

FREE LEAGUE

Symbaroum



BOOK I

Starter Rules

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Welcome to Symbaroum

JUST AS THE blight mist finally dissolved *during our* breathless escape, an ancient ziggurat appeared before us. Our hunters *slowed their* breakneck pace – neither the primal blight beast nor the *chattering, clawing, corruption-oozing* swarms wanted to leave the milky white depths of the fogbank.

We did not stop. Sunken *and overgrown, the* broken pyramid ahead was nearly devoured by the forest, *still its* asymmetrical opening seemed like a gateway to safety and rest. We *forced our way* through the hanging vines, lowered ourselves to the floor with ropes, *and let the* fear and corruption fade away; the blackened veins on Oleana's *colorless* cheeks paled as the look of panic slowly left her eyes.

Sunlight *found its way* through cracks up high and fell upon a mighty pillar at the center of the hall – made of naked gray stone with a surface chiseled in *strange designs, hypnotic* in their worn splendor.

We *walked about* halfway towards its foot before Oleana grabbed my arm, *making me* halt.

"Like *blight* beasts in mist," I whispered as they came into the light, slowly *surrounding* us; almost human, naked, with their spider jaws twitching in hunger.

As Oleana pushed me towards the pillar, I knew I was going to die. Still, I climbed, the words of my father ringing in my ears: "In Davokar only one law applies: whatever may happen, never give up!"



Example of Play

The Game Master: The strange creatures come ever closer. What do you do?

Player 1 (Oleana): I keep driving Alavan forward: [wheezing] "Climb! Climb the pillar."

Player 2 (Alavan): I do as she says, I rush for the base and start climbing.

The Game Master: Roll against your value in Quick.

Player 2: I have Quick 13. (Rolls a twenty-sided die, called "D20", with the outcome 9.) Yes, I pass!

Player 1: I start climbing too. I have the ability Acrobatics; do I have to roll?

The Game Master: No, you both manage to find a good grip on the chiseled surface, but the same goes for the creatures. Obviously, they see you as intruders. Maybe also as prey...

Player 1: I look around while climbing. Do I see anything that can help us?

The Game Master: Roll a Vigilant test.

Player 1: So, I need 10 or lower. (Rolls a D20 with the outcome 4.) Made it!

The Game Master: There is a ledge about ten meters up, lit by faint sunlight from a crack in the ceiling another twenty meters up – it could be a way outside. However, two huge spider beasts are climbing down towards the ledge, towards you. What do you do?

Player 1: I quickly tell Alavan what I've noticed.

Player 2: How about the ledge? Is it wide enough to stand and fight on?

The Game Master: [Nods with a smile]

Player 2: Great, so we face the spiders there...

Player 1: ... and then we push for the opening!

The Game Master: Okay, but just so you know – if you don't eliminate the spiders in one or two turns, their masters will catch up to you...

Symbaroum's Dice Set



Four-sided (D4)



Six-sided (D6)



Eight-sided (D8)



Ten-sided (D10)



Twelve-sided (D12)



Twenty-sided (D20)

About Symbaroum

THE SHORT STORY you have just read could be a scene from the *Symbaroum* roleplaying game – a game where you get to explore the vast forest of Davokar in the hunt for treasures, knowledge and fame; where you may visit one of the eleven barbarian clans to trade or to plunder their treasuries; establish a base of power among princes, guilds or rebellious refugees in the capital city of Yndaros; fight for the honor of Queen Korinthia or ally yourselves with the ancient guardians of the forest. Whichever path you choose to walk, wondrous adventures wait over every hill and around every bend.

This starter set is specifically designed to let you and your friends experience treasure hunts and expeditions in dark and dangerous Davokar. It includes two ready-made adventure locations for you to explore and also contains guidelines for creating your own adventures. Of course, our

hope is that this experience will leave you curious to know more about the game world – its forests, cultures and not least its long, dark history.

The world of *Symbaroum* is both very different from and similar to our own. In the game world you can expect to encounter laws of nature that make magic and blessings real; creatures like elves, trolls and lindworms; a level of development which in most aspects resembles that of late medieval Europe; and societies with steep hierarchies where the weak and the sick have a hard time surviving.

Regarding similarities, *Symbaroum*'s world, like our own, has been shaped by a long history; it has areas of undisturbed nature, bustling cities and villages; and is inhabited by individuals who firmly believe that the world around them is real and that their actions have real consequences. Sure, it is a fantasy world, but this is not something which its inhabitants are aware of.

