Solo Adventures v2

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Perhaps you have a really cool idea of a character that you really want to try out. Perhaps you are geographically isolated and you find PBP games annoying.

Of all the RPG systems available I feel that Ars Magica, with its emphasis on laboratory activities and seasonal studies, is ideally suitable for solo play.

A Covenant can be built and finances organized. A character can easily be created and each season planned and played out, research undertaken, spells and items invented.

However characters do not grow in a vacuum and there will come a point when the Covenants starting resources have been exhausted. What is needed is a method to determine those random events that make life interesting and to provide stimulus for further studies.

Below is a system I use to determine when adventures call forth the wizard from his tower.

# Solo Play

Generate your character and Covenant as per the Core Rules. Perform each seasonal activity as per the rules in the *Ars Magica Core Rulebook*, Chapter 10.

I recommend using the Covenant Finances rules in *Sub Rosa* (Issue 15, page 14) as the random fluctuation tables and Covenant resources are excellent story generators.

Also recommended are the Aura Variation rules (*Realms of Power: Magic*, page 10).

At the beginning of each year, roll for the following:

* Covenant Finances (if applicable)
* Aura Variation (if applicable)
* Adventures!

# Step 1 – Adventures!

Make a list of Character Story Flaws and Covenant Hooks and anything else you believe might generate stories. Some virtues (such as Guardian Angel or Gossip) are particularly suitable for generating adventures.

Each year:

* For each Minor Story Flaw or Covenant Hook, roll a Simple Dice
* For each Major Story flaw or Hook, roll three Simple Dice

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Roll | Effect |
| 1 | An adventure occurs. Go to step 2. |
| 2-9 | Nothing happens. |
| 10 | Bad omens. Add an extra botch dice to the next adventure that year. |

A character may also choose to initiate his own adventure in which he selects from the various options and rewards. This is appropriate when seeking a specific reward.

Example: Darius of Flambeau (Arm5 page 34) has the Story Flaw Enemies (Renounced Magus). He also has Hermetic Prestige and Driven which might also be suitable for generating stories.

The player rolls 7 Simple Dice (three for Enemies, one for Hermetic Prestige three for Driven), resulting in 0, 2, 4 & 0 & 3, 1, 8. An adventure is going to happen as Darius feels compelled to investigate rumors of an infernal hedge wizard.

# Step 2 – Adventure Difficulty

Roll a Stress Die, ignoring Botches.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Roll | Difficulty | Base Ease Factor |
| 1-3 | Easy | Base Ease Factor 9 |
| 4-6 | Average | Base Ease Factor 12 |
| 7-10 | Hard | Base Ease Factor 15 |
| 11-15 | Very Hard | Base Ease Factor 18 |
| 16-25 | Impressive | Base Ease Factor 21 |
| 26-35 | Remarkable  | Base Ease Factor 24 |
| 35+ | Almost impossible | Base Ease Factor 27 |

The resulting number is the Base Difficulty of the adventure.

For young magi, those that are 5 years or less after Gauntlet, the difficulty is decreased by 3 points, due to the benevolent help of nearby covenants making your life easier. In fact to make it more thematic, you could make it last seven years, the duration between two tribunals, a “period of grace”.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. A 5 is rolled making this an average difficulty. The target numbers for the challenges should be 12 and the adventure should take a little over ten days. The difficulty is decreased to 9 because Darius is only two years out of Gauntlet.

# Step 3 – Origin of Adventure (optional)

Roll a Simple Die to determine the origin of the adventure. This is optional as it may be self evident depending of what Story Flaw/Hook was rolled. The difficulty rolled in Step 2 should be a guide for particular options.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Roll | Type | Easy/Average | Hard | Impressive | Harder |
| 1 | Nobility | Knight Errant | Local gentry | Greater nobles | Royal |
| 2 | Religion | Friar | Local priest | Monastery or Bishop | Militant Order |
| 3 | Peasant | Local | Farmer | Merchant | City Guild |
| 4 | Faerie | Knight Errant | Local gentry | Greater nobles | Royal |
| 5 | Official | Village headman | Tax collector | Agent of Noble | Papal Envoy |
| 6 | Criminal | Thief | Outlaws | Murder mystery | Assassin |
| 7 | Hermetic | Mercere | Own House | Quaesitor | Arch Magi |
| 8 | Covenant | Visit by mage | Nearby covenant | Far away covenant | March |
| 9 | Natural | Storm | Wild animal | Disaster | Plague |
| 10 | Supernatural | Ghost | Monster | Monster | Dragon |

