

Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch

Essen demo

Eero's notes

So, DS is the first volume in a multi-volume d20 campaign setting. The difficulties demo-wise are considerable: selling to people not invested in d20 is more likely to sell them on the d20 Modern sourcebook (recommended for those wishing to use this product, by the way), while you can't sell to d20 players by the virtue of system – they already have that.

Strengths of the product at hand:

- The only scifi setting for d20 at this caliber of production value and detail. Fully “supported” by several other products.
- Pretty successful combination of high-concept and generic science fiction memes; serious take on the source material, no kitchen sinking, likely to attract gamers who appreciate a coherent setting. Might be change of pace for some d20 players.
- Stretches the concept of a traditional adventure with character classes and adventure material focused on societal and financial issues.

Conclusion: Because setting is the primary sales point, the demo shall focus on displaying the setting and the ways it connects with the d20 system. In practice this means sitting down with the book and discussing it's merits for 15 minutes with the prospective customer. This is a “demo” insofar as it allows for a dynamic taste of the setting, focused on issues the audience finds interesting. Like an extended GM monologue, which is something not entirely unfamiliar to most d20 gamers.

Preparation and overview

Read the product through several times, it's necessary to be pretty familiar with it so you can deviate from the script as necessary. Make special note of your own favorite sections, so you can discuss them meaningfully.

Before the convention, prepare any print-out materials necessary. I'm going to print out and laminate the map of Eos, the map of the solar system, the sample runes and the publishing schedule to have some focal props apart from the book itself. If something else strikes you as relevant, add away.

When demo time comes, get the book and the props and sit down with the interested folks. This demo works for 1-5 people perhaps. It's pretty important to find out right away whether they are familiar with D&D or d20 Modern; if neither, then I'm a bit skeptical whether it's a good call to offer this demo to them.

Conduct the actual demo via discussion of the following significant topics. Make plenty of use of the book itself, turning it to appropriate pages and pointing out the features you mention. At the end of each section pick out suitable members of the audience and invite them to tell of their own relevant experiences; I'll include example questions for each topic.

Skip or rearrange topics as necessary concerning the audience and time. Add extra topics you find meaningful when reading the book. Do not exaggerate, and keep within the parameters of normal d20 play when making suggestions as to how the book should/could be used. You'll

probably have to field a lot of questions about whether the setting can “do” different kinds of campaign ideas or character concepts. Answer by reference to both system and setting.

Topics of discussion

The following should each be worth 3 minutes of spiel and a couple of minutes of questions. They are in a roughly sensible order, but jump around according to need. I provide a bulleted list of points for each topic as well as numerous page references to explore. Try reading a sentence or two from a relevant page when you go over a point. Embellish freely with personal ideas of what you’d find interesting in gaming in this system.

1. d20 Modern vs. D&D

[Only use this one if the audience is not predominantly familiar with d20 Modern.]

- Fundamentally the same system, no need to re-learn everything. (Pg. 78; use weapon stat blocks as example, point out the Purchase DC system)
- Mostly available for free in the Modern SRD, like the original SRD. (Pg. 7; note that experienced D&D players won’t need the actual book at all)
- Generic base classes, advanced classes and prestige classes provide genre-flexibility. Race-specific classes are also possible. (Pg. 52, 67, 48; different sample classes)

Questions:

- **What genres do you play apart from fantasy?**
- **Does anybody have experience of playing d20 or D&D in historical or other non-fantasy context? Ever tried to use firearms in D&D?**

2. Earth is gone, humanity prevails

[Swap order with topic 3 if audience predominantly literate.]

- Setting history begins with the Earth blowing up. (Pg. 10)
- *Dawning Star* is a huge evacuation ship. (Pg. 118)
- *Eos* is the planet they landed on to craft a new civilization. (the map)

Questions:

- **Does the premise sound at all interesting? Any experience with similar games?**
- **What kind of adventure opportunities are there in the mankind’s greatest journey?**

3. Classical scifi

[Skip or dumb down if audience particularly non-literate.]

- The setting has visuals reminiscent of Babylon 5 and other post-NG TV scifi; sleek technology, cultural mixtures, humanoid aliens. (Pg. 9 and any other illustrations)
- Clear roots in classical scifi, relishes in working out consequences of technological progress; d20 heritage ensures that the technology discussion drives towards adventure gaming situations. (Pg. 6)
- Aliens are perceived primarily from a social perspective, with adventure hooks arising from cultural differences. (Pg. 25, 201 for Velin; Pg. 167 for Vaasi)

Questions:

- **Read any Asimov, Heinlein, Sturgeon? It’s a bit like that.**

- **What kind of implications are there in a minuscule industrial base combined with complex earth-made technology and a fragile biosphere of a new world?**

4. Different campaigns

[Segue here from any of the above when it seems appropriate.]

- Wide open for different campaign styles, high replay value. Adventure-oriented materials ready for GM-full traditional play style. (Pg. 7)
- Strong Wild West stylings; gunslingers, colonists, Indians (Velin) are possible. Society vs. individual, frontier situation. (Pg. 58-62; colorful advanced classes)
- Pulp possibilities; ruins, strange aliens, nazi-equivalents (Vaasi), exotic locales. Carefree adventure and sense of wonder. (Pg. 177)
- Good vs. Evil is easy, the game bends to become a cross of D&D and Starship troopers. Focus on the Vaasi. (Pg. 89; a discussion of low-tech vs. high-tech weaponry in Eos)
- Space opera! *Dawning Star* itself is still up there, and there is ample reason to leave Eos behind. (the solar system map)

Questions:

- **What aspects of the described setting seem the most interesting?**
- **Campaigns really go all over the place, don't they?**

5. Social and economical issues

[Alternative for 4, in case there's a dearth of GM-types in the audience.]

- The system actively facilitates community-based characters. (Pg. 53, 55)

Questions:

- **Ever wanted to play a merchant that rocked in D&D?**
- **Ever wanted the paladin to be responsible to his community?**

6. Serious support

[Try to fit this one in at the end, it has good stuff in it.]

- DS is smart scifi (and the only d20 scifi setting around), not a superficial whiz-boom laser-fight like many scifi games tend to be. (Pg. 178; discussion of campaign content)
- Blue Devil Games supports the campaign setting with comprehensive supplements. (Pg. 206; the publishing schedule)
- Helios Rising: there's some pretty smart stuff in there, it's practically 12 interlinked campaign settings in one. [Mention examples]. (the solar system map)

Questions:

- **Do you use or want supplements for your game?**
- **How much rpg material do you buy per year? Like PDFs?**

Ending the demo

End the demo by letting the audience handle the book themselves (in contrast with you flipping back and forth constantly), and ask an array of questions to ensure that their curiosity is satisfied. The goal is to have some kind of gamer rapport going at this point – you've asked questions and engaged into a discussion of the possibilities of scifi adventure gaming with them. If the audience is sympathetic with the idea of intelligent scifi adventure,

you should have exchanged ideas about the difficulties of mecha repair or whatever at this point, and there should be a good possibility of making a sale.