

A Dark And Restless Tide



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SFX Skills

SFX skills differ rather widely from the ordinary skills most characters have. SFX skills reflect an awakening knowledge, increasing learning, or growing mastery of forces outside the experience of most men. Characters without the appropriate SFX feat or feats cannot learn or use SFX skills. During game play, SFX skills function much like ordinary skills, though they often have additional parameters associated with them.

Class vs. Cross-Class

SFX skills are class skills only for members of the SFX Adept class, or some Advanced or Prestige classes; whether or not these classes are available (or available for PCs) is up to the GM. For characters of all other classes, they are cross-class skills. Possessing the proper SFX feat does not allow characters to learn SFX skills as class skills. SFX feats only permit the learning of SFX skills.

Skill Checks

Character make skill checks with SFX skills just as they do with ordinary skills unless noted otherwise in the skill description. The character rolls one d20 die and adds his Rank in the SFX skill, as well as adding (or subtracting) any applicable ability modifiers, as well as any circumstance bonuses the GM may decide are applicable. The DC of most SFX skills are listed in the description of the skill itself, while some skills automatically succeed (with ranks determining some aspect of the skill effect).

Actions

Using an SFX skill takes an amount of time noted in the skill's description. Most SFX skills require a standard action in combat. Other SFX skills require a full-round action or more. All SFX skills are subject to the normal rules regarding actions.

Saving Throws

SFX skills that affect other creatures often allow a saving throw to negate or reduce their effects. This is generally a Will or Fortitude saving throw, and unless otherwise noted the DC of the save is equal to 10, plus half the character's ranks in the SFX skill (rounded up), plus the skill's key ability score modifier.

Strain

Using SFX skills is invariably taxing. Each use

of an SFX skill weakens its user in some way, known as Strain. Strain usually comes in one of several different forms, the form chosen by the GM at the beginning of game play.

Strain as Nonlethal Damage

Strain can be represented as differing amounts of nonlethal damage. This nonlethal damage is usually listed in the SFX Skill description as an unmodified number. Strain as nonlethal damage will be used as the default in SFX Skill descriptions and other notation used throughout this and other SFX Skill publications.

Keep a running total of the amount of nonlethal damage a character has taken. If a character's total nonlethal damage exceeds the character's current hit point total then the character falls unconscious. If a character takes nonlethal damage in a single round from Strain equal to, or exceeding, his Constitution score he must immediately make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15). If he succeeds at this saving throw he is Dazed for one round and Fatigued, if he fails this saving throw he immediately falls unconscious for 1d4+1 rounds and awakens Fatigued.

If the Strain from using an SFX skill causes the user to become unconscious, then the skill effect still occurs as under the skill description, but cannot be maintained (if the skill can normally be maintained).

The Strain of some SFX skill use is determined by the circumstances of the skill roll. Certain feats may also affect the amount of Strain caused by using SFX skills. The character takes the Strain regardless of whether the SFX skill check is successful, and the damage happens each time a skill is retried, as well.

When using nonlethal damage to represent Strain, keep in mind that characters will generally increase their ability to cast a number of spells in succession as they gain levels (and thus gain Hit Points). Nonlethal damage will heal at a greater rate as levels increase, as well.

Strain as Ability Damage

Strain can also be represented as Ability Damage. The most common type of Ability Damage associated with Strain is Strength, though if a GM wishes to make SFX use in his campaign more lethal, he can use Constitution. Ability damage accrued in this fashion will affect characters as normal, and will heal normally as well.

When using Ability Damage to represent Strain, note that a character will, in general, be able to cast slightly more spells in a short period at very early levels, but the amount of Strain they can withstand will never increase (or increase very slowly). Ability damage heals at a slower rate than nonlethal

damage, and characters will only be able to cast a few spells a week, as opposed to a few spells a day.

