been found. Possibly a few findings on the scene of the crime may be discussed and after that the players will have to decide what to do in typical role-playing style.

All playable characters have the base skills "INTERROGATION" and "INVESTIGATION" at their disposal. When speaking to NPC characters, they may either decide for themselves if they believe that NPCs story or try an INTERROGATION check. The Murder Master will then (secretly) set a requirement that the player must reach in order to get the most truthful answer from the Murder Master whether or not that NPC spoke the truth. Now the Murder Master is not required to say "he speaks the truth" or "he lies", but he/she can keep it a bit vague, like "you don't trust him" (this does not necessarily means that NPC is lying. That NPC can also be hiding something). Please note that the roll is optional, players are not required to do this if they already have an idea themselves whether or not that NPC is trustworthy.

When players decide to check the environment they will have to roll a d20 and based on a minimum requirement the Murder Master (secretly) set, they may be lucky to find something interesting. Of course, it's not always that there is anything available at that spot (in real murders you may also look at a certain spot for clues or evidence while none is present there).

Based on additional skills players have they can roll for extra information. Like if a magic liquid is found, players with the "ALCHEMY" skill may try to roll to see if they can recognize that stuff (see character building for more information).

Bonus points are added up to a roll. If a player has a +1 bonus for INTERROGATION and rolls a 15 on an INTERROGATION roll, then it's $15+1=16$.

When the time of the first round is over, the Murder Master will tell the players to secretly write down their first main suspect and then resume. When the last round has passed the Murder Master will ask the players to reveal their choices. A good way to go can be to ask why players suspect certain characters. Lastly the Murder Master reveals the murderer and explains a few things how the players could have known.

Notes:

- The Murder Master is allowed to set any requirement for a roll, which technically means that even a “natural 20” can still fail even with a +5 bonus on that specific skill.
- If the Murder Master has set a requirement of 15 and the player rolls exactly 15 (bonuses included of course), the rule “meet it beat it” will apply.
- Please note, when a player fails their INTERROGATION roll, it doesn’t automatically mean the Murder Master will lie about the truthfulness of the NPCs statements. Murder Masters can be very mean you know. A good Murder Master with loads of experience with being a Game Master on other RPG types may know how to handle this best.
- It’s not allowed to check the same thing twice. Failure is failure. A bit of a difference can be the INTERROGATION rolls when speaking to the same NPC multiple times when a new subject is being discussed as them a new roll may be made. It’s up to the Murder Master’s judgment how this is done best.
- There is no official time or number of rounds, but 4 rounds is recommended, in which the first round takes 1½ hour, and the others 15 minutes each. This should make a nice playout.

Character Creation

Quick Overview

Basically all characters have a name and a race, optionally people may decide to note down whether their character is either male or female, but that may not necessarily have any value to the game (although the Murder Master may, (if the players can handle that stuff), have the victims to try to go into kind of stuff that people would normally only do with members of a specific sex, but that is only story telling stuff and no official rule).

Now Murder Masters may decide that characters start at higher levels, but when you keep it to the official rules each new player starts at level 1. For each time, time a player did give up the correct murderer during the stage that all players must write down their murder suspect an experience point is gained, and with a certain amount of experience points the level will rise, and of course, as usual in RPG games, going a level up will bring some benefits.

Now at level 1, each player has 5 skill points, these may be used to buy extra points for INTERROGATION or INVESTIGATION, or buy extra ability for 2 skill points each. These ability may also be upgraded for 1 point each. Please note the + bonus for the two base stats or abilities may never be more than the half max number of skill points at the time (when halving points, you always have to round down, but never go lower than 1). If that half is 5 or higher, then 5 will always be the maximum number of points.

A player is allowed to go lower than 0 on INTERROGATION and INVESTIGATION (so not on the extra abilities) in order to gain more points.

Please note if you have INTERROGATION bonus +2 then when you make a d20 roll to check on this, and you roll for example 12, then its 12+2 so your roll when then be 14. When you have a minus score of -2 then it would be 12-2, so the roll will then be 10. Rolls can never be below 10.

It is NOT allowed to put minus points on your extra abilities, only on INTERROGATION and INVESTIGATION! It is however possible that some abilities do allow you to do checks in some abilities that you do not have for a certain penalty. You can not upgrade those “shadow abilities”. If you have that second ability as well, than that penalty doesn’t count and the normal rules will apply.

Please note, some racial traits can contradict the basic rules. If that happens the racial trait voids the official rule. (The same may apply on pre-made characters either released through the official channels or set up by the Murder Master).

The Base Stats

INTERROGATION

When the player speaks to an NPC, they may ask the Murder Master to roll for INTERROGATION (the Murder Master may only refuse this if the NPC is not a suspect at all, for example when speaking to their commanding officer or an expert called in for help, etc). If the player wins the check by rolling the number set up by the Murder Master, the Murder Master may reveal wither or not that NPC was speaking the truth or to keep it vague by saying if the player trusts him/her or not.

Players should be alert that this the most vague skill at their disposal and that rolling for this can lead astray. Murder Masters are not required to make “natural 20” rolls (not even with sky high bonuses). There is a reason why lie detectors are unreliable in real life, you know.

INVESTIGATION

When a player decides to search the environment or pieces of furniture, the Murder Master can make to require that player to roll a d20 for investigation and if the minimal score is reached the Murder Master will then have to reveal any kind of clue present. Of course, it is possible that nothing can be found on the investigated place, simply because it was never there in the first place, and the Murder Master doesn't have to reveal that (especially not on failed rolls).