About Roleplaying Games

WHEN PLAYING ROLEPLAYING games, all participants except one assume the role of a player character – a fictional persona whom they will play in the story.

In-game, you choose what your character does and says, and you verbally convey this to the other participants. You should pretend to be the character, like an actor in a movie or a play. This starter set includes five sheets with pre-generated characters (also, see page 59); if you cannot agree who will play which character, roll a die to settle it.

The one participant who does not control a character is the Game Master. Simply put, the Game Master is the one who makes the world come alive for the players, and who challenges the player characters as they strive for their goals. As something of a real-time director, the Game Master must be prepared to improvise if the characters do something

unexpected, at other times to help the players on their way – all with the goal that their mutual story should be as thrilling and enjoyable as possible.

To support the story, the Game Master has an adventure – a script that describes locations and non-player characters that the player characters can encounter, as well as what challenges they may need to overcome. The adventure is nothing but a frame-work, as the characters can decide to act in a way which is not covered by the script, and as the Game Master can choose to improvise and make up her own events. Still, the Game Master can always fall back on the adventure when she is unsure of what to say or do.

The Game Master's task is a bit more difficult than that of the others, but can also be even more rewarding. The Game Master gets to make up intriguing adventures, portray jolly innkeepers and terrifying monstrosities, and (together with the players) breath life and color into the game world.

In short, roleplaying games are played with the primary goal of having fun. You do not compete with each other; instead you share a common adventure through the eyes of your player characters. The individual who shoulders the Game Master's responsibility is tasked with managing the game, for instance by describing the world and testing the characters with problems and challenges. But the common story, or more accurately, the shared adventure, is something which the players and Game Master create together.

Tips & Guidance

More information on how roleplaying games operate can be found on various online forums and sites. On the forums you can also post questions to more experienced gamers – questions touching on everything from game rules to the design of adventures. Free League's own forum can be found by way of our homepage at freeleaguepublishing.com. You are most welcome to visit us there.

The Setting

THIS CHAPTER GIVES a brief introduction to the *Symbaroum* game world, just enough so that the players get an idea of the setting in which their characters live and breathe. The pre-made player characters are designed so that they have a pretty limited understanding of the world at large, and especially about the Kingdom of Ambria and the Clanfolks of Davokar – the idea being that they, just like their players, will get to discover the setting as the game progresses.

History

THE GREAT WAR, the hungry hordes of the Dark Lords – a nightmare that lasted for two decades and which left little to hearten those who finally woke up. Instead they had all the reasons to grieve: tens of thousands had died; the maimed and broken were beyond count; the land was ravaged by death magic; there was famine and infertility. And even though the young Queen Korinthia had been rescued from the claws of the enemy, she had returned a shadow of her former self, with a lifeless mask covering her once radiant sunshine smile.

Twenty-one years have passed since the Dark Lords were vanquished and the Queen realized that her realm was dying. She was forced to lead her people to safer grounds, that much was evident. And before long she was able to identify where to start anew. North of the mountain range called the Titans lay the fertile soils which according to legend were the ancestral home of her people. The time had come for Korinthia to claim her birthright.

During the past couple of centuries the region up north had been controlled by warring, barbarian clans and before that by the prosperous city-state of Lindaros. According to legend, Lindaros suffered the wrath of celestial powers, causing a most

infectious bleeder's disease to wipe out its entire population. This occurred about two hundred years ago, after which it took more than a century before the nomadic clans of the region dared approach the contaminated ruins.

No more than a couple of months after the decisive battle against the Dark Lords, Korinthia's troops reached the region in the north. At the Lindaros' ruins, they encountered a small barbarian settlement, established by the clan Kadiz that had been evicted from its territory in Davokar fifty years earlier. After a siege that lasted only three days, the barbarian chieftain bowed before the superior power and the work of rebuilding Lindaros could commence – a task that mainly was carried out by thousands of prisoners of war and as many so-called volunteers, men and women who were on the run from already dead regions in old Alberetor.

The Queen did not join the refugees until seven years after the war's end. When she did, she declared that her new realm would be called Ambria, "the shining", and the increasingly well-organized capital was to be named Yndaros in honor of Korinthia's father, the hero king Ynedar. Three years later the Queen's armies also managed to



THUS SPOKE AROALETA

"... and the day dawned, when the spawn of the Serpent took to arms, when the crimes of countless days must be counted and atoned for, horn by horn, fang by fang. And the sinners wept with blinded eyes, they moaned with severed throats, they fled on fractured limbs. And Symbaroum fell, into dreamless sleep ..."





overwhelm the barbarian warlord Haloban and his clan warriors – a triumph giving Korinthia and her people the opportunity to start exploring and harvesting the ample riches of Davokar Forest.

