

PROJECT TITLE: HARLEQUIN'S GAMBIT

Lead Developer:

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High Level Description

The end of the *Dawn of the Artifacts* sets up *Harlequin's Gambit*, a campaign book featuring fully-written adventures, including maps and NPCs, in the format of *Harlequin* and *Harlequin's Back*. The titular artifacts from DotA 1–4 have fallen into the hands of Frosty, Eهران the Scribe's agent. Together, they point the way to a cache of magical knowledge hidden since the last age of magic. The shadowrunners act as Frosty's agents to recover the cache, and in a final and deadly game that she has to play out with an immortal elf that wants the knowledge for her own ends. As instrumental players in this unfolding game, the players will have to make a choice that can effect the entire Sixth World. The end result of the campaign provides the means to introduce the advanced magic rules in the High Magic book for 2010.

Project Milestones

Proposals due	July 15, 2009
Writing assignments	August 1, 2009
First drafts due	September 17, 2009
Dev comments on first drafts due	September 31, 2009
Final drafts due	October 21, 2009
Cover art assignment	August 15, 2009
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Cover art final due	November 5, 2009
Art assignments	September 28, 2009
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VISION

At the end of the last Age of Magic, a few groups knew that the world as they knew it was ending. Soon, elves and orks would no longer be born, the last magical creatures would die out in the wild or fade away, and the spells that supported their civilization would end. Determined to leave something of themselves behind—perhaps as a testament to their civilization, perhaps because a few of them believe they would survive the dry years 'til the world reawakened, they crafted caches with the primers of their magic and hid them with clever spells and enchantments. A handful of magical keys were created that would reveal the location of these caches.

The first set of these magical keys were found, the artifacts from the *Dawn of the Artifacts* adventures. Sheila, the secretive immortal elf behind the Atlantean Foundation, prompted the race for the artifacts by revealing the existence of one of them to Eهران the Scribe, another immortal elf, and one more versed in their artifacts. The Atlantean Foundation's Mystic Crusaders followed Eهران's agent Frosty as she crossed the globe, hunting down the artifacts, guided by Eهران. While Sheila intended to capture the keys from Eهران, her plans went awry and Frosty ended up with all four keys. Sheila quietly receives advice from Harlequin to hold back and wait for Frosty to unearth the cache before claiming it—which precipitates a formal challenge, a *chal'han* between Frosty and Sheila (exactly as Harlequin planned it).

The ancients built more than one cache, with some redundancy to ensure that if one or two was lost, the bulk of their lore would remain. The *chal'han* is designed to be a short series of contests to recover these caches, with the winner having access to all four—since it is possible that a cache could be destroyed or stolen, succeeding at the first two doesn't necessarily grant immediate victory. These contests make up the other three adventures in *Harlequin's Gambit*. Aside from their most obvious rivals, the Mystic Crusaders, the player characters will have to deal with outside interference from the Apep Consortium, the Black Lodge, and possibly others. The challenges are not the slay-

the-dragon-and-pick-the-flower kind of quests, these are in essence shadowruns of impressive scale but well within the groups' capabilities.

Each cache is a cubic stone chest, two feet on a side and engraved on each side, and which weighs about 180 kg—enough for a serious human weightlifter to lift on their own; the larger trolls and orks can carry it without too much problem on their own. Each chest contains fifty thinly-beaten orichalcum sheets (which are identical for each chest), sandwiched between one hundred engraved granite tablets, plus a selection of enchanted items—samples to show the practical applications of the theories and formulae on the texts. The chests can be smashed, blown up, or otherwise lost; the locking mechanism is a simple Force 20 magical spell dispelled by the presence of the disc (from DotA).

Chapter 1

The first part of Harlequin's Gambit involves the shadowrunners assisting Frosty, who uses the keys to locate the first cache, located in the military installation on the island in Crater Lake, in Tir Tairngire. Once the shadowrunners are successful and outside the parameter of military security, Frosty meets up with Ebran and Harlequin—and the Mystic Crusaders sweep in to steal the cache before it can be opened. Here, Frosty declares an open challenge—a *chal'han*—to Sheila, one elf to another. The winner keeps the cache and can do whatever they want with it; Ebran and Harlequin are named as witnesses.

