



## Exalted (Exalted, #1)

*Alan Alexander , Carl Bowen , Rebecca Borgstrom*

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Do not believe what the scientists tell you. The natural history we know is a lie, a falsehood sold to us by wicked old men who would make the world a dull gray prison and protect us from the dangers inherent to freedom. They would have you believe our planet to be a lonely starship, hurtling through the void of space, barren of magic and in need of a stern hand upon the rudder.

Close your mind to their deception. The time before our time was not a time of senseless natural struggle and reptilian rage, but a time of myth and sorcery. It was a time of legend, when heroes walked Creation and wielded the very power of the gods. It was a time before the world was bent, a time before the magic of Creation lessened, a time before the souls of men became the stunted, withered things they are today.

This is the story of that time.

THIS IS THE STORY OF THE EXALTED.

### Exalted (Exalted, #1) Details

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## From Reader Review Exalted (Exalted, #1) for online ebook

### David Colby says

As the rulebook to my second favorite RPG of all time, I better give the thing five stars. My only real complaint is that it's not longer, and the thing is already big enough to kill small cats with. Also, gorgeous artwork and a compelling, fascinating setting. Trying to explain said setting to someone else in a single paragraph (let alone a sentence) always causes people to back away slowly.

If you like high fantasy, roleplaying games, and ridiculous(ly awesome) things, then Exalted is the book for you!

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### Bryan says

This edition became far more complicated than necessary.

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### Oliver Eike says

The most epic of games ive played so far.

The system itself is the typical d10 system of White wolf, but if you think its the same as OWoD or NWoD, you are in for a wicked suprise.

You can play a multitude of various splats, ranging from your average human to above average human, from a creature born from an egg of jade or a mayan inspired draconic lizardman, from an elemental type of bender in Avatar style to a Celestial level exalt that can either shapeshift, kill people with talking, shoot bolts of sunlight or kung-fu monk type of bureacratic lawyers of Heaven. Yeah... it gets weird. But thats not all, you can also play like a fae, which means you can basically play a faerie princess in a way where you can mix Dragonball Z with Frozen and the witch in Hansel & Gretel.

So you have a wide array of what you can play, each different splat has a different power level as well in the game. Where Celestial Exalts stand at the top.

The charm system itself in the game can be a pain to get into, it will take quite sometime to become familiar enough with splats to not have to look up the charms frequently, that is a drawback of the game, but at the same time a strength. For you can custom build your char to a degree i rarely get to see done in most games.

There is much to love about this game, but there is also much frustration. For the errata often ends up needing errata which in turn might need some more... errata! It has been a hot mess at times, certain books have even gotten the mechanical aspects of it entirely errataed. Like the Dragonbloods core book. While others are left crippled and ignored. Like say the Scroll of Monks?

But the 3rd edition might be great, if it ever gets actually published.

The setting itself draws heavily from mythology from across the globe. Most notably from eastern and greek/roman mythos. But if you look hard enough, you will find traces to most cultures and mythologies in

the game.

Setting wise, the world is vast and extremely varied, so you can run pretty much anything. There are even books for running cyborgs, or setting the game in alternate universes where you can play in space or in modern day.

But whether you like or dislike anime, this game can offer some epic fight scenes or even social combat where you can talk down enemies with words, rather than stabby stab. In a system that, more or less works.

Balance in the game is eh. But then it isn't meant to be a thing.

I don't know what more I can say, and as I'm sleepy, I don't want to say much more than give this game a look. It is more than worth the attention.

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### **Pat McGlynn says**

This is a game about kicking ass and taking names. Whereas good old D&D has been failing me, Exalted gets me pumped to hang out and roll some dice with my friends.

Be damned linear character development, miniature selling grid based battle systems, and the need for a half-dozen extra books that just give you new arrays of numbers and nothing meaningful in developing a world. This is high fantasy gaming at its finest. Everyone gets magic, everyone is awesome, everyone has powers that are useful, and everyone has access to whatever they want.

A minor detail is that most White Wolf things I have picked up are on the wordy side and sometimes read like text books. However, for this brave new world, the setting is very refreshing. It is a cool blend of Eastern and Western fantasy.

