

conquest of conquest

As I have said before, I am a roleplayer more than anything else. So even though Worldcon had come to my hometown as ConJosé, I chose to go to a small gaming convention further up the San Francisco peninsula.

Last year's ConQuest was a fun little¹ con where I was able to play in a few games (at traditional "west coast" lengths of 6-8 hours each) as well as get in some board games. This year was no different, but I played in fewer games overall simply because there were fewer interesting games. Unfortunately, there was enough going on that a scheduling conflict prevented me from attending the A&E Worldcon party.

Saturday, I played in a Silver Age Sentinels game. Sunday, I ran my own SAS game. Monday, I played in a supers game using the Storyboard system I first encountered at last year's ConQuest. Notice a theme?

ConQuest is still young and small. It seemed to have less people this year, but I am sure Worldcon and the economy is to blame. I will probably go next year, unless GenCon, which I plan on attending in Indianapolis, makes it unfeasible.

comments

#325

michael cule

Angel's Fred is an example of a character from a specific story arc that got elevated to "opening credits" status. This is a tradition on *Buffy/Angel*. Originally, Angel himself was intended as a short-term character on *Buffy*.

robert dushay

Meeting any NPC, large or small, should have a purpose. Meeting the big guns of the setting just so they can lord over (or crush) you is not constructive. Meeting them so that you can interact with them in a meaningful way is more appropriate and fun.

lee gold

I use props, mostly maps, cardboard character figures, and handouts, as visualization tools. Especially in combat, things get confusing and props help the players visualize their character's surroundings. However, I never use a grid-based combat system because it changes the focus from roleplaying to wargaming.

viktor haag

Using Transformation for a mental effect is bad form. Force the player to use Mind Control and make all the Ego rolls for everyone in range.

"Mortal secrets" is a good way to phrase and limit Secrets' power. What about shared secrets?

Fudge is designed to be more flexible and adaptable than OTE. You can use OTE-like traits with Fudge with no added effort. The section on Subjective Character Creation is no more difficult to use than OTE.

What you choose to call the trait levels is one of those superficial, cosmetic changes that Fudge GMs should do, and are encouraged to do, on their own. Since the average person is Poor (-2) at most skills, calling a modifier of 0 "Average" instead of "Fair" can be misleading.

richard iorio 2

Ars Magica magic, while player-defined, is much more rule-structured than BESM's magic, especially Dynamic Sorcery. I would place Ars Magica as a third point, midway between D&D and BESM.

Six is my preferred number of players for convention. Most conventions have a minimum of six, and if you are doing game demos, limiting it to four players may be too inefficient.

avram grumer

I know the 4dF distribution even though I got my Fudge dice without the chart. My only point was it is not as obvious as a pure percentile- or d20-based system, for example.

You can also undo auto-corrections in Word. If you notice the change, simply perform an undo. However, while editing, the auto-correction may still kick-in later. But using undo is handy for those auto-corrections you may not want to disable permanently, such as capitalization.

¹ Almost 1200 attendees, according to their website.

spike y jones

I only participated peripherally in the SAS playtest. I paid for a Pyramid subscription solely to get a copy of the rules so I could use them for a convention game (I had already used BESM for supers). As a result, I did not get to play until after the comment period was over. What I found most disappointing is that the few of us who wanted things looser and simpler always seemed to be drowned out.

The people who wanted everything spelled out because they hate ambiguity were probably coming with more of a Champions mindset seemed the most frustrated with the playtest. GOO wanted to keep things loose and GM-defined. This prompted calls for sidebars and explicit explanations and GM permissions that started getting ridiculous.

