

Escalation 6

THE 13TH AGE FANZINE | WINTER 2017

3

FESTIVAL

in this issue

MARTIN
PALADIN
TALENTS
KILLMANN



IMPERIAL DISPATCH



As the holiday season ramps up, it's time for us to find a comfortable chair near the fireplace, sip some eggnog, listen to our favorite Christmas carols, and ponder how the inhabitants of the Dragon Empire celebrate midwinter. Is there merriment and feasting? Or do they observe a more somber ritual? For this issue, there's more than one take on the Dragon Empire's Yuletide festivities.

While Christmas may be the holiday on many of our minds, we would be remiss if we didn't consider the Dragon Empire's plethora of other holidays celebrated throughout the year or more sporadically. Our talented community submitted far more festivals than I'd anticipated! They range from real-world analogs to unusual celebrations that could only occur in a world filled with magic and wonder.

Why are festivals worth including in your game? They provide texture to our imagined world. Just as the people of Earth observe the anniversaries of important events and the rhythms of the seasons, realistic inhabitants of the Dragon Empire would do the same. Holidays help establish the passage of time in the game world. They demonstrate that characters in a fantasy setting have the same motivations and primal needs as we do. Festivals provide verisimilitude, because every culture on Earth can relate. A world without celebrations feels less real, less approachable.

So pepper your adventures with the feasts and fasts of the local cultures in your game world. Borrow from the festivals we present in these pages, from the holidays and solemn days of your own culture, from the pages of history, and from the celebrations that you appropriate from other fantasy settings. Extrapolate how the inhabitants of the Dragon Empire may have a very different way of observing their holidays thanks to the fantastical nature of their world.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank the talented contributors to Escalation. Your gift of time and talent allows us to continue giving a little something back to the 13th Age community. You have my gratitude, particularly given how busy this season can be. Merry Christmas, and may Krampus pass by your home. 🍷

Gratefully yours,
Tim Baker



Art: Patricia Baker

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Art: Dean Sepencer

DECORATING FOR FESTIVALS THROUGHOUT OUR GRAND DRAGON EMPIRE

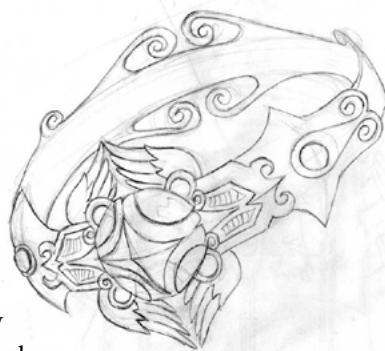
BY MELODY HAREN ANDERSON

We all know about the festivals baleful or bright that come around each year, but how to properly decorate for a maximum of safety and enjoyment is a question I receive all too often. Rejoice, for I bring a list of three tips and tricks applicable to all celebrations, along with guidelines for a few of the most commonly vexing festivals.

Leave out food and a drink: It might seem strange, but even the more dangerous visitors to your home may be placated by such things left out for them. If particularly good, they might even make sure to protect it in later years!

Don't skimp on protective charms: While it might clash with hospitality suggested by the first, you don't want some visitors knocking on your door all through the night.

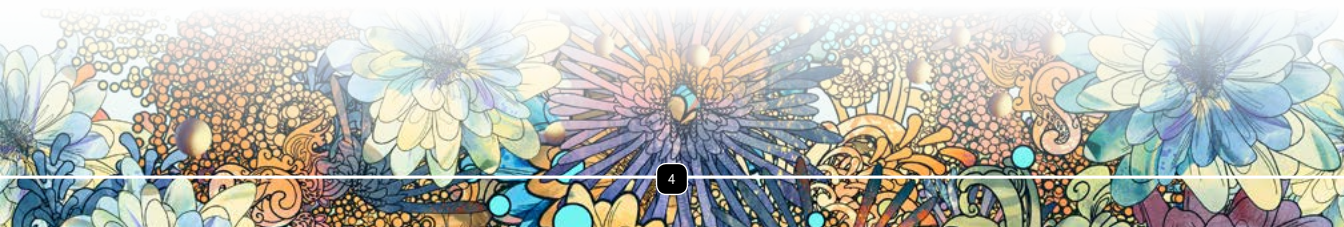
Wooden or rough implements: If you're going to leave out implements for food and drink, make sure they're sturdy and aren't anything too expensive to replace.



FESTIVALS OF THE EMPIRE

Festival of Lights: Make sure to put up potent charms against fire – one for each wall of your house. The increased magical energies of this night make destructive magics all the more common for raging out of control. Fire can spread. Do yourself and your neighbors a kindness.

Night of Doors: Decorate in brightly colored gourds and fruits. I am not certain why, but it seems many of the visitors from other worlds or realms find such things disturbing to even look at, much less be in the presence of. It can weaken their more dangerous powers, and along with the food may encourage them to pass you by peacefully. Make sure to keep them only directly against your house, so as to not antagonize too much.



Passage of the Dark Walkers: Decorate with freshly seeded grains, ripe fruits, and other symbols of overabundant life. The lesser undead can not abide them. Make grooves under doors and windows to fill with salt. This should help with the stronger undead and protect the salt from being blown away! Remember tip #1 and always make sure to have a loaf of fresh bread set out. While their sense of taste might be gone, often the more intelligent undead can still smell, and this can awaken kindly memories in them.

While there are a number of smaller festivals practiced all over our great empire, I can't go into each of them specifically. But with these three simple tips and local practices, you too can have a happy and safe day or night, no matter what may come! 🎲

SIMONE "SARDONICUS" THE THIRD

by Patryk "Ruemere" Adamski



MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

The go-to person for arranging weddings and funerals for the high and mighty, grand openings and great fiestas. With her influence she can find career starting spots – or arrange a quick disappearance of an inconvenient character...

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Tall, somewhat stiff woman apparently in her late fifties. She's always wearing a semi-transparent veil covering lower part of her face. Simone also tends to wear furs. Those who spend time in her presence tend to notice an unchanging, permanent grin.

MOTIVATION

Order, social influence and respect.

SECRET

Simone has been poisoned so many times it has left lasting effects; slightly stiff movements and an unchanging sardonic grin. Such is the fate of the master of a poisoner cult – you need to be willing to accept what fates and rivals have in store for you. Her embrace brings euphoria, pain and death. This makes her graces highly sought after by those in the know.

WEAKNESS

Simone's affection for her lovers is always genuine. She may be cold, sarcastic or outright scornful of those in her vicinity, but at the same time she will go to extreme lengths to keep them safe. Some whisper that her enemies suffer from terrifying maladies, dying over the course of weeks and months, often taking their own lives to escape the pain. 🎲

PALADIN TALENTS

BY MARTIN KILLMANN



New Talents for defenders of the realm.

ADVENTURER LEVEL TALENTS

CORRUPTED CHAMPION

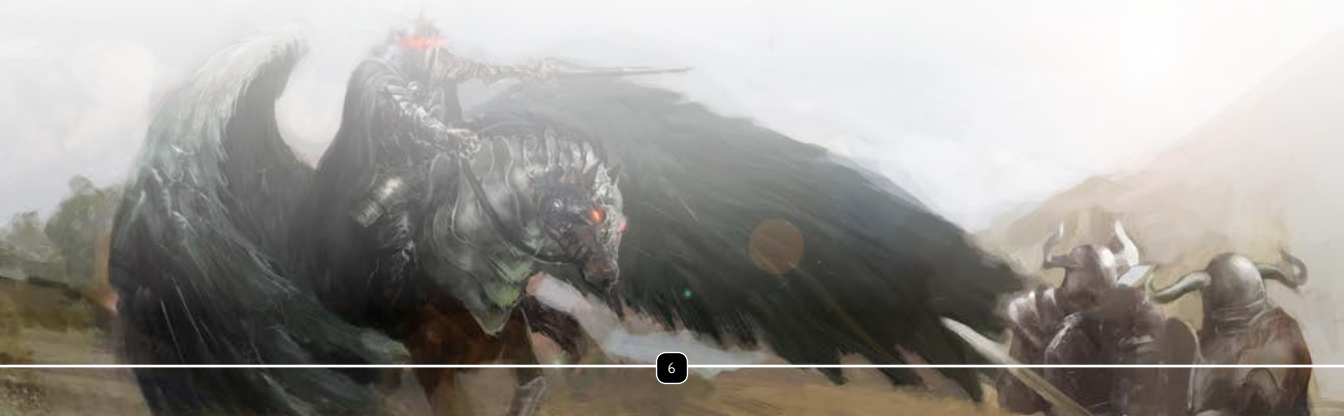
The temptations of the Diabolist weigh heaviest on those of purest heart. Her gifts are subtle. She would never risk losing a valuable agent with overtly visible markings that betray their true allegiance. You feel your power slowly increase as the demonic corruption takes hold. You haven't given in yet... at least that what you keep telling yourself. You'd rather not look into a mirror too long, afraid of what you'll see. Deep inside, you know that your soul is forfeit, and you act on borrowed time. Was it worth it?

