The Silven
Trumpeter

The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

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Got an urge to send a note to our editor? Would you like to volunteer as a writer? Have comments about an article?

Write to Dana at : adriayna@yahoo.com

From the Editor

by Dana Driscoll

Welcome to the April edition of the Silven Trumpeter. A shocking bit of information — RPGs cure illness! Towards the end of last month, I was miserably sick with a cold. And perhaps not so surprising, I decided to pass the time by playing some new CRPGs, specifically, a new PC game called *Sacred*. Even though my head was pounding and my sinuses were clogged up so bad I felt like my head was going to explode (doing 1d6 damage to all within 10 feet), the time passed quickly. Instead of writing on the couch in agony (taking 1d6 subdual damage per hour), I sat in front of the computer screen perplexed. I played *Sacred* for almost two straight days and slowly, my nose cleared up and my head began feeling normal again. The CRPG cures the common cold!

Some may simply say that I would have gotten better without the game. Even if that is true, none can deny that the CRPG made what is normally a miserable illness a rather pleasant experience. This fact shouldn't be left in the dark or kept to a rather secluded group of RPGers. And so, I'm petitioning for the inclusion of consoles or PC systems in every hospital room in the county. Who needs doctors when you have RPGs? If nothing else, complimentary dice and *Player's Handbooks* should be provided as a courtesy.

Back to reality, the RPG is really an experience like nothing else. While I don't necessarily think doctors are out of a job just yet, we should all take time to appreciate the genre. Think about both you have contributed to it and what you have gained.

This month our theme is music and song and how these relate to gaming. I encourage you to check out "That Hollywood Magic" by Scott Fitz for a detailed description of how to incorporate music into your games.   Eytan Bernstein discusses a new song-related god in his "Faith Based Initiative: Pantheons III" article and Shane Cubis brings two famous Aussie poets to our attention with "Antipodean Adventures." Angus McBlane and Carl Batchelor cover music from a CRPG angle, listing some of the best and worst tunes CPRGs have produced.

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Crossroads E-zine

Arboreal Corruptor
Cover art by Kevin Crosley

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Chatting with Gary Gygax

by Gary Gygax and Kosala Ubayasekara

Welcome to the eleventh edition of our regular monthly debate and informational pieces done in collaboration with Mr. Gary Gygax, the original creative mind behind the Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game. This month we focus the current state of the RPG industry.

Q) Recent years in the RPG industry have seen a huge proliferation of RPG companies. What new entrants to the industry have caught your eye in recent years and why?

True, there are more publishers with a great number of products chasing a diminishing audience of consumers for their offerings, those being mostly d20 works. Wizards should be actively recruiting new young players, but that isn't happening.

As I do not play the new D&D game I am not a valid judge of the works being published, so I cannot estimate the worth of publishers who do mainly such products.

The main new entrant that has caught my eye, and my work, is Troll Lord Games. They have and will be publishing a great number of my games, books and modules.

Q) How do you judge the "feel" of the industry since its inception? From a business perspective what are the challenges that lie ahead for RPG companies in the 21st Century as opposed to what they would have had to contend with in the late 70s and early 80s?

From 1975 through 1985 there was a continual growth in the audience for RPGs and hobby games in general. Those were halcyon days! Thereafter the interest peaked and things slid down the chart. There was a spike when in the last year of the 20th century Wizards of the Coast launched D&D 3E. Sadly, they did not carry through with plans to cultivate interest in paper RPG activity in young persons, likely because they were acquired by Hasbro.

The whole century is far too long a period for me to speak to. What I can foresee in the next few years is a struggle for paper game publishers to remain viable. The market is small, growth not being stimulated, and there are far too many products competing for consumer dollars. There will be attrition. The handful of companies that produce superior D20 products and those that offer other RPG systems will continue on. Games Workshop will remain a major player, but if WotC keeps publishing new editions of the D&D game every three years or so, their share of the market will erode with each new edition. The fate of White Wolf is up in the air. Their ending the current World of Darkness might prove a master stroke of marketing, or it might be disastrous.

Q) You mentioned a couple of months ago that we could expect to see a growth in e-RPGs and PDF based RPG products. Is there anything keeping PDF products from reaching the mainstream other than the consumers necessity to print the product themselves?

There is a lot of activity in creation, marketing and sales of pdf RPG products. Printing them out is not much trouble if it is an adventure module, as one is used only by the GM, and not usually more than once or twice. Print-outs for other sorts of material become less attractive. Maybe when it is possible for the average person to have such work bound in book form at a low cost that problem will be solved.

The principle hurdle for pdfs is marketing them. The vast majority of hobby game fans are neither active online nor subscribers to a gaming magazine. As of now the pdf audience is only the hardcore audience, about 10% or so of the total number of persons who

About the Authors
Gary Gygax is credited as being the founding father of the *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game and is a well known figure and writer in the industry. Now working mostly on his new role-playing product line, Lejendary Adventures, he is a household name among role-playing enthusiasts.

Kosala is a serial entrepreneur residing in Stockholm, Sweden. Aside from being the founder of Silven Crossroads, Kosala holds an advisory board position in a privately held Swedish company and works part time in the Swedish public sector on a volunteer basis.

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About the Artist
Interior black and white artwork for this article is done by Veli-Matti Joutsen. Mr Joutsen is a self taught artist living in Finland who has been drawing and illustrating since early childhood.

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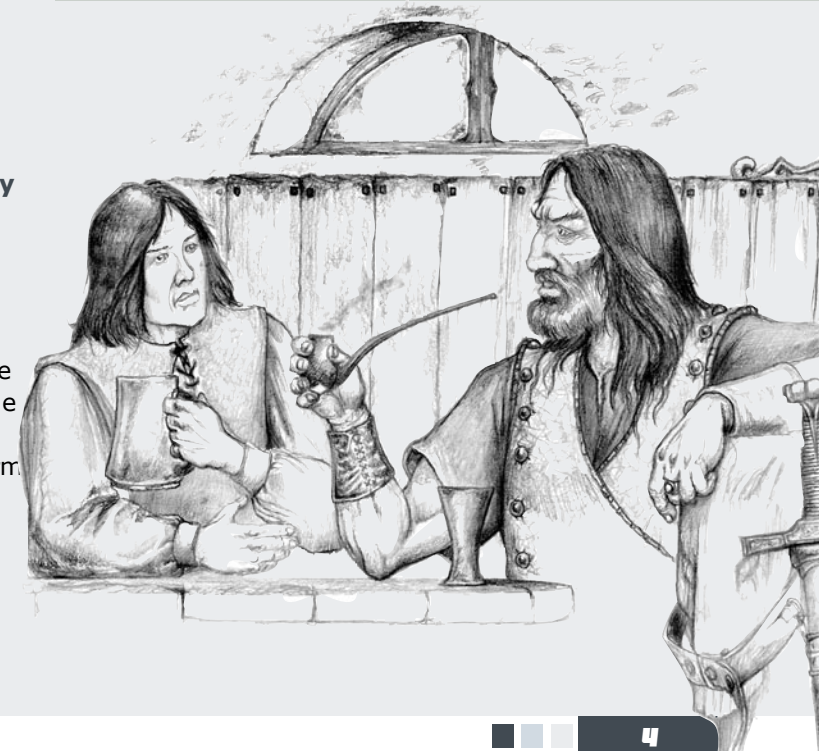
play. As distributors pick them up and FLGSs add pdfs to their inventory, more regular gamers will be exposed to them. As home computers are increase in number each year, it is likely that 90% of game shop customers have or soon will possess the means to read and print out pdfs.

Q) Clearly we have seen the Internet force changes in business models for most traditional media based companies. Do you think that a traditional RPG company will be faced with the necessity to diversify its product lines to include e-RPG products to compete effectively in the modern RPG consumer market?

No. Paper product is more desirable than a pdf print-out. Good paper gaming material will sell well without any e-product backup. However, offering such in addition to the paper product will add a bit to the bottom line and certainly gain considerable customer goodwill, so many publishers will likely do that.

Q) We have seen a decline in live action role-playing in the last decade. Any ideas what that might depend on?

Yes. The decline is two-fold in its origin. First, electronic games are attracting most of the potential audience, so that young persons are playing computer games or online games are not getting into the true RPG. Second, the only US company capable of effectively marketing paper RPGs to the audience of young persons is not making any effort to do so. Thus the number of young players entering the hobby diminishes each year or at best remains constant. With normal attrition in the whole of the audience, that means declining total participants.

Q) Perhaps, in the far future, when real-time virtual reality reaches its full potential we will be able to see live role-playing make a comeback as a popular RPing medium. If we were to follow in the footsteps of Jules Verne and peer down the wide lens of the future, what might we be able to see for our industry?

I have no doubt that when the technology improves as you suggest, there will be a very large audience for RPGing online, one nearly as great for gaming on the home computer—solo or with links to friends so as to play as a team. This is certainly the future for the game form. That said, the best experience will remain the group playing together, face-to-face, with a real live Game Master, the latter with or without electronic enhancements to his presentation.

Q) We have had quite a few "likes and don't likes" about gaming and the industry on our forums the last month. So lets round of this session with your list of pet peeves about the industry.

The only one I have that is worth mentioning in my estimation is the combined d20 and OGL licenses. These two licenses were bad for Wizards, bad for the D&D game, and bad for the D&D game audience. The reasons should be self-evident to the reader, but I'll touch on them just in case. WotC has no quality control over products produced under these licenses, they lose potential sales income, the D&D mark is not bettered, the publishers producing material compete with WotC in areas other than adventure modules, the distributor, retailer, and consumer are overwhelmed with material lacking quality control, and the shared experience of classic modules has been lost.

Exclusive Interview : Kameron M. Franklin

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by Pike Stephenson

Last year, Wizards of the Coast turned fantasy into reality with two simple words: open call. The WotC book publishing division is producing a new line of books dubbed *The Priests* that is to be set in the ever-popular *Forgotten Realms*. Each of these books will be a stand-alone novel centered on a character or characters of a particular priesthood. One of these books, titled *Maiden of Pain*, will be about worshippers of Loviatar, the goddess of pain and retribution and the subject of the open call.

Wizards opened their doors to any writer, previously unpublished or industry professional, to submit a cleverly crafted single page synopsis and ten page writing sample as their contest entry form. Hundreds of enthusiastic writers stretched their imaginations and applied their skills in hopes of winning the coveted prize- the opportunity to write the novel!

It took Wizards' editorial staff several months to sift through the entries as they searched for the right combination of story telling and ingenuity, that special piece which was both unique and engaging. They found just that in the work of an unknown yet talented young writer named Kameron M. Franklin.

When I learned about Kameron's success, I contacted him with the prospect of an interview. Soon after, I realized that this was the perfect opportunity to do more than interview a new author; I could follow him on his journey from conception to completion. Over the course of the next year or two, I will continue to interview Kameron and report his lessons and insights on the formation of a novel and the book publishing industry from a fresh perspective. And maybe, along the way, we might catch a few spoilers about *Maiden of Pain*.

Q) Could you tell our readers a little bit about yourself?

I currently live in the Pacific Northwest with my wife and son. I grew up all over the U.S.; my dad worked for the government and we moved every couple of years when he got a promotion.

I just graduated from Portland State University last spring. I majored in General Studies: Arts and Letters and minored in Professional Writing.

Q) Aside from writing, what other hobbies do you have?

I enjoy reading, playing *Dungeons and Dragons,* and pretty much anything to do with a computer or the web. I also like camping and skiing, though I haven't done much of either recently.

Q) How long have you been interested in writing?

I started writing in the third grade. For Show and Tell, I'd bring "books" I had written about some of my favorite fictional characters and read them. A friend and I also wrote our own magazine with neighborhood gossip and fake news stories.

I didn't become serious about writing until my senior year in high school. I took a creative writing course and my teacher encouraged me to enter a short story in a state contest. I didn't win, but from that point on, I knew I wanted to be a writer.

Q) What inspires you to write?

Reading is a huge inspiration. Whenever I get hit with the proverbial writer's block, I generally pick up someone else's work and dig in.

Preparing for D&D games also helps. I've been a DM for most of the 20 years I've played the game. (Coincidently, I was first introduced to D&D in the third grade) The process of plotting out adventures is similar to outlining a story, and helps get the juices flowing.

Q) Who are your strongest influences?

In a general literary sense, John Steinbeck has always been one of my influences. I like his style of writing and the content of his stories. Specific to the fantasy genre, I'd have to say Terry Brooks is perhaps my strongest influence. *The Sword of Shannara* was one of the first fantasy novels I read, after Tolkien, of course. David Eddings' *Belgariad* was also an early read and one that shaped how I viewed the genre. More recently, I have become a big fan of L.E. Modesitt, Jr.'s *Magic of Recluse* series. The way he takes mundane tasks and imbues them with magic enthralls me much the same way Steinbeck's tales of the ordinary and under trod did.

Q) Have you previously published any work?

No, *Maiden of Pain* will be my first time in publication. I have submitted materials four time previous to this and received rejections for each. Interestingly, none of those four stories were fantasy pieces.

Q) Describe the "moment" when you first learned that you had won the Maiden of Pain Open Call contest.

October 22, 2003, a day I will never forget. It was about 4 pm; my wife and I were passing the newborn back and forth when the phone rang. She answered it and then handed it to me. I was greeted by Peter Archer and Phil Athans, at which point I knew I had won. As they congratulated me, I mouthed to my wife "I'm going to be an author." She gave me this

disbelieving look. After the call, we jumped up and down screaming for several minutes.

Q) How did you approach your story proposal?

I took to heart the line from the open call that WotC wanted the story to grow organically from the setting. So, I actually got into my DM mindset and began looking through the recommended material (the Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting and Faiths & Pantheons) for possible plot hooks. I read through the sections for all three locales they gave and picked the one I found to have the most potential and the one I thought had not been touched upon in previous novels.

I was also fortunate to have a friend with a copy of the 2nd edition accessory FR10: the Old Empires. It provided a lot more detail than what was found in the FRCS and gave me some great ideas.

After the research, I created some basic plot points that later became the synopsis. Then I came up with the characters. Finally, I began envisioning a scene that turned into the excerpt.

Q) How challenging did you find it to condense an entire story into a single page synopsis?

The synopsis was the hardest and the last part of the proposal. I had my plot, but there is no way you can fit every idea onto one page, even using 10pt. New Times Roman. So I really tried to stick with major events and throw in a little of how they affected the protagonist.

Q) Without giving away any specifics, what is your story about? Can you tell us the story's theme?

Uh… it's about a cleric of Loviatar. (hehe) At this point that's about all I can really say. The story does have a couple of themes I really want to play up. One is the transition of going from a sheltered upbringing where everyone shares the same beliefs to a wider world where you have to explain and defend those beliefs. The second theme has to do with realizing and reconciling conflict interpretations of the same belief.

Q) In your opinion, what makes a compelling story: character, plot or both?

I would say it's an 80/20 split for me between character and plot. There are only so many plots and they've all been used. And while the same is true for character types, what makes the story compelling is the characters and how they react to the situations.

Q) Do you have any advice to give hopeful writers that want to work for Wizards or any other publishing house?

Write. A lot. Get the basics down. I was amazed at the generally poor level of grammar and spelling when I went back to school, and this is college we're talking about. Some of the Maiden of Pain samples I've read from other contestants suffered from this. Writing is a skill, just like playing basketball or a guitar. There are rules to follow and the more you practice, the better you'll get. I'd encourage everybody to take a creative writing course or attend a workshop at least once. It did wonders for me.

Research the publisher's submission guidelines. Nothing says, "I really don't care about this" like sending in something in a different format than what they've asked for or that doesn't fit with the publisher's line. That's a sure way to get rejected.

Wizards posts their guidelines on their website in the Books section.

And be ready for rejection. I was the rare case. Most writers get more rejections than they can count on fingers and toes before they land a paying gig. Don't give up when you get your first "Sorry, the Editors." It's not always a comment on your writing skill. Sometimes, the story just isn't what they're looking for.

Thanks Kameron, and congratulations!

There you have it, part one of a dream in the making. As Kameron said, his success is rare but possible. With skill, talent, perseverance, and the right inspiration, you too could see your name in print.

Next time we'll investigate Kameron's first draft ups and downs, handling (or being handled by) a professional editor and hopefully squeeze out a story teaser.

On the Written Style of RPGiana, Part I

by Raymond Huling

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Do role-playing games have a proper rhetoric? That is, do they use a standard set of stylistic tactics to achieve their various goals? Are they, in other words, an art about which we can make general statements? Or in other other words, do all RPGs have the same textual habits? If som what can we say about them? For the sake of this article, let's hope the answer to some of these questions is yes—as I mean to sketch out precisely these figures. Specifically, this article will cover the rhetorical strategies that I've observed in every role-playing game with which I am familiar. While trying to remain general I also want to describe what is exclusive; I'll try to ignore any approach to writing that RPGs may share with other discourses—which (to narrow the scope further) doesn't mean to say that I'll try to attain to the definitive. No, role-playing games have enough trouble with identity as things stand; far be it from me to aggravate this condition.

I want to keep it superficial as superficiality is a great analytical tool. It allows one to take things for exactly what they seem to be—and RPGs display an enchantingly bizarre surface. In fact, two rather shallow observations led me directly to this attempt to confront RPGs on an aesthetic line: first the new thug-life game, Wyrd is Bond and second, a strange sentence in the latest D&D supplement, Unearthed Arcana.

A lot can be said about the word 'Wyrd.' In Old English it means "that which happens" or "fate." We know that the modern descendant 'weird' as "supernatural" or "bizarre." It has nothing to do with the etymology of 'word,' and we shouldn't consider it an allophonic variant.   Did the authors of this game intend all this? Do they want us to find them sententiously declaring that circumstances entirely out of our control, rather than our spoken will, our oath, binds us together? Are we talking about social determinism here, in a

game that has necessarily to do with American blacks and crime? Perhaps gangsta RPGs, just like zombie movies, are political. I can't say for sure yet (the book hasn't arrived), but at any rate, we've stumbled across some interesting stuff here.

Does Wyrd mark a stylistic trend? Not alone, certainly, but what if we place it alongside this remarkable statement it may: "If the character fails the save, he becomes dying"—Unearthed Arcana (pg 117, under "Stable Characters and Recovery").   Note that the authors have not in any way set off the word 'dying' from the rest of the text, as they should have done if they meant to rely on a local, technical use of the term, i.e. one specific to the rules-set they are presenting. Of course, as it stands, the meaning remains clear: we have a boldfaced rubric 'Dying' just above the section in which this sentence appears, accompanied by a nice, if complex, definition.

But the point is that this construction is also from Old English. In that language we had the option—sometimes the obligation—to say of a person who has died that he 'became killed,' to which the formulation 'becomes dying' strikes us as remarkably similar. Thus, we enjoy a neat coincidence of expression—from two very new products, also very different from each other, two statements that reflect English speech of a thousand years ago. I think it quite unlikely that we could have come across such a phenomenon in any other kind of writing. On the other hand, it could have been, in UA, merely another editing flub. If so, it remains a serendipitous and charming one, still unique to RPGs (and we'll explore the meaning of errors a bit later).

Nonetheless, these examples, though probably exclusive to RPGs, don't have to do with the purpose I outlined above. That is, except heuristically—neither offers any insight as to a general style. Not to

disparage them; little incidents like these brighten our day, and we can find them everywhere. Consider this gem from the introduction to the Deluxe Edition of Car Wars: "As new supplements, ideas, and questions came up, we would "patch" on an answer—and pretty soon these "patches" started getting in each other's way." Those tiny precious, almost adorable quotation marks convey the fullness of the eighteen years that have passed since that product appeared, a period in which this sense of 'patch' has entered into that rare state of being known as 'common jargon.' We might also detect an important, though subtle, difference between this stylistic nugget and those other two we've glanced at—this one admits a broader analysis; it speaks to the process of the production of RPGs and this production has implications for style.

We'll turn then to the first rhetorical category of this investigation.

Amateurism

It advances us little to observe that hobbyism continues to dominate the RPG industry, but to suggest that almost nothing separates the amateur from the professional in this business—that may move us quite a bit. It's true, of course, that, in terms of quality—of writing, of game mechanics, in terms of ingenuity and creativity, only money puts the hyphen in 'pro-am.' The products of the largest RPG companies come from money and make money, but they in no other significant way distinguish themselves from their lowliest competitors.

Let's keep this within the bounds of style, as too much could otherwise be said. In the broadest sense, what differentiates a professional style from an amateur one? Can we establish a single test that

will allow us to reliably discriminate between one and the other? Yes, we have only to discern whether the decision to err has been made—because only this puts the professional apart from the amateur. That's all—just errors. And this does amount to a choice. Professional writing doesn't owe its status to clarity, concision or formality—plenty of pros operate successfully without giving a thought to any of these. Watch both the professional and the amateur at their respective work: the professional displays all the signs of care; the amateur does not. A professional constantly questions himself, looks things up, double-checks, and asks for advice. The amateur chooses to let this slide in favor of some other goal.

Thus we have the universally acknowledged amateurish quality of the writing and editing of role-playing games and RPG-related materials.[1] Everybody knows it. For an RPG to get through a page—literally, one—without some kind of misstep marks an achievement. It has always been this way and always for the same reason: the writers of role-playing games keep their attention first on the community. RPGs enjoy a communal production. Though individual authors (and certainly businesses) may embrace or dissimulate the fact, it is the case that role-playing games arrive to us through a process of open exchange.

Consumers in every market express almost a sense of ownership over the ideas behind the products they purchase; they seem to think themselves possessed of an entitlement to judge what they have spent their money on, as if they have been involved in its coming into being. What's different in the system of RPGs is that, here, these feelings are true; they have legitimacy, in that suppliers actually enter into genuine dialogue with consumers. Designers have to—on the whole, the consumers produce and exchange among themselves products in all ways except gloss equal to those offered by the professionals.

Take a look at issue six of The Unspeakable Oath, a Call of Cthulhu fanzine. In it, you find the rules for "Call of Cthulhu 5," a revision to certain of the rules presented in the then-new fifth edition of that game. No difference in quality between Pagan Publishing's little rag and Chaosium's legendarily award-winning series. Now, some may object—"but that was John Tynes! A guy who has become a well-known and very well-respected game designer!" Yes, and that's the point. A huge percentage of the consumers of RPGs could switch roles with the producers of them and both qualitatively and stylistically we'd find no difference in the resultant publications.

That's why you can open up the 1979 Dungeon Master's Guide and pick out, almost anywhere, a sentence such as the following: "By the same token, they are playing the game the way you, their DM, imagines and creates it." 'Their DM' set off by commas is non-essential—remove it and then re-read the sentence. Yet, in 2003, in what we may think of as one of AD&D's many descendants the drow novel Insurrection, we have this: "Gritting her teeth, Halistra tested the end of the crossbow bolt that protruded from her arm and almost wretched from the pain that doing so produced." 'Wretched' is malapropism but such errors abound in RPGiana.

Off the top of my head, I can recall seeing, in just the past few months, 'obtuse' for 'abstruse', 'alternately' for 'alternatively', 'excise' for 'expel', 'ripe' for 'rife', 'classical' for 'classic', 'baneful' for 'baleful', and, of course, 'lay' for 'lie.' These did not occur as typos; they happened as the work of amateurs. Even among those who seem to have a real mastery of their craft, we encounter the same disregard for the kind of mistakes that cause resentment. An author who wants us to believe he is comfortable with a vocabulary that includes 'athame', 'carious', 'came', 'trew', 'ophidian', 'tosspot', 'motte', 'flense', and 'tonsorial' proceeds to stagger us with "some might say that gives my associates and I cause for concern." Gives we? No, it is gives us; gives my

associates and me. Only an amateur could make this mistake, a hypercorrection. That's from another RPG novel, perhaps the furthest extreme of RPGiana, but look with a grammatical eye at one of the hearts of your typical game—a bestiary. You'll always come across something such as this: "This pale, bent, misshapen humanoid feeds by burrowing into cellars and basements and lying in wait for someone to enter." No, it does not at all feed in this way. It takes food, it nourishes itself, it eats by biting off and swallowing the flesh of the victims it catches by hunting in the manner described above.

Now, before the linguists get into it with their semantic change and whatnot, we should recognize that none of these abuses amounts to so much as catachresis, in the sense of a misuse in the process of gaining acceptance, e.g. 'self-deprecate' rather than 'self-depreciate' (though some of us continue bravely to challenge this usage—the last native speakers of another dying language!). Using 'anticipate' to mean "expect" has much and good precedent, but declaring a book obtuse, meaning "difficult to understand"—that's still just gibberish.

Does anyone really care? Does it really matter that, on the back of Unearthed Arcana, someone chose to enjoin us, in bolded majuscules, to "Unlock a wellspring of knowledge," having apparently not realized the impossibility of unlocking a wellspring. Perhaps it was forgotten that, traditionally and logically, we tap one (my bet—the initial phrasing was to unlock a vault or some such, but that some marketing type thought 'wellspring' would sound more lively.) No, probably we don't care, because we simply don't demand the same standards from RPGs that we do from other writing for which we pay up to forty bucks a pop. This aspect, this style of writing in role-playing games occurs as a result of a tacit agreement between producer and consumer; it is the first sign of the community. A solecism in an RPG or related product doesn't indicate laziness or disrespect; it marks a moment of sharing.

This differentiates mistakes in RPGs from those in other discourse. What would constitute an embarrassment for the New York Times serves as a point of pride, a badge of honor for the RPGista. Just as folk singers use awkwardness of expression to convey sincerity, RPG writers employ amateurism to indicate their place within a community—style, therefore, rather than fault.

This covers the most immediately apparent style in RPGiana. In the second and third parts of this article, we'll take a look at other stylistic approaches native to the fascinating discourse of RPGs.

(Endnotes)

[1] N.B. What about this one? Do I impugn the capabilities of my fellows here at Silven? Of myself? Certainly not! Here, at the SC, we establish our community bonds differently—somewhat to my dismay.

Sabotain: Break the Rules

by Patty Estill

Sabotain: Break the Rules is the first-person role-playing game set in the futuristic world. Combining the sophisticated RPG system with adventure and hovercar racing elements, and strong first-person shooting action, Sabotain offers unique gaming experience with rich nonlinear storyline and involving gameplay. Check out the story behind this new futuristic RPG.

The Galactic Empire of the people was formed to unite all the planets anf forma centralized powere for all the galaxies. The ruling leader assumed the title of Emperor. At first tinings went very well, but as time went on the ruling party developed its own interests, interests that differed from the initial principle of space development. Aristocracy appeared in the young Empire and they needed money to gratify their personal needs and interests, The Empire began to oppress the colonies by raising taxes, stealing scientific discoveries and new technologies and forbidding the use of the same without permission from the Emperor. Needless to say, many of the colonies, which were now strong and well developed, did not like these changes. They began building their own space fleet and strengthening their defenses, with the ultimate plan to break away from the Empire's grip, with force if necessary.

At first there were only a few discontented members and the Empire did not give them notice, but soon almost one-third of the planets had declared independence. The Emperor ordered the elimination of the worlds who re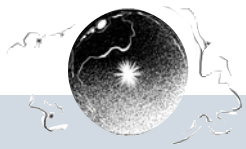fused to submit. These planets established the Confederation of Independent Worlds. They gathered together their forces and repulsed the Empire's army. This war lasted many decades. At first the Empire held the upper hand, but as many scientists, military, and other experts left the Empire to join the Confederation, with the hopes of further realizing their plans and wishes, the Confederation of the Worlds became stronger and more powerful.

A new and vigorous young politician, Vladimir Castor, appeared and became the Chairman of the Confederation Council, and gained appeal among the people of the Worlds. He had the ability to inspire other with his ideas. The Empire has grown weak and, has decided to arrange a series of provocations in an attempt to turn the tables in their favor. The secretly send an agent to the Confederation capital to sabotage the synthetic food production factory by adding psychotropic preservatives that will produces blind slave behavior in the citizens.

This is where you come in, and where the game begins. As a secret agent Hero, you will explore the huge world of the Confederation capital, Miracle City, performing various sabotaging tasks starting from simple persuasions to furious carnage. Your true mission, or so you thought, is to end the war, but our Hero will be confused by events and faced with the decision of choosing loyalty to the Empire, joining the Confederation forces, or discovering, and possibly joining, the Rebel organization.

Gaming Tips : That Hollywood Magic

by Scott Fitz

About the Author
A gamer since 1976, Scott has worked in and around the game industry for many years. He has spent most of his life in the grail quest of gaming: the perfect game. To that end his has honed his game craft to razor sharpness. Now he gives out game advice on a number of Internet sites.

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For those of us with a DVD player, experimenting with all the disc options becomes a hobby unto itself. Director's commentary, F/X off and alternate languages are all common options. One option that you don't see very often is Sound Track Off. This option removes all the background music and musical score from the movie, leaving just dialog and the occasional sound effects. After watching a few movies with this option on, I realized why this option had "gone away" in the newer DVD releases. Without the music in the background of the movie, I was not experiencing the same emotions that I normally felt when watching a given film. Without being aware of it, the music helped make the movie for me.

Perhaps you are saying "uhuh, sure." So try this experiment. Put in a movie you know well. Activate the subtitles option (or not if you know the movie really well). Mute the TV. You will hear the dialog in the actor's voice in your head. You will know the sound effects. Then in moments when nothing is going on you will hear it, the music in your imagination. That, my friends, is your mind trying to fill in the soundtrack that you are not conscious of, but that affects you never the less.

Hollywood is obviously onto something here. They wouldn't add music if it didn't make moves more successful. Can music make a game more successful? Initially I did not know. Like most GMs, I tried to keep the game area quiet and empty of distractions. Eventually I began to experiment with how to introduce music into my games. After learning some hard lessons, I came up with some rules that work for me.

This is more advice than rules, but music for your game is one of those you need to "gather" over time, rather than just grab in one bunch. The best tool to help you do this is "the little black book." As a GM, you function much like an author. Like an author, keep a notebook with you. Record interesting things, observations, or ideas as you encounter them. Don't trust your memory; trust your pen. Keep an ear out for music playing. Check the musical credits or research what music was added to the show. Record descriptions (scenery, interesting people, the name of stores, music lyrics, turns of phrase) that can be used as little nuggets of descriptive goodness in your campaign. Keep a record plot and story ideas (and the music associated with them) and use them as springboards for future game plots. This will bring your game's soundtrack in line with the stories being played. The little book will help you improve your game craft and your campaign, as well as adding music to your gaming life.

From there, you need to select music for certain scenes. If you know you are going to have a tense negotiation, the high energy dance tune you use for combat is not the best music to have in the background, even if it is the next track. As the GM you need to be aware of the music and use it, rather than just letting it "play." Never make a big deal about the music. It is just another tool for the GM to express a story and setting. If you make music a big deal, it takes away from the game more than it gives.

Music can be used to set and reinforce a mood or a setting in a game. However, music must be set at a background level. Any louder than that and it becomes a distraction. If players are spending more time focusing on the music than playing the game, something is wrong.

One needs to think of the music as another voice of the game. Just like the GM needs to present information in just the right way to preserve the game's feel, music should be selected to reflect the "feel" or ethos of the game. The specific music being played must fit the campaign, the setting, or the action. Music that fits the setting should reflect the kind of game and the environment like any non-player character. Drumming and traditional Japanese folk music were the soundtrack for my Nippon game. The soundtracks for Mortal Kombat were played when we were having combat in a martial arts game. We played chamber music for a Victorian game. Environmental sounds were great when we were in forests or out in the wilds. For a fantasy campaign, classical, celtic folk, or even Beatles could be applicable. During a huge street brawl in a modern-day game Marilyn Manson, Stabbing Westward, or Rage Against the Machine were all in the background. Find the mood you want, choose music to complement it, and play it.

Back to music during play, to keep the disruption of maintaining music to a minimum. Designate one player as "keeper of the music." This is an assistant GM position of sorts. It is that player's job to play DJ, with some input from the GM. This allows the GM to keep attention on the game and to add music to the gaming experience. A keeper maintains a constant flow of music that fits the setting and mood at a low volume level. Both the player and the GM pass notes to determine what kind of music they need next.

To assist this, most keepers create a "playlist" of what songs/ tracks on what albums were good for what kind of situations/ moments. The GM can scan this list and flag specific songs or general feelings for the next important scene.

Note: The keeper should be rewarded with extra experience or karma points or some game experience mechanic. The keeper's efforts enhance the game, just like anyone who contributes something to the campaign as a whole.

If you are a 21st century GM, you might be using a computer or laptop to assist you. If this is the case, you can be your own keeper. To do this, you need to invest in a nice pair of supplementary speakers for you system. You can use the CD player in your system or stored files as the general sound track of your game, then select certain songs when you need them for impact. One useful trick when doing this is creating folders with various song launches. These folders

can be used as albums or to hold specific songs for specific moods. If your keeper has a system up as well, you can create a small network and both of you can manipulate the music.

So music is probably sounding like a good idea now. The next logical question is "Where do you get 'gaming music'?" You would be surprised on how much "gaming" music you already have, if you have an average gamer's music collection. Between that and your troupe's you might not need any more. You can pick up more music in any music or video store, and most local libraries. The Internet can still a great source for free or inexpensive music, if you are careful. Just do not spend too much money on your music. It is just another game prop. So budget money towards music carefully, as money spent on it is money not spent on new supplements or game products.

I found you do not have to go selecting music alone. If you need help finding appropriate music, music store clerks, media librarians, and some Internet user groups, are great sources of information. If you are enthusiastic and make sure to thank them appropriately, they will be a great resource for future music searches.