These are only suggestion to inspire creativity. There is no mechanical impact. Feel free to alter or come up with your own.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. A 1 is rolled making this an adventure involving the Nobility. Perhaps the local lord takes exception to the sinister Darius wandering his lands.

# Step 4 – Timing

Roll a Simple Die to determine when the adventure will occur during the year. This may modify the difficulty of the adventure as the environment is negotiated.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Roll | Season | Notes |
| 1-2 | Spring |  |
| 3-4 | Summer |  |
| 5-6 | Autumn |  |
| 7-8 | Winter | +1 to all target numbers |
| 9-10 | Character choice | This reflects that not all story events have to be dealt with immediately. Sometimes a Mage may wish to put off an adventure until convenient. |

Example: Darius of Flambeau. A 9 is rolled. Darius hears the rumors at the beguiling of the year but does not fancy tramping about the countryside during the dead of winter so he resolves to depart in the spring.

# Step 5 – Complexity

Roll a Simple Die to determine the Complexity of the adventure. This will determine how many sets of challenges will be required to complete the adventure.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Roll | Complexity | Challenges |
| 1-3 | Simple | One set of challenges |
| 4-6 | Complex | Two sets of challenges |
| 7-9 | Very Complex | Three sets of challenges |
| 10 | Roll twice on this chart |  |

Example: Darius of Flambeau. A 4 in rolled. This will be a Complex adventure with two sets of abilities being required.

# Step 6 – Type of Adventure

Roll a Simple Die for each set of challenges determined in Step 5.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Roll | Type of Adventure |
| 1-2 | Social |
| 3-4 | Combat |
| 5-6 | Magic |
| 7-8 | Legal/Diplomatic |
| 9-10 | Character choice. This reflects that there are often multiple approaches of resolving conflict. |

Example: Darius of Flambeau. For the first set of challenges a 1 is rolled, a Social Challenge. For the second set of challenges a 9 is rolled making this Darius’s choice. While he would like to avoid conflict with the Local Lord he needs to play to his strengths so he elects to use Magic.

# Step 7 – Opt Out (optional)

At this stage, having seen the challenge before him, the character may decide to not proceed with the adventure. This is because the difficulty is too high, the rewards too low, or he does not have the right abilities to complete the challenge sets.

Having decided to opt out the character suffers whatever losses as seems appropriate based on the adventure premise.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. If he passed on this adventure the only likely consequence to Darius is another possible story in a future year (adding an extra dice in Step 1). However Darius does not back down in the face of danger!

# Step 8 – Proceed with the Adventure

Resolve each set of challenges rolled up in Steps 5 and 6

Each set of challenges has a number of abilities associated with it. The character must select three of the abilities and, along with an attribute of choice plus a Stress dice, against a target equal to the adventure difficulty in Step 2.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Social | Combat | Magic | Legal/Diplomatic |
| Folk Ken | Awareness | Awareness | Artes Liberales |
| Etiquette | Martial | Supernatural | Law |
| Charm | Brawl | Realm Lore | Organization Lore |
| Intrigue | Leadership | Parma | Folk Ken |
| Guile | Stealth | Penetration | Intrigue |
| Organization Lore | Athletics | Magic Theory | Guile |

These are Stress Rolls. One Botch Die, plus one extra Both Die for each Bad Omen from step 1.

All Organization and Realm Lore roll should be relevant to the situation.

The character must select a different ability and attribute, and cannot repeat the selection in this adventure until each ability and attribute has been used.

This means very complex missions with several sets of challenges may well involve every attribute.

The character can boost any of the rolls with the use of an appropriate spell or enchanted item. The magnitude of the spell or item effect is added to the roll to solve the ability roll. If this option is used for several rolls, then a different spell of effect must be used each time.

