

SORCERER

SPIEL ESSEN DEMONSTRATION

Begin specifically with a physical description of the setting and character. Do not explain a damn thing about the system. The setting is “Baltic sword-and-sorcery.” In the U.S., I then say “a cross between Viking and Russia,” and the people nod enthusiastically. I say, “dark green forests, fog creeping into the fjords, and lots of scenes on the ocean.”

Describe the character as follows: she is, of course, a 19-year-old sword-wielding chieftain’s daughter, with striking blue eyes, and white-blond hair ... a strand often falls in front of one eye. It is amazing how well this description works.

1. Method: three people play a single player-character simultaneously

Let them decide for themselves if they want to proceed by consensus or by taking turns. Describe these options to them and move on (they’ll decide during play). Show them the character sheet:

- Point out that the numbers equal that many dice to roll (do not explain resolution; do that when it happens)
- Point out the descriptors (and say they are not constraints; it’s OK to act “against” them) – note that “aristocrat” is an attitude, not a social status – show that her Telltale, her Lore descriptor, and her Price are all linked, and flip over the sheet to show them her sword and other related items
- Point out the Humanity score, say that it’s central, but don’t explain it yet

Mention to the group that ordinarily, one player would make up the character, demon, and the Kicker.

- Point out the Kicker. They will probably react strongly. Move directly into the situation, describing her standing at the prow of the dragon-headed ship, out on the water of the ocean, with fog swirling around her.

2. There are three character sheets for different points in the character's life. In practice, I only ever used the first one because it worked so well, and showed the players the others afterwards.

4. Take them through a couple of conflicts, starting with a Bang (see below for the 19-year-old version). Do not play out a full “scenario” but rather proceed through one or two Humanity-based rolls of any kind. That’s a good point to stop, when they see Humanity go up or down more than once.

When you call for such a roll the first time, explain that if her Humanity drops to 0, it means that she becomes one of the Spirit Folk forever and fades away into the mists.

5. Rules to emphasize:

- Always roll when there’s a conflict of interest among fictional characters. Never roll when there is no conflict of interest among fictional characters.
- Show how easy complicated, orthogonal conflict resolution is; demonstrate that you as GM utilize no fiat regarding the dice.
- Currency, specifically bringing victories from one roll into the next roll as bonus dice
- Bonus dice for role-playing – just watch for everyone to shudder or to react positively to some announced action, and provide the dice. Briefly explain your criteria when you do so, that this is not about “acting” but rather about group responses
- (small point about bonus dice: use the Sorcerer & Sword rule about the character openly announcing her views on life)
- Freedom of choice – the scenario does not expect the character to do something in order to “see” the adventure, but rather, her decisions *are* the adventure

KADRI (age 19)

Her basic story: she was taken by the Spirit Folk at age 12 and has spent 6 years with them, only recently returning to the lands of men with the long-lost clan sword. She was embraced by her father, but is regarded with suspicion by many people. (No, the sword is not a demon.)

Starting situation: The captain of the ship joins her at the prow. Describe him: he is a feared “reformed” pirate who has struck a deal with her father to raid only enemies’ ships.

“Milady,” he says, “This is not the ‘story of you.’ This is about your father and your duties to him. I’ll tolerate none of your witching ways aboard this ship, and you’ll keep that sword well hidden. When you meet the prince, you keep your mouth shut and smile, and say ‘yes sir.’ While you’re on this ship, you’ll do the same. Do you understand me?”

Use the back of the sheet to point out the elements being used: the captain, the person she’s affianced to, the demon, her sword, and so on. Then say,

What do you do?

The scenario will probably launch dramatically from here. Note that an attempt to placate or fool the captain is just as much a conflict as attacking him is. The scenes may be paced in minutes or in days, depending on what the players do. You may or may not need to introduce the prince.

GM notes: the demon is built to demonstrate three things.

- the limits of demonic action (slightly lower Stamina) if the player gets excited about telling it to do this or to do that
- the range of demon options: to obey her commands or defy them, to act on its own (e.g. affecting her dreams), the relationship of its attitude to its Need
- The relationship of Binding – emphasize that she has *agreed* to keep it fed with its Need, as a fundamental element of her character’s back-story. Unfortunately, this scenario rarely demonstrates that the character has full access to *all* the sorcerous rituals; it’s built mainly to showcase resolution and dramatic choices

NPCs

The captain: Olev

Stamina 4 (warrior), Will 5 (leader of men, arrogant), Past 6 (sea-raider captain)

Don’t anticipate what the players will do, regarding this character. I’ve seen them play her to fall in love with him, to kill him, to subjugate him, and to be initially humiliated by him.

The prince: Toomas

Stamina 3 (warrior), Will 4 (zest for life), Past (clan-leader’s heir)

Notice that Toomas is actually a pretty nice guy; if the scenario goes quickly in the beginning, I have him show up in a small boat that he’s sailed out himself to meet the ship.

A typical sailor/crewman

Stamina 3, Will 3

A typical sea carnivore (leopard seal, medium-sized shark)

Stamina 5, Will 3