I would like to mention my favorite sources of gaming music. First, movie soundtracks make excellent sources. The pieces all follow the same feel and have pieces for a variety of mood. The soundtrack for videogames can be a perfect fit for games as they will often hold the exact types of songs as you need for a game. The compilation albums for a given time period or TV show themes also work well. (In our modern age, making your own compilations is fairly easy as well.) Classical music is very, very inexpensive. You can get two to eight hours of music for a fraction of the price of a soundtrack. If the game is set in a historical period, use traditional music for that area (the Internet is a great for this). If it is a fantasy analog for a historical period, grab things that are appropriate (for example, the use of Japanese

folk music and drums in our magical Nippon Game). If the game is straight fantasy or sci fi, pick a musical feel and stick with it. Over the years, we have used Modern Celtic, bluegrass, techno/dance, Native American/ tribal music, and Beatles tunes all to great effect for games. Environmental music/ sounds CDs, Animal sound enhanced music, and the Fresh Aire series round out the field. These music types can be used for the environment, rather than the genre.

I need to make a special mention of special effect CDs. They can be very handy, but the timing to use them correctly needs to be just so. I would only recommend using them if you are a 21st century GM and running them off your computer.

My rules for music in my campaign are fairly simple in the end: Keep it soft, keep it organized. Choose

appropriately, get help often. The big one is never let it distract you from the game, but only use it to enhance the game or not at all.   Keeping these simple rules in mind will let add that Hollywood magic to you game, enhancing it for the enjoyment of all.

Motoi Sakuraba

Website: http://www.cocoebiz.com/sakuraba/index.shtml

Motoi Sakuraba is best known for his work on *Valkyrie Profile* and the *Star Ocean* Series. His most recent work, *Star Ocean 3*, which has yet to be released outside of Japan, is arguably his best. Combining fully orchestrated "event" music with synth based "battle" music two very different streams of music have appeared in this game. There are not only epic operatic orchestral tracks but also fast paced rhythmic battle tracks. In addition to game music, Motoi Sakuraba has also composed for television and film.

Nobuo Uematsu

Website: http://www.square-enix-usa.com/uematsu/

Nobuo Uematsu is by far the best-known game composer in the world because of his continued work on the *Final Fantasy* series. Having worked on every *Final Fantasy* from *I-XI* (with the exception of *X-2*), his music developed into his own unique style. Ranging from epic and sombre themes to "fluffy" character themes (such as *Yuffie's theme* from *FFVII*), Uematsu has done it all. He has been with Square since the beginning and it can be argued that he is one of the finest composers in the world, living or dead. With *Final Fantasy VII,* he brought new life to a genre that had long been ignored. CRPGs came to fruition following *FFVII,* which opened the doors both creatively and musically. RPGs were no longer relegated to the niche they once were. Musically *FFVII* had one of the finest soundtracks produced in the last ten years and has recently received a *Piano Collection* album, although fans are still waiting for a fully orchestral album. The argument could be made that RPG's are the most musical of all genres. In essence they need numerous different styles for each particular area thus allowing the composer freedom in creation. A debt is owed to this composer not matter how one feels about his music.

King Axyars last battle

by Khaz Axzen

About the Authour
Khaz Axzen and wife Donna currently live in the Pocono mountains in north east Pennsylvania with their two children, Devan and Lauryn. When not working or chasing the kids around, Khaz enjoys reading, writing, watching Yankee games and shopping for additions to his fantasy knife collection.

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Sinking behind the western most spur of the Nethrun mountains, the setting sun signified the end of another day. It's last dusky beams shone through the western window of the temple of Rhohadon, the dwarven god of battle. Perhaps for the last time, King Tor Axyar of the lion clan stood, bathed in the brilliant light reflecting off the golden hammer and anvil altar dedicated to his god.

Memories raced through his mind as he removed his golden, gem encrusted crown and reverently laid it at the foot of the altar. He remembered his sire, how he died nobly from wounds sustained in battle against the united barbarian tribes, the same barbarian tribes howling their blood lust on the plain outside the gates of Tor's great city, Tebla-A-khoro.

Wearing the ancient armor of his ancestors, Tor would meet the assault head on. He would not direct the battle from his throne room while brave dwarves died. Going against his advisors advice, he would lead the dwarves of the northern plains into glorious battle like his father did before him and his fathers father before him. For Tor knew deep inside him that the setting sun not only signified the end of another day, it signified the end of an age, the end of his era, and the end of all dwarfkind. The time of short-lived, greedy humans was upon them, and he would meet it with his axe in his hand, and a battle cry upon his lips. The dwarves of the lion clan would not go quietly into oblivion, they would march proudly with their heads held high.

❋--------❋
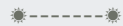
With a well aimed swing of his axe, king Tor Axyar of the lion clan dispatched another barbarian. Retrieving his notched axe from the dead man's head, Tor turned and surveyed the battlefield before the gates of his city.

Wiping gore and brain matter from his face, Tor spotted the human known as Drunord, an insane Norseman and war chief of the barbarian horde.

Drunord stood, feet planted firmly, legs spread, surrounded by dead dwarves. His huge broadsword flashed crimson in the torchlight as he swept it back and forth, up and down, dealing death with every stroke.

Tor, his helmet lost in battle, bellowed to the dwarves engaging the wildman to stand clear, then issued his challenge.

Drunord snapped his head around; his insane gaze fell on the gore spattered dwarf king.

Whirling his axe in front of him defensively, Tor picked up speed as he approached. Using his forward motion, he launched into an offensive flurry of strikes that caught the Norseman on his heels; it was all Drunord could do to parry and sidestep King Axyar's precise blows and feints.

Stepping back, bleeding from half a dozen nicks and cuts inflicted by Tor's blinding fast strikes, Drunord tried to change the momentum of the fight. Launching his own offensive, Drunord brought his huge broadsword down, then around from left to right.

Tor hopped to his left, avoiding the downward chop of Drunord's sword and deftly ducked under the backswing. The dwarf came out of his crouch swinging, he stepped inside the insane Norseman's return swipe, blocking it at the hilt with his gauntleted left forearm. Bringing his axe around from right to left, Tor felt the blade make contact with the big mans hip, parting leather breaches, flesh and muscle, then grinding off the pelvis bone. Smelling victory, Tor grasped his axe in two hands. Using his momentum, he spun, bringing his bloody weapon around, only to feel it swoosh through the empty space that just a split second ago was occupied by 300 pounds of smelly human.

❋--------❋

Drunord felt the dwarfs axe bite deeply into his left hip, and knew he was in trouble. Instinctively he hit the dirt, anticipating Tor's next move. He rolled painfully onto his injured left side, under the dwarfs axe, and kicked up with his good leg, making solid contact with the off balanced dwarfs face.

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Tor immediately regretted underestimating his opponent as he saw the viking's boot too late to avoid it. His vision was obscured by a white flash of pain, as his nose and several teeth broke from the force of the kick. His split lips throbbed painfully as blood flowed freely from his mouth and nose. King Tor Axyar shook the fog from his brain and the blood from his eyes as he picked himself up quickly, ignoring the pain. Assuming a defensive posture, Tor watched as Drunord stood, using his huge sword for support, giving his mind an extra moment to clear.

Both combatants shut out the battle that raged around them as they circled each other like two injured animals. Drunord was limping badly and Tor was blinking away the tears from his quickly swelling eyes, trying not to gag on his own blood as it ran down his throat.

Drunord made the fist move, feinting high. When Tor committed with a high parry, the Norseman, with surprising speed for someone his size, stopped his sword, and swept it low in a reverse arc. Tor jumped over the sword, almost losing his balance on the slick ground, and brought his axe down, scoring a glancing hit on Drunord's sword arm; at the same time he spit a mouthful of blood and teeth into his opponents eyes and face.

Tor landed on both feet to Drunord's right, and with a one handed back swing, caught the momentarily blinded human in the back of the head with flat of his axe, sending him staggering forward.

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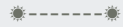
Drunord felt Tor's axe smash into the back of his head; the resulting flash of pain brought a rare moment of clarity. Drunord saw his life pass before his eyes, through the red haze of battle lust and pain. He saw the events which led up to this moment tumble through his mind. His childhood, watching his mother die of starvation so that he could eat. His people, scattered and un-united, eking out a meager existence in the harsh northern mountain climes while the dwarves prospered on the lush, fertile plains. Drunord united his people and led them this far. If he was going to die, he would do so as a warrior, and join his ancestors proudly in Valhalla.

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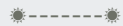
Howling in pain and rage, Drunord planted his feet and turned, swinging his sword around in a wild arc. Tor once again ducked under the swing and moved inside, bringing his axe up. He slammed the axe head into Drunord's exposed chin, driving him back and giving the dwarven warrior king the opening and arm space he needed.

Quickly, Tor drew his axe behind his head and struck, bringing it down with a thwack on Drunord's chest, through fur lined, leather armor, embedding it deeply in the shocked human's sternum.

Drunord's death howl was heard all across the battlefield. All eyes turned to see King Tor Axyar pulling his axe from the dying human's chest. The king then collapsed in a heap, injured and exhausted.

All the dwarves from the lion clan ran to their beloved king, sweeping him up and retreating back to Tebla-A-Khoro, as the Norse warriors pursued, only to be

driven back by dwarven crossbows from atop the wall.

The dwarves of the lion clan staved off the barbarian hordes first assault. As they carried their warrior king to the temple of Rhohadon, the sun began to rise above the Black Dragon mountains in the east, turning the night sky purplish red, ushering in a new day. They lived to fight another day, even if their hero king, Tor Axyar, would not.

Watch Me Soar!

by Kosala Ubayasekara

About the Author
Kosala is the founder and site admin of Silven Crossroads and a gamer since the age of 10. When not working on Silven related stuff he is an entrepreneur, politician, pool player and student.

Kosala comes from Sri Lanka but now resides in Stockholm, Sweden.

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About the Artist
Kevin Crossley is a young talent working in the UK that has been drawing since a very early age. Now in the process of making his way as a fantasy artist, he can be reached for commissions at the email address below.

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I am flying, high above
    The world, its people and I see,
        There are no barriers, no dangers
            Just me.

No doubts, no fears I know
    Leap up to attack me,
        My days of hunger are over
            And now there is only peace.

The world runs like a small river
    Down by my feet,
        And the smile on my face widens
            As my head nods to a beat.

The music I hear now is full of life,
    And knows the careless joys of true freedom
        My mind wonders through ideas, dreams and
            Unfettered plans take seed, COME!

See for I am mighty now!
    No longer trapped by them!
        I am a song, I am a dream
            I am free.

The White Wolf Insider

by Amaranth

About the Author
The author writes: "I have been a White Wolf fan for the past 10 years, and it never seems to stop.. no matter how hard I try. I have two kids, and a loving wife.. which support me through everything that I decide to do. I look forward to providing you with information regarding to the White Wolf Gaming Studios, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions."

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Welcome to the second edition of the White Wolf Insider. The White Wolf Insider takes a look within the gaming studio's of White Wolf, providing you with information on the newest releases and latest news. The hope is that this column will generate more interest in White Wolf Gaming Studio products.

The End of the World ofDarkness is Near

Gehenna has struck the Get of Caine. The Garou have fought their last battle against the Wyrm. Those mages who could have ascended. The Time of Judgment ishere at last and nothing is safe—not even the online store!

April 30th marks the final day of online sales for all role-playing books, fiction and merchandise set in the modern *World of Darkness*.

As a special thanks to all fans who have supported White Wolf for 13 great years, White Wolf is running a special promotion to allow you to complete your *WoD* collections. Place an order for $30 of products through our web catalog, andyou'll receive two free items; place an order for $75 or more, and you'llreceive those two items and an additional hardcover supplement. Thesefree items will change every weekday from now until the April 30th deadline.

March 1 Specials: Order $30 and receive **free Mind's Eye Theatre Prop Deck** (WW5180) and **Clan Novel Anthology** (WW11113).Order $75 and receive those items **free** and **DarkAges: Inquisitor** (WW20004).

The Fine Print: Only physical products ready to ship count toward the order total for this promotion. Ebook sales, convention admissions, Camarilla memberships and all preorders are ineligible. Qualifying orders placed after midnight Eastern Standard Time will receive the following day's free items. Products related to *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle, Exalted, DarkAges, Sword & Sorcery Studios, Two Wolf Press* and *Borealis* will continue to be sold after April 30. Sale of physical items from these lines count toward the order total for this promotion, however. White Wolf reserves the right to substitute an item of our choice if we run out of stock of any listed item.

White Wolf/Sword & Sorcery Studios Partners with Goodman Games to Publish DragonMech

March 8, 2004 -- Goodman Games is pleased to announce that it has reached an agreement with White Wolf Publishing, Inc. to publish *DragonMech* under the Sword & Sorcery Studios imprint. White Wolf will handle all publishing and distribution duties for *DragonMech*, which will be produced by Goodman Games and designed by award-winning team Super Unicorn. *DragonMech,* a world of medieval fantasy mechs powered by steam, magic, or the labor of a thousand slaves is scheduled for July release as a 240-page hardback with a price of $34.99. Other Goodman Games releases will continue to be published independently by Goodman Games.

"I thought that *DragonMech* would be a great match with Sword & Sorcery from the moment Joseph first showed me the concept," said Andrew Bates, Managing Editor for Sword & Sorcery Studios. "As is evident in our partnerships with Malhavoc Press and Necromancer Games, we look for a combination of a strong creative voice and entertaining, marketable concepts. *DragonMech* has all that in spades."

"Ever since White Wolf entered d20 publishing with Sword & Sorcery Studios, it has been at the forefront of the market. Whether it's through the *ScarredLands* campaign setting or partnerships with other publishers, Sword & Sorcery Studios has great taste in RPGs. It's an honor to join their company," said Joseph Goodman, President of Goodman Games and author of *DragonMech*.

All *DragonMech* releases will be available to retailers from White Wolf in their normal distributor listings. Other Goodman Games releases will continue to be published separately by Goodman Games. The *DragonMech* 2004 release schedule includes the rule book, an adventure, and the previously unannounced Mech Manual, as follows:

July: *DragonMech*, 240 page hardcover, $34.99, ISBN 1-58846-988-3, stock #WW17600.

August: *The Shardsfall Quest*, 72page softcover, $15.99, ISBN 1-58846-997-2, stock #WW17601.

November: *Mech Manual*, 128 page softcover,$21.99, ISBN 1-58846-989-1, stock #WW17602.

DragonMech is set in a medieval fantasy world destroyed by relentless lunar meteor storms. To survive, the surface races have used magical and mechanical means to build thousand-foot-tall city-mechs, which now house most of civilization. Kingdoms have been replaced by mobile mechdoms,

and the mounted knight is anachronistic in the face of steam-powered combat mechs.While lunar creatures launch invasions from the skies, fleets of smoke-belching steam-mechs battle for scarce supplies of wood, steel, and coal.

More information on *DragonMech* can be found at http://www.goodman-games.com and http://www.swordsorcery.com. More informationon Sword & Sorcery Studios can be found at http://www.swordsorcery.com.More information on Super Unicorn can be found at http://www.superunicorn.com. Contact Philippe Boulle at prboulle@white-wolf.com or Joseph Goodman at goodmangames@mindspring.com for questions regarding this press release.

DragonMech is a trademark of Goodman Games. The content of the *DragonMech* rule book is copyright (c) 2004 Goodman Games.Sword & Sorcery Studios is a trademark of White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

About the Authour
Alicia (Lynxara) writes the webcomic Fantasy Wars and the RPG Wars comic strips for the Silven Trumpeter. She graduated from Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in 2002 with a major in Religion & Philosophy and is currently a graduate student at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. When not changed to her word processor, her hobbies include anime, video games, and of course, role-playing.

About the Artist
Elizabeth Ellis (KouAidou) draws the webcomic Fantasy Wars and the RPG Wars comic strips for the Silven Trumpeter. She graduated from the University of Maryland with a major in Japanese in 2003 and is currently at large. When not shackled to her art supplies, her hobbies include anime, translating, and of course, role-playing.

by Kou and Ali

Exclusive Interview : Kevin Crossley

by Kosala Ubayasekara

About the Author

Kosala is the founder and site admin of Silven Crossroads and a gamer since the age of 10. When not working on Silven related stuff he is an entrepreneur, politician, pool player and student.

Kosala comes from Sri Lanka but now resides in Stockholm, Sweden.

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About the Artist
Kevin Crossley is a young talent hailing from England, just starting to break into the fantasy illustration genre.

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Kevin Crossley is an up-and-coming artist featured one of the artists featured in recent works of both Green Ronin and Malhavoc Press. His unique style and creative works will sure to leave the RPG industry speechless for years to come. We thank Kevin for sparing time for this exclusive Silven Crossroads interview!

Q) Lets begin by telling us a little about yourself. Where are you from, how old are you and what do you do today?

I'm from Leeds, a city in Yorkshire, England. I'm 32 now (good grief… how did *that* happen?) and for the past 9 years I've been working in the computer games industry.

Q) How did you get into fantasy artwork and what kind of art background have you had?

I've *always* loved good fantasy artwork, but I think the thing that really hooked me in was a book by Rodney Matthews my dad bought me when I was at school. Matthews' art was so stylized and so well executed, and the ideas he came up with so compellingly weird that I was almost addicted to looking at it.

My passion for fantasy art really started there, and I still have the book to this day, although the pages are all falling to bits! The other major influence on me was 2000AD, the British comic that had Judge Dredd, Rogue Trooper, etc. It also had the utterly amazing Nemesis drawn by Kev O Neill, and of course Slaine drawn by a whole host of amazing artists, and looking at the artwork these guys produced made me want to be like them.

As for my art background, when I was at school, the one thing I could do well was draw, and that's what I did, every day and night. I guess I should say that when I was really young I wasn't much better than anyone else in class, but the one difference between most of the other kids and me was that I just never stopped practicing. As we all got older, I became more and more focused, and when the other kids were going out at night dancing and drinking and screwing, I was at home, hunched over a piece of paper scribbling away like crazy! I went to an art college after school, then onto university where I studied graphic design. I sucked at that but passed the course anyway. I then spent 2 years unemployed and filled my days doing paintings of people's dogs, wives, budgies—*anything* at all to earn a crust or two. For a while I painted a lot of botanical stuff—plants and animals etc. I got books on biology and studied how muscles attach to bones etc, and gradually learned more and more about how animals, people and plants go together.

I think it's important to have a good knowledge of how things work from the inside out. It's easier to sell a crazy looking monster if you've based it in part on truthful physiology.

Q) What kind of art mediums to you work in?

I taught myself how to paint with watercolor and gouache, and I use pencils and inks too. I use putty rubbers (erasers if you're not a Brit!) and tissues to lift color off the paper as I work, then work into the interesting patterns this process creates. You can put so much depth into the texture of a piece using techniques like this. I guess every artist has his or her own methods, but I'm always experimenting to see what other crazy tricks I can use. One friend I used to work with gave me the idea of sprinkling rock salt onto a wet area of watercolor. The salt soaks up the paint around it, then when it dries, shake the salt off and you have a really striking texture on the paper! (Professional tip: Don't use the salt in your cooking, it will taste foul.)

These days I scan in my original art and use Adobe Photoshop to tidy it up and add finishing touches, but I work really hard to maintain as much of a hand-rendered quality as I can. Painting in Photoshop is great fun, and relatively quick and easy if you know what you're doing, but give me 15 hours, a crate of beer and a real paint brush any day!

Q) What are your goals as an artist?

My goals? At first, I was driven completely by the need to escape the miserable poverty I grew up in. (Get the violins out, it's sob story time!) Basically I only wanted to get out of the life I was stuck in, and the only way to do that is to identify what you might be good at and work hard to be as good as you possibly can be at it. I really didn't care about being the best or anything, not at first. It just so happened that people really liked my drawings, and I got a lot of encouragement to do more, so I just kept going.

Gradually I did begin to consider where it might all lead, and I suppose that's when I started looking at the comic and fantasy art worlds, and began dreaming about being that sort of artist one day. I never really thought I would ever be good enough to make it, but more and more I find myself chasing that dream with increasingly stubborn determination. I won't let it go. The last 6 months have been crazy and humbling. That so many people seem to like my work is totally insane, and I'm so grateful for that. I guess this has helped to bring my goals into sharp focus. My ultimate goal now is to improve my work and try to emulate the sort of quality I see in the likes of the dudes who inspire me so much.

No matter *how* good you get, or how great you *think* you are, there will always be someone who does it that much better. I aim to be the best, which sounds a bit arrogant, but shouldn't this be the goal of any artist, writer or musician? If your ultimate goal is to be average, then you are dooming yourself to failure, or at the most, being unremarkable. So I study the great artists who make it all seem so bloody simple, and I desperately try to lift my game into their league. God knows I'm nowhere near these guys, but it won't stop me from trying. Everything I do I take pride in, but I don't kid myself. It can always be better. That's it really, I just want to become as good as I can possibly be.

Q) Who are your artistic role models and sources of inspiration?

Okay, I'll list some of my current faves: John Howe, Alan Lee, Brom, Carlos Huante, Greg Staples, Jason Brashill, Brian Bolland, Kevin O Neill, Jim Murray, Arthur Rackham, Scottie Young, Francisco Herrera, Joshua Middleton, James Ryman, Scott Cambell, Marc Silvestri and Alphonse Mucha! There are loads of others too... too darned many if you ask me!

Q) We have noticed the great work you have done for Malhavoc Press. What other contract work have you done?

Not much so far, I've contributed artwork to 3 books for Green Ronin which were all published last year, and I've just completed the art for 2 more Ronin books which I guess will be out soon. I have a few more jobs lined up, but I'm also practicing sequential comic art and preparing work that I hope will appeal to the comics market. It sure isn't easy though.

Q) How do you perceive the commercial art industry today? Is formal training a requirement to succeed? Is the competition so fierce that you need to really outshine the competition or does contacts play a significant role in landing jobs?

The commercial art industry, like any other arena of business is a seething snake pit. You just jump in and hope to get noticed, but you have a good chance of getting chewed up and spat out. I've been rejected so many times, partly because I wasn't good enough, and partly because there are so many artists out there you just get lost amongst them, and no one knows you're there. I've known quite a few artists... truly inspirationally *amazing* artists who just never get anywhere. You look at their work and think...

MAN! Why aren't they millionaires with books in shops all over the world? Then there are the artists who really aren't very good at all who seem to be up at the top, earning barrels full of cash and diluting the quality in the professional marketplace with sub-standard work. Sure, this makes me sound like an arrogant ass, but it's just the way it is. Some people deserve greatness, but never get it. Some people *have* greatness, but do nothing to deserve it. Formal training is of course useful, but it won't guarantee you a job at the end of it. You must absorb as much as possible from college or university etc, but what really matters is how you *use* your skills and how you put what you learn to the best use.

Having good contacts however, is perhaps one of the best ways to get known within the industry. Sure, I've been working my fingers to the bone trying to improve my style and quality of work for years now. What I lacked however was a good understanding of how the industry works, how you approach it and how you conduct yourself around it. By chance, someone I worked with knew someone who worked in the fantasy art industry. I sent this guy samples of my work to ask for advice really, but this dude turned out to be totally cool and a great help. He gave me loads of advice and tips that made a huge difference to the work I produced, then he introduced me to Green Ronin last year that resulted in my first contract. (*Huge* shout out to James Ryman! Cheers buddy!)

To sum up, there is no one way of getting into this industry. Luck can play as much a part as a genius talent, but I honestly believe sheer hard work will pay off in the end. I mean, jeez, I might never get another job for all I know! What I do know is that I really appreciate the decision a few people made to hire me for the handful of jobs I've so far had, and I'll relish every moment of it, however long it lasts.

Of course, I hope to be doing this for as long as possible!

Q) What kind of advice do you give to artists looking to break into the fantasy art industry?

Never give up. If you believe in your work, just be true to it and keep practicing. Sure, some people seem to be lucky and get places without too much trouble, but hard work really will define the course your career and life will take. Some of those artists I listed above are naturally talented *gods* who walk among us. This is their world and we just live in it. But I bet one or two of them had to work their butts off to get where they are today. When you see a fabulous work of art, what you're seeing are not just the hours that went into creating it, but also the years of late nights and hard work that came before it. What you draw on paper is a reflection of how much of your life you have invested in your art, and anyone looking at it will appreciate that.

We thank Kevin Crossley for his time and are looking foward to seeing more of his work in the future! For more information about Crossley or to view his galleries, you can visit his personal homepage here: http://www.kevcrossley.com.

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CHARACTERS : Who's who, What's what

by Matthew Conlon

About the Author
Matthew grew up in Brookline, Ma and is currently a draftsman at a mechanical and electrical construction consulting firm in the heart of Boston. In his precious spare time, he likes to read, write, play D&D and watch movies. He is also owns and maintains http://www.conlontech.com and http://www.griznuq.com.

He currently lives in south-eastern Massachusetts with his wife and two dachshunds, Oscar and Mocha.

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There are many things that a GM should know about the characters in his or her campaign. I'm not talking about character names, height, weight, or color of hair and eyes, although these things are also good to know. Rather, I'm talking about the things that make a character come to life; the reasons that a character is something that someone would want to play. Is this character pious? Does this character have any prejudices? Is this character allergic to anything? This article details the importance of knowing your characters and tips to keep you informed.

Everyone comes from somewhere, and most of the time, where someone comes from has a lot to do with who they are today. Have your players come up with a background story for their characters. You need to make some decisions before you present this opportunity to the players. You need to decide whether or not you are going to give them complete free reign or add in parts that you need them to include. Players, this is your chance to tell a story. This is not an opportunity that presents itself very often. This might actually be your only chance, so take it! The GM has many, many things to do, other than come up with a history of your life. You may just end up with something uninteresting, which takes away from your character. Don't let this happen!

Naturally some players, most likely the less accomplished role-players, will want to add things like, vast riches, incredible powers and powerful friends. "My father was the only merchant allowed in the palace and he was best friends with King Stormwell. I have since kept in contact with King Stormwell, and he has offered to adopt me because he's got no children and he's sick. Now I'm a crown prince…" and so on and so forth. You are the GM, so it's ultimately up to you. Do you want him to be King of Burntlandia? You have the power to say no, or to let him do it only to be overthrown by the King's secret mistress, Penny Pincher.

On the other hand, your players may all draft up good, plausible backgrounds. Now you have something to work with. Ed decided that his father was a farmer, and they were traveling because his farm was burnt down by Baron Von Greenbacks, who gave Ed the scar. Well, you've seen enough sci-fi movies to know that Ed is going to be the one to finally go against Baron Von Greenbacks in the final parts of the adventure – only to find out that they are brothers. I'm sure *no one* will see that coming. <Insert "yeah, rights" here.>

It's a good idea to have a chat session with players about their respective characters to get a feel of who they want their characters to be. This way you can get a fair hold on what types of reactions these characters are likely to have to certain stimuli or events. Perhaps one of the characters lost a loved one at the hands of an ogre and his life's mission now is to eradicate all manner of ogre. You know what he's going to do the first chance he gets to fight an ogre regardless of how powerful the ogre may be. Any GM, new or experienced, could use this in a campaign.

Don't rely too heavily on assuming that the character would act a specific way however. If you set up the adventure so that the character reads a sign that says something like, "Help, heroes wanted to guard against ogres! Apply within!" and the characters decide, "Nah, sounds boring," your whole session just went down the drain unless you find a different way to shove the players in the correct direction. You will find yourself sitting behind your GM screen reworking the adventure that took you all last weekend to plan. Every GM has been in this situation at least once or twice. The moral of that story is to have a backup plan. If you are hanging the storyline up on an assumption of how your characters react, give some thought to what you can do if your assumption doesn't work out the way you had hoped.

Knowing the types of personalities and proclivities isn't enough. A GM needs to know what the characters have for items and abilities to effectively create an adventure. You as a GM might layout an adventure that includes a sleep spell being cast against the party and it needs to succeed for the storyline to run smoothly. You tell the party, "someone is making magic-looking movements, next thing you know, you are waking up in a dungeon" when a player reminds you that a few sessions back, (Which these days are further and further apart, at least for me) she

EXAMPLE

Ed wants to play a paladin. In the description of his character, Ed makes it a point to mention that he's got a scar on his left cheek. When you tell Ed that he needs to come up with a background, make sure that you tell him to explain where he got the scar. You may even want him to include other parts. You tell him, "Your parents were eaten by an owlbear when you were four-years old, while you were traveling from the Great City of Somewhere to the Vast Sands of Nowhere. A great swordsman, Sir Larry McGoobers happened by, killed the owlbear and took you to his home in the village of Dumpwater." Now you leave it up to the player to come up with why the family was traveling, what was his father's occupation, where he got the scar, and why he decided to become a paladin.

found a treasure trove from which she acquired an item that prevents sleep or charm spells. Now your story line is botched. Likewise if you know that your player's characters have an item that shield them from psionics, you probably wont waste the time to generate a paraplegic psionicist with no armor for an arch villain. Or maybe your sense of irony is such that you would.

Keep a separate notebook to keep track of things like these. I personally like to have a couple sheets of paper (I prefer graph paper) dedicated to each specific character and one master sheet for the most general notes. I keep notes like "Zippy hates goblins" "Cowboi is allergic to goblin hair," and "At some point, these guys are going to have to fight some goblins" on the master sheet. The individual sheets are filled with as much information about the characters as I can get. You can of course go high-tech. These days I keep track of the info that I need to keep on my trusty PDA.

Something that you have to remember as a GM is that just because YOU know that the character has a specific item doesn't mean that the villain knows about it. In other words, that same spell caster that I mentioned before would still cast the sleep spell, and realize that it didn't work. This is not something that you want to omit! Why bother letting the character get an item that has a specific purpose if you are never going to let them use it? Have the spell fail, but have a plan B ready. (Bad guy runs away or brings in henchmen is always a good one.)

The other side of the coin is that if you know what your player characters are capable of, you can (and should) allow them the chance to use their abilities. Player #1's character has the uncanny ability to slip through *very* small spaces. You should make it a part of the story that he has to do this in order for

the party to triumph and save the maiden, or the planet… what have you. What's the point of allowing a special ability if they're never going to have the chance to use it.

You have a good handle on what your characters would do in some specific situations, and you also know what they are capable of doing, given their items and abilities—now you have only to learn what it is exactly that the characters *want*. Have your players set down on paper some short term and long term goals.

EXAMPLE

For instance, the fellow who was hunting the ogres knows that he will never eradicate all of the ogres on Earth (or whatever you call your world) and thus instead, a goal might be to run the ogres out of the local caves, and see how he feels after that. Having met a short term goal, maybe he got it out of his system. If not, then it's off to the next cave network.

It is sometimes easy to lose sight of the fact that who a character is, is a direct result of where he came from, who he was, and what he has lived through. Above all else, have fun. After all, that's what you're there for. Think of your campaign as a story in the making. What would you like to read?

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

*The Perilous Quest to Mandregal's Tower
Part III: Where We Run Out of Subtitles*

by Matthew J. Hanson

About the Author

Matthew J. Hanson is an aspiring writer, as well as a long time gamer. He normally lives in Minnesota, but is currently finishing his senor year of college in Beloit Wisconsin. Recently, his 10-minute play *Who is Ruth* was selected as the winner for the American College Theatre Region III winner, for their 10-minute play competition, and it will be advancing to the national competition in April. If you would like to learn more about Matthew J. Hanson, please feel free to visit his website at www.matthewjhanson.com.

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Starlanko the Magnificent, wizard extraordinaire and vanquisher of the dreaded Hound of Balisiphar, crested the hill overlooking the town of Fansberry: the golden brown of a dozen thatched roofs, located periodically along a single dirt road. At the far end (which really wasn't that far) was a larger, slightly more well-constructed building, which Starlanko guessed was public building or meeting house. At the other end was a water mill, aged but in good repair. It was built along a body of water that was as much a river as Fansberry was a town, and town was perhaps too generous a word to describe Fansberry. While taking in the sights, Starlanko contemplated of the events that had lead to his current situation.

It all starred auspiciously enough, a day north of here in the Black Dog Tavern, where Starlanko heard tell of the late wizard Mandregal's abandoned tower, likely to be rich in arcane secrets. In short order, Starlanko teamed up with the wizard Callan, to go uncover these secrets.
Oh, and Redreck came along as well.

To make a long story short: ogres (Starlanko could have taken them), yet another wizard (Bargle), tower, books, secret door, explosion, Queen of the Damned (Dathelle), sheer stupidity.

Yes, thought Starlanko the Magnificent, that about summed it up. He was quite happy with the conclusion he had reached. It was just in time too, because Callan was pounding against the large wooden door of a nearby house. He was in a bit of a hurry, having something to do with saving a damsel in distress named Ennorra from a deadly poison.

A ragged mutt lying in shade of the house cocked his head towards Callan, and woofed in a half hearted fashion, but did not have the energy to make more of it.

The door soon swung open.

"Callan, is that you?" an older woman greeted him.

"Yes. I have it," Callan said.

"Leolus be praised," the woman hugged Callan briefly then ushered him inside the house.

Starlanko noticed Bargle, the wizard and bounty hunter that had joined their quest, slip away. Starlanko thought briefly about following, but decided the house and the company occupying it was more inviting.

Starlanko soon found himself in a crowded bedroom. Callan huddled next to a bedridden woman, and applied a salve to her shoulder wound. The center of the wound oozed black pus, and jagged gray lines shot from it, like lightning made of ashes. Despite her injured and sickly state, Starlanko could not help but notice a refined, yet simple elegance about here features. The woman who greeted them at the door watched anxiously. Both women had had a common beauty about them, though far more lines of experience crossed the standing woman's face, and gray streaks accented her hair.