You also have the possibility to use a specialist for a single test during a set of challenge. In that case you use his or her Characteristic + Ability instead of yours. You can buy specialists with Build Points, but instead of costing their highest ability in Build Points, each specialist costs their main Abilities, plus their main Characteristics times two. Negative characteristics are treated as zero for the Build Point cost. They basically work like very simplified grogs: they don’t have virtues or flaws, so only the relevant abilities and characteristics are listed. For example: two-handed weapon: 6, Survival: 5, Strength: +1, Perception: +2, Total Build Points cost: 6+5+(1x2)+(2x2)=17.

As with every adventure, Confidence Points may be used to affect these rolls.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. He elects to do the Magic Challenges first. He selects Penetration 6, Parma 5, and Spell. Possibly a magical fight as occurred. As this is a hard adventure the spell must be of at least level 20. He scans his list of spells. While Leap of Homecoming is his most powerful it is difficult to think how this might be useful in the situation so instead selects Twist of the Tongue level 30). Darius is a little worried about the Social challenge to come so he reserves his best characteristics for them. He selects Stamina 0 for Parma and Dex +1 for Penetration.

For the Social Challenge he would like to have used another Spell but he has already applied that option so he selects Intrigue 3 (Plotting), and Folk Ken 2 and Guile 3 (Fast Talk). It seems as if Darius is not being entirely honest in his dealings with the local nobility. He selects Intelligence, Perception and Strength. How precisely Darius is going to use Strength with Guile (Fast Talk) may be worth some consideration but as he has a -6 to Social Rolls due to his Blatant Gift it may be a little academic.

# Step 9 – Determine Results

The success of the adventure depends on the success of the three Abilities rolls in each of the sets of challenges in Step 8.

For each set of challenges:

* Three Successes: Select a Reward plus 5 experience points
* Two Successes: Select a Reward
* One Success: Select both a Reward and a Loss (or a Story Event)
* Complete Failure: Select 2 Losses
* Each Botch in step 10: Select an additional Loss

For each set of challenges the character gains one experience point and one confidence point.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. He rolls his dice against a target of 9.

First challenge:

* Penetration plus Dex (6+1) plus Dice roll of 5=12 Success
* Parma plus Sta (6+0) plus Dice roll of 3=9 Success
* Spell Casting total of 37 plus Dice Roll of 0=37 Success

Second challenge:

* Intrigue plus Int (4+3-6) plus Dice roll of 7=8+3=11 Success
* Folk Ken plus Per (2+1-6) plus dice roll of 5=2 Fail
* Guile plus Str (3+2-6) plus dice roll of 0=-1 Fail

The spell casting roll was a zero so this is a possible botch. His botch dice are 2 (one base, two for Bad omens less one for Spell Mastery). He rolls a 3 and 4. Not a botch, and his casting total is sufficient to get the spell successfully cast.

The Intrigue roll was initially a failure but Darius used a point of Confidence to add 3 to the result making this a success.

The Guile roll was a 0 so this is a possible botch. His botch dice are 3 (one base, two for Bad omens).He rolls a 0 and 8 and 0. A double botch is unfortunate for Darius.

The Magical challenge set has 3 successes giving a reward plus 5 experience points.

The Social challenge set has only 1 success and 2 botches. This gives Darius both a Reward and a Loss as well as two additional losses for the 2 botches.

# Step 10 – Rewards

For each set of challenges determined in Step 9 determine the rewards for successfully completing each challenge.

Pick from the follow effects.

* Build Points. Gain a number of Build Points (Covenants page 5) equal to the Base Difficulty of the challenge divided by 2.
* Remove a Flaw/Hook gained on previous adventure
* Covenant Boon Minor. Temporary if difficulty between 3 and 7
* Increase Minor Boon to Major. Temporary if difficulty between 10 plus
* Covenant Boon. Major if difficulty 12 plus
* New Minor Virtue if difficulty 20 plus & Very Complex challenges
* Reduced Time. The adventure is completed faster than expected in Step 12

The Build Point option allows for enchanted items, Books, Money, Vis, or recruiting specialists.