The majority of playtesters seemed to really like the system and what GOO was doing but needed clarification on how things were supposed to work. For example, powers like Adaptation seemed useless compared to Armor. It was this group that seemed to have the most influence in the playtest. The relationship between GOO and the playtesters was adversarial at times, but it was clear by the end that SAS was a solid system that met its design goals.

open gaming report

Why does the logo show an “open d6” with the “6” and “4” on opposite sides? I don’t mean to be anal, but c’mon. Also, I would never refer to any system that requires me to buy a core rulebook² as “free” or “open” and would consider such systems outside the scope of an “open gaming” association.

lisa padol

Character points are an illusion of balance. A character can be much weaker than a character with much fewer points. Rather than compare points, you have to compare actual ability.

Bert was speared in the arse.

nick parenti

I am happy to see it was not just me who has a problem with the droid’s lack of memory in SW Episodes I and II.

² Especially if that rulebook may have nothing to do with the setting or genre I am trying to create.

jonathan tweet

“Kirkiness” is a very interesting idea. I think it begs the question of what we are trying to simulate in rpgs: Kirk’s actions as seen on-screen or Kirk’s actions if he did not have the writers telling him what to do and ultimately being on his side. Besides, some “non-Kirky” characters do need to be beaten down with failed tries. Because characters never technically fail, the technique you describe opens up a situation where characters never have to face the consequences of their failed actions.

When the character’s ability at something is greater than the player’s, rpgs use skill checks to resolve the action. So, what do you do with a player who cannot pick up on the tactical subtleties of the rules, especially as they apply to teamwork? Use a teamwork or tactics skill.

jonathan woolley

Can you name the source of this strongly discouraging quote? “The following Classes are ‘NPC’ Classes. ... These classes are not as good as the basic character classes, and should rarely, if ever, be used by player characters.”

Shooting someone in the back has nothing to do with surprise or feints. It has everything to do with facing. While I appreciate the intention behind a simplified grid-based combat system, I find that the D&D rules are too complicated given the logical holes it has. I can forgive holes in a simple system (like d20 Cthulhu) and I can forgive complexity in a logical system, but D&D occupies a no-man’s-land that I find frustrating.

daphne & bertwald

Last time we left our intrepid heroes, they had been trudging up the river and figured out that the cave they wanted was, in fact, the cave being guarded. They surveyed the situation while crouching behind a tree.

Daphne asks, “Do we have any idea who these guys are?”

“I don’t. Do any of them look like that creepy guy?” Bert says,³ “Oh yeah, I remember someone calling out ‘Salandra.’ I don’t know if this makes any sense, but maybe we could climb up in one of these trees, and watch for awhile... see if we can get a body count... schedules, etc.”

“We don’t have that kind of time.”

“We don’t? Why not?”

³ After GM prompting.

Daphne says, "Gather some leaves and branches. We're going to smoke whoever is in there out."

"See, that's why the Duke put you in charge. Plus I kinda think he likes you."

"What?" Again, "What?!"

"The Duke put you in charge because you have good ideas. What what?"

"Just get the stuff."

"Yes, milady." He fake tugs his forelock, and goes very quietly out to get some of those aforementioned leaves and branches.

Daphne slips her arm out of the sling again. It is stiff but workable. She asks, "So who is this Salandra person, anyway?" But Bert is a few yards away, gathering wood very quietly.

Bert returns with a good-sized armload. "Did you say something to me?"

Daphne repeats, "So who is this Salandra person, anyway?"

He looks at her oddly. "Person? It's the next country over."

"Oooooohhhh. So these guys are...."

"Foreigners?"

"Right. And they are here because...."

"There's something in the cave they want?"

"I see."

Bert suggests, "Or maybe the cave leads somewhere."

"Think it's related to your little seed thing somehow?"

"Remember, the temple people talked about a dark portal or something?"

"And?"

Bert continues, "And we're supposed to defeat the darkness or close it or something? You're supposed to be the brain here, don't you remember?"

Daphne retorts, "I'm just trying to figure out how these guys fit in 'Dickwad'"

"I see you remember some things just fine." He grins at her.

"So here's what we do. We smoke whoever is in there out. Then we go down and....do whatever it is we're supposed to do down there."

