

Ex3 Storytellers Guide

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DESIGN PHILOSOPHY ON 3E STORYTELLER GUIDE

- I intend to give Storytellers, old and new, advice on how to run a game of Exalted set within Exalted Third edition. There is absolutely nothing in this book I wouldn't recommend to myself or my own friends if they wanted to run a game.
- Charms will use distances in meters when referenced, not yards. I'm Canadian and I find the Imperial system a pain in the ass. Miles are still used, it's easier to say three miles than 4.8 kilometers.
- You may see me asking questions in bold on certain parts, be it notes or things I'm concerned of. I'm leaving them anyways, as if anyone makes such things I'd be really grateful as I'm a lazy prick.
- Most importantly of all, I made all of this to entertain people. If I brightened the day of even one person, then I consider this all worth it.

Chapter 0: Glossary

- **BBEG** - Short for “Big Bad Evil Guy”. This is often what is regarded as the final boss or main antagonist of the current story.
- **Chargen** - Short for “**Character Generation**”. This is typically used to describe the process of making a new character. Picture it like “charging” up a new character to make it easier to remember.
- **Excellencies** - The generic dice adder that Exalts gain when they take a favored/caste ability or a charm in an ability.
- **McGuffin** - An item that is important to the players or towards the plot. It doesn’t matter what it does or what its used for as that can vary game to game, but the end result is that it's important and others want it. Examples in Exalted include the Eye of Autochthon or Paragon’s Staff. In popular Media it includes things like the Ring in *Lord of the Rings*.
- **NPC** - Short for “Non-Playable Character”. These are the characters that are not played by the main players themselves and most often by the Storyteller.
- **PC** - Short for “Player Character”. These are the main characters that the players themselves control.
- **Storyteller** - The person in charge of running the game of Exalted and narrating events to the players. Often called Gamemaster in other games, as White Wolf wants to be different. Storytellers are usually differentiated from Gamemasters in that they try to tell a story with aide of players rather than be an iron fisted judge who enforces the rules. Honestly I just consider it the same damn thing with a different coat of paint so call it what you want.

Chapter 1: Welcome to Exalted!

Hi, and welcome to Exalted! Exalted is a high tension game modeled for dramatic and high powered characters who have the potential to shake the world and how they enact upon it! Will your character become the next Achilles? Will he gain traits and make the archetypal shonen action hero blush? Will he create a breed of dinosaur that pisses heroin? Well all of that will be discovered in play by the masterful performance of your Storyteller!

What's that you say? You're saying you're the Storyteller? Well then, you don't get any of that! Instead you get the satisfaction of making your fellow man happy while listening to their complaints of how you're constantly screwing up and doing a terrible job! Thankfully, this piece of work is modelled to help to navigate the pitfalls and challenges of Storytelling Exalted as because let's face it, no one wants to be a Game Master for a game.

But enough of the introduction, let's continue to the real meat of this article, how to run the game! With this advice your players will go from complaining about your lack of effort to seducing inanimate objects in record time!

You think I'm kidding? Hahahaha... Ah... Mercy.

Sidebar: Beat Me Badly

From this point on, I want people to give their thoughts on how I'm doing here. Do not hold back, as I want this to be the best product this can be.

WTF IS EXALTED AND WHY SHOULD I PLAY IT

A solemn question that most people ask upon any game really. Unlike Dungeons & Dragons or White Wolf's other game "Vampire: The Masquerade", Exalted is a different beast from a lot of other games I find personally. Upon starting in Exalted, it is not rare or uncommon to start at the literal peak of human skill, and it only goes up from there. A common saying is that players in Exalted will often be as powerful at the beginning of the game as some other characters are at the end of other games! Regardless of the exalt type, characters will play as exemplars of humanity, showcasing both the best and worst of humanity.

This doesn't mean Exalted is a power wank fest with nothing bad happening to you or the players ever. Far from it. Exalted is mainly a game about consequences, good and bad. Sharing one aspect with ancient plays, your character has the potential to shape the world with his actions. For example, if he is a legendary General, who leads his men as if it were an extension of his weapon, then people across the land may know of him. You may get an opponent's army to surrender by merely asking, whenever that is because you have yet to lose a single battle, the most powerful warrior in the world known as the Saint of Blades is your personal ally, or that you are known to

leave no survivors. Princes may not only ask you for favors, but may give you lavish gifts just to leave them alone!

In addition to combat however, what Exalted also has strengths in is non-combat. In another character you could be a Merchant Prince so influential that people say you should be called a Merchant Emperor. You master the ebb and flow of the markets with ease, trivially consorting with alien powers like demons or fae to get items and devices that a king would pay handsomely for. Your vast fortune allows you to purchase nearly anything you please, from the finest courtesans, sprawling estates, vast armies, and friends in *very* high places. People clamor for your attention as with a single word you can open a town up to untold riches... or suffocate them by ensuring that no one will trade with them ever again, dooming their civilian population to starvation if lucky, or a Raksha raiding party at worse.

Both of these can be done at character creation by the way. That's why I like Exalted or rather games like Exalted. While combat is a thing, a lot of care went into things that are not related to combat. You're not just superhuman at combat, but can be superhuman at almost *anything*! When you add in things like the higher power level, I find that you're basically playing larger than life heroes in where the very land itself is at stake from the very start of the game, and one has many ways in order to try and do that.

I HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO STORYTELL!

Well we're here to fix that! Whether it's learning new hints or doing a trial by fire, it'll be an experience for us all!

Being a Storyteller, or Game Master as it's called in other games¹, is all about creating the world the rest of the players are going to inhabit. Going beyond just math and numbers printed on paper, but providing the drama, people, locales, and challenges that await your characters.

First however, we'll need to start from the beginning.

- 1) Supplies, you'll need the following:
 - a) Players - Obviously
 - b) A place to game at - Such as at a person's house, a game store, or possibly even some bars allow for such things. Libraries often have meeting rooms which you can reserve for free, making them great places to host games. Other places that could work are group rooms at restaurants or hotels. (Thanks Moonie Leitmotif!)
 - c) Character Sheets - Obvious reasons
 - d) A Game Master Screen - This is so that the players don't see what you're doing; any cardboard blocking the way should do fine, but you can skip this if you want.

¹ This is a "White Wolf-ism". I just use Storyteller and Game Master interchangeably.

- e) Dice (lots) - You're going to need lots of dice, lots. An area about 20 10-sided dice (called d10's for short) are suggested as a minimum, 25 if you want to be on the safe side.
 - i) Electronic Dice Roller - Exalted 3e uses a lot of dice tricks and manually counting the 10s for specific sides may take time. Mike Tilly's online dice roller [here](#) rolls dice, instantly counts successes and arranges dice in order so you know how many 1s or 10s you got. Throw it on an iPad or something in the center of the table and presto. For Android and Apple phones there is also the Onyx Path dice roller. All the feeling of rolling physical dice without the hassle of physically counting!
- f) Additional paper and pencils - For scribbling various notes and keeping pizza orders in check
- g) Exalted 3e Core - No matter who or what you play as, you'll need this. A game isn't a game without people checking the rulebook at least once.
- h) Additional Books (if applicable) - If you're playing any character types other than Solars, you'll want to get those books too.

Supplementary Literature

Given that Exalted 3e tells you to figure it out for yourself Dark Souls style in terms of running a game, and that I'm unprofessional as hell, some other books regarding Gamemastering in general would be nice, but also how to run games such as Exalted well. The following books are what I consider to be some good ways of reading to get a handle on it outside of this document.

- [Exalted: Second Edition Core](#) - Yup that's right, the previous edition of the series. Crack that baby open to the Storytelling chapter and read away. Just ignore anything to do with the combo rules and anything past the Experience section (Which is the last section anyways).
- [Godbound](#) - It's no secret I don't like the OGL Idea Cramming, but goddamn did Crawford do an amazing job with his ideas. Like Exalted, it gives a large scope of what characters can play with and the Gamemastering chapter "Running *the World*" gives specific advice not only on how to run games with such powerful players, but how to make things interesting and challenging for them as well.
- [Sly Flourish's The Lazy Dungeon Master](#) - I really *really* wish I had this book when I first started to run games. The advice this man gives is invaluable on how running amazing games doesn't need hours of preparations and how little is needed to accomplish a lot. The only warning I can give is don't go full bore lazy, as until you're experienced you may still want to stat things out. may want to still stat out things.
- [Any Pre-Published Adventure](#) - Exalted-specific material works best since it fits the game line, but any does in a pinch. The ones made by competent people professionally give a good idea how to design encounters or steal NPC's from, and in a real pinch are good for a beginning Storyteller. Be warned, however, they are rotten in terms of improvisation, and most often it's not a matter of if things will go off the rails for these adventures but when. Still, incredibly useful as a resource for idea-mining.

- [Watch SerAaron's Lore Primer on YouTube](#) - SerAron assembled a lore primer with (sometimes less-than-tasteful), art and a voice over detailing the lore of the Exalted world.
- [I've Started an Exalted Game, Help!](#) - My own personal video series on how to run an Exalted game. The topics I cover in it are largely the same ones covered in here, only I go more in depth about how to do things. I apologize for the first video, I didn't think the music volume would be quite that loud.

Chapter 2: Running a Game

OK, now you've bitten the bullet and decided to run a game, but you still have many questions left before you run your game.

SIDEBAR: Take it easy~

The following may seem a lot for a new storyteller, but the main goal here is to relax and try to have fun with the other players. Just act competent enough and the players should follow. Admit faults when you make them, but otherwise just be relaxed when playing a game and things should be significantly easier for you.

Pre-Game Preparation

So before you can even plan out anything with your players, they will benefit from knowing what to base their characters on. After all, a Pirate King normally doesn't do well in a vast desert! Nor would a joker type character be a good fit in a super serious game. So before the game even begins, here are some suggestions on how to pitch a game to your group of players so they can tailor or narrow down their character concepts:

- **Length:** Are you planning for the game to be a one shot ordeal? A short game over the span of a month? A year? Multiple years? Do you have a set end goal in mind (EX: Overthrowing the Realm)? Or do you just want to continue running until you all feel you've had enough?
- **Subjects:** Are there any subjects within the group that others are uncomfortable with? Sex, rape, drug use, racism, anything such as this is a good idea to lay down before the game begins.
- **Tone:** Is your game a super serious sort of game, where drama takes the stage and epic stakes are in play, or is it a sort of game which is a slapstick comedy and Voltron appears every session or so?
- **Location:** Creation is utterly huge, and thus deciding on a primary direction or location may be within your best interest. Read through the locales of Creation and decide where you want to go, as in General each direction has a certain flavor to it:

- The North: Nordic viking territory with the harsh wilderness beckoning to be explored. Think Skyrim basically if you need a quick example, but it has airships and civil war too.
- The West: Adventures on the high seas and pirates abound, stop by the coastal islands and say hello/enslave the locals!
- The South: Arabian Nights Desert area of Exalted, filled with riches and danger in all directions. Also sand, lots of sand.
- The Scavenger Lands: A war torn area of Creation filled with strife and riches, akin to the warring nations. Great for enterprising warlords. More than half of all Exalted games come from here, and also the most populated Region in all of Exalted.
- The Far East: Further East of the Scavenger Lands lies the endless Forests of the East, where the Great nation of Halta spends its days fighting off the Linowan nations, diplomatic tensions with the fae, and the Dowager's forces all at the same time.
- The Blessed Isle: Home of the Realm and a favorite for high intrigue games. High stakes games of cat and mouse for all skill levels here, but the payoff is worth it as if one controls the Realm they control Creation, and with the Empress missing the Throne is up for grabs...
- **Antagonist(s)**: A good villain or problem the Players can rally against is also a good option. Sometimes a player might want revenge against an Abyssal and his liege for killing her family, other times the enemy might be hidden until the players finally uncover them in an elaborate conspiracy. Sometimes an excellent villain may even develop in play!

We'll go over some of these steps in detail right now.

Length, Location, Tone, and Subjects

Before you start your game (or any game really), you should decide on a few important details. First is what times everyone is available and, secondly, how long everyone can play the game. The amount of time per session varies group to group, but for my own it runs about four hours, others I've seen go on for five or longer. Not only that, you need to determine how long you wish to run the chronicle for. Do you want to run a game for a few weeks, months, a year, or for as long as everyone is interested? Games with shorter durations tend to be more focused towards the point they're trying to solve while longer ones generally take time to smell the roses along the way. It's very important to be upfront with the players about this to know just exactly what they're getting into.

Second is what Tone do you wish to run your game in? Do you want to be a very serious sort of game, or something more lighthearted and goofy? Do you and the PC's want to do something like Kingdom Building or be more like travelers who roam the countryside solving the problems that plague the land before departing once more due to their wanderlust? Are wonders from the First Age more common than normal in the setting or are they so few in number that you can count them

on just two hands? Do you want to do a 'Vanilla' game of Exalted, or something like the Modern, [Heaven's Reach](#), or Gunstar Autochtonia modules²?

Location is important, as each direction of Creation is absolutely huge. Even with wandering games the players are unlikely to leave a single direction because of the sheer volume of things to do and the size it has. *The Realm* and *The Threshold* chapters paint a very good picture of what each place is like without wasting my breath here and what I would consider essential reading. At the bare minimum, a player should read the direction the game is going to take place in. The rest of it is good to get knowledge of what Creation is generally like and what dangers or boons inhabit it.

Lastly, whenever there are any touchy subjects that other players don't feel like addressing in the game. Topics such as rape and in-detail sex are usually considered the norm to omit in games and unless said otherwise generally go without saying. Other topics may or may not include racism, sexism, detailed gore, drugs, and possibly more.

As SiguardCole from reddit says, "One thing that worked for my team on that stage was making a (North American movie rating) analogy. Is this gonna be a PG, PG-13, or R story? What elements would not be present, only happen off-screen, or happen on-screen?" This is what I feel to a good goal to aim for as a wide area for what a group can be comfortable with. Most Exalted stories are very likely going to be PG-13 in rating, quite possibly going into R rating as the story progresses.

Example: *Ron has decided that he wants to take his masochistic impulses to the next level and wishes to run an Exalted game for his friends after their PathDragons game ended a while back. Seeing as how he always wanted to try doing something with the South of Exalted, he decides that he wants to set the game there if that's alright with the players. He'll be doing a 'standard' sort of Exalted game, which shows off some of the nitty-gritty of Exalted but still showing how cool/lucky they are to be Exalts in such a world. In terms of taboo topics, he knows his group is pretty much fine with anything other than the usual rape and in-detail sex, so it's safe to break such a thing to the prospective players and they all agree with the ideas, Ron giving them the rest of the week to read the material and think up any concepts.*

Upon coming back to him, each of the players came up with a character idea. Hank is a person who hasn't played Exalted since 1e, knowing a bit about the fluff but it's been a long time. He wants to try making a Twilight based off Indiana Jones whose speciality is searching for lost and ancient tomes in the South Desert using his sandship and loyal crew. His own fighting style is mainly going to be a ranged focused build using a powerbow and some evocations for it he found online, which the Storyteller approves of.

Amanda is a very experienced person with Exalted, knowing the ins and outs of the system very well. She wants to play as a Night caste Assassin who specializes in the Ebon Shadow style of Martial Arts. While the group may be lacking a Dawn, she more than makes up for it with a razor focus on

² These are alternate dimensions for Exalted games to take place in outlined in Shards of the Exalted Dream. They are fun in a sense, but be warned fluff on them is a little harder to use as you're stuck to a comparatively small section of a book whereas Vanilla has multiple books of information if you need. Unless you use my Heaven's Reach Guide, in which case you have an expanded setting.

knowing exactly what charms she wants. Amanda's backstory of her Night caste hailing from The Lap and wanting revenge on Dragonblooded for killing her parents sounds cliché, but seeing as how Amanda has always been the type to develop her character in play more than via backstory Ron allows it. Amanda surprises the GM, however, when she doesn't pick out an artifact; she claims she couldn't afford it after getting other Merit dots useful for a Night such as Contacts and Influence (The Five Dark Fingers) representing her mysterious organization she is a part of.

The last player is Hibiki, who knows nothing about Exalted or White Wolf products in general. After looking through some of the information in the book, she decides she wants to play something akin to a Charismatic Barbarian Warlord from a Southern Tribe whose dream is to unite all the tribes in the south into a great and powerful nation. She picks a Zenith caste which allows her to easily excel in both social and physical encounters. At character creation, she picks up an Artifact short spear for the melee ability, uses her bonus points to select backgrounds to fill out what she'd consider good for a starting barbarian Warlord (Command, Resources, Language) then considers it ready.

Antagonists

Antagonists are the central part of 95% of RPG's as of today and indeed a major part of how stories are developed. Batman vs the Joker, Holmes vs Moriarty, Gods vs the Titans, all of them pose to be hurdles and obstacles for protagonists to overcome. Regardless of how big or small they are. This won't be a primer of how to create the perfect protagonist, as far more educated people in literature debate such things in literature. But for the purposes of this document I'll bring you over how to make an antagonist in Exalted.

There are a few varieties of possible antagonists that exist within the Realm of Exalted. Most antagonists of the game boil down to fundamentally human ambitions, desires, and reasons. A God may not have the need for food in Exalted, but he'd desire prayer for power and ambition of wanting to see their purview excel. The scope may be different, but ultimately the God desires the same thing as a human does. Even the Primordials, for as Alien as the setting and others try to make them out to be, made the Games of Divinity mainly as a method to entertain themselves with.

What is important however is how these beings will develop over the course of a story. Just as no player character is unaffected by the change around them, no enemy will be unaffected by the actions of players if they chose to interact with them in some way, shape, or form. If a Daimyo who assaulted the PC's armies at the beginning or prelude of a game sees how his normal army dispatches are getting trashed by the players, he could decide to just send the main bulk of his army and his elite troopers, or he could see if he could hire a sorcerer to summon demonic or elemental aid, or just agree to write off the losses for now and try to make a truce with them. The actions, ideals, and knowledge the character possess will lead them to make the decisions they do and are important for an NPC.

If this sounds complex, it is daunting at first but you quickly learn how to get used to it and make shortcuts. Just remember you don't need to make the perfect villain, you often just need to make one 'good enough' for the game itself. This doesn't mean to half ass things, but rather make it

so the antagonists role in the story makes logical sense and has some actual mechanics for when PC's interact with them.

How to make Antagonists

There are a few ways to make antagonists for a game itself. I usually find it useful to follow a small list of how I assign Antagonists, or at least NPC's within a game I make. This is not an order of importance (Though I'd definitely consider the player created ones by far the most important), but rather the steps I use in making antagonists and NPC's within the setting themselves.

1. Player Created Antagonists - By far the most important resource for a Storyteller and Gamemaster of any system. If a player mentions how in their backstory they were wronged by a certain antagonist and wishes. This should set up an immediate Flag in terms of importance and what the player himself wants to deal with in game. This also gives you an immediate starting point(s) for starting to make connections towards other NPC's within the setting. This builds upon what the player gives you making them more involved with the story, and you *always* want that.
2. Current Major NPC's within the Area - This is the second resource you should look into, see if there are any major players within the area and how they relate to each other. Such things may not come into play immediately, but are important to know about. If you're in the West for example, knowing the major powers that exist are Coral and their Pirate Fleet, the Silver Prince and his deathly army, and then Wavecrest and their plethora of resources are good to know about. You can ask how is the NPC tied with this organization or other major people in the area. Are they neutral, hate each other, would die for each other, or is it complicated? You don't need to make a connection to literally everyone, but rather can reveal some information through play or even the players themselves.
3. Storyteller Created NPC's - The last step would be now creating Antagonists and NPC's of your own Creation in the world, taking care to see if they could play into steps 1 and 2 as well. Anything from the Big Bad Evil Guy of your own invention to the throw away villain you play to throw at the PC's like pitching a block of meat into a grinder. From someone with the grandest ambitions to the brilliant plan he has to the idiot darkness controlling Raksha who is just driven by the motivation beyond something to find for eat and lacks any foresight beyond that.

Figuring out how each villain can connect to the other can possibly result in a maddening number of intricate webs that could fill a pin chart that would make a conspiracy theorist jealous. However there is a far saner method of pull this off and also far less work intensive. I'll take a page out from *The Lazy Dungeon Master* and use what I call its "Rule of Three" and 3x5 index cards. That is whenever you're planning out you try to limit it to three major things in order to prevent you and the players from being overwhelmed but also give them enough actual meat or substance in a story in order to latch onto. Each town has three major locations in it, three major possibly friendly NPC's, three potential antagonists, etc... More or less of these can be used and figuring out the exact

number you and your players are comfortable with takes some time, but three is a good number to start off with.