After he finished tending the wound, Callan spoon-fed a broth of herbs to his stricken lady. The broth, like the salve, was made following the recipe found in Mandregal's tower. After the bowl was empty Callan stood.

"That should do it," Callan said. "Now all we can do is wait."

"Ah, waiting. One of my less than favorite activities," said Starlanko the Magnificent.

"I should apologize," Callan said. "In my haste, I forgot to introduce you all. Mellarra, this is Starlanko the

Magnificent, and his associate Redreck the Fierce. They both helped me find the antidote. And this is Mellarra, she is Ennorra's …"

"Don't tell me," Starlanko interrupted. "The resemblance is clear. You must be Ennorra's slightly older sister," he said with a smile and a slight raise of one eyebrow.

"No, I'm her mother actually."

"Oh. It must be tough being a widow. A woman alone in this day and age." Starlanko, motivated purely out of concern, he would assure you, placed his hand gently on Mellarra's elbow.

"My husband is out of town," Mellarra replied, and drew her arm away.

"It must be difficult, being alone for so long, not knowing whether he'll return."

"He'll be back tomorrow morning."

"It must be lonely."

"And he can be a very jealous man."

"Oh. Does Ennorra have any spinsterly aunts?"

"No."

"I think she has a bachelor uncle," Callan piped in.

"No thank you," Starlanko replied. "Though maybe... no never mind."

Mellarra notice her guest were all standing, and brought chairs in for them to sit upon.

"Bargle wandered off," Starlanko mentioned when they were all seated.

"Yes," Callan replied. "I suspect he's looking for signs of Arolic, but I'm keeping an eye on him."

"You sent that raven of yours?"

"Yes, Mr. the Magnificent. He has a name you know. It's Mathue. Mathue the Raventastic." Though Callan spoke easily with Starlanko, his gaze never left Ennorra lying on the bed. It was almost as though Callan was looking inside of her. "I don't think Bargle will have much luck in his however. The town has already been searched, by the local authorities, as well as other bounty hunters. Arolic cannot be found."

"He's probably fled," Starlanko said.

"No, he's still here. Someplace." Callan mopped from sweat from Ennorra's brow. "She knows where he is," he said.

"Is that why he poisoned his own sister? To keep hidden?"

"No that's not it."

"Why then?"

Callan sighed. "Perhaps another time."

Starlanko felt the awkwardness, but he still had more questions. "Is it true then, what Bargle said about Arolic worshipping the Queen of the

Undead?"

"Yes," replied Mellarra. Her voice was hollow, talking about her son as though she talked about the wars of long dead civilizations. "My son is a Dathellite."

Starlanko was not sure how to follow that up, so he located the spell book plundered from Mandregal's tower, and started leafing through. He, Callan, and Bargle had agreed that each wizard would copy any spells he wanted from the book. Starlanko had not yet fully explored the contents.

"Rocky," said a weak voice.

"What was that?" Starlanko asked.

"She's coming around," Callan said. He gently lifted Ennorra's hand to his lips and kissed it. "It's all right. You're safe now."

"Rocky," Ennorra said again. She was distant, barely wavering above consciousness.

"Rocky is just fine," Callan assured her.

Starlanko had to ask, "Who is Rocky?"

"The dog," the mother answered.

"You don't understand," Ennorra said. "Arolic... he has shifted..." her eyes closed, and her breathing slowed, as she drifted again into unconsciousness.

"She said he shifted," Starlanko said. "As in shape shifted. I think she is trying to tell us that the Arolic turned into the dog."

"No, not the dog," came a smooth voice from just the other side of the bedroom door. It swung open to reveal that Bargle had returned. "He's become a worm. A parasite. He has taken up residence in the canine's

intestinal tract."

"How did you learn that?" Callan asked, trying to hide his shock.

"I have my sources."

"What kind of sources?"

"A magician never reveals his secrets."

Everyone, except Ennorra and her mother, soon poured from the house. The dog Rocky still lay next to the corner of the house. As they approached, Rocky looked up at them, but did nothing more.

Each of the three wizards cast a spell to detect magic.

"I don't see anything," Starlanko noted as he walked around trying different angles. "Wait. There, something faint."

"Being inside the dog blocks most of it," Callan said.

"Well, then what do we do now?"

"We turn him back of course," Bargle replied

"While he's inside the dog?" Starlanko asked.

"It's not difficult. We simply dispel all the magic in the area, and inevitably we will affect him as well," Bargle explained.

"It's not a question of how hard it is to do. It's a question of, he's inside a dog."

"So?"

"So, while I've never actually tried it myself, but I'm fairly certain changing something from worm size to human size while it's inside a dog's stomach will kill the dog."

"It not as though it's your dog."

"That doesn't matter. You can't just kill a dog. Killing a dog makes you a bad person."

"You want to know what makes somebody a bad person Starlanko the
Magnificent? Desecration. Murder. Robbing graves. Reanimating the dead.
Pouring the blood of diseased animals into a town's only source of water.
All these offenses the man living in that canine's bowel has committed.
And I feel that letting such a man escape justice also makes one a bad person."

"I'm not saying we shouldn't bring him to justice, I'm just saying we should wait until after he's out of the dog."

"And just how do you intend to accomplish that?"

"With an expel parasite spell, naturally."

Bargle's eye's narrowed. "Why didn't you mention you had a spell that could expel parasites?"

"First of all, I just did. Second of all, I don't really have it per se, as much as Mandregal put it in his spell book. I figured you would have read it, but perhaps I assume too much. It didn't look that hard, based on my first glance. I'm sure if you gave me a little time, I could get it figured out and cast in on this old feller."

"You have an hour Starlanko. I have waited long enough to bring Arolic to justice. I will not wait too much longer."

It was not long at all. The spell was as simple as Starlanko believed it to be. Soon Rocky was hacking and coughing, and spitting up a small slimy worm. It was not a pleasant sight to behold, but Starlanko knew it was a great deal more pleasant than the alternative.

"Now you may turn him back," Starlanko said.

"I don't think that will be necessary," Callan interrupted. While
Starlanko had been researching the spell, Callan had found a few necessary supplies. Now, he lifted the worm and dropped it into a clay jar. He then covered the top with cheesecloth, and tied a length of cord around it tightly, so the cloth would not accidentally come off. "Perhaps Bargle will wish to turn him back once he has turned Arolic over to the authorities, but I believe that this method will make him much easier to transport." Callan handed the jar to Bargle. "And it is a great deal more fitting," he muttered.

"Thank you. Speaking of which, I really must be going. I'm afraid this is where we part way." Bargle mounted his horse, and was gone.

Callan returned to tending Ennorra. Starlanko went inside the house as well, but he to examine Mandregal's spell book.

"It's a pity," Starlanko the Magnificent said. "I didn't see an inn nearby. Some of these spells look quite complicated. They may take several days to work out, and I really don't have anywhere to stay."

"We don't have much to offer," Mellarra said, "but you may feel free to stay here."

"I hate to inconvenience you, but maybe if it's only for a few days."

"I really have what I wanted," Callan said, "and I know what a busy man you are Mr. the Magnificent. You may take the book with you a study it at your leisure. I have no need for it."

"Oh, I couldn't. You deserve access to any new spells as much as I do."

"No. I insist."

"Well perhaps... does Ennorra have any cousins," Starlanko asked.

"No."

"Then I really must be going."

And so he did.

Antipodean Adventures : *Australian Balladeers*

by Shane Cubis

G'Day all. In accordance with the theme of this month's *Trumpeter*, I will be looking at a pair of Australian balladeers from the past—Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. If you want to play a bardic type in an Antipodean Adventures game, then these men make a fine pair of examples. This column departs somewhat from the usual Antipodean Adventures format, as I have opted to include a sample of each man's work. I find that with creative types, one does not really get a full sense of who they are without a balance of biography and work. These two may also serve better as background characters in an RPG, giving a sense of flavor to the setting.

Bards in an Australian setting can be city folk out exploring the bush and sending back poetry or articles to metropolitan newspapers, or they can be from the bush themselves, having grown up surrounded by eccentric and interesting personalities to write about. The city folk are more likely to have a romanticized view of the hard life away from Sydney or Melbourne. Bush bards can relate to the people they meet on more of an even keel, having shared a common background, and may be able to fill something of a diplomat role in an adventuring party.

Banjo Paterson is one of the best-loved poets of Australia. Not only did he write 'The Man From Snowy River' and 'Clancy O' The Overflow', but he also penned the song that many foreigners think is our national anthem – 'Waltzing Matilda.' Paterson, whose real first name was Andrew, was born in 1864. His pseudonym, 'The Banjo' was taken from the name of one of his father's horses. He grew up in a rural area, where he met a wide variety of colorful bush characters that would infuse his later work. Paterson worked as a journalist, traveling all around the world to report on such events as the Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion. In spare moments between writing influential poetry, he also found time to become a major in the Australian Imperial Forces during World War I, become a practicing lawyer and run a grazing property.

Paterson's work as a whole has a deep connection to the land and people of Australia. He blends a sympathetic view of the bush and the people with a real sense of humor. 'Waltzing Matilda' in particular demonstrates this balance. It is the story of an itinerant farmhand who steals a sheep for his dinner. Upon being caught in the act by three policemen, he chooses death over punishment.

Waltzing Matilda

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong,
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,

"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,

"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the billabong:
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee.
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker-bag,

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me."
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker-bag,

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me."

Writer of the Month : Shane Cubis

Shane Cubis (24 as of April 2nd) is a bingo caller, school teacher, directory assistance operator and writer from Wollongong, Australia. In addition to role-playing, he enjoys playing a variety of board games, including *Diplomacy* and *History of the World*. His other interests include *Spider-man, MAD Magazine*, time travel, politics, and history.

His favorite movie is *Back to the Future*, and his favorite book is *Catch-22*. While pretending to work on the computer, he listens to TISM, Bloodhound Gang, and other random music. He has had articles published in a number of publications, including *Knights of the Dinner Table* and *d20zine!*. He also wrote and acted in 'Dream Date', an award-winning short film starring Australian cricketer Brett Lee. **Antipodean Adventures** is his first regular column, and he is very proud of it.

His favorite D&D humanoid foe, PC race and PC class are, in order: bugbear, dwarf, and wizard. His favorite RPG is *Hackmaster*. If he could cast one first level spell, it would probably be *Charm Person*, to the scorn and derision of his *Magic Missile*-favoring peers.

Cubis has pipe dreams of being able to write as a proper job, instead of a diverting hobby. His mother once called him a 'wordsmith', and he cannot conceive of any higher praise. Anyone requiring such a handsome, urbane and - above all - gifted writer should feel free to contact Shane. He is currently waiting by the keyboard, drumming his fingers in anticipation at writing deathless prose for you or your organization.

Shane and his charming fiancée Marnie recently acquired a black and white kitten named Spaz, who is fitting in nicely.

Contact the Authour
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Up rode a squatter*, mounted on his thoroughbred;*
Down came the troopers, one, two, three:
"Who's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker-bag?

You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.
Who's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker-bag?

You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"

Up jumped the swagman and sprang into the billabong;

"You'll never catch me alive!" said he;
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong,

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!
Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong,

"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"

Henry Lawson was born in 1867 to poor parents, on the goldfields of Grenfell, New South Wales. His father hoped to strike it rich, alongside many other struggling diggers. Henry had a very different life to his contemporary Banjo Paterson. Whereas Banjo was more of an outgoing traveler, Henry was quiet and retiring from a young age. An ear infection left him completely deaf by the age of fourteen, an affliction for which he was mercilessly mocked by classmates. Nonetheless, he remained optimistic that things would get better, and used his poetry as a way of expressing his feelings. In 1888, the Bulletin newspaper picked up his work. His understanding of Australia was easy to see, and he soon gained a loyal following among the readers of that publication.

Lawson was never rich in his own time. Like many belatedly respected artists, his writing tended to be on the side, subservient to any 'real work' he could pick up, be it carpentry or house painting. In fact, when the Bulletin sent Lawson out into the bush to report for them, he decided he did not like journalism and returned to Sydney. Here he could share a beer and conversation with mates – this was what he treasured most of all.

In 1896, Lawson married a woman named Bertha Bredt. After two children and years of unhappiness, they split. Lawson descended into alcoholism, which resulted in some gaol time. He died at the age of fifty-five, alone in his home. In his time he had written a number of important and influential stories and poems, capturing the Australian spirit and setting the tone for our national identity. Below is reproduced a fragment of "Eureka," a depiction of the plight of the diggers of the Eureka Stockade. It was written in 1889, thirty-five years after the conflict.

Eureka (A Fragment)

Roll up, Eureka's heroes, on that grand Old Rush afar,
For Lalor's gone to join you in the big camp where you are;

Roll up and give him welcome such as only diggers can,

For well he battled for the rights of miner and of man.
And there, in that bright, golden land that lies beyond our sight,

The record of his honest life shall be his Miner's Right.
Here many a bearded mouth shall twitch, and many a tear be shed,

And many a grey old digger sigh to hear that Lalor's dead.

But wipe your eyes, old fossickers, o'er worked-out fields that roam,

You need not weep at parting from a digger going home.

Now from the strange wild seasons past, the days of golden strife,

Now from the Roaring Fifties comes a scene from Lalor's life:

All gleaming white amid the shafts o'er gully, hill, and flat

Again I see the tents that form the camp at Ballarat.
I hear the shovels and the picks, and all the air is rife
With the rattle of the cradles and the sounds of digger-life;

The clatter of the windlass-boles, as spinning round they go,

And then the signal to his mate, the digger's cry, "Below!"

From many a busy pointing-forge the sound of labour swells,

The tinkling at the anvils is as clear as silver bells.

I hear the broken English from the mouth at least of one

From every state and nation that is known beneath the sun

The homely tongue of Scotland and the brogue of Ireland blend

With the dialects of England, from Berwick to Land's End;

And to the busy concourse here the West has sent a part,

The land of gulches that has been immortalised by Harte;

The land where long from mining-camps the blue smoke upward curled;

The land that gave that "Partner" true and "Mliss" unto the world;

The men from all the nations in the New World and the Old,

All side by side, like brethren here, are delving after gold;

But suddenly the warning cries are heard on every side

As, closing in around the field, a ring of troopers ride;
Unlicensed diggers are the game, their class and want are sins,

And so, with all its shameful scenes, the digger-hunt begins;

The men are seized who are too poor the heavy tax to pay,

And they are chained, as convicts were, and dragged in gangs away;

While in the eye of many a mate is menace scarcely hid -

The digger's blood was slow to boil, but scalded when it did.

But now another match is held that sure must light the charge,

A digger murdered in the camp! his murderer at large!

Roll up! Roll up! the pregnant cry awakes the evening air,

And angry faces surge like waves around the speakers there.

"What are our sins that we should be an outlawed class?" they say,

"Shall we stand by while mates are seized and dragged, like `lags', away?

Shall insult be on insult heaped? Shall we let these things go?"

And on a roar of voices comes the diggers' answer - "No!"

The day has vanished from the scene, but not the air of night

Can cool the blood that, ebbing back, leaves brows in anger white.

Lo! from the roof of Bentley's inn the flames are leaping high;

They write "Revenge!" in letters red across the smoke-dimmed sky.

Now the oppressed will drink no more humiliation's cup;

Call out the troops! Read martial law! - the diggers' blood is up!

"To arms! To arms!" the cry is out; "To arms if man thou art;

For every pike upon a pole will find a tyrant's heart!"
Now Lalor comes to take the lead, the spirit does not lag,

And down the rough, wild diggers kneel beneath the Diggers' Flag,

And, rising to their feet, they swear, while rugged hearts beat high,

To stand beside their leader and to conquer or to die!
Around Eureka's stockade now the shades of night

close fast,

Three hundred sleep beside their arms, and thirty sleep their last.

Around about fair Melbourne town the sounds of bells are borne

That call the citizens to prayer this fateful Sabbath morn;

But there, upon Eureka's hill, a hundred miles away,
The diggers' forms lie white and still above the blood-stained clay.

The bells that ring the diggers' death might also ring a knell

For those few gallant soldiers, dead, who did their duty well.

There's many a "someone's" heart shall ache, and many a someone care,

For many a "someone's darling" lies all cold and pallid there.

And now in smoking ruins lie the huts and tents around,

The diggers' gallant flag is down and trampled in the ground.

The sight of murdered heroes is to hero hearts a goad,

A thousand men are up in arms upon the Creswick road,

And wildest rumours in the air are flying up and down,

'Tis said the men of Ballarat will march upon the town.

But not in vain those diggers died. Their comrades may rejoice,

For o'er the voice of tyranny is heard the people's voice;

It says: "Reform your rotten law, the diggers' wrongs make right,

Or else with them, our brothers now, we'll gather in the fight."

And now before my vision flash the scenes that followed fast -

The trials, and the triumph of the diggers' cause at last.

'Twas of such stuff the men were made who saw our nation born,

And such as Lalor were the men who led their footsteps on;

And of such men there'll many be, and of such leaders some,

In the roll-up of Australians on some dark day yet to come.

Campaign Ideas

The wide range of activities and roles undertaken by Banjo Paterson shows how the balladeer (as a bardic type character) can provide a ready crux for an adventuring party. A roving reporter who regularly publishes poems in major newspapers would probably have to travel around the land looking for stories, and in doing so run into the kind of trouble that provides fodder for RPGs.

Other members of the party are likely to be strong characters, possibly resembling the Man from Snowy River, Clancy O'The Overflow or Mulga Bill. The PC bards could be writing down the adventures of these bush men. They are as likely to leap into the action as hang back to record it, and may answer a challenge on behalf of the party with a heroic and poetic turn of phrase. In some ways they have a very romanticized version of the bush, which may lead them and the party into trouble on a regular basis.

Henry Lawson wasn't much of a role model for heroic adventurers. His poetry, however, is full of imagery and ideas for adventures in the middle of Australia's history. Below are a few links to the poetry of both men.

http://www.poemhunter.com/p/t/poet.asp?poet=3084

[http://www.poemhunter.com/andrew-barton-paterson-`banjo/poet-7296/](http://www.poemhunter.com/andrew-barton-paterson-`banjo/poet-7296/)

The Poem Hunter site has links to other sites with information on the men as well. Excellent resource!!

Conclusion

As always, feedback is welcome. I would be very interested to hear how useful people found this article and any whether any of the past Antipodean Adventures columns have worked a real, live role-playing game!

Comment on this article online at this URL:
▶ http://www.silven.com/articles.asp?case=show&id=100

Memorable CRPG soundtracks

by Carl Batchelor

β: ¾

About the Author
Carl is a self-confessed "Cranky Veteran Gamer" who when not working, can be found playing whatever new CRPG happened to get released that month. Carl's non-gaming hobbies include debating and/or arguing politics, Phillies baseball, web design, and working on his very own science fiction novel. Although he has been a gamer since 1982, Carl's greatest passion will always be writing and reading what others write.

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When we think of the things that make a great PC RPG, we usually think of the story or the gameplay. I'll even admit that the graphics, especially if the gameplay isn't strong enough to take attention away from them, often make or break a game. Considering that video cards have progressed faster then sound card technology, it doesn't seem surprising that not many people talk about a game's music. While console RPGs have always been ahead of the PC in this particular category, that isn't to say that there aren't PC RPGs worth cranking up the volume. On the contrary, there are some whose soundtracks are so well done that they become remembered not for their visual impact on the player, but the audio impact instead.

To put it another way, great music can make up for less then stellar graphics or gameplay. Often times, the music works so well within an RPG that it does a better job of setting the player's mood then the visuals would have if they had been up to par. Examples of this can be found in the *King's Field* series, which although lacking a bit in the graphics department, have some of the most "unique" background music I've ever heard. Whether it's a crucial event in the storyline or your first step into a dungeon teeming with decaying undead, it falls upon the game's music to set the mood for what is to come.

Great music can make you cry, like *Celes' Opera Theme* always does to me whenever I play *Final Fantasy VI* and watch her attempted suicide, or it can make you nervous the way *One-Winged Angel* did in *Final Fantasy VII's* end battle. Graphics never age well, but like the aforementioned examples, a great moment in CRPG'ing stays with you forever as long as it is accompanied by the perfect music.

When doing CRPG reviews, I often forego explanation of the rating I gave the music category because not only is the sound the very first thing you'll be subjected to after turning on the game, but whether you like it or not depends entirely on your tastes as a gamer. What one person thinks is a great symphonic sound track full of subdued melodies and light-hearted combat music may seem a boring and borderline coma inducing to someone else. Still, all of this aside, when a game has an extremely good or extremely bad soundtrack any serious gamer can tell. With that having been said, this article will point out which PC RPGs have impressed me with their music and which ones impressed me with their lack of it.

Without a doubt, the best example of a flawless soundtrack in a PC RPG would be Bioware's *Baldur's Gate 2*. When I bought the collector's edition, I was thrilled to see a complete soundtrack CD packaged with the game. Putting the disc aside, I installed and played the game for the next few hours, awestruck at how each section of the city had a different tune attached to it in the background and how profoundly the music affected the story's mood. At the end of the day when I reluctantly stopped playing in order to get a few hours rest, I would place the soundtrack CD into my stereo and fall asleep to it. Although this strange practice went on for only the three months I played the game, there are still times when I listen to it for reasons other then nostalgia. I knew from the very moment I heard the music play over the auto-run screen that I was in for a special treat, and you'll have a hard time finding people who disagree with me. Whether or not you liked the game or its real-time battles, you'd be lying if you said the music was anything less then magnificent.

When Bioware made *Baldur's Gate 2,* they benefited from the mountains of cash they had made from their previous *D&D* based game. It was unlike *Daggerfall,* which was rumored to be over budget, long in development, and hampered by bad press thanks to its initially buggy state. Say what you will of Bethesda's second installment in the *Elder Scrolls* series, but it did things with MIDI music that no other game had done up until then. Giving each province in the game its own set of songs, as well as creating the absolute spookiest set of dungeon music ever, *Daggerfall* made up for its shortcomings by focusing on mood & ambience rather then graphics. After all, what *Elder Scrolls* fanatic doesn't remember the first time they strolled into the capitol city's castle and heard that regal sounding trumpet music? Nearly eight years later and the music still holds up against what is being created today.

Another fine example of audio making a huge impact in a game would be *Diablo 2*. With a soundtrack so good they not only packed it in with the collector's edition but also made the tracks available on their site as MP3s, Blizzard spared no expense in making their long-awaited nethack clone a musical masterpiece.

Having the honor of being one of the rare online games I've played where I happily turned the music UP, *Diablo's* tunes varied so wildly from one scene to the next that it never got old. Thankfully, the repetitive gameplay didn't come packaged with repetitive music.

Last but not least in the category of superior PC RPG soundtracks would be Sierra's little known and underappreciated *Return to Krondor*. Having had the misfortune of being a sequel to one of the most beloved CRPG's of the "Golden Era", *Return to Krondor* was picked apart by both Raymond E. Feist fans and casual gamers alike. Although I adored the game, even more so then the original *Krondor* title, many people did not. They complained about the graphics, the voice overs, the plot, and the turn-based combat…but they did not, however, complain about the music. If anyone deserved an award, it was whoever was responsible for *Return to Krondor's* soundtrack. Though repetitive in the beginning, due in part to the constant wandering you had to do within the city walls, by the halfway point in the main quest you had heard over twenty different tracks. At a time when CRPGs were considered a waste of money by the white-shirt CEOs pulling the strings, *Return to Krondor* had the production values of a Hollywood movie.

As good as these four games were, PC gamers like myself know the truth behind our dissatisfaction with PC RPG music. That truth is that PC RPG designers do not focus on their game's musical accompaniment the way that console designers do. This results in most PC RPG soundtracks becoming quite forgettable and often times, in the case of the last few *Might & Magic* sequels, very regrettable. Most of this is due to our two distinctively different cultures. The Japanese seem to enjoy music much more then we do and put far more of an emphasis on it, as any karaoke bar in Tokyo will show you, and we western gamers are more concerned with cutting edge graphics and authentic Orc blood splatter. Partly due to this, most PC RPGs are devoid of any memorable background music whatsoever, and make the rest of the genre look worse just through association.

Examples of a poor soundtracks can be found in *Arcanum, Pool of Radiance 2, Anachronox* and even my own beloved *Fallout* series. This isn't to say these games were in some way inferior, but their soundtracks sure were. Most PC RPG'ers know this and accept it as "the way things have been", so complaining about this is equivalent to screaming at a brick wall. Still, it would be nice to see more of a Bioware-esque effort put into every PC RPG. Or at least try to avoid the folly of *Morrowind*, which even though its music was excellent, only had a mere seven tracks which constantly repeated until you slipped into a coma.

As usual, if anyone in the PC gaming industry is going to change this trend, it will be the Europeans. Games like Larian's *Divine Divinity*, Arkane Studio's *Arx Fatalis*, and Piranha Byte's *Gothic* are all examples of soundtracks that, while not exactly legendary, are still far better then what we have grown accustomed to. Perhaps in time, we'll be able to buy special mixes of PC RPG music the way console gamers do with their own games. Though you won't see me holding my breath for it.

Name: Noriyuki Iwadare

Website: http://www.cocoebiz.com/iwadare/index.html

Noriyuki Iwadare is one of the many great RPG composers to come out of Japan. His most noteworthy RPGs are the *Lunar* series and the *Grandia* series. In addition to these two well-known series he has also done a variety of other work in the past years in the game industry. To focus on his more recent work in the *Grandia* series, while it is primarily a synth based soundtrack, there are traces of wholly orchestrated music within. The best place to find orchestrated tracks is to look to the arranged albums. He seems to favour for upbeat themes in his music that is reflective of the games that he composes for. In addition to game music composing he is pursuing a career in original non-game music. His latest album is *Ingmar: For the Beginning*.

Name: Yasunori Mitsuda

Website: http://www.procyon-studio.com/

Yasunori Mitsuda is by far best known for this excellent work on *Chrono Trigger, Chrono Cross, Xenogears*, and most recently *Xenosaga*. While some of his music tends to be heavily inspired by celtic music he is also known for mixing it up. On the *Xenosaga* OST he favours a more epic operatic style. The *Xenosaga* soundtrack was also one the first game OST's to be at least partially fully orchestral. More can be heard him in the upcoming *Shadow Hearts II,* in which he is the music supervisor. He will be   working with up and coming composer Yoshitaka Hirota, whom he also worked with on the original *Shadow Hearts*. In a surprising twist he will not be composing the music to *Xensaga Episode 2: Jenseits von Gut und Boese* (Beyond Good and Evil), as was previously speculated.

Star's Night - Part VII

by Aaron Todd

About the Author

Aaron Todd is a devoted husband and Computer Operations Manager in a Philadelphia suburb. A classically trained literature buff and an award-winning poet, he has turned his attentions over the last year to his long-sought-after career as a novel writer. With his first work nearly finished, Aaron is actively seeking a publisher and agent. In his free time Aaron likes to jog, bike ride, read Star Wars novels, and enjoys a challenge at any level. With Football, Hockey, and Lacrosse as his favorite things to watch, activity is never in short supply.

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Jagger had found Ynara's ship and with relative ease made his way inside. He looked around to find that she did not appear to live alone.

Ynara returned to her ship only to find that someone had slipped aboard. Now Jagger was bargaining with her, trying to squeeze money out of her while she had a gun trained on him. But then again, maybe he did actually want to help.

"I don't need your help." Ynara said with distaste.

"Of course you do. If you didn't your son would be here, wouldn't he?"

"And maybe I'm on my way to pick him up right now. Did you think of that?

"You would have killed me on the spot, then, wouldn't you?" He was leaning forward now. He placed her pad he had been holding on a clear spot on the console.

She watched him and for a brief moment figured she could probably shoot him, take the pad, and go. She couldn't take her eyes off of the pad. That pad had every bit of information that she'd gathered over the last five years in trying to find her son.

"So, what are you, some kind of mercenary, or something?" Ynara spat.

"Not exactly, but that will do for now," Jagger had never thought of himself in such a light, but he kind of liked the way it sounded. "Call it what you want. I try to help people who are like to help me. Well, maybe not like to help me, but are willing to help me. Guy's got to make a living."

"Yes, I suppose a guy does," Ynara eyed him up and down. When she first left the Bollen, she still hadn't quite realized the ramifications of what he had told her.

If her son really is mining at Centrix, she would need some help. She didn't really want to let on so much to a perfect stranger, but he had gotten himself this far. He must be somewhat resourceful. She hadn't planned on hiring anyone yet, but this might be a good start.

"How long has he been gone?" Jagger's tone had changed. He was more human know. This had been a pretty intense couple of minutes.

She found herself answering him without thinking about it, "Five years." Whether she was relaxing or breaking down, she wasn't quite sure, but either way she had a feeling this guy wasn't going to go away.

"Five years. That's a mighty long time to live with the idea that someone has taken him from you. Are you sure you don't want some help?"

She could stop looking at the pad now. She looked right at him, masking the confusion that was tugging at her determination. The man who held the story of her son in his hands just moments ago now seemed significantly less threatening. Until now, she hadn't even picked up on the fact that he had a gun on his hip the entire time and hadn't reached for it once. It stayed holstered. This guy was either not afraid of her, or he was really stupid (which she doubted), or he did want to help her.

But why?

He could have killed her and taken her ship if he had wanted to. He could have thrown the data pad in a garbage chute once he had seen that it didn't have any financial information on it, but he didn't. And just now, he had symbolically offered her son back to her.

She'd only known this man a very short time, but it seemed like she might have to trust him. There had been only one other person she had been able to trust for years, but five years without her son had been a long time, and maybe this guy would help her. She had no idea what it was going to be like where she was going. She lowered her gun.

"So, can I trust you to help me?" She had lowered her defense along with her offense. She wanted to gain some sympathy from him now as well.

"You can trust me as far as you want to. I don't go running all over the place just offering my services to anyone that looks in need. I'm not completely discriminating, but you look determined. You strike me as someone who will do anything to get what she wants. For that, you deserve some help, even if it is for a price." Jagger stood up as he finished the sentence.

It was the first time she had really seen him standing. She hadn't noticed anything about him when she bumped into him in the bar. He was not a particularly big man, but he looked fairly strong. He stood about half a head taller than her, but his shoulders were considerably wider. She doubted that he took the time to exercise. It was probably genetic.

He was certainly not what most would consider an attractive man. His features were rough, but somewhat scarred. He had one very painful-looking scar that ran most of the way across his forehead.

Its color was slightly paler than the rest of his skin, which was relatively dark. She wasn't sure if she wanted to know how he had gotten it, but she might ask him later.

His hair was a dark brown, looking painted to match his well-worn smuggler's coat. Almost like the long fur of a Menalese desert fox. The coat had no discernable pockets on the outside, but she'd seen ones like it before. Guys like this always needed to keep a few gadgets and/or guns handy, so she could be sure it had some concealed on the inside.

His sidearm was kept holstered securely against his thigh. It was slung lower on his hip than she was used to seeing, but she noticed as he reached out his hand to shake hers that his arms were unusually long.   When he dropped it back to his side the end of his fingertips came more than halfway down his thigh. His hands were very thick, like the hands of a man who strapped leather for a living. If he had any fighting experience at all, this guy could most assuredly pack quite a punch.

"So, how much do you want?" She had to find out what this was going to cost her. Money was not in an inexhaustible supply.

"Let's not talk about that just yet. You'll pay me later and you'll pay me what I'm worth to you. It will be a lot, I assure you, but you'll find a way to pay me." It was rehearsed. He'd given this speech before. He was as slick as the grease off a hoversled's piston.

"So," he began, "what do you want to do now?" His tone was even more relaxed than it had been earlier.

"I need to get some provisions before I-" She stuttered, "-before we leave, but that shouldn't take long. When can you be ready to take off?"

"I can have my ship locked down and be back in about two hours. Good enough?" He picked the data pad back up again and placed it in one of the inside pockets of his coat.

"What are you doing?"

"Sorry, but we don't know each other that well yet. Don't worry, you will have it back as good as new before we take off." This guy was smarter than he looked. A little distrust might be a good thing, here. It would keep them both alert.

She didn't like having that data pad out of her sight, but so far, it looked as though he might be helping her after all. She would just have to deal with it for now. He might wind up coming in handy anyway.

"Two hours," She was subtly swaying her body forward and backward, fidgeting like a child. "See you in two hours."

As he turned and headed for the hatch, she watched him leave the ship and walk out into the hangar. She watched until he was outside the door of the hangar itself. She slumped back down into her captain's chair with a thump and the tension seemed to bounce right out of her in the process.

"If he had jerked even slightly at any time, I probably would have shot him," she thought to herself. She had been more than a bit nervous around him. After all, he was a bit intimidating, and he had the information she needed to find her son.

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The market fair was not unlike most that she'd seen. She only needed some more travel rations if he was going to want to eat and a second spare charger for her pistol. She would not need the entire two hours for her tasks, but wanted a little time to make sure her head was clear before disembarking with a man she just met. She might was well look around the place a bit, watch some of the locals.

There was a coffee shop just a block down from the entrance to the hangar, and she could use something to settle her down a bit, so she decided stop there on the way to the electronics store.

There were the standard of coffee shop regulars, the slicers and hackers taking up nearly half of the place. The best hackers were always the easiest to pick out. Completely anti-social, wide-eyed, and suspicious, assuming their species supported such features. There were plenty that did not, but she saw a couple of them in here as well.