Alternate: Variable Strain

To make Strain more unpredictable, you can replace the flat Strain number found in SFX Skill descriptions with a die roll. In general, it is suggested that the maximum number on the die, divided by 2, should be equal to the normal Strain used for the skill.

Strain to Spell Burn

Strain numbers can be converted to the Grim Tales' system of Spell Burn. As most Strain numbers are divisible by 3, a d6-based Spell Burn system integrates easily into an SFX Skills system.

Strain	Die	Strain to Spell Burn
2	d4	1d
3	d6	1d
6	d12	2d
9	d20	3d
10	d20	3d
12	d20	4d

Feats and Talents

SFX Aptness (General)

The character has an aptitude for some form of SFX. This aptitude can be an inborn talent, the result of exposure to some external stimuli, or the result of study.

Benefit: The character has access to one (1) SFX feat of his or her choice. This SFX feat need not be taken at the same time as Aptness, and can be taken at any time there-after.

Normal: SFX feats are unavailable to characters without levels in the SFX Adept class.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times; each time it is taken it allows access to one (1) more SFX feat of the character's choice.

Several Talents can also be made available by the GM, if he is making use of the Strain to Spell Burn alternate system. These Talents will somewhat alleviate the penalties associated with Spell Burn when utilizing SFX Skills.

Magical Adept

Master Eldritch Flow

Diabolism

Diabolism concentrates on the summoning and binding of malevolent, yet powerful, creatures or forces not native to the caster's plane of origin. The nature of these creatures or forces is largely irrelevant, but all are uniformly hostile toward human life and consciousness. Dealing with diabolic forces is, therefore, fraught with danger. Exacting ritual must be observed and sacrifices offered to appease the infernal powers for the Diabolist's magic to function. The sacrifices demanded of Diabolists most often take the form of blood ... whose isn't of much concern. A diabolist can offer his own blood to enact his spells (recorded as Con Damage), or the blood of others. Though animals, small and large, are often sacrificed for lesser magics, greater power comes at a much higher price and human blood is the currency of the most powerful Diabolic arts.

Diabolism (SFX)

The character has discovered the secret to learning the rites and rituals associated with summoning, binding, and communicating with infernal forces.

Benefit: The character has access to Diabolism SFX skills and can acquire ranks in those skills.

Normal: Diabolism SFX skills are not available to characters without the Diabolism SFX feat.

Special: Though a character with this feat can learn Diabolism SFX skills, note that they are not class skills for that character and normal cross-class skill rules apply. Characters with levels in the SFX Adept class can obtain SFX skills as class skills.

Diabolism SFX Skills

Black Binding (Cha)

Requirements: Diabolism SFX

Check: This spell binds and restrains demonic beings known as fiends. This spell is most often used to confine summoned fiends in order to allow the Diabolist to bargain with the fiend for some service. While so confined the fiend cannot use any magical, spell-like, or supernatural abilities and cannot physically move beyond the bounds of the spell.

The smallest diameter of any particular *Black Binding* diagram is the facing of the fiend to be imprisoned within it. The physical aspect of the diagram can be made up of any mundane or magical component that leaves a visible trace upon a solid surface. This can be as simple as a drawing in chalk, blood, or salt; or as opulent as a mother-of-pearl mosaic inlay or circle of standing stones. While the imprisoned fiend cannot physically affect the binding diagram, if the diagram is disrupted or disturbed

through external means in such a way as to destroy part of the diagram the spell ends.

The DC, Strain, and Sacrifice required for a *Black Binding* depends on the power of the fiend being confined, noted by the fiend's Challenge Rating.

Fiend CR	Check DC	Sacrifice	Strain
0 - 3	15	2 Con	3
4 - 6	20	3 Con	6
7 - 9	25	4 Con	9
10+	30	6 Con	12

While this spell is normally cast in preparation of, and tailored to, a specific fiend it can be cast on an uncontrolled demon the caster stumbles across. The Diabolist takes a -5 penalty to his *Black Binding* check roll when casting the spell "on the fly" in this manner.

