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*.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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.

***Charles’ Spot***

Charles is using the telescope to map the stars for his astrology club… and if pressed he likes astronomy too. He plans on heading to the roof of the dorm and observing the stars.

***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.

Pretty much – that all happened…

* Becki accepted the position on the Emergency Dance Committee (the production company commissioned for the dance went bankrupt and took their money) and they selected the theme of Enchanted Fall Fantasy
* Sally studied with Ted and Bracket, keeping her from failing her math class
* Leslie also studied with Ted… Ted is getting to be a bit of a ladies’ man… though he wouldn’t know it
* Dam Simmons has been introduced and Ted dislikes him intensely
* The group has speculated that Charles is competing with Becki for valedictorian…?
* Pale Kid (Allister) asked Becki out, sort of, and she sort of accepted inadvertently
* Payton is ready for Bracket to stream Swordsphere
  + He also showed Bracket how the Huntsman does not show up on normal sensory channels
  + They investigated the spike in activity on the other channels
  + They discussed playing back the signal through the Swordsphere rig – haven’t done that yet
* Leslie, Bracket, David and Ted (and via text, Becki) played a game online where you answered multiple choice questions and your Swordsphere character build would be determined (ala Ultima)
  + However, at some point, the game got weird and asked some very dark questions, and then froze
* David communicated with Morton Grimes and asked him about the possibility of one of the programmers of Swordsphere inserting pictures of the missing kids into the game
  + Grimes knew nothing about it, but did mention that there were a lot of people that were fascinated by the case – and that the internet has a lot of strange fandoms
* Ultimately, everyone got decent enough grades
  + Because Becki spent all of her points in school – she gets the following perk
    - ***Grounded*** – Because you are so in tune with the real world, you can choose to reroll up to two times in any given “school” session

***Spheria Intro***

The world of Spheria was the battleground in an epic war between the gods. The powers unleashed were so destructive that the world was shattered into hundreds of shards. Each of these shards is a small, self-contained world (adventure zone) connected to the others by the mysterious gates. In the meantime, the gods left to find other universes over which to compete, leaving behind a small segment of their forces (essentially, the angels and demons) to squabble over the remains of the world.

***The City of Jade (phrase “Jade Trade City”)***

Years ago, Jade was a trading post on a route connecting the human kingdom of Celenar with the elven tribes. The Shattering crushed the kingdom, leaving only Jade and a handful of other cities intact. In the dark years following the cataclysm, monstrous raiders finished off the remaining settlements and Jade became the de facto capital of Celenar.

Jade is a bastion for the Order, the Soldiers, Captains, Elves, Wizards, and White Knights. It is a crowded, busy city with almost anything a newly minted adventurer would need. Including:

* **Arcane Scribe** – Pretty much all spells from the base list can be bought here. He will also pay for scribed scrolls of spells found at adventure sites (½ to ¾ for old spells, 2-3x for new/unique spells).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Tier | Available | Cost |
| 1 | 12/12 | 100g |
| 2 | 9/12 | 300g |
| 3 | 7/12 | 600g |
| 4 | 5/12 | 1000g |

