
vs. Elves



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Game system based on vs. Monsters by Philip Reed.

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Introduction

On the western seaboard of far distant Verdan, the human city of Balphor has been set upon by the armies of the Autumn Queen. Ill equipped to deal with such a threat, the men of Balphor have barred the gates to their great city, sealing themselves off from the world that exists outside. As the elves lay siege to the city, its residents do the only thing that they can do. They wait for death to claim them.

vs. Elves takes place within the walls of Balphor, on the western seaboard of Verdan, at the close of the 7th Aeon. Players assume the roles of human settlers, besieged by the armies of the Autumn Queen, the cruel ruler of Verdan in the wake of King Oberon's assassination. The Autumn Queen will not rest until her lands are purged of human taint. She will not rest until *you* are dead.

In order to play vs. Elves, you will need a copy of this document, a standard deck of playing cards, and a copy of the vsM Engine (which is made freely available by the cunning and devious Philip Reed). Swing by Mr. Reed's [website](#) for more information.

The World of vs. Elves

The default vs. Elves setting is not your typical fantasy affair. Homo Sapiens is the *least* common species of sentient being, elves are truly supernatural, and dwarves are simply humans with a disability (as opposed to an entire race of bearded alcoholics who live underground). And there's more....

The technology in the world of vs. Elves is far more advanced than that which crops up in most medieval European fantasy analogues (the city of Balphor serves as an analogue to *Victorian* Europe instead). Swords are still in use, but firearms are the preferred weapons of the city's defenders, and gaslights cut through the fog as it wafts off the nearby sea.

By default, the action in games of vs. Elves takes place in the walled city of Balphor, as described herein. Should you choose to expand the scope of your own vs. Elves game to encompass more of Verdan, feel free to do so, but realize that this will change the focus of actual game play significantly.

The Gateway to Verdan

The last stronghold of humanity in the ancestral Elven homeland of Verdan, Balphor is a massive, walled, port city that has served as mankind's gateway into the Elven lands for the past eighty years. With the ascension of the Autumn Queen to the throne of Verdan, this gateway has been barred forever. Humans are no longer welcome in Verdan.

The City Center

The central district of Balphor is both the city's largest and most secure quarter. It is here that the House of Lords, the ruling council of Balphor, resides and here that the wealthy make their homes. The massive limestone buildings at the city's center are packed tightly together, the many streets warded with heavy gates of iron, and the many walls lined with cleverly concealed murder holes.

In more peaceful times, this quarter of the city was untouched by crime, but as death tightens its icy grip upon humanity in Verdan, hysteria grips all of Balphor – even the upper classes. In these dark times, the city center has been transformed into a realm of paranoia and fear. Only the brave dare tread the cobbled streets of Balphor's city center.

The Arts District

The arts district has always been a very colorful neighborhood, but it has become a lawless land of excess in recent months. If you can imagine a vice, you can find a place to indulge it in the arts district of Balphor. Here,

amongst the ranks of a chaotic Bohemian community, there are drug dens, prostitutes and unscrupulous merchants lining the streets for as far as the eye can see.

The arts district is, understandably, very popular. All of Balphor's citizens, rich or poor, can lose themselves in a pipe full of opium or flagon full of mead, living out their final days in blissful ignorance of the violent war that is currently unfolding around them.

The Forge District

In Balphor's forge district, thick black smoke is belched forth from brick smokestacks into the air, blotting out the beautiful azure skies of Verdan. The scent of sweat and iron permeates the forge district, even in these dark times, when much of Balphor's populace has resigned itself to a fate worse than death at the hands of the Autumn Queen.

Precious few of mighty Balphor's forges still operate, but those that do provide weapons for the staunch defenders of the city, choosing not to surrender silently to the Elven armies that stand outside of the city gates. These forges are heavily guarded by the remaining members of the city's militia, while the others have fallen into a state of disrepair.

The Docks District

Largely abandoned in recent months, the docks of Balphor were once the gateway to Verdan for thousands of human colonists every year. Currently, they are blockaded by the Royal Elven Navy who have orders to fire upon any approaching human ships – whether they are leaving the harbor or entering it.