The key to making a good villain is by making intelligent beings who are capable of acting on the world around them; what drives them is their character. The key difference between tabletop gaming and video games is that tabletop games have potentially infinite ways how an antagonist can act within a given context while even the best of video games will find it immensely difficult to come up with more than half a dozen. This doesn't mean that all antagonists have to be brilliant masterminds, far from it. What they need to be is believable, and believable villains need to be rational characters; even if they act from emotion or rage there often needs to be a reason for it. Expanding on what *The Lazy Dungeon Master* says about this subject:

- Good villains have a reason for being what they are. This could be their prime motivation such as seeking to right a wrong made on them long ago, or just something as basic as wanting to build a grand palace and thus begins stripmining the local areas.
- Good villains have plots and plans and are not static. Just because the players do not interact with them doesn't mean that they are frozen in stasis and thus make no actions³. An antagonist could see how PC's are an obstacle to their master plan and attempt to find ways to deal with them from interrupting it. This can include fighting, but it can also involve things such as getting a truce from them or just deceiving them.
- Good Villains are smart, that is they make what they consider to be rational decisions based on the current circumstances and information. They won't continually use the same plan over and over again with expectations that maybe *this* time it'll finally work. If they see something not working then they'll try a different approach. This does not mean antagonists will always make flawless decisions based on hard evidence. If one is angry and they're convinced to attack an enemy, then in that context attacking the enemy seems like an excellent idea.
- A lot of good villains will think what they are doing is right. When Oda Nobunaga ordered every man, woman, and child caught leaving a temple to be slaughtered he did this act on the belief that it was the best thing for Japan. He himself wanted to rule it yes, but also he did what he thought was right. A great villain will actually be right to the point where players find it difficult to critique his own actions when put in his shoes. This can be hit or miss for some people, as if some people wanna play a less serious sort of game then Skeletor "Evil for the sake of doing evil" is fine.

Antagonist Layout Sample

After deciding that the group wants to involve a game in the South and Hank, the group's Twilight, wishes for his Twilight to investigate the legend of the Five Metal Shrike, the Storyteller notices that the player Hibiki with her Zenith caste comes up with the idea that she wanted to use a tale of a ruthless barbarian warlord, Ruggar, that is quickly picking up steam in the South who is currently taking over all the tribes into one large group and Exalted when his group attempted to

³ Unless the players literally do put them in stasis like Han Solo.

assault her own tribe. The Storyteller likes the idea as it not only gives a potential idea, but it he thinks he can also lay out a possible way for how things are set up.

One of his possible major NPC's and possible antagonist would appear to be a strange man with various phoenix related powers named Asakim. He'll claim to be empowered by having Garuda Bird parents, but in actuality he is the manifestation of the Five Metal Shrike itself, wherein an ages old cult dedicated to worshipping the machine the protector of the South which came to them in their most dire time during the Balorian Crusade. A form of Tsukumogami⁴ from Japanese Myth. Asakim himself would appear to be a bit of a loner and not getting along well with others, but seeming to always appear whenever there are supernatural confrontations involving the Undead, the Fae, Wyld Mutants, or hostile spirits themselves. Claiming to beat such monsters for people as nothing more than a hobby, his only goal is to try to subtly misdirect the Twilight when he can in order for him not to learn the key activation phase that would make the Five Metal Shrike obey the Twilight, and thus lose his own freedom. This gives the logic that Asakim himself isn't outright hostile towards the PC's, in fact he'll help them time to time against supernatural threats, but however he wants to maintain his freedom.

Ruggar the Barbarian Warlord however has heard of the tales of the Five Metal Shrike, and through his own Shamans and spies he has heard that it's also possible to control such a machine all for himself. Ruggar is quite a bit more simple than Asakim, in that his goal is to conquer as much land as possible in order to prove the strength and honour of his clan. His goal is twofold now, first that he will use his army and spy network like before to not only raid and pillage but also to find out any information regarding this Legendary Phoenix of the Skies. If he can use use them himself, great. If he can trade them to the circle's Twilight for more information, even better. Second is that his chieftains warn him that fighting the Player Circle head on is suicide. The Zenith herself managed to take out an entire raiding force just by herself when she exalted, much less being able to handle nearly four more of them. Rather they tell him to hold off on a major attack for now and continue to build up his forces, and when they finally get the location of the Legendary Phoenix of the Skies than they'll immediately tip off the Realm that the circle is actually Anathema, and while the circle is fighting off the Wyld Hunt he'll swoop in to finish the Hunt off with his hoard of tens of thousands strong and use the Legendary Phoenix of the Skies to destroy anyone from the Realm who tries to fight him back. If he someone finds it first, all the better, but the likelihood of that happening is very small.

The group's Night caste Amanda is a bit less picky with her own choice in the matter. After having her own her own family killed for punishment for stealing in the Lap, she just developed a bitter resentment towards the Realm and everyone from it. To that end the Storyteller thinks up another great antagonist that could be used here in the form of a Dragonblooded circle led by a Charismatic Dragonblooded known as Cathak Kenshin. Cathak Tenshi's Dragonblooded group and army was sent to the city of Gem in a desperate plea from Gem in order to protect themselves from the barbarian hoard and the Realm saw this as a good way to gain favor. Kenshin herself sees protecting the mortals who cannot protect themselves as a duty for a Prince of the Earth and is one of the main reasons why Ruggar's massive barbarian horde hasn't seriously attacked Gem as of yet. The Storyteller wishes to make some tension here between Amanda's Night caste and the Dragonblooded occupiers

⁴ A form of youkai/spirit which is the manifestation of an object. Google for more information.

who are the main reason that Gem is safe to this day. Maybe Amanda's character will have a small change of heart about all Dragonblooded, maybe she'll decide not all of them are bad, or maybe she'll just decide to dispatch them all because Dragonblooded must die to her. Most ways lead to advance the Storyteller.

Now with all of these ideas floating around in his head, he takes out his index card and just writes a quick few points about each of these major NPC's on one side.

- *Asakim: Tsukumogami of the Five Metal Shrike. Loner who helps engage other Supernaturals as hobby + can assist PC's in doing so. Wants to stop Twilight from learning Five Metal Shrike location and control codes to maintain his freedom.*
- *Warlord Ruggar: Warlord Chieftain of the All-Devouring Horde of Ruggar. Wants Pheonix of the Skies himself, will attempt to steal or bait information from group by any means necessary.*
- *Cathak Kenshin - Leader of the Realm forces in Cathak. Believer in the Immaculate theory and wishes to see humanity flourish. Disgusted by Ruggar and currently protecting Gem from Ruggar's forces.*

The Storyteller is able to then use the rest of the space on the front end of the card for various important notes, such as events or character intimacies.

NPC Template Creation

If you need a good idea on how to make an NPC, whenever it needs be right now or someone more detailed, simply basing them off other characters in fiction, or wholesale ripping them off is fine so long as you can cover for it. This allows you to instantly make a framework for the NPC's when you have someone you know well enough. Best of yet, it requires almost no preparation or forethought once you do this.

Example: The Storyteller had frameworks in mind when he was looking over three of the major NPC's. Asakim is mainly just a thinly veiled reference to Mokou from Touhou, Warlord Ruggar's character of a conqueror is based off of Shao Kahn from Mortal Kombat, while Cathak Kenshin is a very thinly veiled reference to Uesugi Kenshin from history in terms of warrior/general prowess but with the personality from Tenshi from Touhou as he's into that stuff.

If you reading this and don't know the template characters I used as a base, doesn't matter. What matters is you as a Storyteller know the characters, as you're the vehicle that introduces the players to these characters. The only important aspect is to base your characters off of the original and not be a full scale rip off. Using different names is a must, and often if I really want to drive the point across I often flip the gender as that tends to really throw people off.

But presto bango! You now have some character ideas so the characters no longer have to talk to the air in front of them! But now comes the more interesting, and what more people call the harder part: Actually statting them out.

Also as a rule of thumb, don't make NPC's meet face to face with the players unless you are prepared for possible horrible things or even death to happen to them. You never know what could happen, so be prepared for that.

Statting NPC's Out

This is often regarded as a dirty word and probably where a lot of a workload from being a Gamemaster comes in. Unlike other well known game systems, finding some Exalted antagonists can be a bit of an issue. You can give an NPC personality and do fine, but without mechanics you may as well be playing freeform. Thankfully Exalted 3e gives us the Quick NPC rules, and by god are we ever going to abuse the hell out of this. See that one bit in there that says full fledged NPC's should have their own character sheets? Ignore it. I've been using Quick NPC's for years upon years and still am fine off for it. You'll probably need an index card (or two) for charms on more complex characters. For end game tier bosses, you'll probably need a few pages.

For now, let's blaze through some of these ideas in a rapid, bullet like point fashion as they're addressed in the book.

Essence, Health Levels, Health Track, Join Battle

- Essence - Exalts will most often be Essence 1-5 while most spirits will have Essences ranging from 1-7. Essence +6 Exalts and Essence +8 spirits tend to be extremely powerful boss characters who tend not to have a few index cards of information, but rather an entire page or more of powerful abilities even when using shorthand. Such things are best suited for BBEGs, but Exalts of Essence 1-3 and Spirits Essence 1-5 are what I find an 'average' creature in Creation could be expected to have based on my own conjecture.
- Health Levels - Barring any sort of defense the average amount of initiative a person needs in order to one shot the standard 7 health levels exalted dices standard humans is 17-19. Each health level increases this value by an average of 3, meaning 8 health levels takes 20-22 dice of initiative to one shot. Charm values can change this value rapidly as can special abilities, but this is often useful for gauging just exactly how long a fight will go on.
- Mote Pools - All exalts and spirits will tend to have different mote pools, and tracking the different pools can often be a pain in the ass so I'll give some advice. For throwaway or weak essence users such as a Blood Ape or Greenmaw, don't expect them to last long in battle, don't even bother tracking their motepools⁵. Based on mote consumption you could decide by turn 3 or 4 that they mote tap out and exhaust themselves. For more significant opponents (Both in power and/or importance in plot) set their motepool to a flat (Essence x10), all scenelongs costing no motes to activate (They pay other resources as normal), begin the combat with one scenelong up of your choice. For Exalted antagonists this works well, for spirit ones you may need to do some adjusting since their mote pools are so large. You can keep those as they are or adjust to compensate (EX: Octavian's actual motepool is 110, with these rules it'd be 60. To compensate cut all mote values of his

⁵ This is relative to the PC's strength though. If Blood Apes are actually a big threat? Track him. If they're cannon fodder, don't.

charms in half rounded down. Any mote stealing/draining effect has its final result cut in half to compensate and Octavian instead gains +3 motes per turn in combat instead of the normal 5. Its not totally the same, but if you want lower numbers its close enough).

- Willpower - Useful for the automatic success, otherwise just listen to what the book says. If you want a better ballpark, those who are fresh from deep meditation/relaxation have full WP, those who are exhausted in any fashion have 1-3 willpower, while at all other times assume an average of 5.

Dice Pools

The book goes over the details of what each of these dice pools mean. I find these are important to use and to follow. See while a Twilight with INT 5 and Lore 5 with Solar Lore charms will annihilate any sort of Fact roll he decides to use, a Storyteller might be tempted to artificially inflate this value. I'm here to say unless that NPC has a serious reason to increase their stats, I'm telling you to avoid this temptation. Setting all challenges at difficulty 5 eventually is boring as hell, and part of the design mechanics in 3e is that other characters have a shot to make a difficulty 5 roll without needing to sink as much dedication into the craft as the INT 5 Lore 5 charmed out person can do.

There are ways around this problem. First is using penalties to make the problem harder to solve. Maybe the Twilight had access to faulty information to base the fact off of, or maybe he's tired as all hell while being completely drunk at the same time. Such things can make a roll harder to accomplish its own goal.

The other idea to set a high bar for higher tiers of information and capabilities. Before the game look over your players stats and record the higher values of non-combat stats such as Lore or Medicine. The next step is to make up new difficulty levels starting at 6 for these tasks. A Lore roll of +6 might uncover a fact about a Third Circle Demon who has been known to rarely leave hell or barely anyone has studied. A difficulty +10 roll may allow the Lore user to declare biological facts about the Celestial Incarnae or declare facts about the normally unknown entity He Who Waits Behind the Wall⁶. A person with Medicine +6 successes may be able to save a person whose body is now a carrier for the Young of the Scorpion Empire, while those with Medicine +10 successes may even be able to find a way to restore a person who's been soul devoured by the Raksha themselves! You don't need much, and on the bright side you won't be blindsided if a PC asks, "So how many successes do I need for X?" This is what Morke does for his game, and he was one of the creators of Exalted.

Now the quick character guide tells you what values mean what, but I can hear some of you going "...OK how does this relate to how easy or difficult an encounter will be for my players?" This is extremely dependent on other factors, the exact charms an enemy has being one of them. But there is a simple rule of thumb I use for myself when gauging how many dice an opponent should have and how much challenge this would give the players relatively in comparison. Below are the

⁶ HE COMES

amount of dice an Antagonist has compared to a PC and how much of a challenge that'd be *before* charm use.

- -4 or less Dice - Total curbstomp by players. Usually this character doesn't stand a chance or is there to make the players look good.
- -3 to -1 Dice - This opponent can often be bested by simple stunting or a few bread and butter charms. A threat you can't ignore but shouldn't be life or death.
- Equal to +3 Dice - This opponent often tells the players that clever thinking and more charm use is involved in order for the players to come out unscathed.
- +4 Dice or More - This opponent is a serious threat and should be treated as such. Heavy charm use and players being on their A game are involved. Such dice pools are often reserved for BBEG's, Raksha, or Storytellers who know what they're doing. If you need to ask yourself if you're experienced enough to do it, the answer is no.

I may be negative on the last line, but I'm saving you some pain. Trust me I've seen it any game where a Gamemaster thinks one harmless tweak can challenge the players and instead results in a total party kill. Stick with the above and you should be fine. If you have the +4 idea, feel free to ask other Storytellers of Exalted your idea and what they think of it.

Another thing to keep in mind would be what the actual values on stats and the quick NPC dice pools mean. Don't make *every* opponent have the exact same dicepool, that not everyone is going to have a dicepool of 11 for a problem (That is Attribute 5 Ability 5 with a relevant speciality). For mortals only the best of the best can have this dicepool and for Exalts its generally someone who invests heavy dedication in their field. So if your player decides to start a barroom brawl, make the general Bouncers probably have dicepools of 6 in intimidation and fighting stats, if a young spoiled Dragonblooded is involved then ask yourself if he fights much at all and assign him possibly the same amount of dice (before weapon accuracy modifiers), if his much older Immaculate Brother is there than feel free to give him the 11 base pool before modifiers (Dexterity 5, Martial Arts [Fire Dragon] 5, Speciality of Form Weapons).

Soak and Weapon Damage

There are two ways to do this:

- Ballpark how much STA and STR an NPC would reasonably have, then select armour.
- Select an armour then add the NPC's Essence to the soak (Or 3 soak if you suspect the NPC has low soak). Pick out a weapon, assign accuracy based on the reference metric above BEFORE accuracy modifiers, than treat the NPC's essence as their STR.

Unless you're really in a hurry, I'd suggest the first option as it allows a bit more fine tuning. Just note that due to the math of Exalted, having an NPC with a persistent soak (I.E.: One that remains the same via armour and scenelongs charms, not those that are activated via charms) may be difficult for some players to overcome.

Powers

Now we come to the REAL meat of a lot of NPC's in Exalted and often the one with the most headaches involved. But thankfully there are some helpful tips involved to making this process a lot less painful.

- Steal and use powers from anything you can think of. You need quick mechanics for a basic damage adder charm for an NPC, you can take something out from my Alchemicals book and use that in its place with a new coat of paint. With enough paint I'm pretty sure you could get it to appear like a Lunar WELL before their manual comes out.
 - At the time of this writing, a lot of fan conversions for the splats are all out. ~~One Dragonblooded, Two Lunar~~, Two [Sidereal](#), One Abyssal, One complete Infernal, and Two [Alchemical](#) conversions have been released.
- If you go through a rulebook you have for an NPC (Like Dragonblooded) and see how a charm requires a ton of prereqs, feel free to ignore all those prereq's and give those NPC's the charm that fits them. They're NPC's, they're allowed to cheat like that. You can treat them as knowing the relevant charms before that, but if you really want to show off how your Dragonblooded Archery has the Phantom Phoenix charm, who cares about the Whistling Firecracker Prana charm if it's never going to come up in play?
- Need charm ideas for NPC's that follow a strong thematic suit without pouring through charm lists? Try Evocations and Martial Arts. Using these two things already explains volumes about the NPC's themselves before a single word is said. What their mindset is when related to these things, how their view the world, and other things can practically answered by this almost immediately.

Example: *The Storyteller looks over the three major NPC's for his story. Warlord Ruggar is an important figure but right now he thinks the players are not going to encounter him until much later on, so he can delay statting him for the time being.*

Asakim however he suspects will be vital in knowing some stats off of the get go. He suspects that Asakim doesn't interact with humans much with him being a loner, and makes it so his lying capability for him is about a 7 or 8 to show that Asakim can at least misdirect people who try to locate his body and an 11 dice pool in knowing all about First Age artifacts and history in general (He's lived through most of it). For combat the Storyteller thinks that giving Asakim a slightly buffed up version of The Burning Name trait from the sorcery ritual works for him. Most of the other traits can be taken directly from the Garuda Bird's charm list, the Righteous Devil charmset, and finally a watered down version of All of Creation Turns to Ash from the Volcano Cutter for extreme emergencies, in where Asakim can use this charm but in exchange immolates his current body and destroys it. This isn't an issue as a week later Asakim can come back so long as the Five Metal Shrike is intact can get anywhere else relatively quickly by using the Shrike as well. The Storyteller can get around not statting the Shrike by just saying it stays well outside the players reaches if he does use it for travel. Asakim would only risk his true body in battle if something akin to the Balorian Crusade happened again.

Cathek Kenshin is something easier in comparison being a Dragonblooded. The stats for the Immaculate of Fire stats from the book and alter the dice NPC listed dicepools in order fit her character more. If the Storyteller thinks Kenshin's personality doesn't fit a martial art, he could use the experienced Dragonblooded template. In either way, he could pad the character with more charms using [online sources available to him](#), simply picking out five offensive/defensive/war/misc charms can calling it easy. More or less depending on the character

SIDEBAR: Player difficulty vs expectations of in game world

This what I feel to be important and where often some people find a disconnect towards. Some people just like to play characters, pick what they think is cool towards them, and don't pay much attention to stats outside of that. Others realize how the system works, make a character optimized⁷ for it, then often play it not only for the role playing but also to be challenged using the extent of this system. The former runs into a problem when you make an enemy is too strong. This can happen with some enemy you see statted online (Who originally made it to challenge optimized players) or enemies who are not "White Wolf" statted and have very high stats. Viator of Nullspace is a good example of this, as this is a BBEG so strong using normal rules that players *need* to make a loose build in order to defeat something like that monster legitimately (That is, without use of plot fiat or McGuffins). However the people who optimized however may be very bored when enemies from the White Wolf statted enemies fail to provide challenge to them.

The end solution to this is just basically knowing your players and doing something you all find enjoyable together. There is no right or wrong way to do this, just that some people have a different idea of what they find entertaining compared to other people. It may be difficult to gauge a challenge for the circle as a new Storyteller, but hopefully the advice I provided should be enough. If one player in your group is very knowledgeable about Exalted and you're very unsure and cannot get a hold of other people, ask him to look over any statted enemies you may come up with. The surprise value may go down, but at the same time it helps make a more enjoyable experience for everyone in the area. An example I can think of is involving two Dawns I played in two different games. First was a bit more social and my Dawn invested about 90% of the XP into combat. A few other players were worried that I was bored, but I still had a good time by just having enough input in talking scenes. The other is where most combat would end in the first round for me, and other players enjoyed this as they could do whatever they wanted from other charm trees.

IF YOU ARE A NEW STORYTELLER REVERSE STAT TRANSLATING THINGS FROM EXALTED 2E/1E, DO NOT USE THE DEATHLORDS OR THEIR IDEAS. The Deathlords from those games are horribly statted going from a realm of "Fun challenge for all" into "It takes 256 or so ticks in order for us to actually be able to hurt it"⁸. It's easier to throw everything about them stat wise in the trash and go about it from scratch. Some Solar charms for them can be used, but you need to be

⁷ I consider Optimization different than minmaxing. Optimization for me is picking a Dexterity 5 Melee 5 Speciality swords character yes, but picks the charms he thinks are neat/fits a theme and generally stays away from things which don't fit. Minmaxing is doing literally whatever you can to ensure your character is the strongest possible in the field without any other considerations.

⁸ This isn't an exaggeration.

careful you can put on them. If you need something to compare it against, use Viator of Nullspace from the Autochtonian Compass from 2e, which is something far more sane and actually beatable through significant effort rather than just being straight up unwinnable and unfair.

SIDEBAR: Player comparisons

In some other games on the market there are ways to bring players in line with each other remotely. Fate uses the skill pyramid and aspect stacking, DnD has Base Attack Bonus, so on and so forth. White Wolf games are a bit tricky as they have absolutely none of these safeguards in place whatsoever. If one player's base combat pool (That is, attribute + Ability before any modifiers) is 4 or less than another players, then unless that player knows what they're doing then one battle that is going to be easy for one player is going to be incredibly hard for another. Accuracy bonuses from weapons help solve but do not eliminate it. I maintain that you don't need much investment in combat in order to be proficient at it in Exalted 3e, but this is probably the minimum bar. Unless your players are experienced, you may want to approach the players about this or invoke some houserules to level this disparity. If this doesn't work, the only option may be tailoring combat for the PC's, letting the strong player tackle the strong enemies. This is not foolproof however, because if the strong PC fails then the rest of the PC's are probably left with an opponent they have little hope of winning against.

Again, if you need an average ballpark metric, one combat charm per three/four non-combat charms is a good yardstick in order to keep up in combat. Some things to this however are the exception (Crane Stylists for example, may be just happy only knowing Crane and a few dodge/resistance charms).

