Swordsphere Notes March 24, 2016

***Overview***

The group has completed its trek through the Island of Beginnings and has stepped through the gate to the Jade Trade City. However, before they continue their journey in the world of Spheria… the real world calls. As the first weeks of school have passed, it is now time for the first exams of the year, the Castlegate Prelims. Students are buried in books and stress is high, especially for the freshmen class.

***Test Time***

Each PC gets four rolls of 2d6. They can then assign any of these rolls to their *Best Subject* (and take a +1 bonus to the score). They must assign another roll to their *Worst Subject* (and take a -1 penalty to the score). The remaining rolls are *Other Classes* and *Activities*.

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| **Die Roll** | **Letter Grade** |
| 13+ | A+ |
| 12-11 | A |
| 10 | A- |
| 9 | B+ |
| 8 | B |
| 7 | B- |
| 6 | C+ |
| 5 | C |
| 4 | C- |
| 3 | D |
| 2 | F |

These rolls represent how confident you feel about each of your subjects going into the week before Prelims. You get 12 points to spend raising your grades, each point increases your die roll by one. Alternately, you may spend these points as *Gaming Time*.

Becki is ***Determined*** – If she spends 3 points in a subject other than Gaming Time, she gets a bonus +1 to that subject.

David is ***Resourceful*** – He gets 2 additional points to spend wherever he chooses.

Ted is ***Athletic*** – He gets a +1 to his Activities, and in addition, each 2 points he spends in that category gives him a bonus +1.

Bracket is ***Twitchy*** – For every 2 points he spends Gaming, he gets an additional point.

Players can spend up to 2 of their points helping someone else with their classes, but only if they have the class in question at a higher level.

Any points put into Gaming give free checks, 1d6 crafting materials, or 1d6\*25 gold.

***Breakfast***

To start the stressful week before Prelims, Charles uses the dorm kitchen to create a wonderful, vegan breakfast. He also suggests a good morning run, followed by a meditation break. While Charles is cooking breakfast, a note is slipped under the door. David gets it and it is from the mailroom. Charles has a package that is too large for delivery and he needs to pick it up.

It is a telescope… David also has a package 🡪 the book, A Hot Summer in Texas.

***The Dance Committee***

Arwen Anderson approaches Becki and asks if she would be willing to join the Homecoming Dance Committee. The dance is soon after Prelims, and the meetings fall right in prime study time. If Becki takes on the job, she will be burdened with another category to deal with, but will gain prestige in Arwen’s eyes. If she does not take the committee job… well Arwen understands…

***Dan Simmons the Jerk***

Ted’s wrestling practices have started in earnest and things are going well, except for the fact that one of the older wrestlers is a jerk. Dan Simmons transferred over from NY Coastal Academy. He was champion of the Eastern Regionals, he is a stud running back on the football team, and is an all-around great athlete. He is also the stereotypical entitled jock. He struts around the hallways as though he owns the place. He enjoys picking on his “lessers” which includes pretty much everyone not in his clique.

Ted will have to put up with Dan in wrestling practice, in the locker room, and in various incidents in the hallways of the school.

Dan is currently better than Ted, and beating him will require Ted to push Athletics super-high.

***Sally is Struggling***

Sally is struggling in one of her classes (make it a “best” class for one of the PCs). She mentions her troubles to Becki and laments that if she blows these tests, she won’t be able to maintain her GPA, and thus, her scholarship.

At one point, Sally can be overheard on the phone, in tears, “It’s just hard, that’s all… No daddy, I don’t want to come home… I know you can get me a job in the plant… But, I don’t want to… Look, I have to go…”

***Streaming Swordsphere***

Payton rushes into Bracket’s room. He has solved the last issues to streaming Swordsphere. Next session could be live-streamed with no glitches. However… there is something weird. Payton pulls up the recording of Bracket’s last play session and asks Bracket to point out exactly when he saw the Huntsman.

The recording plays as normal, but at the point where the group sees the Huntsman on the beach, there is no one there – even though everyone in the recording behaves as though they have seen someone. The video shows no one at all.

The Huntsman doesn’t seem to show up on any of the normal sensory channels. However, Payton plays back the waveforms of all the channels, everyone can see one set of channels go crazy when the Huntsman appears… What is on those channels?

If anyone expresses curiosity, Payton indicates that he might be able to play the signals back through a Swordsphere rig… but someone would have to be in the rig.

***A Hot Summer in Texas***

In the midst of Prelims Week, David gets his copy of A Hot Summer in Texas delivered to him via campus mail. The book is a fictionalized retelling of the Bauxton Murders that occurred about 14 years ago in Bauxton, TX. The author of the book, Morton Grimes, was the attorney for the defense. He was harshly criticized and ultimately disbarred for the book, but it sold enough copies to score him a publishing deal. He writes moderately successful thrillers and murder mysteries now under the name M. Porter Grimes.

A Hot Summer is a sprawling book that winds through 38 chapters. Included in it many convoluted elements are:

* The hard-bitten, veteran detective. He is cynical and calculating and for much of the book, seems to be unmoved by the chaos and carnage caused by the events around him.
* The newly promoted detective who is a child of South African immigrants, looking to prove that she deserves her new responsibilities.
* The white, rural community forced to absorb a group of Muslim refugees. As the book progresses, and children start to disappear, the tensions between the different groups boils over into violence.
* The church rocked by rumors that its pastor committed horrible crimes that were covered up and forgotten years ago.
* The slick and charismatic psychologist with ties to many of the missing children. He manipulates vulnerable people into doing his bidding and uses them to thwart the investigation at every turn.
* Families shattered by guilt and grief who never heal from the death of their children, or the secrets uncovered by the subsequent investigation.

Ultimately, the detectives find their killer, the supremely intelligent psychologist, William Dodd. Dr. Dodd had his tentacles spread throughout the surrounding community, and used his position and reputation to get access to children. Then, he used his intimate knowledge of the people in Bauxton, to manipulate them (and sometimes blackmail them) into doing his bidding.

Dodd had two accomplices, a patient of his, Gregory Fenton and his girlfriend Sally Varsh. Dodd had such a hold over Fenton that, when the detectives started to close in on the truth, he convinced Fenton to confess to the crimes. Indeed, for a while, Dodd had Fenton believing he was the Bauxton Killer.

The last third of the book describes Dodd and his trial, and includes several interviews with the murderer. In one chilling interview, Dodd brags how he didn’t *kill* his victims, but instead he *consumed* them. When pressed on that statement, Dodd talks about how he consumed something precious and unique from each of his victims, devising convoluted tortures and mind games to strip them of their hope, trust, love, and faith before finally murdering them.