Only a small group of militia men stand guard at the city docks, vigilantly warding the city of Balphor from an invasion by sea. Should the Royal Navy choose to actively attack the harbor, even Balphor would quickly fall before the armada's mighty cannons.

The Slum District

Home to the vast majority of Balphor's citizens, the slum district has always been a hive of villainy, but in the wake of the Autumn Queen's siege it has become a full-blown combat zone. Many in the House of Lords fear that the growing chaos gripping Balphor may spark a civil war of sorts in the slums.

Unfortunately, what few members of the city's militia that remain at their assigned posts are spread so thin that, the citizens who live in the slums have been left to their own devices for the time being. Hopefully the fears of the city's Lords will not come to pass.

The Down Below

Beneath the cobbled streets of Balphor lies a winding maze of sewer tunnels, ancient catacombs, and caverns long forgotten. Here, in these dark places, many rumors say that there dwell things of nightmare. The 'land' of Down Below is a common fixture of bedtime stories for naughty children who live within the walled city of Balphor.

The History of Balphor

Generously deeded to the nations of humanity by the now dead King Oberon nearly a century ago, Balphor is an ancient port of Verdan. Founded nearly three millennia ago and serving as everything from a military port to the seat of Verdan's crown royalty over the years, Balphor has a long and storied history. A long and storied history that, for the most part, humanity knows nothing about.

The War of Unity

Balphor is a city that has been razed by war many times, but the first such time that it was toppled by force came during the Elven War of Unity. Verdan was split between those elves who sought unity as a race, and those

who championed the many virtues of individual existence. Balphor, then home to the Grand Council (a band of Elven magi), served as the last bastion of hope for this latter group. And here, this group of elves was snuffed out like a candle that had burned too long.

The Crown Jewel

Following the War of Unity, the great city of Balphor was rebuilt to serve as the seat of the newly formed Elven Empire. For nearly 300 years, all of Verdan was ruled from within the walls of Balphor. And then the Great Revolt came about. The then king was toppled in a daring coup, the local military forces seized control of the walled city, and once again war gripped the lands of Verdan.

The mad General Prax and his army seized Balphor with an iron grip. The general declared himself God Emperor of Verdan and threatened to annihilate any who dared stand against him. In the end, his threats were hollow and he, along with his city, was obliterated by the combined might of those armies still loyal to the Elven Empire and its true king.

The Ruins Rebuilt

For nearly 800 years, Balphor stood a ruin upon the western shore of Verdan. It was eventually revived, not by the Empire, but by those who had been pushed to the Empire's outer edges. Here, amongst the abandoned ruins of once mighty Balphor, a new generation of elves established a simple fishing village where they could eke out simple lives.

This village would grow as more elves sought to distance themselves from the growing inland metropolises of the Empire. Once such a metropolis, Balphor now offered a taste of the simple life. Inevitably, however, it grew. And grew. And eventually, it was again a port city of unparalleled grandeur upon the shores of the tumultuous Azure Sea.

The Recent Past

Ninety-five years ago, King Oberon of the Elven Empire deeded the city of Balphor to the distant human kingdom of Farthing in an unprecedented show of friendship between the races. Good King Oberon sought to foster a strong relationship with the humans because he saw them both as strong military allies and a means to seize property for the Empire upon the far distant Western continents.

This strong peace with humanity stood for nearly 100 years – then King Oberon was assassinated, and the Autumn Queen took his place upon the throne of Verdan. The result was a swift and sudden 'purging' of humanity from the realms of Verdan. And now she has set her sights upon Balphor. It seems as though the great city will be razed once more.

Player Characters

In the city of Balphor there are precious few citizens who have not sunk into the depths of apathy or despair. Most of the city's militia has disbanded and, as a result, Balphor has been plunged into chaos. While the elves wait outside of the city's heavy iron gates with their weapons poised, civil unrest threatens to destroy it from within.

Player characters in games of vs. Elves are a rare breed – they would raise their sword and fight, rather than silently accept their fate. Player characters are heroes in every sense of the word, individuals battling against seemingly unsurmountable odds, rather than throwing in the towel and calling it quits.

