

SOLDIERS & SERPENTS



INTRODUCTION

At first it seemed like the Throneists had won.

Michael had called in many brethren from many corners of The Realm. They outnumbered Lucifer's Loyalists 2 to 1.

But in the aftermath of Lucifer's initial strike, the Throneists began to realize that the battle was just beginning...

Soldiers & Serpents is a new card-based roleplaying game set in the world of the *Soldiers, Serpents, and Sin* series by David M. Taylor II. The first book, *Lucifer*, tells the story of the opening salvos in the war in Heaven, the war between those loyal to the Throne and those who follow the fallen hero Lucifer. It is a story of violence and betrayal and quest for power. It is a story in which death itself is an unexpected consequence.

This is a beta version of the RPG to give you a taste of what's to come. This version is free to try out, and we hope you will follow us as we develop the finished version of the game. We would be happy to hear your thoughts and questions about mechanics. Send them to gabriel@fihgames.com

Watch our websites at fihgames.com and dt2author.org for information about the game as it becomes available!

USING THE BETA SET

MATERIALS

The cards are the most important materials you will need. Cut them out and separate them by deck. There are four heroes (Seraph, Grigorii, Gladiator, and Cherub) each with a set of five character cards. The first card is double-sided with special abilities for the light and dark versions of the character. The other four cards have a gold back and are the character's Power cards. Each hero has an associated Consequence deck with red backs.

There is a shared pool of Corruption cards (also with red backs so that they can be used with the Consequence decks) and a Choir card that is used collaboratively. You may need to print multiples of the Corruption cards, depending on what happens in your story. You may also cut out the Strengthen (+), Weaken (-), and Damage (*) tokens provided, or use your own tokens to indicate these effects.

For the beta, you will need to provide your own dice. Soldiers and Serpents uses three kinds of dice:

- The **Light Die** is an 8-sided die, preferably white
- The **Dark Die** is a 12-sided die, preferably black
- The **Blood Die** is a specialty 4-sided die numbered 0 to 3, preferably red

You can easily get 4, 8, and 12-sided dice at your local game store, but the Blood Die is unique and unlikely to be something you'll be able to find even at well-stocked stores. If you can find blank 4-sided dice, you can mark them yourself with permanent marker. Otherwise, just use a regular d4 and read any result of "4" as a 0 instead.

RUNNING THE GAME

This beta document includes some story suggestions for running the game, but does not include any of the extensive world information from the fiction itself. Much of that will be included in the final version. For now, see the series website (secretsoftherealm.com) for reference information.

RULES

For players, the most important thing to understand is the challenge procedure. There are a few additional rules for Gamemasters (GMs), which are listed in the “Telling Stories” section starting on page 7.

CHALLENGE PROCEDURES

When the GM presents the players with a challenge that must be overcome, the players should discuss (in character if possible) how they will solve this problem. Once the players agree who will make the first attempt at addressing the challenge, that player goes through the following steps:

1. Player Chooses a Power

The player does this by looking carefully at the effects (regular text) and keywords (italics) for each power and choosing a power that makes sense for the challenge presented. Note that not every character may have a power that is relevant to the specific challenge the GM has presented.

2. Player Chooses Light or Dark for that Power

Some powers may make sense either way, but some may only be relevant on one side or the other due to the nature of the challenge. For instance, a Seraphim who wishes to flee danger instead of standing and fighting may need to use the Dark Flaming Wings power, which has the keyword *escape*.

3. Player Rolls the Appropriate Die and Checks for Automatic Success

If using a Light Power, the player rolls the Light Die (d8). If using a Dark Power, the player rolls the Dark Die (d12). If the die shows a 7 or 8, the power automatically succeeds. If rolling the Dark Die and the die shows a 9-12, the power automatically succeeds but with an Overpower (see step 6 below).

4. Player Chooses Whether to Draw Consequences

If the number on the die is not an automatic success, the player may choose to draw from the Consequence deck. Each player has their own

Consequence deck tied to their character. The player adds the Consequence card value to the die value for the new total. If that total is still not enough for a success, the player may draw another Consequence card. Once the player reaches a successful total, they must stop drawing. At any time during the Consequence draw step, the player may choose to fail the challenge and discard the drawn cards (see step 7 below).