From what I've noted, my players don't seem to miss D&D either. They can get as crazy as they want in combat without having to worry about what the rules say they can or cannot do. Exalted makes combat fun and flowing, rather than a bulky break down of mechanics and just saying "I full attack the monster" every round.

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### **Tazio Bettin says**

To call this game a mess of unnecessarily complicated, poorly playtested and utterly incoherent rule would be an understatement.

The setting is also a horrible mish mash of anything, literally anything one can find in mass market pulp and fantasy adventure fiction. Chinese martial arts, hyperadvanced mayan technology, the Mahabharatha underlining the setting and being the main source for its ideas, lizardmen, dinosaurs, undead, ghosts, flying ships, vikings, arabian nights places, sentient robots, demons... there is literally anything you can think of. A complete mess of a setting, and the rules are worse. I dare any player to memorize all the charms they need to play their characters, and especially any GM to memorize all the charms of a single strong enough NPC. There are hundreds of them. Infinite lists. I don't want to have to study harder than for a PhD just to enjoy an rpg, do I?  
No way.

## **Dustin P says**

The setting (being all I have read at this point, has a great deal of verisimilitude and believability. The art is gorgeous, if at some points not safe for children. I still have a lot of book to cover though, will update as I progress.

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## **Benjamin Plume says**

Had a brief stint with RPGs in college. They were fun, and I tried to get into this one but without success.

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## **Michal says**

For me it's the best RPG ever. If you like to play very powerful individuals with great deal of influence on setting and wide possibilities of character development, it's choice number one. Exalted don't participate in stories, they create their own story and define its course. Their every action change the world around them. They're legend incarnate.

Game is heavily inspired by asian legends and pop-culture, so expect something along the lines of Final Fantasy, Legend of Zu (and other chinese fantasy and legends), Kungfu Hustle (well, that's parody but still, exaggerated awesomeness is integral part of the game) and epic anime fantasy. But there are elements from many other legends from all around the globe. Would you like something like northern myths about wars between gods and giants? No problem. Would you rather prefer ancient greek hero style? Here you go.

Main motto of the game is: "Everything goes if it is awesome enough"

Long ago, I found short but best definition of game ever:

"It's like Moses spent 50 years in the desert learning Jehovah Fist Kung-Fu and then teamed up with Conan, Hercules and Kenshin to fight the Pharaoh's jackal-headed ninja armies."

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## **Mark Stone says**

I was reluctant to admit it, but the second edition of Exalted is even better than the first.

Exalted is White Wolf's amazing kitchen-sink fantasy roleplaying game. Think high fantasy anime, set in the ruins of an advanced magitech society, with evil soul-eating fairies lurking at the edge of the world, dead gods sleeping beneath it, and banished demons beyond it. The premise is that you are the chosen of one of the world's powerful deities, filled with your patron's power and set out to make the world right. The corebook details the heroic champions of the sun god, but other books allow you to play chosen of the moon, the stars, the earth, or the corrupted slaves of death. You can play a swashbuckling androgynous pirate girl, a giant robot pilot, an ambitious sorcerer, a cunning diplomat, a warrior, a ninja, a thief, or absolutely anything else you want.

One of my favorite games. Full of awesome.

## Red Wheelbarrow says

White wolf has done it again by creating a entirely different world where normal mortals can come and play. It's exciting, new, the possibilities are almost limitless, I can't help but be impressed by the second most popular gaming system in the world.

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## Alden says

Epic. Bunch of ideas, not a standard fairyland. Rules work well. And yet, don't really find myself wishing to an exalted campaign, or wondering what Alon-ke Seon would do, the way I do other characters I've played.

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## Brian says

Before the world was bent but after the Great Contagion, there was a civilization built in the image of the First Age. It sought to emulate the splendor of the bygone Golden Age, but it was in all ways less. It was a time of sorcery and heroism, of fabulous wonders and treacherous betrayals. Ruled by a decadent empire, it slipped inch by inch into barbarism and darkness, until one last cataclysm blotted it out forever. Yet, in its sunset, it was a splended thing, and glorious were the deeds of the Exalted.

