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Nolan '15

The Duelist Supreme

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The Duelist Supreme

Encounter Level 7 (Scales 5 to 11)

Summary

The wood elves fear the ancient duelist. They tell tales of her wrath, and warn against uttering her name, lest she take it as a challenge. This encounter pits your players against an incredibly powerful single opponent. The ancient duelist is a match for an entire party, and is capable of shrugging off all but the most powerful attacks. Your players will need to work together if they want to take her down, and she only gets more dangerous the longer they take.

Encounter Statistics

Terrain Tags: Boss, nature, travel

Favors: Barbarians, paladins

Foils: Wizards, rogues

Encounter Weight: Heavy (fully-rested parties)

Creatures: 1x The Ancient Duelist

XP: 20,000 experience points (13, 000 from creatures, 7,000 ad hoc)

Encounter Weight

This is a boss battle. The ancient duelist is a powerful foe that only gets stronger as the fight continues. If your players are the type to save their strongest abilities, relying on at-will powers they can use over and over again, they're going to have a very difficult time here. Parties that prefer to shoot first and ask questions later will fare significantly better, as the sooner they take down the Duelist, the better.

Facing the Duelist

The exact location of this fight is up to you, but an example is provided if you don't have a place in mind. The ancient duelist has awaits challengers in ruins amongst a forest grove. When deciding where to set this fight, it's important that the location be in close quarters, so the duelist can stay in melee range, and it should have some opportunities to block line of sight for both the players and the duelist to take advantage of. The following text will set the scene when the players approach.

The forest grows sparse ahead. In the widening gaps between the trees you see ruins, old enough they're scarcely more than a stone foundation set in the soft earth. What little of the walls that remains reaches pitifully toward the sky. The remains of a campfire smolder in the center of the ruins. Someone has been here recently.

Terrain

The ruined walls are fairly flimsy. Each 5-ft. section has AC 8, 60 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Once knocked down, they create difficult terrain, but don't do damage to any creatures nearby. There are no other terrain features of note.

Tactics

The Ancient Duelist is a complex creature with lots of abilities. Take some time to familiarize yourself with them before running this encounter. The duelist makes common use of her attack action, augmented by the blade, *Moonlight*. Her powerful legendary actions provide either a debilitating condition to one of the characters or a bonus to the duelist until the end of her next turn. It's critical you keep track of the number of rounds that have elapsed in this fight, as the duelist's Momentum ability makes her more dangerous the longer the battle drags on.

Moonlight, the Duelist's Sword

You might want to give your players a bit more than "a favor" as treasure, so here are some statistics for the rapier used by the ancient duelist. Because magic items can unbalance a campaign, you should only provide this reward if it's right for your game. Moonlight isn't overly powerful compared to other magic weapons, but if your game has very few of them, it might be a poor fit. Trust your judgment.

Moonlight

Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)

Moonlight is an ancient elven spirit bonded to steel, the weapon itself altering its form to accommodate its wielder. When a character attunes to Moonlight, they feel a question, a wondering as to what their ideal weapon is. Moonlight then becomes whatever weapon they imagine and remains in that form until the character is no longer attuned, at which point Moonlight becomes a rapier once more.

While wielding Moonlight, you gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. When you take the attack action, you can make one additional attack beyond your normal limit. If you are reduced to 0 hit points while wielding Moonlight, you are instead healed for half of your maximum hit points, and Moonlight loses all magical properties until you take a long rest while bathed in the light of the moon.

Who is the Ancient Duelist?

Though she has very little desire to converse, clever players may find ways to open a dialogue with the ancient duelist. Whether they use *Speak with Dead* to talk to her after defeating in her battle or some method to win the fight without destroying her, as long as she has been defeated in battle, the ancient duelist is content to talk for a time before passing on to her afterlife. Shae-Saree Vilumiadel is her name, a wood elf from many, many years ago. She was obsessed with becoming the greatest warrior to ever live, and needed a weapon to match her lofty aspirations. She sought the aid of a wizard, and together they performed a ritual to capture the moon's very light and forge it into a blade. The wizard tricked her, and the ritual in fact caught the spirit of a still more ancient elven warrior. The warrior was bound to the blade, ripped from a deserved afterlife and trapped in a cage of steel. Shae-Saree killed the wizard using the blade, and felt the spirit's approval. She devoted the rest of her life to killing those who had escaped justice. See the Plot Hooks section for more ideas on integrating Shae-Saree's story into your game.

Her Legendary Actions are where most of her damage comes from, focus these attacks on characters that are weakened by either her Cursed Dagger or Mark Prey abilities. When picking targets, the duelist should focus on worthy opponents, primarily other melee fighters. She relies on her Thrown Riposte ability to deal damage to other foes while she focuses on her main target. Her Fan of Knives legendary action is initially a good choice, but as she gains Momentum, it becomes far more effective to use Dashing Strike to make dual rapier attacks. Once the fourth round of combat has begun, she should use Dashing Strike exclusively. Use the Endurance Legendary Action when she's dealing with debilitating conditions such as *hold person* or *web*, or if she has used all her uses Legendary Resistance.

Treasure

The spirit of the ancient duelist, if defeated, will offer a favor to the party. She will give them a small brooch depicting a sword set against a crescent moon and tell them to cast it on the ground when they need the help of a skilled warrior. The Duelist's Brooch will break used in this way, summoning the Ancient Duelist for 10 minutes. She obeys the commands of the one who summoned her and then vanishes, never to be summoned again.