In areas outside combat however things are usually far less dire, as combat constantly carries the threat of death/injury at any encounter whereas most Lore rolls may not be life or death unless you're attempting to deactivate First Age security bots. Don't worry about this section as much persay.

Detailed Enemy Creation Sample Walkthrough

NOTE: This was written before I used the South game example, and I'm lazy to localize but it provides a very detailed process of statting up an enemy regardless.

OK, so I want to make an enemy that my players can possibly encounter. Seeing as they're in the Northwest in the Linowan territories you try wracking your brain for a possible powerful creature that can provide a challenge to the players. So what so of interesting enemy can we create that isn't just raw numbers? Well first, I go with what seems cool, and a cool enemy idea off the top of my head is the Hydra from many fantasy stories and other tabletop games. It's also an enemy that sounds simple enough to create that doesn't involve the usage of charms or other such powers, so we'll just use that.

The first step is to visualize the creature and what it can do. Not anything related to crunch, but rather a basic description of some of its abilities, features, and description. For us Hydra's are fairly basic in terms of enemy description: a multi-headed lizard that is known to eat anything unfortunate enough to cross its path. Abilities such as regeneration and poison blood are other common traits, but tend to vary from source to source, so for now let's keep it simple at first and nail down the most important feature of a hydra: the multiple heads. Since this is the main feature, we should tackle this first, as nearly all of its other stats will be balanced around this.

Now doing something like making each head a separate entity with its own initiative track may sound like the easiest method, but it is far from that. Remember that even so much as two initiative tracks makes one a very fearsome opponent. Which may be fine for some final boss, but as something that isn't a main boss it's easier to ditch the multiple attacks. So then how do we represent the multiple heads of the hydra, attacking multiple times over and overwhelming the defenses of those who fight against it? Thankfully that answer is already somewhat solved for us in the fact the Battle Group system exists. We can create a very devastating opponent if we give it the ability to make Battle Group attacks as a separate thing in addition to its main head attack. A good balance seems to be letting the number of heads represent size +1, and making it start at Size 1 or 2 seems to be a good start. The players however may decide to ignore the head and just go straight for the body, in which case we can give the players a reason fight the heads and not just simply ignore them all. The heads using a constant Defend-other action reflexively on the body at all times seems to work, which can only be broken when the heads have the size depleted.

With that in mind, I'll give it a stab and give this a shot as a unique abilities the hydra possesses.

Limitless Hydra Heads: The Northeastern Hydra is said to possess a limitless number of heads, a unique mutation spurred on by the Wyld whereas the Hydra will grow more heads the more endangered the beast currently is. Each Hydra has at minimum two heads from the moment it is born and learn very quickly early on how to overwhelm opponents with their heads working in furious harmony. In addition to its normal initiative track, the hydra also possesses a Battle Group on itself at all times with the Battle Group representing the multiple heads. The size of this group starts at 1 and uses the traits of the Hydra's bite for its own attack and for adding the battle group bonuses. It uses the Hydra's own main initiative for determining turn order, and may attack before or after the Hydra on the hydra's own turn. It may delay its action or spend its turn aiming by paying the appropriate initiative, but it cannot use initiative for things such as gambits. Size applies as normal to all stats *except* for soak. If the battle group composed of the Hydra's heads has its size reduced to 0, then that represents all of the heads either being sliced off or beaten to a lifeless pulp apart from a single remaining head (Which still may act as if it were a normal character). However this state of vulnerability does not last forever, for approximately (Old size) turns later a new batch of heads will burst forth from the Hydra's shoulder area. These will either sprout from the neck of severed heads or new heads with burst forth, consuming the useless heads in an orgy of bloodshed and violence in which new heads will quickly sprout. The new batch of heads will increase the size

of the hydra's head battle group by +1 up to a maximum of 5 and completely refill its magnitude. Each increase of size representing an exponential increase of heads where size 2 may be 5 heads while size 5 could be something akin to 36 or more. These heads do not suffer rout and cannot be targeted by command or rally actions. Upon reaching Size 5, depleting the size of the Hydra heads down to zero does not grant it any additional size, but rather additional heads are presented as their drill going from poor to average, and if it happens against increasing their might by +1.

Multiheaded Shield: The heads of the hydra are not just used for great offense, but defense too. The hydra's own main body is considered to be under a persistent defend other action from the Hydra's heads, which unless the hydra is on its last head then it instinctively will defend itself from harm using such heads. The only lapse this defense has is when the Hydra is waiting for its heads to generate, leaving its exposed body vulnerable to attacks. Upon reaching size 2, the Hydra is considered to be able to see 360 degrees around itself, making sneaking up on it to stab it in the back significantly more difficult.

This seems well and good, but what about people who try to shortcut the hydra fight by saying it starts with more heads? Well that's fine. If the Storyteller feels it's better for a Hydra to start off at size 2 or 3 then that's fine, but having a size 5 Average Drill +1 might battlegroup at all times is very strong, especially when it's only one stomach to feed. We could make it so that it does something like having all excess heads die off after some time, so I can think of one of two possible ways to help remedy this problem:

Limitless Hydra Heads: (Add for option 1) While this does give the hydra a significant increase in power, this increase in power cannot be permanent as the amount of food a hydra would need to sustain so many heads would be astronomical. Thus excess heads are over the course of a day deprived from any nutrition and will slowly die off, the hydra biting off the heads once they die in a special way that does not allow for regeneration. Consider the hydra losing a size reduction of heads by one every two hours until they're back down to size 1.

Limitless Hydra Heads (Add for option 2): While this does give the hydra a significant increase in power, the nutrition cost for doing so is immense. A hydra of size 4 is considered to be a mighty predator, but now needs to be on the hunt for most of the day. A hydra with so many heads that it is considered to have might 1 may very well be almost unstoppable, but it is required to eat almost constantly to the point where even going to sleep would be almost starving itself by the time it woke up. Such hydra's are not long for this world since this level of food consumption cannot be maintained indefinitely, thus the hydra will die of starvation shortly after such an event. Starving hydra's who are about to die are said to constantly devour their own heads, consuming their own poisoned flesh until even they succumb to its effects.

Option 1 makes it a bit friendlier in case the player wants a hydra familiar, while option 2 makes it so that Hydra's are good enemies but are very throw away. But in the meantime we'll assign him a statblock. Since a Hydra is a water based predator such as the River Dragon, we can use that to help share some of the same stats for the quick reference block. The only difference would be while the River Dragon is big and strong, the Hydra relies more on its multiple heads to deal damage, therefore we can just subtract some dice from the Feats of Strength section or just just ignore it. This part is a fairly easy cut and paste job.

Hydra

Essence: 1; **Willpower:** 5; **Join Battle:** 5 dice

Actions: Feats of Strength: 8 dice (may attempt Strength 5 feats); Intimidate: 5 dice; Resist Poison/Disease: 8 dice; Senses: 5 dice (see Keen Nose and Night Vision); Stealth: 5 dice (see Undertow Menace); Tracking: 6 dice (see Keen Nose)

Resolve 3, Guile 1

Now comes the actual number crunching for the battle itself. Even experienced Storytellers will often be wondering what the exact amount of dice they should give to an opponent in regards to accuracy, damage, and defense. The short answer is basically use the guide I mentioned above, but having literally every NPC tailored to match the Player's stats would be a bit unexpected in a living breathing world. I mean just because my Essence 3 Solar has 16 dice to attack easily doesn't mean that even rank and file bridands should have 11 dice to hit before accuracy bonuses. Remember for a mortal a person with Attribute 5 and Ability 5 is exceeding rare to find in a mortal. Exalts may get such a thing easily, but Intelligence 5 and Lore 5 is an intellect on par with Einstein when it comes to math, a true revolutionary and pioneer. This would make sense for a legendary hydra (And possibly even having higher scores), but right now we want to keep the head stats from being too insane.

Again, using something similar as a base, we can take some of the River Dragon's stats and just focus on speed a tiny bit moreso than power. We can take those dice subtracted out from the Feat of Strength stat and throw them into combat movement speed. The bite damage will be less as well, but given that the Hydra will be attacking twice per round (and quite possibly everyone at once) this is more than adequate.

Defense is about the same, but remember the **withering** and **decisive** split. **Withering** attacks may be easy to land even if the opponent has a defense of 7 fairly reliably. Trying to break that same defense using a **decisive** attack pool however is much harder in comparison. Thus when deciding what sort of defense for opponent's keep this in mind. Also try to give some opponent's a lopsided defense, as in make them proficient in either dodge or parry while not as good in the other.

This rewards players who take charms which say “Unblockable” or “undodgeable”, making them feel this purchase was worth it.

Next comes soak, hardness, and health levels. These are fairly important, in fact I consider them moreso than defense. A high soak means very specific builds can blast through it, high hardness means that an opponent *must* possess an initiative with an amount equal to that hardness before even thinking about an attack, while health levels are health, but if you want a quick formula than on average it takes 3 initiative to do one health level of damage on average. Meaning even just a single ox-body technique for a Solar at Stamina 1-2 takes the amount to knock them out in one hit from 17-18 initiative to 22-24 initiative. For enemies especially this can add up greatly over time.

To break it down, the original soak, hardness, and health levels of a River Dragon meant it was a pure strength based tank that could batter down anything in front of it with raw strength. I tend to think of this Hydra more of a woodpecker that just so happens to be giant and eats people. Not only that, but he has a constant ablative shield that people will need to get through before people can hit him reliably (Remember, the heads constantly use defend other on the body, so this will effectively double the parry defense). Therefore we should lower the health levels of the Hydra significantly along with the soak and hardness. If you want a good ballpark of how much soak to give an opponent, follow this little guide:

- For less durable opponents, give a soak equal to $2 + (\text{Light mundane armour}) + \text{Essence}$. If increasing health, do it by +2 health per investment
- For medium durable opponents, give a soak equal to $3 + (\text{Medium mundane}) + \text{Essence}$. If increasing health, give it +3 by investment.
- For people who just won't die, give them a soak equal to $4 + (\text{Heavy Mundane}) + \text{Essence}$. If increasing health, give it +4 per investment with each investment contributing towards a -0 health level as well.
- Artifact armour may be used instead if the Creature is renowned for toughness, such as the hide of a River Dragon, you may increase by an additional 1-3 points
- If you think a creature should have hardness, give it an amount equal to half the soak, rounded down. If you're using artifact armour stats, use that hardness instead.
- Avoid using any other powers that would increase soak

Health levels is a bit easier. Remember the base starts at seven health levels. If this is a singular, powerful opponent who cannot use magic than adding +6 health levels should be enough to challenge players, bringing the total amount of health to 13 health levels. In terms of what sort of health to assign, make it so big hardy monsters have more health levels in the -1 or -2 range with some smatterings of -0. Since our Hydra has more of a medium toughness, we can say he has a single -0, but most of the other health levels are down in the lower numbers. Remember that death is scary, and many creatures may also attempt to flee once they reach a certain health level condition or some other requirement is met.

Combat

Attack (Bite): 11 dice (Damage 11, minimum 2), Tags: Reach

Combat Movement: 8 dice

Evasion 0, Parry 4

Soak/Hardness: 9/4

Health Levels: -0x2/-1x4/-2x5/-4x2/Incap Hydra's will flee if they suffer 8 or more levels of damage or it means their head count would bring them to roughly size 4 (Where it starts to become difficult to live). A starving Hydra however will abandon all pretense of safety if it means a chance to eat.

But wait, I remember how battle groups calculate their magnitude, which is basically Health Levels + size. If this Hydra has size one then it means nearly 14 withering damage is needed to reduce the size by the first time and only increasing from there. At Size 5 this represents a soak increase of +5 and a total of 70 withering damage needed before all the heads are off! This can be fine for parties who are really focused towards combat, but for the majority of people who play or have less optimized parties, we'll need to reduce it a bit more. Even then I'll suggest reducing it as blasting past 70 units of health can be quite a slog, so we can just make this small edit:

Health Levels: -0x2/-1x4/-2x5/-4x2/Incap Hydra's will flee if they suffer 8 or more levels of damage or it means their head count would bring them to roughly size 4 (Where it starts to become difficult to live). A starving Hydra however will abandon all pretense of safety if it means a chance to eat. *Note that for purposes of determining Magnitude, a Hydra's health level amount is considered to be about 10 instead*

Awesome, everything is looking just about fine statwise and it supplements the main feature of our statted monster very well, so now all that's left to do is just assign it a few more traits, special attacks, and abilities which could be considered best fitting for it given its history and difficulty.

Merits

Bottomless Lungs: A Hydra can hold its breath underwater for fifteen minutes before it needs to surface. In a scene of combat or intense physical exertion, it may hold its breath for the entire scene, but must then surface at the end of the scene.

Keen Eyes + Blood Smell: River dragons apply the double 9s rule on Perception-based rolls made using sight. In addition if a quarry is bleeding, it doubles 9s on rolls to smell them too.

Exalted Healing: Hydra's regenerate from their wounds very, very quickly.

Poison Body: The blood of a Hydra is one of the most potent venom's in the East, and many creatures avoid preying on Hydra's specifically for that purpose. Young Hydras have the first dot of this merit always. More experienced and older Hydra's tend to have the two dot merit of this ability, poisoning anyone with a successful **decisive**

Night Vision: Hydra's can see in dim conditions as though they were in broad daylight, and reduce the difficulty of Perception-based checks made in deeper darkness by one.

Undertow Menace: The Hydra gains double 8s whenever it attempts to establish Stealth while underwater. Additionally it does not count waist high water as difficult terrain, treating it as if it were normal terrain.

In addition, one can add additional special attacks to the Hydra as well. These are great if you want to dial a difficulty up beyond just raw numbers. Here are a few of them I can think of, some off the top of my head and others stolen from Dungeons and Dragons 4th Edition.

Special Attacks

Hydra Fury: Instead of using its heads to attack targets all around the Hydra at once, more cunning or intelligent Hydra's may use the number of heads to overwhelm a single unlucky opponent. The Hydra makes a single attack against an opponent using Head based Battle Group and applies an amount of onslaught equal to the size of the current battle group. If the attack the battle group did hit and did damage, than the Hydra does an additional amount of post-soak **withering** damage or if a single willpower is paid, a **decisive** attack that does additional damage equal to the threshold successes on the attack roll, maximum of the Hydra's size.

Rampage: Upon reaching the -2 health levels, the Hydra may immediately make an attack against every opponent in range of its heads with its Head based battle group. This does not consume his action for the turn.

Threatening Reach: The Hydra's heads are extremely long, more often than not easily able to get the better of opponents who foolishly charge in. In order to move away from a Hydra, one must use a disengage action when they are either close or short range of him. In addition, the head with the active initiative track may attack out to Short range, but the Head based battle group may only attack in close range.

And aside from the fluff, we are basically done creating our enemy. This may seem fairly complex, but as you become experienced with a game you should be able to make an NPC in only a few minutes. Quite often all you need is a currently existing enemy as a template, a few minor additions and presto you're all done.

COMPLETED HYDRA STATBLOCK HERE

So if one wanted to do something for their North game, and they wanted a memorable enemy to fight while flying across the Northern lands, the players flying over in their airship while you and the Raksha stare at the laughing players. But don't worry, we have plans for players who make use of flying, evil plans that can only be cooked up by a Storyteller on Acid and the twisted minds of a Raksha. A Canadian Goose is scary enough, but what happens when we make it even more dangerous? Using the template of the Hydra we can make a flying, squawking being of pure hatred and malice towards all those that dare intrude upon its land: The Dire Goose.



My god, how horrifying.

If one wishes to make this creature into a legendary beast, you don't need to do everything from scratch. Indeed you only need to make a few changes:

- Willpower can go as high as 6 or 7
- Join Battle gets bumped up a bit to 10, base initiative now 5.
- Abilities increase a bit:

- Feats of Strength goes to 12 (May attempt Strength 7 Feats of Strength), gains Incredible Might from Tyrant Lizard Stat Block
 - Intimidation goes to 8 dice, I mean Jesus Christ look at that thing!
 - Senses go up to 7 die
- Resolve and Guile increase by 1 each
- Bite is now 13 accuracy, damage 13 minimum 3
- Defense is now Evasion 3 (in air), Parry 5
- Now has access to the two dot version of unusual hide to show its steel like feathers with one more for good measure. Soak/Hardness is now 12/6
- Health levels now -0x3/-1x5/-2x6/-4x2/Incap and will not stop until the opponent is dead. For determining magnitude, a Dire Goose's Health level is considered to be 13 instead
- Merits
 - Flight is now gained and gains a +2 bonus to combat move speed while in the air. There is no escape.
 - Bottomless Lungs is replaced with a special merit that allows it ignore all Environmental hazards based on cold weather and ignores two points of penalties related to cold weather
 - Poison Body is now level 5, with its blood being a potent acid that melts mundane weapons to scrap if a single level of lethal damage is done to the Dire Goose while using it, those who attack barehanded and deal lethal suffer an acid bath Environmental Hazard immediately upon damage and continues to burn until the player successfully passes a Resistance roll
 - Undertow Menace is refluffed, and treats waist high snow as normal terrain.
 - Gains the Legendary Size merit
 - Gains Limited Regeneration, recovers a single point of health whenever it recovers from a crash or regrows all of its heads
- Special Attacks
 - Limitless Hydra Heads now start the Dire Goose at a size 3 battle group. Additionally when growing new heads it treats the turns needed to regenerate the heads as (Old size - 3). Lastly it no longer starves based off the number of heads as they always fall off over time. The creature respire off hatred alone.
 - Gains Terrifying Dragon Roar, which must be made using its original head
 - Gains Relentless Hunger, in which any damage to a battle group or attack renders one incapacitated and dies, than those people are instantly devoured
 - Threatening Reach now allows all attacks to hit out to short range, even the Head based battle group. It is a literal walking army.
 - Rampage is now activated upon reaching any new health level category, though if one punches through multiple categories at once (EX: from -0 to -2) than it only makes one attack.

A link to the full sheet of the Dire Goose can be found [here](#) for your viewing pleasure.

How to Design an Encounter

So you now have your players, NPC's with proper motivations/reasons and actual stats, but now we actually need to plan out the encounter. After all most encounters don't happen in a featureless white room devoid of any major features. No things happen all the time, evolve and change over the course of a scene.

The three major types of scenes that I know of Exalted are Combat, Social, and Miscellaneous.

SIDEBAR: DESCRIBING THE SCENE

As a Storyteller, you're going to be describing scenes constantly, so there is the question of how one should describe scenes well enough so that enough information to the players are given but at the same time avoiding being overly long-winded about it. To be honestly fair this something I feel I haven't mastered myself after more than decade of doing it. If you want a quick trick however, appealing to the senses always works. In addition to describing any major things in a scene, try to describe also how the area looks in general, how it smells, humidity, basically appeal to at least two other senses other than sight.

Example: A hooka den in the Nexus Firewander District, a lot of people appearing burnt out on both jobs and drugs, players are looking for the owner for reasons (any reason).

Description: As soon as you thought the air quality couldn't get any worse in Firewander you enter the Poppy Seed hooka den. Your vision is nothing but a clouded haze with all of the thick smoke in front of you, the shockingly bold smell of drugs assaulting your nostrils while the faint smell of people breathing in their hooker smoke can be heard all around. From what you see, Emerald Lily doesn't appear to be here, but from the hazy silhouettes you see near the back of the room you can see some bouncers. From a casual glance these overmuscled guards are the only official looking people you see, so asking them for information seems to a better start than asking those around you who appear more than burnt out on drugs, their jobs, or something else far worse altogether.

The Role of Mystery in an Adventure

In a [TED Talk](#), JJ Abrams said that mystery is the fuel for imagination. You may be tempted to over explain things, but the point is you don't always have to. People become more interested when they don't know things, they have a desire to learn and experience more of this magical fruit you are selling. Rather than having a hard ironclad answer prepared for some supernatural phenomena, let it hang. If a player really wants to know about, Lore rolls can fill in the blanks as needed. This is why I find it important not to overplan things, as when the group can develop an idea collectively together, I often find this shows a stronger base interest in a game.

The balancing point to this however is don't get lazy for it. If a player gets a really good Lore roll to learn something, give him information that's relevant or useful at that current time and try not to over explain things. If things are done right the player themselves can fill in the blanks. On the other hand you shouldn't complete skimp out on giving any information. Constantly pulling people's yolks will get tiresome and they'll either become disinterested or rip open the mystery box by force. Like everything regarded to Storytelling, it is an art one needs to learn over time.

Just when you finally explain things, don't fuck up like LOST did.

Combat Encounters

Just running a plain white room encounter in Exalted is not only boring, but it rarely happens. Sure insulting a Delzahn Noble and then having a melee fight inside of a sand circle drawn on the ground can happen, and in this case it should play out even if the player is laughably stronger than the opponent. As Exalted is a game about consequences, even this white room battle has some considerations about its aftermath. If the player puts on a show and narrowly beats the Noble the Noble may consider that he lost fair and square, if the player utterly humiliates him in battle than he may seek revenge and pull strings to make it so that any business the players have in the area is far more complicated, or what if they flat out kill the noble and now have to deal with a very angry and very influential noble who puts out a price on the player's head! These are the kind of things one will need to consider almost constantly for any given battle.

Planning out a combat encounter may sound it takes a lot of work, but most of it will come from antagonist creation. There are a few questions and steps that I usually follow with each encounter though. First is the antagonists themselves (Which we dealt with statting up already), second is the environment it takes place in, and third is what the objective of the encounter is supposed to be for the PC's and the NPC's involved.

