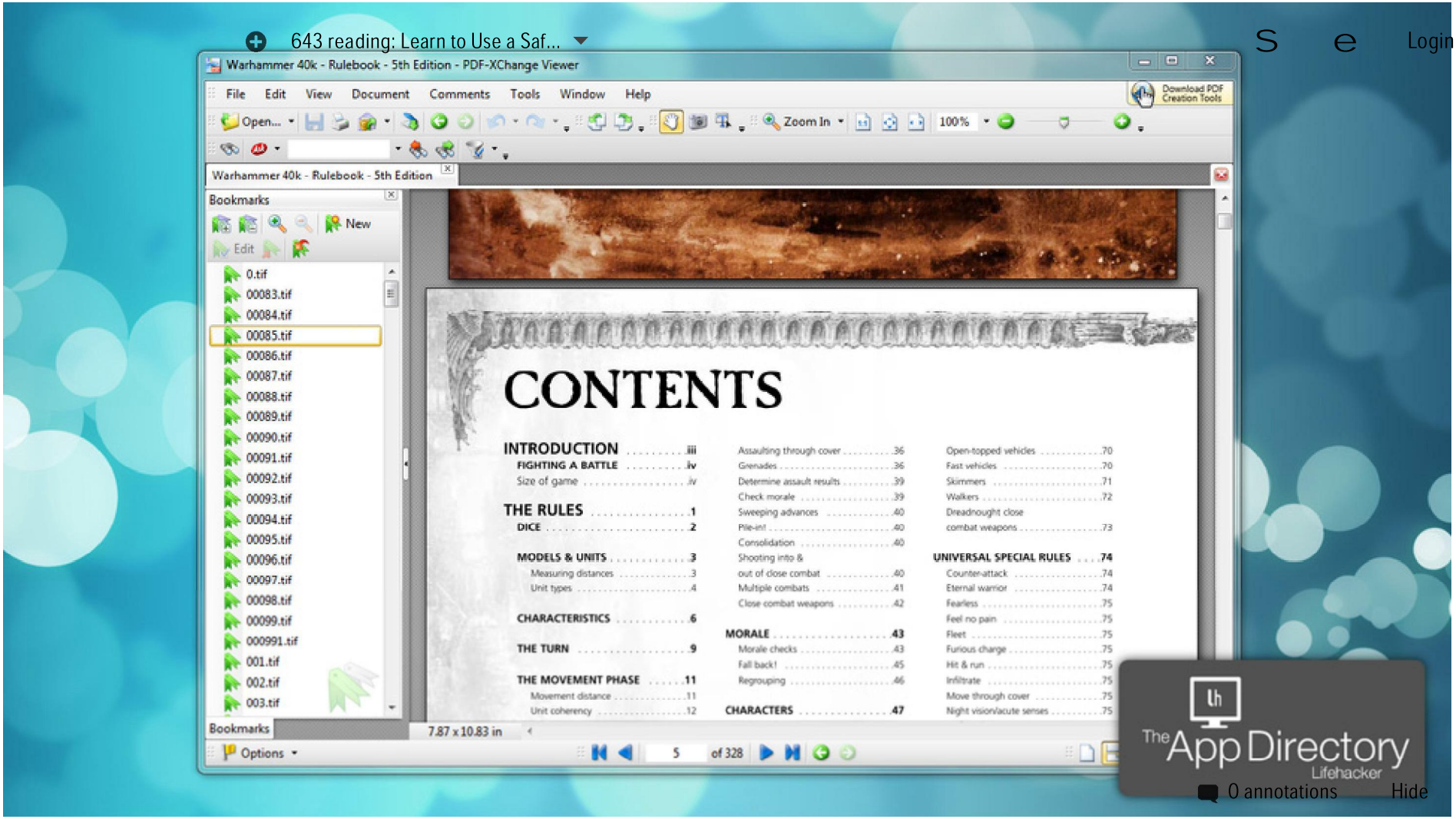

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Where It Excels

PDF-XChange viewer is not only very, very fast, but has a lot of annotation and editing features in its free version. Its big strength over other viewers is that it doesn't add watermarks to your edited files; instead, it just limits what you can edit. If you need to heavily edit a lot of PDFs, you may have to pay for the pro version, but for the occasional annotation or markup, PDF-XChange gets the job done better than anyone else.

Where It Falls Short

PDF-XChange isn't quite as lightweight as some other PDF readers, like Foxit or Sumatra, but it's more than lightweight enough for most people's needs, especially if you have to edit PDFs at all (it blows the pants off Acrobat). Also, the pro version is a little expensive, but

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you'll be hard-pressed to heavily edit PDFs without paying $40 or so, so it's still the best there is at what it does. It also has an Ask bar in its toolbar, which makes you wonder how much of the junk up there is just a waste of space.

The Competition

Foxit Reader (http://www.foxitsoftware.com/Secure_PDF_Reader/) is PDF-XChange's biggest competition. It's a bit faster and more feature-filled, but any annotations you make will add a watermark to the file in the free version, which is very annoying for some. If you can deal with a watermark, though, it has more editing features than the free version of PDF-XChange. It also comes with some bloatware in the installer, but it's hard to knock this when PDF-XChange is even worse, cluttering up its own toolbar when it doesn't even give you the option to turn it down.

If you never need to edit PDFs, **Sumatra PDF (http://blog.kowalczyk.info/software/sumatrapdf/download-free-pdf-viewer.html)** is the reader for you. Unlike the other two, it's extremely minimalist, providing just a simple, super-fast window from which you can read PDFs. No more, no less.

Lastly, we have to mention **Adobe Reader (http://get.adobe.com/reader/)**. While it isn't the fastest or most pleasurable to use, it is still the standard reader and editor (http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat.html) in the PDF world, meaning that sometimes, when your PDF just won't open correctly in other programs, Acrobat will have the best compatibility. It isn't something we'd recommend installing now, but if you ever have PDF troubles, keep Adobe in mind, as it might be the solution.