* **Guild Hall** – The large, marble/jade, gothic building in the middle of town is a space for many of the larger and more influential guilds in this region. All important guilds maintain offices here, and for some, this is their headquarters. There are also meeting halls here and administrative NPCs for those wishing to start guilds.
* **Craftsman Alley** – A wide street lined with carts and tents where the merchants set up shop. There are several NPC merchants here, most of whom are selling non-magical items with no properties. There are tons of PCs that have stores as well, and almost all of them are selling special stuff, for pretty darn high prices. (I will have to come up with a few examples.)
* **Elven Embassy** – Yemblor, the Elven Ambassador and his staff are here. They are able to give players quests and will give Elven players the key phrase to the Elven lands. (“Speak Mighty Oak”)
* **Church of the Order** – The Order has an ornate chapel here, dedicated to Galephon, the Herald. Galephon warned humanity of The Shattering and created the magic that saved Jade and the surrounding lands. They will sell weapons and armor at a slight discount to anyone with the Order as a background.
* **The Home of the Scholar** – The wise Scholar lives here. He pays for lore (in lore books) and will gift any PC with the Scholar background a free spell.
* **The Ziggurat** – A multi-story tavern owned by a PC named Aztoc. This place is always full of players bragging, challenging each other to duels, having costume contests, and forming adventuring parties to take on one quest or another. There is great food and drink, a message board, and a dueling arena in the back.
* **The Herald** – An NPC run tavern near the chapel. It is owned by a fellow named Armand and his wife Talia. Most players hang at the Zig, so the clientele here is primarily NPCs. It is quaint and quiet. Any player that actually spends time here will find that Armand and his family are quite talkative and curious about players… this could open up knowledge about the “People of the Land.”
* **The Arena** – A large colosseum where players can battle each other, or various monsters. The Arena Master will run tournaments here, as will various guilds.
* **The Palace** – A walled fortress in the middle of town is the home of Celeria’s royalty. Queen Ferevenia holds court here. The place is magically protected and guarded by powerful NPCs. At their current level of power and connections, there is no way they could be invited here… later perhaps

(Note: The other “starter” cities are the Iron Fortress (“lonely mountain fort”) which is the home of the Dwarves, Berzerkers, and the Company; and Shadafar (“sandy desert jewel”) which is city of the Bashkars, Witches and Sorcerers)

***Events in the City of Jade***

* **Guild of the Loremasters** – A small guild called the Loremasters is trying to monopolize as much lore as possible. To do so, they seek out characters with the skills Gate Lore and Historical Lore and try to recruit them. Those that join get well compensated. Those that refuse are harassed, killed and generally made miserable.
  + The Loremasters can’t affect larger and more powerful guilds, so they leave them alone. Lore characters who join a guild are generally safe. Instead, they prey on weaker guilds and unaffiliated characters, extorting them
  + PCs meet a scared, youngish Wizard named Olcephio who is being tailed by Loremaster thugs
  + Later, Fizel gets recruited by the LMs. They offer a large amount of money for him to join
* **Ahmeia’s Friends** – Ahmeia’s buddies show up to collect her. She is annoyed at them but ultimately, wants to hang with them as well as the PCs. Lonzo and Stellara belong to the Last Chance guild, which is a guild that consists of people that are terminally ill.
  + Ahmeia will want both groups to hang out, but the LCers are reluctant to allow in outsiders
* **Blackstar Envoys** – Two tough-looking types wander through town, drawing stares and hushed whispers. A dark star shape can be seen on one of their forearms
  + These are members of Blackstar, one of the more notorious PK guilds in the game
  + People are unsure of what they are doing in town, since they are KoS for most guilds in the game
  + They are rumored to have a base in the Bandit Hideout, somewhere in the Swollen Swamp, but few know where it is
* **River Wardens** – A quest board lists a call for river wardens to protect a trade boat heading downstream
  + The boats are travelling to Lansalle, a small coastal town
  + On the way, there are bandits (NPCs mostly) and goblins who will try to raid the boats
  + Lansalle is a fishing town, the sea nearby is home of a couple dozen islands… lots of potential there, since the PCs have a boat
    - A few PCs and groups make their home here, especially those with the ability to construct and fix boats
* **People of the Land** – At some point, while walking the streets, someone will have an encounter with the NPCs
  + A child is being pulled along a busy street by his mother, when she drops a beloved teddy bear – giving the PC a chance to pick it up for her, and to notice the gratitude in her eyes
  + The owners of the Herald are talkative and curious with outsiders, and will start to ask questions of the PCs that should make them wonder about the nature of the game’s NPCs
    - “How did your people gain the power of immortality?”
    - “What happens when you leave this world? Where do you go?”
* **The Queen’s Procession** – Queen Ferevenia is escorted through town by her guard. All of the NPCs get out of the way and show their respect. How do the players behave?
* **Nox and Victoria (and Cassandra)** – N and V meet up with the PCs shortly after they arrive in town. They are anxious to show their friends the sights and start new adventures with them. They hang out at the Zig, of course. Cassie hangs out at the Herald… because the Zig is so overdone.