- Roll d12 for damage with two-handed heavy melee weapons and d12 for recovery dice.
- Whenever you roll a natural 1 on an icon relationship roll with a different icon, you can trade it for a 5 with the Diabolist.

Adventurer Feat: As a free action, you can reroll an attack or save. In exchange, switch one of your icon relations to the Diabolist until the next time you use a 5 or 6 with that relation. You must have an icon relation you can switch to use this ability.

Champion Feat: When you use the reroll, gain a +1 bonus for each current icon relationship die with the Diabolist.

Epic Feat: For one battle per day, roll 1d8 on the demon ability table and gain that ability.



DEATH KNIGHT

In the early days of the Lich King, he relied entirely on armies of revived zombies and skeletons, but his mindless hordes were too easily outmaneuvered. He soon learned that even an army with a near endless supply of expendable bodies requires leaders to direct them in battle.

Training promising necromancers in the arts of warfare carried the danger of nurturing a future rival who could both raise an army and lead it. Vampires were smart and strategic, but they couldn't lead the troops in daylight and considered themselves too cultured for the dirt of the trenches. Instead, the Lich King corrupted the bodies of the paladins who had tried, and failed, to defeat him, and created the order of the Death Knights.

- When you take this talent, you are Sorta Dead, as per the necromancer talent (13TW p84). You can take the feats of that talent.
- You also gain a necromancer spell, which can be any spell up to your level. You can replace Intelligence with Charisma as key ability for the spell.
- Your Smite Evil deals negative energy damage (*consider renaming it*).
- You must have at least one icon relationship point with the Lich King to take this talent.

Adventurer Feat: You can use the Deathknell necromancer talent on an enemy after you hit it with Smite Evil, if its hit points are low enough.

Champion Feat: When an enemy is staggered after you hit it with Smite Evil, it is weakened until the end of its next turn.

Epic Feat: You can choose a second necromancer spell, at two levels lower than your class level.

FIST OF THE CRUSADER

The Crusader's Fist is the most dedicated, ruthless and fanatical unit of the Crusader. They are men of action, brash and are ill-tempered. They are the first to ride into freshly discovered hell holes, and the last to come out. On the battlefield, they fight with bestial ferocity, especially when wounded. For them, the end justifies any means, and their heated rivalry with the followers of the Great Gold Wyrms has caused more than one tavern brawl.

In battle, when you are staggered the first time, roll 1d6 and gain a Crusader's Boon from the table below. Each boon gives you a special interrupt action that you can use at-will until the end of the battle.

1. Crusader's Punch: When an enemy makes a melee attack against you and the natural attack roll is lower than your Strength score, deal damage equal to your Strength modifier and pop free. Double the damage at 5th level, triple it at 8th.

2. **Crusader's Heart:** When an enemy makes an attack against you and the natural attack roll is lower than your Constitution score, reduce the damage by your Constitution modifier (double at 5th, triple at 8th) and immediately save against any save ends effects of that attack.
3. **Crusader's Dominance:** When an enemy attempts to disengage from you and the natural save roll is lower than your Dexterity score, make a melee attack against them.
4. **Crusader's Tactics:** When an enemy makes a melee attack against you and the natural attack roll is lower than your Intelligence score, you or the next ally to attack it can roll twice on the attack and take the better result.
5. **Crusader's Gaze:** When an enemy makes an attack against you and the natural roll is lower than your Wisdom score, deal psychic damage equal to your level plus Wisdom modifier (double at 5th level, triple at 8th).
6. **Crusader's Defiance:** When an enemy attacks you and the natural attack roll is lower than your Charisma score, the enemy is struck by fear (dazed and can't use the escalation die) until the end of its next turn.

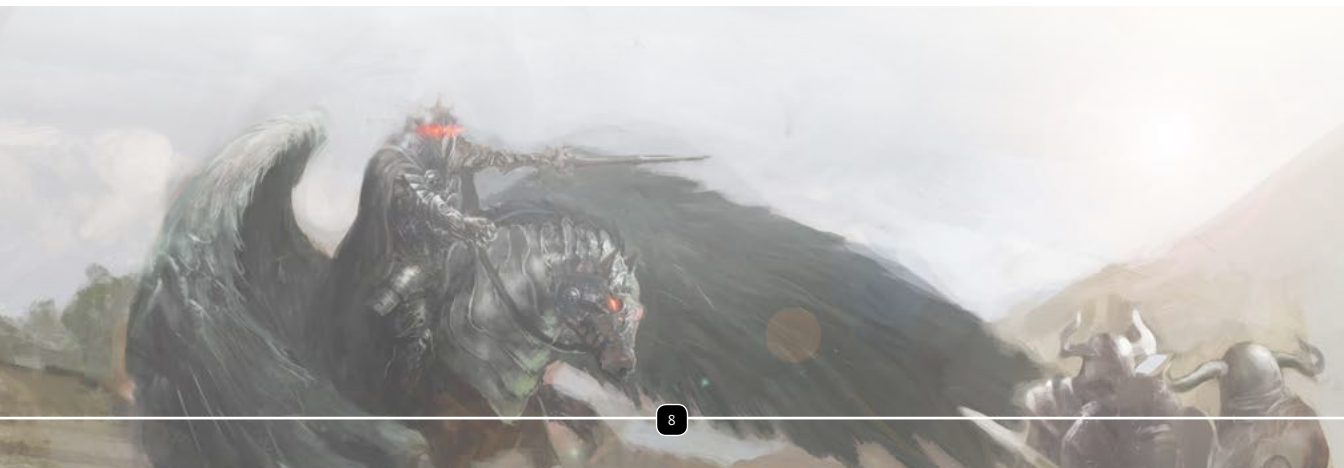


Taking this talent requires an icon relationship point with the Crusader.

Adventurer Feat: For one battle per day, gain the Crusader's Boon at the start of your first turn.

Champion Feat: When you gain the Crusader's Boon, you can also spend a recovery to heal.

Epic Feat: Roll one additional d6 for each icon relationship point with the crusader, and choose one result you like.



GLORY OF THE EMPIRE

In a past age, your paladin order spread the glory of the Empire to the corners of the known world. You protected the sea wall, stood guard near the abyss, and ventured far west to secure new settlements past the Giantwalk. Now, the ancient imperial roads are in ruins. The magic that pacified the lands and guaranteed a bountiful crop is weakening. Your order is long past its golden days, but now, you are needed more than ever. You stand with the Emperor. You protect civilization.

- Choose one tactic from the Commander list up to your level and add it to your powers. You can change this tactic during a full heal-up.
- This talent requires an icon relationship with the Emperor.

Adventurer Feat: Your nearby allies gain a +1 bonus to MD.

Champion Feat: Choose a second tactic, up to two levels below your class level.

Epic Feat: Gain all feats of your two current tactics.

GOLDEN LEGION

Now that the Great Gold Wyrms has sacrificed his physical body to seal off the Abyss from the mortal realm, he has to rely on agents to stop nefarious plots by the Diabolist. Each year, he initiates a select few paladins into the Golden Legion to serve as his eyes and ears, as well as his sword and shield. He shares a piece of his remaining essence with them, to bring them closer to his exalted draconic nature. Initiates can be recognized by the golden shimmer on their skin and in their eyes.

- You gain two powers, Breath of the Gold and Indomitability.
- You must have an icon relationship with the Great Gold Wyrms to take this talent.

Breath of the Golden

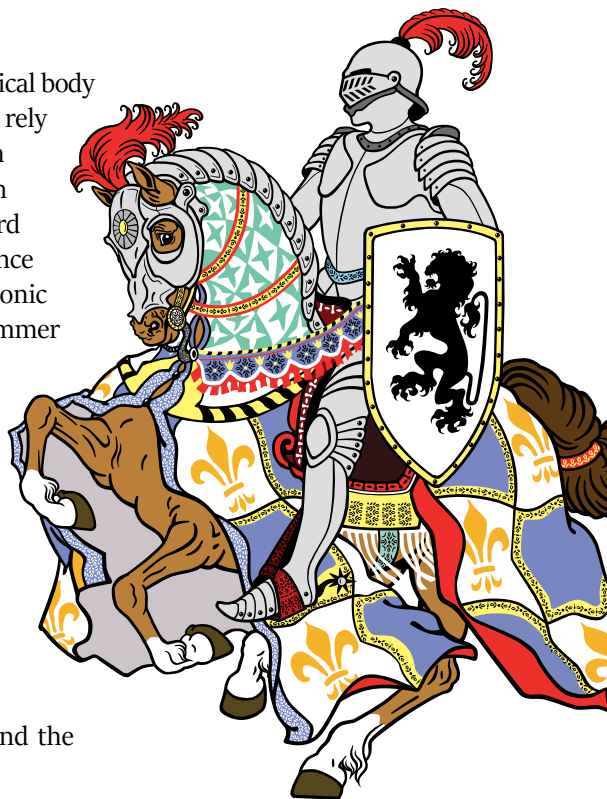
Close-quarters spell; Breath Weapon; Daily

Target: 1d2 nearby enemies in a group

Attack: Charisma + level vs. PD

Hit: 1d8 per level + Charisma fire damage

Natural even hit: 10 ongoing fire damage per tier and the target is dazed (save ends both)



Miss: Half damage

Breath Weapon: For the rest of the battle, roll a d20 at the start of your turn. On a 16+, you can use Breath of the Golden again on that turn if you wish.