Much has happened over a short period of time, so there has been no room for subtleties. Disobedient barbarians have been killed, banished or imprisoned by Korinthia's experienced and well-equipped soldiers; the obedient ones have been used for labor under slave-like conditions. The latter also holds true for many of Korinthia's own subjects, namely all those who came from the south without personal riches or sought-after skills. If anyone bothered to keep count of how many people have died in the process of building Ambria, the final score would be in the thousands. But no one does. To those who are alive nothing counts but the remarkable result. Although the restoration of Yndaros is far from finished, the city has grown to enormous proportions, and at

the same time Korinthia's knights have conquered all land between the mountains in the south and the woods in the north. Now the nobles of Ambria are starting to plan for new conquests, in the north and in the west.

Seven years ago, the uncrowned king of Ambria's treasure-hunters, Lasifor Nightpitch, established the town of Thistle Hold. The construction was largely financed by the reward Lasifor had received for an armful of dried Twilight-thistle – a rare herb, allegedly powerful enough to aid the gravely ill Abesina, mother of Queen Korinthia. Ever since then, the walled settlement of Mayor Nightpitch has acted as a safe haven for Ambrians exploring Davokar, a forest full of natural resources and rich remnants of long lost civilizations; also a forest full of rampant abominations, dark-minded creatures of otherworldly origins and a band of wardens most unwilling to welcome the damages done by human explorers.

The Game World Map

Included in the game box is a map of the region where the game plays out. It may be a good idea to have that map handy while reading this section of the book, to make it easier to visualize the layout of the land.

Ambria

THE REGION KORINTHIA is determined to conquer is dominated by Davokar, a forest that in itself is as varied as a continent. Traversing the woods from Thistle Hold to its northern edge would take weeks, if not months, and on the way one

would have to face ravenous beasts as well as hostile elves, blight-stricken abominations and treacherous nature.

South of Davokar a rolling landscape of fertile plains stretches out. Where they are not plowed by



Ambrian farmers they are covered by pale green grass or small groves where the birds and beasts of the lowlands find shelter. This is Ambria, a kingdom divided into seven duchies encircling a domain ruled by the Church of Prios, the Sun God and the Giver of Laws. The Grand Duchy of Korinthia is by far the largest, just as the capital city of Yndaros is larger than Thistle Hold, Ravenia and the high seat of the Sun Church, Templewall.

The region is framed on two sides by towering mountains – the wild and majestic Titans to the south and the Ravens to the east, growing taller and steeper the further south one travels. Aside from some mining colonies and the monastery of the Twilight Friars south of Yndaros, the Ambrians are yet to establish any noteworthy settlements in the mountains. Instead they have become a refuge for robbers, free-thinkers and rebellious barbarians.

Davokar

TO PRODUCE A summarized account of Davokar Forest is a challenge – partly because of its varied and changeable character, partly because so much of it is yet to be reliably mapped. For several centuries, the barbarian clans have kept to the outer areas of the forest, from the edge to about four days' march inwards. The reason for this is said to be twofold.

And as for the dwarven realm of Küam Zamok, its inhabitants appear to be totally indifferent to humans, with the exception of the few families that, for reasons unknown but wildly debated, have settled down in Yndaros.

The climate is colder and more humid compared to what the Ambrians are used to. Damp winds from the southern oceans climb over the Titans and are not the least embarrassed to drown Ambria in heavy rains, especially during the autumn. The winters are cold, with snow covering the streets of Yndaros for a month or two, or even longer during the winters that the barbarians call Istaros, when arctic winds sweep down from the north, so cold that hearths which are allowed to go out can barely be brought back to life and the blood freezes in anyone who dares venture outside for longer than it takes to collect more firewood.

On the one hand, the outskirts contain all they need in terms of prey and useful plants; on the other hand they abide by a long list of strict taboos that ban them from entering the deep. The witches claim that Davokar is sleeping, that the forest must not be disturbed, that death and destruction will follow if the edicts are violated.



This transcript, partly damaged and unreadable, was found in the pocket of an explorer who fell down and died right outside the North Gate of Thistle Hold. It is said that the expedition she was part of aimed to find the fabled city of Symbar at the heart of Davokar.