"Yep. That seems to be the best plan." He looks doubtful but stalwart.

"You got something better?"

"If this were one of those tales the priests tell, we'd be hearing a little voice in our heads telling us we were on the right track." He sighs in frustration.⁴

"What kind of crackpot priests did you listen to growing up?"

"Okay, I'll creep up and put the wood and leaves in the opening. Can you get a... err... some tinder lit?"

He adds, "Oh, can you make a sound like one of these birds? To warn me if someone comes?"

"Yeah, I'm all over that."

Bert creeps up to make a damn good smokin'-out fire.

Daphne has her bow ready, several arrows near at hand. She keeps an eye out for anyone coming back to the cave as well.

Bert gets to the mouth of the cave near the edge of the river. Looking into the mouth of the cave, it looks awfully deep to Bert. He hesitates, and creeps back to Daphne. "The way in seems to slant way down. I'm not sure the smoke will go down."

"Huh."

Bert adds, "I've never seen smoke go down unless there was something blowing it down."

Daphne looks like she's going to say something for a minute, then passes. "OK, new plan."

Bert quietly lays down the wood and leaves.

When he returns to where she was waiting, Daphne says, "We need to get in and get out before any of the others come back."

"You got any sleeping potion or something we could put on an arrow?" Bert asks.

"Afraid not."

"We have no idea how many are down there. But, if it's a portal, maybe there aren't a lot in the cave."

"We're not getting anything accomplished just standing here," Daphne says.

Bert agrees. "Right. Let's just go." He pulls out his sword.

"I suppose you're going to make me go first again."

"I'll go wherever you say, mon capitaine." He does the forelock-pulling thing again.

"You've really got to stop that shit," Daphne says. "This is why nobody likes you. Now let's get moving."

"Oh, no. Lots of people like me. YOU don't like me." He grins again and starts out ahead of her.

"Yeah, you got me there."

They get to the mouth of the cave. After a few dozen yards, at the edge of the light, the cave opens up into a larger cavern.

Bert says, "It's okay. I'll still protect you."

"You've done a bang-up job thus far."

He stands to one side of the opening and then peeks around the corner.

Daphne's bow is slung over her back and she has her knife drawn. She notices that the wood framing around this opening is fairly freshly cut and very rough.

He slips around the corner, and, hugging the wall, heads down the passage. The floor is rough, but there is evidence of recent foot traffic.

Daphne follows him. He moves quickly but as quietly as possible, hoping to surprise anyone there.

At the edge of the light, they can make out signs of a small campsite inside the cavern. They notice

⁴ **Me:** The voice is having dinner (I often eat while playing, as the game time coincides with dinner time).

picks, axes, and torches lying on the ground near bedrolls.

He slows, holding a hand out behind him to signal Daphne. Whispering, hardly more than a breath...

"Daph, can you see in the dark?"

"What?"

He had been hugging the left hand wall. He slides to the left so that he is in the dark room, against the wall, so he won't be backlight in the passage anymore. Then reaches back to grab her arm to pull her next to him, around the corner.

Daphne grabs one of the torches, Bert grabs another, and they light one.

With the torch lit, they can see all around this long, sloping cavern. They notice a few more uninteresting things in the campsite. At the far end, the cavern appears to drop off.

Bert says, "Looks like that's the way. Should we take any picks or axes?"

They investigate the drop-off and it looks like a sinkhole, with some beams installed to reinforce it. The slope is about as steep as a staircase. The walls are an odd combination of smooth and rough-cut stone. At the edge of the torchlight, it appears to level out.

Daphne gestures down to the bottom with her head.

Bert nods, and starts down, using his free hand to hang on to the walls. Bert almost stumbles on the way down, but it's not too difficult.

At the bottom, he puts his back to the wall, to watch both ways, and nods to Daph to come down.

Daphne makes it down, slipping⁵ the last six feet.