Indomitability

Daily; Free Action

Effect: Spend a recovery to heal, and cancel all effects and conditions on yourself, including ongoing damage. You can use indomitability even if you are otherwise prevented from taking actions, such as from being stunned.

Adventurer Feat: You gain resist fire 16+.

Champion Feat: You can target 1d4 enemies with Breath of the Golden.

Epic Feat: You can use Indomitability once per battle.

GREY GUARD

On the surface, the Grey Guard is a paladin order that supports the Empire and the Cathedral on missions that require a more subtle approach, in enemy organizations and enemy territory. They provide protection to imperial delegates, trade routes and messengers beyond the borders of the Empire.

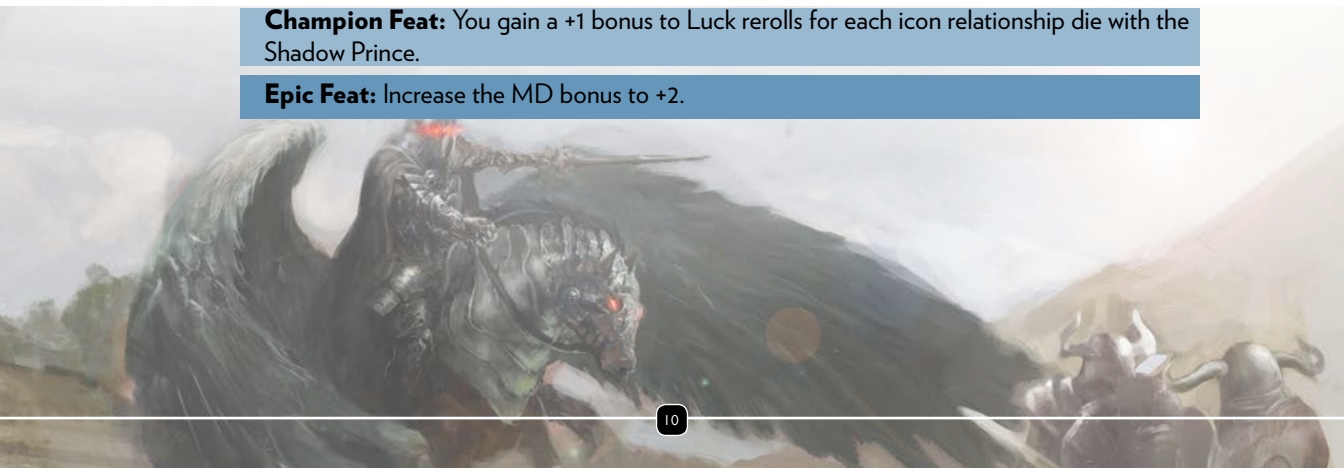
Behind the scenes, the Grey Guard is yet another front for the Shadow Prince, and any information that is protected by the guard also passes through its hands. The Emperor knows, but it is not clear whether he sees the Shadow Prince's involvement as a benefit or a necessary, but manageable, evil.

- You must have an icon relationship with the Shadow Prince to take this talent.
- You gain the Shadow Prince's Luck blessing, which allows you to reroll a skill check, a save or a Smite Evil attack once per day per Charisma modifier.

Adventurer Feat: You gain a +1 bonus to MD.

Champion Feat: You gain a +1 bonus to Luck rerolls for each icon relationship die with the Shadow Prince.

Epic Feat: Increase the MD bonus to +2.



GUARDIAN OF THE VAULT

It may be a surprise to those not familiar with dwarven values, but the best knights of the Forge don't protect the northern border against the orcs, or the throne room against assassins, they protect the Dwarf King's treasure vault. And they don't just protect burglars from getting in, they protect certain artifacts from getting out. Ever wondered where the severed left hand of the Lich King is kept?

- Serving as a guardian is an honor exclusive to dwarves. For a non-dwarf to join these ranks would be quite a unique thing. You must have an icon relationship with the Dwarf King to take this talent.
- As a guardian, you are especially trained in dealing with magic items and artifacts, both the beneficial and the dangerous kind. You gain the Rogue's Trap Sense ability, and you can use it against magic items and artifacts as well as traps.
- When you wear dwarven-made heavy armor, a blessing by the Dwarf King reduces the damage you take from a hit by a non-mook enemy by your level.

Adventurer Feat: When you wield a dwarven-made weapon, reroll natural 1 on the damage dice.

Champion Feat: You gain a bonus to item power recharge rolls equal to your Charisma modifier.

Epic Feat: Once per day, you can concentrate on a known, named artifact to gain insight to its lore or a vision of its location.

INQUISITOR

You are tasked with eradicating the lies and falsehoods that endanger the Empire. In peaceful times, inquisitors act as enforcers who catch fugitives, instigators of rebellion and practitioners of the dark arts. But these are not peaceful times. As the law breaks down in the outskirts of the Empire, they are acting more and more as judge, jury and executioner in one.

- When make a skill check to determine a lie, illusion or falsehood, and the check is a natural even failure, reroll the check once.
- You also gain the Counter-magic ability of the Wizard's High Arcana talent.
- You must have an icon relationship with the Archmage or the Emperor to take this talent.

Adventurer Feat: On a natural even hit with Smite Evil, the target is hampered until the end of its next turn.

Champion Feat: You can now cast Counter-magic twice per battle.

Epic Feat: On a critical hit with Smite Evil, the target is hampered (save ends).

LAWFUL GOOD

You have sworn to follow the law and serve the greater good, to set a shining example for nobles and commoners alike. The path of the righteous is not an easy path to follow, as the letter of the law does not always agree with the morally right thing to do. There are many pitfalls, moral conflicts and temptations.

- You gain a d6 righteousness die that represents your inner moral compass. Whenever you make a skill check while acting in the interest of the law and the greater good, add the die to your roll. For example, you would gain the bonus if you convince a sinner to seek atonement, to notice evil intentions, to smash the statue of a false god or stop an assassin from slipping poison into a cup. At the same time, you take the die as a penalty if you ever attempt heinous acts like deceit, theft and murder.
- Once per day, as a free action, you can declare an opponent who breaks the law and harms the greater good to be a force of evil. You add your righteousness die to all attacks and saves against that opponent. If you defeat this foe, you regain one use of smite evil and one recovery. If you abuse this ability to blame the innocent, you lose a use of smite and one recovery.

Adventurer Feat: You can sense the presence of anyone you have ever declared a force of evil within roughly a mile radius.

Champion Feat: You gain an extra use of Smite Evil per day.

Epic Feat: You can declare a second enemy per day a force of evil.

LIGHTBRINGER

You are the shining beacon that brings light into the darkest corners of the Empire. When the darkness refuses to retreat, when the creatures that lurk in it snap back, you drive them out with the sharp edge of your sword.

- Your Smite Evil attacks deal holy and fire damage. When you hit with Smite Evil, deal the Smite's bonus damage dice to all nearby enemies. Double your Smite **bonus** damage against undead.

Adventurer Feat: You gain resist attacks by undead 16+.