Special: When using *Black Binding* to confine a fiend in order to wring a service from it, have the fiend make a Will saving throw each fortnight (14 days) spent in captivity. The DC of this save is 10 plus one half the characters ranks in *Black Binding* plus the character's Charisma modifier. If the fiend fails this save, it capitulates to the request of the Diabolist that has it bound. Each fortnight the fiend must make another Will save with a cumulative -2 penalty to the save each fortnight spent in captivity beyond the first.

Time: The diagrams and rituals involved in casting a *Black Binding* normally require one hour to successfully scribe upon a flat surface. Casting the spell rapidly on a free-roaming demon can be done more quickly (see above). The minimum time for inscribing a *Black Binding* diagram is one full round action per 5' of the diagram's diameter. Thus inscribing a 15' *Black Binding* takes, at minimum, three full round actions to perform. The caster must be free and mobile to move around the circumference of the spell's area of effect during the casting.

Sacrifice: See Above

Strain: See Above

Dark Aegis (Wis)

Requirements: Diabolism SFX, can be used untrained.

Check: *Dark Aegis* creates a protective veil around its caster that protects him from all forms of attack. This veil is accompanied by a visual manifestation of the caster's choice (chosen once, the first time the spell is used). This visual manifestation can be as flashy as a glowing nimbus of dark energy or as subtle as an invisible shroud of force.

The *Dark Aegis* grants its caster a Deflection Bonus to Armor Class and all Saves based on the results of a *Dark Aegis* check, as illustrated below.

Check DC	Deflection Bonus
15	+2
20	+3
25	+4
30	+5

The *Dark Aegis* remains active until the caster receives any Hit Point damage (as opposed to Ability or Nonlethal damage). Whenever the caster takes damage he must make a Fortitude save, DC 15. Failure indicates his control of the *Dark Aegis* slips, and the spell fails. The spell automatically fails if the caster is rendered unconscious.

Time: 1 Full Round Action

Sacrifice: 2 Con

Strain: 3

Bend the Will (Cha)

Requirement: Diabolism SFX

Check: This spell bends the will of a victim to that of the Diabolist. The Diabolist can command the target to perform one action that can be described in twelve words or less, the performance of which can take no more than six minutes.

The target can make a Will save to resist the effects of *Bend The Will*, the DC of which is equal to 10 plus one-half the casters ranks in *Bend the Will*, plus his Charisma modifier, if any.

The target of *Bend the Will* must understand the language of the Diabolist, be able to hear him speak, and have line of sight to the Diabolist's eyes. If the eyes of either the target or the Diabolist are concealed during the casting of *Bend the Will*, the spell automatically fails.

Any command that is dangerous to the target of *Bend the Will*, or violent in nature, entitles the target to a +2 bonus to his Will save. An obviously suicidal command entitles the target to a +6 bonus to his Will save.

Special: A Diabolist can use *Bend the Will* as many times as he wishes against a particular target, regardless of the success or failure of the spell. If a Natural 1 is ever rolled on a *Bend the Will* check, however, the target of that casting is forever immune to the *Bend the Will* attempts of that Diabolist.

Time: 1 Standard Action

Sacrifice: 4 Con

Strain: 3

*Brimstone (Will)***Requirement:** Diabolism SFX

Check: This spell summons forth a blast of hellish, sulfur-stinking fire from the Diabolist's hand. This burst of fire has a range increment of 10 feet and is resolved like a ranged attack, using the Diabolist's Will modifier in place of his Dex modifier. The damage of this burst of fire is based on the number of ranks the Diabolist has in *Brimstone*.

Rank	Damage
1 - 3	2d6
4 - 7	2d8
8+	2d12

Time: 1 Standard Action**Sacrifice:** 1 Con**Strain:** 3*Snapping the Thread (Wis)*

Requirements: Diabolism SFX, can be used untrained.