5. The Player Resolves the Success and Consequences

If the player reached a successful total, they now narrate what happens in the story that makes that challenge successful. The GM may add details that are revealed as part of the success. If the player drew Consequence cards, they now explain how each one affects the story and their character's behavior. This includes Corruption cards, though the player has more flexibility in deciding how those might apply to the situation.

6. The GM and Player Resolve an Overpower

If the total on the die or the die plus Consequence cards reached 9 or more, the player now narrates how the character displays violence, arrogance, or selfishness as part of this action within the story. The GM selects an appropriate Corruption card and hands it to the player. The player reshuffles their entire Consequence Deck with the new Corruption Card added.

7. The Player May Add 1 Card to the Choir in the Event of Failure

If the player draws Consequence cards and chooses to take failure instead of a success with consequences, they can choose one Consequence card they have drawn and narrate the effects as part of that failure, then place it under the Choir card. Other players may use cards on the Choir instead of or in addition to drawing their own Consequence cards for future challenges without suffering the listed Consequence.

OTHER EFFECTS

Strengthened

If a character is Strengthened by any power or effect, they ignore the text on the first Consequence card they draw for a challenge and simply add the value for free to their total. The Strengthened effect usually lasts only until it is used. Players may use a token to indicate when a character has been Strengthened.

Weakened

If a character is Weakened by any power or effect, they ignore the value on the first Consequence card they draw for a challenge but still must carry out the text. The Weakened effect may be temporary and last only until it has affected one Consequence Draw, in which case players may use a token to indicate that the character is Weakened. However, Damage can Weaken specific powers, which is indicated separately. Temporary Weakened effects do not stack with damaged powers – instead, the temporary effect only applies when using an undamaged power.

Damage

Damage is calculated with the Blood Die, which is a four-sided die marked from 0 to 3. Some powers may add or subtract from the roll. When a character receives damage, the player must use Damage powers with values that add up to the total damage received (or more, if they cannot be exact). Place a Damaged token on the power, and treat all uses of that power as Weakened. Damaged powers cannot be restored without healing. If all a character's powers are Damaged, that character is Incapacitated until healed (except for the Gladiator, per that character's special power).

Fallen

When a character adds their sixth corruption card to their Consequence deck, that character has fallen with no hope of redemption. Flip the hero card and use the Dark side. Fallen characters may not access the Choir, and they do not gain further Corruption.

NOTES ON UNUSUAL EFFECT INTERACTIONS

- Strengthened and Weakened can apply to a character or to a specific power. Effects on a specific power only apply to the next use of that power, but effects on the character apply to the next use of any power.
- Remove the token after applying it, even if the challenge is unsuccessful. Do not remove the token if no Consequence cards are drawn (on a 7+).
- Strengthen and Weaken tokens cancel each other out. If both are applied to the same power, remove both immediately.
- A Strengthen token allows for a temporary normal use of a Damaged power. Remove the Strengthen token after using the power.
- If a character has one effect and uses a power with the opposite effect, remove both tokens without applying them.
- Effects never double, so if a power already has the same effect on it, do not apply an additional token. (Note that Damage overrides Weaken - replace the Weaken token with a Damage token if the power becomes Damaged while already Weakened.)
- If a character has an effect and uses a power with the same effect, the player may choose which token to remove.



TELLING S+ORIES

In *Soldiers & Serpents*, the gamemaster is responsible for keeping things moving forward and making sure that the story doesn't get bogged down in unnecessary challenges. Because success and failure is always in the players' hands, the result of a challenge should always be considered decisive - repeated checks are not useful. This means that failure should never halt the flow of the story. Instead, it should provide lingering effects that will have to be dealt with later.

For example, if a Grigorii fails a Travel check to successfully carry an important piece of equipment that is essential for the next part of the story, that doesn't mean the group fails to get the equipment to its destination. Instead, failure leads to complication. Perhaps the whole party has to help, which means they are so distracted that they run afoul of hazards or even an ambush they could have otherwise avoided.

To help with both pacing and with this emphasis on making each roll matter, the gamemaster should clearly delineate the session into specific scenes. A scene is a small unit of story, centered around one specific problem or event. Once that problem or event has resolved for good or for ill, move on to the next scene. The GM should announce every time a new scene begins, because some special abilities trigger at the beginning of scenes.