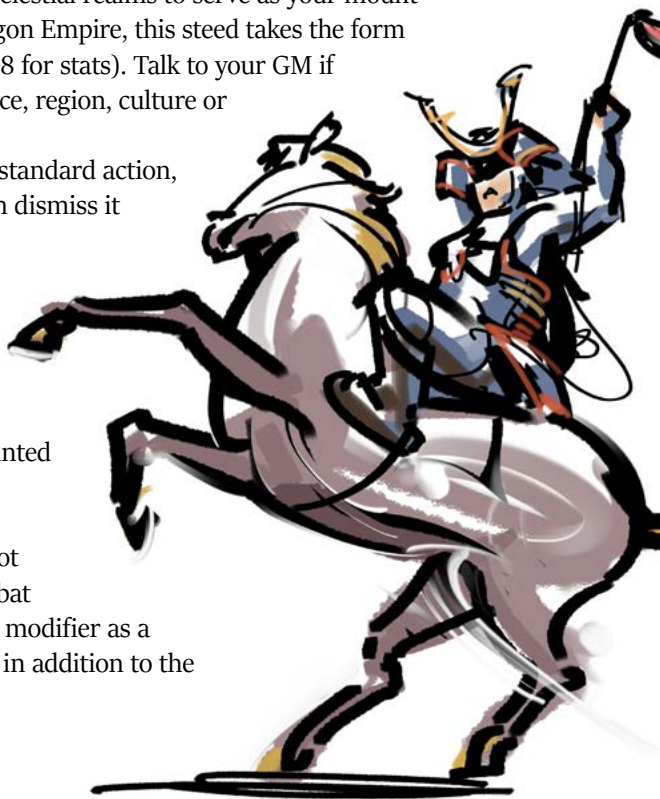
Champion Feat: You gain a +1 bonus to hit against undead.

Epic Feat: When you use Smite Evil against undead, that Smite is not expended.

Paladin Special Mount

Note: This talent is requires the Mounted Combat rules published in 13th Age Monthly #20.

- You can summon a divine steed from the celestial realms to serve as your mount in combat. For human paladins in the Dragon Empire, this steed takes the form of a Warhorse (see Mounted Combat page 8 for stats). Talk to your GM if a different type of mount would fit your race, region, culture or religion better.
- You can summon your mount at-will as a standard action, and it stays as long as you require. You can dismiss it back to the divine realms as a free action.
- Once summoned, you and your mount act as per the mounted combat rules. If your mount is killed, you can summon it again after your next full heal-up.
- While mounted, you can attempt one mounted combat action per round as a quick action as per standard rules. However, due to an emphatic link with your mount, you are not limited to the standard two mounted combat actions per battle. You add your Charisma modifier as a bonus to mounted combat control checks, in addition to the default stat.
- When you fail a mounted combat control check, the DC of following checks is not increased.
- As a divine creature, your mount deals holy damage.



Adventurer Feat: Your first mounted combat action in a battle doesn't require a mounted combat check and doesn't increase the DC of further checks.

Champion Feat: Your second mounted combat action in a battle doesn't require a check or increase the DC.

Epic Feat: When you make a Smite Evil attack, your mount also gains the bonus if it makes an attack on the same turn.

STORMHAMMER

You are a champion of heathen gods, of old deities of the elements, or the untamed nature of the wind and the sky. The clergy of the Priestess claims that your belief has no place in the cathedral, but every time lightning strikes the top, they are reminded of their insolence. You must have an icon relationship with the High Druid, the Orc Lord or the Three to take this talent.

- When you hit with a melee attack, add your Constitution modifier in lightning damage. When you hit with Smite Evil, also add 1d4 thunder damage. Double both bonuses at 5th level, triple them at 8th.

Adventurer Feat: You gain resist lightning and thunder 16+.

Champion Feat: If an enemy is vulnerable to thunder or lightning damage, you gain a +2 bonus to hit against them.

Epic Feat: When you Smite Evil, increase the bonus thunder damage to 3d12.

VALIANT OF THE STAR COURT

The Valiants of the Star Court are an elite guard that serves to protect the Elven Queen. Each member undergoes rigorous training by high elven sword masters, wood elven scouts and dark elven assassins to protect her and her nobles from any inside and outside threat.

While traditionally, the members of this guard are second or thirdborns from the nobility of the three elven races, occasionally noble houses of other races have sent promising children to the order to strengthen diplomatic ties. You must have an icon relationship with the Elf Queen to take this talent.

- When you take this talent, and each of the two levels after that, choose one of the boons below, until you have chosen all three.
- White Boon: You are immune to the dazed condition, including daze caused by fear.
- Green Boon: You gain a +1 bonus to your critical threat range with one-handed swords and bows.
- Black Boon: You gain resist poison 16+.

Adventurer Feat: You gain three points towards an elite guard background that covers not only prevention measures against poison and assassination but also court etiquette and diplomacy.

Champion Feat: The first enemy you hit with Smite Evil in a battle is also dazed (save ends).

Epic Feat: Increase the bonus to critical hits from green boon to +2.

CHAMPION LEVEL TALENTS

You can take the following talents as your 5th or 8th level talent.

CHAMPION OF WAR

You are the chosen champion of your deity, and you can feel his or her guiding hand in every strike.

- You gain a +1 bonus to melee attack rolls.

Champion Feat: When you hit an enemy with your Smite Evil, that enemy is vulnerable to your allies' attacks until the start of your next turn.

Epic Feat: For one battle per day, grant all nearby allies a +1 bonus to attack rolls.

CLEANSING TOUCH

You channel the merciful hand of the Priestess to relieve your allies from their ailments. You must have an icon relation with the Priestess to take this talent.

- Once per day per Charisma modifier, as a quick action, you can end a condition that an ally next to you is under. You can end the condition regardless whether it requires a save or not.

Champion Feat: You can use this ability on nearby allies.

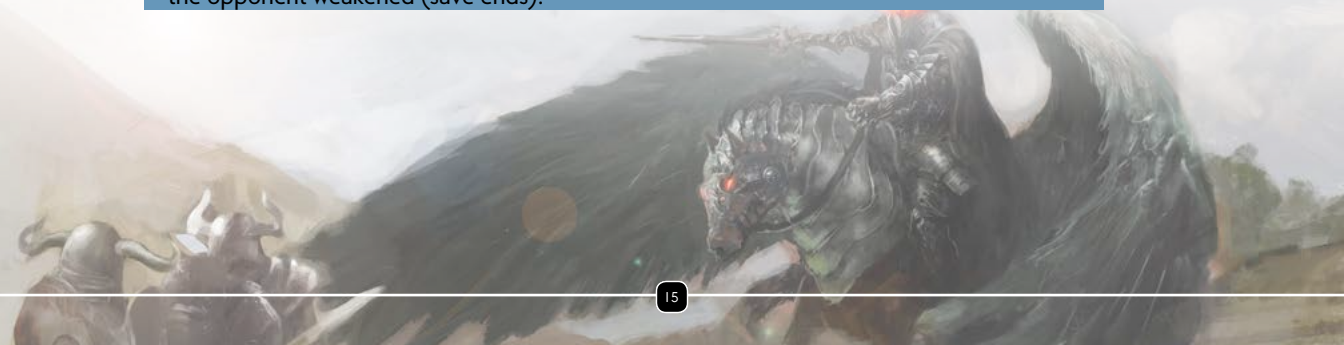
Epic Feat: You can use this ability on yourself.

RADIANT PRESENCE

- The creatures of darkness are in awe of your shining presence and weakened in their resolve.
- When an enemy you are engaged with rolls a save, including a save to disengage, it must roll twice and take the lower roll.

Champion Feat: If the save fails, the target takes holy damage equal to your level.

Epic Feat: When you hit an enemy with Smite Evil, you can expend a second use to make the opponent weakened (save ends).



EPIC LEVEL TALENTS

You can take the following talents as your 8th level talent.

SHIELD OF DEVOTION

If your heart is pure and your belief is unshaken, the power of faith can block the mightiest of strikes.

- Once per day, when you or a nearby ally is hit by an attack, you can negate the attack as an interrupt action. Until the end of the battle, the target has resist all 14+.

Epic Feat: You can use Shield of Devotion twice per day.

WINGED SMITE

You have discovered your true soul, a reborn angelic being that was cast down to the mortal realm.

- When you take the free action to activate Smite Evil, you can fly across the battlefield on ethereal wings to engage a nearby enemy. If you make the attack in mid-air, the wings let you land safely.