-Exalted 1e Core

Exalted is one of my favorite games of all time. I ran a first edition game for five years, plus an additional year of random fiction extras and discussions about where the game might have gone, and I'd dare say that almost everything I learned about running an RPG I learned over the course of that game. I bought *Exalted* 2e when it came out, but after a discussion with my group we decided not to convert over and so I skimmed the book, and never really sat down to read it cover to cover until now. I'll try not to do too much comparison with 1e as I write, but with the context above it'll be hard. But, what comparison I'm going to do I'll get out of the way in the beginning here:

--I really don't like the art. 2e's art has a few great pieces--the picture of the hiker seeing Mount Mostath in the distance on page 51, for example--but generally I was lukewarm on it, and a lot of it I actively disliked. It didn't seem as thematically or stylistically unified as 1e did.

--I prefer the writing style of 1e. 2e has the benefit of a lot more setting material to draw on, but that also means it goes into much more detail and feels more like a technical manual and less like weird fiction. 1e's sense of wonder was due to most of the setting not being fleshed out yet, but it definitely got my imagination working more.

--The chapter comics do a decent job of setting the tone, especially the very first one with the river god, but I prefer the chapter fiction from 1e.

--While I think the concept is fine, I hate the word "Magitech."

That out of the way, let's dive in.

## Setting

Exalted takes place in Creation, bordered by the swirling chaos of the Wyld on all edges and anchored by the

Elemental Poles. To the west is the Elemental Pole of Water and a vast sea broken up by occasional islands until the sea and sky merge into one. To the south is the Elemental Pole of Fire and balmy coastal cities that give way to trackless sands and broken ground until in the far southern reaches the ground is too hot to walk on and the very air bursts into flame. To the east is the Elemental Pole of Wood, where fertile plains turn to dense forests whose trees grow taller and taller until the ground falls away and it's nothing but vast trunks going up and down into the misty green. To the north is the Elemental Pole of Air, from the temperate cities on the coast of the Inland Sea to the icy wastes of the north criss-crossed by tribes of nomads and haunted by the dead until it all becomes a vast sheet of ice. And in the center is the Blessed Isle, the stronghold of the Realm, the greatest empire in the world, and towering over the Realm is the Imperial Mountain, the Elemental Pole of Earth.

The assumed heroes of the game are the Exalted, empowered by the gods to fight the ancient Primordials and rule Creation. The Solars--the assumed protagonists of this book--were the greatest, until their hubris led to debauchery and chaos and they were overthrown, hunted down, and slain in incarnation after incarnation. Their enemies are the Dragon-blooded, elementally-empowered Princes of the Earth who rule the Realm and brand the Solars as Anathema. There are also the protean Lunars, the manipulative Sidereals, and the sinister Abyssals, among other, stranger beings. Like the Fair Folk who lurk in the Wyld beyond Creation and feed on human souls, or the spirits of the dead who watch over their ancestors, or the myriad of gods who govern every principle and location in Creation, from the concept of justice or the movement of the moon to the local god of an individual river or arrangement of boulders.

I am an unabashed lover of Creation. I could write pages and pages of setting description about the various areas of the setting and the people that live there, but in the interests of not turning this review into a book in its own right, I'll leave it at that.

It is a great setting, though. It's huge enough that it's possible to have wide diversity in cultures and physical geography without even accounting for the mutating effects of the Wyld, but the parts that are detailed are far-flung enough that it's easy to drop in your own kingdoms and civilizations in almost any place on the map. There are some places where the writers seem to forget this, though, like when they talk about how the Linowan, who are several thousand miles from the ocean, and would have to go several thousand more miles out of their way to get there by river, have a sea presence. I get that it's only a couple inches on the map, but each of those inches is a thousand miles. Creation is *big*.

There are also points where it gets a bit tedious. It's true that the Realm is the greatest power in the world and the Dragon-blooded are extremely important to the setting, but I'm not sure that we needed all that info about the inner workings of the Realm in this book. The assumed default is that the players will play Solars, and since repeated mention is made of how Solars who Exalt on the Blessed Isle almost never live very long, it probably would have been better to put that wordcount into describing the places where the characters will be spending their time.

The assumed tone of the game is Bronze Age epic crossed with high-powered wuxia film, with a greater or lesser proportion of either depending on the location chosen and the preferences of the players. I've noticed that the Bronze Age part tends to get lost in a lot of the online discussion, but the book does provide support for it through the setting. For example, the bestiary is filled with prehistoric creatures like dinosaurs or megafauna. On the wuxia side, the main staple crop of most places isn't maize, it's rice. Minor things, sure, but it does a lot to set the mood if the characters are fighting giant insects and velociraptors and getting jumped by ninjas in tea houses instead of fighting goblins and getting jumped by bandits in taverns.