The coffee itself was strong and extremely bitter, but she preferred it that way. Hot and stimulating. The more senses that kicked in, the better she liked it. The soothing dark liquid even had a spicy aroma, although it was supposed to be a house blend. There were no places left to sit, so she left the shop to get her rations.

She found a charger from a street vendor who had probably stolen it from a dead person or from a wide-eyed innocent, but she didn't really care. Everyone had a right to make a living, and it made things cheaper for her. And if she took the time to think about the kinds of things she had done in her life, she would probably never sleep.

The food rations she purchased she packed into the bag she carried with her over one shoulder. Once hydrated, they would be much bigger and would no longer fit into a bag such as this, but when you traveled as much as she did and had to pack as many rations into your ship as possible, the smaller the better. She often had to sacrifice taste to do this, but such is the life she would lead until she got her son back.

Now that she had the supplies she needed, she headed back to the ship and got the pre-flight checks done before Jagger arrived. He could probably help her with some of it, but she didn't trust anyone with her ship. No one knew it better than she did, and no

one ever would. She intended to die with that ship.

She carried no misgivings about her future. She'd been searching for her son for five years now and every new planet she came to, she knew that she might never leave. And with all of the space travel, if security force didn't get to her at some point, bandits probably would. As such, she figured she would probably die in space, or in some out-of-the-way place on some out-of-the-way planet.

In the latter case, she had installed a self-destruct mechanism into the ship that would only allow her to be gone for three days at a time before the ship would blow itself up and everyone nearby with it. There were enough charges on her baby to take out half the hangar it was parked in right now. Only her child meant more to her than the ship.

She was thinking about precisely that when she ran directly into a giant man—her face level with his chest. It was the bodyguard of that no good….

To be continued...

D&D Online Q&A (excerpt)

The following is an excerpt from an interview on Turbine's upcoming D&D Online MMORPG. Lead Designer, Ken Troop provided us with answers to our questions.

Since it has been a couple of months since we talked last, lets begin with a recap. Has any information you released last year regarding the game, i.e game world, mechanics, style etc. been changed or altered from what you announced before?

Ken Troop: As you're no doubt aware, we've been pretty quiet about details so far. The nice thing about doing that is you're unlikely to need to contradict yourself down the road! Our focus is still on bringing exciting D&D quests and adventures to life for parties of players, so that hasn't changed. For the world, we have announced that the game will be in Eberron, the newly developed D&D campaign setting from Wizards of the Coast.

How far have you come with the development process? Is the game engine complete? Have you managed to narrow in on a probable release date?

Ken Troop: We're one day closer to shipping than we were yesterday! We're very much on track for a 2005 release. Right now, our main focus is on combat and party roles. D&D characters have a wide range of skills, feats and spells at their disposal – ten fighters with different sets of feats, stats, and skills can play very differently from each other, so we're taking a hard look at balance and party dynamics. We'll be starting to focus more on the social aspects of the game next.

Will there be pre-rendered cinematics in the game or will all the visual be done using the game engine?

Ken Troop: Undecided at this time, though our engine is more than capable for such sequences.

Can you tell us something about the implementation of magic in the game? How many spells will there be? Can players create their own spells, potions and magic items?

Ken Troop: Magic will be handled much like it is in the pen and paper game. Spellcasting classes will be able to acquire, prepare, and cast a wide variety of spells. Players will not be able to create their own spells, etc. in the first release, as we decided that it was more important to focus on the development of fun moment-to-moment combat and campaigns. To do a really good job on Crafting requires almost as much effort and attention, and we felt it was better to not dilute our focus.

How will guilds be implemented? Can players create their own? Will guilds be able to compete each against each other?

Ken Troop: There will be two types of "guilds" – the player organizations that are traditionally called guilds in these sorts of games, and the NPC organizations that the players can ally themselves with. The Eberron setting is rife with schemes, plots and backstabbing, so expect competition at all levels.

How will players gain experience? Will killing monsters and completing quests be the only way to gain experience?

Read the answer to this question and the rest of the Q&A in our D&D Online mini-site at

http://www.silven.com/dndonline/dndonline.asp

Confessions of a Lejendary Mind

"What? My Avatar Just Had his Arm Bitten Off?"
Optional Critical Effects Tables for Humanalia and Beasts of Lejend

by Dale Holmstrom

About the Author

Dale Holmstrom began a lifelong passion for RPG's and war games in a friend's dingy basement in 1978. Recently, he has contributed to the upcoming D20 Medieval Fantasy supplement EARTH1066, and has playtested several war games. His other hobbies include hunting, Bowyery, gardening, mini-painting, reading, and PC gaming. He is currently finishing his Bachelor Degree in History and plans to become a Professor.

He currently resides in Saint Louis, Missouri USA with Theresa, his lovely wife of 11 years, and their cat Tiberius.

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Welcome to Confessions of a Lejendary Mind. This month I'm presenting some additional effects for critical hits. Why? Well maybe I'm a die-hard macho cist and enjoy seeing additional pain on the faces of fellow players when I roll crits against their avatars. This may be a true statement, but most that know me realize that I'm more than likely to roll a critical miss than a critical hit, so the whole maschocist thing is out.

The real reason these tables are an addition to my games is that they add some macabre fun to the system. Those that have played GW's *Blood Bowl* may agree that the black humor throughout the game's system enhances playability. There is nothing more funny than to see a Troll throw a goblin downfield and see the poor goblin land in the opponent's bleachers… ok, I'll save that for another column. Unlike many other games, I have added tables for the creatures Avatars encounter as well.

Not only will your Avatar's experience the pain of a "shaving cut" when they get hit critically, but your Avatar's will be jumping up and down when the LM states, "Mary, Queen of Scots" when they make a critical head hit on a evil Centaur. The tables are vaguely rules specific, allowing for a broad interpretation of the effect. As an LM, it is up to you and the rules system to finally decide what happens to critically hit Avatar or Monster, but I think you may like having a few charts to enhance your decision.

A final note concerning the tables: Dragonkin were intentionally excluded from the charts due to size and magical nature. Malevolent spirits and Dietal minions do also not apply for critical hit effects. Lejend Master's should employ common sense with these tables. Enormous animals and slimes are good examples of where these tables do not apply.

Well, that will wrap it up for this month. If anything, I hope these tables will produce a few chuckles and inspire Lejend Master's to be more creative in describing combat wounds. Next month I will tackle the controversial subject of the Berserk in the LA setting titled, **A Berserk for all Seasons.**

Critical Effects Tables

Notes regarding Tables

There are different descriptions of healing required; this is their interpretation.

1. "…until healed…" The Avatar must staunch the wound, either through ability use or extraordinary means for effects to stop.

2. "…until fully healed…" The Avatar must regain his Base Health Rating for effects of wound to end.

3. "…magically healed…" The Avatar may only use extraordinary means for full recovery of her wounds.

1. Critical Effects on Humanalia

If a REGULAR ATTACK is rolled and it is a critical hit. Roll 1D10 and consult the following to see where the attack landed.

1-Right Leg	6-Left Arm
2-Left Leg	7-Left Arm
3-Right Arm	8-Vitals
4-Right Arm	9-Vitals
5-Right Arm	10-Head

If the Avatar declared a AIMED ATTACK, just look at the appropriate column and roll.

See table 1 at the end of this article

2. Critical Effects on Animalia and Beasts of Lejend.

If a REGULAR ATTACK is a critical hit, Roll 1D10 and consult the following:

1-Limb	6-Vitals
2-Limb	7-Vitals
3-Limb	8-Vitals
4-Limb	9-Head
5-Limb	10-Head

If the Avatar declared an AIMED ATTACK, just look at the appropriate column and roll.

See table 2 at the end of this article

3. Critical Effects on the Living Dead

If a REGULAR ATTACK is a critical hit, Roll 1D10 and consult the following:

1-Limb   6-Vitals

2-Limb   7-Vitals

3-Limb   8-Vitals

4-Limb   9-Head

5-Limb   10-Head

If the Avatar declared an AIMED ATTACK, just look at the appropriate column and roll.

See table 3 at the end of this article

Table References

All the tables are spread over 4 sheets in an excel file that you can download here:

http://www.silven.com/ezine/extras/criticalhitdamag etables.xls

Table 1 - Humanalia Critical Effects Table is found on sheet 1 of the excel file

Table 2 - Animalia, Beasts of Lejend Table is found on sheet 2 of the excel file

Table 3 - The Living Dead Critical Effects Table is found on sheet 3 of the excel file

If you are having trouble finding the data or the sheets in the excel file, please send an email to support@silven.com and let us know.

DP9 review : Jovian Chronicles

by Nash J. Devita

Core Command Player's Guide: Deluxe Edition
Authors: Mark A. Vézina, Paul Lippincott, Ben Strong, Thomas Chevrier- Laliberté, & Pierre Ouellette
Publisher: Dream Pod 9
Review Date: *Feb. 23rd, 2004*

Reviewer Bias: I was introduced to the Silhouette system about two (2) years ago when I pick up Heavy Gear 2nd Edition. This title was received for review and future play.

This is the core rule book for *Jovian Chronicles* (along with the *Silhouette Core Rules*). This is a 255 page hardback with art (cover and interior) from Marc Ouellette, John Wu, Bobbi Burquel, Patrick Boutin Gangé, Ghislain Barbe, Jean- François Fortier, & Pierre Ouellette.

From the Back Cover

"Tightly strapped in the linear frame of the cockpit, you wait impatiently for the launch signal as your spacecraft emerges on the ship's deck and is hooked up to the catapult. Suddenly, a warning klaxon, a surge of light and your 70- ton war machine is propelled into the vastness of space. Skillfully, you search the silent void around you for signs of the attackers. A flare of ion light betrays their presence – there!

Plasma thrusters at full power, you bring your massive railgun to bear and fire in one smooth motion, already dodging a hail of missiles launched by one of the black fighters. As your opponent's armored hide buckles under the multiple hits of the hypervelocity penetrators, his power-plant explodes in a blinding ball of fire. The computer confirms the kill as you recognize the CEGA imperial eagle on the attacker's wingman…

Inspired both by classic science- fiction and cutting edge anime, the **Jovian Chronicles** will take you beyond the confines of the planet Earth to discover a solar system on the brink of war. Along the way, you will interact with a rich cast of characters and possibly alter the destiny of the Jovian Confederation – if not the human race – forever!

Review snapshot

Archetype: Core Rule Book / Player's Guide
Body: 10 *(Game Mechanics)*: They can be daunting but highly worth it
Mind: 11 *(Organization)*: Quite nice
Spirit: 11 *(Look & Feel)*: beautiful and inspiring
Attack: 7 *(Value of Content)*: Another book is needed along with this
Defense: 10 *(Originality of Content)*: wonderfully executed
Health: 10 *(Physical Quality)*: The only damage I would expect to ever see are banged corners
Magic: 10 *(Options & Adaptability)*: Many various styles of game are possible

How we rate our reviews

Scoring Definitions:
12 = Superior. Best of the best.
11 = Excellent. Just a hair from perfect.
10 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.
9 = Good. Most gamers would like this.
8 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.
7 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.
6 = Sub-par. Flawed, but not without promise.
5 = Poor. Some gamers would dislike this.
4 = Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.
3 = Very Bad. Among the dirty dozen.
2 = Inferior. Worst of the worst.

Get ready to enter the 23rd Century and step into the world of the **Jovian Chronicles**. Are you up to the challenge? This book features:

- A detailed world background and a rich setting for high adrenalin adventures;
- Extensive guidelines and tips for adventuring in the solar system of the 23rd Century;
- Duel- stats for the powerful Silhouette CORE rules system, a highly acclaimed game engine that uses classic six- sided dice, and the widely popular d20- based rules placed under the Open Gaming License;
- And tons of anime- style archetypes, weapons, equipment, and vehicles!"

Presentation

The cover features five (5) individuals in various action poses. The front- most individual is a red haired (cut short) woman. These people are all in front of a grey and blue mecha. There is no specific credit for the cover artist. As with all DP9 hard backs, the cover is a very solid gloss hard cover with a sewn (and glue) binding.

All of the interior art work is black and white and in an anime / manga style. The largest images, through most of the book, are about a third of a page. There are a few images, like tech schematics, that are a full page. The image placement, as far as position and content relevance, are top notch.

Content

This title offers the basics of this game, not the basics of the system. For the system basics, see either the OGL Core Books or *Silhouette Core Rules*. The exceptions to the basic rules are offered within though.

It is the 23rd century. The solar system has gone through many great changes. Some time ago, Earth became so crowded that expansion beyond the planet became necessary. Space colonization began. Humanity expanded all the way to Saturn (ok, Saturn's moon, Titan – Saturn is not solid).

Thanks to the faltering ecosystem of Earth, the plant began to fall apart. Some of the colonies announced their independence – first Mars though others followed. Earth had no choice but to let them go. Earth then went 'dark'. Communications were impossible – to and from, nothing was sent from the planet, and those that tried to go to Earth were never heard from again.

Eventually, Earth returned. A new government was in place and that government wanted its colonies back. Having survived for so long without Earth, these independent space stations and planets refused to fall back under Earth's control. Earth was not too happy about that and decided to try to take them back by force. They are still trying to this day and thus are the primary enemy in *Jovian Chronicles*.

Mercury is known as the greatest of merchant systems, Venus is the banking capital of the solar system and tries to keep to their own, Mars is now divided under two governments, Jupiter is known for it's great industrial might and technology (and is the primary system for characters), and even distant Saturn (and its moon, Titan) are a bit of a force now – although mostly a 'company town' of a Jovian (from Jupiter) company. Even some of the orbital space stations and colonized asteroids hold their own (though are heavily reliant on other systems).

Life in space is not an easy thing. The average living space is about the size of a dorm room at a university, not even close to the size of the average apartment or flat. Want to own something? Hope you can make room for it. One quickly learns to make friends with their neighbors and even rely upon them for the things that you might not have.

Such close quarters can also be very dangerous. If an accident, or worse – violence, breaks out, everyone in the area can be in the path of harm. All citizens learn how to deal with many of these things from the time they are very young.

This does not even begin to cover the fact that most systems, at one time or another, are at war with at least one other system. The dangers of war are even greater thanks to the level of technology and the simple fact that it is taking place in space. Instead of snub fighters that appear in many science- fiction stories, *Jovian Chronicles* uses humanoid mecha – huge battle suits. These are far more versatile, maneuverable, and deadly than an aircraft- design snub fighter.

The number of genres that are possible with this anime- styled science- fiction setting. Mass combat, piracy, political intrigue, and many, many others are completely possible and can be done quite well within this system and with the background that is provided.

Conclusion

The background is so fleshed out that in just reading a great many story arcs jumped into my head. I can't wait to run a game in this setting. As with DP9's other space- based, science- fiction line, *Core Command*, the basics are not very original but the execution and the details are totally new and beautiful, to say the least.

Despite the editing issues that are in this title in a few areas, this is the best original science- fiction RPG I have read over in a long time. I absolutely love science- fiction and mecha. This is the game that I would go to first, hands down, when choosing an **original** license.

Where to buy

Our affiliate partnership with FRP Games gives our readers to buy Jovian Chronicles at a discount from the link below:

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=5333&ref=sil

Through the Lens of History
Using History for Better Gaming

by Sean Holland

About the Author

Sean Holland is gamer with 26 years of experience. He currently DMs one D&D campaign and plays in two others. He has a BA in History (minor in Philosophy) from the University of Portland, Oregon, and is working on a MA in History at the University of Georgia. He does writing and play-testing for the game industry. If you look at any of AEG's recent One Word series of books for the d20 system you will find his name in there somewhere and he has had other writings published over the years as well.

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About the Artist
Kevin Crossley is a young talent working in the UK that has been drawing since a very early age. Now in the process of making his way as a fantasy artist, he can be reached for commissions at the email address below.

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bombjak69@hotmail.com

Vision 6

Youth of a Legend - Alexander the Great, Part I

Following last issue's look at the Persian Empire, the lens now focuses upon the man who destroyed it; Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, Emperor of the World.

Alexander is one of the most well known and colorful of history's great conquerors. He marched forth from his homeland, the small Kingdom of Macedon, at the age of twenty. He defeated every army arrayed against him, toppled the mightiest Empire of his age, Persia, and conquered lands as distant as India before dying at the young age of 32.

This vision covers Alexander's history until the invasion of Persia began, next month will finish his story.

Part I - The History

Alexander's story begins with his father, Phillip II of Macedon, who forged the Macedonian Kingdom into the major military force in Greece. Macedon had long been considered backward and even semi-barbaric by the Greeks, as the Macedonians only followed some Greek customs and did not fully adopt the way of the *polis* (city-state). Phillip had organized his kingdom into a tool for his ambitions, refining the Greek phalanx of pikemen as his main arm by using more men organized into deeper ranks with longer pikes (called *sarissa*). The phalanx was supported with superbly trained cavalry as both scouts and as a striking force. The Greeks never used cavalry in large numbers, so Phillip's army displayed unique flexibility on the field.

Phillip's armies defeated the Illyrians and secured his throne against domestic rivals. A marriage to Olympias, princess of Epirus, another Kingdom in the Greek orbit, gained Phillip further allies. Olympias conceived Alexander among many portents. Legend says that Olympias felt herself impregnated by a thunderbolt as fire flowed through her body and spread out across the earth. Phillip in turn dreamed he had sealed her womb with the image of a lion. Alexander was born while his father was away on campaign in 356 BCE.

Olympias and Phillip reportedly had a stormy relationship, they were often at odds. The couple had only one other child together, a daughter named Cleopatra. Olympias doted on Alexander and tirelessly worked to promote and support her son. Phillip often clashed with his fiery wife and went on to take other wives, as was the Macedonian tradition, which lead to further conflict with Olympias. Olympias and Alexander remained close and he sent her lavish presents from his conquests, but even Alexander occasional complained about how much his mother expected of him.

As Phillip's son Alexander had access to the best of everything including tutors. At age seven he was sent to learn from his mother's kinsmen Leonidas who was a harsh taskmaster. Alexander remembered his first tutor, who had made a sarcastic comment about his lavish use of incense in rituals by sending him sixteen tons of incense with the note "I have sent you plenty of myrrh and frankincense, so you need never be stingy towards the gods again." But it is Alexander's later tutor who is more widely known; for three and a half years, starting at the age of thirteen, Alexander was taught by Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers of the Greek tradition. Aristotle was trusted by Phillip as Aristotle's father had serverved as a doctor in the Macedonian royal house. Aristotle's focus on the natural world and medicine would benefit Alexander and his soldiers on campaign and Alexander in return sent the philosopher samples of the plants and animals he encountered. It was said that Alexander slept with a copy of the *Iliad* annotated by Aristotle under his pillow.

Alexander was trained in the arts of war, politics and horsemanship and he excelled in them all. He was recognized as a skilled debater, he played the lyre and possessed a fine singing voice, though he never sung again after his father commented that he should be ashamed of such a sweet voice. Alexander athletic skill was recognized with an invitation to compete in the Olympic games but declined as he would not have other kings to compete against.

One of the most famous stories of Alexander youth is how he gained his horse, the magnificent Bucephalas. This black stallion was a gift to Phillip but he was unbroken and unridable. Alexander, then about twelve, complained that the grooms did not know how to handle such a horse and his father challenged him to prove that he knew better. Alexander had noted that Bucephalas shied from his own shadow and managed to control him by facing him into the sun and

then vaulting unto his back. Phillip said to Alexander afterwards, "My boy, we must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is just too small for you."

Alexander was given his first command at the age of sixteen, when he was left in charge of Macedonia while Phillip was campaigning against the Greek states. Alexander led an army to crush a rebellion in Trace and was rewarded by his father with the rank of general. In 340-339 BCE, father and son fought together extending Macedonian power (at the expense of Thrace) to the Dardanelles.

The years of 339-338 BCE saw Phillip's humbling of the Greek states as the Athenian and Theban led anti-Macedonian league was decisively defeated at the battle of Chaeronea, where the cavalry commanded by Alexander was prove vital by splitting the Theban and Athenian forces. The defeat of the anti-Macedonian league brought all of Greece under Macedonian influence. Phillip forced his election as "Supreme Commander of Greek Forces" thus allowing him to prepare for his dream: the invasion of Persia. All of the resources of Macedonia and the Greek States were bent towards this one goal

But relations between Phillip and his son soon deteriorated as it seemed that Phillip was seeking another heir to replace Alexander. The noble Attalus's niece, Eurydice, had attracted Phillip's eye and was slated to become his wife, already pregnant with Phillip's child. Attalus' family was growing in power and during the wedding Attalus, inadvertently or otherwise, insulted Alexander. Only Phillip's intervention prevented bloodshed but Phillip's defence of Attalus drove both Alexander and Olympias into self-imposed exile. This split proved temporary, lasting around a year, and Alexander and his father were soon reconciled.

Alexander returned just in time. As Phillip was preparing for a triumphant entrance during his daughter Cleopatra's wedding celebration in 336

BCE, Pausanias, captain of Phillip's bodyguard, assassinated the king. Pausanias was slain as he attempted to flee, so his motives were never discovered but the Persians were suspected of being behind the assassination.

Alexander took up the kingship, a moment that he had been preparing for his entire life. Among his first acts were the removal and execution of those blamed for the assassination, which included a number of political rivals such as Attalus and his family including Eurdice's newly born son, Alexander's half brother. Alexander then quickly suppressed a number of revolts against Macedonian rule, including one in Greece that led to the total destruction of the city of Thebes and the death or enslavement of its entire population. Reestablishing control thus delayed Alexander's Persian expedition until the Spring of 334 BCE.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Alexander makes an excellent model for a conquering hero, or villain; ambitious, vain and immensely talented, Alexander has it all. He is a wonderful, if unpredictable, friend and a terrible enemy.

An unusual campaign would the rise to power of such a person, with the other characters being the companions and allies whose fate, political and otherwise, is tied to that of the main character. It would be a highly political game with chances for heroics and treachery, romance and adventure
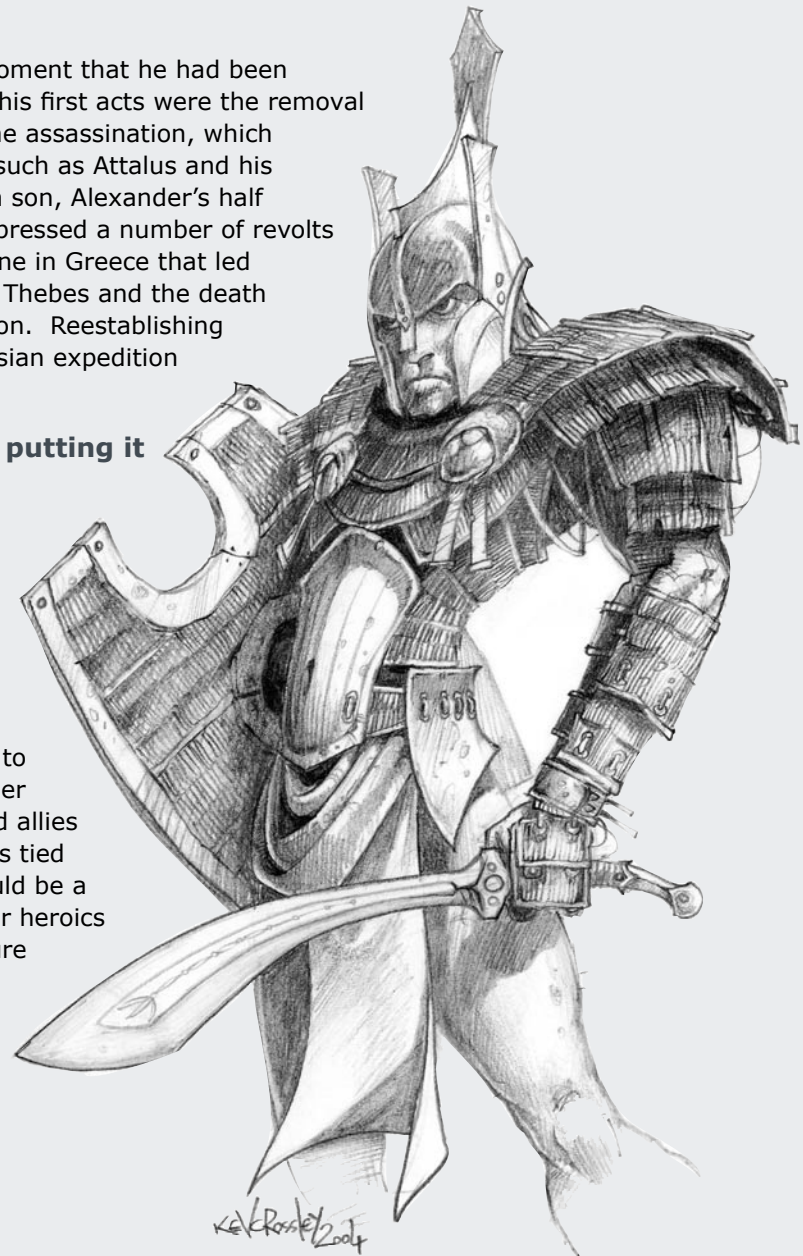
Supplemental d20 Material:

New Feat

Well Taught [General]

You have been raised with the best possible education. You are widely read and well schooled in etiquette.

Prerequisites: Having access to an excellent education, Int 10, Wis 10.

Benefit: Diplomacy and all Knowledge skills are always class skills for you. In addition, you may choose either Preform to always be a class skill for you, an additional language or a bonus of +2 to checks with Diplomacy or a single Knowledge skill

Special: Your knowledge of scholarly works may give you a minor (+1) circumstance bonus in dealing with some scholars and other well educated people.

This feat may usually only be taken at 1st level.

Polyglot : Created Languages, Part I

by Dana Lynn Driscoll

About the Author

Dana has a variety of different interests, some of the most important being reading, writing, learning, and playing D&D. She is currently a graduate student working on her PhD in linguistics at State University of New York: Stony Brook, with her undergraduate work in Literature, Writing, and Women's Studies.

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"Prukninkop fimbud gup pikilnel!" - Dak Tamble, *The Fodder Cannon Reporter*

Welcome to Polyglot, your source for RPG linguistic insight. This article marks the start of a new chapter for the Polyglot column—the beginning of a larger series of articles on creating languages. Many serious gamers begin to tread down the road of constructing a language, most frequently to compliment a homebrew campaign setting or add to a new race. Knowing about how languages work can also help the more casual gamer create consistent names for a region of their world, character or race.

Most people who are familiar with fantasy are familiar with J.R.R. Tolkien's Elven tongues while sci-fi fans have heard Klingon used on the various *Star Trek* series. Both of these languages represent successful attempts at constructing a language. The second, Klingon, is a fully functional language, created by the linguist Mark Okrand specifically for the *Star Trek* franchise. Another famous constructed language is Esperanto, a language originally intended to be a global language. While language creation is complex and tricky, you have your own linguist ready to walk you through the basic steps of language creation and answer any questions you may have along the way.

This article's focus is to overview the areas of language creation that will be covered in the upcoming months and to get the readers thinking about languages they may be interested in working on. We will also address some preliminary issues that language creators need to keep in mind.

As these articles progress, I will be creating two new fantasy languages for use as illustrative samples in these articles. Two radically different languages will be developed throughout this article. The first language is Gnomish, the language of the core gnome race from *Dungeons and Dragons*. I chose this language because

I thought it would be interesting to try to encapsulate who the gnomes are through their language, because it hasn't been done before, and because the gnomes are my favorite core race. The second language is Dwarven, yet another language based on a core race in *D&D.* Due to the close relationship of dwarves and gnomes, but their very different views on reality, developing the two languages simultaneously will prove an interesting challenge. The two languages will also provide a much more substantial example for the novice language creator.

One thing you will notice is that I am disregarding some of the little information the core rulebooks provide about both the Gnomish and Dwarven tongues, especially about the gnomish alphabet and sample dwarven names. I am, however, attempting to preserve what has been set up in most of what has been presented in the Races chapter of the *Players Handbook*. All of the gnomish examples in this and future articles will be shaded in brown for quick reference. The dwarven examples are shaded in green.

Why Created Languages?

Last month I detailed how to use real-world languages for your campaign. Sometimes, however, a real language simply won't cut it. You want to create a new language for your own homebrew setting, or perhaps you don't want to spend the time learning about a real language to use it in a game. Or, you want to take your character to a new level by using their racial language. Maybe you want to develop a unique accent or spell incantations for a particular character. Whatever the reason may be, there are plenty of reasons to create your own language for use in an RPG setting.

Before we get into the specifics of language creation, however, it is important to note that language creation is a tedious and detailed process. As I have

demonstrated in previous Polyglot articles, languages themselves are very complex entities. As such, for a created language to be viable and believable, it must embrace many of the complexities of language. These complexities must be considered and worked in fully by the language creators. The intention is to keep the upcoming articles as simple for the beginner, yet as resourceful and comprehensive as possible. I hope to detail many linguistic phenomena that you can use to create more interesting, multifaceted languages and shy away from created languages that mimic English in every way (as so many first attempts at language creation do). As the articles progress, please feel free to ask questions, request more examples, or ask for further details in the comments section. Also, feel free to send me your progress on your own languages for critiques and comments. And now, onto the basics of creation!

Language Considerations

Languages are not spoken on created in a vacuum. The society who uses them will construct the language based on their needs, their environment, the politics of the land and the languages that are in contact with their own. Languages grow and evolve as their peoples do—and thus, the history of the people is also a consideration for language creation and change.

The first thing to think about when deciding to create a language is what group of people or beings is the language being created for. The assumption this article makes is that the created language will be used for a race or people within a RPG setting. They may

be a long-forgotten race whose language exists only in the tomes, place names and knowledge they left behind. They may be a prevalent race who spans many areas and the language has widespread use. They may be an isolated race who are beginning to branch out for the first time.

It is best to have a firm idea about the race you are creating the language for before you begin the actual creation process. Languages are born, develop, and evolve out of the societies that use them. Here are some considerations you need to make:

Who are the speakers of the language?

The speakers of the language are the first and foremost consideration that a language creator needs to think about. Defining the people and the culture is the first step in the larger language creation process. Not only must you think about the group as a social unit, but also about the size and shape of the creatures you are creating. Are they humanoid or more monsterous/alien in appearance?

Gnomish

Lets move to our first example language, Gnomish. We will start with an overview of the gnomish race. The gnomes are a prevalent, if not underrated race in most standard fantasy settings. They are tricksters, pranksters and overall have a very inquisitive nature. They are known as inventors, researchers, illusionists and engineers. They enjoy precious objects, gems and are excellent alchemists. They are more technologically advanced than other core races. They get along especially well with dwarves and halflings. These are all things to begin to keep in mind when developing the language. The prime speakers of the gnomish tongue are gnomes, but there are other speakers of the language as well. Other users are detailed below.

Dwarven

The dwarves are an orderly, stubborn, courageous, down-to-earth and trustworthy race. While the dwarven people are widespread and found within many lands, their homes are carved out deep within the mountains. Their strengths include skill in battle and their hardworking spirit, but their main weakness is greed—especially of gold. They are known as master craftspeople—especially in the arts of stonecutting, stoneworking, building and metalworking. They are also known for their fine, yet potent dwarven ale. The prime speakers of dwarven are dwarves, although since the dwarves are such an old race and live so long, many forgotten history books are written in the dwarven script.

How old is the language?

The age of the language coincides with the age of the people who speak it. The older the language, the more historical possibilities for change and irregularity develop. A very old form of a language will not be understandable to present day speakers. Education and literacy rate will help slow the changes that take place in a language—but language change is inevitable.

Gnomish

The core rulebooks give no indication of the age of the gnomish society, so I'll have to take some creative license in that regard. The gnomes are an older race who have firmly established their place in the events of the world. Their language has developed as their society has, creating a rich balance between the old and the new.

Polyglot d20 Supplement #1: Alternative Speak Language Skill

Welcome to the first d20 supplement to the Polyglot column in the Silven Trumpeter. This first supplement is an alternative to the *Speak Language* skill found in the *Players Handbook*. It focuses on a more realistic way of utilizing the *speak language* skill, including levels of fluency in a language and accents, language learning, and conditional modifiers to language-based checks.

For a through description of the problems and issues associated with the core *Speak Language* skill, I encourage you to check out my past articles: Polyglot: Linguistic Realism vs. Simplicity in RPG Gaming (January Edition) and Polyglot: Realism Revisited (February Edition).

Speak Language:

The speak language skill does not work like other skills. Languages work as follows:

- All characters begin play with four ranks in Speak Language: Common and four ranks in their racial language (if any). A racial language can be defined as a language that the members of the race gain automatically as per the chapter one in the *PHB*.   Characters also gain three ranks in bonus non-native languages equal to their intelligence modifier. See chapter one of the *PHB* for information on racial bonus language choices.

- Similar to the knowledge or craft skill, each language a character speaks is treated as a separate skill with separate ranks. Therefore Speak Language: Common is separate from Speak Language: Draconic.

- No more than one skill point can be put into Speak language each level except as noted below. This represents slow process of language learning and the dedication needed to learn new languages.

> ## Dwarven
>
> *The age of the dwarven society is also not mentioned in the core books. The dwarves are an ancient race, with a long-standing written tradition. They have their most ancient histories still intact as they choose to carve everything important to them into their great stone halls or stone tablets. These tablets stand the test of time quite well and span back for thousands of years. Like the dwarves themselves, their language is rather slow to change.*

Is the language still in use, is it slowly dying, or is it forgotten?

If the language is dead and forgotten, the pronunciation of the language and a lot of information about how the language will most likely have been lost. The older the language, however, the more influential it may be.