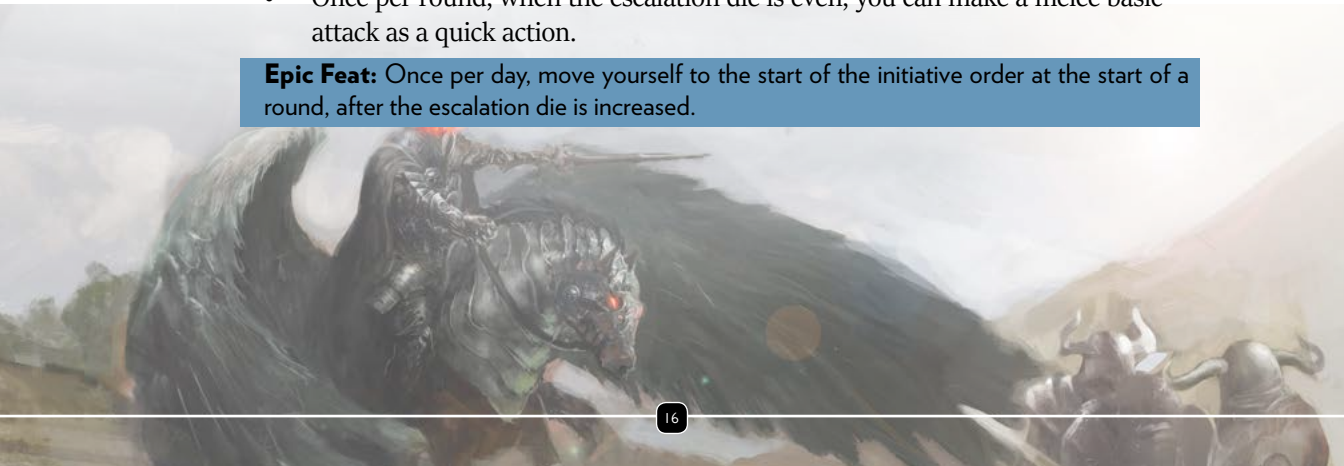
Epic Feat: If your Smite Evil attack is a natural even roll, you can spend a second use of Smite Evil to make another Smite Evil attack against the same or a different nearby enemy as a free action.

ZEAL

Your heart burns with religious devotion. No matter how tired you are, no matter how often they slash at you with their swords and their claws, you swing your hammer again and again until they are driven back and defeated.

- Once per round, when the escalation die is even, you can make a melee basic attack as a quick action.

Epic Feat: Once per day, move yourself to the start of the initiative order at the start of a round, after the escalation die is increased.



ESPECIALLY PASTY

BY MIKHAIL BOPCH-OSMOLOVSKIY



Come, sir! Look over here, madam! I have the perfect gift for that special someone in your life. Now I know, you've heard it all before, but trust me, you haven't seen anything like it. Not sure what to get for the kid who has everything? This gift is sure to satisfy. It is magic, you see. But fear not, it's cheap, too. It guesses what the holder wants to see, and takes the form. Try it! You, sir. What do you wish for? Socks? Well, to each his own. Think of a perfect pair of socks. How do you like them, fluffy or a bit coarse, black or white or red? Now open the box!

GIFT BOX MIMIC

Shrieks of delight turn to screams of terror. Go on, unwrap your present.

1st level spoiler [ABERRATION]

Initiative +1

Chomp +6 vs AC—5 damage.

Psychic lure: The “present” can be taken out of the “box.” If the lure is ever far away from the mimic, it dissolves into sticky goo. In such an event, the mimic can create a new lure as a standard action by losing 4 hit points. The mimic can absorb its nearby lure as a move action.

Once per turn, the mimic can use one of the following abilities as a quick action:

[Special trigger] C: What you desire most +6 vs MD (one creature nearby the psychic lure)—the target is dazed, hard save ends. Holding the “present” to admire it makes the save easy instead. The effect also ends if the mimic dies, or uses what you fear most or what you desire most again.

[Special trigger] What you fear most—the psychic lure gains fear aura (15hp threshold), which only affects the creature holding it. The fear aura is active until the mimic uses what you desire most. In addition, the lure sticks to the creature's hands, save ends.

AC 19 | PD 16 | MD 11 | HP 19



Having dealt with the mimic gift boxes, you may well be inclined to deal with the one who sold them to you as well. It's not until you start comparing your stories do you realise the stall owner, charming and convincing as they were, was slightly different for each of you. What is going on?

The good news is that there are no "gifts" in the mimics at the stall. The bad news is that they have combined their psychic lures into one perfect salesperson.

When using what you desire most and what you fear most,
ask the targeted player to describe what they're seeing.

GIFT BOX STALL OWNER

"I have just the thing you need."

Double-strength 1st level spoiler [CONSTRUCT]

Initiative +5

C: Perfect Smile +6 vs MD (1d4 nearby enemies)—4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Corporeal Merger +6 vs PD—the stall owner glomps over the target creature. While this way merged, the creature is stuck, grabbed, and takes 5 ongoing psychic damage. To pry themselves free, they can spend a move action and attempt a DC 20 Strength skill check.

Limited use: The stall owner can only use corporeal merger if it has no creature merged into it.

Just plain wrong: While the stall owner has a creature merged into it, it gains fear aura (9hp threshold).

Goo golem: Whenever a creature makes a melee attack against the stall owner, its weapon gets stuck if the natural roll was odd. Yes, this includes a monk's kicking foot. To pry a stuck weapon free, a creature engaged with the stall owner can spend a move action and attempt a DC 15 Strength skill check.

Natural 5 or less roll: The stall owner uses corporeal merger as a free action.

AC 16 | PD 10 | MD 14 | HP 75

13 FESTIVALS, HOLIDAYS AND CALENDAR PECULIARITIES

BY JOSÉ LUIZ F. “TZIMISCEDRACUL” CARDOSO

Maybe you devised a calendar for your campaign, or maybe you use a famous calendar from a campaign setting (or, perhaps, this particular aspect never came up during your games). In case you don’t have a campaign calendar, here – in 13th Age tradition – are 13 basic concepts and ideas regarding festivals and holidays for your games (OK, there’re more than 13).

THE MONTH OF THE EMPEROR

The idea here is that there’s either a month named after the Emperor (you can call it “Dracounary”, “Imperialia” or any other faux-name you like). Ideally, this the 12th month – the last of the year. During this period, the Emperor must perform a series of rituals (possibly visiting all Seven Cities) to symbolize the renewal of his power and authority over the Dragon Empire. What few people know is that if the Emperor fails to perform the simple tradition, then the defeated 13th Month will return: the Month of the Wizard King. The notion that the Lich King can have free reign over the Dragon Empire, each year for an entire month, is a dreadful and closely guarded secret.

THE FESTIVAL OF ALL THE GODS

The most important of holidays, the Festival of All the Gods is also, theoretically, one of the safest days in all the Dragon Empire. That’s because it’s considered a terrible omen to kill during the Festival. Every year, it is told, many of the lesser gods of the Overworld come down to the Dragon Empire for one full day, to “feel the pleasures” of the flesh and mortality. All the Seven Cities and most villages of the Empire throw great revelries to please the gods, even holier-than-thou Santa Cora (where the Festival is so gaudy and extravagant that it is a common joke among thieves and scoundrels that the Priestess leaves town, while the Diabolist moves in). Because one never knows if a drunken merrymaker is a “normal” mortal or a god, killing and even combat during the Festival is avoided (after all, gods love to curse). A mission during the Festival is thus a tough call for most adventuring parties. Because calendars are strange things, astrologers and oracles suggest, for safety, that the Festival of All Gods should last seven days and seven nights.

THE STOLEN HOLIDAY

The Prince of Shadows is sometimes a show-off. His last heist wasn't about stealing treasure or magic, but a holiday. How did the Prince accomplished that? What festival was stolen? Was it the Goddess of Mercy Day? If so, how will her priests will bless the recent peace treaty between the Elf Queen and the Dwarf King? Or maybe the Prince stole the Celebration of Flowers: the famous holiday of the Little Gods of Spring. Which icon would be interested in stealing Spring!? Ironically, probably the High Druid, who would get back the power to put the natural cycle in "it's proper place." Maybe the Archmage paid the Prince, desiring complete control over the Empire's seasons (and thus ensuring eternal spring with his geomancer rituals). The race is on!

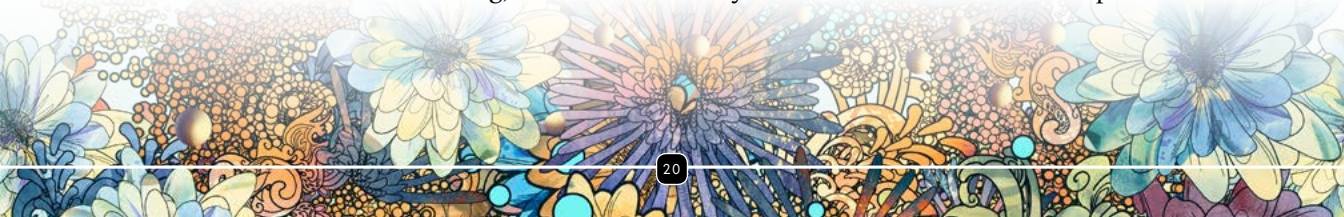
THE GIFT-GIVING DAY

It is said that the Elf Queen created this holiday with a mighty ritual in a previous Age. One of the Empire's most important celebrations, the Gift-Giving Day is used not only as a chance to meet your allies and loved ones, but also to reinforce political and religious pacts. Kings, barons, nobles, archpriests, and all kinds of rulers use this day to send gifts to their vassals and to receive gifts, thus cementing their oaths. Even the Emperor, it is whispered, sends gifts to the mighty Five, the greater metallic dragons of the realm. The problem? Well, the Silver is in captivity in Drakenhall and the Blue can't be trusted to deliver the gift. So that is where you come in: your party must get inside Drakenhall, deliver the imperial gift to the Silver, and get the hell out of the City of Monsters (probably with a gift for the Emperor). But rest assured, you got the easier job... imagine those poor fellows tasked with reaching the Great Gold Wyrms.