Whether they are a member of the city militia, a private detective, or simply a citizen who has taken up arms, a player character is a cut above the common man (or woman). The one thing that all player characters have in common is their indomitable will. They will not go quietly into that dark night.

Creating Player Characters

For the most part, characters in games of vs. Elves are created in the same manner that player characters are created in the core vsM Engine rules. What few differences do exist are discussed below.

New Good Stuff

The following new Good Stuff options are provided to help you custom-tailor the vsM Engine to the world of vs. Elves:

- **Dark Elf:** You are one of the long hidden elven revolutionaries (see *Game Mastering*) thought to have been wiped out during the War of Unity. Although you lack the psychic connection of Empire elves, you have the ability to see in the dark (no light source needed) and get to pull an extra card when attempting to actively deceive someone.
- **Sorcerer:** You possess the ability to bend arcane energies to your will (see *Weaving Magic* for more details).

New Bad Stuff

The following new Bad Stuff option has also been provided to help you custom tailor the vsM Engine to the world of vs. Elves.

- **Dependent:** You are dependent upon a certain mood altering substance to function normally. For every day that you go without this substance, you suffer a -2 penalty to all attribute ratings. And, yes, penalties levied in such a manner are cumulative.
- **Dwarf:** You are afflicted with a rare genetic disorder that causes you constant pain, has stunted your growth, and limits your ability to move gracefully (draw one less card when resolving actions dependent upon agility).

New Equipment

All of the equipment present in the vsM Engine SRD, with the exception of motorized vehicles, Bibles, and other equipment culled from modern Earth (e.g., flashlights and cell phones), is appropriate for inclusion in a vs. Elves game. The following new equipment is presented to help the GM evoke the unique feel of the vs. Elves setting.

Weapons & Ammo	
Weapon Name	Value
Gatling Gun*	Queen
Gatling Bullets (50)	Five
*This is a tripod mounted, hand-cranked, unwieldy bit of artillery best suited for stationary firing (although it could be mounted in the back of a wagon for easy portability).	

Drugs & Paraphernalia	
Substance Name	Value
Opium (six grams)	Four
Opium Pipe (cheap)	Two
Opium Pipe (ornate)	Three
Ale (one pint)	Two
Whiskey (one liter)	Two
Wine (one liter)	Three
Wine (one cask)	Four
Garter Flask	Two

Miscellaneous Goods	
Item Name	Value
Newspaper*	Zero
Lockpick Set	Three
Pocket Watch	Six
Silver Holy Symbol	Four
*In these dark times, newspapers are published irregularly at best, and their information is usually erroneous (but always entertaining).	

Weaving Magic

Casting magic spells in games of vs. Elves is a simple affair, for the most part. The following is a short list of spells common to the vs. Elves setting. A player character with the 'Sorcerer' Good Stuff can cast any of these spells at will, provided that they pay the cost in Health points listed in parentheses.

- **Ball Lightning (2):** The sorcerer can conjure a small ball of electrical energy at his fingertips and hurl it at an opponent. This spell inflicts damage as a Hunting Rifle if it strikes its target successfully.
- **Bolt (1):** The caster can conjure small bolt of magical energy from his fingertips and throw it at an opponent in combat. This bolt inflicts damage as a Bow if it successfully strikes its intended target.
- **Darkness (1):** The casting character can create an area of magical darkness within their line of sight that measures up to five meters in diameter. Such darkness lasts for five minutes before it dissipates and, until it does so, it trumps all artificial light sources.
- **Heal (2):** This spell restores three Health points to a target, up to their initial Health rating (i.e., this spell can't boost the target's Health rating higher than its initial score).
- **Heal All (4):** This spell restores *all* of a target's lost Health points, up to its initial rating (i.e., the spell can't boost the target's Health rating higher than its initial score).
- **Invisibility (4):** The target of this spell (but not its possessions, footprints, and so on) is rendered invisible for five minutes. This spell can also be used to effect inanimate objects.
- **Levitate (2):** A sorcerer causes the target of this spell to levitate in the air. Such a target may be moved up or down at the caster's discretion, although no horizontal movement is possible via levitation.
- **Light (1):** This spell causes a small beam of light to emanate from a fixed point (e.g., the end of a staff). This light has a range of five meters, shines with the intensity of a flashlight and lasts for a total of 15 minutes (although the caster can snuff it out at will).
- **Petrify (8):** Casting this spell upon a target turns said target into a statue. The target loses one point of Health per turn, as their flesh slowly turns to stone. When their Health rating is reduced to zero, they are petrified. The effects of this spell linger until its caster has died or willfully revoked them.
- **Raise Dead (8):** This spell does not return a dead individual to life – it animates their body and places it under the control of the casting sorcerer. This is the manner in which many so-called 'undead' are created.
- **Repel Undead (6):** All mindless (e.g., skeletons, zombies, etc) undead creatures will ignore the target of this spell (in combat or otherwise) for ten minutes.
- **Sleep (2):** The target of this spell falls into a deep sleep for a total of fifteen minutes, but will immediately awaken if attacked.
- **Teleport (6):** A caster who weaves this spell blinks out of existence and reappears at a location of his choosing, with the caveat that he must have previously visited said location. Note that a sorcerer may transport other people with him by making physical contact with them while casting the spell.