Ahead appears to be a natural fissure in the surrounding rock. It is just large enough for a mounted rider to pass through. The fissure is long, but winds and bends enough so you can only see maybe a dozen yards ahead at a time.

Daphne says, "Well, that's unusual."

Bert says, "Too bad we don't have the horse with us." Bert leads again, walking very softly.

After many minutes, the walking softly gets very boring. There is a slight grade downward. But, damn it, he keeps doing it, because who knows when they'll turn a corner and run into.

The walls are mostly rock, but occasionally roots show through the sides of this natural fissure. The roots get more numerous and thicker as they move along. They come across an area where the roots are especially thick. They can see where someone hacked at them to open a path.

They eventually come into a very large cavern. The air is stale with a familiar, sickening odor. The cavern opens up above and below them. It far outreaches their torch.

Daphne wrinkles her nose.

"Daph... this smells like just before we got to the bridge. That foggy stuff."

Daphne can see signs of a foot trail leading down further into the large cavern. "Come on."

Bert follows her, sword arm poised.

The going is uneven, like winding down a trail on the side of cliff, which is essentially what they are doing

"I hope we get somewhere before this one goes, too."

They start hearing sounds like ...bats? ...rats? ...something.

Bert flattens himself to the nearest wall, and pulls Daphne back, too. Looking around, trying to spot where the noise is coming from.

"Ooooo!" Daphne says, "It's just bats. Get a grip. And not on me."

He lets go with a grin. "You're sure it's bats?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"Okay." He starts out again.

The trail shows slight traffic, but the horse apples are noticeable. The trail never reaches the bottom of the cavern, but it starts sloping up again. Bert, however, feels a twinge in his back that pulls him downward like a stone weight is pulling him down. He squirms and his knees give a bit.

Bert cries, "Daphne! What's on me?? What's happening??"

"Calm down." Daphne cannot see anything wrong. "There's nothing there. Probably just your little seed thing reacting to whatever is up ahead."

He tries to poke at wherever it seems to be with his sword.

"Dammit Bert, just calm down."

"It feels like it's dragging me down." He now gropes behind him with his other hand.

Daphne sighs.

"Sweet Aurora, if this is the evil seed, please make it stop." Bert's squirming causes some of the trail to give way and he tumbles down the side, away from the trail. He is into the darkness before Daphne can grab him

He tries to grab onto something without losing his sword. He slides on his back for a ways, aggravating the wound in his buttocks. He tries very hard not to swear. When he stops, the ground is damp. His feet feel like they are in mud. He tries to scoot backward to higher and dryer ground.

"Bert?"

"Daph?"

"You, ummm, OK down there?"

He starts climbing back up toward the light, using hands. It is very slippery going and he cannot get a foothold.

"More or less. I can't get a foothold."

He hears ...slithering? below him.

⁵ Or sliding gracefully, depending on who asks. :)

Now he tries much harder to scramble up the slope. Using his sword as a cane/pick to help get a purchase. He feels something wrap around his ankle

Daphne calls, "Follow this slope around, maybe it'll meet the path again."

"Daph! Something's got me by the ankle!" He slashes out with his sword trying to aim for where the thing that's got his ankle might be. He hits something and hears a thunk like chopping a carrot and it lets go. He tries again to scramble up the slope as fast as he can.

"Bert? What's going on? Bert!"

"Hit... something... with... sword... let go... trying to get up there..." He is not making much progress back up.

"Follow the slope around. Maybe it will meet up with the path later."

"Daphne!" Suggestion of gritted teeth. "There's something DOWN here! I don't think it's a good idea to stay here! Do you think you could... say... throw down a rope or something?"

"I don't have any."

"Fine. Just great."

"Well, do you?!"

Bert makes it to the top.⁶ The last several yards, he was able to stand up and walk up. He lies there on the path for a few minutes, listening to himself breathe.

Daphne asks, "So, how's yer back?"

"Well, it hurts more than it did before." He staggers to his feet.