THE CELEBRATION OF TOWERS

The greatest holiday in the dwarven calendar is the Celebration of Towers. It is also known as the Counting, because it is the day when dwarves all over the Empire send



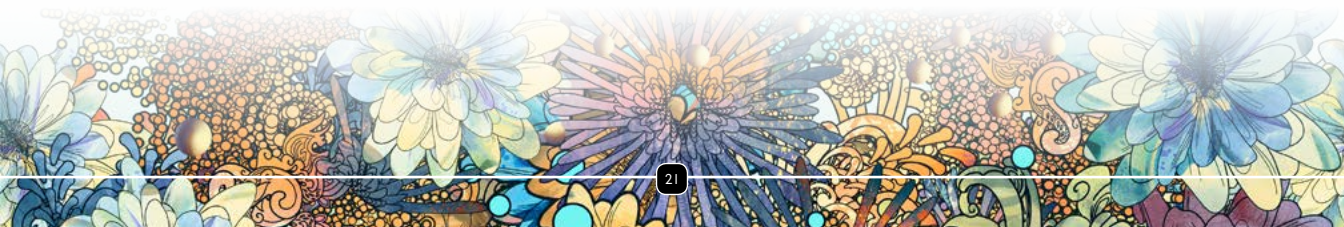
all the information they possess about treasure and magic items to the Dwarf King. The name of the holiday is derived from the famous dwarven coins (or towers). Because all precious metal and forged magic items are – theoretically – a part of the Dwarf King’s mythic hoard, the Counting is considered serious business by most (loyal) subjects of Anvil and Forge. Of course, most thieves in the Empire (and a few drow) love the Celebration of Towers because it’s the best chance to find where all those riches and fortunes are kept.

THE NIGHT OF THE WHITE WHEEL

The High Druid doesn’t care for calendars or any other notion of control over the seasons, but she does pay attention to the eternal cycle of the elements and the stars. The Night of the White Wheel is one of the year’s druidic holidays, celebrating the renewal of life, fertility and the ley lines across the Empire. Some druids insist that, without the celebration, spring wouldn’t last. It’s a traditional night for weddings, name-givings, and wild dances around fires and holy sites. During the Night of the White Wheel, all are welcome in druidic circles and domains – even enemies. This is why it is a holiday used by imperial forces (and adventure parties) to reach the most radical druidic factions, especially in the Blood Wood, with peace proposals. It is whispered that you can raise or reincarnate a fallen friend during the Night of the White Wheel, if you’re in a druidic ley line. However, if you manage to complete the ritual, it is also said that you must sacrifice another creature in the Night of the Black Wheel (the opposite holiday, during midwinter).

NAME-GIVING DAY

The exact day of name-giving changes based on local traditions. Most humans prefer to name their sons and daughters on the day they’re born. Dwarves have a particular day of the year where Names are given – it is an important holiday because dwarves consider Names to be something apart from the Named. A dwarf is given a Name and, at the time of his or her passing, must return it to the Dwarf King unblemished. High Elves only name their heirs during the first night of the year, while wood elves only give names during the spring, and drow during the winter. Half-orcs raised by the scions of the Orc Lord must take their name, either killing its actual holder or a beast. Halflings name their sons and daughters exactly one year after they’re born (before that they’re called “my joy” or “my beloved”). Gnomes name when they want during a secret



festival where True Names are given. You get the picture. The problem is... what happens when this important ritual isn't observed? Nameless Dwarves are not even considered dwarves. To be nameless among humans is a common prerequisite for assassins and spies, making you harder to find with divination. It's said that nameless gnomes are powerful illusionists, but with time they start to fade, becoming themselves illusions. The worst happen with elves... it has something to do with "The Curse of Briar and Thorn", and not even the drow miss a Name-Giving Day.

GNOMEDAY

Gnomeday is the much feared Day of Pranks and Fools. Even if not all cities celebrate Gnomeday, you can bet that all the Little Folk do. Indeed, some magistrates and paladins tried to banish the "holiday," which is also known as the Festival of Deceits or the Night of Illusions. Celebrated on the 1st day of the 4th imperial month, Gnomeday marks some cryptic event on the Little Folk's mythological cycle. On no other day are the gnomes' illusions so powerful (and unruly). Is that a result of a massive and communal ritual? Or just a natural event? Does a god (or icon) power the gnomes' magic? The Diabolist would dearly love to take credit for that, while the Prince of Shadows would love to steal such rituals. Perhaps Gnomeday is the last vestige of a fallen, lost, or trapped Icon: the Illusionist. A few particular paranoid imperials claim that the Illusionist is still abroad, and the fact that most people believe him/her gone is all part of "the Plan" (those same sages and officials believe that the Illusionist is masquerading as another Icon, probably the Prince, of course). During Gnomeday, all communities of the Little Folk celebrate their gifts (especially in Concord and Glitterhaegen).

Illusions are particularly potent during Gnomeday; in fact, they seem not only common, appearing all over the Empire, but also have a will of their own. Lies and deceits come easier to the tongue (the bards love it). In fact, any PC can, once during Gnomeday, try a bluff, tell a lie, or otherwise manipulate the truth better, gaining +6 bonus to one such skill check. However, they become "one in debt to the Illusionist" (a popular term) – in game terms, they're considered to have rolled a 5 (a complication) with an icon (chosen secretly by the GM or rolled on the Icon Die). The GM is encouraged to introduce one fact, scene, NPC, or maybe even an event in Gnomeday. The chosen aspect is shown, after the holiday, to have been false or happened in a different way (either because of a gnome, or because it was a rogue illusion).



Art: Rick Hershey

THE DARKNESS EVE

This is the dreaded but necessarily holiday of the Dark Gods (after all, they're still gods, not demons). The followers of the Dark Gods, especially the Crusader, preach that without darkness there's no light, thus claiming the importance of attending the Darkness Eve. This holiday is used to perform important executions and rituals against demons and the Abyss. Because many Dark Gods hold power over the Underworld, the fallen, and the dead, Darkness Eve is also used to honor one's ancestors through sacrifices, meditations, and the cleaning and reconsecration of cemeteries. Weirdly, this makes Darkness Eve either a frightening or very serene day. As the dead are honored on this day, it is a grave crime to disrespect or offend the dead. Unfortunately, through a legal and divine loophole, this rule extends to the undead, which use Darkness Eve to walk unmolested through the Seven Cities (if a particular undead commits murder or damages property, they're fair game). For unknown reasons that still challenge many sages, Darkness Eve is also considered a Halfling holiday, known as the Day of Silence.

NAMELESS DAYS

There are some days that shouldn't be: darkly auspicious dates, unfavored by the gods and auguries. Days that mark greater catastrophes from past Ages. Nameless Days literally don't exist. No imperial events take place on those days, no documents or pacts are signed, no imperial seals are affixed (no imperial decisions are taken). There is an important task force composed of imperial sages, diviners from Horizon, and oracles from the Cathedral, dedicated entirely to research, identify, and warn the Dragon Empire of Nameless Days. These wise men and women are members of the Imperial Ministry of the Ensembled Inquisitor of Egregious Events, jocosely called The Ministry of the Eye. The Eye commonly either hires adventurers to dig old ruins, looking for past apocalypses, or to venture to the Overworld or Underworld, searching for astrological signs or the auguries of the dead. After all, when a prophecy foretells that on the 333rd day of the 333rd year of the 333rd Emperor, the Doom of Gorogan shall awaken, what better way to avert "the End" than to publicly declare that the "333rd day of the 333rd year of the 333rd Emperor" didn't happen (jumping from the 332nd to the 334th day)? Many adventurers (and even a few squads of the Crusader) are hired to enforce Nameless Days. They may, for example, stop a wedding at Concord or an important pact between nobles and the Dwarf King in Glitterhaegen.