Note that ranged combat spells (e.g., ball lightning, bolt, petrify) are resolved like any other ranged attack is. Also, even if such a spell fails to strike its target, the caster must still pay the associated Health cost.

Finally, note that it is possible to kill yourself by taxing your body too much when casting spells – it is for this reason that magic is not as prolific in the world of vs. Elves as it is in many fantasy settings.

Game Mastering

Unlike many fantasy settings, that of vs. Elves comes with a built-in self destruct button. Roleplaying in vs. Elves is, by default, set upon a very specific stage, with the player characters pitted against a very powerful enemy (an entire species, in fact) and their lives hanging in the balance. The chips are down, and things look grim for the player characters.

The Setting Secrets

The following elements of the vs. Elves setting should be gradually revealed to player characters over the course of the campaign, not laid bare all at once.

The Elven Hive Mind

This is what the War of Unity was really about. Long ago an Elven sorcerer of some renown discovered a way to forge a psychic bond between all living members of the Elven race. When this sorcerer unveiled his discovery, many hailed it as a cure for the many social ills that plagued the Elven race. Not everybody saw it that way, and many scoffed at the idea that creating an artificial hive mind would solve all of the world's social ills overnight.

Eventually, the Elven nations were split on whether or not to unify the race under one leader, via the artificial hive mind, or strive to exist as individuals. In the end, the spells were

cast, but only those who wilfully surrendered to the hive mind were engulfed by it. These elves became a new, highly efficient, master race – and those elves who resisted the hive mind became hunted, branded as traitors.

Eventually, those traitors, led (ironically) by the very sorcerer who had first envisioned the hive mind, was trapped within the city of Balphor. Here, the hive elves struck their final blow and exterminated their brethren in one foul swoop. When the smoke cleared, the city of Balphor was no more.

The Dark Elves

Unbeknownst to the hive elves, several members of the resistance managed to escape destruction at the siege of Balphor. Without a connection to the hive mind, these elves would not reap the full benefits of the newly founded Elven Empire, but they would also be able to avoid detection by its members. And they would not forget the act of evil perpetrated at the seaside city of Balphor.

These elves have plotted and schemed for centuries, hiding undetected amongst the ranks of their murderous brethren, waiting to wipe out the vile hive entity that consumed the once noble Elven race (unbeknownst to the rest of the world). And with the Autumn Queen's push to purge humanity from Verdan, a rare opportunity has presented itself.

The Doomsday Device

Somewhere beneath the walled city of Balphor, hidden deep within the bowels of the Down Below, lies the one device capable of unraveling the Elven Empire forever. Lost for millennia, it is knowledge of this device and its involvement in the Great Revolt that fuels the Autumn Queen's current quest to exterminate all humans living in Verdan.

When the Grand Council realized the danger that a unified master race could pose,

they set about creating a magical device that was capable of disrupting the hive mind should it ever be implemented. Unfortunately, they never finished building it.

When the hive elves destroyed the city of Balphor, thus ending the War of Unity, the incomplete device was hidden deep within the network of caverns below the smoldering ruins. Here, cloaked in darkness, the device lies forgotten until very recently.