Spicing up an environment to give it substance and intractability may seem to be difficult, but even just a few aspects added to it can improve a scene considerably. Think of it like decorating a home. A room may be barren at first, but even just adding a few things improves the mood of the room immensely. If you have the luxury of planning out an environment in advance, think of some things that are in the environment as static scenery, things that are there to mainly look pretty but could also provide cover in a pinch.

Second are hazards and obstacles, anything that could be a danger to people on the battlefield or players that needs to be dealt with. This could be anything as simple as it being very windy and giving a penalty to any ranged based roll, hurricane force winds that force a Dexterity+Athletics or Stamina + Resistance roll each turn in order to remain balanced and makes ranged attack rolls much harder, loose sand below your feet making it hard to stand on the ground, or the all time favorite of a house being on fire that keeps on getting progressively worse which makes the encounter have a time limit for most people.

The last thing you need to ask is what the objective for the encounter is for both the PC's and any antagonists/NPC's involved. This may be "Kill the other dudes and keep myself alive" yes, but there could be other reasons for combat to resolve sooner. Perhaps dialogue opens in combat and the opponents stand down, summoned demons bound to guard an area suddenly stop attacking the players once they leave the area they're duty bound to protect, or that the NPC's/PC's have made off with the McGuffin and now further combat is pointless to continue or it would be far better to regroup. Keep in mind the people centric view of the setting. Yes a warrior may desire an honorable death in combat and would never consider surrendering, but for a person who has a family back home and doesn't like pain? He may toss in the towel upon getting hit with a decisive attack or noticing that his opponent has such an extreme advantage that he's never going to recover from it.

But the golden rule I try to take out from this is to make sure that everything has something to do it in these tense moments. It doesn't matter if they always take it, but the important thing is that it's there. Tense moments are basically times when the PC's feel their characters to be at actual risk in the world or something they care about/involved with are in serious danger.

If you're forced into a battle quickly and without warning, then quickly make note of the surroundings. See if you can figure out if any complications can arise from the surroundings (Attacking the king in the king's room would normally lead to reinforcements quickly from the guards outside). Don't try to shoehorn things into a combat unless you feel the opponent would've been the type to plan for such a thing and add them in organically. Such as a paranoid king probably setting up traps in his throne room, but if caught while being transported in his royal carriage than he'll likely have no such trump cards at his disposal.

Example: *Ron the Storyteller is now planning what he is considering one of the first big battle encounters. His plan is that demons summoned by Ruggar's Sorcerers are tasked with making a trap and killing the PC's while at the same time attempting to get away with the Twilight's current notes he has on the Five Metal Shrike. Seeing how Hank and Hibiki's characters are compassionate people he plans for this encounter to a tough moral choice. While staying inside of Gem, they will make it so that the hotel they were staying in 'suddenly' caught fire while they were away on business. The players, unable to resist the clamoring cries for help that those currently caught inside of the burning place would spur them to action. Hank can use his knowledge about fire and even his bureaucracy charms to help ensure that help arrives smoothly and on time, Hibiki the Zenith can describe herself smashing through walls in order to get to the civilians sooner, while Amanda runs into the building in order to get the momento that her parents left behind for her. The demons would spring their trap the very second the PC's get far enough into the building where escape becomes difficult (And ideally if someone gets to the room the PC's were staying at). When the demons start attacking, they'll also try to pin the the civilians inside of the building as well, and while the players themselves may have smoke countermeasures the civilians are not so lucky! Add in the fact the fire is raging on (which the demons seem immune to) make it all the more complicated. The demons plan also remains the same in that if Hank the Twilight remains outside, a shadow demon will try to steal the notes from his backpack when he's busy helping with the firefighting, if he jumps in to join the combat he'd also attempt to steal it combat after an opponent lands a grapple gambit on him. If the players actually flare then it becomes*

more of a pro for the demons, who are aware of the players Exalted status and would gladly do a public demonstration of their exposure as anathema. The demons themselves are nothing special, just Blood Ape variant that is highly resistant to flame, Garda Birds made into a type of demon based on the Green Sun of Malfestas, and one sneaky shadow demon who doesn't have much at combat but is great at ambushing, disguises, stealth, and stealing who is in charge of stealing and getting away with Hank's notes. The outcome for this could happen in many different ways, such as the entire town being thankful for their heroes, possibly solid confirmation that Anathema are in the city for the Dragonblooded currently protecting the city, the current ruler of the city (The Despot) possibly seeking backroom deals for their good work or demanding they leave due a botched rescue, etc...

Scene Setpieces

What's that you're saying? "Help, I'm creatively bankrupt and need ideas to spice up my encounter!"? I'm happy to help.

Combat Setpieces

1. The environment itself poses a large challenge and the battle takes place while being tested by them. If no earlier rolls to help against the environment have been made roll STA+RES at a difficulty set by the storyteller (Difficulty 1 for long travels across civilized territory, difficulty 5 for the harsh deserts of the South). Failure means you're a -2 exhaustion penalty and are treated as having a minor intimacy towards food/water/rest. A botch subtracts -2 successes and having a major intimacy towards food/water/rest and require you to get these soon.
2. The ground is loose or shaky, making movement a bit more difficult. Apply a -1 penalty to any rush or disengage action for things such as loose sand. A -3 penalty and -1 penalty to defense can be applied to something like violently rocking ships or very slippery floors, to -5 for frictionless surfaces.
3. The building that you're in is on fire, and you're sure there are innocent people somewhere inside of it that will be burned alive unless something is done.
4. Arrows constantly rain down from the sky, constantly inflicting what is considered a -2 onslaught penalty on all targets not within cover. If defense dips below a certain number, the target is immediately hit by a stray arrow which is resolved as an automatically successful attack from an enemy battlegroup.
5. Environmental hazards line the area and are ready to lance out at a moments notice towards the unguarded. If defense dips too low, apply an environmental hazard against a target immediately.
6. A gate to another dimension has opened and very angry and nasty things are pouring out from it. Treat as an enemy battlegroup that automatically succeeds in rallying for numbers every turn and increases in size until a certain number is reached.
7. The area is littered with traps set by a Sorcerer or craftsmen. Wandering into a trap without knowing its there counts as an ambush the first time it happens in a scene (surprise attack from then on). Traps automatically activate once PC's get in a certain zone for them.

8. The space in the area is unstable, allowing for two spots which are technically long range can be counted as close range for purposes of combat. For extra difficulty, the opponents know exactly where these places are whereas the PC's need to find them manually.
9. Being underwater.
10. The battle takes place over the caldera of a volcano on top of a flimsy bridge, or really any high height.
11. The battle takes place in the middle of a volcano. In addition to the high amounts of heat, the only safe platforms are cooled pieces of magma to fight on top of. Don't ask how people survive just by standing there, just know that it sounds awesome and you should therefore ignore that question.
12. The battle takes place in the middle of a crowded city.
13. The battle takes place where the thickest place to stand on barely fits one's own feet. Balance rolls are needed and jumping/swinging is often needed to move a range brand effectively.
14. The enemy wishes to engage in a long term assault against the PC's in waves and thanks to various methods (Such as dematerialized spirits, a sorcerous location working over an area, spies everywhere with efficient communication networks) are constantly reporting where the PC's area.
15. A hurricane is ravaging the field and you're now fighting in it. Environmental hazards are constantly applied towards all those in the area, balance is needed to fight on top of spinning rooftops, ranged attacks have lots of penalties.
16. An Obelisk of Light is overseeing an area. A turn spent without being in cover shows the tip of the Obelisk glowing red, a second turn spent represents the Obelisk immediately making an attack against the player. For more threatening/dangerous/'fuck you' situations, the attack automatically hits with a threshold of 0 for heavy crossbow weapon with a minimum damage of 7 withering (lethal damage in crash).
17. The combat takes place in a room where the walls and/or ceiling are slowly coming together threatening to crush the players.
18. A healing presence is on the field for specific creatures. A control node could make it so automatons can piece themselves together ceaselessly like the Golden Army in Hellboy, a necromantic McGuffin regenerates any ghost within its range while exposing them to the madness of the Neverborn, etc...
19. Your game's version of Ridley suddenly appears mid-scene, deciding now is a good time to get rid of his PC Rivals.
20. Supernatural darkness blankets the area, aggressively snuffing out any source of light within the area. A torch only emits enough light to see a foot in front of it, while other directed sources of brighter light (EX: Handheld floodlight) only go into short range. Anima banners illuminate out to close range easily, but unless +5m per turn are spent on fueling it the darkness will dim an anima banner by one step per turn. Other senses will be needed to navigate the darkened land. Is that so~?

Tips and Tricks for Faster Encounters

Want to make encounter faster and smoother for all involved? Here are some helpful hints and tricks.

- **For Players** - With the wealth of charms at your disposal in 3e it can be overwhelming, but in the end most people will actively use a few workhorse charms. If you have some trouble wondering what to do in combat, make a small memo or notecard for specific 'charm combos' and their usage. For example, if you're a Brawler using Fist of Iron Technique and Ferocious Jab on all of your attacks could be one reminder. For the ranged character of the group another could be his "Press this button when you want to get away from the opponent NOW". You won't cover all situations, but at least you'll immediately have a good idea where to start.
- Delegate some responsibilities to a player if they want it. For example having someone keep track of initiative for everyone involved in a combat, or someone else keeping track of where each player can be in relation to each other via zones can be useful.
- Throw out the soak/hardness and defense of each opponent for all of the players to see. If the players know these traits than combat becomes much faster. Health levels can be shown if you feel like as well, but keep charms and such hidden.
- [Online Dice Rollers](#) often speed up dice calculations significantly, especially when it comes to dice tricks.

Social Encounters

Social encounters operate a bit differently compared to physical combat. Exalted 3e has a rather detailed social combat system with a wide array of actions and tactics one can use, add in with how much more subtle nuance social scenes can have in general and one may become paralyzed on how to actually run a social encounter in general. Yes you may have the rules, but that's the skeleton. Nobody eats skeletons, unless you're a dog then you don't play tabletop games. What everyone wants is the meat, the juicy meat that comes from fleshing out a proper social encounter. Social encounters can be as complex or as simple as you want them to be, but there are a few simple tactics you can use to make things run far more smoothly and easily for you.

The Basics of Social Influence

As with normal combat, the best place to start is the physical description of the scene itself. This helps just in case a battle does break out yes, but it can also add to the scene and conversation if an NPC can be said to be grabbing a curtain in rage, in the midst of playing a card game, or a monologue in the rain before a fateful duel starts. The overall tone of the scene itself can quite possibly set the mood of the NPC in question, which is also important for character interactions. You may meet a nation's king in his castle, but his mood would be completely different from if he had a new son versus his most cherished son being murdered. Likewise the environment can play to the

tone of a scene, a place that is dark or rainy could be considered 'gloomy' while a bright and sunny field of rolling plains can have people with high hopes. An important note to consider before social combat even begins is to guess what each NPC in the scene was doing before any social interaction can occur, depending on what happened it could set the mood for next interaction with the players.

But now we reach the real meat of the entire situation, the NPC's in the scene themselves. Unlike in combat or more physical challenges the words, emotions, and beliefs of the NPC's themselves will be the main selling points of a scene. I mean that quite literally too, as an NPC's intimacies are literally what makes them who they are. A Farmer is going to have a different set of intimacies than an Ambitious Warlord, but the one thing they both have in common is that intimacies are the the quickest way to get them to do things for you. So hence the golden rule for most social encounters appears: *The quickest way to get someone to do what you want is to appeal to their own self interests and this is where intimacies come into play.*

So it is for this reason that intimacies are the most important aspect of social combat itself. They're not only things that separate one character from another, but are also the armour you use to protect yourself or a weapon that is suddenly turned against you. Some intimacies are things people will dedicate their lives towards or even die to uphold and protect them. With all of this in mind, one could probably feel the pressure of how to make an NPC 'fleshed out' as it were. The temptation then eventual panic into making a huge laundry list of intimacies for a NPC to make them into a deep and meaningful character can rapidly begin to pile on. I'm here to say that it's actually a bit easier than you think.

The best way to make a good NPC with intimacies is, you guessed, the rule of three or in this case four. When you make an NPC see if you can think of three or four intimacies that help support his character; one at minor, one at major, one at defining, then an additional one to place wherever you want. This, when combined with the emotion advice from earlier, is often enough levels for players to pull in the midst of a social encounter without seeming overbearing to the Storyteller. If you're stuck on exactly what sort of intimacies one would have, ask yourself the following questions:

- Worldviews - Does he have a particular view of the world that he upholds? A Farmer may have a worldview of "A hard day's work is good for the soul" while a Brutal Warlord may have a belief of "I will rule these lands or see them burnt to ashes around me!" These are Principles that people tend to follow.
- People - Nobody lives in a vacuum, so think about other people. The farmer from earlier could have intimacies such as "Outsiders (Tie, Distrust)" or "Wife (Tie, Smile I come to)" while the Brutal Warlord could have intimacies such as "Duke Asheron (Tie, Needs to be Out of the Picture)" or "Lily (Tie, The Daughter I Cannot Say No Towards)". By doing this you not only have people to build off from, but it also gives potential ties and ways to get to others. Even hermits may have an intimacy of something like "Unwise Rabble (Tie, What I Secluded Myself From)". In fact how a hermit feels towards people could be a very big reason why he became a hermit in the first place.

- Places - What does a person think about the land that they're on, their neighbours, or even foreign lands in general? The Farmer probably never left the village in his entire life, so he may have an intimacy of "Town of Izu (Tie, Home Sweet Home)" or "Shadowlands (Tie, They're coming closer...)". The Brutal Warlord may have something like "Shishu Province (Tie, Base of my Power)" or "Yakatomi Plaza (Tie, I know Duke Asheron's Spies are there!)". Someone like a monk or a priest in another example could consider a shrine or church sacred ground, second only to the god they revere themselves.
- Things - Is there any particular object or thing that a person feels a strong attachment towards? Not a person or place, but some object they carry around with them in their possession or have it stored for safekeeping? A Farmer could probably have an attachment to "Lucky Dice (Tie, Won many games)" or maybe harbouring a secret of "Ixil's Dagger (Tie, Its demands must be met to protect the village)". The Brutal Warlord may have something like "The deed to the Mikami Region (The future key to my power)" or "Money (Tie, It is a Means to an End)". Both of these things address how they feel towards an object, whenever it be a minor belief or something that is literally the core of their existence.

Giving an NPC one of each of these four things at least is enough to start an NPC out itself. It may seem slim for some but trust me once players start interacting with the character that intimacy list is most likely going to change a lot. For minor NPC's such as the farmer itself, his intimacies really don't to be splayed out much (Except if he comes an important plot point with Ixil's Dagger). In fact a Farmer may really not even be significant enough to warrant a full social encounter compared to the Brutal Warlord. We'll go into this a bit later of when to use a social rules and when to ignore them. But for now we have an intimacy list to use, but people place different weights on different things. A Farmer probably doesn't feel the same way about his Lucky Dice than he does his Wife. Likewise the Brutal Warlord's Principle of "I will rule this region or see it burnt to ashes around me!" is probably a defining character aspect for him. This is where we enter the territory of intimacy weights: Minor, Major, and Defining. I won't waste my breath explaining what they in depth as the book goes over them in detail, but I can give you a quick list of how one feels towards each level in general.

- A minor intimacy is something you like and would go out of your way for, but not if it carries too much of a personal risk. (EX: A character may do an action that may make them late for a job, but not if they know they'll be fired for it).
- A major intimacy is something someone would fight for or place themselves in significant risk for, but they won't die for it or risk their entire life collapsing because of it. (EX: A character may do an action that risks him getting fired from his job, but not if it carries major penalty that doesn't involve death could be very well done if caught [IE: Treason])
- A defining intimacy is something one would die to uphold or seriously consider abandoning everything they have for the sake of it. (EX: At this level characters can literally be called upon to sacrifice their own lives if necessary so long as there is just reason to do so)

It's because of this that intimacies are critically to a character in both offense and defense. Without using an intimacy to leverage a point nearly any social action fails. There are exceptions to

this rule, such as the Inspire or Threaten actions, but one is temporary and the other doesn't make long term friends but really good at making enemies. It's for this reason Guile is important as those who don't know your intimacies cannot leverage any points at all. Even a person does know intimacies however your intimacies can be used to bolster Resolve to a rather high amount with even minimal investment in resources. This is intentional as it is often difficult to persuade others out of their beliefs but also that you'd be leveraging an intimacy against them as well. These, combined with the Social Reset rules, should be enough to keep anyone with a firm mindset safe.

When to Use Social Influence

A question I often hear from new Gamemasters/Storytellers from any game is "when do I use X", the answer involving social influence is rather simple: Does the scene itself involve dramatic weight (AKA: Is there a potential chance of failure)? Social Influence is a tool you can use just like any other mechanic in a game, but you need to know when to use it. For example if your characters become aware of party where the who's who of everyone in the local region is attending it and your character wants in? Then unless you really pissed off the local guards getting in shouldn't be too difficult, as after all the real meat the players want is inside the party not the guards outside. Sneaking into the party is an option yes, but what of the brilliant socialite who dares not hide her radiance from the world? There are many ways around this. Falsifying an invite using Linguistics, showing an incredible array of wealth that makes the guards feel stupid for leaving someone as important as you out, bribes, or even a threat to the guard saying they can fetch the Guard Captain to check who you are but wouldn't be surprised if the Guard got lashed for asking such a stupid question as part of an intimidation action. Thing is these guards probably have intimacies such as "I don't want Trouble" or "I want to live a peaceful life", so if a PC needs to roll at all then let them roll and if they succeed then let them in. Even a dabbling exalt in social should crush the difficulty of these rolls, so let them into the party where the interesting things are happening. If that fails, well there should be another way⁹.

Another example is when asking a friend for something like a personal favor. Chances are if you ask your friend to help you move then he'll probably agree if you're footing for beer and pizza after the job is done. Think of this as a minor task, something so low or beneficial to the target that it's worth any short term trouble or discomfort, even if you'd spend a half hour cursing at each other for getting that couch in the house. The same could be said of Exalted. As a shorthand method if you offer someone an item for a seemingly innocent task, then you can just bypass the bribe roll needed. If you're offering a mighty Daiklave to a barbarian warlord under the condition he destroy his hated rival? That's honestly not much of a deal at all, it's like someone giving you a \$1000 prepaid card

⁹ A good example of this is Deus Ex. Nearly any time you found a way to complete something in that game then chances are there would be another 5 ways you didn't know about. RPG's are like this in a way, if you become stonewalled one way try and find another way in. You can still do things where you absolutely fail, but often it should come from a series of bad decisions and luck rather than just a single bad roll.

with the sole condition that you spend all the money on it on whatever you want. If the Barbarian Warlord finds out you're hiding something, like how his hated rival recently became an undead champion of death, then you may need to make social rolls when he comes back in anger demanding answers from you. Likewise the only time a player should make a roll to intimidate a terrified civilian into doing a task when they're showing their full divine splendor and/or covered in the blood of their champions is whenever or want the player wants to make the poor soul faint.

Lastly, just because you appeal to a person's own self interests doesn't mean everyone or everything is a selfish asshole; indeed just like in any other setting there are the fair share of noble and selfless people. A generous and noble general could have a principle like "It is my sacred duty to defend the people" at the major or even defining level. Sure he cannot respond to every single threat or complication that arises, but you are still capable of appealing to his heart if you can leverage that intimacy to your advantage. Proving that his people are in imminent danger is the most direct way of doing so and you hardly even need to give him anything else in turn (Other than support if the enemy is something akin to an Abyssal). Likewise you can even have an idealistic Solar Paladin NPC who has an intimacy of "I always help those in need!" which represents his noble intentions even if he's as dense as sack of bricks.

Stop Playing My Character!

While social influence can spice up games and make things interesting, as a Storyteller you need to remember that social influence goes *both* ways. Unlike in some other games where convincing someone may be a one sided skill check, in Exalted it's active on both sides. A General could just as likely convince you to stand down just as much as you are able to summon him to a duel. This fact however can cause some friction with people, mainly because even with just normal rolling a person can convince their character to do or believe something contrary to their own beliefs. This can be scary to some players, but there are some guidelines for both the Storyteller and the players themselves can follow to ensure everyone has a good time.

The first and golden rule when using social influence against the players: make sure whatever is being asked or convinced of on the players is both constructive to the story and entertaining to all of those involved. A Dawn General who is duped by a Dragonblooded Wyld Hunt spy about attacking an incorrect location is a good idea for the game itself. It adds further complications on whenever the players will see through the ambush in time or whenever they'll survive the ambush in one piece. A player who is the Priest of of the Unconquered Sun could have their faith shaken by an Infernal Prince of Hell who shows proof of why the gods are worthless and none are worthy of his worship could play out the inner turmoil in his soul as he tries to either repair his damaged faith, abandon it, or even do something like go on a quest to radically restructure the world so the example the Infernal showed him could never happen again. These things are good, they help further the story or make things far more interesting. Convincing a player who has the goal to locate his missing sister to completely abandon said sister is *not* alright when the player really wants to accomplish this goal both in-character and out-of-character. This is an

event the player is really looking forward to in the game, so don't take out one of the entire reasons for playing the game! Sure you can test the resolve of the character by having characters warn him that slavers move all across the Scavenger Lands, but remember that such things should build off in a way that all players enjoy things. What if someone delivers 'proof' that the character's sister died tragically, but in the same scene a masked rival Deathknight is suddenly shown to have the face of the character's sister? Things are now interesting again as they've taken a sudden twist!