> ## Gnomish
>
> *The gnomish tongue is still in use today. The language is not the dominant tongue, but certainly has found its own niche even outside of gnomish lands. The gnomish tongue is widely used in technical manuals, inventors guilds and alchemists recipes, and has been so for quite some time. While not as clear and direct as some languages, the gnomish tongue has the ability to represent detail and description as no other can.*

> ## Dwarven
>
> *The dwarven language is alive and well in the dwarven lands, and used to a limited extent in other lands. Dwarven craftspeople prefer to use dwarven in their businesses, so many blacksmiths and stonemasons know dwarven.*

What sort of society does this race have?

The type of society will have a strong impact on what types of expressions, vocabulary and connotations your language will have. A simple agrarian society will have a large number of terminology for weather, crops and animals but few words to describe technology.

> ## Gnomish
>
> *Gnomish society is somewhat more technologically advanced than most other races. Because they are inventors and craftspeople, their language has a rich vocabulary of technical terms, concepts and descriptions. In an attempt to encapsulate the gnomish prankster spirit, it is also a fun, playful language, full of language games and jokes.*

> ## Dwarven
>
> *The dwarves are an ancient, stubborn race. They are slow to change and accept new ideas—which is partially why their society has stood for as long as it has. They are also a very ordered, structured society. They have an especially large inventory of drinking terms and dwarven insults as well as a vareity of words for types of stone and tools.*

- Speak language is a class skill for all classes. If you are a class that had *Speak Language* as a class skill in the core rules (Bard, Loremaster) you gain the ability to learn languages twice as quickly as any other class. This means that you can put two skill points per level into *Speak Language* instead of one as noted above.

There are four ranks of language proficiency, each represented by a rank in a specific Speak language skill. Theoretically, one could put more than four ranks into a specific Speak Language skill, but there is no benefit to doing so. More than four ranks in any speak language skill represents someone who has extensively studied the language, understanding etymologies and the historical development of the language.

More ranks in a specific speak language skill gives you circumstance modifiers to some language-based skills when using that language. Language based skills include: Diplomacy, Bluff, Gather Information, Intimidate (when using verbal taunts), Listen (to hear people talking), or Perform (singing or oratory), and Sense Motive.

The following are the ranks of proficiency in speak language:

1 Rank—Basic proficiency. You can understand and construct some simple sentences, but any sort of complex idea is beyond you. You speak with a very heavy, defined accent that hinders comprehension. If you are using a language to perform any language based skills that you only have one rank in you take a –4 circumstance bonus to all rolls. There is also a 50% chance during communication that the messages are mixed.

2 Ranks—Intermediate proficiency. You are an intermediate speaker of the language. You can comprehend and understand all basic ideas, but have limited vocabulary. Your accent is still very heavy, but concepts are now less confusing and you are more understandable. You are not familiar with most of the idiomatic expressions or nuances of the language. If you are using any skill involving language you only have two ranks in, you take a

What other races have close ties to this race?

Defining what ties (social, geographical, and political) will help further define the language you are working to develop. Races with a close connection will have an influence on language, specifically a strong influence vocabulary. Borders between two different languages or areas where two languages come into contact are areas where one is likely to find language creolization (a merging of two languages) taking place.

Gnomish

Gnomes have close ties to dwarves and halflings, and limited contact with humans, half-elves, and elves. They also learn the language of their enemies—goblins, orcs, and giants. Any or all of these languages may have a significant influence.

Dwarven

The dwarves are especially fond of their gnomish neighbors, and tolerate other races such as halflings and humans. While they have little in common with elves, they have come to appreciate their assistance in wars fought against common enemies.

The design flaw that creators of languages may run into (and indeed, I will run into) is that with the exception of Elven, none of these other languages have been developed. It is difficult to work in influences without having the other tongues.

What is the level of technology and development of the race?

Generally speaking, the more technologically and scientifically advanced a race is, the more vocabulary the language will need to deal with the various aspects of science. A strong magical or divine tradition will also increase the vocabulary.

Gnomish

Level of technology is a strong influence on the gnomish tongue. When it comes time for vocabulary considerations, much care will have to be given for technical terms.

Dwarven

Dwarves are masters of metal working and stone cutting, so special attention will need to be paid to such terminology. Since their race is so old and slow to change, however, they have many ancient expressions that have evolved in meaning.

What is the climate like where the race lives?

Climate is another consideration that a language designer must think about. Climate often dictates much of how a society lives, how a society operates, and how a people create a livelihood. In an agrarian society, there will be many terms for weather, types of crops and farming techniques. These terms would be non-existent in a desert environment based on commerce and trade. An artic-dwelling people will have a large variety of words for different types of snow, but may only have one word for tree or flower.

−2 circumstance bonus to all rolls. There is a 25% chance during communication that messages are mixed.

3 Ranks—Fluent speaker. At this stage, you are very fluent in the language. You still speak with a light accent, marking you as a non-native speaker, but you can easily convey any message or complex idea. There is no penalty to language-based skills nor any problems with mixed messages.

4 Ranks—Native Speaker. At this stage, you are either a native speaker of the language, or you have studied the language so extensively that you can mask your accent with success. You gain a +2 circumstance bonus to all language dependent rolls when dealing with other native speakers of that language.

On Literacy: Any character with two or more ranks in a language is considered to be literate. A character with two ranks takes twice as long to read and comprehend a text. A character with three or more ranks is fully literate.

Notes on Speak Language: Non-humanoid languages (elemental languages, demonic or celestial languages) are very difficult for humanoids to speak. As a result, without significant magical or technological intervention, these cannot be spoken by humanoids. If you have ranks in one of these languages, you can read and comprehend them, but can only speak them with magical assistance.

Gnomish

Gnomes are usually forest-dwelling creatures who have a respect for nature and living things. Their environment is important and innate to them, and their vocabulary should represent such.

Dwarven

Dwarves live deep within mountains with a great respect for the secrets that the earth holds. Their vocabulary will have a large selection of words for types of stone, consistency of stone, tools, and geological processes related the earth.

What major historical changes have taken place with this race?

Everything that takes place within a people's past helps influence who they are. This same consideration is given to the history of a language, which closely coincides to the history of the people itself.

An historical example of this type of phenomenon is what took place in medieval England. In 1066, William the Conqueror, a Norman who spoke French, became king of England. Within the next decades, the English-speaking aristocracy was replaced with French-speaking counterparts. During the 12th through 14th centuries, a multi-lingual system existed in England, with the aristocracy and government conducting affairs in French, the church using Latin, and the large majority of the common population still speaking English. These historical facts are responsible for the large amount of Romance-language influence that is still prevalent in the English language today. This demonstrates how both history and politics have tremendous impact on the present linguistic reality.

Gnomish

This is another area where creative license must be taken with the dwarven and gnomish race. It is hard to create historical influences to a language without knowing the history of the race itself. These influences will be developed further as the language itself is.

What is the political status of the people? Are they the dominant race in the region or world?

This question relates neatly back to the previous one. As demonstrated with the English example, a politics can have tremendous influences on a language—even changing the fine aspects of the language itself. Politics, especially determining who is the prevalent race, can have serious influences on the language. The dominant race will often bring their language with them when they spread, colonize and conqueror.

Gnomish

The gnomes are certainly prevalent on the scene, but not through sheer force or political power. Their tongue is the language of science, the language of engineering, the language of progress. As such, they have a rather unique status.

Dwarven

The dwarves have a stable and significant place in the world. Even though they are fine warriors, their society usually does not stir up trouble with neighboring countries.

Are there divisions among the race that may result in dialect differences?

Geographical, political, or cultural divisions can result in different dialect areas and types. While this isn't something you immediately need to decide, it is something to keep in mind while progressing forward. Most languages have multiple dialects. For a d20 based game, creatures sharing the same language on separate planes would have all developed distinct dialects, if not separate tongues.

As you delve into the beginnings of language creation, constantly be aware of the race or group of individuals that you are creating the language for. The language should reflect the people in nearly all aspects.

The Basics of Created Languages - Overview

The following months will touch on a variety of subjects, each adding to the previous one. Much like constructing a brick house, the process of language creation is one that builds upon itself. Throughout these articles, I will be bringing in examples from our two sample languages—Gnomish and Dwarven.

Part II in the series will detail the basic building blocks of all languages—the sound system—known to the linguists as the study of phonetics. Before one can begin to build a lexicon (vocabulary), one must know what sounds make up that language. Not only will we be discussing English sounds, but also sounds found in other languages, resources detailing other types of sounds, and a discussion of how different races, speaker anatomies, or cultures might influence what types of sounds are found within a language.

Part III of the series will build upon the phonetics article to tackle the next rung in the ladder—how individual sounds combine to form sound systems in a language. The study of this process is known as the study of phonology. Not only will this article

detail information about possible syllable structures and combinations, but also give information on types of processes that occur at the syllable level.

Next we will build from the previous articles and begin to discuss the structure of language—in the fields of syntax (structure) and morphology (word formation). This article will detail the different ways that languages can operate, as well as the types of markers that can occur.

Once the basic building blocks of how the created language works are in place, we will then move onto developing the bulk of the language—the vocabulary itself. This will touch on techniques to quickly generate new vocabulary lists, influences into vocabulary, and creating a vocabulary that is accurately representative of the culture for which you are creating the language.

After we discuss the basic building blocks of language, we are ready to dive into orthography—i.e. the writing system. We will survey a large number of writing systems to give a language creator a multitude of options.

Finally, we will touch upon some advanced issues including historical change, dialects, language families, pidgins and creoles, language games, and do a survey of what types of languages the readers have came up with.

We have looked at some basic considerations one needs to make before beginning the task of constructing a new language. It has also detailed why gamers may be interested in language creation, as well as give a detailed roadmap of where the series of articles will lead. Join Polyglot next month in the Silven Trumpeter for part II of the created language series where we tackle the basics of the sound system.

Faith Based Initiative : Pantheons Creation 101: Part III

by Eytan Bernstein

About the Authour

Eytan Bernstein is a High School social studies teacher on Long Island. He enjoys RPGs, writing fantasy fiction, movies, and making up unique words. He has previously been published as a poet and is also an accomplished pianist/songwriter. He hopes to someday make it as a game designer/fantasy writer.

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Last Month's article focused on the first half of a pantheon that was created using the *Alignment Model.* This month's piece will explore the second half of the pantheon and conclude with a discussion of how all of the gods fit together as a cohesive whole. It will also cover the linguistics and etymology behind the names of the gods. For this month's Trumpeter theme of song, I have created a new goddess – Anisa – a goddess of pleasure.

To recap, most pantheons are based on some sort of model. There are many possible models from which to choose, but one of the most common is the *Alignment Model.* It is founded on the principle that a different god represents each major spectrum of morality in a given world. Those gods are embodiments of that part of the spectrum and all of their powers and manifestations should fall under this jurisdiction. These gods are not limited entirely by alignment, rather their alignment delineates likely areas of dominance. They have a personality and quirks all their own. When reading the entries of the gods, keep in mind the following: *this is only a basic framework of and introduction to a pantheon. It is not currently an official set for any particular setting though it has been tested in some campaigns.*

In the first part of this article we saw Pelias, the CG god of water; Barad Barak, the CN god of the air; Dareh, the LE god of the earth; Synnove, the LG goddess of the sun; Tiras, the NG goddess of agriculture; and Vega, the N god of magic. This month's article gives the second half of the pantheon and some final thoughts about pantheon creation.

The Gods Themselves, Part II

Hama: Intermediate god of Invention and Law

Place of Residence: Unknown

Names: The Great Smith, The True Protector

Areas of Dominance: Crafts, Trades, Invention, honesty

Practitioners: Clerics, Paladins

Worshippers: Craftsmen, Paladins, Inventors, Bodyguards, Soldiers, Lawmakers, Some Gnomes

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Domains: Knowledge, Law, Protection, War

Symbol: Scales of Justice on one side, A hammer and anvil on the other

Favored Weapon: Warhammer

Avatar/Image: A simple burly smith with a large hammer.

History: Hama is the opposite of and the counterpart to almost everything represented by his brother Vega. They do not hate each other, but their interests are often at odds. Many think of it as a sort of balance, but others see it purely as a rivalry. There has never been violence between the two and both still feel some form of brotherly love, but tensions are often strong. Whereas Vega is secretive, Hama reveals all truths. Whereas Vega is mysterious, Hama is open and friendly. Whereas Vega is distant and aloof, Hama is close to the people and cordial. He is probably the most active god among the people and is said the regularly consort with the higher ups in his church. He is not however, a force of good. He is concerned with truth and innovation, not how they are used. Thus, he will often make inventions that are used for evil by Dareh or Hel'demius. He does not like those gods, but is more concerned with act of innovation over how creations are used.

Dogma: Encourage innovation wherever you go. Help seek out and maintain truth and justice for they are the path to order and innovation. Keep the followers of Vega in check, but don't resort to violence against them. Though their aims conflict with yours, they have a place in this world as well. Teach and spread crafts and trade everywhere so that the people can tackle any problem and spread civilization. Sit on councils of justice and advise lawmakers for without justice, only tyranny and oppression can exist.

Rationale: Hama serves as a direct counterpart to his brother Vega. He is tangible, active, accessible and friendly. He is also honest and is very focused on truth and justice. Together, they create an archetype of opposing twins.   He is also unusual in that he is a combination of both a god of justice and a god of invention. This is noteworthy because most people assume to only have gods associated with one major aspect of life. There is no reason that a god could not have two unrelated domains.

Hel'demius – Lesser god of Destruction, Vengeance & Fire

Place of Residence: Unknown

Names: The Great Warlord, The Flame of Doom, The Black Flame

Areas of Dominance: War, Fire, Strength, Destruction, Pillaging, Vengeance

Practitioners: Clerics, Evil Rangers, Blackguards

Worshippers: Warriors, Fire Elementalists, Those seeking vengeance, Monsters **Alignment:** Chaotic Evil

Domains: Chaos, Evil, Destruction, Fire, Strength, War

Symbol: A broadsword dripping flaming blood in a background of black fire

Favored Weapon: Greatsword

Avatar/Image: A massively built man drenched in blood with a flaming sword and flaming hair and eyes.

History: Hel'demius is the son of Dareh, born of a mortal woman named Analara who was kidnapped and raped. She died in his violent and traumatic childbirth in which he burst from her womb. She is said to haunt all of the underworld, using her ghastly powers to harm women in childbirth, pregnant women, and infants. Hel'demius is a force of massive destruction. He casts waves of magical bloodlust over battles and cares not who wins as long as much blood is spent. He is sometimes at odds with Hama, but has taken care to prove that he has use for Hama's inventions and does not simply destroy them. He seeks vengeance on Synnove for destroying many of his schemes and wars. He feels the world needs to be cleansed of its weakness by destroying anything that is not strong enough to survive his assaults.

Dogma: Destroy, murder, rape, pillage and burn everything. Conduct wars for the purpose of bloodshed and destruction. This world needs to be cleansed and those pretending to serve good agendas are really only promoting weakness. Kill the weak willed to strengthen the herd. Create minions of undead to amass a greater army of destruction.

Rationale: Every pantheon needs a god of pure destruction. Hel'demius has much in common with Ares, except he has little in the way of cowardice. His own blind fury drives to constant and senseless violence. He has long since convinced himself that his actions are necessary to cleanse the world, but most of his worshippers are simply sadists. He makes an easy antagonist though he is not particularly clever and thus, it is safe to assume that any particularly complex plans wrought in his name were probably concocted by another deity.

Inhomra – Lesser goddess darkness and deceit.

Place of Residence: Unknown

Names: Goddess of Thieves, The Greatest Liar

Areas of Dominance: Thieves, Merchants, Illusions, Crime, Pranks, Lies

Practitioners: Clerics, Blackguards, Rangers

Worshippers: Merchants, Thieves, Illusionists, Assassins

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Domains: Evil, Luck, Magic, Trickery

Symbol: A circular rim with a coin that spins on multiple axes

Favored Weapon: Shortsword

Avatar/Image: A cloaked shadowy figure whose face is never visible. An amorphous blob of shadow.

History: Inhomra has never been a particularly important goddess, but she's always been an annoyance. In the last few hundred years, this has changed. Almost all who practice dishonest trade, crime, or murder worship her. Less savory tricksters, illusionists, and worse find her an adequate matron. She enjoys nothing more than getting away with a flat out lie or tricking another god into going against their nature. She cares little about how much trouble her lies and pranks cause as long as there is still a world left to trick. She is constantly at odds with Hama who never seems to laugh at her pranks or understand her perspective. They say that has some major secret that she is hiding and the other gods are leaping at the opportunity to find out. They are playing right into her hands.

Dogma: Open your mind to the myriad of possibilities. Never limit yourself to the truth though it can occasionally be a useful device. Always test that limits of your ability to lie for if you can't have fun, life is not worth living. Carry out elaborate pranks for the world is far too serious. Indefinitely borrow items from those who don't need them. You can undoubtedly find a better use. Lie, cheat, prank and steal to cause confusion so that none will discover Inhomra's secret.

Rationale: Inhomra is a class trickster figure. She is a little bit evil, but not on the destructive scale of other gods. She enjoys nothing more than having the last laugh, performing the best prank or telling the best lie. Ironically, she is a very poor sport when it comes to being fooled. She serves as a less vicious choice for evil characters with a less destructive character. She also has a very interesting trick up her sleeve. She has tricked Hama into unwillingly creating a mirror of opposition that functions on gods. She has used it only once to create Anisa.

Siyamak Tamal – Demipower of Corruption

Place of Residence: The Underworld

Names: The Dark Tree, The Seed of Despair

Areas of Dominance: Plants, Corruption, Despair, Rot

Practitioners: Clerics, Alienists, Blackguards, Blighters

Worshippers: Cultists

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Domains: Evil, Madness, Plant

Symbol: A Twisted Gnarled Black Tree

Favored Weapon: None.

Avatar/Image: Never seems to move from its place.

History: Little is known about demonic entity known as the Dark Tree. It's followers seem to derive a great deal of power from the creature, but they are as much in the dark about its true origins as the rest of the world. It is suspected by some that the creature is a massively powerful transplant from a dark and twisted arboreal plane. Its motivations are unknown though clearly it is affected the other gods in a negative way. They are attempting to ascertain more information to learn how to strike against it.

Dogma: Though the tree has given no formal commands to its followers, they have claimed visions and messages from it. The cultists generally seek to corrupt and despoil all that is good, holy or natural in the world. They embrace deceit, murder and depravity on all levels as well as all other things evil. Only truly disturbed or mentally (and often physically) scarred people join. It is a haven of the deformed when there are few other places for them to go. Think of the cult as an evil network of spies and cultists who seek to undermine the world order at all times.

Rationale: Siyamak Tamal serves as the ultimate mystery to both the gods and mortals. It is unknown where the being came from and what it is doing. The gods suspect that the creature has answers to many of their most pressing questions, but few would (or could) venture to do anything about it.

Anisa – Intermediate Goddess (clone) of Pleasure & Hedonism

Place of Residence: Unknown

Names: The One True Pleasure

Areas of Dominance: Music, Pleasure, Sex, Hedonism

Practitioners: Clerics, Druids

Worshippers: Bards, Prostitutes, Hedonists

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Domains: Earth, Evil, Plant, Protection

Symbol: A triangle of vines

Favored Weapon: A sickle

Avatar/Image: A voluptuous red haired naked woman whose only covering is her long and wild red hair.

History: Anisa is a new goddess, created when Inhomra disguised her Mirror of Opposition as a perfectly clear pool of water. Tiras happened to view it when she passed. This created Anisa, a clone with all the abilities of Tiras. Anisa is a perversion of everything important to Tiras. She values only hedonism and cares little for creation or procreation.

The Etymology of The Gods Names

Many of the gods in this pantheon were named based on their domains. The meanings of each name (with a few exceptions – notably Pelias, Hama, Hel'demius and Inhomra) correspond to the dominant aspect of the god. Pelias is a special case for he is a relatively unimportant figure in Greek mythology with relations to Poseiden – hence the connection to the sea. Hama Hel'demius and Inhomra were names I made up.

Barad Barak is Hebrew. Barad is modern Hebrew for hail and Barak is lightning (and also happens to be the name of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak). Dareh is Armenian for "wealthy one." I took it, along with several other names from www.babynames.com – a great site to search for names. Synnove (also taken from the site) is Scandinavian for "Sun Gift." Tiras is Hebrew for corn. Vega is latin for "Falling Star." It happens to be female, but the god is so androgynous that I felt it really didn't matter. Siyamak is Persian for "Man with Dark Eyes" and Tamal is Hindi for "Dark Tree" (both taken from the site). I really wanted something exotic sounding and this fit perfectly. Anisa is of African origin means Joy and Pleasure.

She often masquerades as Tiras and only a few mortals – those that she has deemed fit – know of her existence. Her greatest desire is to kill Tiras and usurp her position as consort to the king of the gods. She seemed to have received some sort of special additional domain related to song in her creation, an unintended side effect of the mirror. This has garnered a few additional worshippers for her in the form of bards and other musicians.

Dogma: She has little dogma as she doesn't really know what she's doing. She's only been in existence for a few months and has a handful of followers. Right now, she preaches hedonism alone.

Rationale: Anisa was created in honor of this month's theme of Song. She has yet to make a significant mark on the world, though her appearance signals great change (and trouble) for the pantheon.

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These are the nine main gods (and two less important ones) of the pantheon. Together, they cover most of the essential aspects of life. They have domain over the elements, knowledge, war, justice, and various other key aspects of life. The *Alignment System* keeps a balance among the gods, though some are clearly more powerful than others. Besides alignment, the glue that binds the gods together is their common mystery. Siyamak Tamal seems to hold their origin in his roots, but no one can pry it away from them. The being has already corrupted one of the gods and hopes to sink its roots into others.

This model works well and has a lot of interesting gods, but it still somewhat limited in scope. As mentioned earlier, it is necessary to expand each god in order to give them more depth. Each would have two to five servant deities or aspects that would act as conduits for the gods power in the world. Each would represent a different aspect of the god's portfolio. For instance, Synnove might have three servants: one representing her aspect of honorable war, another for her sun aspect and a third for her spirit of honor, chivalry and justice. These would be linked to her, but are separate beings with their own abilities and aims. Some gods might usurp lesser powers with related abilities and domains. This allows some deities to have powers that are seemingly unrelated – perhaps the reason for Hama's two distinct personalities. This would allow for a fleshing out of the pantheon and is also an interesting twist on the *Alignment Model*.

Writing a pantheon is a difficult task for there are many factors that must be considered, not the least of which is whether or not the pantheon is compelling and interesting. As with every creation, some pantheons (and some deities) will be better and more interesting than others. The quality of a pantheon is based on the interesting and multifaceted nature of the gods, their relationships and conflicts and even their names.   Ultimately, unless you are publishing your pantheon, the most important thing is to fit the gods and the pantheon as a whole to the world in which you are running your game. It doesn't matter if your concept is great if the gods are all wrong for your campaign. For more information on the various aspects of creating a pantheon, see part I of this article series.

In next month's Faith Based Initiative, I will be exploring the question of whether or not gaming is a spiritual act. Does role-playing (or at least good role-playing) give us a greater awareness and understanding of human nature and spirituality? Do gamers play RPGs in lieu of religion (how many religious gamers have you met?) How can we make gaming more spiritual (or enhance the introspection that comes with playing a character? This will compliment my first article that considered whether gaming and religion were like oil and water. It will also dovetail with my article that dealt with the history of criticisms of role-playing.

A Warriors Guide to Magic Lecture V : Cascades

by Lance Kepner

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Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen please take your seats. We must begin in earnest because the importance of my current lecture will expand far beyond the reaches of this room and begin spilling into the multiverse as I speak.

When I last spoke with you all I had the pleasure of speaking on behalf of the Arcane Styles (http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=208) that I helped develop in my own laboratory. After reading some comments, and double-checking my calculations I came upon some fascinating discoveries. As I rummaged through my equipment frantically searching for the necessary devices, I soon realized the impact of my newest inventions. The entire magic world would revel in their magnificence, and rightfully so. So prepare to be bamboozled, flabbergasted, and downright amazed by the invention of Cascades!

The Cascade

So what are cascades, you may be asking yourself. And you would be right to do so. And I will answer. Cascades are simply and ultimately a single spell. And while that may seem rather mundane, I assure you, cascades are anything but. Cascades generally come in three major forms: Augmenters, Barrages, and Hybrids. But before I delve into the complexities of each form of cascade, I must first enlighten you on the actual entity.

A cascade, as I have stated before, is simply one single spell. This single spell, however, consists of exactly three spells, no more and no less. In essence one single spell, the cascade, has the same effect as casting three spells. The cascade's spell level is half of the combined spell levels of all spells involved (0th count as .5), rounded up. A cascade's spell level can never be lower than the highest-level spell involved in the cascade. Also all spells involved in the cascade must be from the same school. All cascades have the combined components of each of the spells involved, including material components. These components are not jumbled together, but are used as each part of the cascade is cast. All spells in the cascade must have the same casting time, but do not require the same range, target, or duration (although spells that hold charges per round do not do so after the casting such as *shocking grasp*, and spells that have per round effects like *produce flame* are not usable in cascades).

A target still receives any saving throw available by the spells involved in cascades (using the cascade spell level, not the actual spell level of the spell involved, to determine DC), and each spell involved applies spell resistance if applicable, but only to that spell and not the entire cascade (unless each spell involved allows spell resistance, in which case the check is rolled only once with the cascade having a +2 bonus to the DC).

The effects of a cascade happen in a specified order and cannot be changed or altered unless a new cascade is researched. Once a cascade has begun it cannot be stopped until it has completed. A caster can choose not to follow through with the cascade but must spend the casting time of the cascade each round to release the magic energy in a non-harmful way to the caster. If this is not done, the caster takes 1d6 points of magical energy damage per spell level of the non-used segment spells. For example, if a cascade uses a 1st, 5th, and 5th level spell, and the caster does not want to continue casting and chooses to ditch the cascade after the 1st level spell, he takes 10d6 points of magical energy damage immediately. Finally, the combined spell level of a cascade cannot exceed 18.

It is time for an example. For instance take the following:

Apprentice's Assault [Cascade, Barrage]
Evocation
Level: Sor/Wiz 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels), Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels), Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Effect: Burst of light, ray, force.
Target: Single or multiple targets
Duration: Instantaneous effects each 1/round.
Saving Throw: Fort negates, none, none.
Spell Resistance: Yes
Spells Involved: *flare, ray of frost, magic missile.*

Apprentice's Assault begins with a first round *flare*, followed by a second round *ray of frost,* and ends with a third round *magic missile* attack.

Who Can Use Cascades?

Cascades are rare spells developed through laborious practices by both wizards and sorcerers. Bards can develop certain cascades that aid them in their performances and tricks, allowing them a wider repertoire of entertaining abilities. Divine casters can use cascades for such purposes as ceremonies and rituals.

Cascades have two basic requirements. All cascades must be researched, and a caster must know all the spells involved in the cascade. For prepared arcane casters this simply means they must possess the cascade's segment spells within their spellbooks. For prepared divine casters the segment spells must be on their list, including domains. For spontaneous arcane and divine casters they must actually know the segment spells.

Researching Cascades

To research a cascade requires time, effort, and money. Following the core research rules (or your own house rules) simply treat the actual cascade spell level as one level higher for purposes of determine research costs and time. For instance to research a normal 1st level spell requires 1,000gp and one week of time in a well-stocked library. After that week a DC 11 spellcraft check is made and if successful the spell is learned. If I wanted to research a 1st level cascade, it would take me 2 weeks and 2,000gp and a spellcraft check of DC 12. This extra time accounts for the rigorous testing process that is involved with cascades. The slick motions and timing are of utmost importance. A cascade also requires in depth research as to the probability of the segment spells working with one another.

What Are the Different Types of Cascades?

As I stated earlier cascades come in three major types: Augmenters, Barrages, and Hybrids. Each is named for their primary purpose. Other types may exist, and I hope to achieve some great breakthroughs soon with regards to those other types.
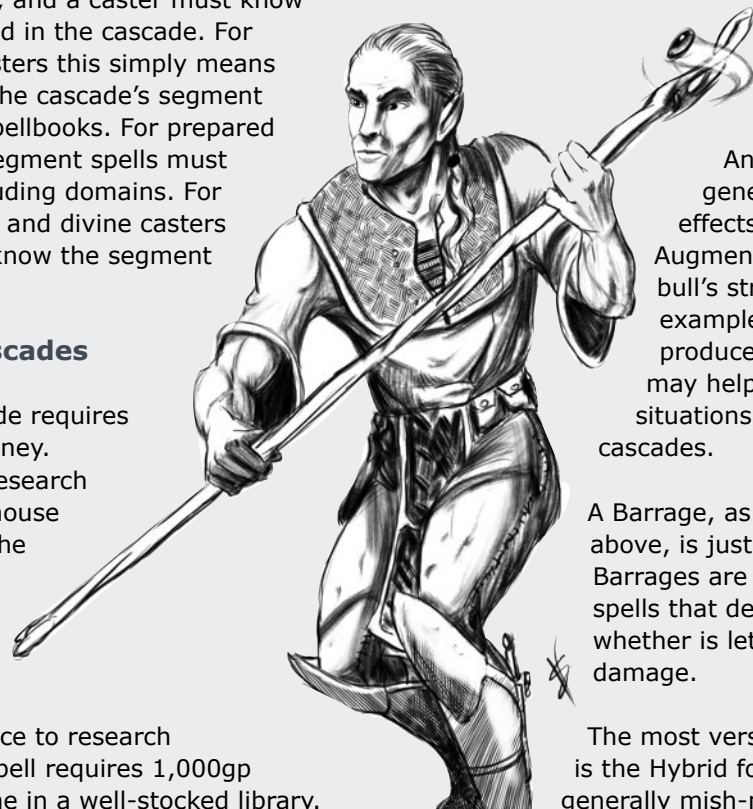
An Augmenter is a cascade that generally produces enhancement effects upon the caster. Augmentations like enlarge person, bull's strength, and fly are good examples. These cascades generally produce a wide range of effects that may help the caster prepare for many situations by only preparing a few cascades.

A Barrage, as you can see by the example above, is just what the name means. Barrages are always filled with segment spells that deal damage in some form whether is lethal, nonlethal or ability damage.

The most versatile form of cascades is the Hybrid form. These cascades are generally mish-mash mixes of spells (of the same school of course) that produce an effect the caster is looking for. Maybe a cleric does not want to spontaneously lose three spells for three cure moderate wounds and so has prepared a cascade with that purpose in mind. Hybrid cascade possibilities are nearly endless.

Why Use Cascades?

Cascades take a lot of time and money to develop, but offer great returns. For prepared casters the benefits are obvious. One cascade can now take the place of three prepared spells. If you are wading into battle, perhaps instead of preparing three magic missiles you only want to prepare one barrage cascade and some other 1st level spells. The cleric

each segment) and the spell level would increase from a 1st level spell to a 2nd level spell. In this example note that maximize would not be allowed, since *flare* cannot be maximized. You cannot apply a metamagic feat that only affects the cascade itself (such as repeat spell T&B).

Q: Do the benefits of school specialization apply to a cascade?

A: Yes, since each segment spell within the cascade must be of the same school.

example above is a great use of cascades for divine casters.

For spontaneous casters it may seem like a waste to know three spells, and then know a fourth generally higher level spell that uses those already known spells, but with the amount of spells per day spontaneous casters receive, cascades can add even more power and versatility to their repertoire.

Why Not To Use Cascades?

While the benefits are obvious, the disadvantages so too should be obvious. Once you begin casting you are locked into the cascade for a minimum of three rounds (unless quickened) and getting out of a cascade can be dangerous. A spontaneous caster must know all the spells involved in order to know the cascade, and this could lead to over specialization, or bad use of spell slots. Combat changes rapidly from moment to moment, as do most situations, so use of a cascade may not be advisable if you need to take other actions or perform other roles during those situations.

Conclusion

Cascades offer a powerful and balanced tool to all spellcasters looking to expand their horizons. The paradigms of mundane spellcasting must be shunted, and we must begin to explore the true nature of magic. Only by inventing, or possibly re-inventing, these forms of magic use can we ever hope to achieve the magic magnificence of our ancients. I hope you all research your own cascades and use them with great thought and wisdom. I am on the verge of breakthrough with regards to cascades that will make them even more powerful, but that will have to wait until next time. I leave you with four cascades that I have researched, and while you will have to research them yourselves, it should give you a good idea of what cascades can accomplish.

- Orph Maloney

Appendix A: Cascade Examples

Apprentice's Assault [Cascade, Barrage]
Evocation
Level: Sor/Wiz 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels), Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels), Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Effect: Burst of light, ray, force.
Target: Single or multiple targets
Duration: Instantaneous effects each 1/round.
Saving Throw: Fort negates, none, none.
Spell Resistance: Yes
Spells Involved: *flare, ray of frost, magic missile.*

Apprentice's Assault begins with a first round *flare,* followed by a second round *ray of frost*, and ends with a third round *magic missile* attack.

Treat all spells as per their entries in the *PHB.*

Holy Assault [Cascade, Barrage]
Evocation
Level: Cleric 5
Components: V, S, DF
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Close (25 ft. +5 ft./2 levels), Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level), Medium (100 ft. + 0 ft./level)
Effect: Burst of sound (10-ft. radius spread), ray, Cylinder (10-ft. radius, 40ft. high)
Target: Single or multiple targets
Duration: Instantaneous effects each 1/round.
Saving Throw: Fort partial, none, Reflex half.
Spell Resistance: Yes
Spells Involved: *sound burst, searing light, flame strike.*

Holy Assault begins with a crushing *sound burst* in the first round, followed by a *searing light* in the second round, and finishing with a *flame strike* in the third round.