"Before meaning when we came down here, or before meaning just prior to writhing around like a maniac and falling off this path? At any rate, now that everyone and their horse knows where we are, we should probably be moving forward. If you are up to it."

Bert gestures for her to lead the way. She does and they move along the path as it slopes back up.

Bert says a little prayer to Aurora just under his breath. "Sweet lady, please help me, because this heartless bitch certainly won't." But in his own head, he's doing more serious praying to Aurora, to keep the evil away from him

After a long while, it looks like they have made it to the far end of the cavern. There is another fissure, larger than the first leading out. Then they notice the point of flickering light far up ahead.

Bert feels his back getting better—only a tingling. He senses the evil is behind him. "Daph, wait a second."

"What?"

"I think that feeling in my back is telling me where the evil thing is. And I don't think it's ahead." He stares down into the cavern.

"Well, there's something ahead."

"But I think what we're looking for is down there."

"Fine. You go down there and look. I'll check out this over here."

As they are standing there, Bert feels his ankle burning. Let me have the torch."

She hand it to him and he sees there is a slice burned into his boot where he was grabbed. "Damn. Another wound, probably from the same kind of thing."

"Whatever is down there can wait for us to deal with whatever is up ahead."

Bert gestures again for her to lead. He sticks the torch into the ground next to the path. "We can see. I'll leave this here for now."

"OK."

As they approach the light, they start hearing sounds of metal and rock banging against each other and chanting in a strange language. The visibility is still very poor and they press on.

Then the fissure opens up into a long cavern filled with goblins. They are picking at the walls, chanting. The man you saw enter the cavern is at the far end, talking to a large goblin. The chanting is similar in rhythm to a chain gang.

Daphne exclaims, "Oooooohh, horse shit."

Daphne carefully backs down the path away from the tunnel. Bert is ticked off, but resigned to it. He backs away with her. There is much clanging and chanting from the goblins, so sneaking is pretty easy. The fissure is not perfectly straight, so they do not have to back up far to get out of sight.

Bert breathed, "What now?"

"I think you were right. Whatever we're looking for is down there somewhere."

"You don't want to dive in and take out these guys? They only outnumber us about six to one or so."

"Is that sarcasm?"

"You think?"

"Cos this really ain't the time for it."

"Never stops you, does it?" Bert adds, "We probably have to do something about them, though. Unless we can fight this other thing quietly."

"Any ideas?"

Bert looks back toward where the goblins are and examines the scene. The goblins are in the fissure, mining the sides, making it bigger. The fissure is large enough for three mounted knights to ride side-by-side and far deeper than they can see. There are between six and a dozen smaller goblins.

Every once in a while, Daphne glances behind them to make sure nobody else is coming though the cavern. Daphne he can only see as far as her torchlight, but she has not seen nor heard anyone from behind.

⁶ Utterly frustrated at the lack of assistance from Daphne, I cut the scene short.

Bert says, "On the other hand, they didn't hear us yelling before, did they, and they aren't the real enemy."

"They did try to kill us. Probably to conceal whatever it is that they are doing here."

"Do you think what they're doing has anything to do with the darkness we're supposed to get rid of? Or do they have a separate agenda?"

Daphne shrugs. "I guess I can try to take out the big thing at the back if you keep the little ones at bay."

"Look. We can't just stand around, and we can't afford to have them sneak up behind us. Let's just do it. I'll take care of the big guy, and you handle the little things. Just shoot arrows at them."⁷

"The big guy is the farthest back," Daphne objected. "And one target is easier to aim at than 6."

Bert starts striding back. "Fine, whatever you say, mistress."

"I'll tell you later where you can stick that attitude."

He unsheathes his sword, and takes a couple swings, loosening his shoulder. "We probably should try to get as close as possible without alerting them."

Daphne gets out an arrow and nocks it. She sticks another between her teeth and creeps forward.

Bert slips down one wall of the fissure, trying to be very quiet. They make their way back to their previous vantage point.