The nature of the *chal'han*, used in the original *Harlequin* and in a modified form in *Survival of the Fittest* is a non-lethal game of dominance (and sometimes revenge) between two immortal elves or dragons (not the players know this, for all they know boss-lady is playing the High Elven Court Etiquette card). None of the immortals involved—Sheila, Ebran, Frosty, or Harlequin—can be directly involved, unless someone breaks the rules; instead they act through their paladins. In Sheila's case, the Mystic Crusaders; in Frosty's the player characters. Harlequin and Ebran aren't the principals and can neither aid or hinder either side, unless directly attacked, but each will shadow the teams to check on their progress. This whole situation has, unbeknownst to all, been set up by Harlequin specifically to place Frosty in this position with Sheila—win or lose, his apprentice will have taken her first step into the society of immortal elves, and done so in such a manner that will give her significant prestige, and possibly power.

The shadowrunners aren't just pawns in this challenge; Frosty made her challenge on the spur of the moment, but she has to get the shadowrunners to be her willing agents in this manner. That means offering the player characters a sizable payday, plus whatever other incentives they can work out between them—up to and including some of the goodies kept within the caches. Of course, the player characters can sneak out an item or two on their own if they have the brass to try.

Chapter 2

The first quest takes the shadowrunners to London; somewhere is the second cache. The shadowrunners have the Piri Reis map (from DotA #1) and Shantaya's Compass (DotA #2), which highlights the route to Bel Tann – an astral rift in the city sewers which leads to the metaplane where the second cache is hidden, but will only “open” if the player characters present the Piri Reis map. The Mystic Crusaders, surprisingly, have a fragment of the Piri Reis map that they can also use for this purpose. The astral rift is guarded by a sect of urban druids and the general nastiness of the sewers (ghouls, mutaquas, etc.); the druids will peacefully allow access to the group that takes care of their rivals in the local underworld. The Mystic Crusaders, for their part, have sided with the gangsters and intend to use their superior numbers and firepower to go through the druids. As a third option, the Black Lodge subtly offers their assistance, in exchange for assistance claiming the cache when this is all over (how they learned of it...best not to ask).

Gaining access to the astral rift first gives the team a leg up, as it involves a brief group astral quest. The astral quest takes the players through the darkest and nastiest parts of a possible future metroplex the entire isle of Britain. The player character's goal is to reach the Citadel, an ivory tower on a hill rising out of a black, burning lake. Along the way, the players face astral projections of the Black Lodge and possibly other magical threats. This is basically a race. Whichever team doesn't make it to the astral rift first, all is not lost; Frosty or Sheila/Sheila will call in and instruct them to destroy the physical anchor for the cache—the London Stone—which will cause the second cache to be lost forever—a tie, in other words. In addition to mundane security methods (mostly passive) and the physical problems involved, the London Stone is surreptitiously under surveillance by the Vigilia Evangelica, who will step in if it is threatened.

Chapter 3

The third cache (according to the Piri Reis map) is in Cape Town, and is currently on display at the Zulu Museum. This adventure is essentially a theft; the player characters are presented with a target that has considerable security, both obvious and discreet, which they have to bypass or go through by whatever manner they choose. Complications are the Mystic Crusaders, who arrived here first due to information provided by Sheila and are planning their own theft, and an Apep Consortium team that is attempting to negotiate with the curators for access to certain items in the collection. The Black Lodge again offers to assist the characters in return for future consideration by providing them a map of the city sewers beneath the museum, which can bypass some of the security.

The cache itself is not the item on display, but located in a truncated stone pyramid *beneath* the storehouse, guarded by a cadre of Zulu Heavenherds. The pyramid is a magical vault that will only “open” when an electrum

pyramidion (capstone) is set and aligned according to the correct astrological signs (which can be accomplished with the astral sextant from DotA #4); the pyramidion itself is in the possession of the Apep Consortium team, who are willing to trade it for certain items from the storehouse—a proposition that the Apep Consortium will make to both teams when they figure out what is going on.

A complication during this adventure is that the shadowrunners have to handle it without any assistance from Frosty; she is kidnapped by agents of the Vigilia Evangelica shortly after touching down. Her astral projection encourages the player characters to focus on grabbing the cache rather than try to rescue her, but the player characters make their own decision.