From a player side of things, you shouldn't need to worry too much as getting convinced in the first place can be made pretty difficult. Intimacies themselves give huge boosts to Resolve when used in their defense. If someone has Resolve 5 and the opponent has a social pool of 10, then that's a 50/50 chance to break through it. Even using a minor intimacy to bolster Resolve with a bonus of +2 is enough to make those odds go down dramatically on the opponent's side. Even if you have a Resolve of 1 then you can still make due with using intimacies as decision points, where one resisted point makes you immune to such topics and approaches for at the very least the rest of the scene. If you have something akin to eight intimacies this means they can be targeted more easily, but at the same time allows for a much greater defense. Lastly remember that if an opponent cannot use an intimacy to leverage their point, then social influence automatically fails. The only exceptions for this are Intimidation and Inspire. The latter of which is only temporary while the former is up to the player to decide how courageous they are, and given that most players start off as Exalted of some sort then you're hardly going to be scared of lesser things. A normal man is afraid when a mugger pulls out a knife, a Solar with even remote combat investment wonders what's for dinner instead.

But what if you're saying something along the lines of "That's stupid! I NEVER want my character to be convinced of something by others! Fuck you for even suggesting that!" Let me break this down for you. What if someone was trying to ask you what they thought of your favor show and for every point you brought up the other side immediately shouted "NO!" It doesn't matter if your points are well constructed or how you feel towards it, they just keep shouting "NO!" and "NOPE!" to each and every one of your points refusing to listen. This is what a character who constantly rejects social influence is like, an immovable brick wall that is static and stagnant. Know that so long as the boundaries are clear, social conflict can actually be a great activity to play out in of itself. This isn't to say that playing a gruff soldier who finds galas a waste of time isn't anti social, indeed he could very well be more at home at the bar with fellow soldiers. This is why the "Lone Wolf that Doesn't Get Along with Others" type of characters are so bad, because unless done right it means the players are only concerned about their own enjoyment rather than that of everyone else at the table. Hell if other people challenge your beliefs, counter back with espousing the virtues of your own beliefs! Something to make the game overall more interesting for everyone involved!

If you *still* are dead set about never wanting to be the target of social influence no matter the circumstances, then there's nothing much else I can say other than grow up/move on. The only time the exception to this appears is when your Storyteller is an asshole or directly incompatible with your preferences, which that case it's best to move on.

RUNNING A GAME - My Notes

- What you will need
- Setting up premise with players, going over backstories, selecting location
 - Premise being a serious sort of game, or a gonzo sort of one
 - Going over player backstories with them
 - Remember that some people like to work on stories before sessions whereas others may do two-three sentences and prefer to develop it in play.
 - Select a geographical location in Creation, as each is different.
 - Break down locations a bit
 - Nearly everyone picks Scavenger Lands anyhow
- Preparing for a game/running one
 - Types of players
 - Exalted strengths tends towards a sandbox style gameplay, but some people may like more guided games (AKA: Railroaded)
 - Taking proper notes, describing certain events that may possibly happen in two-three session's time and then predicting them. Such as if having a warlord country next to your players, it doesn't mean that him attacking you is set in stone. You can let him attack/attack him, or you can appease them, set up a puppet, and more.
 - Do not become addicted to this. Remember keyword is possibly, as it may or may not come true, but you are ready in case it does.
 - What to do in case things go off a little bit, such as having some pre-statted NPC's in case a fight happens, etc...
 - Improvisation when things go very wrong.

- Antagonists

- ~~Who they are, how they develop, how to use them.~~

- ~~How to make story wise~~

- ~~Often easy, sometimes a PC will make a big opponent for you.~~

- "A good villain thinks he's right, a great one knows he's right."

- ~~Mention exceptions too, ala skeleton evil, or just being evil for the sake of evil.~~

- How to Stat Enemies

- ~~Talk about the quick NPC table, its lifeblood.~~

- ~~Difficulties are often deceptive, usually its best to ignore the essence level and look at the dicepools. ESSENCE IS NOT LEVEL, treating it as such can lead to bad times.~~

- ~~-3 to -1 dice less than the PC's means an opponent is generally easier and bested usually with simple stunting let alone charms, +0 to +3 dice more means the PC's are usually in for a bit of a challenge in where a bit more clever thinking is involved and possibly charm use. +4 or higher means the PC's will require charm use and tactics in order to best the opponent.~~

- Enemy statting section, mindset of how one makes an enemy.

- How to Design an Encounter

- Describing a scene

- Combat encounters

- Social encounters

Chapter 3: Charms

Nearly every game setting in existence has methods of how players can make their characters climb to power. Feats, Abilities, Stunts, Aspects, all may work different in principle but each of them have one thing in common: They allow for exceptions to be made in favor of the normal rules. For the Exalts in Exalted, these are Charms. I don't mean something cute or fancy, I often mean something that will let you brutalize the shit out of your opponents, manipulate them to do your bidding, or uncover the greatest mysteries of the universe. But all in good time.

Does this mean that every Exalted character in Exalted is magical? Does this mean everyone is a wizard? Yes and no. Exalted isn't a game where you start off as a country boy who saved up enough money for a sword and armour then head off to explore the world. It's more of a one where you were a curious boy who studied all about fantastical locations of the world when growing up, and the day you finally happen to buy your first sword and armour a barbarian hoard comes knocking, you then start glowing really oddly in the middle of it then kill them all, then head off to explore the world. The themes and flavours of the Exalted vary by their type, but for Dragonblooded and Solar their charms are usually just extensions of their own skill. You don't shout out "THUNDERBOLT ATTACK PRANA!" for your attacks¹⁰, but most of the time they're just natural little tricks your character has learned over time and are given new destructive force by the power of essence flowing through you. The charm Soaring Crane Leap can vary with the graceful fencer nimbly leaping up in the air in a perfected motion she spent a long time perfecting or a raging barbarian who just uses sheer force to savagely leap into the air leaving cracks in the ground below. This is the same charm but described differently, and Exalted encourages you to do this. Even with the same charms, there is often so much variation in charms one can take that both a nimble fencer and a raging barbarian can take the Melee ability as their main method of combat, but each of them will feel different mechanically as well as thematically.

In terms of limitations, charms rely on an "Mana point" like system using motes and willpower normally, but other more potent charms can cost things like anima levels, health levels, Experience Points, or other things. This means unlike other games you don't have at-will or daily abilities you use, rather so long as you have the resources you can use a charm whenever you want, and when one runs out of these resources it usually represents the end of a fight or one is going to end soon, but in my experience this rarely happens if a fight begins at full. More powerful charms can only be used once per scene, day, or even story but these charms are more the exception rather than the norm and one can use charms as much as they want and whenever they please.

How Charm Types Varies by Exalt

The Exalted charms vary in thematics depending on the Exalt type itself. While you can play as a Solar who uses fire powers to immolate his opponents, it may often be a bit easier to play as a Fire Aspected Dragonblooded or a Fire/Volcano Themed Exigent than to bend the Solar part too

¹⁰ Real players will name all of their attacks,

hard, as usually those exalts tailored for immolating opponents with the raw power of fire will often have far more charms dedicated towards it, while a Solar may need to make several custom charms in order to somewhat emulate this or learn a martial art. The breakdown of various Exalted types are as follows. Note that this is only during the time of this writing, so thematics may be slightly off and possibly more exalts types may be added in the future:

- **Solar** - The Solars are exalted whose charms focus on supernatural excellence. Their charms may not be as esoteric as the other exalted, but they are usually the most straightforward and very powerful. Think of them as the archetypical action hero or classical hero in a way where most of the time they accomplish things just by their raw skill alone. Their charms do have some supernatural themes such as attacking with rays of light or bringing out one's inner spirit, but they're often rare or powerful charms.
- **Dragonblooded** - Dragonblooded charms are somewhat similar to solar charms in that they have a type of excellence, but just as important to them are elemental powers that each of them are imbued with. Turning their sword ablaze or attacking the enemy with earthen spears are trivial matters for them, and even their very anima shows their elemental might by often damaging people just by being near them. Being the most numerous of the Exalted they may be the weakest, but when tackling issues together as a group they are more than capable of keeping up¹¹. With a Dragonblooded you do not fight alone. Your sworn brotherhood (AKA: Your circle/fellow PC's) are alongside you and if that fails, you call upon the authority and might of the strongest kingdom in Creation.
- **Lunars** - Lunars call upon the power of animals, the wild, and their patron to empower their charms. Many Lunar charms are themed around animals. The ferocity of a Tiger, the cunning of a fox, and the wise mind of an elephant are at the disposal of Lunars. But it doesn't end simply there, the Goddess Luna is known as a shapeshifting God(dess) of the wild among many other things. This makes it so that Lunars can not only transform into other animals, such as a fly for sneaking into a military base or a bear for combat, but they have access to the deadly warform. A perfect fusion of man and beast that can rip and tear their opponents to pieces. The fun doesn't stop there, as they are not only able to replicate animals, but virtually anything they come across and use their forms. You want to sneak into a military base by killing an officer and taking their form? People will have a hard time calling you out as you literally *become* that officer. A solar may impersonate them flawlessly, but they won't be able to know the exact knowledge they know or literally just act the same. Even things such as robots can be impersonated. ~~Note that Lunars, out of all the exalted, may change the most in 3e, but I'm confident that what I mentioned here will remain the same. Hopefully.~~
- **Sidereals** - Sidereals call upon the very fabric of reality for their own charm power source. While a Sidereal is certainly skilled, they often cheat quite blatantly in order to accomplish their goals. Long travel times and epic journeys across the lands are often a quick daytime ride across Heaven for Sidereals, pulling information from seemingly nowhere and making eerily accurate predictions about things, and when a town is about to be destroyed by a

¹¹ Unlike other Exalted which are usually chosen specifically by the gods, Dragonblooded are made by natural human reproduction. No god is needed, just a man, a woman, a little bit of luck.

volcano they can simply make it so that the town simply never existed near the volcano in the first place and rather somewhere far away safe. Even their fighting style represents this, as while their native charms are deadly they are the only Exalt capable of using Sidereal Martial Arts to the fullest extent, reality warping styles that often make people in character and out of character yell, "Bullshit!" Even their status in heaven as agents of the gods allows them great favors in heaven, capable of buddying up with gods to the point where having tea with them once a season is a common thing while for other exalts is a legendary achievement. At that point you don't build defenses against the incoming enemy invasion fleet, rather you simply ask you buddy at the Department of Seasons in Heaven if he could make a storm of the century and hurricane directly on top of the enemy army in exchange for a bit of under the table prayer and your army problems are gone. Of course with great power comes great responsibility, and Sidereals are often beholden to make sure Creation is within decent working order on the metaphysical scale and often need to work as a form of police force to keep heaven in working order. The busiest of Sidereals see free time as an almost alien concept by necessity, often giving out instructions on how to fill out paperwork while practicing their fighting kata's.

- **Abyssals** - The corruption of the Underworld leads from Solars turning into Abyssals¹². Their charms mirror the Solars own in terms of thematics in terms of excellence, but are often either geared towards killing people, achieving a goal with ruthless precision, or dealing with the dead in some way. A solar may train a group of Tiger Warriors to be the greatest fighters ever known, but the Abyssal can train a group of people to become the greatest killers ever known unphased by petty things such as fear or morality. In the past editions they worked for the Deathlords, often being heralds for the end of all things. In this edition they appear to be more like Paladins of Death, like the Raven Queen in Dungeons and Dragons. Out of all the Exalts, they are the ones who strongly resonate with gothic overtones, and fans of World of Darkness Vampire may seem a bit surprised that Abyssals function as seemingly superpowered vampires, in where in a pinch they can drink blood to regain resources. It may seem like Abyssals are the default character choice for someone making a character named Killfuck Soulshitter, but they're still people and usually won't kill unless there is a reason behind it. Lastly they are the only Exalted who are able to master the most complex secrets from the art of Necromancy. Going past from making Spooky Scary Skeletons, into making horrors from your deepest nightmares and Dead Space before teleporting them directly to your doorstep. Sweet dreams :)
- **Infernals** - The corruption of the Solar Exaltations obtained by the Yozi's, fallen creators of the World, has lead to the Infernals in an attempt to get revenge on the gods by letting them have a taste of the Exalted themselves who originally imprisoned them. Infernals are exalted who channel the alien powers of demons into their own abilities to accomplish their own goals. This isn't akin to your normal Dungeons and Dragons fire and brimstone demons, but can odd themes like crystalline bodies, an immaterial sand genie who grants your wish for a price, a shapeshifting master of darkness (Both metaphorical and physical),

¹² No, this is not something like a paladin falling in other games. A Solar exaltation can only become an Abyssal in very specific circumstances.

a being with an ego so dense that reality bends around you, and more expressions. Infernal charms often do odd things at times, and more often than not the book encourages you to find your own use for them in creative and new ways. Eventually Infernals learn to shed their own humanity before turning into devastating Shintai forms, terrifyingly powerful and unique manifestations of demonhood and transhumanism, accomplishing their goals by making everyone within a city a uniform collective or primordial hellscape where only the strong survive and the weak are incinerated with emerald flames. The also have close ties to Hell itself, and are treated with far more respect than other Exalts normally are or at least have an easier time blending in with it. Hell itself is so complex and bizarre in Exalted that I'd highly recommend picking up the Second Edition book of "Compass of Celestial Directions: Malfeas" for the full layout of hell and its minions.

- **Alchemicals** - Alchemicals are a tangible form of Exaltation made originally by the Primordial Autochthon, who fled Creation for unknown reasons then taught the mortals inside of his World body how to create and maintain them. Alchemicals and their charms are about technology, and by extension all of their charms are physical tangible things Alchemicals literally install into themselves. A solar may train himself to punch harder and harder until he finally knows how to break stone, an Alchemical gets neuro-muscular enhancements combined with a pneumatic fist to shatter the stone instead. Easily being one of the most durable and adaptable of the Exalted, their charms come cheap, fast, and powerful but are not as efficient mote wise. Like Solars, their charms tend to be rather straightforward in function, but rather following a natural progression of an ability they tend to follow themes of "How can the base technology of this charm be enhanced and what new things can we learn from it to make new things?" While other Exalts are often God Kings or Leaders, Alchemicals are often champions of their own state in which they're often revered as superheroes, which bodes them well as their maintenance costs are very high. Alchemicals don't also begin as human either, rather an Alchemical Exaltation is made with a soul that has accomplished heroic deeds over many lifetimes rather than one, coming out of the Vat complex they were birthed in with full knowledge of what they are, personality, and more. Lastly the home of Alchemicals is Autochtonia, a completely unique realm different from Creation in which they live in what could be best described as a clockwork planet floating in a void of nothingness, but a common theme of Exalted often has them coming into Creation for the first time. Many people may dislike Autochtonians because their themes are so different than normal Exalted, and that's OK because people can like things that you and I don't like. Normally this is the last splat released, but being a shill I can tell people that if you want to play Alchemicals in 3e, you can do so thanks to [my hard work](#). If you wish to express thanks, please send me unmarked bills in your native currency.
- **Exigents** - Exalted that can be literally anything at all. An Exaltation is made when a god uses a portion of their power to imbue a mortal with divine might, and a god can range in anything from the god of a local town to mighty gods such as the god of Seasons. So if a God wants a champion and is willing to accept decrease in his overall power, he petitions to get an Exaltation from heaven and imparts it to a worthy mortal, gaining the mortal access to powers related to the Gods themes and abilities. An Exigent of smithing would be able to make wonders the world has never seen before and use them better than anyone else, an

Exigent from the Goddess of Blades would know almost no peer when it comes to swordplay, and an exigent from the Goddess of Music could melt the hearts of people around her and then do (literal) face-melting solos on her opponents. We don't have a book yet, but if you want to make a charmset of nearly 50 charms more power to you. It's not like I already started one myself (Actually it's closer to three). Still your imagination can run wild with these ones and the sky is basically the limit.

- **And more!** - There is more unique Exalted and powers that await them in the future!

What Charms are Not

Charms are not auto-win devices nor are they usually developed to snap a finger and make a problem go away. Charms don't grant you perfect wisdom; they may tell you information and possibly what your choices can do, but it doesn't bestow wisdom upon you, that is how to properly use them. This is intentional and is not only up to the players to decide, but also room to grow in character about how one should use their powers. A charm doesn't let you create say the perfect government. It can let you make a government that is virtually corruption free and follows your instructions to the letter, but it is never perfect. Major figureheads such as lords (or equivalent) may continue to engage in political intrigue, getting access to a government grant to make new roads while denying his rival access to the grant to bolster his armies as he knows a barbarian horde will come soon. You can do some interesting things that are not practical in reality and make them world, such as run your country as a brutal police state where people are actually happy due to charms that make them as such, but even this will run into problems.

Players and Storytellers alike are to remember that charms don't instantly solve a problem, but rather make a current problem easier by the one using it. Speed the Wheels doesn't instantly complete paperwork any more so than Melee charms instantly kill the enemy, but it can do so in a much faster way. Even incredibly powerful charms, such as Celestial Bliss Trick, only give a defining tie towards the Exalt rather than outright mind control them completely and utterly. It now becomes much easier to convince them, but you still need to actually convince them!

Likewise you don't "need" charms to do an ability. If you want to be an amazing commander and lead a mighty army then you don't need War charms. You can be an amazing commander and lead a mighty army just by using War alone. War charms simply make your already powerful army into an even mightier one, or opens up completely new options such as turning a group of untrained peasants into a group of coordinated warriors that even veteran soldiers would give pause to. While some charms do grant entirely new things, such as throwing an entire city into hell itself, you still don't need them to accomplish the goal of murdering everyone in the city. Most Exalts are perfectly capable of doing such things themselves, personally, and with only a simple excellency.

Custom Charm Creation

So you want to make a brand new charm. Perhaps you found a hole in the charmset that you really want to accomplish, perhaps you thought up something your character wants to do that

should be his signature charm or perhaps style, or maybe you're a freak like me and do these things out of boredom. Whatever the case, I'm here to guide you through how to make charms. As a disclaimer, I'm warning you that this is how I create charms, everything from NPC opponents, total conversion sets for other splats, and even my own characters I play in game as. Secondly, there isn't a hard charm creation guide for Exalted. The closest we'll get to is Exigents or how Borgstorm discussed how she priced charms in the Second edition. Rather charm creation is more of an art form, in which you create your work, compare it against other charms (official and homebrew) before finally calling it done.

Step 1: Select a Concept for the charm

Obviously the first step for any sort of power is to have an idea what you want it to do or accomplish. Perhaps you found a hole in the charmset you wish to address, maybe you want to do something really cool and unique to your character, or just want both. Either way at this stage you don't nail down anything concretely, but rather describe your charm in a sentence or so about what you want it to be. You can write down the name if you want as that helps some people, but for me the name is often the last thing I think about unless it's somehow important for the charm.

***Example:** After watching Super Robot Wars UX footage more time than is reasonably healthy, Sandact6 noticed how Gundams in Gundam 00 were capable of blowing up entire ships. Looking at current charms, he was saddened that no charms in melee allowed to do something like cut an entire ship in half, as swinging a single axe at a ship really wouldn't sink the entire thing. So rolling up his sleeves he sought to emulate the power of the GN-0000 00 QAN[T] Gundam with its ability to fire a beam saber miles long, capable of outright vaporizing battleships AND slicing open a planet made of ultra-durable nanomachines. Deciding that this is a perfect fit for his melee wielding Dawn caste in his sci-fi game, he names the charm, "Wrath of the Godsaber" and making notes that it specializes in not only cutting ships in half, but is specialized in bringing down large opponents overall.*

Step 2: Cross check to see if other charms already exist and comparing

This step involves checking the charm list to make sure that your charm doesn't already exist in one form or another, which sounds easy but even the people who make the game sometimes make the mistake of creating a charm for something when a similar charm already exists. While looking for charms that seem to be yours, look for other charms that could help guide your decision process, that is charms that are similar to yours or have bits and pieces of them you can cannibalize. Once this is done, decide where on the charmtree this charm should go (Don't worry about the charm minimums for now).

Checking the book is often a difficult exercise, so don't be afraid to ask message boards or friends for advice.

***Example:** Because he is a freak, Sandact6 knows automatically that such a charm doesn't exist already, so he goes about checking the books to see if something that is close to his charm already exists. After looking through the books, he finds two charms that may help. White Reaper sets the idea*

that certain attacks can ignore the size of an army, while Solar Judgement Flare shows how a character can sink a ship by a single monstrous shot. With this in mind, he moves to the next step.

Step 3: Breathing Life into the Charm

The next step in the process is actually bringing your own creation to life. You've got the idea, you've got a few other charms you can steal ideas from, and you got a charm where it's feasible to split off and make your own unique charm. Now comes the crunch. A charm itself is broken down into two basic parts: Its cost and its effect.