Setting the Stage

The following is a short recounting of the events leading up to the current state of affairs in Verdan.

Recent History

Mad as she may be, the Autumn Queen managed to piece together the fact that the aforementioned device once existed. And that was all it took to push her over the edge.

Convinced that the device still existed, that the humans knew of it, and that they planned to use it to destroy the Empire, she begged good King Oberon to war with the humans before they activated it. Recognizing her paranoid delusion for what it was, Oberon refused her – so she killed him and seized control of the hive mind herself.

Mustering the combined might of the Elven Empire, the Autumn Queen's armies have marched across Verdan, infected with her insanity, leaving a trail of dead humans in their wake. Their march ended outside the great city of Balphor. Here paranoia has unhinged the Queen and her subjects... do they attack and risk activation of the device?

The men of Balphor have no idea that the magical device even exists. All *they* know is that the once peaceful Elven Empire has turned against them without cause and that, if things continue going the way that they have been, they can expect to die in Verdan. Only a small

handful of Balphor's citizens have taken up arms – the rest are content to die.

Finally, the long hidden Dark Elves see the War of Unity unfolding before their eyes once more. They do not know where the device created by their ancestors now lies, but they know that the time to use it is close at hand, Can they trust the humans?

This is where things stand as the first session of a vs. Elves game unfolds. Where it goes from here is entirely up to you.

Elves as Monsters

In vs. Elves, the main opponents of player characters will come in the form of elves sent to infiltrate the city (although you should feel free to throw in a few sessions that revolve around other monsters to shake things up). The following elves represents typical members of their particular sub-species.

Empire Elves

All elves of the Empire are connected to the hive mind and, subsequently, corrupted by the madness of the Autumn Queen. The degree to which this insanity effects elves of the Empire depends upon the genetic make-up of the individual sub-species – some merely become fanatic warriors, while other are driven into a state of homicidal psychosis.

High Elves

The ancestors of those elves who fought to implement the hive mind so many years ago, high elves are considered to be the most pure example of their species. They look as you would expect an elf to look – they have fair skin, a slim frame, delicate facial features, pointy ears, and a love of foppish clothing. The main difference between these and your typical high fantasy elves is on the *inside*.

High elves have been part of the hive mind long enough that they have acclimated to the changes that occur when another ruler seizes the reigns. As such, while the Autumn Queen's psychosis has left its mark upon their minds, it has only succeeded in strengthening their loyalty to the Empire, not driving them over the edge of sanity.

Special Ability: Can see normally in the complete absence of light.

Offense: 4 (Damage cap five)
Defense: 2 **Mental:** 5
Physical: 3 **Health:** 4

Changelings

A changeling is a magically altered high elf that, in its natural form, appears as a grotesque amorphous blob. A changeling is capable of enveloping another creature within the folds of its body and assimilating that being. Thereafter, the changeling can assume the physical form of the assimilated creature (but not its knowledge or memories) at will, simply by concentrating.

As you might expect, changelings make very efficient spies and assassins. Only by asking them a series of questions that tests their knowledge, can one discern that they are an imposter – and if a changeling has taken the time to study a subject prior to assimilation, even this may not reveal their presence once they assume the identity of their victim.

The Autumn Queen's insanity has had the same effect upon those changelings who are connected to the hive mind as it has had upon the high elves (i.e., it has strengthened their resolve to fight on the Empire's behalf, but has not yet had much effect past that).

Special Abilities: Assimilate other living beings (one at a time) and assume their visage at will thereafter.

Offense: 6 (Damage cap six)
Defense: 4 **Mental:** 8
Physical: 3 **Health:** 8

Due to the malleable nature of the changeling's true body, the above ability ratings apply no matter what form that the vile creature has assumed.

Goblins

These small, vicious, creatures are the elven equivalent of humanity's dwarves (i.e., they appear to be short, slightly malformed, high elves). Often shunned in Empire society due to their appearance, goblins are still part of the hive mind and, thus, serve their Queen as faithfully as any other elf.

Goblins have, for the most part, always been highly susceptible to suggestion and, thus, very sensitive to the shared emotions of the hive mind. With the Autumn Queen in charge, goblins have all but lost their grip on sanity, becoming cruel, vicious, warriors with little regard for their own safety.

