

The Silven

Trumpeter

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From the Editor

Sound off!

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

Letters to the Editor

"I have been reading your zine for four months now and I want to say that I look forward to each new issue. I just hope you don't start charging for it!"

- John Selkirk, Nebraska

Thanks John! Rest assured that the Silven Trumpeter will always remain free

- Editor

"Thanks for the interesting read. I have a question about the stance your magazine takes on some issues. It seems that some articles contradict or dispute what other articles are trying to front. Is this your point?"

- Chad Miller

The Silven Trumpeter is an independent publication that does not take any one stand on an issue. Our writers are encouraged to pursue controversial, yet well researched topics and are not forced into writing with any one agenda. We consider it a strength of our publication that we can present more than one side to any issue. Thanks for your comments

- Editor

An ingrained but often overlooked area of RPG gaming is written works of fiction. Games and fiction have a rather convoluted relationship—in one sense there are many fans of fiction that want nothing to do with gaming and many gaming fans that want nothing to do with reading fiction. On the other hand, fiction and RPG gaming form a symbiotic relationship. RPG games borrow heavily from past works of literature and at the same time, new fiction is created specifically for consumers of RPG games.

Often it seems that these two forms of entertainment have very different audiences and purposes. Fiction novelists, including some in the fantasy and sci-fi thread, have little to do with gaming. And as much as we may not admit it, some gamers read little other than their rulebooks. But are not the two innately and intricately connected? What makes a great book—plot, character, dialog and structure—also makes a great game, be it tabletop or CRPG.

While it is true that many of authors who wrote the fiction that has inspired many of our modern RPG games have long since passed on, the spirit of the stories lives on. And for at least some game designers, it is in honor of these past works of fiction that great games are created. It is also these stories that inspire us to create character concepts and try out new ideas. So perhaps it is time to appreciate those fiction writers that inspire us to create new character concepts or design more intuitive games.

This month's Silven Trumpeter has an excellent assortment of mostly twisted fiction to inspire your games. Pike Stevenson's *This Darkness, My Heart* deals with a man whose powers are put to the test. Christian Bonawandt's *Feeding* reminds us that there is more than one type of cursed weapon. Aaron Todd's *It Still Tasted the Same* tells of the darker side of life. To lighten things up a bit, Matthew Hanson's *Starlanko the Magnificent* saga continues.

Not to worry, for those of you who prefer to wet your appetite with more "crunch," our usual monthly columns are still here along with regular articles and a host of this past month's content taken from the Silven Crossroads site.

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Crossroads E-zine



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Chatting with Gary Gygax

by Gary Gygax and Kosala Ubayasekara

Due to Mr Gygax' recent bout of illness we are taking a hiatus in *Chatting with Gary Gygax* this month. Instead we wish Mr Gygax a speedy recovery and look forward to resuming this column next month.

- The Silven Trumpeter team

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.

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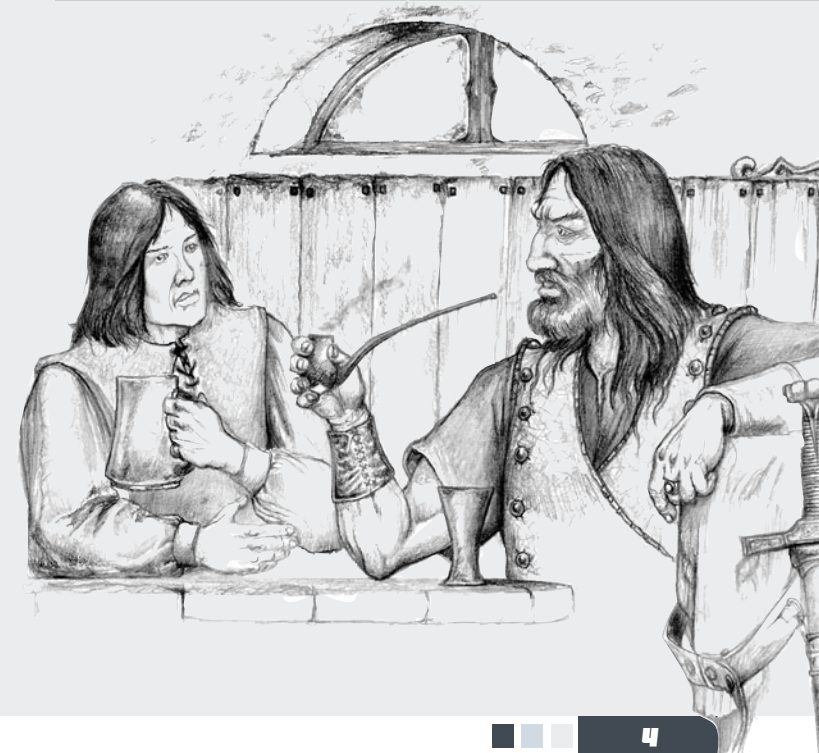
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About the Artist