Whether the players are successful or not, the characters are taken to a safehouse overlooking the Giant's Causeway (which has grown since the Awakening, linking Scotland to Tir na nOg—though for the most part it's under water). The player characters, if wounded, are given a brief chance to rest, be magically healed, stock up on ammo and weapons, and plan their assault on the fourth and final cache. Frosty, whether the shadowrunners rescued her or not, is there as well.

Chapter 4

The final cache is located somewhere out in the Causeway, pushed up from the sea bed on a column of basalt. In the middle of a mana storm (one of the Tir's infamous *Doineann Draoidheil*), the shadowrunners set out; the Mystic Crusaders are hidden nearby. The shadowrunners have the only key to opening the cache (the disc from Artifact #3), which means the Mystic Crusaders have to grab it from the player characters. In addition to the weather, the stormy seas, and the Mystic Crusaders, the shadowrunners may also have to deal with a sea serpent and the malfunctioning Veil. If it looks like the player characters are losing, a Black Lodge magician manifests and offers them guidance to the artifact.

At the end, Sheila and Frosty stand with the surviving caches as Eهران and Harlequin go about the ceremony; whoever wins gets them all. The winner accepts her victory with grace, which is about when the Wild Hunt (summoned by the Black Lodge) and both the Apep Consortium and New Templars of the Vigilia Evangelica attacks. The four elves have their hands full with the Hunt, leaving the player characters to protect the cache from the Apep Consortium and New Templars, who are as eager to fight each other as they are the shadowrunners (this scene is largely a cinematic battle, to avoid the bookkeeping of trying to keep track of such a nasty and random battle in the rain). A Black Lodge magician manifests and encourages the runners to throw the cache into the sea, where the Black Lodge has a sub waiting, so that none of the elves get it. Whether they do so or not is up to them.

The epilogue is that, whoever gets the cache(s), the contents are leaked onto the Matrix. This sudden infodump of advanced magical knowledge sets the stage for all the new rules, metamagic techniques, and gear introduced in the High Magic sourcebook.

Revelations

At various points in the adventure, the shadowrunners have the opportunity to question the principals about what is going on. Frosty is as clear and up-front with the shadowrunners as she can be; Eهران is evasive, Harlequin just likes to fuck with them. Sheila is generally forbidden from trying to interfere with the shadowrunners.

If asked or prompted, Frosty explains that the Atlantean Foundation are convinced the knowledge within the cache will verify their claims about Atlantis—but also that the Mystic Crusaders believe the world is not ready for most of the magical knowledge. If the Mystic Crusaders succeed, then they will hoard the knowledge, doling it out piecemeal to profit themselves, and filtering it to support their image of an idealized Atlantis—that is, if they don't become corrupted by it first.

If they ask Frosty what she'll do with the caches, she'll give them the hint that she's going to destroy it—the knowledge is too dangerous for any one to have. If pressed, or the player characters try to convince her otherwise, Frosty reveals she plans to upload it to the Matrix, unfiltered. While some of the knowledge in there is extremely dangerous, Frosty feels that if she decided to edit the content than she would be no better than Sheila or “the other manipulative, pointy-eared bastards.” If specifically asked, she may also reveal that the caches may include texts on blood magic.

Harlequin will make a point of keeping tabs on the shadowrunners, though he won't directly help or hinder them and is pretty much unseen for most of the adventure. If asked, he'll tell them that he doesn't know what Frosty will do with the cache. She could hide it for another thousand years, or keep it for herself and become a magician on par with her peers; maybe she'll even entrust it to Harlequin and Eهران for safe keeping. Harlequin emphasizes that Frosty's trust rides on the player characters—if at any point they choose to fail, then Frosty's *chal'han* is lost.

Sidequests

Possible sidequests or interstitial scenes can include the shadowrunners transporting or babysitting the caches or artifacts, renegotiating their payment with Frosty, or saving Mystic Crusaders (who, after all, are not bad people) who get in a jam. Attempting to make off with the caches themselves, sell them, create fake versions and substitute them, or destroy them is entirely up to the shadowrunners—Frosty has to deal with the consequences, since she needs the shadowrunners to act for her; though the player characters could understand that once the *chal'han* is finished, they

become fair game again (although threats to do any of the above are perfectly acceptable bargaining tactics to increase the payday).