Cost and effect of the charm are two intertwined things, in that how strong a charm should be within a given action it takes compared to other charms, even an excellency. There is no easy part to this, and literally all of it is guesswork. Borgstorm¹³ made her own chart for pricing charms in 2e, which I still follow to this day with some minor adjustments to make it fit to 3e. The advice was basically boiled down to this:

- Charms are largely exception based and vary exalt by exalt. What one exalt can do for cheap or easily another might be able to do so with extraordinary effort, if at all. This advice fits most exalts, but not all of them.
- 1m is the least amount of resources you can pay for an effect, and in general 1m is equivalent to about 1 die. Therefore this allows us to set a baseline for powers.
- The following table is used for charm costs. Again this is not ironclad, but a good rule of thumb to follow.
 - Motes = The standard resources for most charms. 1m can mean one die, 2m a single automatic success, while ten motes can mean very powerful effects that are often used only once or twice per battle. Barring permanent charms, most charms will cost these.
 - Willpower = Willpower is used as a twofold mechanism in charms. First that it can be used as a cost reduction of sorts, and 1 WP = 4m otherwise. Meaning if you make a scenelongs charm that looks balanced for 9m, it should be the same at 5m 1WP. This is important as sometimes you just want to lower the cost of charm due to commitment cost. The other detail about willpower is that it's often used as a limiter, meaning if you assign it to powerful charms one will not be able to use as much compared to one that just costs motes. Lastly, willpower can be used in charms that often require a great deal more concentration, rather than physical or mental might, to use. One may really need to concentrate in order to use said charm.
 - Initiative = Roughly equivalent to motes in overall importance. In battle initiative is used for when you go, your damage pool, and even a certain amount of your life pool. 1i can equal one die roughly but usually in different circumstances, such as not wanting one to pay for it when in initiative crash. It can be used in circumstances such as snap firing a decisive attack, making a close range attack work at range, or as

¹³ For those not in the know, she was one of the people who made the Exalted Second Edition corebook and 1e Sidereals.

fuel/timer for powerful charms that you want to end when in initiative crash (meaning players will need to highly consider when to make a decisive)

- Health Level = One health level is worth about 4m, regardless of its damage type. Charms that do this are often powerful charms with a large degree of danger for its user, such as shearing off a piece of the soul or requiring blood as part of the activation. They are valued the same as willpower, but charms that require these effects are often much rarer.
- Experience = Often reserved for charms that do large scale, miracle like effects or in 3e teaching people. In rare cases when a powerful charm wants its magic to endure, spending Experience may be a good offset to constant commitment or specific durations. Be careful with the resources, as PC's hate spending hard earned experience on too many charms.

Lastly, you really need to break down charms and see their powers using the above list. Take for example Excellent Strike, in where it gives one automatic success and cascades 1s on an attack roll. First we see the charm is melee and can only be used with weapons. Second is that it gives one automatic success, which is worth about 2m, so we can call this 2m out of its 3m cost. Lastly comes the cascading 1s. Those who know math may ask why this is a thing, as at most you're only getting 1 extra die for every ten you roll. Most attack pools are going to be 10 or more die so this is about right, 3m for an automatic die and one more die on average. A closer look at other charms however show things such as Hail Shattering Practice or Bulwark Stance show very bad things happen if you roll a 1 in an attack roll with those charms, so Excellent Strike is a good buffer to make sure those charms won't activate.

Some charms are a bit top heavy, featuring loads of effects. In which case it's better to analyze groups rather than each single point individually. Other charms such as from Martial Arts are incredibly strong compared to native charms usually, and thus its better if you often compare them to other martial arts charms in their totality. In terms of estimating how much a charm should cost, I'd say not to even worry about that until you have some crunch of the charm written down, then break down some bits about how it should be costed.

***Example:** Sandact6 takes all this information in mind and decides that a mile long beamsaber sword is best bounced off Blazing Solar Bolt for a prerequisite, deciding to make it an upgrade charm to Blazing Solar Bolt that will injure large things but also give anyone else who comes into contact with it worlds of pain. First he decides to make into a painful experience, and thus decides rather than make Blazing Solar Bolt into a psuedo-decisive attack, making it not only a standard decisive attack that uses all initiative as normal, but dealing an additional (Essence+extra successes) on the attack that the base charm still uses. Now since the fluff of the charm is a mile long beamsaber strike, making it so that it ignores the size of a battlegroup for a single expensive attack sounds fine, as does making it take the hull damage effect from Solar Judgement Flare. These are some powerful effects, but in the anime itself QAN[T] could only use the Raiser Sword while in Trans-AM mode, which was a once per day effect. Seeing the visuals in the attack and the original manifestation of the charm in mind, he makes the charm only capable of firing when all possible anima levels are consumed for the attack. Compared to Solar Judgement Flare, it is powerful in its own right and still somewhat weaker, but*

resources now seem right. The game Sandact6 is in allowed the charm at Essence 3 as he is impatient and the players quite frankly didn't mind, but the charm itself would probably be a better fit at Essence 4. Essence 3 may be possible but that is stretching it. So all that's left is to make the charm itself:

Example Charm

WRATH OF THE GODSABER

Cost: - (3a); **Mins:** Melee 5 Essence 4; **Type:** Simple

Keywords: None

Duration: Instant

Prerequisite charms: Glorious Solar Bolt

By holding the weapon up into the air, the Solar's weapon bursts forth with a solid beam of pure essence flying up a mile long, all before he brings it down on the unworthy. This charm upgrades Glorious Solar Bolt, activating only when the Solar spends three levels of anima to bring the range of the charm to long, in which the enormous saber springs forth to decimate its foes and his anima is blown back into golden particles from the sheer force of the attack. This counts as a normal **decisive** attack in addition to the benefits of its prerequisite charm, which is an additional amount of damage of (Essence + Threshold successes). The size of the saber itself is also a factor, allowing the solar to deal damage to extremely large foes with ease. Creatures with the Legendary Size merit can be damaged as if they lacked that merit, battle groups do not factor their size into their soak when faced with this attack, and when attacking a ship the Solar can deal one point of hull damage for every three successes on the damage roll. The solar resets to base initiative after this attack.

A repurchase of this charm makes it so that the charm remains active for one turn after its use. The solar resets to base initiative after, but makes charms such as Solar Counterattack or clash based charms far more effective.

CHARM NOTES - My Notes

- **DELETE THIS PART AFTER FINISHING SECTION**
- Talk about charms
 - What charms are, and how they're basically everything in the game. Tends to differ from most other games, in which charms are kinda like magical feats or abilities.
 - Did I address this well enough as a "magical skill" of sorts?
 - Reminder of what charms are vs what they are not. Charms are usually intended to make most actions easier. You don't 'need' bureaucracy charms to use bureaucracy. It becomes a lot easier, but you can still use it.
 - Charms don't make you flawless or wiser, that comes with your own choices.
- Solar charms
 - A build guide for players, telling what attributes in each section does. Including skeleton ESS 1 builds along with Supernal charm suggestions.
 - How to make customs. Use EX Raiser Sword as an example.
- Evocations
 - How to make evocations, use the Sayuka Stop Watch as an example.
 - You statted it, now break it down for people.
- MA
 - How to make MA, use the DFO Brawler style as a good example

For Players: Build Advice

Now for the beginning players, opening the charm section and looking through it may elicit many emotions. First being bewilderment on the sheer volume, possibly followed by confusion on what to actually take. Not just what to take to look cool or take to fill a concept, just what to take *period*. Thankfully I am here, and I rip apart charm lists for breakfast.

For this section I will break down each ability and go over their corresponding charms. I'll have 'bare bone' selections on what to take early on to accomplish things I think are cool or particularly effective, followed by a Supernal suggestion which go over very powerful combos which one can do if that ability is their supernal ability or if one has Essence 5. I'm not going to go over the charms one by one, that'd take forever, but I will mention what I consider to be noteworthy ones.

In general, for people who manually want to pick out their charms, keep the following in mind:

- Keep your essence level in mind. All the charms in the book are arranged so that you have Essence 1 charms first followed by later essence charms.
- Essence 1 charms are going to be your bread and butter. They're not something you buy then become obsolete by another charm at Essence 3 or 4. Even dabblers in a charm area would find their capabilities improved many times over with a simple 2-3 charm selections at Essence 1.

My breakdowns are simple, mentioning what the ability can do with Solar charms followed by the charm packages, listing the charms needed and the requirements needed to do so. For charms, I took the liberty of counting the amount of charms one would need to buy in order to complete this combo, including prerequisite charms (if any).

The charm breakdown can be located [here](#) in a separate document, mainly to keep this document a bit smaller, but also google documents lags to utter hell at about 200 or so pages.

Martial Arts

Martial Arts are a unique form of combat in Exalted, both with a list of pros and cons. The pros of Martial Arts are:

- That they're a great way to add thematics to your character. Usually only very special and dedicated people are known to pursue martial arts, challenging worthy opponents or specific training styles unique to the martial artist and/or their dojo.

- Martial Arts charms can be bought and trained with Solar Experience. This is a big boon, as it allows one to buy solar charms to encompass many different areas of expertise while still maintaining combat efficiency.
- Martial Arts charms are *very* strong. Each Martial Art charm is nearly akin to two-three regular charms. Regardless of their opponent, a character focused in Martial Arts and only containing up to the form charm is an incredibly dangerous and powerful combatant.

Of course, it comes with a few cons:

- In order to begin how to learn martial arts, you need a four dot merit and also a dot in Brawl, BEFORE you can even purchase dots of the Martial Art you wish to take.
- Each Martial art has their own rating you need to buy up, as if each ability is its own completely separate thing. While a compatible Martial art can be used with another with only using the highest rating, this can be complicated at times (See below).
- Martial Arts have compatibility issues, in where you cannot combine it with Archery/Brawl/Melee/Thrown. Most martial arts can be combined together, but weapon and armour restrictions make this harder. Furthermore some martial arts really only shine when the form is activated, limiting which one you may use.
- Most Martial arts have deliberate holes in them. This is problematic in a sense as if you find Melee lacking in defense you can just make a custom charm, but for Martial arts this won't happen as each style is its own unique style which cannot be altered. Finding ways to patch these holes up, such as native charms or other martial arts styles, are highly recommended unless your martial art is one of the rare ones which can do almost everything.

With how short the MA styles are, I'll be going over them charm by charm, often with a brief summary at the beginning of the style of how it fights the most effectively in combat and good complementary abilities to go with it.

SNAKE STYLE

Snake is a great style to pick if you want to humiliate your opponents in a more physical fashion. Snake style is great on **withering** offense and defense, providing strong ways to simply tear through an opponent's soak and contains fairly good steady damage regardless of your Strength. This style gets significantly stronger if you have more initiative than your opponent, which means oddly enough you'll rarely want to do **decisive** attacks. Outside of knowing exactly what you're doing, you'll want to use a **decisive** attack when you're absolutely sure you can knock out the opponent in one hit. Otherwise it is more effective to use the charms in this style to reduce the opponent to a paralyzed, poisoned punching bag, which in the end is akin to kicking a bag of puppies moreso than fighting an actual opponent. Given the natures of Player Character's however, they'll soon be trained to attack anything in front of them.

Dexterity is the king of Snake Style bar none, increasing both your soak and damage directly with its charms while also increasing your disengage/Rush/Defense stats. Its armour compatible nature allows for some truly impressive soak, and sorcerers who take Invulnerable Skin of Bronze

as their control spell simply for the passive effect will be swimming in soak. Dumping Strength and Stamina with this style is actually possible due to the all powerful nature that Dexterity makes with this style. Due to the importance of initiative however, a Snake Stylist will often want to start with as high of an initiative as possible, so Awareness is going to be a key ability. Dodge is a good partner as Snake style defense charms tend to boost that and can net you initiative outside of attacking. Resistance can be used to get soak up to *ludicrous* amounts of soak, though hardness is always going to be a tiny bit of a problem. Athletics helps with mobility, but once one has Uncoiling Serpent Prana a lot of movement issues are generally pretty solved, though it does help speed battles up.

Snake manages to combine fairly well with several martial arts styles. Tiger Style is great in case you start with lower initiative and need to pummel someone to get initiative *now*, also pairing well with Snake's Anti-Armour charms to really destroy an opponent. Black Claw is great when you need to embarrass someone socially in addition to physically, also in theory capable of applying a whopping -11 die penalty on an opponent's attempt to attack you when fully maxed out in its speciality with Snake. Crane actually shares the same form weapon, and while Crane is addicted to its own form, Snake Style is still capable of providing offense with its anti-armour charms, something which is VERY welcome in Crane style. Lastly Steel Devil Style is something that Snake stylists can also use with dual hook swords, covering Snake's weakness of lack of direct **decisive** damage very well while giving Steel Devil an even stronger **withering** attack base. Snake is also useful for Steel Devil Stylists who are disarmed or caught without their weapon.

- **Serpentine Evasion:** This is why you want to use dodge, nothing more really. The fact that you can activate it after seeing the opponent's roll is useful, and it can also be activated alongside Drifting Leaf Elusion for effectively +2 defense after you see an opponent's roll.
- **Striking Cobra Technique:** This is the cornerstone of your offense, and it is goddamn amazing. 3m sounds like a bit, but adding +DEX to **withering** damage is basically +5 to damage, which is turned into post soak die if your opponent is crashed. The only con is that it can only be used on people who haven't acted yet in the turn (This is why Awareness is important for you kids). The Mastery benefit helps it to be used even if the enemy has a bit higher initiative.
- **Snake Form:** The soak bonus alone makes this style insane, which is basically a +5 boost to soak. Add in the +3 from mundane light armour and that's better than wearing mundane heavy armour with none of the downsides of heavier armour. The dice penalty bonus at first seems to be something used for defense only, but it also applies to clashes, meaning your opponent takes that penalty in clash attacks between the two of you. This is important later in the style, but it's also great when you want to make a clash attack in an attempt to get more damage in against an opponent without charm use, and since you'll often be swimming in initiative the loss of delaying your turn isn't that high. In fact if your opponent has amazingly high defenses, your best bet will be to clash him.
- **Armour-Penetrating Fang Strike:** Low Strength users rejoice, your salvation has arrived. If a high armour user has more initiative than you, one or two applications of this will probably solve it unless their natural soak is very high as well. Save this for times when you

need a desperate initiative boost, damage to pull in enemies from Uncoiling Serpent Prana, or a Double Attack Technique from hell via Steel Devil style.

- **Crippling Pressure Point Strike:** This charm is critically important for Snake Style specialists, and is almost mandatory if fighting multiple opponents at once. Blinding Fang Strike just makes the opponent worse overall, and is great to use against people spamming Defend Other (They become worse at their job or need to leave their ward alone for a turn to recover). Nerve-Deadening Venom Atemi is the bane of all weapon users everywhere, and someone who is crap at other skills is pretty much knocked out of the fight with two applications for most opponents. Withering Venom Paralysis is what you use if you want to make a getaway or kick an opponent when they're down. If all four of these are active (Venom Atemi two times), then the opponent may as well concede as there's very little chance of coming back from it.
- **Essence Fangs and Scales Technique:** Just what you need, more soak. In fact, a user at Essence 3 with Light Armour and Snake style form up is going to have +11 soak in addition whatever Stamina provides. Even artifact weapons are probably going to find this difficult without damage enhancers. The **withering** damage boost is always welcome (Desperately welcomed if barehanded). Even if this costs a willpower, using this addition is always worth it for the advantages it brings.
- **Uncoiling Serpent Prana:** I think we're supposed to be Reptile, not Scorpion. Either way, it gives one an effective ranged attack on opponents. Ideally you use this on opponent who tries to get away from you, as the drawing in effect is more useful than the damage effect most of the time, but if you can knock out the opponent then the ranged attack option just may as well be worth it.
- **Snake Strikes the Heel:** An incredibly useful charm, only hampered by the expensive willpower cost. Do not be fooled by the no damage rule of the charm, as an opponent may wish he would be dead after this is activated. The **withering** option is a tool to get the opponent's initiative lower than yours so your charms can activate (or they're aiming to do a really nasty hit). **Decisive** can only use gambits, but often a Disarm, Clinch, or Crippling Pressure Point Strike use can be enough to ruin an opponent's day.
- **Countless Coils Evasion:** Really this is here to help against multiple opponents, people who can **decisive** when crashed and/or large initiative gathering abilities, team battles, or just want to reset a battle from square one. This effectively blows your initiative wad to save yourself. This can be helpful in team battles, in which you reset the opponent then have your buddies beat them into a crash, then you tear into them like tissue paper. However in 1v1 fights or fights against multiple opponents this charm can kill you. Do not use this unless the amount of damage would be enough to knock you out, as normally you'd have 5 initiative after. It may be enough to spite the opponent who beat you but not their friends. This can reset a fight after a bad Join battle Roll, but if it fails then you may want to try to clash the opponent and pray for the best.
- **Essence Venom Strike:** This is an excellent way to kill someone just in case your **decisive** attack didn't knock out the opponent. The poison ensures you always get the speed bonuses so you don't need to worry about keeping high initiative anymore and relax a bit. When combined with Blinding Fang Strike, a -5 to all actions is probably enough to call the game

there. You can accelerate the poison with the mastery effect, but the main goal is the penalty it provides to stats and keeping your high initiative charm bonuses no matter what. The best times to use this charm would be at the beginning of a fight, when your initiative compared to your opponents is far too much, or for giggles. Otherwise it is going to be more effective to punch them unconscious.

TIGER STYLE

Tiger style is the style you want to pick if you want opponent's to scream "Oh god help me, I'm being mauled to death by a tiger." Tiger style combines many potent effects into one style. Damage is the main star, as the damage this style inflicts makes other styles blush with envy. However other properties of this style are also here. Enemies will find it very difficult to disengage with a Tiger stylist safely, as there are heavy penalties for disengaging against a Tiger Stylist. Combined with grab charms and its rush focused natured, it is very versatile.

Tiger Style encourages a very heavy use of strength and Dexterity. Stamina is welcome as well, but with charms in the style and the ability to use light armour with it, your soak will be very good. It has no charms to help with your Defense stat, so you will be forced to rely on your main Defense stat, rely on another martial art, or just simply use Dodge (The last is strongly recommended). Athletics is a must have pair for the style, as contesting disengages and rushing is central to the style from the very beginning. Stealth with this style helps, allowing for some fairly brutal damage when combined with it, however it is not nearly required as Athletics and more of a nice thing to have. Users who don't want to raise their physical attributes higher, or at least their strength, will find this style somewhat less effective. A special note with this style is that Strength Increasing Exercise is AMAZING with this style, as many charm grant bonuses dependent on the users strength, and Strength Increasing Exercise increases the user's strength a fair bit, allowing for more damage and soak in one go.

Tiger Style has a small blessing in where it combines very nicely with several other martial arts. It is good with Snake style to switch to if you make a **decisive** attack and combined with several of Snake's ranged and anti-armour charms or giving much needed damage to Snake. Black Claw users may also find it useful in the situations where really just beating the shit out of an opponent is what's needed. A slight dip into Ebon Shadow Style allows for some excellent benefits to the one who wishes to make the most out of surprise attacks. The Dawn's Fangs also allows a brutal addition to the Tiger Stylist's repertoire, or really any evocation that replicates Falling Hammer Strike. Tiger style also works with claws and even Wood Dragon's Claws, allowing Sorcery users to have high use with the style as well.

I also want to say I'm watching *Aliens* while writing this and it is still a goddamn amazing movie.

- **Crimson Leaping Cat Technique:** Early on in the style this charm helps by ripping a point of initiative from an opponent when successfully rushing them, but by also gaining additional dice to the attack using threshold successes from a Rush attempt. Against

Athletics poor opponents this may be worth flurrying, but often times it's best not to as both your attack roll and rush roll are penalized and you may just lose more than you gain from it. Upon gaining the capstone charm of this style this charm can be constantly spammed for more dice to the attack roll.

- **Striking Fury Claws:** An expensive charm, but certainly a very powerful one. For non-Mastery users the main use of this charm would be to blow past high soak users with its assured damage, as otherwise its just a very expensive post-soak adder that should be used sparingly or rarely at all against low soak users. With the Mastery effect however it becomes a very potent effect, adding a potentially large amount of post-soak damage based on your strength in addition to normal threshold damage. Either way, this charm is also amazing against anyone who attempts to disengage from you, allowing you to smack them the next turn with an extremely potent attack as it turns post soak damage into automatic successes. This is the main reason many people may want to avoid disengaging from a Tiger stylist, simply because of retribution from this charm.
- **Tiger Style Form:** Incredibly potent form, allowing a user to duplicate up to (Strength x2) threshold successes on an attack roll, meaning instead of gaining +3 bonus damage on a **withering** attack for gaining +3 more successes on a roll more than an opponent's defense, this increases it to +6 bonus damage instead. This is simply huge, allowing you to ravage and destroy low defense targets with ease, even allowing those who have Striking Fury Claws to gain both damage types as well. Suffering no penalties for going prone is nice, as not only does it allow for some amusing imagery but also situational bonuses, such as giving ranged attacks penalties as you lay down behind cover or using tall grass as a method to assist your stealth attempt. Netting the Initiative one gets from an opponent attempting a disengage roll makes an opponent seriously question whenever they should disengage from a Tiger stylist, or only do so unless absolutely necessary. The bonus to Rushing and Disengaging is nice, but at the beginning is very weak. At Essence +3 and higher it really kicks off, providing a hefty bonus or at least enough to offset the flurrying penalty one receives from both an attack and defense. The reflexive form transition is a bit difficult to get off however, and even if you did it would leave one open to counterattacks, so some caution is advised. A skeleton build would include up to here, and even at this point amazing offense is had.
- **Celestial Tiger Hide:** This provides a rather potent amount of soak, effectively making your soak the sum total of your Stamina+Strength, plus whatever armour you can bring to bear. Hardness remains somewhat low at the lower Essence levels, but the main draw will be the large amount of soak. Strength Increasing Exercise will potentially allow for far more soak and damage as well. The soak and hardness addition encourages attacking you in a range where you can attack them. Undying Predator's Roar is good in case of an emergency, but should only be used in case of an emergency. Its reset condition is difficult to activate unless you are a Dawn, it's just more effective to just use Resistance charms and try to resist the damage.
- **Iron Claw Grip:** The charm that Tiger Stylist's use to clinch an opponent, and a fairly effective and straightforward one, allowing one to get bonus rounds of control. At Essence 1 this is somewhat lackluster, but the Mastery effect for Solars makes up for it with double 9s

on the control roll, which not only ensures that you'll win, but also with the full potential bonus rounds.