Treat all spells as per their entries in the *PHB*.

Illusionary Performance [Cascade, Hybrid]
Illusion (Figment)
Level: Bard 5, Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)
Effect: Visual figment that cannot extend beyond four 10-ft. cubes + one 10-ft. cube/level (S)
Duration: Concentration + 3 rounds (see text)
Saving Throw: Will disbelief (if interacted with)
Spell Resistance: No
Spells Involved: *major image*

Illusionary Performance may create a wonderful scene from a play with three characters or objects. It may also create numerous other images, or illusions that the caster can think of. The caster does not need to maintain concentration on the first two illusions, and they will begin performing the tasks as per the spell *major image*. After the cascade finishes (3

rounds), the caster may concentrate to maintain all three images.

Treat all spells as per their entries in the *PHB*.

Getaway [Cascade, Augmenter]
Transmutation
Level: Sor/Wiz 3
Components: V, S, M, F
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: You
Duration: 1 min./level (D), 10 min./level, 1 min./level
Spells Involved: *expeditious retreat, spider climb, fly.*

Getaway is a cascade used for those preparing a quick escape in any situation. In the first round of the cascade the caster is granted an *expeditious retreat*, in the second round the caster is affected by *spider climb,* and in the final round the caster is under the effects of *fly.*

Treat all spells as per their entries in the *PHB.*
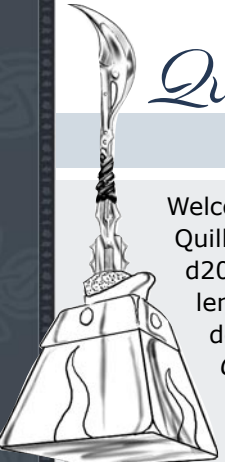
Quillion's Quill : Ryth Blood

by Steven Russell

Welcome to the second edition of "Quillion's Quill." Each month this column will present d20 material that I have developed to help lend specificity and actual mechanics to the details of my homebrew campaign setting *Questspire the City of Adventurers*. These will include races, core classes, skill uses, feats, spells, prestige classes and magical items**.** These designs have all appeared in the Silven.com forums and can be discussed in further detail there. This month we are looking at a new race known as the Ryth and a controversial new background feat *Ryth Blood*.

Races of Questspire

"Dragons, Ha! More than likely some sorceress with too much to drink and her pride talking. You have it half right though, sometimes you are simply born with it. The Ryth are an excellent example against the idea of draconic sorcerers. They are or rather were other races replacing parts of their very flesh with the stoic energy of spells. The gift of magic passed down to their children is quite obvious if you spend anytime among them."

- Excerpt from Mage Myths and Outright Lies by Zanna Barterhex, Tradewizard of Questspire.

I knew I wanted to introduce a new race of people to my homebrew fantasy setting Questspire. Yet I wanted to avoid the cliché's of anthromophic races or monstrous character races. When I saw Monte Cook's idea of a transformational race I decided I wanted to do something similar to but different at the same time. That is when I envisioned a group of people who were experimented upon, parts of the bodies replaced by magic. I named this transformational race the Ryth—a word play upon the idea that they were originally thought to be a myth and that they had rifts of magic as parts of the body.

The descriptions of the Ryth include information on background, personality and outlook. Remember that these are generalities and not necessarily true of every specimen of the Ryth living in the lands of Questspire today. I use them as guidelines, but feel free to depart from them as needed to make characters unique and interesting. These races are genetically incompatible with any other. Mating between members of different races will not produce any offspring that vary with their base race though there are sometimes traces such as those with the *Ryth Blood* feat.

Ryth

Ryth (pronounced Rith-in, singular and plural) is a catch-all term for a kind of formally different species. The results of magical modification, parts of their bodies are composed of magical energy. Due to their ability to *sculpt self* (see prestige races from the *Oathbound* setting by Bastion Press and below), magical transformations, and the various different racial foci, they have various different gifts and forms.

The Ryth were originally part of a fifty-year experiment by the Illren Empire, a group planar spanning human conquerors. The Ryth were created to increase the power of the Illren military wizards. The Ryth were slaves who were tested upon and dissected and by their Illren masters. The Illren Empire was hoping to one day field vast armies of powerful spellcasting warriors. Only the Illren Empire's movement of its capital to the primal plane allowed the Freedom War, a full-scale rebellion on a thousand worlds, granting the masses the ability to overcome the might of the Illren Empire. During that time, the Ryth escaped, joined the rebellion, and after the war have settled into the area known as Questspire.

By some definitions, it is a mistake to call the Ryth a race. Almost all Ryth were once members of other races who were forced or have chosen to transform themselves using *sculpt self* to alter a fully developed being into a magical Ryth. They gain a body somewhat made of energy and with a natural predilection for magic. They also become extraordinarily long lived as the first of their kind, a human by the name of Gharghest Redroar, is currently 150 years old. He was transformed when he was 100 by the Illren Empire.

Any race can become Ryth. While Ryth can reproduce with members within their own species they have difficulties within others (an Elven ryth and an Elven ryth can have a child but a Human Ryth and an Elven Ryth cannot). Many Ryth children have been born over the last 50 years.

Personality:

Most Ryth did not intentionally give up their race to transform themselves, both physically and mentally, into new creatures. Clearly, they have often become fanatic, driven individuals. They wish never again to allow the return of the Illren Empire or be poked and prodded by fascinated wizards. Ryth adore magic, being extremely curious and experimenting with its power often mindless of the consequences. Ryth have a particular affinity for sorcery, seeming to have an even more intuitive grasp of the subject then some half-dragons. Each Ryth's magic has its own

About the Author
Steven Russell is a would-be-game designer, long time Gamemaster from Dayton, Ohio. He is supported and betrayed by his fanatical gaming companions known as "The Group". They are currently exploring his homebrew campaign setting: Questspire. Other current projects include a Wheel of Time d20 netbook and and a Epic Level Campaign Setting code named Heavan's Battlefield. His favorite saying is "A hundred thousand lemmings can't be wrong!"

This Article is dedicated to Sylvia Russell Let me not be late in knowing and sharing all that my mother has been to me

Contact the Author
Star_weave@hotmail.com

unique color and flare and they pride themselves on developing their own distinctive and artistic spell variants. They would rather create a variant than ever learn something ancient if given the choice.

Physical Description:

Most Ryth are of moderate height and weight, with large and high brows or completely bald. Small-multicolored bits of energy comprise parts of Ryth flesh. They all have color shifting eyes—one eye never being the same color as the other.

Relations:

Ryth wish to live in Ryth groups. Many races, particularly those who despise unnatural races have an aversion to the Ryth. However, those able to look beyond that can find the Ryth to be generous and hard working. Ryth look upon other races fairly equally, referring to all of them simply as "The Unsculpted."

Outlook:

Despite their dark and tortured past, not all Ryth are loud, bitter or inherently violent. In their own view, they have ascended to a new form and a new level of being that brings them closer to magic. Their concerns deal mostly with finding their place in this new existence and in this new world.

Ryth Lands:

The Ryth have separated themselves from normal society because of their transformation and they have remained separated afterwards. They have gathered into their own quarter of the Lands of Questspire and established their own noble house. The house governs over the Ryth lands and people and for now the Lady of Quests has let them go their own way so long as they pay their support to her government.

Religion:

All Ryth revere magic as sacred worthy of admiration and veneration and all most all of them worship some deity of magic or magic itself.

Language:

Ryth speak Illren, Common and the languages of their base race.

Names:

Almost all Ryth adopt a new name when they become Ryth of their own choice. Examples include Juhn Brightfire, Lin Brimstone, Hithyr Glimmerwish, and Scev Sharpform.

Adventurers:

Ryth become adventurers for a thousand different reasons. However, many also seek to understand their place and the place of the Ryth in the scheme of things, now that they have a new form. Ryth may go on adventures simply because they want to take and retain control of their own lives, go where they please, and do as they like. More are simply curious to see new kinds of magic.

Ryth Transformation

The process of transformation to Ryth requires the use of the *Sculpt Self* feat . If a character begins play as a Ryth, this cost does not affect its starting exp or LA. It is possible for a character to become a Ryth even after a campaign has begun. Those that make this choice must take a level in Ryth immediately after taking *Sculpt Self*.The transformation is not complete until the character gains that level and spends the appropriate time of meditation (1 hour for every 100 xp required to gain the level). A Ryth character gains all Ryth racial abilities and keeps racial abilities that he already has (the bonus feat and the skills bought with the bonus skill points of

a human for example)although he gains no further benefits that would be gained by his advancing character level.

Ryth Racial Traits:

Ryth are very durable. Their form is magically enhanced during their transformation, giving them a +2 racial bonus to Constitution. However, since they have no patience for things they do not instantly grasp imposing a - 2 racial penalty to Intelligence. The Racial Benefits to Constitution and Racial Penalties to Intelligence from the characters base race do not stack.

Ryth have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size unless their base race does.

Ryth are naturally attuned to the arcane magic of sorcery. Ryth enjoy a +2 racial bonus to knowledge (arcana) and Spellcraft checks.

Ryth gain the bonus feat *Ryth Blood* (see feats.)

Ryth must take the *Sculpt Self* as his first level feat if he begins play as a Ryth.

Ryth base speed is equal to his base race.

Ryth favored class is sorcerer; the character loses all benefits of his base race's favored class.

Automatic Languages: Common, Illren plus base race.

Bonus Languages: Any.

Racial Levels: Ryth can take a few levels in "Ryth" as a class to develop their racial qualities more fully.

Ryth Levels:

Ryth can take up to three levels in "Ryth" at any time. Not all Ryth take any or all racial levels. Ryth levels

stack with a spellcasting class level for purposes of determining caster level for spells. If the Ryth have two spellcasting classes, add the racial levels to the higher of the two. Innate magical abilities gained through Ryth levels use the character's total level as the caster level.

Hit Die: 1d6

Skill Points at 1st Character Level: (2 +Intelligence bonus) x 4

Skill Points at Higher Levels: 2 +Intelligence bonus

Ryth Class Skills: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Knowledge (arcana)(Int), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int) Spot (Wis)

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Ryth with levels only in Ryth (no actual class levels) are proficient in the use of simple weapons, but no armor or shields.

RYTH BLOOD [BACKGROUND]

Your arcane powers are derived from a hereditary link rather than the blood of dragons.

Prerequisites: Con 13+, Sculpt Self, Ryth Background

Benefits: You use your Constitution modifier instead of your Charisma modifier for all sorcerer spell-oriented effects that use a Cha ability score and Ability score modifier. This includes determining bonus spells per day, saving throw DCs, and the maximum level of spells that you can learn. This affects only spells that you cast as a sorcerer.

Special: You can take this feat only at 1st level unless you take the Ryth Transformational Race Class.

SCULPT SELF [GENERAL]

You have the ability to modify the essence of your being.

Benefit: You may spend XP to gain prestige race alterations. You cannot spend the XP for a prestige race alteration if that expenditure would reduce your level.

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Level	BAB	Fort	Will	Ref	Special
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	+1 Con; choose one spell like ability from the list of 0th level sorcerer spells subject to GM approval. You can use this chosen ability at will
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	+1 Con; choose one spell-like ability from the list of 1st level sorcerer spells subject to GM approval. You can use this chosen ability 3/day
3rd	+2	+1	+1	+3	Choose one spell like ability from the list of 2nd level sorcerer spells subject to GM approval. You can use this chosen ability 1/day

d20 mini-feature : Unearthed Arcana

by Lance Kepner

"Dungeons & Dragons: Unearthed Arcana"
Authors: Andy Collins, Jesse Decker, David Noonan, Rich Redman
Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Review date: *2/24/2004*

Reviewer's Bias: I have personally been waiting for this book for some time now. I enjoy using variant rules in my campaigns, and I was pleasantly surprised to find a ton of extra information in this book and not just a compilation of core book variants. I received a review copy of this book.

A Book of Variants

The nature of Unearthed Arcana is variant rules. These rules can be adopted into most any campaign with little effort to add spice or flavor to areas that DM's think may lack such effects. The variants listed in the book are of course under DM discretion, and not for players to just "take" if they feel like it. Everything in Unearthed Arcana should be run by a DM prior to adding it to your campaign. In fact, while UA might be a great player tool, it is an even greater DM tool.

It is by far one of the easiest books to read published by Wizards of the Coast to date. It is not a source on select information or niche areas that tries to explain this that and the other about the product. UA is a book on variant rules, and while those who favor flavor over crunch may find this book a bit like reading a scientific manual, those who enjoy the standard WotC mix between the two will be in pure heaven. All the great crunch is in here, and may be the healthiest source of crunch around, but it is presented with pertinent flavor to feed the gamer soul. Included in this tome are great effects like sidebars dealing with WotC designer's personal house rules.

As the introduction states, 226 pages of variant rules will never see inclusion in one single campaign. So while you may use the Book of Exalted Deeds as your campaign manual, you won't be using all the information in Unearthed Arcana at once. Consider UA like the Complete Warrior or Miniatures Handbook; A product meant to provide supplemental rules to heighten your game... in this case all the rules are variants on the standard, not posed as standard.

Knowing how to use this review is almost as important as know how to use Unearthed Arcana itself. If you are interested in the entire book, then read this review like the book, front to back. But if you are only interested in one specific area, please skip ahead to that area. You don't have to read each and every entry in UA to get the most out of it. You could only read one or two variants, and decide to use them and change your game ten fold for the better. This is a book that you could look at once, use something, and come back a week, a month, a year later, pick up again, and find a plethora of new inspiration.

Chapter One: Races

A few variants are listed in chapter one that deal solely with races. The first of these variants are the **environmental variants** of aquatic, jungle, arctic, and desert versions of all of the core races except humans. These variants can be used instead of the standard races if your campaign is set primarily in one of those areas, or in addition to the standard races to

define areas of your own world. For those lawyers out there only the aquatic subtype carries a +1 level adjustment, but only if its added into a setting where it would be advantageous over a standard race.

The next variant is **elemental types** for core races. While not the same as a half-elemental template, these variant rules represent an affinity towards a particular element and not a bloodline or kinship. Races with this subtype apply minor variations in ability scores and racial bonuses to attack and damage. The four elements are represented with air, earth, fire and water. Half-races like half-elves and half-orcs are also discussed with how to apply the variant rules, since of course the other half is human.

The next variant listed in the racial section is an interesting one. It details a method to **reduce a character's level adjustment**. We all know the plight of playing a level adjusted character... early power offset by long-term weakness. A level adjusted character should be equal to a standard class advanced character in theory, but as it turns out the advancement chart of the core classes is not an even rise. The bar is often raised at increments and shoots way up near the end to offset the powerful high-level magic that is available. As is such, level adjusted characters cannot meet that swift rise later in their career and fall behind. With this variant, however, a level adjusted character, at 3x their LA can expend an amount of exp to "lose" a level adjustment increment, say from +1 to +0. An interesting variant to be sure, and it does set back the LA character a level here and there, but with the recuperative nature of the d20 experience system, it may be a drop in a bucket to gain those high class levels.

The next segment deals with **bloodlines**. If any of you are familiar with Birthright you will instantly know what these are, and if any of you have been following [Andy Collins' Bloodlines Campaign](#) you will also have a feeling as to what these are. Bloodlines encompass a host of abilities that a character can take, being that their blood is ancestral in nature. These Bloodlines can grant powers to the host as their ancient powers affect their bodies. Bloodlines come at a price, and the more potent a bloodline the faster one must pay the "bloodline level". While this level may grant bonuses related to your bloodline it does not grant many other bonuses. Common bloodlines listed are celestial, demon, devil, doppelganger, most chromatic and metallic dragons, elemental, fey, genie, giant, gith, hag, lycanthrope, minotaur, ogre, slaadi, titan, troll, vampire, and yaun-ti. ...And you were thinking they would only list a few! Included for each is a short description, and a chart with minor, intermediate, and major traits. Included also at the end are random rolling charts if you want to 'spring' one of the bloodlines on a character, or want to host a randomized bloodline generation campaign. I did notice reading through the majority of the bloodline trait charts that they all seemed at least somewhat alike. This was confirmed at the end of the section when they listed a 'how to create your own bloodline' guideline chart with what bonuses to generally give at what levels for what power bloodline.

The last section in this chapter details the **racial paragon variant**. These variant rules are basically racial levels. Each standard core race, along with some common level adjusted races, is given three levels. These levels can be taken at any time, with no multiclass restrictions or experience penalties, and their only requirement is that you be of the correct race. These paragon levels are pretty standard fair across the board, but are quite interesting. Each is granted some ability based on the races favored class, usually a bonus feat or bonus skill points, and an ability score adjustment. The racial paragons are quite interesting, and add flavor to your standard core races and pose an interesting play experience in dealing with very elvish elves.

Overall the races chapter is a very robust 41 pages of pure enjoyment. The five variant rules listed are interesting and richly detailed, and can add excitement and novelty to any campaign. These core adjustments can dramatically alter a campaign, or subtly enhance it, or both at the same time per DM discretion.

Chapter Two: Classes

The next chapter in Unearthed Arcana is all about variant rules for classes. While many of you might spend a few minutes deciding on a race, we often spend much longer deliberating on character class. Trying to find that perfect mesh with the idea in your head is a tough business, even with all the prestige classes out there today. That's where these variant classes come in. The variant class rules take the standard core class and alter it slightly, making it just a bit more appealing to someone looking to take the class a different route.

The first example is the variant barbarian called the **totem barbarian**. This concept is very similar to *Arcana Unearthed*'s version. Essentially the barbarian chooses an animal type like a bear, eagle, or dragon, and instead of gaining all the standard core barbarian abilities they lose some abilities and gain some other abilities more pertinent to their totem. It is an interesting variant that makes each barbarian slightly different and more animalistic, but may not appeal to

anyone that views barbarians in that way.

The next class on the block is the bard. UA devotes three variants to the bard, the first being the **bardic sage**. This is the perfect class for those Loremasters out there. Great bonuses to bardic music and the ability to attain divination spells like analyze dweomer at 4th level make this bard variant very friendly to those know-it-alls. The next variant bard is simply the **divine bard**. Drawing their powers and spells from the gods, they cast divine spells. This is balanced by the fact that their casting ability is now wisdom instead of charisma, although charisma remains important for their other bardic abilities. The last bard variant is the **savage bard**, a mix of a barbarian and bard. While I would like to say they put some time to make it a whole class, remember this is a book about rather quick variants, and the only thing exceptionally different in this variant bard is the spell list.

The next class up is the cleric, and while only one variant is offered, the **cloistered cleric**, it is a doosey of a variant. Remember what I said before about loremasters? Well I may have to recall my words. With a Lore ability that functions as the bardic knowledge ability, the knowledge domain for free, and an expanded spell list, this is one hot variant for caster know-it-alls.

The **druidic avenger** is the next variant on the list and is pretty much a combination druid/barbarian. While they get some of the barbarian abilities, and lose some of the druid abilities, some may find interest in going to 20th as a druidic avenger over a multi-classed barbarian druid.

The **fighter variant** is a simple thug. While this variant gets some extra skills and skill points, I don't see it doing anything special that a fighter couldn't have already done.

The next big section is on the **monk variant** fighting styles. These fighting styles are basically 'schools' of training or orders that the monk may belong to. It is an attempt to personalize the monk class. Of the eight fighting styles listed a DM or player can easily create their own. The styles are basically a guideline of what the monk should take at what level. If a player follows the path exactly without deviating, they gain some extra benefits at 6th level. While all the styles end at 6th, using these lists it is possible for a DM or player to expand upon them into higher levels.

The next three variants are **paladin variants**. The three listed are paladin of freedom, paladin of slaughter, and paladin of tyranny. Basically these variants are simply paladins of other alignments. They retain many of the same class features across the board, with the evil side gaining more evil oriented abilities ala the blackguard.

Next up is of course the ranger, chiming in with two variants, the **planar ranger** and the **urban ranger**. The planar ranger, as you could expect, is more at home traveling the multiverse than the woods. They gain some skill changes and some interesting planar abilities, like the ability to have celestial or fiendish companions. The urban ranger is probably one of the neatest variants yet. It allows an ability called Urban Tracking, which the ranger can use gather information checks to track down individuals. It also allows the ranger to select an organization or group as his favored enemy. The urban ranger also gains the best hide in plain sight ability to date, with no drawbacks or stipulations on its use. The **wilderness rogue** is the next variant and I am adding it to this section because it is almost exactly the same as the urban ranger.

The **battle sorcerer** is the next variant and doesn't seem interesting at all. It gets a d8 hit die with lowered spellcasting and some weapon and armor proficiencies, along with the cleric attack bonus. There is no arcane spell failure rate for them in light armor, but that doesn't offset the fact that the

warmage class from the *Miniature's Handbook* is still a better class.

The **domain wizard** has been one of the hot topics on message boards since UA's release. This variant wizard basically chooses one domain (like a cleric) at 1st level. All spells in that specific domain are cast at +1 caster level. A domain wizard cannot also be specialized, but is that a problem? On top of this they get a free domain spell per day, and automatically add domain spells to their spellbooks. Oh yea, the drawback, there is none.

The next section details some examples of how to simply swap out one class feature from class A and give it to class B. There are some interesting thoughts in this section such as fighters with sneak attacks but no bonus feats, and druid monks. Overall I think this section is more for inspiration than actual play.

The next section of chapter two deals with **specialist wizards**. Not to be outdone by the domain wizards, these specialists take their craft to the next level. There are some key abilities that these variants require a standard specialist to give up. These are either their bonus specialist spells or their summon familiar ability, and instead the specialist gains some new ability. These variants, unlike the previous ones, are not necessarily for the individual character. This section describes in some interesting flavor text how campaigns can be different simply by having variant specialists. That is not to say, however, that these variant rules cannot be used individually. While each specialization has their own unique powers granted at certain class levels, the overall feel is rewarding to specialists. It is interesting that while reading through this section I have come upon many interesting ideas for areas in my campaigns thanks to the flavor text. I rather enjoyed this section.

The next section details **spontaneous divine casting**. Essentially this allows clerics and druids to cast spells the same way a sorcerer does, with spells known and spells per day. While this variant allows higher spells known it limits spells per day to be cast. While this may be interesting for druids, again the *Miniature's Handbook* has the answer with the Favored Soul.

The next section details **class ability variants** such as a ranger choosing a favored environment over a favored enemy, a rage variant, a turning variant for both undead and planar beings, and a very interesting wild shape variant that allows druids to take on aspects of animals (such as grow wings) instead of becoming an actual animal.

Nearing the end of chapter two is the **prestige character class variant**. This variant enables DM's to use bards, paladins, and rangers are prestige classes instead of normal character classes. All three prestige classes have requirements that can be met at 5th and taken at 6th, and all three prestige classes have 15 levels. It is suggested that if you run a game with these prestige classes, the representative core class not be included in the campaign.

The next to last segment of chapter two is one of the most talked about entries in UA, **gestalt characters**. What are gestalt characters you might be asking? Essentially a gestalt character is two classes at once. No drawbacks, no buts, no negatives, just like it reads. A 1st level gestalt character can be any two character classes. Have no qualms, this is advertised as high-powered and rightly so. While not exactly double the power level, gestalt characters are better for groups that have three or less players. I am pretty much sold on the idea to be honest. Many times I have wanted to run games with three or two players, but didn't want them to have two characters each. This is a great way to allow the players to feel powerful and important, as long as you, the DM, know how to handle them. Luckily UA gives a very richly designed segment on how to do just that.

The last section of chapter two details **generic classes**. Three classes, the warrior, expert, and spellcaster (not to be confused with the DMG versions), are so generic that the player chooses almost their entire repertoire of abilities. Again, it is suggested that you do not use the core classes with this variant. A player chooses a generic class and the which saves they want as good and poor, which class skills to take, and any bonus feats or class abilities in place of the bonus feat. This is a great option for those of you who want to run a simpler or more grass roots campaign. This variant allows pretty much ultimate customization of the player's character.

So there you have it, chapter two; a chapter filled to the brim with variant classes and variant class ideas. With 32 pages of such variant rules, you should have enough material to work with for years to come.
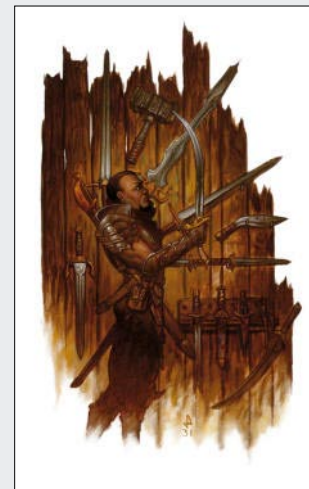
Chapter Three: Building a Character

The third chapter in Unearthed Arcana deals with character skills, feats, and background. While the skills and feats systems are pretty robust elements in standard D&D, DM's may need to expand or contract them in order to accommodate special needs. I know I've personally hated determining skill points for even low-level NPC's.

The first section in chapter three details the use of **alternative skills systems**, of which there are three variants. The first of which is the **max ranks, limited choice** method. What this system basically enables is the character to choose as many skills as they would normally get skill points at level up (like a

bard's 6+int) and those are the skills that character knows. In addition, those skills are always treated as having the maximum number of ranks allowable. This system makes it easy to make NPC's but limits choices for players.

The second skill system is an even simpler **level based** system. In this system the player simply rolls a skill check, 1d20 and adds their character level to the result along with any modifiers. There are no ranks in this system, and it makes it easy for DM's to generate NPC's on the fly. It does, however, severely limit what players can accomplish.

The third and final skill system variant is a **complex skill system**. This system makes use of multiple successes to determine complex actions instead of one simple roll. Using this variant may add time to the check, but it should add drama and intrigue into the check, but it won't make an automatic failure on one bad roll. In this variant a success is only achieved after three successful checks, and a failure is only after three failed checks. Each skill is listed in this section with examples of how to implement complex skill checks into your game.

The next area that UA delves into is the fun realm of feats. But UA takes a non-standard approach to feats. The first variant feat system is a system of **traits**. Traits are not like background feats and like them at the same time. Background feats usually have no drawback, but traits have an innate drawback. (Similar to this author's [infamous feats](#)) Traits are supposed to be used to enhance a characters background or backstory, and are suggested to be role-played. There are a total of 35 traits listed that range from aggressive to skinny.

Like traits, but only with the drawback are **flaws**. A character can begin play with up to two flaws (same with traits), but flaws only have drawbacks, and they are quite substantial drawbacks, such as a -3 penalty to will saves, or -2 to any ability score. While some

DM's may require character flaws, they probably didn't mean this hearty list of 13 flaws. The benefit to taking a flaw is that the character can take a bonus feat for each flaw they have (up to two of course).

The third feat subsystem is probably the best of the bunch, at least in my mind. **Spelltouched feats** represent an accident of magic. Some form of magic has rubbed off on the character, and they have some serious advantages related to their magic Velcro personality. While these spelltouched feats are pretty powerful, the character can only access them if they have come into contact with the required magic. And while their effects aren't on a high-powered level, they can lead to magic becoming much more important in a campaign than you may want it to be.

The last feat based system is a variant called **weapon groups**. This variant is supposed to be a replacement for the standard weapon proficiencies. Groups of weapons are classified together, such as axes, long blades, short blades, etc. and each class gets a certain number of free starting groups. Characters can choose groups to add just as if taking a proficiency feat. This would be an excellent system for a DM looking to run a more martial campaign, that would focus the differences between armed combatants styles, and would go very well with some of the feats and styles mention in *Complete Warrior*.

The next system is a very interesting system that I plan on using in my games mainly because of the feedback from my players. In all my games I try to offer downtime to craft items and replace equipment, but it always ends up being boring for the crafters or the other party members. This variant **craft point system** may alleviate those concerns. In this system characters gain a number of craft points at level up, and by taking newly expanded crafting feats. Characters can bypass the necessary 1 day for every 1000gp crafting rule by expending craft points. If they do so, they can create the item immediately. Essentially this system assumes that characters have

been working on the item in their spare time whenever they can, and simply finish it at that point. It seems like a well-balanced system, and still requires gold and experience expenditure as well as the necessary item creation feats.

The last section in chapter three is all about **character backgrounds**. Listed here are 11 tables to quickly generate a character background. But these charts are not your typical background generators; these try to determine what the character was up to since they began adventuring. The personal details can be expanded upon or even created by the DM separate of these tables, but once the character begins adventuring, these tables begin to play an important role. Listed parts of the table include a percentile, the activity the character was up to in that time (1d6 months), class, feats taken, skills used, gear, contacts, reputation, and recognition (all three discussed in later chapters). There are charts for military backgrounds, arcane backgrounds, aristocratic backgrounds, underground activities, and more. These charts can definitely help a DM quickly come up with an interesting higher leveled NPC in a fix, although it takes a bit of reading to understand how the charts work.

All said and done chapter three weighs in at 30 pages even of pretty decent material. While not all excellent, chapter three does have some strong points, namely craft points and spelltouched feats. Many DMs will find a lot of useful material in chapter three.

First Half Summary

So far Unearthed Arcana has yet to truly impress upon me an overwhelming feeling of amazement. It is, however, probably the best book this year for D&D and d20 fantasy. The first three chapters start off slow with a few highlighted elements and a majority of minor points. But that is to be expected. The book follows a linear order of campaign progression,

starting with character creation in race, class, and background, and then proceeding into combat and adventuring. Maybe the final half of the book will prove to satiate my appetite for new crunchy giblets, but I must admit that I am very full on what I have already digested. Do not mistake me, the first three chapters are so full of material that it will make anyone's head spin, and it is material that must be digested slowly. But, perhaps like the myth of Chinese food, you'll be hungry an hour later. I hope you will join me for a second helping when I move on to the final course and the last half of Unearthed Arcana. Until then, I hope this review wet your appetite for more juicy bits. As always feel free to comment, and take your suggestions to the forums where you can discuss the variants in "this thread of the Silven Forums.

Chapter Four: Adventuring

This chapter of Unearthed Arcana deals with all things combat oriented. From armor as damage reduction to massive damage variants, UA covers it all. All told there are fourteen combat variants (even more if you count some of the sub-variants) to keep your players scared of dying or dropping like flies. To be honest there are lots of good variants in this chapter, some of which may be adopted by many DM's, but mostly these variants fit into a niche category of low-powered, low magic. In most cases these variants are grim and gritty, or try to expunge the arbitrary nature of the D&D hit point system. What I enjoy about this section is that for each variant, there is a behind the screen sidebar with the low down on how the particular variant will interact with the d20 system and your game.

The first variant is the **defense bonus** system. This system works well when you are in a setting or area that considers armor to be bulky, cumbersome, and/or rare. The workings of this system are quite simple. Each class is granted a set defense bonus based on their armor proficiencies. This defense bonus is used instead of armor bonus. The variant is useful if you have PC's who hate to wear armor or wonder why a 20th level fighter without armor is no harder to hit than a 1st level commoner. While it is an interesting system, it does have some drawbacks that are discussed. Figuring out monsters defense bonus can be a pain if they have natural armor and class levels. But if you are going with the system, the few pages devoted to it should not be a problem to take in.

The next variant is one I know I've been curious about, and I know many people have raised questions about. **Armor as damage reduction** sounds interesting, but in practicality can be a pain to use and implement. Each armor type has its armor bonus lowered, and each armor type also gains a damage reduction number, usually 1/- to 4/-. Natural armor is also granted damage reduction values, but shields are not. This variant assumes that hits connect more often, but do less damage. While this system is great again for a low-powered, low magic setting, once a game gets into the higher levels where the monsters can do massive damage, down go the PC's much faster.

The next and final armor based variant is **damage conversion**. This variant makes the armor bonus granted by armor convert that much damage into non-lethal damage. It essentially means that while the hit goes through, your armor absorbs some of the blow and so do you, but its not a wound. The benefit to this system is that while wearing armor a character can essential gain damage reduction of their armor bonus vs. non-lethal damage.

Moving on from the 'protect me' variants into the 'I'm hit' variants we have a variant called **injury**. In this variant there are no hit points. Blasphemy! You say? Well kinda, I actually like this variant for low power low magic settings. Essentially when a character takes damage you access the damage value of the attack (dmg / 5 round up). This damage value is then applied to a DC 15 fortitude save that the

posted on: 3/3/2004
by effrenatus

Legendary Weapons

This is Marc from The Game Mechanics. Lance points out that the legendary weapon section has very few examples. As it turns out, there are quite a few examples around, just not in UA. WotC used open content from our publications for that section (check section 15 of the OGL and you'll find TGM), and we have a good deal of samples.

The original publications were PDFs (Swords of Our Fathers, Staves of Ascendance), and Green Ronin published a compilation of the two as Artifacts of the Ages. All the free material is linked from the AotA page on our website. This includes three free legendary weapons, a sample scion NPC, a write-up on mind scions (psionic scions :), and advice from the authors (JD Wiker and Rich Redman) on making your own. The best place to start looking would be the AotA page:

http://www.thegamemechanics.com/products/artifactsoftheages.asp

For those of you who don't know, JD Wiker and Rich Redman are former WotC staff authors (and current WotC freelancers) who founded The Game Mechanics with Stan! and me just over a year ago. With our WotC-trained and -experienced authors, you can be certain that material from The Game Mechanics is up to the same writing standards as material from WotC.

--Marc Schmalz
Web Manager, The Game Mechanics, Inc.

posted on: 3/3/2004
by adriayna

No Psionics?