Check: *Snapping the Thread* is used to disrupt and negate other SFX spells. The caster of *Snapping the Thread* makes a skill check to disrupt another caster's spell, the DC of which is equal to 10 + ½ the caster's Skill Ranks in the spell in question + the caster's appropriate ability modifier for the spell. If successful, the targeted spell immediately ends. The target spell must be within 100' of the caster of *Snapping the Thread* to be affected by this spell.

Time: 1 Full Round Action**Sacrifice:** 2 Con**Strain:** 3*Dread Summons (Wis)***Requirements:** Diabolism SFX

Check: *Dread Summons* is used to call infernal beings known as fiends to the caster's own dimension. Once summoned, the Diabolist has no actual control over the fiend, though the creature is usually of a favorable mindset to the summoner if the proper rituals and sacrifices have been observed. The fiend is not forced to come to the call of *Dread Summons*, and if the proper sacrifices are not offered the most likely outcome is the failure of the spell. If the spell is offensively miscast, or the sacrifice found to be especially displeasing, the summoned fiend may indeed still appear ... and rend the Diabolist limb from limb.

Once summoned, a fiend usually has an attitude of Friendly or Indifferent. The Diabolist can attempt to bargain with the fiend using the Diplomacy skill. The DC of this Diplomacy check is ad-

justed by the fiend's Charisma modifier. Demons are especially open to bribery, though only of a most base nature. By supplying the demon with meat and drink worth a purchase DC of 1.5 x the fiend's CR the Diabolist can gain a +2 to his Diplomacy check. If the Diabolist can raise the fiend's Attitude to Friendly, it will agree to perform some reasonable service.

More reticent or difficult demons can be convinced through imprisonment (see *Black Binding*). This is almost an expected part of the trade and though a particular demon will have no more to do with a Diabolist who wrung promises from him through a Binding, it does not stop other demons from answering his Summons. If a Diabolist wrings promises from a fiend with Wrack, however, his *Dread Summons* rolls will find their DCs increased by a cumulative +2 for each fiend the Diabolist has used Wrack upon for the purposes of bargaining.

The *Dread Summons* check for summoning a fiend is based upon the CR of the creature being summoned, as are the casting time, Strain, and required Sacrifice. Unlike most skills, the success or failure of a *Dread Summons* does not hinge upon a single skill check. Multiple *Dread Summons* checks must be made during the casting of the spell (as shown on the table), one every ten minutes of the casting. Failure of a *Dread Summons* check does not mean the *Dread Summons* has immediately failed, only that the previous ten minutes of casting has been wasted. If the Diabolist fails two *Dread Summons* checks in a row, however, the spell immediately fails. If the Diabolist ever rolls a natural 1 on the d20 die, he has offended the fiend in some way and it appears at the end of the casting with an Attitude of Hostile.

Fiend Cr	Check DC	Sacrifice	Strain	Min. Casting Time
0 - 3	20	2 Con	3	10 min.
4 - 6	25	4 con	6	30 min.
7 - 9	30	6 Con	9	1 hr.
10 -	35	10 Con	12	2 hr.

For each CR of the fiend above 10, add 2 to the DC of the *Dread Summons* check and 10 min. to the casting time. Other numbers stay the same.

If several supplicants are involved in the casting of the *Dread Summons*, the casting time can be reduced by ½. The number of supplicants necessary to reduce the casting time is equal to the CR of the fiend being called x 2. Thus a CR 14 fiend would ordinarily take 2 hr and 40 min. to successfully summon with one caster, but if 28 supplicants take place in the summoning the spell takes only 1 hr and 20 min. Additional supplicants beyond this number give bonuses to the *Dread Summons* rolls of the pri-

mary caster as stated in the opening paragraphs on Diabolism.

Time: See Above

Sacrifice: See Above

Strain: See Above

Voices of the Damned (Cha)

Requirements: Diabolism SFX, this skill can be used untrained.