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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On the Written Style of RPGiana, Part 2

by Raymond Huling

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In the introductory article of this series on the written style of RPGiana, we looked at the first aspect with which this discourse distinguishes itself: amateurism. I say first because it seems that every person who picks up RPG materials for the first time notices the extraordinary amount of errors before anything else. With this in mind, I tried to make sense of two facts: 1) RPG materials are, in general, written at an amateur level; and 2) it is not hard to write at a professional level. I advanced the theory that, consciously or unconsciously, RPG writers choose not to bring their work up to a professional standard in order to maintain a culture of amateurism, which would make this 'failing' of RPGiana a rhetorical strategy.

Very few people have agreed with me—at least, so far as concerns my argument; the initial facts I have yet to see disputed. Alternative hypotheses have been offered: the amateur quality of RPGs is due to laziness, to inexperience, and to arrogance. There may be some merit in the last one: professional editing amounts mostly to humility; the amateur writer never doubts himself. Certainly, it has been the case that, where technical points have been questioned, not a single one of my interlocutors has made *any effort* to substantiate his claims, whether with the small task of an internet search or the comparatively large one of a turn through a print dictionary (excepting, of course, my own editor, who has made her disagreements with me over grammar known practically, above all by occasionally changing my punctuation; I'm still unsure about the semi-colons). It remains the case, in my experience, that the vast majority of RPG enthusiasts simply have no interest in attaining to a higher standard of writing. I continue to hold to my interpretation as to why.

This second article will explore a more traditional rhetorical device: exposition.

Exposition?

Issues 227-233 of *Daredevil* constitute Frank Miller's finest hour. In seven issues, he both revitalized and completely changed the tone of a comic book that had been stagnating for twenty years. This task must have not been enough for him, because he also chose to adhere to an interesting formal restriction. He would, in every issue, weave into the narrative text a description of both Daredevil's powers and how Matt Murdock came to have them—a small feat of exposition, perhaps, but one executed perfectly seven times in a row.

Super-hero comics have an obligation to do this for new readers; they have to include, somewhere in all that four-color bombast, an indication of just what this business of tossing cars and swinging around on webs and being green is all about. They don't, however, have to include the requisite explanations in the narrative. They can simply sign-post it somewhere in the first few pages.

Generally, role-playing games do not enjoy this diversity of options. When it comes to expositing the rules, worlds and inhabitants of the game, RPGs must do exactly that, as directly and clearly as possible. This has an effect not only on the style of RPGs but also on the mindset of the community that supports them. This last observation is merely that. It seems to me that gamers tend both to imprint very readily and to express themselves encyclopedically. Their conversation, much in the manner of 'fluff' text, relies markedly on naked illustration, cataloguing and categorization. Gamers spot and employ tropes and formulae with extraordinary facility—perhaps too much: the way in which an RPG kid picks up and utilizes the elements of his games strikes me as equally impressive and eerie. It happens on both sides of the economy: the author of *Exalted* mentions that

one of the characters in one of the novels from which he drew inspiration would have made a good Lunar. At any rate, if you've ever heard someone try to describe the entirety of American society in terms of *D&D's* alignment system, then you know what I mean.

Back to the main theme. RPGiana relies heavily on direct, unadorned description, and it has a number of ways of handling this reliance and of mitigating it, not all of them successful, but some of them remarkably inventive. These approaches are what we'll look at in this article.