- **Prey-Maiming Frenzy:** Pain, pure pain. The Strength bonus damage is rare for a pure, **decisive** damage booster with no catches or downsides. Even the reset to your initiative is going to be welcome as you're going to have a large boost to the initiative reset, making a grapple a great choice for people who wish to dispatch a target then move onto the next one or just end a fight that much quicker.
- **Raging Tiger Pounce:** Once this charm is learned, use it until you can hit your opponent. You nullify all penalties when prone but your opponent's still contain some hefty penalties for being so and effectively bolts them in place, and even if they recover you still benefit from it. The Mastery benefit turns this into a rather expensive, but powerful attack you want to spam all the time, as you have the potential to KO an opponent just by **withering** attacks or make your **decisive** attacks always do some damage, making the form transition that much easier.
- **Spine Shattering Bite:** This is often a death knell for ranged attackers, forcing them to pass a hellishly hard roll and even punishing them if they pass it. A powerful attack, but it's best used on ranged attacks or bastards who want to try and run away. Stealth users are also horribly crippled by this charm as well, as they won't be able to move at all, which would make stealth suffer an extremely heavy penalty if they tried to hide.
- **Stalking Cat Movement Meditation:** This forces enemies to make more disengage rolls, which means more bonus damage against fleeing targets. The defense penalty against surprise attacks is nice, as is the mastery effect of allowing one to rush in stealth, which is helpful against fleeing opponents.
- **Leaping From Cloaking Shadows:** A hell of a buff to use against any attack roll, but it becomes amazingly effective when attacking disengaging opponents or from stealth (or both). This allows for the large amount of successes needed to land virtually any **decisive** attacks with a large threshold. With Strength Increasing Exercise, it pretty much just makes opponents smears across the walls. In fact, a single use of this charm can turn the tide in a battle, for at very least make activating the form much easier.
- **Angry Predator Frenzy:** Turns you into a killbot that cannot be reasoned with, only wanting to ravage your enemy, allowing a large amount of threshold successes to a **decisive** attack, with Leaping From Cloaking Shadows this can potentially allow you to spam incredibly lethal **decisive** attacks so long as your willpower holds out. Rushing as a reflexive action now allows them to be used in conjunction with Crimson Leaping Cat Technique to rush every action and gain bonus die with no penalty, allowing combinations with charms that give bonuses upon succeeding with Rush actions. The Mastery bonus makes it so that you almost always have some initiative, great when combined with Leaping From Cloaking Shadows and Prey-Maiming Frenzy. Anima destruction is nice, potentially denying opponents access to their anima powers and fuel source for their charms.

SINGLE SHINING POINT IN THE VOID STYLE

This incredibly long named martial art is considered the hardest hitting burst damage charmset in the game, period. Tiger style may involve more damage over the longer term, but Single Point is the style you go to when you want an opponent dead within the first three turns of combat, and if you make it right usually the first. Aside from mechanical viewpoints, this is the style you want to use if you want to play as a fast slashing swordsman of the South... or the viewpoints of 9 out of 10 people reading it the Iaijutsu style of Exalted. I personally use it to get out my inner weeaboo and make my attacks into the Zantetsuken, Zankantou Ikkitousen, and many more.

Shining Point demands a very high Dexterity to power its own charms, but a join battle roll is just as critical. This style is about killing in one hit with overwhelming damage, so use any form of Join Battle you can get. The favored method is Awakening Eye in Awareness, but Perfect Shadow Stillness + Blinding Battle Feint in Stealth or some charms in stealth can also help offset this. Either way you're going to want at least an 8 in your join battle pool before charms, then increase that as high as literally possible through charm use. Not going first in battle is a big drawback to the style as this style involves taking the offensive from the start and simply never letting the opponent breathe. Shining Point allows armour up to medium, which is good as literally no charms give soak bonuses (Though the form type charm helps with this somewhat). Shining Point is weak in direct defense, so you'll want to shore up your defense with either another martial art, Solar Melee (You'll need a high melee score, but Dipping Swallow Technique will keep your defense high) or Dodge. Resistance can help with your otherwise nil defense problems. Athletics is highly recommended for the damage doubling charms, which will send you into orbit with this style when you obtain Thunderbolt Attack Prana (I did nearly 150 levels of damage in one attack with this style and Thunderbolt Attack Prana once, in actual play and not white room). The ability to Rush or contest disengages is nice, but becomes moot once a specific charm in Single Point is obtained. Lastly a good willpower is suggested for this style. Single Point is very willpower intensive, and even after two fights with only a small handful of charms your Willpower pool will begin to shrink very fast.

Single Point gets shafted when it comes to other martial arts assisting it. The only published martial art that also has a sword focus (at the time this was written) is Steel Devil, which actually works very well with Single Point. Steel Devil does not specify what swords it can use, so that means you can use twin slashing swords. While sadly you cannot use Steel Devil's forms (A lot of Shining Point charms involve the form). Naked Fang Draw is a good join Battle charm if you cannot get any others for some reason, but the main focus is Double/Triple Attack Technique which will allow you to build up charge insanely fast and can be used on either your action or your sword's action. This allows for amazing offense and a fairly potent defense. The only con is that this is fairly expensive, and if you're just dipping than it may be best to just get up to Steel Devil Strike.

Another warning about this style is that it starts off slow, very slow. Nearly all the offensive might in this style is contained within the form which is locked behind Essence 2. You will be very fragile in the beginning, so it may be worthwhile to grab some evocations to help you along or just be careful what fights you pick. The difference is so big that it may be good to beg your ST to allow

you to grab the form, even if you're a solar and have to do without the mastery benefit until Essence 2. Its that important.

- **Gathering Light Concentration:** Even in the defense this style tries to give some offense, but the problem is that this charm is very expensive. It's fine when going against a single opponent, but any more than that and it becomes problematic. It should be noted however that this charm is a multiattackers bane, and for the cost of 15 or so motes you can annihilate an opponent's defense if they lack some sort of onslaught negator. Another good combo with this is using something like Flow Like Blood or Fivefold Bulwark Stance to keep your defense high, wait for an opponent to multiattack, then pop the mastery benefit to throw all the onslaught onto the opponent. Remember onslaught negator charms only stop onslaught from being applied from your defense, but you still suffer from it, this is the only charm in the book which straight out eliminates onslaught applied to you. If you are a Solar Brawler, do not use Falling Hammer Strike, and if you're a fan of multiattacks do not ever use them if the opponent has the mastery effect or has motes to burn.
- **Shining Starfall Execution:** Overpriced for its value in my opinion, but it does have its uses, allowing for tiny bit more extra damage on the **decisive** attack. Fatal Stroke Flash can double the potential initiative gain from this charm from 5 to 10, but I find by the time I can use Fatal Stroke Flash efficiently that the extra initiative is superfluous, but it may come in handy if the opponent has a healthy initiative score. At Essence 1 this can allow you to make decent **decisive** attacks with any initiative above 3, but if you're doing that then you're effectively grasping at straws. Hang on, let your teammates do the heavy lifting, you only need to hang out until Essence 2.
- **Single Shining Point in the Void Form:** You gain another initiative track. This sounds simple, but this is goddamn huge as it sends both your offense and defense into the roof. Most opponents are going to be hard pressed against this sort of offensive front, as the initiative drain is going to be very painful from the constant bombardment of attacks. Any initiative they possibly gain is going to be taken away by your second attack, allowing you to obtain defense through power. Another defensive boost is that now you can make a **decisive** attack and still have a nice comfortable initiative barrier in front of you while you nurse your other back up to safe levels. However upon learning this you become addicted to initiative, or more importantly going first. Going first means this charm will automatically activate (And depending on how one reads it, allows the same join battle charms used to win your join battle roll be used for activating the form too, but no official clarification on that), and going first means you can immediately begin an offensive front that the opponent is going to really struggle overcoming. Not activating it means that if you're unlucky, an opponent will attack and hit you which will reduce your initiative further, then when you activate the form you'll be delaying your offense. Note that the form shuts off when your blade's initiative track reaches zero, and unlike a normal initiative track it cannot make attacks during it. So if given a choice between yourself crashing and the blade crashing, always pick yourself so you can keep your offensive front. Dragonblooded get shafted on this charm, but they can still use the sword as an initiative padding of sorts, that or prepare themselves to eat willpower alive.

- **Fatal Stroke Flash:** The keystone to making overpowered attacks in this style. If your opponent is crashed then this effectively doubles your initiative. This can turn a 15 initiative attack from a probably tankable hit into a 30 initiative instant death attack unless the opponent has a ton of health, Resistance charms, or incredible luck. The drawback to this charm however is nasty, so my suggestion is to avoid missing altogether but using the Mastery effect or using every bit of your excellency to ensure you land it. When combined with Thunderbolt Attack Prana than this allows for damages in the 50s easily (That's levels by the way, not dice). Only Resistance heavy builds can tank this, that or things such as Legendary Size. This charm is also great against battle groups, as the insane damage you'll likely pull off if your initiative is 20 or so higher than the battle group means there is a very high likelihood of multiple size losses, which means multiple initiative break bonuses, effectively dispatching an enemy (or crippling it to near worthlessness) and getting back possibly most of the initiative you used for the attack.
- **Liquid Steel Flow:** The only **withering** booster in the style, but a really solid one. +DEX damage to all attacks is a huge boon, allowing you to wreck no/light armour users while fending off medium armour users. Remember that the initial duration is one round, so if use this on your first attack and fail, you can still likely proc the scenelong bonus on the second attack. The **decisive** benefit is very strong, allowing one to turn 3 dice of damage into automatic successes. If both attacks hit, this is a potential 6 levels of damage, meaning you'd only need a single level to actually knock a normal opponent out of the game! Note that the scenelong benefit costs willpower, and once a **decisive** attack is used this charm ends, so it is important to either end a battle all in one hit, use the scenelong part sparingly, or just this as a **decisive** from the get go immediately. The Mastery bonus allows you to press the offense even more, and keep going until the opponent is crashed.
- **Void-Slicing Wind:** Insane mobility and damage. In most combats this allows you to be a threat to literally anyone on the field. If a friend is in trouble, you can simply pop this charm to rush towards an opponent, very likely kill them, then go back to normal. An attack from this when Liquid Steel Flow is in effect is very likely going to hit unless the opponent can increase their defense (or has a massive defense to begin with). The damage boost this charm provides can be very well worth disengaging than attacking the opponent, turning the automatic level damage from Liquid Steel Flow from a 6 to a possible 8, meaning certain death if the opponent only has the standard 7 health levels. The second form of this charm, Countless Strikes Sheathed is an extremely potent charm in of itself albeit situational. Allowing one to make multiple **withering** strikes in a line or reduced power **decisive** attacks, which may seem like a ripoff... until one realizes that Liquid Steel Flow applies to them meaning that you can instantly rip three health levels off an opponent at the weakest (And continue until you hit the final target) or use Fatal Stroke Flash and do massive amounts of damage (Remember, Fatal Stroke Flash adds damage equal to the differences in initiative). It is unclear if activate Fatal Stroke Flash applies to all enemies in the line with a single activation or multiple ones must be used, but I assume its the latter with the precedent set in Solar melee. Even if this is extremely expensive, the fact that you can potentially end three or four opponents instantly at Essence 2 is extremely telling.

- **Horizon-Swallowed Star Flash:** Reflexive clash with a potential to gain bonus damage (Both in threshold successes over your opponent's score and the second from Shattered Mirror Nova-Strike). An expensive skill, but good if you want to constantly keep on the offensive. With two initiative tracks you can tend to use this a little bit more often than just Melee alone, melee still has a better baseline minimum damage with things such as Fire and Stones and its disposal.
- **Six-Demon Scabbard Binding:** A very interest utility charm, functioning as not only a way to protect yourself from 'funhouse' effects that seek to warp reality or your person, but allows you to cut a path for yourself that can greatly simplify any sort of Survival roll for navigation in the Deep Wyld, Labyrinth, or other such icky places where the geometry shifts while things constantly try to kill you. Additionally it serves as great protection against any sort of local creature attempting to shape you as well, batting them across the head if they so much as even try. This charm is situational, but it's one of the charms that when the situation finally arrives you'll be damn glad to have it.
- **Blinding Nova Flare:** An unblockable and undodgeable attack that costs nothing to execute!? You shouldn't have! A successful gambit from this essentially forces a person to either have Seven Shadows Evasion or eat the hit, which amazingly useful against people with fairly high defenses, as one hit using Fatal Stroke Flash combined with this will immediately make them rethink their life and possibly surrender. Landing a difficulty 5 gambit will require around 12-13 dice on the safe side, but even if you fail the opponent still has a lowered defense. If you're ever on the receiving end of this, your only hopes to avoid getting hit at to use Seven Shadow Evasion or some sort of clashing charm to immediately challenge the attack.

EBON SHADOW STYLE STYLE

Ebon Shadow Style is all about using stealth to your advantage, and it does this in a way that gives thrown or archery a serious run for their money. While Thrown or Archery may have range, Ebon Shadow allows the user to make worthwhile **withering** attacks from stealth rather than praying to god your opponent goes down in the first attack with thrown or archery (Thrown or Archery have very nice nova attacks, but if you fail or if more opponents arrive, you're sorta shit outta luck), this style can constantly hide from the opponent and striking them where they least expect it. If you wish to make a stealth user that uses close combat weapons, than Ebon Shadow will be your best friend. Think of it being like melee Zer0 from Borderlands 2.

Being the Martial art all about stealth, you'll want your stealth as high as possible when using this style, then picking up as many stealth charms as possible to further add to its power if you should so desire. Given the style's ban on armour, Resistance may also be a very welcome choice if you plan on getting hit (you will be getting hit at some point). Not being able to be attacked is one of the best forms of defense yes, but Dodge charms will be useful to you, especially since Rumor of Form will allow you to reflexively stealth so long as the opponent has at least a single 1 in their roll, and when most serious opponents will be rolling *at least* 13 dice the chances of this happening are pretty good. A good Awareness may be needed in order to get a good join battle roll (Remember,

an Ambush will only trigger if your opponent has less initiative than you), as a Solar you can somewhat skimp this as Blinding Battle Feint can give you a great join battle alone but Awareness is always nice in 3e so you really want to avoid dumping that entire ability. Thrown can be used as a good supplementary ability, in where you can nuke a bunch of people with powerful decisives immediately at the start of a battle then switch to Ebon Shadow style for the rest of it, but generally I find just hiding and sneaking up on the target once again generally works well too. As a general note, the Belt of Shadows is an excellent Artifact for people of this style, as adding +3 dice to your stealth rolls is fine, but turning into an immaterial Shadow is even better. You can even ask your Storyteller to come up with smoke bomb items in order for you to make cover so you can hide more efficiently.

Ebon Shadow has quite an impressive array of weapons for it. Sais, Knives, and Tiger Claws. Sais are probably going to rarely ever be seen, currently this is the only martial art that uses knives (But given how popular knives are that may change in the future), leaving Tiger Claws as its only weapon synergy as of the time I write this document, and it is a **really** damn good one. Tiger Style also goes great for making sneak attacks, and with how Ebon Shadow form is just **nice** to have rather than essential, you could really milk Tiger style for all its worth and if you're fighting an opponent who has a high awareness score to make Stealth impractical (Very rare), Tiger Style can provide the muscle needed to shred that opponent to pieces. Snake Style goes very well with Ebon Shadow if you're going pure unarmed, gaining some additional defense in the form (Both a penalty to hit and a soak bonus) but also gaining additional damage for all unarmed attacks (bringing them closer to artifact levels). Seven Points of Weakness Strike + Armour Penetrating Fang Strike is essential ignoring all armoured soak and adding dice extra dice of damage, and lastly Snake Style is just happy with a high dexterity rather than wanting higher Strength like Tiger style. Ebon Shadow combined with Crane can take care of one of Crane's biggest weaknesses (Damage) with just the form alone.

- **Nothing But Shadows:** The penalty this charm provides is very weak early on, but later on it applies a straight penalty to an enemy awareness roll, which may as well be extra dice to your roll. Faking death can be situationally useful, but for the love of god be careful of enemies who always attempt to take the head. Furthermore if you use this charm when the form is up and the enemy knows how Ebon Shadow works, do not expect this charm to work at all. The Mastery benefit allows it to be useful even at the lower levels, potentially netting a nice chunk of initiative whenever you make a stealth check. This can be done as soon as battle begins via Blinding Battle Feint or after making a decisive attack and wanting to have a bit more initiative upon reset.
- **Seven Points of Weakness Style:** About 75% of the enemies in the game will use armour, so at the very minimum this means shaving off nearly 5 points of armour while when using a sneak attack it allows you to virtually bypass all of full plate! The Mastery benefit makes it so if an opponent attempts a non-armour soak build that they're very heavily penalized for it. If you're a solar you'll be using this on every attack, no questions asked. If you're someone else, you're still using it 75% of the time.

- **Ebon Shadow Form:** A flat +1 defense is always nice to have. The +3 initiative upon reset may not seem like much, but it should allow you just the bare edge needed to attempt another stealth roll before the enemy can act. The dissolution upon death is a nice way to never be discovered, but more often than not it's a tool used by the ST to annoy the players. The form itself also leaves some interpretation to be had on my end leading to one of two options regarding the anima turning black and shapeless. First is that it just helps hide yourself better in case you need to flare. The other is since the anima is black one could attempt to stealth without the stealth related penalties for anima flaring. If its the latter than Ebon Shadow is amazingly good that lets virtually any solar type have a Night-lite anima power. If not then it just means you need to be more careful with how you spend your motes. Regardless I don't know, as this is one of the things that 3e doesn't clarify. If it doesn't, the form is merely 'alright' and if you can control mote spending than it's entirely possible to use other forms for just as devastating as effect, such as Snake or Tiger.
- **Elusive Flicker Evasion:** Forces an enemy to make a reroll against you when a decisive attack is used. Fairly bog standard, and when combined with Dodge defense raising charms this could make the attack roll virtually impossible to land. The mastery benefit is nice to gain extra initiative, but that's more to help gain extra initiative over the opponent so you can stealth before they can on the next turn.
- **Shadow Body Dissolution:** A good, but expensive panic button. It's mote cost makes it so that you want to activate this charm as little as possible. While it cannot be used with other effects that lower decisive damage (Such as Adamant Skin), effects that grant hardness are allowed in this instance, meaning that if you lower an opponent's damage enough the attack will outright fail if they do not have enough damage to bypass your hardness, effectively forcing your opponent to build up a lot of initiative to strike you. Also this charm effectively renders large magical multi-attacking charms such as Iron Whirlwind dead on arrival, as they're forced to go all in on one attack before you completely nullify the rest of the attacks with trivial ease. This charm can also be used in initiative crash, which is also a nice touch.
- **Shadow Stepping Motion:** A charm that not only makes you stealth better but makes your attacks far more deadly. The penalty for moving across wide open terrain is now effectively nullified (Which if it is sunny, this is a big plus) and also doubles 9s during it, making you a very fast shadow which kills people. It can also be used on attacks, making the normal -2 penalty applied from attacking while in stealth to -4 on decisive attacks (Unless you roll horribly or the opponent has a penalty negator, this is basically an automatic hit) while a withering attack adds a nice chunk of damage allowing one to take on even the highest of soaks with ease. Like Seven Points of Weakness, this charm should be used nearly 90% of the time after using it, as there is rarely a reason to ever *not* use it, and with it immediately being available after the form it should be your next pick in this style easily. Oh and its Mute too, meaning it won't contribute to your anima so you can use other charms as well.
- **Throat-Slitting Shadow Atemi:** On a normal decisive attack this charm is OK, a nice way to add some extra damage is always nice, but once again scales very slowly and even then is always dependant on threshold damage. Unexpected attacks turn this charm into a literal murder machine. Ambushing an opponent with this usually means flat out death unless they're bloated with health levels or have very specialized charms, and even during battle

itself Shadow Stepping Motion means their defense will be nuked so it may as well be an ambush attack. Dissolving the body is also a great touch, and helps avoiding your opponents finding bodies. Be very, very afraid of this charm.

- **Umbra-Noose Execution:** A very nice charm that allows one to gain another large wad of initiative before making a decisive attack, but after the sheer insanity that is Throat-Slitting Shadow Atemi this charm is far more tame. The Mastery benefit makes it so this charm effectively only costs 1WP, but more often than not Throat-Slitting is going to be far more useful in the longer run. ...Though showing an entire battle group hanged by their own shadows is one hell of a demoralizer.