I was suprised that Wizards didn't touch on psionics at all in this ruleset. Perhaps it was bad timing--with the 3.5e psionics book coming out soon, they don't want to write 3.0 rules in a 3.5 book. Still, it was a little discouraging.

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http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=233

player needs to make immediately. If successful the character suffers no ill effects, if they fail they take a hit (-1 to subsequent fort saves for injury). If they fail by 10 or more, they immediately are disabled. This variant and others like it don't leave you hanging, they explain new rules for handling death and dying, as well as how to handle healing both natural and magical. And remember those behind the curtain sidebars I mentioned earlier? Reading them can save you a lot of time throwing something like injury into your game and finding out it just didn't work with your style of campaign.

The next variant is probably the most well know and talked about variant, **vitality and wound points**. This variant originally appeared as the main staple combat resolution in Star Wars d20. I believe it has been slightly modified for the better in this instance. Basically you replace hit points with vitality points. You gain VP the same way you gain HP, at level up. Each class has a vitality die instead of a hit die. The difference is in the additional wound point system. A character has a number of wound points equal to their constitution. Once a character loses all their vitality points (0) they cant avoid taking real physical damage, so all damage is applied to their wound points. A critical hit also bypasses vitality points and deals damage to wound points directly, although the

damage from the critical is not doubled. Once you take wound damage you are wounded and suffer a few negatives. Once your wound points reach 0 your are disabled, after that dying. This variant works well in many games, but in D&D with large creatures doing massive damage, you may have characters dropping quickly. Constitution damage is also a killer in this system. It is a great variant for low healing campaigns.

The **reserve point** variant is one of the only variants I can see be used in almost every D&D game around, especially if healing is a bit rare or the party does not have any healing capabilities. In this variant characters have a number of reserve points equal to their total hit points. When a character takes damage, you take it off their hit points as normal, but for every minute they spend resting, they gain back 1 reserve point. Magical healing cures first normal damage, and then any extra is not wasted, it simply flows over into reserve points. While you may think that this system basically doubles a characters hit points, it does not stop them dying in a fight any quicker. The character has no control over how they use reserve points (except in one non-lethal case), they just represent the body's natural healing capabilities.

The next series of variants describe the **massive damage threshold** and some variants on how to change that function. While I have never been a big fan of the standard *Player's Handbook* approach to massive damage, these variants at least give me hope that the system does serve a purpose. There are numerous sub-systems listed here that range from constitution based saves, to alternate threshold levels. But reading through I realized that if the players aren't scared of taking heavy damage, then nothing could really scare them. While I wouldn't use one of these listed variants, I would use the suggestion in the next section.

This next section is a discussion on **death and**

Introduction

Either you have bought *Unearthed Arcana* or you haven't. It seems in most gaming circles today this dichotomy exists in full swing. And from what I've observed, the groups that have it are having more fun. Now that isn't a generalization that says 'you need *Unearthed Arcana* to have a good game.' I am simply saying that the variants presented in the book seem to be accepted into the hearts of players and DMs alike.

So what does all this mean? I hope to shed some light on the book of variants and help players and DMs find what they need for their game, or for a new game, without any trouble or play-testing woes. If you own the book, this article should help you decide what variants to use in that upcoming game you want to run. If you don't own the book, this article could potentially swing you around, or enhance your reservations. I in no way intend to make this article out to be a sales pitch for WotC (they neither pay me or give me props), but rather a guide for DMs and players looking to enhance their games with the variants listed within the book.

This article will give some pretty general campaign types and list what variants go well with that particular style of play. But I just wont stop there and expect you to find everything out the hard way. I will try to expand upon the variants, and give you a commentary on what the game will (or could) be like. For those of you with the book, it may prove insightful in dealing with the variants that you are "on the fence" with. And for those of you without the book, you may read the article and find something that you've always wanted to try.

For purposes of limiting myself (and your sanity) I will only concentrate primarily on core D&D style games. I may mention other systems here and there, but generally all my examples are for the D&D system.

dying. As I was speaking of massive damage above, it is noted in this section. Essentially this section details some new rules (which are used throughout this chapter) in dealing with death and dying. These rules do away with the -1 to -10 threshold, and adopt a fortitude save approach. I am still not sure if I like the approach due to mages ineptitude at fort saves, but the section about massive damage struck me. In this death variant a player cannot be reduced to more than 0 hit points. You take the damage that was dealt to drop them to 0 and you make the character make a fortitude save based on that damage. Success and failure depend on if the save was successful and if so by how much. Where massive damage comes in is that if you use these rules, a massive hit can still outright kill a character, but its much more likely to drop them to 0. Again this system makes certain feats like great fortitude much more important, and in the above systems as well certain multi-classing "2 point bumps" can make these saves negligible.

Coming off the pages of Eberron (the new D&D setting) are **action points**. These points are gained at level up and allow a character to fudge die rolls, use feats they don't have, or improved upon feats

they do have. Essentially they are heroic action points that a character can trade in to do something they really want to do. The variant is well thought out and requires some thought by the DM, but makes the characters feel more important and more in control. I look forward to playing in games, and playing with this variant.

The next very long section of this chapter deals with **combat facing**. It details out very nicely how combat facing in D&D can work on both squared and hexagonal grids. It also details out how certain attacks work from facing like tail slaps, wing beats, sneak attacks, flanking, and also details out attacks of opportunity, flanking, creatures of all sizes zones of influence and much more. For the combat aficionados out there, and you know who you are, this seems like a great way to make D&D a bit more realistic. While I would not suggest this variant for the common DM or player as it would make combat that much slower and complex, if facing always bothered you, read these pages and memorize them.

The next variant is a very interesting one called **variable rolls**. In this variant static numbers like a characters total attack bonus, skill modifier, save bonus, are not static at all. That +4 attack bonus turns into +1d4, and that +13 to bluff becomes +1d20. You read correctly, instead of having a static number, all rolls are joined by a variable roll based on your static modifier. It sounds interesting, and actually ends up helping the PC's mathematically by +. 5. It can get a little zany though, and it is highly suggested that you choose either static or variable and stick to your guns.

The second to last variant in chapter four is the **bell curve roll**. In this variant players get rid of their d20. That's right. Instead they use a series of d6's to roll. This variant ends up lessening the chances of critical fumbles or critical hits, and requires some minor adjustments to things like critical ranges. As the behind the curtain sidebar suggests this variant

The Beginnings

As I stated in my rather long review of *Unearthed Arcana*, this is a book that will probably be picked up at the beginning of every character creation session and definitely picked up at the beginning of any campaign. But why? Are there key accessories in the book that every character or campaign must have? On the contrary, I think the purpose of using *Unearthed Arcana* variants is not to add something to the game (although invariably that is what happens) but rather to take something familiar and possibly antiquated away and replace it.

If you have ever designed your own campaign setting, you know that one of the primary elements that makes your setting work is your specific theme. The theme could be good vs. evil, that the world is very young and new, or the world is very old and decaying. And these themes are all fine and dandy and serve very little to help the campaign setting if there are not supplemental or variant rules in place to facilitate the theme. This is where *Unearthed Arcana* comes in rather handy. By flipping through the pages you can find a vast assortment of variants that aid in bringing any campaign style to life. So lets delve into the unknown and see if we can't make some connections.

The Very Young World

A very young world has a few possibilities for direction. It could be very young because the gods have just formed. It could be very young because magic is undiscovered or only newly discovered. It could also be very young because it was very old and went through armageddon. So there are lots of variations on the 'young world' theme, and *Unearthed Arcana* can help you sort them out. Below you will find listings of some campaign ideas, a brief synopsis, and the variants used. Afterwards there will be a discussion on the choice of variants.

tends to lead to a grittier game because of the nature of the bell curve rounding die rolls out around 10.

The last variant is simple, **let the players roll all the dice**. Basically the players roll all the dice, but in a different way since they don't have the bad guys' information. The players basically start making a bunch of opposed rolls vs. themselves. Attack rolls vs. defense rolls; your players do it all. It does free up the DM to concentrate on story telling, but it also takes away a large portion of the DM's power to control the flow of events, potentially fudging numbers, etc. It can insight your players to be more aware of the game, but also can inspire those cheaters.

Overall chapter four has some very interesting variants that I think will see a lot of play, and some I don't think will see much at all. If I had to pick my favorites it would definitely be the new death and dying variant along with the conjoined massive damage variant, and definitely the reserve point system. Throwing in the action point system for good measure into any game can offset the grittier variants. I think there are tons of options for low powered and low magic campaigns in chapter four, and reading through them all it makes me want to make my next game such.

Chapter Five: Magic

The fifth chapter in Unearthed Arcana is all about magic. For those innate wizards and sorcerers out there lick your fingers and get your bib on because this chapter is saucier than a southern bar-b-q. But that's not to say that of the nine variants presented in this chapter, only the wizards and sorcerers win out. Quite the contrary, these variants prove useful for all classes, and some even useful for non-spellcasters. So let's just get right into it then.

The first variant listed is the **magic rating variant**. This variant gives each character a specific magic rating that they use instead of caster level. A chart determines the magic rating by grouping like classes together, such as the melee classes, bard and sorcerer, etc. The magic rating as I said above replaces caster level, and what that actually entails is a lot of mechanics, such as range, effect, duration, damage, etc. Maybe I am missing a point here besides giving some melee classes some magical aptitude if they chose to use it, but there doesn't seem to be any benefit besides some multi-classing issues. Maybe it's a variant that rewards multi-classed arcane casters, likewise with divine, by granting them a slightly higher caster level, but that's all we need is to make multi-classed spellcasters more powerful.

The next variant is an interesting one that is more flavor than crunch. **Specialized summoning lists** is an idea that incorporates flavor into the mechanics. Essentially a summoner chooses a themed list, or a personal list of summoned monsters. When they do this, their choices are of course limited, but it adds much more flavor to the game. Themed variants include alignment based lists, celestial, fiendish, animalistic, elementalistic, etc, the list can go on and on. While it does take some work to balance the CRs of new summoned monsters into a player's list, it can be rewarding for them to be able to summon new creatures not possible before.

The next variant is one that I have always wanted to use in my games, but never had a source for it. Well now I do, and so does the rest of the community. **Metamagic components** is the variant I am speaking of, and it is a doosey of a variant. Basically the idea is simple, monster parts equal monster power, thus monster parts should be able to power spells, ergo new spell components. We've all seen characters that want to chop off that minotaur horn or skin the gorgon, and we've all assumed that something should come of it, be it armor or an item. But what about spell components? Most of them are already weird things anyways, so this variant only

Neoterra

Sprung into existence by a sole god of power, Neoterra is more of an experiment than a world. Beings from all over the cosmos were transplanted on this relatively small world and forced to live and work together for the amusement of the god. After a few hundred years the hard life has forced the memories of the junction (and magic) out of people's minds, and they focus now only on survival. In this rough, new world, survival is a day-to-day affair.

Variants: Generic Classes, Weapon Group Feats, Injury, Incantations, Honor.

Discussion: Since survival is most important in this rough world, Generic Classes can allow for freedom in character design and concept. Since magic does not fully exist, you may also want to deny players access to the generic class Spellcaster. And since this world is martially based, Weapon Group Feats help to further classify players into a role. The injury system seemed like a great choice for this setting. The injury system is pretty gritty, but with the generic classes, could lead to more involved characters and combat. And since magic and monsters do not (for the most part) exist, the Injury system works well. In this world, magic cannot exist for some reason, but the old texts are still around. This means that characters who want to find out about their past could take Knowledge Arcana as a skill, and learn to perform some incantations, which would be a primary form of magic. And since the world is so new and social, I included Honor as a system of alignment and action restriction.

makes sense. In this system, specific components when used to cast the spell can apply certain metamagic feats to the spell. This application requires no preparation of the spell, no increased spell level, just the use of the metamagic component in place or addition to the standard component. And we aren't talking just monster parts, there are gem components, alchemical components, ritualistic components, treasure components, and on and on. This variant makes less "sell the loot" discussion and more "I can use that" talk. There is an extensive list of each spell in the *Player's Handbook* and the metamagic component necessary, along with price. If you take anything away from chapter five, let this be it.

The next set of variants deal with **spontaneous metamagic** casting. In the two listed variants there are mechanics that allow casters to employ metamagic feats spontaneously, without having to prepare them ahead of time. The first is the use of daily slots. By taking the metamagic feats with this variant a certain number of slots or uses per day are available to the character to use that metamagic feat on any spell that it can affect (yes there are stipulations). The second variant is a spell slot method, where by the caster expends extra spell slots equal to the metamagic cost. Thus if a caster wanted to quicken a *magic missile*, they would expend the original slot for the *magic missile*, and then four other slots (1st or higher).

The next variant is a pretty robust **spell point** system. To explain this variant the best possible way I would have to use either the terms power points or mana. Essentially a character attains spell points based on a chart and bonus spell points based on another chart for high ability. Spells also cost differing amounts of spell points based on spell level (very similar to the Psionic power point costs on powers). This variant leaves spellcasters way up in the air as far as versatility goes. The variant essentially makes all prepared spell casters spontaneous casters

(although prepared casters like a wizard can prepare a new 'list' each day) and all spontaneous casters even more spontaneous by allowing them that many more spells per day. There is also the option of making **vitalizing magic** in this variant. It is a system in which once a certain amount of spell point sis used up, the caster becomes winded and fatigued.

The final real magic based variant is **recharge magic**. This is a very interesting variant similar to the EQ RPG system of magic, but without the mana. In this variant system spells have two extra properties called recharge time and it is either general or static. Static recharge times never change, and are listed in the long chart in the section. For example *teleport* has a static recharge of four hours. Spells with the general signifier recharge differently based on caster level. If you are a high level casters your low level spells recharge faster, sometimes only 1 round. At other times the recharge time is around 1d4+1 rounds for sorcerers and bards and 1d6+1 rounds for all other casters. In essence this makes magic much more prevalent, much more available, and much more dangerous. A caster can now go around and cast 1st level spells every round, essentially making every spell they know innate. Most of the problem spells are dealt with via static recharge times, so you don't have to worry about a character charming an entire village in a few rounds. Overall the chart looks to control the power spells quite well, and it would be a really interesting variant to try in a magic based campaign.

The next variant shies away from the magic casting slightly to bring us around to magic items. The legendary weapon variant is quite interesting and may see play in quite a number of campaigns. Basically there are legendary weapons out there, a DM is free to create any they want, but they aren't super powerful weapons until in the hands of a Scion, someone who can wield the weapon to its fullest potential. These scions come in four basic breeds, the battle, faith, spell, and swift scion. Each scion is a

De Novo

The world again as it was not. De Novo is a setting in which a great armageddon wiped out almost all of the sentient life on the world. The inhabitants struggle with daily life, trying to overcome the hardships of living on a world that is barely populated. Finding people is all that matters. But a new danger, one from the great wastes is approaching. Beasts of incredible size and ferocity threaten to destroy what semblance of life is left. Can you put together the events of the past and utilize the knowledge of the ancients to fight for your life?

Variants: Environmental Racial Variants, Variant Character Classes, Craft Points, Vitality and Wound Points, Reserve Points, Action Points, Spell Points.

Discussion: Since this is a post-apocalyptic world, I thought the Environmental Racial Variants would help in designating where the races are from. In addition, the Variant Character Classes should help to make the setting feel different than most. Since this setting probably requires the players to constantly be on the move, Craft Points work well. There were a lot of options in this setting with regards to combat. I choose to give VP/WP a try here, because there were a variety of races and potential encounters with wild beasts. Reserve Points in this setting help to alleviate the need for magical healing. Action Points are included because we don't want the heroes feeling like they can't accomplish anything, and AP gives them a great opportunity to feel important. Finally, for what magic does exist, I chose to use Spell Points to cover all the bases.

separate prestige class based primarily on class archetype. The wielder of a legendary weapon may know or not know of its powers, but once they begin taking levels in the associated scionic ;) prestige class they begin bonding with the weapon and unlocking its latent abilities. While flavorful and a great DM tool for giving a player a specific weapon of incredible power, there is only one example given for each scion. First let me explain that the scion prestige, any of the four, is just a template, the DM has to add to the prestige class the abilities the weapon imparts when wielded by the scion. There are examples given, but no charts or expected progression (such as in the bloodlines section), so DM's are flying blind. While the examples should prove informative enough for any DM to go on, it still seems like this variant was part of something potentially great and slimmed down to fit.

The second to last variant is on that I am not sure on at all. It is the **item familiar** and it is elusively compelling in its raw power. It is not a familiar in the way that wizards or sorcerers get familiars, but more of a bonded item to the owner. It requires one feat at 3rd or higher level to attain, and that is all. The item must also be of a certain value. When chosen there are numerous special abilities the item gains, such as intelligence, awareness, special powers (chosen by the owner), as well as the owner being able to get a +10% exp bonus for all exp gained when in possession of the item, being able to store skill ranks in the item, and on and on. I'm just not seeing the drawback. If you lose the item (who would lose it really?) you suffer some exp loss (but its not really loss because its only the bonus you received). There is no reason a character shouldn't take the feat and gain the 10% exp bonus, the other abilities seem secondary. Maybe the role-players out there agree with me that this won't be a problem for them, but if any DM allows it in any other game, I bet everyone will have one.

The final variant in chapter five is the **incantation variant**. In this variant it is possible for

knowledgeable character to learn of incantations and perform them without any spellcasting ability whatsoever. Before you get up and jump, you need to realize that these incantations are very dangerous, and if failed can easily cause death, dismemberment, or severe embarrassment. These incantations are also extremely focused so as not to take the place of spells, and they take a long time, with huge preparatory requirements, and possibly horrible outcomes. But I love them. They provide a mechanic for rituals and ceremonies that was severely lacking in the fantasy D&D setting. Now when a group walks in on a ritual, they can actually determine what it was doing, learn it, etc.

Overall chapter five was pretty impressive with some great variants for spellcasters and even some magical variants for non-spellcasters. I particularly enjoy the incantations, legendary weapons, and recharge magic. I hope to play some games using some of those variants sooner than later. If magic is your primary focus of the game then this chapter is definitely for you, but be warned, reading this chapter is like reading a science manual or the arcane studies book, it can get repetitive and pretty confusing when all the variants jumble together. There are many good variants in this chapter for different styles of play and different campaign styles, and any DM is better off reading this chapter than not reading it, especially when your players come to you wanting item familiars… don't mock me, I warned you all.

Chapter Six: Campaigns

Chapter six of Unearthed Arcana deals with all the supplemental aspects of running a campaign. In the eight variants listed in chapter six all are more or less easy to implement into a fresh campaign or an ongoing one. These variants range from low impact like contacts or reputation to high impact ones like sanity and taint. It is up to the DM to implement these only into a campaign that can accept them as normal entities, taint and sanity work well together

but not in a high fantasy world where heroes are supposed to be heroic.

The first variant is **contacts**. This is a pretty simple variant that basically gives the characters some leeway in their personal backstories to develop individualized contacts, or persons of reference, with which they can associate on friendly terms. Each class type is given a progression rate for acquiring contacts with bards at the forefront of course. While the contacts serve little purpose in a game other than to give a player a small NPC that is generally friendly, it is a tool I assume most DM's have used informally for many, many years. For those that haven't, perhaps this would be a good time to start with some nice and simple rules.

The second variant ties somewhat directly into the first one, and that is the variant of **reputation**. In this system players, and anyone in the game world for that matter, can acquire fame or infamy. The player or NPC has to make a reputation check to see if they have heard of the character or not. There are of course bonuses and penalties for this check, and it is quite high, so players can't be famous until at least midway through their core levels. Reputation can be a godsend when dealing with people, or a hindrance. It is fun to see your character try to be inconspicuous when everyone knows his name and what he looks like. Even though this section gives some simple rules for reputation, a DM must be aware of potential abuse, and it is suggested that the DM carefully read this section and the sidebar before making any decisions.

The next variant called **honor** can be a supplemental variant rule system to alignment. There are three suggested methods of characters acquiring honor including mechanical honor, free-form honor, and family honor. In the first form, mechanical honor, characters of different alignment start with a set base of honor, depending on a character's actions (and based on a chart) bonuses or penalties are added to

their honor score. Depending on the total honor score the character gains certain benefits to skill checks and leadership modifiers. In the free-form honor system the DM is in almost total control of what honor the character has. The DM also applies the benefits as they see fit. In the final honor system, family honor, a character's base honor is based on their family. Again bonuses and negatives apply based on information contained within the section. There are also a few very good sample codes of honor from bushido to the paladin's code.

The next variant has a good many pages devoted to it, and for good reason. Adding **taint** into a campaign will dramatically alter the feel of the game. The exact and full workings of taint are quite numerous and I won't bore you with the explicit details, but the general idea is that evil taints everything, areas, beings, characters, everything. When a character comes in contact with tainted beings or places, depending on a save, they may become tainted. When a character accumulates taint points it applies negatively to his constitution and wisdom scores, if they die because of taint (0 con) they may rise again into the un-life as undead. This section also includes some tainted prestige classes.

Tying closely in with taint is the next variant, **sanity**. Many of you may know sanity from the Cthulhu game. Essentially that body of work is reprinted here. Like taint, characters can acquire a sanity score, or rather lose sanity. Almost everything in the game with this variant causes the loss of sanity, so it's a good thing that a character's sanity score can be quite high (no higher than 99). There are numerous ways to lose sanity, from seeing horrible monsters, being in really awful places, knowing forbidden lore, casting spells, going to planar places, and such. The effects of sanity are measure in insanity. Characters can go into mild lapses of insanity from low sanity scores, acquire short term or long-term insanity, or even go completely insane. Since in this system most characters go insane, there are many ways of dealing

The Old World

The old world is a staple of fantasy settings. Old worlds are usually rich in ancient treasures and beings, have well developed pantheons, and have histories that stretch back thousands of years. With all this in mind, and all the information that is possibly available, it is essential that an old world feel like an old world because of not only intent but also mechanical design. So what follows are a few examples of old-world settings, variants used, and a brief discussion on why they work.

Antiquity

For thousands of millennia the old order has ruled. A class of beings so inordinately powerful as to control all known elements of the multiverse - space, time, energy. And for thousands of millennia their creations, their puppets, their slaves have existed; to serve them, to entertain them and to facilitate their supreme lives. This is the world of Antiquity, a world where forward progress stopped ages before, and a world where the future is as determined and set in stone as the giant monolithic statues to the old order. But for as powerful as the old order is, they cannot fight the entropy any longer. The old order waged countless ancient wars to eradicate all usurpers to their power but they could not conceive of the possibilities that now present an opportunity for the beings of Antiquity to revolt. Welcome to Antiquity, where ancients rise within mortal bodies to continue a war waged eons ago.

Variants: Bloodlines, Prestigious Character Classes, Spontaneous Divine Casters, Character Traits, Death and Dying, Item Familiars, Contacts.

Discussion: The premier focus of this setting definitely has to be on the Bloodlines. It is the key element described in the introductory piece. All player characters should have a bloodline, although most NPCs in the setting do not. Since the setting isn't typical, normal classes may not have been

with sanity loss. Introduced in this chapter are healing methods for insanity, alchemical remedies, drugs, and addictions. At the end of the section is a nice summary of mental disorders and phobias to help you insure that your characters are playing their disability correctly.

Probably the best variant in the entire book, in my mind, is the **test-based prestige class prerequisites**. This is a rather simple concept, and one I am sure that many DM's have employed. This variant simply makes prestige classes (at least the ones that are part of organizations) test applicants instead of just admitting them. An organization from a game standpoint has no idea about character attack bonus or skill ranks, but those elements are there to balance the prestige class against the entire body of D&D work. But what if you want to get away from the metagaming and get down to role-playing. For each of the prestige classes listed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* there are tests that each one requires an applicant to pass in order to gain admission. The tests all have requirements that should only be able to be met by those interested in the prestige class, but remove the "useless feat and skill rank" requirements. I know as a DM I often wonder why a character needs certain feats to get into a prestige class. Is each person in the PrC the same? These tests allow a character to take a test, maybe once a year, maybe only once, and if they succeed they gain admittance, or potentially just training for formal admittance. This variant also describes methods of creating your own tests, and also describes tests for some higher-powered feats.

The last variant discussed in chapter six is the **independent XP awards system**. This system basically expands the D&D experience chart to increase the amount of experience needed to attain new levels. This system is for DM's who want a little more freedom in designing encounters, or DM's who make their own monsters up and want them to be appropriately worth the XP, or for DM's who simply

want to slow down standard progression. For those DM's out there that abide by the XP system closely, then this may be a variant that interests you, but for those DM's that just give free form XP based on the charts, this system will most likely not be for you.

Chapter six starts small with contacts and reputation and then flares up in the middle with taint and sanity. Overall, it is a great chapter for DM's who want to change major portions of their campaign. Taint and sanity work extremely well together, but completely change the feel of the campaign from heroic fantasy to Cthulhu horror. As with any variant, a complete understanding of the system is in order before applying it to any game, especially a currently existing game. Besides the test based prerequisite system, I would not recommend adding any of the chapter six variants into an existing game.

Afterword: When Worlds Collide

The afterword of Unearthed Arcana is a set of three suggestions for implementing some of these variants into a campaign. They discuss the means by which to have an ongoing campaign use a great variety of these variants, but not all in one world. Essentially, by switching worlds, players can experience new variants on a limitless basis. This may be an appealing suggestion to many, but I have my misgivings, having played in such games before. Such a campaign usually jars a player, makes characters jaded, but not always, it could work for you and these suggestions can help you determine what type of world hopping campaign you could run.

Conclusion

Unearthed Arcana is a book like none other. It is a tome of variant rules that can alter a game as slightly or unnoticeably as possible, or as drastically and dramatically as possible. The variants listed here can spawn numerous new games, new campaign, and new characters. Whereas other books only detail

around, thus prestigious character classes. Coinciding with slavery is probably a form of religious contempt-thus the Spontaneous Divine Casters. Character Traits add to the feel of the setting by letting characters customize themselves with a few mechanics. The alternative rules for Death and Dying make the setting a little more like a war, where characters have a high possibility of dying, but its all unknown for the most part. Item familiars add a link back to the ancient war, and can serve as possible "guides" to PC's. Contacts add to the social element of this game, and help establish the "underground war" feel for the setting.

Adumbral

A world cloaked in mystery, intrigue, and evil, Adumbral is on the verge of a dark epiphany. For years the populace has lived unawares of the darkness just outside their borders. But recently people have gone missing, livestock have been mutilated, and there have been sightings. What lurks in the shadows beyond the walls of the town?

Variants: Generic Classes, Character Flaws, Vitality/Wound Points, Summon Monster Variants, Sanity.

Discussion: Adumbral is a dark world, where normal people have no idea of the darkness just outside their imaginations. The normal mind is incapable of dealing with the horrors of the shadow. For that reason, sanity plays an important role in this setting. Generic classes help to describe the setting as non-specialized. Character Flaws add another dark tone to the game. The VP/WP system helps characters stay alive, but also adds more of a gritty feel to combat. The summon monster variant for spellcasters can help define the setting since normal magical monsters probably don't exist.

specific topics, Unearthed Arcana covers a broad range of subjects that matter most to a campaign and player. Inside this tome are infinite worlds for players and DM's to explore. Unlike other books that may be repositories of information, UA is a repository of ideas. I believe that no other books, besides the core books, provide as much motivation and inspiration as Unearthed Arcana. This is a book you will be picking up every couple of months. This is a book you will re-read every year for new ideas. But more importantly, this is a book you will be picking up before every campaign, and that is the mark of a truly great book.

Where to buy

Through our affiliate partnerhsip FRP Games you can buy this product at a discount at :

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=8438&ref=sil

Riftwall

The Riftwall is world on the edge of a great transition. For as long as history records, the world has been near a giant rift of magical energy that cuts the world in half. No one is sure what lies on the other side of the Riftwall, but none who enter have ever returned. The world is separated by the wall of magic energy for a specific reason, to keep good and evil apart. But the energy that sustains the Riftwall is fading, and both sides are making encroachments. Which side are you on?

Variants: Racial Paragon Classes, Complex Skill Checks, Defense Bonus, Damage Conversion, Variable Modifiers, Recharge Magic, Taint.

Discussion: The Riftwall itself is the primary focus of this world, and its effects are what define the settings mechanics. Since it is a massive energy source, Recharge Magic seems like a great tool to define magic in the setting. Recharge Magic is more powerful, so we need to give Defense Bonus and Damage Conversion to the fighter types to try and make up for that fact. It may not be enough, but it should help. Since this is an older world, Racial Paragon Classes can help define the sides to be the epitome of good and evil. The Complex Skill Check system can help the non-combatants feel special in this setting, by having the training necessary to complete some important tasks. Variable Modifiers is an interesting mechanic that can alleviate some the standard "bonuses" and make the world a little more random and dangerous. Taint follow up last, and can be used as the alignment system. While you may think taint can only work for determining evil taint, a few tweaks and an evil game in this setting can benefit just as much from attaining "good taint."

Conclusion

I've tried to give examples that have used the majority of the variant rules in *Unearthed Arcana*. You do not have to use as many variants in a setting as I chose to. Some variants work well with each other, some do not. Careful consideration must be used before using a variant, and you must consider all other rules for the setting before making any final decisions. More importantly I hope you got something out of this article that inspired creativity in your own games or settings, not just ones that you have mulling about in your head. *Unearthed Arcana* and variant rules books can be used to great effect to sculpt and mold a setting to the feel you want that setting to have. Sometimes things fall right into place with one variant rule like Sanity; other times it takes a number of variants to achieve your goal. That's the beauty of the variant rules presented in *Unearthed Arcana*; they provide endless possible campaign options for you and your players.

d20 review : Legacy of the Dragons

by Bradford Ferguson

"Legacy of the Dragons"
Authors: Monte Cook & Mike Mearls
Publisher: Malhavoc Press
Reviewed by: *Bradford Ferguson*
Review date: *02/29/2004*
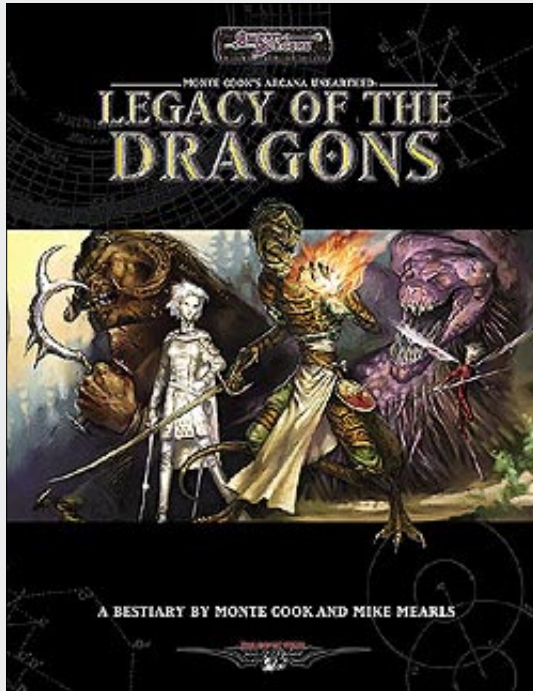
Reviewer's Bias:

I have run an Arcana Unearthed mini-campaign when I took my players through Siege on Ebonring Keep *(Mystic Eye Games). I stopped the campaign in order to do some campaign design, but ultimately felt that* Diamond Throne *(Malhavoc Press) did not offer enough in specific to help my creativity-starved mind get a campaign going. For me,* Chaositech *(Malhavoc Press) offers a possible legacy of items left over from the dramojh;*

ultimately, I needed more unique creatures to stock the lands of the Diamond Throne with since I did not want the players to run into typical D&D monsters. I was eagerly awaiting the release of Legacy of the Dragons *prior to its release and receiving a review copy.*

This review does contain minor spoilers for players who have characters in the Diamond Throne setting.

From the Back Cover

The hideous ghoul worm . . . the deadly blade trolls . . . the prowling kahrn, which literally feeds on combat and anger. . . . This monster supplement provides dozens of new adversaries and allies like these, created as a bestiary for the best-selling Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed variant player's handbook. Inside Legacy of the Dragons, 3rd Edition co-designer Monte Cook and popular d20 System author Mike Mearls present dozens of new nasties for your delight. From akashic seeker to zetetic, this book has what you need to add some teeth to your campaign!

For original, well-designed, and fearsome monsters, look no further than those who serve as the Legacy of the Dragons. In the pages of this bestiary you'll find:
* 50 new monsters, from CR 1/4 to CR 20-each complete with its own encounter;
* 15 new and exciting NPC personalities from the lands of the Diamond Throne;
* New feats, magic items, spells, weapons, diseases, and more, all inspired by the monsters in this book; and
* Quick and easy guidelines for converting all these creatures to the standard d20 System rules.

Presentation

From front to back cover, *Legacy of the Dragons* spans 162 pages. This review is of the electronic .PDF release of the book which is currently available for $11. The interior is black and white and there is excellent artwork by Kevin Crossley,

Jennifer Meyer, Tyler Walpole, and Sam Wood.

The artwork of Kevin Crossley and Tyler Walpole really jumped out at me. Jennifer Meyer only had several pieces and Sam Wood's art was expressive but too sketchy. In my opinion, it is some of the best B&W art that I have seen in an RPG book, and I think that Kevin Crossley will be the next star fantasy artist. The cartography by Ed Bourelle is his usual - which is superb. There are several maps for monster lairs.