Though you can do those too, if you want. Creation is large. It contains multitudes.

## System

If you've played any of the other Storyteller games, you know the basic way the system works. A bunch of

attributes, a bunch of abilities, add them together to get a dice pool, and try to beat a target number. A 7 or more is a success, and a 10 is two successes. Characters have Willpower that they can spend to increase their odds of success and Health Levels that stand between them and death. All that's the same.

There are some major differences between this and the various other Storyteller games, though, mostly relating to combat. For one, combat doesn't involve initiative and going around the table in turns. Instead, it's *tick-based*--each action a character can perform, including doing nothing, takes a certain number of "ticks" and reduces your ability to defend yourself by a certain amount until those ticks have gone by and you can act again. Similarly, defenses are no longer rolled out. Instead, everyone has a Defense Value that's automatically applied against incoming attacks. Damage is still rolled out, though, as successes from the attack plus the weapon damage as is typical for Storytelling games. In addition, characters can move on every tick, which seems like it would help prevent the problem of people tuning out when it's not their turn, since they can block enemies, jockey for position, and so on even while they're waiting for their next action to come up. It does seem a little complicated, but I know there are fan-created accessories called Battlewheels to keep track of combatants' ticks-to-next-action, DV penalties, and so on.

Then, having created this elegant system, they created "flurries," a type of action that let people take multiple actions on the same tick, which seems like it gets rid of the whole point of having a timing-based system.

Combat is brutal, with rules for wounds becoming infected, bleeding to death, taking permanently crippling and disfiguring injuries, getting thrown to the floor or through walls, having armor and weapons smashed, and then the Exalted get to ignore almost all of those because they're just that awesome.

Each character has virtues as well: Compassion, Conviction, Temperance, and Valor. These do have a mechanical effect in play, because a character has to fail a roll in order to go against any virtue rated 3 or higher. Failing a Valor roll to run from battle, for example, or failing a Compassion roll to execute a prisoner, or failing a Conviction roll to change their plan if ambiguous evidence of its failure comes through. It's not entirely a disadvantage, though, since characters can spend Willpower through a virtue to get bonus dice to appropriate rolls.

The main thing that makes the Exalted awesome is their Charms, and Solar Charms take up the single largest chunk of space in the book. Every ability, from Melee to Bureaucracy to Ride, has an array of special effects that can be invoked, letting Solars throw people across a football field, jump over mountains, raise a mob with a rousing speech, walk through walls, keep a ship from capsizing, survive a blow from a mammoth, or any number of other powers. There's a system of keywords for the Charms, like Obvious, meaning that it always causes some kind of physical manifestation that makes it easy to spot, or Emotion, meaning it affects the target's feelings. There's also sorcery, which lets the Exalted summon demons, teleport in the blink of an eye, part vast seas, or call down an acid rain that annihilates everything within its area of effect.

Two additional subsystems that weren't in Exalted 1e are the mass combat system and the social combat system. The mass combat system is a bit strange, because armies are modeled as essentially another piece of equipment that modifies the stats of the commander. It's a reasonable abstraction, but when mixed with the Charm and sorcery system it leads to weird effects. Some Charms have notes of how their usage change in mass combat, and some don't. Death of Obsidian Butterflies summons hundreds of razor-sharp butterflies and should carve a swath through any mortal army, but has no stats for mass combat. Adamant Skin Technique, which lets the Exalt stop all damage from an attack on them, can be used to block massed arrow fire because the army is an addition to the Exalt's stats. It does say that the GM should use their judgement, but I can see a lot of things that would get odd.

The social combat system is tick-based like physical combat, and involves making arguments and then either making a counterargument (social "parry") or stubbornly refusing to listen (social "dodge"), plus other actions. It also allows the recipient to spend a Willpower point to just say no and block the argument there,

but the problems come in when supernatural persuasion is taken into account. Many supernatural powers require more than one Willpower to resist, and sometimes it has a periodic resistance cost. Furthermore, the book says:

Never forget that characters can flee the presence of individuals attempting to engage them in social combat or attack them in an attempt to cut short the conversation.