Temporary effects last a number of seasons equal to the Base Difficulty

This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Players are recommended to be imaginative.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. He has two rewards. He selects Build Points for a total of 9 points (difficulty 9 divided by 2 times 2 rewards). He recovers a Quality 9 Tractatus.

He also gains 7 experience points and 2 Confidence points.

# Step 11 – Losses

For each set of challenges determined in Step 5, determine the possible outcomes for failing each challenge.

Roll a Simple Die on the table, or pick from the following effects.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Roll | Losses | Notes |
| 1-5 | Build Points | Lose a number of Build Points (Covenants page 5) equal to the Base Difficulty of the challenge divided by 2 |
| 6 | Warping Points | Number of Points equal to adventure difficulty dived by five (round up) |
| 7-9 | Wound | Each person on the adventure takes damage equal to difficulty plus 5 plus Stress dice |
| 10 | Special | Select from below |

* Story Flaw. Temporary if difficulty between 6 and 9
* Covenant Hook, Minor. Temporary if difficulty between 6 and 9
* Increase Minor Hook to Major. Temporary if difficulty between 9 and 12
* Covenant Hook, Major if difficulty 12 plus
* New Minor Flaw if difficulty 15 plus
* New Major Flaw if difficulty 20 plus

Temporary effects last a number of seasons equal to the Base Difficulty

Damage may be soaked and healed in the usual fashion. A shield grog may take the wound in addition to his own.

It is anticipated that the nature of the Story Flaw/Hook being rolled in Step 1 should suggest the type of rewards and losses.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. Oh dear, 3 losses. He rolls a 2, 7 and 10. This costs him 5 Covenant Build Points, a wound and Covenant Hook.

The Build points costs Darius 5 points of Vis and 40 pounds of silver

He takes a heavy wound (difficulty 9 +5 + 6 stress dice less 5 points for armor).

He chooses the Story Flaw hospital local lord. This is a temporary flaw lasting 9 seasons.

# Step 12 – Time

The adventure takes a number of days equal to the base difficulty from step 1, plus one day for each set of skill challenges, plus one day for each failed ability roll, plus one day for each botch in step 10

The time taken in adventures, as well as applicable healing time, should be taken in consideration when determining how much of each season is available.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. It takes him 13 days in total to track down and deal with the hedge wizard. (9 for base difficulty plus 2 for both the challenges and 2 for the botches)

# Conclusion

Weaving all the results from the above process into a cohesive story is well worth the effort.

Example: Darius of Flambeau. In the Spring of 1232 Darius of Flambeau hunts a hedge wizard hiding in the manor of Baron Ramon. A battle ensues with Darius the victor however he suffers a heavy wound and spends some Vis.

Unfortunately he is heavy handed in his dealings with Baron Ramon culminating in being caught trying to stuff the body of the hedge wizard into a small chest. Darius manages to buy his way out of further trouble however the Baron remains aggrieved. While Darius is confidant that the Baron will eventually calm down, it might be worth avoiding his lands for the next few years. Perhaps he should do something about that.

The payment of so much silver will put his little covenant into financial distress.

He staggers home clutching his precious tractates, while vowing to get better armor or next time to bring along a shield grog.

# Final recommendations

My recommendation, if you want to use this rule set:

* Start with a mage fresh out of gauntlet
* Start with a Spring covenant, with 300 Build Points where you are the only magus.

Two virtues are really powerful in this rule set: Gentle Gift and Self Confident.

If you consider that you have a -3 penalty due to the Gift for any social challenge involving mundane, Gentle Gift is basically a +3 bonus for a lot of challenge. I was facing this issue in about a third of my challenge. After all, 2 types of adventure out of four (social or legal/diplomatic) and five origins (1,2,3,5,6) out of ten will put you in a tough spot if you don't have the Gentle gift (mathematically, that's 25%, I must have been unlucky with my rolls).

Self confident allows you to burn 2 confidences point for a +6 and it can really help you. Because it is a limited resource, it is not as good as Gentle gift, but when you go for really tough challenges, it will be help you squeeze the win.