The presentation is not without its flaws as it uses the same format that Malhavoc Press has been using for its past products. The text is too small and the margins are too large (see my printing tips below). When I used the proper printing

method, the margins were an inch on every side and an inch and a half on one of the sides (alternating right and left). As a DM, I could possibly write notes in the margin and re-print pages as needed, but I would have liked to see smaller margins and a larger font. Also, beyond the excellent art, the presentation is rather dull with no art in the margins to make the text easier to read through.

What's in a Name?

Call me a nit-picker... Though the writing is excellent, I thought it was a little contrived to call the book "Legacy of the Dragons" as opposed to "Legacy of the Dramojh." Most of the creatures were servants of the Dramojh or they are the results of ill-fated Dramojh experiments. This is heresay, but I think that Malhavoc realized that a book titled "Legacy of the Dramojh" would not sell as well as a book with Dragons in the title. Then Cook and Mearls make an excellent cover story to blame the whole thing on dragons so they can put dragons in the title. Call me a conspiracy theorist...

The Entries

Beyond the obligatory stat block (which comes with both 3.0 & 3.5 space/reach and DR entries), each monster has a physical description and its role in the Legacy of the Dragons or its role in the Lands of the Diamond Throne. They each have "combat" and "encounter" sections. The combat sections detail the tactics, the views about conflict itself, and the special abilities of the creatures. The encounters present a plotline for DMs to use to introduce or incorporate the beasts in an interesting way into your Arcana Unearthed campaign. Many of the entries also have a "society" entry which describes how the respective creatures communicate or gather into communities. Every creature and NPC is illustrated and the quality of those illustrations ranges from excellent to outstanding.
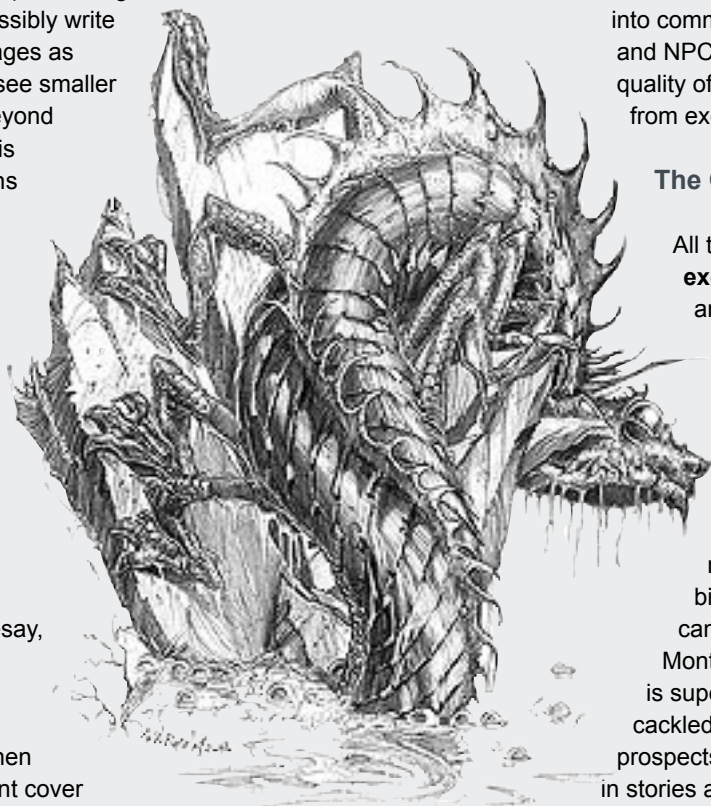
The Good

All the creatures have **excellent flavor** to them and they fill the niches of the Diamond Throne setting for *Arcana Unearthed* (AU). The beasts would also fit well in a standard fantasy campaign though some of their motivations may seem bizarre in a non-AU campaign. The writing by Monte Cook and Mike Mearls is superb and I occasionally cackled with evil DM glee at the prospects of using these creatures in stories against the heroes.

Some of the creatures are simply devastating in their abilities - they are not overpowered for their prescribed Challenge Rating (CR) - as they counter typical tactics that many heroes use in their adventuring and will cause the players to improvise ways to defeat their newfound foes. I would like to highlight some of the entries that grabbed my attention. I will try not to spoil these creatures for players who enjoy this setting.

Arathad: a humongous ooze that have three of ten different abilities for the DM to choose from. Meaning: the DM chooses three of the ten abilities presented for that Arathad to have... The next arathad that the group encounters could (and should) be different.

Blade Troll: these trolls are the next step on the evolutionary ladder. They have taken their ability to regenerate and used it to fuse body modifications to their bones. Think of it as body sculpting taken to the extreme - they have blades sticking out of their limbs for offense and plates fused to their bones for defense. The DM is again provided with a list of modifications that can be used.

Grynloc: creatures that are attuned to magic and are able to craft minor magical charms that help augment their abilities. The authors present nine such charms for Dms to choose from.

Lasher Beast: besides the awesome illustration by Kevin Crossley, these creatures are interesting in that they have arms with tendrils on the end that inject poison into their opponents when they are grappling. The poison is not the same every round either.

Qualleg: these creatures use gelatinous material around them to both augment their abilities in combat and confound their foes. Their society is also very interesting and this could confuse the players (in a good way). Players always assume that monsters have one type of society with one set of goals...

Spined Grappler: Have you ever been frustrated as a DM when your players mop the floor with goblins and kobolds? These diminutive creatures work together well in combat - especially with grappling. What is especially vicious about these little terrors is that they congregate in swarms, colonies, and hordes and that is how they are encountered. This is a good way to challenge mid-level groups with low-level beasties.

Valkith: These creatures punish groups that always enter combat with all guns (spells) blazing. The valkith absorb magical energies and use them to heal. Creatures like this cause the players to improvise and they keep game sessions interesting. Oh, I just thought of a very nasty use of these creatures by the harrid. I'm seeing scenes of death and destruction! *evil DM laughter*
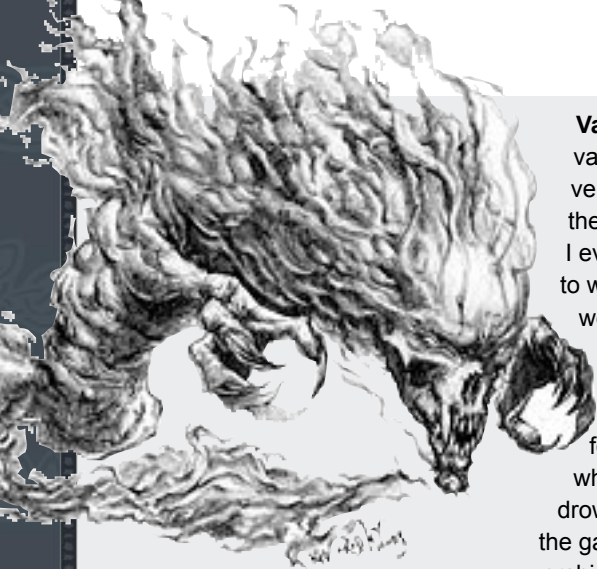
Vallorian: The vallorian are very similar to the dr()w (am I even allowed to write that word), but the similarities are a good thing - even for those who tire of the drow and all the gamers that worship the drow. Their history gives reasons for why they are twisted. They suffer from infighting and they constantly raid the surface. But, they have a good reason for raiding the surface besides the collection of victims for sacrifice. Another cool thing about Vallorians is that they can craft living arms and armor.

The mechanics and the writing throughout the entries is exceptional. Many of the themes of the Diamond Throne are covered from the memory pool to oaths to runes. My depraved side enjoyed reading about how the dramojh experimented on and twisted the various races and creatures with whom they came into contact. Like my examples show, a decent amount of the creatures are customizable in that they have different low cost add-ons that you can use to tweak them. The encounters and societies are superb as well - presenting the DM with plenty of ideas. The backgrounds of the NPCs are very entertaining and leave the door open for the character to meet up with the heroes. One NPC seemed like a typical evil, old sorceror until I read about his right hand man who is a champion of life. To get the answer to that one, you gotta pick up the book.

The Bad

The authors foresaw a potential problem with this book when they created a section at the end of the book with **Conversion Notes** to convert the abilities, feats, and spells from *Arcana Unearthed* to *Dungeons & Dragons*. For example: instead of using the AU spell "glamour" use the D&D spell "disguise self." It does not convert whole spell entries. Also, the AU feats that the beasts have in the book are fully described. In the monster entries themselves, they mark the feats that appear in the *Monster Manual*, but not the feats that are from *Arcana Unearthed* - so you have to assume if you have not very familiar with a feat, it is probably an AU feat and you will find it at the end of the book. It is a good thing that they provided the Conversion Notes if you insist on using D&D mechanics, but conversions are ultimately a pain in the arse. Just go out and buy Arcana Unearthed, it's sold out twice already.

The .PDF is simply huge for a .PDF! It is 162 pages and takes a while to print out. You can three-ring punch the pages and put them in a binder, but failing that you will have to use a large binder clip because a medium one will simply not hold all the pages. When you print out the electronic document in Adobe Acrobat 6.0, you need to set "Page Scaling" equal to "None" which will help reduce the margins (somewhat) and increase the font slightly so that you won't be as likely to need to visit the optomitrist after reading *Legacy of the Dragons* (my appointment is soon). While I'm at it, a couple of printing recommendations: 1) Go out to your local office supply store and buy a 250-page ream of 67-pound paper (this is for covers and full page maps, though there are no full-page maps in Legacy) and buy 108+ brightness paper (normal thickness) which costs around 9 dollars for a ream of 500 pages (that's still less than 2 cents a page). 2) Print those covers out on the 67# paper. 3) Print the PDF in batches and not all at once. Malhavoc warns against this last step.

Anyhow, I did have some **minor nits to pick** with some of the entries. The Akashic Seeker, doesn't describe when a rake is used - experienced DM is assumed. As I mentioned earlier, I would have liked for there to have been a symbol for feats that are described in the back of the book. The Arboreal Corrupter can prepare and cast spells at a certain class' level but typically prepared spells are not presented and the DM is left coming up with this. All the encounter entries give an Encounter Level (EL) but sometimes the entries themselves do not say how many monsters would be encountered for this EL when it isn't obvious. The costs of these two grynloc charms seem to be flip-flopped: "Might" +2 STR, 200gp, 16 hours to create VS "STRIKING" +2 hit/dam, 150gp, 8 hours to create. The duration of the effect is the same for both... I would always choose "Striking" because combat will come into play much more often than strength checks will and +2 hit/dam is better than a +2 STR which provides +1 hit/dam... and "Striking" is cheaper to make. The pricing is simply off; grynlocs could employ both charms (I think). Finally, one of the creatures gave me sticker shock in that when it goes energy drain, it drains 3 levels of experience with a success. Even for a CR 17 beast, I thought this was a bit much as it is devastating to a player's character and simply does not make for fun at the game table, in my opinion.

Conclusion

Legacy of the Dragons makes me want to stop the current campaign and restart my Arcana Unearthed campaign. The creatures in the bestiary have exceptional flavor and interesting mechanics and they all fit snugly into the AU setting. If you are running or are planning to run an Arcana Unearthed campaign, then this book is a must buy. If you are looking for some interesting monsters to pit against the adventuring party, this book will provide a spark provided you can get over some conversion (for non-AU games). Ultimately, *Legacy of the Dragons* completes Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed by providing the DM with a superior monster book.

Where to buy

Legacy of the Dragons is available at a discount from our partners FRP Games.

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=5038&ref=sil

d20 review : Deluxe 3.5 Character Sheets

by Lance Kepner

"Dungeons & Dragons: Deluxe 3.5 Character Sheets"
Authors: Christopher Perkins and Ed Stark
Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Reviewer: *Lance Kepner*
Review Date: *03/05/2004*

From the Back Cover

Keep up with all of your characters. Inside the pockets of this protective folder, you'll find a full set of Dungeons & Dragons character sheets-and more. Formatted in a new folio-style layout, each record has plenty of room to keep track of everything that makes each of your characters unique, including extra space for adding new class features and abilities for your multiclass character.

What You Get

The first thing any buyer will notice is that these sheets come in a very pretty and rather sturdy full color folder. While the folder itself is worth noting for its ascetic value, the inside panels hold the raw material of the product-the sheets. There are eleven four page sheets for each of the core character classes, and each sheet is uniquely tailored to its class. You also get one generic character sheet and one d20 modern sheet. Included in this product are spell sheets for the core classes.

The Good

The folder itself is nice for keeping your characters together in one place, or as a DM for keeping all the sheets protected. The sheets are printed on 11x17 paper in layout style. This means that one 11x17 page printed front and back (4 pages) equals one character record. In essence its like a little booklet, no more flipping through numerous loose leaf pages to find what you want, simply turn the page. This doesn't mean that you are barred from copying the pages if you don't have a copier or printer capable of making 11x17 pages. Since the records are in layout mode that means each page of the 11x17 booklet are 8.5x11.

The sheet contents are quite amazing, and I think the best sheets of any out there, including online sheets like Ema's. For instance the bard sheet has bardic music class features listed right there on page 3. There are magic item segments of the sheets denoting wands and charges, ranged weapon and ammo slots, armor and protective items, essentially everything you could possibly need on your character sheet. The spell sheets are great. Everything about these sheets can speed up the recall time of information. No more passing around the Player's Handbook from player to

player looking up their class related information or basic spell info. With these sheets, everything a class needs to know is basically right there on the record.

The Bad

The back cover says that they are easily photocopiable, and while this proves mostly true, make sure you don't have the copier on the lowest or fastest settings, as there are some shaded boxes that will appear full black. Some of the text may also not appear on lower settings. The character sheets are very good, and I failed to spot any serious flaws or misrepresentations. I am severely disappointed by the lack of a Psionics sheet and power list. They included a d20 modern sheet, why not splurge and go for the psionics sheet as well? Speaking of the spell sheets, they could be done better. I would have liked to see

more information than just the name of the spell and a blank. Of course they are listed properly according to level, but there is no information that the player does not have to fill in. I would have liked to see a spell list akin to many online with school, saving throw, spell resistance, basic description, and Player's Handbook reference page. Maybe that's asking too much, but for $14.95 I expect a complete product.

Conclusion

Baring the lack of psionics, and the rather inept (but complete) spell charts, I adore these sheets. They have all the information in all the right places. The first sheet will always be up and ready for combat, and the other sheets to aid the character in other times. A great buy, infinite resources if you can get access to a copier or scanner. Well worth the money if you want a professional sheet. Compared to the free alternatives online, spring for these as a group, you won't regret it.
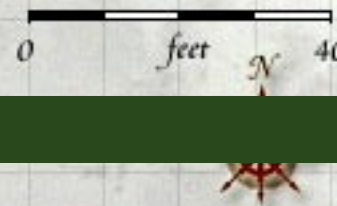
Where to buy

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http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=8440&ref=sil

d20 modern review : Weapons Locker

by Matt Haught

"Weapons Locker"
Authors: *Keith Potter*
Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Reviewed by: *Matt Haught*
Review date: *03/01/2004*
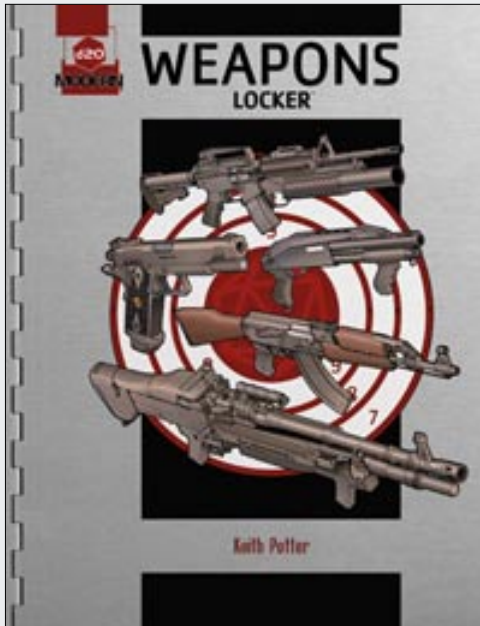
Reviewer's Bias: As a competitive shooter who grew up training with various military and law enforcement personnel on an informal basis, I have some disagreements with the d20 Modern weapons implementation. I tried not to let this color my view on this product, though, and attempted to judge it based on how well it meshed with the standard d20 Modern rules. I also tend to be harsh on statistical errors in weapons supplements out of a desire for increased realism in such games, unless the game itself purports to be other than realistic.

From the Back Cover

"Check your target and open fire. Inside, you'll find a fully illustrated arsenal ranging from pistols and submachine guns to grenade launchers and antimateriel rifles. The d20 Modern Weapons Locker *provides detailed descriptions and statistics for each firearm to make sure the characters of any* d20 Modern *roleplaying game are packing the right gun for the job."*

Introduction

Weapons Locker is the latest supplement for Wizards' popular *d20 Modern* game. It boasts a significant quantity of firearms, including some heavy weapons like HMG's and grenade launchers. Additional rules governing the implementation of these weapons are also included, though the focus of the book is mainly to provide a plethora of military-grade small arms for use by PC's and NPC's.

The focus of *Weapons Locker* is definitely on weapons that are used by military and police units, rather than hunting or target guns. While some purely civilian firearms such as the Hammerli target pistols do appear, they are relatively rare. Most weapons presented are either dedicated military weapons such as assault rifles and machine guns, or dual-use firearms that are common to both civilians and police/military alike such as handguns, precision rifles and shotguns. Don't expect to see stats for a high-grade Perazzi trap gun or Holland and Holland express rifle in this book. *Weapons Locker* is definitely an appropriate name in this regard.

Review snapshot

CLASS: Equipment supplement
STR: 14 *(Physical)*. Standard WotC glued-in hardback binding.
DEX: 8 *(Organization)*. Weapons organized into logical chapters based on cartridge type and usage, though repetitive entries exist. Lacks the comprehensive tables that made *UMF* so user friendly. No index.
CON: 14 *(Quantity of the Content)*. Excellent density. Many more guns than *UMF*, but only a few more pages.
INT: 13 *(Quality of Content)*. Many more guns than *UMF*, especially from former Warsaw Pact states. Most of the additional rules are cut-and-pasted from *UMF*, and there are numerous errors that should never have gotten past an editor. Questionable damage/range stats on new calibers.
WIS: 12 *(Options and Adaptability)*. Lots of guns for PC's and NPC's of any area of the world, but the errors require weapons knowledge for proper correction.
CHA: 13 *(Look & Feel)*. Reasonably good B&W illustrations, but several placed with the wrong weapon or outright incorrect, and most are not quite up to par with *UMF* in terms of artistic quality.

How we rate our reviews

Scoring definitions.
18 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
16 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
14 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
12 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
10 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
8 = Subpar. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
6 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
4 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

The Good

Weapons Locker brings to mind a scene from the movie *The Matrix*: "Guns. Lots of 'em." Despite some optional rules here and there, this book is primarily a hoplophile's shopping list. Pretty much any modern firearm that can be found in use with an organized force can be found here, including variations on standard weapons and clones produced under license. *Weapons Locker* even goes into the old Smith & Wesson "Gun of the Month Club" third-generation pistols in a manner that the ordinary player can

understand. For the most part, the weapons are statted out pretty well, at least in keeping with *Modern's* scheme of weapon statistics.

One thing in particular I enjoyed was the inclusion of many Soviet/Russian and Chinese guns, something that *Ultramodern Firearms* sorely lacked. The inclusion of the Makarov PMM as well as various advanced or experimental weapons truly gives a sense of the emerging vibrancy of the Russian arms market and its innovative ideas that have been set free with the collapse of communism. The sidebar on the special armor-piercing qualities of the 9x39mm SP-6 round was an excellent way to differentiate this specialty round from normal AP rounds, whose terminal ballistics suffer compared to standard loadings.

Weapons Locker also does something no other mainstream firearms book has done thus far: it includes several grenade launchers, from the under-barrel models like the M203 and GP-30 to stand-alone launchers like the HK 69A1 and MGL Mk1. The book also includes several launchers that aren't well known, such as the Croatian RGB-1 and the curious Russian BS-1 "silent" grenade launcher. The chapter also includes rules for various specialty grenades,

including my personal favorite, the "beehive," which is basically a 40mm shotgun shell.

The Bad

A certain level of typographical and editing errors is to be expected in a book of this size that is so heavily based on statistics, but *Weapons Locker* goes far beyond that. For the truly weapons-minded, I have included a list of errors in weapons statistics or information in an Unofficial Errata (link at the end of this article). This list is not complete, as my knowledge of weapons is limited primarily to personal experience and research, but as far as I know it is accurate. *Weapons Locker* also has several places where "ff" is inserted into words, making the reader wonder if the editors bothered to spell-check their work, although this could be attributed to a printer error.

Additionally, several pictures were either totally inaccurate or mixed up between weapons. For example, the AMT Automag entry shows picture of the Automag III or IV, which looks totally different from the original Automag. The illustrations of the M249 SAW and M249 SPW are switched, as are those of the FN CAL and FN FNC. The Beretta M9 is illustrated as an early-pattern 92, before Beretta made significant design changes that led to its

adoption by the US Military as the M9 pistol. These changes involved a reconfigured trigger guard, movement of the magazine release from the heel to behind the trigger guard, and movement of the safety from the frame to the slide. Possibly most annoying, however, is that the M16A4's picture was somehow replaced by an AKSU-74.

Errors in damage and range were relatively common as well, probably the result of using some sort of Clipboard-like feature to cut-and-paste damage from one weapon to the next. In particular, the Dragunov's low damage die as well as the RPD and RPK's high damage die stand out. The Taurus Raging Bull contained range errors in all calibers, and the damage listed for the .44 Magnum version was only 2d6 instead of the standard 2d8 for that caliber.

Weapons Locker carries over some questionable damage codes from *UMF*, as well as making new errors on its own. It retains the extremely optimistic damage of 2d8 and range of 70' for the FN 5.7x28mm PDW round found in *UMF*, though HK's 4.6mm PDW round is given a more realistic 2d6 damage code. In addition, the armor-piercing qualities of

the 5.7x28mm, 4.6x30mm and 5.45x18mm rounds were completely ignored, despite the precedent set by the excellent sidebar for the 9x39mm round. *Weapons Locker* goes further by assigning the .50 Beowulf cartridge a damage code of 2d12! The .50 Beowulf's muzzle energy is roughly equal to a 12-gauge slug (2d8) or 7.62x51mm NATO (2d10), and nowhere near the power of antimateriel rounds like the .50 BMG or 12.7mm Russian.

Speaking of antimateriel rifles, *Weapons Locker* serves to illustrate the problems with assigning 2d12 damage to these massive rounds: it leaves no place for the intermediate-heavy sniping rounds like the .300 Winchester Magnum and the .338 Lapua. Simply giving the .338 a +10' range increment compared

to the 7.62 NATO is not sufficient, nor is treating a .300 WinMag as identical to the 7.62x51mm round in terms of range and damage. The text for weapons firing these rounds reflects the fact that they were meant to extend the range and power of sniper rifles beyond that possible with the 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge, but the stats do not.

UMF's fault lay with its implementation of shotguns, and *Weapons Locker* repeats those errors and more. For example, the Benelli M4/M1014 shotgun is listed as a dual-action weapon that can be used as either pump-action or semi-auto, when in reality it is purely semi-auto with no option for pump-action firing. Its gas system was designed to eliminate reliability problems with recoil-operated shotguns firing low-impulse rounds, and thus remove the need for a pump-action system. Also particularly irritating is the treatment given to the Scattergun Technologies shotguns at the end of the chapter. The text lists the company as being based in Nashville, Tennessee, when in fact Wilson Combat bought the company several years ago and moved the facility to their headquarters in Berryville, Arkansas. The text rightfully praises the quality and effectiveness of these customized shotguns, and makes mention of the fact that they are in high demand by police officers, yet their equally high price precludes many departments from issuing them to anyone but specialized tactical units such as SWAT teams. After reading this lengthy discussion of the merits of Scattergun's shotguns, I found that the listed stats are identical to the standard, factory-stock Remington 870 and 11-87 shotguns presented earlier in the chapter! At the very least, these weapons should be Masterwork with a slightly increased range increment and appropriately increased price.

In addition to its poor treatment of shotguns, *Weapons Locker* displays many errors in regards to sniper rifles. It lists several excellent weapons, but fails to differentiate the truly great from the mediocre, while elevating some above their place. For example, the Dragunov SVD and SVDS, which are little more than Designated Marksman Rifles intended to give a squad the ability to reach out slightly beyond the range of a typical AK, are given Masterwork status. Many superior weapons like the HK MSG-90, USMC M40A1, Robar SR60, Robar SR90, Sako TRG-21 and Sako TRG-41 are not. All of these rifles will outshoot a Dragunov by a considerable margin, and the Sako TRG rifles will outshoot the AW-series rifles, which received a +2 Masterwork status!

Finally, one of *UMF's* greatest assets was its plethora of tables for quick and easy referencing. *Weapons Locker* has no comprehensive table system for any weapons, users or ammunition except for a short table of various grenade types in the grenade launcher section. If you want to know what Russian MVD troops are carrying, you have to look through individual weapon descriptions in each chapter, a time-consuming process that could have easily been eliminated with reference tables.

Conclusion

d20 Modern Weapons Locker is packed with many more guns than its main competitor, *Ultramodern Firearms*, yet the additional weapons come with the price of poor editing and statistical assignment as well as a great reduction in rules options and ease of use. Most gamers don't need the sheer variety of weapons available in *Weapons Locker*, and those who do will probably know enough to be able to write the stats more accurately themselves. Most GM's will be better served by *Ultramodern Firearms* based solely on ease of use and reference tables, but *Weapons Locker's* wider selection has its merits, especially when equipping Russian or Chinese characters.

Unnofficial Errata TXT file
http://www.silven.com/publications/WeaponsLocker/WeaponsLockerErrors.txt

Where to buy

The *d20 Weapons Locker* product is available at a discount from our partners FRP Games.

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=8789&ref=sil

by Dana Driscoll

About the Author

Dana has a variety of different interests, some of the most important being reading, writing, learning, and playing D&D. She is currently a graduate student working on her PhD in linguistics at State University of New York: Stony Brook, with her undergraduate work in Literature, Writing, and Women's Studies.

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About the Artist
All the artwork in this section is done by the author.

Gaming Aids

The Burrow

Cartographers Index : Map ID 11

This quaint burrow can be the home to a wealth of individuals—forest dwelling gnomes, halfling rangers, a small elven family, or even a witch or hermit.   The outside wooden door of the dwelling can be openly visible or can be hidden behind the great root masses of the towering oak tree.

Description:

The cozy residence has been hollowed out of the earth beneath the great tree, reinforced with wood slabs and packed mud. The walls have been painted a rich earthen tone and the floor is hard packed dirt.

When entering the residence, the first and largest room smells of smoke, earth and steaming tea. To the left is a fur-lined couch and to the right is a wooden bookshelf stacked with lovingly worn tomes. Near to the bookshelf on the right is a small stone fireplace. In the center of the room, a thick wool carpet covers the bare earthen floor. Watercolor paintings and ink drawings cover the walls.

The smells of baking bread and steaming soups fill the nose upon entering the upper right room—the kitchen. A wooden kitchen table and chairs, a small cooking stove, and a large wash basin take up the remainder of the room.

To the left is a small storeroom that holds herbs, spices, foodstuffs and other miscellaneous items. Beyond the storeroom is a cozy bedroom with a single bed covered in a wool quilt, a small dresser, and a wooden desk.

Possibilities:

Allow player characters to use this abandoned home as a hideout or base of operations. The burrow home can be further expanded by digging layers beneath the current layer further into the ground.

A number of NPCs the player characters must meet could live in the house—including a famed alchemist who knows a secret formula, a ranger who has agreed to guide the party through the wilderness, or a tribal shaman who has been hiding out inside the forest.

This image was inspired by Sam Gribley's home from the story My Side of the Mountain.

0   05   10   15   metres
0   15   30   60   feet

N

silven X roads

| 0 | 05 | 10 | 15 | metres |
| 0 | 15 | 30 | 60 | feet |

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Street Duel Begets New Legislation

An editorial by Dak Tamble

The scene was the Silven Crossroads main thoroughfare, the setting sun basking the sandy cobblestone road in red dusk. Two figures stood gallantly on opposing sides of the road. The middle-aged man wore royal blue dressings and carried a greatsword while the older man was dressed in green finery and carried a shield and rapier.

In a flash the duel was engaged and for a few blows it seemed like any other duel, but soon it became apparent that something was horribly wrong. Both fighters stopped mid-swing and gazed at each other in a befuddled manner. Then at once they both yelled at each other. The middle aged man asked, "What's your attack bonus?!" While the elder man asked, "What's your THAC0?!!?"

The crowd collectively gasped. The fighters spent some more time staring at each other and then peacefully walked away.

What is going on in our fair city if fighters cannot duel? An angry mob then marched the thirteen and a half feet to city hall, and when they arrived four hours later demanded that there be a standard for all duels.

Then out of nowhere, fifty mages appeared led by the famed Orph Maloney, demanding that if fighting was to be standardized, so too should magic.

Then yet again, out of another nowhere that was completely different than the other nowhere, a few strange people with tattoos and crystal weapons appeared. These 'Psions' as they called themselves demanded the same standardization. They never moved their mouths, so how we all know what they

wanted is a mystery.

In the end the mayor vowed to appease them all, for a price, and the new legislation was put in place.

To see the new legislation all Silven Crossroads residents are invited to purchase an updated version at a of the city rules from the local gaming store. Rumor has it that the price has increased 33% from the old edition.

xx-xx

Silent Chorus Confuses Residents

By Poot Fenbottle

Everybody has heard about the Famed Singing Chorus that arrived in town last week. For months before, the signage advertising the event was found tacked to lamp posts, buildings, and sleeping drunkards all over Silven.

The performance was the talk of the town, and everybody who was anybody was set to attend. It was no surprise that turnout for the concert was overwhelming. The coliseum was packed to the brim hours before the show even started. About fifteen minutes before show time, to accommodate the late-arriving nobility, the Mayor declared that all monstrous humanoids would have to give up their seats and move to the commoner pit.   The result was a small riot, hardly worth noting since monstrous humanoids don't count and few decided to participate because they didn't want to miss the chorus.

Once the grumbling stopped and the goblins were sufficiently trampled beneath the feet of the pot-bellied commoners, the chorus themselves came out onto the stage. Their bright red costumes brilliantly

flashed in the sunlight. Their fine elven features and pale faces were truly a beautiful sight to behold. The crowd was absolutely still as they waited for the first note to issue...but the silence remaiined.

The elves opened their mouths wide and began what could only be described as a outlandish performance. Their features changed, their mouths moved, they even got their groove on and danced around a bit—all in complete silence.

The crowd continued to watch in anticipation, some with confused looks. After about 30 seconds of silence and all hell broke loose.   The goblins and orcs once again took up their riot for not being treated as "people" and the mostly drunk and impatient commoners protested the goblins protest. After a few minutes, the place was in complete chaos.

The concert has confused most residents who attended.

"Ah just think if these here people ur gunna charge me a gold piece fer uh ticket, they oughta at least speak up so ah cun hear 'em" Barton Beersblood, local drunk commented as he picked some goblin goo from the bottom of his grimy feet.

"I'm not quite sure what the point of the concert was," local storeowner Garik Voonfin stated. "The riot was worth seeing though!"

The mayor has refused to comment on the event, but has put forth legislation to prohibit those individuals with a Wisdom score of less than 15 from planning future city events.

xx-xx

St. Cuthbert Day Stories

Saint Cuthbert day has come and gone, and now it is that fabled time we all look forward to... the stories.

As everyone knows St. Cuthbert is best known for revenge. So St. Cuthbert day has evolved as a day to get revenge on everyone and anyone who has wronged you in the past. Needless to say it is one of the goriest, bloodiest, and most vile days in Silven history... and we love it!

On 53rd and Beholder lane, Malaye Uhgru, an orc with a fake finger, took his St. Cuthbert Day revenge on his friend of 22 years whom he blames for the loss of his finger. Uhgru set up a very elaborate orc revenge plan. While his friend was at work Uhgru dug a pit in front of his friend's house and covered it up with some straw and sticks. When his friend came home, Uhgru jumped out from behind the pile of dirt and hit him with the shovel.

On the other side of town, on the corner of 12th and Arrowway, Joemer Kali took her St. Cuthbert Day revenge on her husband of 7 years. Kali says that five years ago she wanted a small pet and her husband denied her. When her husband, who is deathly afraid of cats, came home he was greeted by five large cats –two lions, a tiger, a bobcat, and panther. The husband was obviously distraught and died of shock. Unfortunately, her husband was also a Paladin of St. Cuthbert and so when he died he exploded in a violent blast of revenge killing the five cats who were

actually local druids in wild shape. Kali is remorseful of the entire event.

Our last story comes from our very own offices downtown and our loveable reporter Dak Tamble. When Dak was denied the editor-in-chief position of the Fodder Cannon a few years back, he grudged revenge against the newspaper. Today that revenge came to fruition as Dak Tamble continues to work for the newspaper even though he has not received pay in three months and was actually laid off four months ago. Great revenge Dak!

xx-xx

From the Community: April Fools Horrors

By Mistress Maddy McFindle, School Teacher

April fools is for fools! Every year, I am plagued by pranks from the plethora of children in my school. Who started this stupid holiday? Why does it propagate on? I demand that the Mayor outlaw this outlandish event. I'm sick of the signs on my behind, the mouthwash in my drink, and the sour candies my students tell me are sweet. So again I say, down with April fools!

Editor's Note: Ms. McFindle attempted to lead a group of protesters to City Hall to plead her case but everybody thought she was joking.

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