***Low Level Gate Pass Phrases***

* **Garden of Water and Light** – This zone is centered on the Chapel of the Rose, dedicated to Alayna, the Rose, one of the higher powers. Alayna protects things that are growing, vulnerable, or fragile.
  + The chapel is run by an Abbottess of the Order named Hilda
  + The chapel houses a wonderful garden and orchard.
  + The zone is full of light woods, fields of wildflowers, gentle streams – very peaceful.
  + Wood and plant resources are abundant in this zone
  + A couple players have houses here and there is a small town that has popped up, Lily
  + There are rumors that there is a ***Hidden Cave*** near a waterfall and a holy ***Statue*** guarded by a powerful ***Imp Spell Caster***
* **Speak Mighty Oak (Only given by elven ambassador)** – This leads to the heart of the Deep Woods, which is the last stronghold of the elves. It is a deep, dark forest, with narrow twisting paths. To any but an elf, druid, or woods girl, this place is very foreboding.
  + The elven home of Voath is hidden in the woods. Parties accompanied by elves can be guided here by elf NPCs. Otherwise, this place is super-difficult to find (Navigate 22)
* **Blood Sword Rock** – This zone is a desolate, rocky crag covered in grey, windy skies. There is no signs of civilization in sight.
  + The crag is home to a number of creatures, including mountain goats, harpies and giants, all a little too tough for beginning characters
  + A dragon can be seen in the distance casting shadows on the rocks below
  + Somewhere here is the entrance to a dungeon of appropriate level
  + ***The Stone Prison***
    - No one knows when or how this place was built
    - The lore says that a long time ago, the kings of Celenar would take the most heinous criminals and traitors and throw them into this place
    - It is a prison without cells – a maze of twisting corridors and rooms
    - Are there still prisoners roaming these halls? Undead? How do PCs get in, and once they do, did they just let all the nasty dudes out?
    - The Warden is a badass minotaur who will certainly kill anyone foolish enough to be out of their cells when he comes by
* **The Tavern at the Edge of the Woods** – This leads to the home of the Rogues, the unnamed tavern that sits at the edge of the Deep Woods
  + The Rogues use this as their base and therefore the Tavern is dark, dingy and full of shady looking characters
    - Their leader is a swordsman named Daggart
    - PCs can sign up to help raid the ***Soldiers Outpost*** nearby (or alternately, warn the Soldiers)
    - There are jobs to steal from various prominent individuals in each of the cities
    - There are bounties for elf ears, 100g each
  + The Rogues are happy to trade with PCs, though don’t go looking for discounts. Being an outlaw ain’t cheap, you know. They will also hire out as guards and guides… though whether the players should trust them is another thing entirely
  + Because this place is a safe-haven for PKs,pp there are quite a few PKs here. Killing in the Tavern, or on the grounds is prohibited… by the PKs themselves, but as soon as you leave the area, anything goes
  + Lots of punks from the shadier guilds can be found here, and it is quite a lively place, but it might prove too much for newbies
  + The Crone also frequents this place and she will sell spells/potions to those with her background for a small discount
* **Cave of the Drowning Sorrow** – When the PCs step out of this gate, they find themselves in a dark cave, on a small island of rock, surrounded entirely by water
  + There is no exits, or gate to be seen
  + The gate is underwater, as is the dungeon – PCs will have to swim, and likely fight, underwater to escape
    - Deadly Razorfish will try to hamper their escape
    - This would be a place to come later, once everyone can swim via skill or magical means
* **Graves of Fallen Soldiers** – This is another phrase that leads to a point away from a gate. PCs step out into a misty graveyard with hundreds of headstones visible through a thick fog. The gate to return home is nowhere in sight.
  + Of course there are undead here
  + And crypts to open, clear out, and then loot
  + There is an ***Old Guardhouse*** here and with it the loot of a troop of dead guardsmen
  + In addition, there is a ***Beacon*** here that will lead lost characters to the safety of the Guard and the gate (“*Vigilance of Fallen Soldiers*” is the phrase to get here directly)