Now admittedly, if someone can rewrite my beliefs then stabbing them in the face is a legitimate response to them trying to do so, but the image this conjures, of people running screaming from itinerant preachers or stabbing merchants who try to sell them goods they don't want to buy, is really odd.

The point of this is to affect the target's Intimacies and Motivation, which are a mechanical representation of their beliefs. They don't have much of a mechanical hook into the system, but they provide a basis for determining how characters are played.

There are some sloppy parts, though. The Fair Folk are supernaturally charming and can beguile the unwitting into believing in and accepting them, but there's no tie in with the social combat system. Buck-ogres have a note that they can "split their dice pools," even though that's a relic of the old Storyteller system and has been replaced by flurries. The aforementioned lack of interaction between large-scale battle sorcery and the system to handle large-scale battles. The listing of languages in NPC writeups has languages that aren't listed anywhere in the languages PCs can take, like Sijanese or River Valley.

And I won't even mention the errata. I have both the hardcopy and the PDF, and overlaid the errata as comments on the PDF, and some pages have up to a dozen comments on them. It's probably the most extensively-errataed RPG I've ever seen.

Exalted 1e has given me more fun than any RPG I own and I have a lot of love for the franchise because of that, but while this book does bring a lot of that to mind and even kindles it again in its own right, there are just too many small niggling things that bother me for me to give it five stars. A lot of that has to do with the system, though, not the setting. Creation is one of the most compelling fantasy worlds I'm familiar with, and I'd say Exalted is worth reading just for that.

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### **Timothy Pitkin says**

The setting is actually pretty unique and while I did not read to deep into the game mechanics but it should be pretty easy as most White Wolf Games and from what I read this is pretty much a scion crossed with anime as the players do play as the chosen ones of the gods in a much more fantasy setting and the artwork does push that this is anime inspired.

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### **Mark Austin says**

- ★ - Most books with this rating I never finish and so don't make this list. This one I probably started speed-reading to get it over with.
- ★★ - Average. Wasn't terrible, but not a lot to recommend it. Probably skimmed parts of it.
- ★★★ - Decent. A few good ideas, well-written passages, interesting characters, or the like.
- ★★★★ - Good. This one had parts that inspired me, impressed me, made me laugh out loud, made me think - it got positive reactions and most of the rest of it was pretty decent too.
- ★★★★★ - Amazing. This is the best I've read of its genre, the ones I hold on to so I can re-read them and/or

loan them out to people looking for a great book. The best of these change the way I look at the world and operate within it.

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## John says

I avoided Exalted for a long time, dismissing it as powergaming at its worst. Now that I've actually had a chance to play the game, and read the core rules, my opinion has changed.

The introduction mentions that the ancient epics of both East and West were major influences in the design of the game, and I really see those influences throughout. Those epics are full of larger than life characters that can do the work of many normal men whether in or out of battle. Whether Achilles of the Iliad or Song Jiang of Water Margin, these characters are able to accomplish feats of valor and leadership far beyond that of normal men.

This game models that perfectly in the way that the PC Exalted characters work. The Exalted are larger than life characters with world changing motivations, and the power to actually make those changes.

While some have criticized the game for merely modelling wuxia and anime, I think that they fail to see that those modern forms also draw their inspiration from the epic tales of the past.

Of course, to get to all that you have to get through the seriously crunchy system. I tend to prefer far less complex systems for most of my games, especially when I'm running them, but as a player I've found Exalted to be internally consistent and not that hard to grasp once the basics were explained to me.

There are a lot of subsystems in the rules, and a plethora of special powers (Charms in game terms). So much so that even after playing a few sessions, and reading the core rules, I still wouldn't feel comfortable running it yet.

I do feel comfortable playing it, but this is a system that is going to be really hard to just pick up and play after reading the book. It benefits greatly from having someone already familiar with it teach it to you.

Edit: after playing for another couple months I'm still enjoying this game, so felt it deserved to be bumped up a star.

I feel the errata for this game is worth mentioning. There is a huge errata document for it, but I've learned that it's at least 90% revision of the base game rather than actual errata. Thus, the base game is referred to as 2.0 and the game with full errata as 2.5. The game I'm playing in is using the 2.0 rules and it seems to play just fine that way.

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