MORE IDEAS FOR FESTIVALS

Here are simple ideas for holidays and festivals, mainly taken from the Core Rulebook:

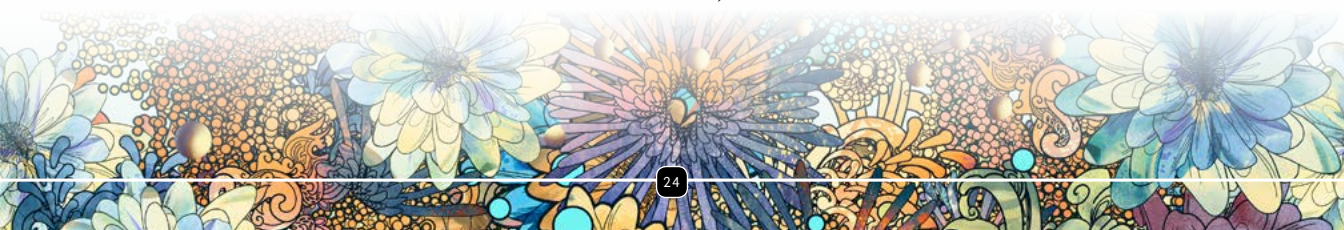
The Incantation: the sacred day when the Priestess first appeared among the folk and, reaching Santa Cora, raised the first layers of the Cathedral with a Word of Power. What was the Word? How did the Priestess manage it? Can she do it again? And, most importantly, how can the Crusader find the Word?

The Day of the Three-Folded Alliance: the celebration of the victory against the Wizard King. Traditionally held in Concord, the Emperor, the Dwarf King, and Elf Queen join to remember the Empire's greatest challenge. However, all three icons are worried, because this year the Orc Lord demanded a seat at Concord and asserts that the event should be rightly named the "Day of the Four-Folded Alliance."

The Renewal of the Crusade: marking the raising of First Triumph, on this day crusaders, demonslayers, and servants of the Dark Gods commemorate "the beginning of the end" for the Abyss. It's a common day for conscriptions into the Crusader's growing army. On this day, volunteers can't be denied the Right of Crusade, so it's a common day for those running from the law, their creditors, or their parents to join the icon "with most attitude" in the Empire.

The Pupil's Day: a minor holiday, where apprentices and students honor their master and teachers across the Dragon Empire. While it's an official event for most guild members, the true importance of Pupil's Day lies with spellcasters. Most wizards, sorcerers, necromancers, and others try to reach their former masters during this day, symbolically returning their first grimoires or wands. A few masters demand the observation of this day, sending a summoned servant or lesser curse after "absent-minded" apprentices. Everyone in Horizon knows that the Archmages goes missing during the night of Pupil's Day and the Prince of Shadows would love to know who the mightiest magister in the Empire studied under.

The Oath of the Golden Watch: the mythical day that marks the Great Gold Wyrms' sacrifice to seal the Abyss. Of late, a clandestine holiday has started among the desert tribes and isolated villages of the Demon Coast and the Red Wastes. Occurring during the same night as the Golden Watch, this day of pilgrimage is called the Crimson Offering. During this dark and starless night, the denizens of those forsaken places ride in caravans to secret and deep wells in the Wastes. There, they throw pillaged gold, sacked treasures, and humanoid sacrifices to the "true savior," the Red. 🐉



SUN FALLS AND THE STALKING TREES

BY SHERM SHEFTALL

THE STALKING TREES (THE STALKING)

The forest is dark and oppressive. It is cold this far north. Your breath forms a cloud of crystals as you exhale. It is not quiet. Unseen animals call out to each other. Insects buzz and bite. Is that column of ants, following? Something skitters in the underbrush. Is there someone in the trees... or did that tree just move? Paranoia, it overwhelms.

The forest is sentient. It is watching you.

The Stalking Trees is a region to the far northwest of the Dragon Empire, near the feared Hell Marsh. Villagers around the area speak in hushed tones about the predatory woods known as the Stalking Trees and the creatures that live within. They do not go into the trees without leaving an offering at one of the small shrines on its borders. They do not kill wantonly in the Stalking, being very cognizant of only taking what they need. The wood is red of tooth and nail. It understands the need to survive, but it will not allow for unnecessary killing of anything within its demesne, whether that be plant or animal.

HISTORY

CIRCLE OF THE TREE

In a prior age, the Age of the Fallen Archmage, there was a powerful druid order known as the Circle of the Tree. They defended the Northern Wood, now known as the Stalking Trees (or the Stalking), from all threats, including that of the Archmage of the time—now known as the Lich King. The Archmage was an even greater power in that lost age. He created great machines, both of the earth and air, which threatened to destroy the Northern Wood.

In this time the people of the wood worshipped the Sun. It warmed them, nurtured them and protected them from harm. They respected, but feared the woods. Only



a few, mostly women, were drawn to the power of nature and felt safe within the confines of the Northern Woods. A natural split occurred between those who would go worship in the forest and those who prayed to the Sun in the sky. This split would come to be permanent when the Circle of the Tree went into battle against the Archmage.

In an act of sacrifice and courage, the majority of the Circle of the Tree gave up their earthly forms and became one with the wood and their patron spirit, “She Who Stalks.” Now their spirits live within the wood, in the foliage, the animals, even the very air – and can animate them to defend the wood. They left behind their loved ones to become immortal defenders of nature.

SHE WHO STALKS

Deep in the Stalking Wood lies the nest of She Who Stalks. Long ago, before the turn of ages, a meteoric stone fell from the Overworld. The few scholars who know of the event debate whether the stone was thrown from heaven or escaped. This stone carried within the seed of She Who Stalks.

The seed found nurture in the soil that would become the Northern Wood. Overtime she grew, and the wood with her. She Who Stalks does not live in the forest. The forest is part and parcel of her being. Her arms, skin hair and eyes. Though imperceptible to mortals and even long lived elves, the forest is slowly growing, expanding as She Who Stalks grows.

With time came living beings. Drawn to the region and the sheltering arms of She Who Stalks. A village formed–Sun Falls–and with people came worship. Mostly women, as they were drawn to the power of the forest and became fearsome protectors of She Who Stalks–the Circle of the Tree.

SUN WORSHIPPERS

Even as the Circle of the Tree battled the forces of the Archmage, the elders of Sun Falls performed a similar, sacrificial act when the Archmage tried to pull the power from the Sun, nearly snuffing it out. Something the villagers still refer to as the Fall of Night.

Fearing the predations of the Archmage, the people of Sun Falls made a pact with the Sun. Protect them and they would protect it and be forever loyal and never leave its grace. The Sun granted their desire, they were made immortal and put beyond the ability of the Archmage to harm them–but can never leave Sun Falls lest they lose their immortality.

SUN FALLS

You enter the small village of brightly colored houses, flowers and flowing cobbled paths. Homes lie on both sides of the river, following its length. Beginning at the falls and ending at the great pool. A suspended rope bridge connects both sides of the village over rushing waters. The villagers come out of their homes, all smiles, flowers in hand...

At the heart of The Stalking Trees, known locally as The Stalking, lies the village of Sun Falls. This small village has been here since the Age of the Fallen Archmage. It's people never changing. Its inhabitants are the mates and children of the druids who became one with the wood.

THE SUN FESTIVAL

Once a year, in the heat of high summer, the sky goes bright, the clouds rush away and silence falls over Sun Falls. Then all slowly goes dark as the Sun languidly falls from the firmament and into the rushing river that leads over the ubiquitously named falls. It descends into a baroque temple of white stone built at the top of the falls and into the rushing river. It's fire quenched and dispersed into the water, a black ball in its depths. The sky has now gone black without stars and the river turned into a glowing ribbon of liquid fire. This is the beginning of the Sun Festival in Sun Falls.

The Sun Walkers begin the ceremonies, wearing ornate robes of red, detailed in gold. The defenders of Sun Falls march in unison through the throngs of villagers, leading to the great pool at the end of village. In their hands they carry spade-shaped, mirrored blades. As they reach the pool, they diverge themselves of their robes and carry only their blades with them into the band of fire that was once a river. Within, they bathe without burning. They bathe with their living god, the Sun itself. Swimming in a seemingly choreographed, circular way. Time passes. They exit the pool, their blades now aglow with liquid fire like the river itself. Each year they renew themselves and their blades in this sacred way.

After the walkers leave the river, the water glows a little less, but the mood of the gathered throng has changed, grown lighter. They doff their garments and dive into the pool. Each regaining their immortality for another season.

After exiting, the people put their raiments back on and begin the days of celebration at their renewal. After three days, the Sun lifts out of the river, transforming from a dark orb into its fiery raiment once more. Back into the sky.

The Sun Festival is over for another year.

SUN WALKERS

The Sun Walkers are the defenders of the village and more importantly the Sun itself. They are the only ones allowed to go out into the world. The walkers safeguard Sun Falls from anything that might get by the Circle of the Tree. Some say they also defend the village from She Who Stalks...

THE SUN TEMPLE

A circular temple of fine, ornately carved stone sits on a small island in the center of the river above the falls. Stone plinths form the walls and the roof. A great hole at the center is open to the sky at all times. In the interior of the temple are steps leading down to a round pool where the Sun will come to rest.