"Daphne? Shall we wait for them to make the first move?"

Daphne takes a good look at the big goblin, judging it to be about 8 feet tall. The human now walks away further down the fissure, his back to our heroes.

Bert nudges Daphne, pointing to the human. He starts running toward the big goblin, sword ready, but he has to get past eight or so goblins first.

Daphne switches her aim to the big goblin's head. She fires and takes the other arrow from between her teeth and nocks it.

Bert starts swinging at the closest little bugger.

The human takes an arrow into the shoulder, dropping his torch and sending him to the ground.

The big goblin turns around, roars, and stares at the two of them.

Daphne aims at the big goblin's head again and fires.

Bert catches the first goblin unawares and knocks it solidly on the head and swings at the next one.

Daphne hits it right in the eye, it roars so loud you'd think the tunnel would collapse.

Daphne takes another arrow from the quiver, nocks it.

It then starts charging, throwing the little goblins out of the way.

⁷ **Me:** Sure you don't want to formulate a more cunning plan?

She aims at its head again and fires, a little more hurriedly this time. The arrow grazes off its thick hide.

Bert swings at the next goblin, which tries to parry with the axe, but it is cut in two with Bert's swing.

Bert prepares to swing at it the second the charging goblin is in range.

Daphne calls "Fall back" while she nocks and aims again.

Bert tries to sidestep and swing to hit on the way by.⁸

As Bert does that, Daphne's let's her arrow fly.

Bert's cut it the goblin in the gut, slicing and sending it forward. Daphne's arrow hits the goblin's other eye, and it falls to the ground.⁹

The other goblins scatter and run away, down the tunnel away from our heroes. Bert runs after and finds a trampled human corpse

Daphne asks, "Why don't you make sure this thing is dead?"

Bert runs after the small goblins.

"Or, I guess I can do it." Daphne draws her knife and swallows hard.

After many yards, Bert loses sight of the goblins. Bert turns and comes back. When he gets back to the human corpse, he searches it. It is wearing leather armor. Under the vest is the crest of Salandra along with another Bert does not recognize (probably a personal crest) sewn into his clothes under the armor. Bert cuts out the crests, ripping the cloth with the help of a knife.

Daphne circles around and approaches the big goblin from the back. She tries to cut a major artery, aware for any sudden movement.

Bert looks up. "What, are you carving him up for dinner?"

She stabs the knife into it, it roars out in defiance before finally falling dead

"EEEEEEEEppp"

"Oh. He wasn't completely dead, then?" Bert notices that Daphne just eeped and he laughs.

She waits about a minute before pulling the knife out of it. The knife is covered in thick green ichor and she wipes it off on its simple clothes. She re-sheathes the knife and picks up the torch.

Bert picks up one or two picks. "Did you search it?"

"That seems to be you department."

Bert does a quick search but does not find anything of note.

⁸ **Me:** Which side, Bert? (There is a good answer).

Avis: He tries to sidestep to his own right, swing from right to left as he's turning, you know?

Me: I was looking for, "On the goblin's blinded side."

⁹ **Avis:** Maybe he'll become a better tactician with experience.

Matt: About the same time Daph starts being nice to him.

"Why don't you search it while I head further down the tunnel," Daphne suggests, "You know, something that turn out to be dangerous."

Daphne starts walking down the tunnel in the direction the goblins fled

"I thought we were going back to face the dark thing," He calls out after her.

"Knock yourself out."

"What is wrong with you?" He follows her, though.

"I already went quite a ways down here, you know."

As they walk, they notice the tunnel is of more-or-less uniform width and height. Once every dozen or so paces, there are wooden support beams on the walls and ceiling. The supports are not placed with great precision. The corridor is three knights wide, one mounted knight high, slightly rounded at the top.

Daphne exclaims, "Shit."

"What?"

"This tunnel goes all the way to whatsitsname."

"Salamandra?"

"Yeah."