CHARM PICKING IN GENERAL

If you're looking for a more "In general" type of guideline rather than reading huge lists, here's what I recommend:

1. Get the charms that let you not die at first, such as getting some Dodge or Melee. As I've shown, you don't need overly much in order to make it breaking through your defense very difficult and even if your offense sucks can hold out long enough so someone else in your circle can help you out.
2. Get charms that actually let you be somewhat of a threat in combat. Again you don't need to do something like the Dawn and invest in 10 combat charms at the start. Many abilities you only need 3-4 charms in it to be good. You may not be the One Who Fights With the Strength of Ten-Thousand, but people certainly cannot just pretend you don't exist on the battlefield.
3. The rest of your charm should be focused on your character's niche, or what you picture him to be good at. An amazing captain? Sail. A inquisitive investigator? Investigation. A man who glides unseen in the battlefield and in castles? Stealth. Often this is the supernal, but sometimes it may be other things.
4. Charm purchases that either seem cool to you or support your character in their niche. An Investigator loves all of the Awareness charms or Lore charms that help declare facts. A Sail would do well with possibly some War for when he boards or Bureaucracy for evaluating goods. A stealth Ninja would like some Larceny so his hiding isn't halted by the first locked door he sees or Survival for covering any long term distance travel. If you're unsure of what abilities can help out with this, ask the other players or Storyteller for advice.

You can probably say I have a bit of bias towards combat, but this is mainly because I also have a strong bias for making sure my character remains alive. Characters will vary quite a bit, but at most I'd say a total between 3-6 of your beginning charms should be in the combat area somewhat. You can do more, but if the charm picks are right those 3-6 charms could very well last you for a very, VERY long time.

Chapter 4: Homebrew & House Rules

HOME BREW EXAMPLES

Don't ask "why?", ask "Why not?"

So you want to hack your game into pieces but don't know some good methods to do so? Or rather want some samples pre-made from a list? Don't worry, I have your covered.

For each houserule listed, I will have the description of how it works, why one would wish to implement this rule, and the Effects for doing so (both positive and negative). Note that the current publication of this document is **Lunars**, so the effects of future releases will not be handled.

ALTERNATE ATTACKING STATS

This houserule changes how both **withering** and **decisive** attacks are made in the system by hacking the attributes to allow one attribute or another to be used for attacks and defense.

- When making Brawl or Melee attacks, the user can decide to use either Strength or Dexterity on the attack roll. This is allowed for Martial Arts so long as it makes sense within the style (EX: Single Shining Point in the Void, with it's quick strikes, cannot use Strength to attack. Tiger Style however can use Dexterity or Strength at its leisure).
 - Fun fact: The current devs want to do this and tried to make it as a stealth errata fix in Lunars, but were shut down because WW doesn't want errata yet. If this isn't a call legitimacy I don't know what isn't. It also let one parry with Strength too.
- Ranged attacks continue to use Dexterity to hit
- When calculating Parry value, use the higher of Strength or Dexterity.
- When calculating Dodge value, use the higher of Dexterity or Wits
- When calculating ranged damage, use the higher of Strength or Perception.

Reason: Some people don't like Dexterity as a godstat, with alternate stats to do (mostly) everything in combat then there are less 'trap' options.

Effects: Some charms (Such as Oak-Curling Clutch) immediately become pointless under this houserule, which my suggestion would be to remove them or keep its repurchase effect for a higher essence. Secondly this makes melee and brawl charms potentially a lot more devastating, especially Tiger Style. However Dexterity is still important in this, especially since it can still be used to hit, for both defenses, *and* it's still the only stat used for rushing and disengaging. Slow melee tanks would have a difficult time keeping up with faster characters. God help you if your Storyteller uses my Infernal Homebrew and has a Scourge.

ALTERNATE XP PROGRESSION SCHEMES

Inspirations: A seemingly infinite amount of threads online that I read when I was horribly bored.

This houserule changes how XP progressions work in Exalted. There have been (far too many) XP progression schemes in Exalted both 2e and 3e (Probably 1e, but I only came on in 2e).

Sidebar: A word of warning about the XP debate

The reason is some people don't like the current XP progression in Exalted, which is often flat at the start but increases as the higher the skill goes up. Before I go into this, I feel its very important to note the current XP scheme in 3e makes it so that Solar XP gives a much needed band-aid to the skills. In 2e you just had one type of XP, and buying an ability that lets you fire sword lasers vs getting +1 more die on a certain roll, people would want sword lasers. Solar XP fixes this by letting you buy up things other than charms, or go REALLY focused in charms if you're going down Evocations, Martial Arts, or Sorcery. I am only one man, but having played in an Exalted 3e game since chargen to Essence 5, I basically have a similar character sheet of when I used flat XP in Exalted 2.0e/2.5e. This debate is often so hot that I'm most likely not going to try and change anyone's mind, I'm just asking to at least see the point of Solar XP, and I can say right now that using flat XP with it will lead to PC's having all 5s in about... half a year maybe. I have personally also used all the XP models listed (Barring XP gen) myself.

● FLAT XP

- Description: Attributes now cost 4 XP per dot. Normal abilities cost 2 XP per dot (1 XP if favored)
- Reason: Some people just really don't like the XP ratios.
- Effects: This shouldn't affect normal XP much at all. People will generally want to beeline for charms that do cool things rather than give +1 die to a roll, and with this it lets them get the abilities minimums they want out of the way faster than normal play. Even after 2 years in a game PC's still went for charms 90% of the time. However if combined with Solar XP, this result can be explosive outright, leading to PC's with attributes and abilities very similar to each other as they have nothing to spend it on if they lack Sorcery/Martial Arts/Evocations to use. Some people don't mind this, others do. If using flat XP, I'd suggest cutting away Solar XP unless you want the players to have an extremely fast growth on purpose, as Solar XP was originally supposed to help band-aid the gap that 2e had in where one wanted sword beams over +1 die.

● SET POINT XP

- Description: The attribute/Ability dot level one had at chargen is now considered the 'first dot' when buying up attributes and abilities. For example, if one character

had Strength 3, normally it would take 12 XP to go from Strength 3 to 4 and 16 XP to go from Strength 4 to 5. Under this system it would cost only 4, as the advancement from Strength 3 to 4 is only counted as the first dot level.

- Reason: People who get things at three generally want to max those things out over a course of a game. This makes it so that the stats that people consider important are much easier to reach in game in exchange for a minor bit of bookkeeping (Just put a small tick over the dots you had at the end of character generation).
- Effects: It lets players get the things they want a lot more effectively. Attributes only cost 12 XP to go from 3 to 5 while abilities only cost 6 (unfavored) or 4 (favored), but still makes it so that things they leave at 0 are a cost-intensive thing to buy into. Solar XP generally shouldn't have a large impact on this one, players become a bit stronger but not as much as they would with flat XP.

● XP Based Character Generation

- Description: Instead of using point allocation and BP in character generation, you are instead given a certain amount of experience points in each area you need to spend, which are: (INSERT LIST LATER)
- Reason: Some people really, really, really hate the divide that BP vs XP can give at start. XP chargen basically gives a single resource to everyone and tells them to use it.
- Effects: Some people just consider this overly math intensive or not worth the trouble, some may not like the fact they can spam easy 5s in stats everywhere at start. The good news is that this does basically force everyone to start on the same playing field at very least.

ALWAYS ON FLIGHT

Inspirations: Touhou, Dragonball series

Who needs to walk? Walking is for normal people! With this houserule anyone with an active essence pool or who is a Sorcerer is capable of flying through the air. This effect requires very little concentration and is as easy (and tiring) as walking or running for the character. Any midair maneuver requires Dexterity+Athletics and any Athletics charms that boost ground speed can also boost flight speed. A character however needs to be conscious in order to fly! If a character is knocked unconscious they'll fall back down the ground, a fall which can be fatal! Likewise any successful knockdown effect will cause a person to begin to plummet towards the ground, starting at one range brand per turn before finally capping out at three range brands a turn. Regaining control of the flight is as simple as doing a rise from prone action.

Reason: It's cool

Effects: Quite a few immediate ones. Firstly would be that walls no longer inhibit your character at all, nor would the floor. Characters wouldn't need to roll to activate floor based traps and could

instead fly over them easily (Use motion detecting traps instead). Charms focused on merely travelling high in the air by jumping or by flight (Including but not limited to, Monkey Leap Technique, Soaring Crane Leap, Unbound Eagle Approach, and Eagle-Wing Style) are effectively rendered useless. Such charms could be reconfigured into mid-air movement charms, but some effects of charms (Such as Eagle-Wing Style's quick advancement) may possibly be salvaged out of the charms.

ANIMA FIELD

Inspirations: RWBY, Halo shields, my own Sci-fi idea I had literal years ago

Strong characters don't need to bother dodging attacks as bullets and blades seem to rebound off of the character's skin entirely. Each and every Exalt's own anima field, even when muted, is capable of having attacks reflect off of the anima field to boil away most if not all harm an opponent seeks to do on the Exalted. Stronger supernatural creatures usually have a similar field constantly on around them, but weaker ones (Essence 4 or lower) and/or mortals are generally left to the full effects. Armour is still used to absorb some of the impact from the blow so that not all of it is channeled into the anima field. The field is not invincible nor all encompassing, so caution is advised! In fact if the field breaks than characters are wide open to the attacks of their enemies!

Reason: One reason is narrative dissonance, some people generally don't like how initiative is far more narrative/handwavy so they want something more solid¹⁴. Other is wanting to feel the solid impact of attacks, or letting even the most fragile of characters feel as if they're capable of taking blows that kill lesser men trivially.

Effects: Most of the details about the field are in the fluff itself. Those without active anima fields (or equivalent) treat **withering** damage as actual health level damage, while **withering** damage between opponents can be seen as innate magical attacks of some sort that steal power from one opponent's field or just general toughness. The same anima field can be used as an offensive tactic, where one can focus all of their field into a special shot or attack that tears through the anima field and nearly all known armours to inflict actual damage at the cost of draining most of your field's power, known as a **decisive** attack. An initiative break is seen as an opponent's anima field or entering low power mode, where normal attacks become much more lethal (hence battle group attacks doing actual damage). During this time inside of initiative break one on the ropes can only use the polarity from their anima field to repel attacks from other anima field users, but they'd have no protection from a full power **decisive** attack.

The field isn't at full strength all the time, that would be far too tiring even for the mightiest of Exalts. Rather the Wits + Awareness roll to join battle not only represents attempting to go faster than your opponent, but also unconsciously focusing your field to repel attacks.

¹⁴ This makes some narrative dissonance where in one combat you can take a Grand Daiklave to the face and have the field hold up while in another a knife is capable of crashing you, but considering how games like M&M have Superman being knocked out by an anti-tank rifle in one shot on a REALLY good roll, I think it's close enough suspension for disbelief in order to make rules work.

Rules wise this literally does nothing, just a different explanation of how protection for exalts works. If you wish you could make it also apply to physical impacts like falling damage (making it FAR less lethal). I'd highly suggest against making it also work against things like environmental hazards, as you'd be stepping on the territory of other charms.

CURSE BENNIES

Ooo! Shiny!

This houserule negates the all at once explosion of the Great Curse and rather only does it gradually in a once per scene method. In this version the Great Curse activation trigger you pick is treated as a flaw. Whenever it is met with in game the player has a choice. They can ignore it for a price of One willpower (maximum once per scene), or they can play along with the flaw. In they choose the latter, they gain a point of willpower (or five motes if they're currently full on willpower) and if the curse is enough to cause a complication that is interesting during play, then the player is rewarded a point of Solar Experience.

Reason: This is more like Fate or Mutants and Masterminds Fate/Hero points. The reward is a bit less, but the motivation behind taking it is the same. Remember, just like normal flaws complications need to be interesting. Players can game this to an extent, but if it only causes grief for the storytellers and/or players than no Experience should be given out.

Effects: GM's have a lot more chances to bait their players into certain acts, but requires more careful monitoring of their sheets.

FUCK CURSES

When the dying Primordials said "WE CURSE YOU ALL TO BE DICKS!" to the Exalted, the ones in this game went "Whatever" and continued on their merry way. The great curse mechanic is gone. If necessary exalts will still track limit, but instead of limit "break" they lose a dot of willpower for a single month of in game time. If this proves to be too short (EX: Generational long games) than increase this to a single story instead.

Reason: Some people *really* hate the curse. With this, losing a WP dot is painful enough to want to avoid limit breaking, but should get rid of most concerns. In games where limit tracking isn't needed, you could eject limit and the great curse altogether.

Effects: Obviously with the curse gone the GM can't bait the character with a "I ACTIVATE MY TRAP CARD!" moment and needs to wait for the players to make an incredible fuckup. Given the nature of Player characters, this is literally only a matter of time.

HARDY SUPERNATURALS

When one learns to take their second breath, you are not merely considered mighty for being able to use charms, but you're frightening when compared to any average joe! Supernatural creatures gain the following benefits:

- Feats of Strength are lowered by one category and Feats of Strength that need Strength 3 may now be done effortlessly. Any supernatural being does not need to roll in order to do something like break a sword across their knee, and throwing a boulder only requires three successes on a feat of Strength roll while only requiring 3 Strength.
- The harshest conditions only have little chance of laying the mighty low. Any supernatural automatically gains an additional (3 or Essence, whichever is higher) automatic successes to resist any mundane environmental hazard. However if a hazard is caused by a supernatural or altered by a supernatural, then this bonus is restricted
 - Example: Walking across a desert means an exalt has little chance of heat stroke, but if an angry sky god decided to spite the Exalt and intensify the sun's rays, then the Exalt would need to resist as normal). Likewise a Fire Aspects anima catching fire to a building and making it an inferno would mean any supernatural inside would need lose the bonus afforded by this supernatural fire.
- Mundane poisons and illnesses cannot affect the Supernatural. Only supernatural poisons and illnesses have any chance of affecting him. This means that alcohol meant for supernaturals would knock a mortal almost flat out, making moonshine seem weak in comparison!
 - For clarification, 'mundane' poison coming from evocations such as Spring Razor count as supernatural, as does any poison coming from a supernatural opponent.
- The Exalt still has needs... just that he can delay them for much longer. The Exalt can now go (Stamina) hours without air, die of dehydration after (Stamina) weeks without water, and perish from starvation after (Stamina) months without food. However in less than ideal conditions, the same penalties from hardships apply otherwise (including staying underwater for Stamina x2 turns!)

Reason: Maybe you don't want PC's to die anticlimactically but still want to remain by the book on nearly everything else. Or maybe you think casually hurling boulders is cool.

Effects: Most environmental treks or concerns are going to be an absolute joke, making so that only extreme environments such as the Wyld, Malfeas, or an Elemental Court are likely to force an Exalt to roll. Environmental resistance charms such as Hardship-Surviving Mendicant Spirit may be reduced in value, but are still welcome for what they bring against the worst mundane environments. A lot of spirits usually have charms to alter or amplify environmental problems, bypassing the protection this houserule can normally bring as well. Poison/Illness-Resisting Meditation are more situational, but will be *damn* useful when they can work as supernatural poisons and illnesses are bound to be nasty. Feats of Strength means even the weakest Exalt is

stronger than the average mortal, and 'above average' exalts can perform feats that amaze mortals almost casually.

MIGHTY SUPERNATURALS

Inspirations: Exalted 2e, Godbound, epic tales involving gods rather than mortals

Supernatural beings don't just show power, they literally *are* power when infused with Essence. Mortal beings can simply never hope to compare. Using this modification does the following:

- The dramas of the gods and supernaturals are so far above the concerns of mere mortals that such people only end up as playthings to such creatures. Whenever a supernatural creature makes **any roll** against a mundane mortal then they automatically receive (3 or Essence, whichever is greater) bonus automatic successes to the roll that do not count towards dice cap. *However*, the supernatural being must at least have some degree of skill in a roll. An Exalt who cannot count (Let's say bureaucracy 0) is still going to lose to a mortal who can count every time (Bureaucracy 3). These bonuses also apply against battlegroups composed of mortals that have Might 0 *unless* they are being led or aided by a supernatural themselves (see below).
- In battle, mortals are almost always treated as trivial opponents. In the case of elite fighters or bodyguards then they're still a joke. Mortal opponents, even mighty ones, always have their health track damaged by **withering** attacks, gaining an initiative break bonus one one is felled (Plus whatever initiative they somehow stole from you back). Against mortal attacks, supernatural characters gain an additional (Essence or 3, whichever is higher) soak againsts **withering** and **decisive** attacks, while insignificant characters cannot hurt the Exalt at all! That is right, soak against **decisive** attacks.
 - To use a fast and loose rule of insignificant opponents under this houserule, anyone who is average in attribute or skill (EX: 2 dots) are treated as insignificant, while anyone who is actually higher than that would be enough that the supernatural being needs to actually **try** against the Exalt.
- The words of a supernatural can worm their way into the strongest of mortal minds. Any social influence action the Exalt makes forces the mortal to spend an additional point of willpower in order to resist it. Likewise social attacks by mortals mean that the Supernatural being gains +3 to both Resolve and Guile... unless they're using a defining intimacy or are a defining intimacy. History is rife with mere mortals tricking gods!
- The above however *does not* apply when a mortal is directly under a supernatural blessing of some sort. For example a Sorcerer who is under the Skin of Bronze spell takes damage as a supernatural would, and a battle group under the blessing of Ahlat himself would apply their full traits against the exalt and give the exalt no automatic bonuses against them. This also applies to the Exalt's own soldiers and familiars, in where if they are under the effect of **any** survival or war charm, supernatural bonuses against such groups are automatically negated. In addition, Tiger Warrior Training gains the following enhancement to give to Elite troops in addition to the ones already there:

- **The Slayers of Gods** - *“And if you look over here, this is where they teach young children to someday become godkillers.”* Against a supernatural opponents a battle group does not suffer, they thrive! Against a single supernatural opponent, a battlegroup gains +1 might and negates any bonuses a supernatural would normally gain against them.
- Mortals cannot make artifacts under any circumstance. Such a thing is too complex for them.

Reason: Perhaps you want to tell an epic tale in where the Exalts themselves are far better than any mortal can ever hope to achieve. Perhaps you want a massive power trip. Either way, this houserule has you covered.

Effects: This quite literally puts mortals in the backdrops, casting the exalts even more like demigods than what they already are, but while seemingly powerful they can be undone very quickly. Effects are put into place so that if someone wants to make a mortal army or a wolf familiar, than such a system shouldn't screw over such concepts. Even without Tiger Warrior Training Technique, even something as basic as League of Iron Preparation will make them fight at full power against supernaturals. Likewise a Sorcerer with Wood Dragon's Claw and Skin of Bronze can fight against Exalts without the penalties (Assuming they're up). Automatic successes are used, as god knows you'll want to avoid rolling more dice.

Chapter XD: My Notes

MISC NOTES

- HI, WELCOME TO EXALTED!
 - Talk about the horrible unrelenting pain of being a Storyteller
- RUNNING A GAME
 - What you will need
 - Setting up premise with players, going over backstories, selecting location
 - Premise being a serious sort of game, or a gonzo sort of one
 - Going over player backstories with them
 - Remember that some people like to work on stories before sessions whereas others may do two-three sentences and prefer to develop it in play.
 - Select a geographical location in Creation, as each is different.
 - Break down locations a bit
 - Nearly everyone picks Scavenger Lands anyhow
 - Preparing for a game/running one
 - Types of players
 - Exalted strengths tends towards a sandbox style gameplay, but some people may like more guided games (AKA: Railroaded)
 - Taking proper notes, describing certain events that may possibly happen in two-three session's time and then predicting them. Such as if having a warlord country next to your players, it doesn't mean that him attacking you is set in stone. You can let him attack/attack him, or you can appease them, set up a puppet, and more.
 - Do not become addicted to this. Remember keyword is possibly, as it may or may not come true, but you are ready in case it does.
 - What to do in case things go off a little bit, such as having some pre-statted NPC's in case a fight happens, etc...

- Improvisation when things go very wrong.
- How to plan an encounter
 - combat. How to set the battlefield, enemies, setpieces, and conditions
 - Social. How to set up the actors. Goals, motivations, and more.
- CHARMS
 - Talk about charms
 - What charms are, and how they're basically everything in the game. Tends to differ from most other games, in which charms are kinda like magical feats or abilities.
 - Reminder of what charms are vs what they are not. Charms are usually intended to make most actions easier. You don't 'need' bureaucracy charms to use bureaucracy. It becomes a lot easier, but you can still use it.
 - Solar charms
 - A build guide for players, telling what attributes in each section does. Including skeleton ESS 1 builds along with Supernal charm suggestions.
 - How to make customs. Use EX Raiser Sword as an example.
 - Evocations
 - How to make evocations, use the DFO Soul Bender sword as an example.
 - MA
 - How to make MA, use the DFO Brawler style as a good example
- HOMEBREW
 - When to use homebrew
 - If too extensive, suggest alternative systems. Such as FATE core, M&M, or Cortex Command.
 - WHY to use Homebrew (Either try to address something or do it because its fun.)
 - Warn about potential problems
 - All homebrew have 'give and take' features. You may solve one problem, but end up creating another.

- Suggestions

- ~~Alternate attacking stats~~
- ~~Always on flight~~
- ~~Puny mortals~~
- DnD Blasto Sorcery
 - Use Mastery and Terrestrial keywords
 - Maybe just more withering spells for other homebrews
- A system based on Godbound that allows sorcerous workings for all.

Hank = Twilight

Hibiki = Zenith

Amanda = Night

Ron = ST