Before we go too far, let's clarify a certain misconception: exposition is not bad, in itself. Despite the fact that any guide to writing will advise the young writer to show, rather than tell, not all showings and tellings have the same effect. As Henry James tells us, "I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive..." In a word, he means, "do it right." *Any* tool can work, so long as one uses it properly. The following example, from the RPG *A/State*, demonstrates a failure, "The most disturbing aspect of a Simil is its head: a human head." Don't tell me what's disturbing; *disturb* me—that's the point of the writing course admonition. The text shouldn't draw conclusions of effect for the reader; it should instead achieve those effects. James merely wants us to understand that we have available to us a multitude of means by which to do this.

So, do they do it, these expository RPGs? We'll redeem *A/State* by examining a more successful passage, "Finding a lost place is a formidable task,

you may only stumble upon one. For a moment, things seem familiar, but then you realize you must have taken a wrong turn, be on the wrong side of the street. Then truth closes in.”

Here, use of the second person draws the reader into the entry; you hardly notice that the authors have introduced a new concept. The passage achieves this effect by appropriating the language of actual role-playing: it evokes the manner in which a game master reveals a situation to a player. This doesn't amount to the usual direct address between author and reader; it anticipates play. For now, we'll simply note this as one maneuver among many in the process of advancing good exposition, but, later on, we'll take a deeper look at this style insofar as it establishes itself as a subject in its own right.

The two game quotations above both have to do with encounters with a creature or a place, and, indeed, some of the best exposition occurs in bestiaries and gazetteers, which is natural, given how much they dominate the discourse of RPGs. Unfortunately, this aspect of RPGiana has been running on fumes *and in overdrive* for twenty years or so. Catalogs of kingdoms and monsters abound, nearly all of them intolerable recountings of the authors' pet worlds and pet, well, pets. Fortunately, these authors sometimes indulge themselves with style. Here follow a few such instances.

Great Exposition!

A good plowing through the twenty pages or so of the city history section in the *Shelzar* supplement for the *Scarred Lands* setting will eventually reward the diligent reader with a number of intriguing passages, such as this one:

This rundown home is the dwelling of a dwarf called Najd Rajaami...who is known locally as the “rhaat” catcher, because he has made it his personal quest to capture the young orphan children (called “rhaats” in Shelzari slang) that live—some say infest—the district.

Now, we'll say nothing about the fact that it should have been “who live in”, moving instead to remark on the extraordinary word-play here. First, the bilingual pun ‘rhaat’ for ‘rat’—an excellent choice, because the Arabic ‘rhaT’, plural ‘aarhaaT’, means “group, band, or troop”—close enough to “gang.” Furthermore, the root is ‘rahaTa’, to “gobble,” which act rats connote. Second, in a fit of black comedy, it seems that the authors have chosen to name their dwarf ‘Helpful’ (one way of rendering ‘Najd.’) Funny, because of the allusion to the famous Seven, dark, because, as it turns out, “Najd is a slaver and sells the children to whoever is willing to pay his price.” This suggests, third and last, that by ‘Rajaami,’ they meant to indicate ‘rajama,’ meaning to “stone (someone); curse; damn; abuse.” Neat!

But enjoyable as all this is, it does give one to wonder, whom is all this charming paronomasia for? Well, for themselves, obviously, though the odd reader may pick up on it to his delight. Too bad for the players who don't get to read the setting book.

More accessible, but no less impressive, is the technique employed in *Delta Green: Countdown*, a supplement so huge and throughout its immenseness so thoroughly detailed as to be practically useless. There is an article on Tiger Transit, a shipping concern founded by the CIA, but now controlled, naturally, by a couple of crazy cults. This section carries a boxed text that summarizes the real-world inspiration for the its subject, the unscrupulous development and marketing practices of certain tobacco companies, along with a bizarre cotton-seed-for-coup backdoor deal between the U.S. government and the Argentinean military. That's a smart thing to do. Not only do the authors provide a sort of textual mirror that lends an air of verisimilitude and urgency to their fiction, they also turn us in the direction that they have taken; they show us one way to develop more of this stuff, more consortia of conspiracy.