Etched on the plinths are strange, circular designs and illustrations. They represent the battle of the inhabitants against the Fall of Night, coming to Sun's rescue and their raising to immortality.

SUN WALKER, LEADER

8th level (humanoid)

Initiative: +10

Fiery Sun Blade +13 vs PD 80 fire damage

Natural even hit: Target is also on fire. 20 ongoing fire damage. Save ends
Target hit and brought to negative half hit points, explodes in fire and ash and is destroyed.

Miss: 20 fire damage

Lightbringer +13 vs. MD (all nearby enemies)

Burst of light from the Sun Blade as the Sun Walker holds it aloft.
Stunned. Save ends.

Immune to normal fire

Resist magical fire 16+

AC 24 | PD 20 | MD 20 | **HP 150**

SUN SALAMANDER

Usually the Sun Walker leader will summon one of these beasts from the fiery river and ride it into battle.

Large 10th level (magical beast)
Initiative: +10

Sun Aura: At the start of the Sun Salamanders turn, any enemies engaged with it take 5d10 fire damage and are also caught on fire. Ongoing fire damage 20. Save ends.

Sky Fire: If the Sun Salamander is Staggered, on its turn, reduce its HP by 50 (unless that would bring it to 0 or below). It transforms, growing burning wings and gaining Flight and Sun Strafe. It loses the Fiery Tale ability.

Sun Defense: Any turn in which the Sun Walker, Leader is not mounted on the Sun Salamander and takes damage, the Sun Salamander can immediately make an attack against the source of the damage.

Teeth of the Sun +15 vs. PD - 120 fire damage

The mouth opens and it is all teeth and burning saliva.

Natural odd hit: The Sun Salamander tail swings. It can make an immediate Fiery Tale attack.

Miss: 20 fire damage

[Special Trigger] Fiery Tale +15 vs. PD (all nearby enemies)

Tail sweeps in a great arc around the Sun Salamander, curling about enemies as it does so. Any enemies hit (maximum of 3) are grabbed and take 20 ongoing fire damage. Breaking free of the tail ends the ongoing damage.

Sun Strafe +20 vs. PD - 120 fire damage

While flying, the Sun Salamander can breath fire upon all nearby.

Hit: 20 ongoing fire damage.
Save ends.

Miss: 20 fire damage

Immune to normal fire
Resist magical fire 16+

AC 26 | PD 26 | MD 22 | HP 450

BACK MATTER

Winter is here. At least for some of the world. Demons of snow and ice have begun their yearly assault. Howling wind jhinn blow through the streets. But, winter or no, there is more than likely some kind of festival or celebration taking place or about to take place near you. Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe and many other holidays are celebrated in our world. You've read in this issue of Escalation how—very like our world—the Dragon Empire celebrates in many varied ways.

For me, no matter the name, I use this time of year to reflect on the year gone by, all who have come and gone in my life and I'm grateful for the people and things that I have. Let me say to you, that I'm grateful for the chance to contribute to the RPG community that came my way via Escalation—and I'm grateful to all in this wonderful community that have embraced our little endeavor. Particularly, I'm grateful for those who have helped us and the community by giving of their time and creative fires to contribute to this fanzine. With that, I wish you all happy holidays, peace and love in the coming year.

But beware. Monsters are coming.

I'll see you all next year. 🎲

Sherm Sheftall
December 2017



EDITORIAL

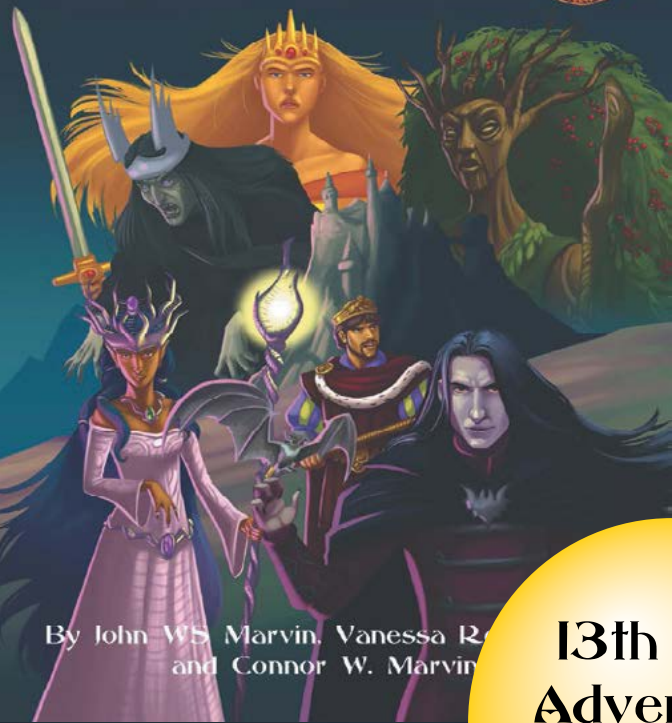
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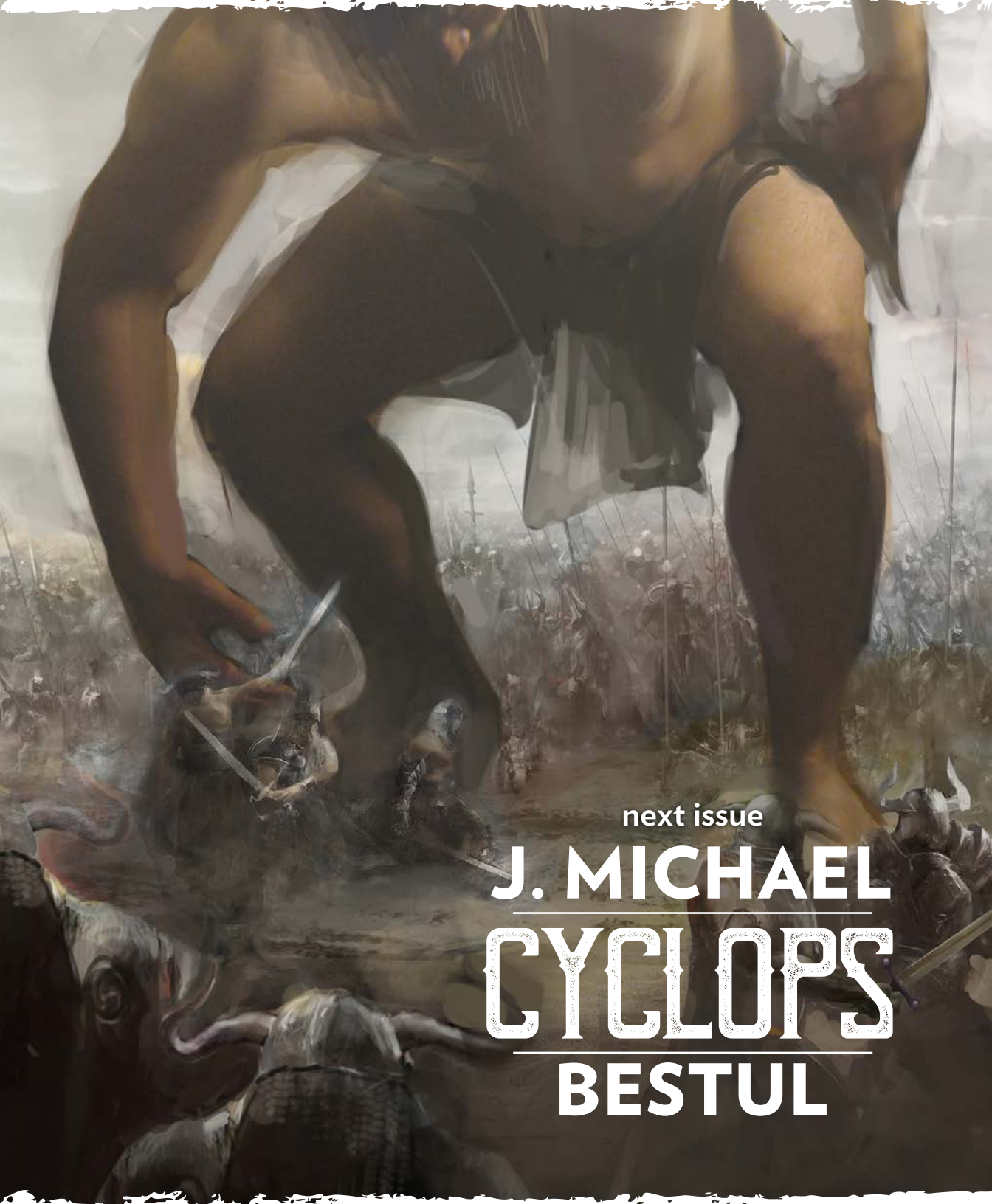
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Gods and Icons Upgrade Pack



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