"Umm... that's not right... Salandra, that's it." Bert says, "They must be planning an invasion or something. We'd better get back and report that to the Dukes."

"Yeah, can't slip anything by you, can we? What do you think would happen if we set some of the support beams on fire? I mean, hypothetically."

"Un, gee, they'd burn?"

"Forget it," Daphne says after realizing the supports were more supplementary than mandatory. "OK. Let's go... do whatever it is we need to back in the mud room then report back to the Duke."

Bert turns and heads back the other way. Daphne follows. Eventually, they get back to the huge cavern.

"Well..." Daphne says, "I guess whatever it is we've gotta do is down there somewhere."

"Well, whatever it is, it's down there." Bert speaks at the same time as Daphne while he picks up the torch they left behind.

"Isn't that what I just said?" "So..." Daphne adds, "Did we ever ask how long this miasma had been around these parts?"

"I don't remember, Daph."

Bert starts to pick his way down, torch in one hand, sword in the other.

"I wonder if these guys disturbed something when they were making the tunnel?"

He stops, and looks at her. "That's a right sharp idea." He starts down again, picking his way gingerly. He stops every few steps and looks out ahead, watching for whatever got him.

The slope levels out some and the ground gets moist. The torchlight shows roots writhing out of the mud, about an arm's length tall. Ahead, they see a giant, sick, twisted, black tree, like a weeping willow crossed with an octopus. The roots are spaced about a pace apart.

Bert stops dead in his tracks. "Sweet Aurora. What the hell is that?"

They hear slithering and creaking as the "branches" sway in a ghostly wind.

"We have to get close enough to it to find out if something is damaging it."

"I wonder if fire would work on that?"

Daphne says, "Not if we are supposed to heal it."

"Damaging it? It looks like plain evil to me. You think we're supposed to heal it?"

"Maybe." As she says that, a root stretches out of the mud¹⁰ and wraps around Daphne's ankle. She lets out an eep.

Bert chops at the root with his sword, avoiding any chance of hitting Daphne. It chops easily, but it does not let go of her ankle. The rest of the root retracts into the mud.

"Unfriendly bastard," Daphne says. "Heal it or kill it, we've got to get nearer to the trunk."

Bert bends down to try to get it off her ankle with his knife, but he doesn't touch it with his hands. He can see wisps of smoke rising from her boot.

"And standing here is just making us a tar... ahhhahhahhahaa!" Once she realizes it did not get completely through her boot, she says, "Can we just get moving before another one pops up out of nowhere?"

Bert places the torch next to the root and it catches fire after a few seconds. It writhes as it burns.

"Come on." Daphne sees what Bert is doing.

"Great. You have fun playing with fire."

"I needed to see if it would burn."

Daphne makes her way towards the tree trunk, trying to avoid as many roots as she can.

"If it'd gotten through your boot, you'd have had the dark seed like me."

As she approaches, roots strike at her. "Damn it, damn it, damn it."

Bert steps around her, and starts chopping them as he approaches them.

"Do we have anything flammable with us?"

Daphne asks while retreating, hastily.

"Our torches?"

"Never mind." Daphne draws her knife and starts cutting away at her sleeve. Once she has some strips of cloth, she'll wrap them around the heads of a couple of her arrows.

"Daph... I don't think we can cure this thing. I think it's evil, and we need to destroy it."

Eventually, she fires a couple of flaming arrows into the tree trunk. When it hits, there is a screech and all the roots retract into the mud.

Bert observes, "I see you've changed your mind." Bert starts helping make more flaming arrows, handing them to Daphne to shoot. The arrows

¹⁰ The mud is like a dirt road after a good rain, not a thick soup.

manage to start small fires, but just when our heroes think they have a winning strategy, one of the branches reaches down and starts plucking the arrows out!

Daphne orders, "Get up there and set a serious fire to the base while I'm distracting it. Chop some its damned roots for kindling if you have to."