This occurs within narrow limits—I can't think of another article in the book that used the same device. It serves to highlight another approach, however: the open use of real-world sources parallels that of the fantastic. We all know that the purveyors of RPGiana steal as much as they can get away with—this may, actually, be the point of role-playing: appropriation and incorporation. Nothing wrong with that as legions of artists have kept just such a practice acceptable for thousands of years—‘kept’ I say, because this sort of ‘borrowing’ preceded any notions of originality, creativity, or property (it's not even borrowing for them, but we'll let that slide). This tactic has the advantage of shorthand, in that it's often simpler and more efficient to point to something, rather than describe it. Norse kennings work this way, as do stories that make use of the Cthulhu Mythos; they rely on their audience's ability to speak their iconic language. For RPGiana, a Rifts novel provides an example:

“So you like working with computers? What kind of deck do you run?”

“Datacore RM-345XS backsurge protected with an ICE countermeasure and multi-net access.”

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* first popularized the term ‘ICE’ (Gibson himself reveals in a note to that book that he got the acronym from Tom Maddox), and the use of it in the techno-babyl exchange above indicates to us that we should expect the rest of the book to partake in the cyberpunkitude that *Neuromancer* introduced. Of course, our Rifty friend might have worded his reference better or perhaps re-read Gibson's book: ICE stands for ‘intrusion countermeasures electronics,’ which makes the sentence awkward at best, nonsense at worst.

Other products have recognized that the task of exposition really amounts to encyclopedic writing and that it might do some good to try out the medieval

model for it, which is to say that they've decided to throw in absolutely *everything*. All Flesh's *Atlas of the Walking Dead* does this, as each entry comprises an illustration, a section of narrative, descriptive text, variant spellings, plural forms, game statistics, variant creatures and story ideas. It works to good effect, because, while most of it may at the moment seem extraneous, the sheer mass of information tends to produce interesting connections. Thanks to the *Vrykolokas* entry, I now know that China Mieville got the term for his vampire in *The Scar* from the variant 'brucolocaus.' Such a thing endears one to, rather than distracts from, the endless exposition. Occasional, clever and euphemistic jokes do the same: "In Japanese folklore, gaki can hunger for all kinds of things, some of them quite strange." 'Quite strange' includes feces, which is sort of funny.

What Besides Exposition?

That's some of the good—what about the bad? Exposition in RPGiana suffers from two faults: over-reliance and the illusion of authority. These two faults twine together. RPG-related products present us with description too often because the need for a certain amount of it tends to cultivate a reflexive acquiescence to the descriptive urge—straight-up description, the bad form of telling is so much easier to do than narrative exposition. Clumsiness rolls downhill. Let's illustrate this:

I can kill with a single word. I can hurl a ball of fire into the midst of my enemies. I rule a squadron of skeletal warriors, who can destroy by touch alone. I can raise a wall of ice to protect those I serve. The invisible is discernible to my eyes. Ordinary spells crumble in my presence.

Truly revolting, utterly contrived, and a virtual palimpsest: the intended audience of this *D&D* novel can see right through this paragraph to the Death

Knight entry in the *Fiend Folio*; they might even make check marks where appropriate. This evinces pedantry as well as maladroitness, and we'll get to the former in a minute, but, for the time being, we should ask ourselves how it became possible to write such an obviously derivative passage. I think that it doesn't go to far to speculate that we deal here with writers who have learned too much of their craft from RPGs. RPGiana cultivates direct, encyclopedic expression, and this is the reason for the frequent failings of the novels where a descriptive passage dictates rather than narrates. Look at this lignified phrasing:

The magic she had just unleashed would weaken a dark elf or pretty much any other mortal being to the point of death. However, depending on its precise nature, the demon—or whatever it was—might simply shrug it off. It might even feed on the blast of force and grow stronger than before.

In part, this stumbling reference to the *Harm* spell serves a purpose aside from defining (or agreeing with) the fictional world of the narrative; it also flatters the mastery of the fan who recognizes it as such. I have no doubt whatsoever that this explains the constant enumeration of spell components in books published as part of a *D&D* series. I would even go so far as to bet real money that a memo or some other form of corporate order *demand*s that every book of this kind must adhere to this restriction. The kids like it when they get to use their 'Spellcraft' skill. Sure, it clunks like a sugared gasoline engine, but we can oppose to that, in theory, mad \$\$\$.

There are ways to do it right, of course. Consider the following dialogue, which explains a rule for vampires both local to this novel and derived from the RPG it fictionalizes:

"She looks like a big-boobed novelty coat-rack back there, or some kind of really expensive sex toy. Isn't it uncomfortable for her?"