Plot Hooks

As mentioned in the 'Who is the Ancient Duelist?' sidebar, you can use her history as a plot hook for your game. She was a mighty warrior, and elves seldom succumb to old age, so what finally killed the ancient duelist? Perhaps she has unfinished business and entreats the party for their aid in completing her task. Or perhaps she was killed in an attempt to acquire her sword, and now those same forces are after the party. If you give your players the blade *Moonlight*, you can use the sword as a strong plot hook for almost anything. Maybe the blade begins to point toward the east every night, pulling slightly on its wielder. You could have the spirit in the blade begin speaking to its new owner in their dreams, or even during the day, but only the wielder can hear the voice. The voice provides them with warnings and guidance, but isn't always right. It might warn that a perfectly innocent man is about to rob its wielder, for example.

Changing the Flavor

You can very, very easily tweak all of the flavor aspects of this encounter. The ancient duelist can be a member of almost any race, she need not be an elf, and you can change the moon-based flavor of the sword and its origins to be just about anything else. One fun idea is to change the duelist to be a character that you or one of your friends played in a former group, tying the worlds together for a brief moment. You could also make the duelist not a spirit, but an actual living champion, potentially giving them evil motivations and making them a proper villain.

Scaling by Level

EL 5 (53,000 xp) - Reduce the duelist's AC to 17, hit points to 140, and reduce the damage dice gained from Momentum to 1d4 per round. These changes tone the duelist down and make her more manageable for a 5th level party without removing what makes her a unique and compelling adversary. They are fairly simple to implement before the session begins, and don't change the tactics used in the encounter.

EL 9 (+5,000 xp) - The duelist now makes three rapier attacks each time she uses the Dashing Strike legendary action instead of two. She gains the trait Magic Resistance, giving her advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. At level 9 the party will have a lot more tricks that can potentially lock down the duelist or mitigate the damage she deals. Increasing the number of attacks she makes and giving her magic resistance helps to mitigate both of this, keeping her a credible threat.

EL 11 (+10,000 xp) - Make the same changes as EL 9, then increase the damage dice gained from Momentum to 2d6 per round, and increase her hit points to 210. At level 11, the party has moved to the next tier of play. They're going to take down

the duelist, but these changes keep her in the fight long enough to be an interesting battle before they do. Consider pairing this with the harder tactics below.

Scaling by Tactics

Easier - The best way to make this fight easier is to avoid using the three recharging actions on the duelist's turn. Cursed Dagger in particular can make for a devastating round of damage against characters with low armor class. Stick to basic attacks, favor the throwing knives over the rapier, and spread out the damage amongst the party. This will still be a difficult battle, but your players will have a much greater margin for error.

The Ancient Duelist

Medium humanoid, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (plate)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)

Speed 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +10, Con +9, Int +6, Wis +8
Cha +6

Skills Insight +13, Perception +13

Condition Immunities Blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 23

Languages Elvish

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Traits

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the duelist fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Momentum. For each round of combat beyond the first, the duelist deals an additional 4 (1d8) damage with all weapon attacks. This bonus damage resets to zero when combat ends.

Magic weapons. The duelist's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d8 + 7) piercing damage.

Throwing Knife. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d4 + 7) piercing damage.

Harder - You don't want to completely focus your attacks on one character, as that will be too much, but you do want to put the pressure on. Make use of Cursed Dagger and Mark Prey whenever they are available, and don't be afraid to lean on Defensive Parry if the party has a lot of weapon based characters who don't have great accuracy.

Lethal - It's time to kill some heroes. Focus the duelist's attacks on one party member, use Cursed Dagger and Mark Prey on that same target, and they'll drop very quickly. Prioritize clerics and other characters with strong healing abilities first, then spellcasters, and target damage dealing characters last. This is not going to be a fair fight for the party.

Reactions

Defensive Parry (3/day). As a reaction when an attack would hit the duelist, she gains a +5 bonus to AC until the start of her next turn, including against the triggering attack.

Thrown Riposte. As a reaction when a weapon attack misses the duelist, she can make a single throwing knife attack against her attacker. The duelist does not suffer disadvantage from being within 5 ft. of an enemy when making a ranged weapon attack in this way.

Legendary Actions

The duelist can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The duelist regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Dashing Strike. The duelist teleports 30 ft. to a location she can see and then makes two rapier attacks.

Endurance. The duelist makes a saving throw against an effect on her that a save can end.

Cursed Dagger (Costs 2 Actions). The duelist makes a throwing knife attack. If this attack hits, the target becomes vulnerable to piercing damage until the end of the duelist's next turn. If the target has resistance or immunity to piercing damage, it loses that resistance or immunity until the end of the duelist's next turn but does not become vulnerable.

Fan of Knives (Costs 2 Actions). The duelist makes a throwing knife attack that targets all creatures in a 30 ft. cone. All targets must make a Dexterity saving throw, DC 18, taking 17 (4d4 + 7) piercing damage plus the duelist's bonus damage from her Momentum ability on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Mark Prey (Costs 2 Actions). The duelist chooses one creature she can see within 60 ft. and marks it as her prey until the end of the duelist's next turn. While marked, the duelist has advantage on attack rolls against her prey.