In *Soldiers & Serpents*, we delineate scenes based on mechanics as well as story. The GM is always able to close a scene if it makes sense to the story, but the players also have a mechanical trigger that automatically ends the scene – once each hero has used a power (even if not successful), the gamemaster must end the scene. This may involve summarizing whatever else needs to happen to resolve the problem or event, but the story moves forward. The GM can base this summary on the direction that the heroes seem to be going or on what would make the most sense in context.

[Note that sometimes one hero may use multiple powers before all other players use one. The trigger still happens as soon as the last hero uses a power.]

Combat scenes are the exception to the one-power-per-hero rule. Instead, the scene continues until one side is defeated through damage, capture, or flight. The procedure for combat scenes is as follows:

- The gamemaster describes the current situation
- Each hero takes one action (in any order)
- All enemies take actions. Any that can attack do so – the GM rolls a single Dark Die, and all attacks hit on a 7 or better. The GM assigns hits equally among the available targets and rolls damage individually.
- Repeat as needed

ADVERSARIES

For these combat scenes, keep in mind how dangerous it is to take any damage at all, let alone multiple attacks in a single round. On the other hand, you don't want to make things so easy that the players never feel that their characters are in peril.

If you want to set up multiple opponents, make sure that there will be at least one or two left to attack after the first hero round even if the heroes are very successful. You can do this by presenting more opponents than heroes, but giving each opponent a small amount of health (usually 2) before being defeated. Or you can do it by having a small number of stronger opponents with a large amount of health (5 or 6). Each of these scenarios will feel dangerous in different ways, so consider how they might fit into the story. You might even mix the two to create a scene with a single powerful opponent and several henchmen.

You can keep track of the opponents' health by making checkboxes on an index card like so:

Belial <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Fallen Cherubim Guards <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Note that the Loyalist agents of Lucifer do not have easy access to healing, so they may not need to be destroyed. Injuring them slightly may be enough to drive them off. When you decide how much health each opponent requires before being “defeated,” keep in mind that this may not be the same as “destroyed.”

SCENARIOS

As we get closer to the full product, we’ll start talking about our plans for published adventures. In the meantime, here are some story hooks you can use to get started:

Michael

Any mission from Michael involves flying to the far reaches of The Realm to begin to root out any hidden pockets of Loyalists. Flight speed and stamina are good things to have here. But the locations are remote and communication is slow or sometimes nonexistent. Conflicts may involve fighting over newly discovered sources of precious metals, jewels, or hidden weapons caches. Strength is a good thing to have here.

Gabriel

Any mission from Gabriel involves creating confusion through language and/or sonics. Vocal skills are good things to have here as well as keen eyesight. They also involve cataloging the new things that are seen, i.e. new weapons, new classes of brethren (Throneists and Loyalists), new dimensions that copper warp spheres take them into and out of. The conflict may involve stealing precious artifacts, like swords, larger warp spheres (rare), and capturing brethren that converted from Throneist to Loyalist.

Uriel

Any mission from Uriel involves espionage and infiltration. Shapeshifting, negotiation, invisibility, and telescopic vision are good things to have here. Brothers may hide out in enemy camps and gather intel, with conflicts surrounding their attempts to get out before being caught. There may also be missions where the heroes pretend to defect, but are actually double agents – Throneists pretending to be Loyalists. Difficulties

may also arise with secret hideouts being dismantled and disappearing or being teleported to another location.

Raphael

Any mission from Raphael involves bringing medical supplies and healing. The capacity to carry heavy weight loads and the ability to fend off those that would attack the wounded are good things to have here. Conflicts come from the temporary portable Leaves not being enough to fully heal all the wounded and carrying soldiers back to The Grove for full healing. Also, if brethren die, there may be fights over their inscriptions, because whoever captured them can gain the powers of the dead brother.

WHAT'S COMING IN THE FULL SET

We're intending to Kickstart *Soldiers & Serpents* later in 2018. At this time, we are hoping to include full-art versions of the materials included in this beta, custom dice, and a complete game guide with fiction, lore, locations, characters, full adventures, and more!

Keep watching for more information!

CREDITS FOR THE BETA VERSION

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