Incentives

Besides mere nuyen, Frosty (and Sheila, if she gets a cache) is willing to give her champions items from the caches to assist them on her behalf—items which are theirs to keep if Frosty wins. These items are samples of what is to come in the High Magic sourcebook, and provide additional incentive for the player characters. These items would be given individual entries as player handouts in the back of the book (possibly a sheet of cardstock?)

Sample/Suggested items:

- **Ancient Symbiont** – Looks like a desiccated caterpillar; when placed at the back of a metahuman through it will eat and replace the tongue, sending new nerves into the user's head. Essentially, the character can sense nearby astral forms and conditions as smells and tastes—at the cost of their own senses of smell and taste, which are permanently gone.
- **Blood Charm** – Minor enchantment powered by the user's blood, usable by mundanes, stores 1 point of Edge.
- **Blood Fetish** – Introduced in *Digital Grimoire*, blood-magic powered fetish.
- **Eldritch Blade** – Magical weapon (not a weapon focus) usable by mundanes; bypasses Immunity to Normal Weapons of spirits and other critters.
- **Mana Web** – A dreamcatcher-like fetish used to "record" an astral signature before it fades away.
- **Spirit Key** – A short bone rod connected to an ancient free spirit; the spirit owes the holder of the wand three services, after which its obligation is complete and it is free. (Clever and powerful shadowrunners, or Frosty or Sheila, can "recharge" the spirit key by summoning and binding the free spirit).

A small selection of metamagic techniques, spells, adept powers, and martial arts can also be made available, which Frosty can teach the shadowrunners at an accelerated pace between individual portions of the quest.

- **Forcing (Metamagic)** – Essentially, the character can cut the time required for a ritual sorcery spell dramatically – they can Rush the Job on ritual magic. They can do this repeatedly to reduce the casting time from hours down to mere minutes, but with greater chances of failure. Every interval reduction increases the chance of failure.
- **Naming (Metamagic)** – Make an Assensing Test against an object; if successful gain its True Name and can subtract your Initiate Grade from its Object Resistance.
- **Exorcism (Martial Art)** – Bonuses for resisting spirit powers and Attacks of Will.
- **Mentalism (Martial Art)** – Increases DV of astral attacks.
- **Hellball/bolt/touch (Spell)** – Damage from these spells cannot be magically healed.
- **Mind Tap (Spell)** – Listen in on telepathic conversations.
- **Slow Burn (Spell)** – Combat spell that deals damage for (hits) rounds.
- **Steal Biometrics (Spell)** – Touch someone and mimic a single biometric parameter (retina, fingerprints, etc.) while the spell is sustained. Essentially limited disguise, number of hits on the spell is the Rating of the disguise against scanners, only one trait per spell.
- **Hellstrike (Adept Power)** – Damage from the adept's unarmed attacks cannot be magically healed.
- **Improved Senses (Adept Power)** – Depth sense (how high above/below the surface you are), perfect depth vision (equivalent to range finder), perfect time, body awareness (immediately aware of the extent of injuries, even when pain is blocked), electroreception, magnetoreception, aura awareness (immediately aware if an astral form passes through their aura)
- **Loan [Adept Power] (Adept Power)** – The adept can temporarily grant one specific power to another; no test if this recipient is voluntary. The adept cannot use the power while it is being loaned. The power uses the adept's Magic rating, not the Magic rating of the recipient.
- **Mystic Weapon (Adept Power)** – Any melee weapon the adept wields is counted as a magic weapon for purposes of overcoming Immunity to Normal Weapons and astral combat

PROS

This campaign would provide a thrilling, quick-paced campaign in the style of the *Harlequin* adventures, directly tying in to *Dawn of the Artifacts* and provide a link to future products (High Magic). It is *not* dependent upon a novel for back story or plot, nor does it assume the runners/players have any previous knowledge (DotA is helpful but not mandatory) of the game world. It reveals some of the secret history of Shadowrun and Earthdawn, but without opening the secrets to the entire world. It allows the runners to be instrumental in a campaign (unlike *Ghost Cartels* where they were cogs in a wheel) and places them at the center of the action—but it should be gritty and challenging. This allows us to use multiple other products, tying in past and current products (i.e., a quest could be in Bogotá, tying into the *Dogs of War* sourcebook); the goal would be to make this campaign sell other products as well, such as location books.

The high point of this campaign is that it would provide a satisfying conclusion to both the DotA arc and the *Harlequin* adventures, yet accessible to players and gamemasters who have never played either.