"Not really," said Theo. "Her muscles are frozen in place, so she is not exerting any effort to stay like that."

'She is not' comes off as rather stilted, but the explanation of how staking a vampire works in the system—and, therefore, in the fictionalization of it—occurs both organically and briefly. Note as well the interesting expression of the unfortunate vampire's physical charms, a depiction meant to playfully tease readers with a stereotypicality of this genre and, especially, this particular game. In order to disguise the reference to a rule, the author winks at us overtly. Further, in this case, we may want to consider exposition of tone, as the end of the first paragraph of the novel reads: "Angry at himself, he kicked at a small wooden post next to the path. *Loser...*"—which communicates, some might cruelly say, the foundational mood of this particular rules-set.

Lord High Exposition

The format of most RPG exposition reeks of authority, as it should; the rules are the rules, after all. But what happens when they get things entirely wrong? The argument from authority tends to aver that, within the system, the game is always right. We need an example, and why not turn to the big boy? *D&D's Monster Manual* establishes many bizarre conventions and advocates some clearly wrong ones. Some of these have become traditional. Take 'ghoul' and 'ghost,' two words that have nothing whatsoever in common with each other, except: 1) they usually occupy the same page in a dictionary; and 2) they both have to do with supernatural creatures. One

word is Semitic, the other Germanic; one refers to a spirit, the other to something more like a demon. Nonetheless, their proximity proved too convenient for the original *MM* some twenty-five years ago, and now they've become almost inextricably related.

A similar phenomenon lies at the heart of another confusion: "efreet (singular efreeti)." This statement appears in the Efreeti entry and for all creatures that appear under the rubric 'Genie' in the 3rd edition *MM*, much as plurals for foreign words appear throughout the *Atlas of the Walking Dead*.

Problem is it's completely wrong. In Arabic, the plural of "afreet" is "aafareet." The incorrect efreeti/efreet has been recommended, because someone discovered that 'djinn' forms this way: the singular of this word is indeed 'djinni' and the plural 'djinn.' The writers simply over-applied this rule, much as one might say 'gooses' instead of 'geese' (and, of course, bungled the singular: even in English, the word is 'afreet', not 'efreeti'.) Where this really begins to get stupid is with 'janni,' another of the Genie entries. They do offer the correct plural there, and it is the same as for 'djinni', but that's only because 'djinni' and 'janni' are *the same word*. They're just different transliterations of the original Arabic. It gets still worse when we remember where 'genie' comes from: not a transliteration, but a claque that happens to be homophonic. 'Genie' is Latin, but the denotative meaning of it for us, "an Arabian spirit," comes from 'djinni,' which it is homonymous and synonymous with, but not a cognate of. The French happened upon the word in the course of translating the *Arabian Nights* and took the opportunity to latinize it rather than introduce a new term. Of course, the *MM* has no problem pluralizing 'genie' with an 's'—and it *shouldn't*: 'genies' is good English, just as the djinni/djinn distinction is. English, limber language that it is, very often bends to accept foreign plural

constructions, and, as discourse in English, RPGiana contributes to this fine practice.

Better to contribute well, then. This would entail having enough respect for a foreign term to transplant it with sufficient of its native soil to allow it to flourish in its new ground. More bluntly: don't do it half-assed.

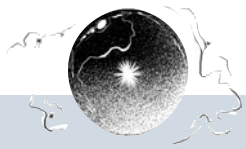
This means that the vaunted volume we've been discussing ought to take issue with the misuse of 'erinyes,' which means "Furies"—plural. Thus: "An erinyes stands about six feet tall and weighs about 150 lbs" means "An [three angry, snake-haired goddesses who punish wrongdoers] stands about six feet tall and weighs about 150 lbs." 'Erinys' is the singular. Why did no one bother to look that up? Because no one *ever* bothers to look that stuff up—a 'correction' after the form of the one we've seen perpetrated in the Genie article (i.e. not a correction at all) comes to us as a result of happenstance; somebody stumbled over the correct plural, with the results we see.