Special Ability: In combat, goblins enter into a state of homicidal mania, unaware of their own well being. As a result, a goblin has a higher health score than is typical for such a weak opponent.

Offense: 5 (Damage cap five)
Defense: 2 **Mental:** 3
Physical: 4 **Health:** 6

Ogres (Berzerkers)

A magically altered troll (see below), the ogre is a mass of walking muscle that has a hideous visage and is possessed of a hideous strength. On the battlefield, ogres are feared by elves and man alike, for they are pure rage trapped within the body of a living being. One does not battle an ogre and live to tell of it.

Ogres are fueled only by the anger, fear, and paranoia of the Autumn Queen. Such berserker warriors are handled by Trolls, much as an elephant trainer handles his massive charge – until needed, ogres are kept penned in cages. When ogres are deployed, they are fitted with a special harnesses that allows their trainer to come along for the ride, mounted atop the beast’s shoulders.

Special Ability: Ogres break a few rules of the vsM Engine. Most notably, the damage cap of any weapon brandished against an ogre in combat is reduced by two. They also don’t adhere to the regular rules for attribute ratings.

Offense: 6 (No damage cap)
Defending: 4 **Mental:** 1
Physical: 5 **Health:** 15

Trolls

The trolls of Verdan resemble slightly larger, blue-skinned, blond-haired, versions of the typical high elf. In combat, trolls are fierce and valiant warriors, though they are often employed as ogre handlers by the armies of the Autumn Queen, as they are the only sentient elves physically capable of reigning in such strong and horrible creatures.

Trolls have much the same disposition as high elves do, thanks to their hive mind connection, but they also harbor the Autumn Queen’s fear that mankind has its finger on the button of a magical doomsday device. It is for this reason that they fight against humanity.

Special Ability: Trolls alone amongst the elven sub-species possess the physical strength necessary to control ogres in combat.

Offense: 6 (Damage cap five)
Defense: 4 **Mental:** 3
Physical: 8 **Health:** 7

Wights

A wight is a foul creature, once a high elf, transformed into a creature of undeath by the Elven Empire’s necromancers. Shadowy warriors, wights move silently through the night, infiltrating strongholds (and walled cities) under the cover of darkness, gathering intelligence and murdering by moonlight.

Wights have a unique bond with the hive mind – as undead creatures, they can break contact with the hive mind at will. They rarely do so, but if they feel that the Empire’s interests would be best served by plausible deniability, wights have been known to carry out clandestine missions on their own.

Special Ability: Hard to Kill. The only way to kill a wight is to destroy their brain or cut off their head. An Ace drawn during an attack indicates an automatic head shot which instantly destroys the wight. You don’t need to draw for damage when fighting a wight: only a head shot will kill them, and any head shot that hits will kill them automatically.

Offense: 4 (Damage cap 4)
Defense: 2 **Mental:** 5
Physical: 5 **Health:** See above.

Other Elves

There exist, as previously mentioned, a small number of elves that do not share a connection with the hive mind and that do not swear fealty to the Elven Empire. These elves are described below.

Dark Elves

The moniker ‘dark elves’ is somewhat misleading, it being an artefact of the distant age when certain high elves opposed the idea of a hive mind and were branded as traitors by those who favored said idea. Physically, dark elves are identical to high elves of the Empire.

The only real difference is that dark elves have no connection to the hive mind and, thus, are not tainted by the Autumn Queen's particular brand of madness.

Special Ability: Can see normally in the complete absence of light.

Offense: 4 (Damage cap five)

Defense: 2 **Mental:** 5

Physical: 3 **Health:** 4

Waerloga

The Waerloga (i.e., Oath Breakers) are the dark elves who compose the final remnants

of the Grand Council, the originators of both the elven hive mind and the device meant to shatter it. These men and women have been hiding for millennia, concealing their presence from the world, waiting for an opportunity to set right what went wrong so long ago.

Special Ability: Can weave spells, per the rules presented earlier in this document. As such, they have a high health rating to facilitate this special ability.

Offense: 2 (Damage cap 4)

Defense: 4 **Mental:** 5

Physical: 3 **Health:** 10



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