The Murder Master is allowed to make very extremely small objects only visible with a magnifying glass (unless the investigator is an Elf, who can naturally see such items without out. The reason Slyvina carries a magnifying glass is simply because it's a memento of her former master and lover Suneau, and she kept it with her ever since he passed away).

Extra abilities

These abilities can help you a great way in investigating a crime. Specific knowledge of the stuff you find, which could be potential evidence, can surely help you to unmask the murderer, right?

These abilities cost 2 skill points to acquire. After they they may be upgraded with extra skill points.

Here's a list of the available abilities:

Alchemy

Alchemy is a kind of magic that allows its user to extract certain kinds of energy known as "manaments" from items (destroying the item in the process) and to use these to create certain stuff (mostly liquids). Now the actual creation of stuff won't be accessible to the players, but recognizing stuff made with alchemy will be possible with this skill.

When you have the alchemy ability you will be able to sense any other form of magic with a -5 penalty, but you won't be able to narrow down the precise data aside from being present, unless you have the required skill.

Although alchemy is a magic skill, non-magical races can learn it (as the magic is in the manaments, not in the alchemist).

Anatomy

Anatomy allows the player to analyze the body of the victim (that is if the authorities allow you access, which is of course up to the Murder Master) and find any medical traces. If NPCs are in bad medical condition or not can also be checked with this skill.

If any kind of poison or strange kinds of substances are in a body can be checked in a normal anatomy roll, however whether this be alchemy, chemistry or herbology, for that an roll with a -5 penalty is required. If the player has the required skill then the bonus set to that skill applies. Unless the required skill is available the player cannot get more specific than this.

Chemistry

This is just the scientific form of chemistry as we know it in real life, as well. Any chemicals found can be analyzed when you have chemistry.

NOTE! As chemistry is purely a scientific ability and not a magical one, it grants no access to any magic abilities (unless you take them on separately). Chemistry is therefore accessible when you have a non-magic race.

Dark Magic Expertise

This skill can only be taken on for 1 extra skill points when the character has physical magic, and will then gain a +2 bonus if a form of magic is considered “dark magic”. Now the Murder Master has a bit of freedom in which is “dark magic” and what is not, but curses will always fall under this category and most spells with pretty bad effects. When it comes to alchemy, detection that it’s a pretty dark concoction (like poison) is possible, but the alchemy ability is required to get further details. An extra +2 bonus can be given on alchemy when dark concoctions are being examined if the skill is present.

Handwriting matching

This skill allows its user to recognize handwriting of people. When a roll succeeds the Murder Master will reveal whether or not two pieces of text were written by the same person or not. When a player has both handwriting matching and Vulpi rune scripting, both skills will automatically get a +1 bonus.

Herbology

Herbology is the knowledge of all kinds of (magic) herbs and plants. Any examination of plant nature (in which fungus counts as “plant”) is possible with this ability.

Herbologists can detect if a substance is made with alchemy with a -5 penalty and can only detect it to be alchemy and nothing more than that, unless the alchemy skill is present, as well.

One thing about alchemy that all herbologists know is that the alchemy poison “muertenegra” (a hard potion to make, forbidden in most of Aeria and kills everyone who drinks it) can be easily identified by pouring it on avoda herbs (herbs that will keep most monsters away when you burn them) purple. (In the actual Slyvina stories, this trick has been applied on several occasions).

Physical Magic

Can you do magic by just waving your hands or pointing at something or stuff like that. That's physical magic. Since this power can in the world of Phantasar also be used to kill somebody, being able to recognize it, can in some cases be handy. This skill allows you to try to recognize it.

Magic signature

Physical Magic leaves its marks and a signature is one of those marks. Now this skill always comes with a -10 with Physical Magic and cannot be acquired separately, but it can be upgraded for 2 points per upgrade. The magic signature can be seen as a kind of magic fingerprint, and is therefore unique to every magician. This skill can be used to match two objects on which magic is used to find out if there's a match. This is a very complex kind of magic recognition. Now it's up to the Murder Master how high the total roll must be in order to be sure there's a match, however 1 or 0 is always fail and so is throwing a natural 1,2 or 3. (Natural 20 is not an obligation for a success. It's really up to the Murder Master).

Vulpus Rune Script

This skill can only be learned by the Vulpi. Vulpus Rune Script is a form of magic in which secret messages can be written and only with this skill you can actually read them. Rune script can also be used to cause other magic effects, such as sealing letters or chests or whatever, and more stuff. This skill will be required to remove seals put on with a Vulpus Rune or to recognize what other runes do.

Now any race can recognize these runes as Vulpus Runes, with a normal investigation roll (although non-magic races have a -3 penalty), but only when you have this skill you can actually read the runes, find out what they do, and (if applicable) deactivate them.

Combat

The Slyvina TTRPG is not combat based, and as such the combat rules are very extremely minimalist, yet as it is possible that suspects gets violent, occasional combat can sometimes take place. When it comes to combat, the player has the combat skill by default and can invest skill points in order to get bonuses, and just as with INTERROGATION and INVESTIGATION you can also go for a negative stat in order to gain more points for other skills.

The suspect attacking the player may also have a modifier set by the Murder Master and then both the Murder Master and the player roll a d20, the one with the highest total score wins.

Now combat is in Slyvina non-lethal, and all that counts is the question if the player manages to overpower the aggressive suspect or not. Players are allowed to aid other players in combat and then the total dice roll counts. Of course, the Murder Master can also send in extra NPC to come to the original fighter's aid.

Overall combat is not the main focus of Slyvina and should therefore always be avoided, but if aggression is an important clue in the murder plot, you now have a rule to work it out.

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