He looks at her like she's lost her mind. "The roots are all gone now. I'm not sure this will work. Keep firing arrows, and let me see if I can chop off some of these branches."

"Whatever. Just do something fast."

He gets closer, cautiously, and tries to whack off any branches that are near him or come near him. Two lash out at him. He cuts one and it falls to the ground. The other is only sliced partially, and it retracts. More are coming.

He stops being cautious,¹¹ and starts swinging wildly at all branches in his vicinity. Bert manages to keep branches at bay. He puts his back into it, hoping to whack right through bunches of them.

Daphne grabs her torch, sprints past Bert toward the tree, dodging branches instead of fighting them off.

And that is when a root trips up Bert, sending him to his stomach. Bert manages to get back to his knees. He jabs his torch at the root, and keeps swinging at any branches.

A branch lanches toward Daphne and Bert tries to intercept the branch before it gets to her. She thinks she jukes it; He thinks he chopped it and saved her.

Meanwhile Daphne is working her way toward the trunk and she gets there quickly.

He follows her in, trying to protect both of them from branches and roots.

Daphne holds the torch on it till it catches fire.

A branch grabs Bert's sword and another grabs Daphne's free arm.

Bert pokes at the branch with the torch and it catches fire and retreats.

The tree is crackling and screaming like wood splitting in a fire.

Daphne tries to burn the branch holding her arm while Bert swings on the same branch. Bert cuts the branch as it catches flame. Daphne holds the torch on another spot on the trunk and Bert does the same.

The tree is now thoroughly on fire. The heat and evil radiating off it is unbearable

He starts circling around it, getting it from the other side

Daphne runs like hell. Bert starts backing off, too, but he tumbles to the ground as a hot poker stabs him through the back. He yells, "Burn, you sucker, burn!"

Daphne gets back to the original trail and looks back. Bert is lying on the ground, writhing.

The tree gives one final WHOOM! of flame and explodes in a shower of smoke and fine black ash.

Bert feels like he lost consciousness. He wakes up with a mouth full of soot. It seems to be snowing around him with black flakes drifting down.

He rolls over, coughing the soot out, protecting his eyes and then struggles to his feet.

Daphne has slumped into a sitting position, her calf and shoulder in severe pain.

He slowly climbs up to her, and sits down beside her. "You alright?"

"Sure. You?"

"I think so. Geeze, did that hurt! But... it's gone now. I hope."¹²

"The plan, by the way, did not involve standing around having fencing practice with the damned thing."

He breathes out a deep, sincere sigh of relief, and offers a quiet prayer to Aurora. He then responds to Daphne, "Hey, I kept most of them off your back. You'd never have gotten it on fire if I hadn't protected you."

"First of all, you were supposed to have set it on fire while I distracted it. Not vice versa."

"That was your plan, not mine."

"And second of all, yes I could have."

"What sort of distraction were you planning?" Bert stands, shaking his head and laughing. "Let's head back to the Duke, and let him know about the tunnel."

"Sure."

He offers to help her up.

They get back to Olden and report to Duke Cedric. I held private, in-character interviews with each of the players in IM. Bertwald was asked where he wanted to be, back with Leopold or working for Cedric, and he chose the former. Daphne was asked what she thought of the adventure and she said, "Too much killing." This was not the answer Cedric wanted to hear and dismissed her, ordering her to accompany Bert back to Leopold's realm.

And so ended the first part of the Daphne and Bertwald saga. At this point, I was suffering GM burnout, so Matt Helms took the reins of the campaign and I made a PC, Tarrant, a young priest. His campaign arc consisted of two parts, though I did GM an adventure in the middle. If you want to read more of the adventures of Daphne, Bertwald, and Tarrant in A&E, you will have to ask Matt.

All the campaign information and logs appear on my website. This is also where the second part of the saga will appear when I am done transcribing it.

¹¹ Again, after GM prompting.

¹² It does feel like it is gone, like a missing tooth.