Check: The infernal forces know many things ... some man was never meant to know, and some things you would more expect to hear from the nosey old lady down the street. *Voices of the Damned* allows the Diabolist to contact and question diabolic forces. By succeeding in a *Voices of the Damned* check (DC 15) he can ask a single Yes/No question or question that can be answered with a single word, per round. The Diabolist can maintain contact with the infernal intelligence from round to round by paying the Strain cost each round he does so. Alternately, if the GM is using material found in The Psychic's Handbook¹ the Diabolist's *Voices of the Damned* skill check may be used to reproduce the effects of the Psychic skills *Remote Viewing* or *Psychometry*, with the Diabolist's *Voices of the Damned* skill check standing in for the respective Psychic skill check. Using *Remote Viewing* in this manner does not provide Line Of Sight for the Diabolist, as the information is relayed verbally from the demonic force.

Special: If the Diabolist rolls a natural 1 on his *Voices of the Damned* roll he in some way angers the infernal forces he is in contact with. The demonic intellect manifests as a Poltergeist-like force and begins attacking everyone in a 30' radius by flinging small, loose items at them (treat as an area attack for 1d4 points of Bludgeoning/Piercing/Slashing damage, Reflex save (DC 15) negates). This continues for 1d4+1 rounds and then the presence departs with a final ominous pronouncement.

Time: 10 Minutes

Sacrifice: 4 Con

Strain: 3

Dust to Dust (Wis)

Requirements: Diabolism SFX

Check: Diabolists use this spell to cover up the evidence of their heinous rituals and sacrifices. Calling upon the powers of their dark masters, they are able to reach out and turn blood evidence to dust and advance the decomposition of bodies by weeks or even months. To be effective, the Diabolist must succeed at a DC 15 *Dust to Dust* skill check. *Dust to Dust* affects an area with a radius of 60' centered on the caster, and can affect blood and tissue evidence up to eleven hours and six minutes old. Functionally, *Dust to Dust* creates a scene that is Extremely

Disturbed in terms of *Investigate-Analyze* (+6 DC) and all *Search* and *Investigate-Collect Evidence* checks take a -2 penalty in the area effected by *Dust to Dust*. For each 5 points by which the Diabolist beats the DC, all *Search* and *Investigate-Collect Evidence* checks take a further -1 penalty.

Time: 10 minutes

Sacrifice: None

Strain: 6

Wrack

Requirements: Diabolism SFX

Check: Through the use of exacting arcane formulae and sympathetic components, the Diabolist uses *Wrack* to cause fiends great pain, helping to bend them to his will or fend them off. The Diabolist must first create a fetish, a representative tool that creates the sympathetic bond between the Diabolist's magic and the body of the target fiend. The form of this fetish is largely up to the Diabolist (and is usually dictated by his tradition, I.E. a voodoo doll, African spirit statue, or ritual dagger), but the components must have a purchase DC of no less than 10. Through manipulation of this talisman the Diabolist causes unbelievable pain to the fiend it is attuned to, causing it to take a penalty to all actions it attempts as its spirit and form fluctuate out of synch with the plane it is visiting.

It is possible to use *Wrack* on a fiend the caster is unprepared for, though the pain is lessened if the caster does not have the proper information needed to call the fiend with *Dread Summons*. If the caster knows nothing about the fiend, his *Wrack* roll takes a -4 penalty and the pain is lessened, inflicting 3 points less of a penalty. If the caster knows the type of fiend he is dealing with, but no other information, the penalty on his *Wrack* roll is reduced by 2. The exact penalty a fiend suffers, and the duration of the pain, is determined by the DC of the *Wrack* check.

Wrack DC	Fiend's Penalty	Duration (Unbound)	Duration (Bound)
15	-5	1 round	1 minute
20	-5	5 rounds	1 hour
25	-6	1 minute	1 day
30	-6	2 minutes	1 week

Time: 1 Standard Action

Sacrifice: 2 Con

Strain: 3

(Footnotes)

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