But keep in mind that exposition in RPGiana always presents itself as authoritative: people will actually *cite* this malarkey. Or, anyway, seek to annoy their peers with it. Beyond pettiness, however, there lies a real responsibility: RPGs have the potential to introduce a great richness into the languages in which they are written. As with any other technical or highly specialized speech, RPGiana must invent, and some of these inventions will find their way into common parlance. Role-playing games are, without any doubt, the largest single influence on fantasy writing to have appeared in the last thirty years. They rank probably third or fourth when it comes to science-fiction. That's power over language. The question of ordering this power brings us to our next segment, another fundamental stylistic trait of RPGs:

pedantry. We'll explore this issue, as well as the style of written play, in the next and final article.

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Gaming Tips : Moonhunter's Top 10 Tips for 2004

by Scott Fitz

For reasons that are arcane, my gaming year seems to start in April. It is always the time for new campaigns, new troupes and new affiliations. I don't plan on it being that way, it just keeps happening. In three years ago in April, I started on a quest to actively improve my own gamecraft and my skills in all aspects of gaming. I had plateaued. There seemed to be no new gaming challenges. On a lark, I answered some questions on how to do things on a website. Then it hit me. Teaching others how to game well improves your own gamecraft. Now follow me here. To advance at a certain level, Martial artists are required to teach other lesser students. Not only does this increase the number of students, it teaches the instructor. The instructor hones their abilities, perfects those basic moves and learns about their own art in the act of teaching others. In the act of teaching others how to game well, a gamer consciously learns the things that they have been doing: clearer ways to frame/phrase the rules and ways to role-play. Late April that year, I began to be a gaming guru on various sites. For a couple of years now, I have doled out advice on the hows, whys and techniques of gaming. Most of them have been in the format of "tips" Zen bits of gaming wisdom. Over the years, I have discovered that I am constantly giving out the same advice over and over again. There is a lot of cutting and pasting in my world. This year, I have decided to list the most common tips. Here is my top 10.

1) Never game with anyone you wouldn't spend 4-8 hours interacting with doing something else.

Despite the stereotypical view of gaming, gaming is a social activity. You are interacting with people (pretending to be other people) for several hours at a time. If you don't like that person or feel uncomfortable with him or her around, you are not going to enjoy your gaming experience. Eventually your gaming group becomes a social group and that

dislike or uncomfortable feeling will only complicate issues. When starting a new troupe, make sure that all members of the group can interact with each other socially. In fact, invite them all to a social event to try out the group dynamics before you play together. This will give everyone a chance to both bond and find their niches. It will also let you see if this group can play together. This step will make your gaming, and your social life, much easier.

2) Learn what each player really wants in a game. Do what you can to give it to them. (If you are a player, learn what everyone wants/ needs, even the GM, and do what you can to allow it to happen.)

GMs and players are constantly complaining about the games they are in are not satisfying their needs for X. This simple step would eliminate many of these types of issues. The GM should take player likes and dislikes into consideration when designing a campaign, game world or scenario. I actually ask for a few "bits" that people want in the game periodically. That way everyone gets most of what they want with a minimum of fuss and disruption.

3) When creating a general setting or campaign in a given genre, make sure the players know the setting and genre AND embrace it.

Ever have a game where someone said, "I didn't know it was going to be like this?" or "When you said SuperHero I was expecting Batman and Superman, not Punisher and Wolverine." It seems to happen quite often. The key to this point is to communicate with your players OFTEN, when creating a campaign. Make sure they understand what they are getting into. It will save heartache down the line.

4) Character creation is a group affair AND must be done with deep GM involvement.

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 he has honed his game craft to razor sharpness. Now he gives out game advice on a number of Internet sites.

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The players should work together to determine who and what their characters are, as well as linking each character to the others in the group. The GM should help players tie their characters to the world and the other characters. If a character does not fit the game or is disruptive, it is the GMs fault.

Most problems in a campaign stem from GMs not truly understanding the characters they let in. If I hear "I can't handle this XXXXX that one of my players made," one more time I will scream. If the GM had just paid attention and exercised the word "no," their campaign would not be in shambles. If they paid attention long enough to realize a group of six warriors would not work in their campaign, it would not have folded. If the characters were willing to work together, but being of different antagonistic nationalities and odd social classes they really can't, the campaign would not of imploded. Sigh. Advice along this line is one of the most common over the last two years.

5) Each character needs one or more major plotlines attached to it. Without that, the characters will not last in the campaign.

This ties back into character creation. Every character should have one plot line that puts her in the spotlight, or gives her something personally interesting to the player. If they don't, you have relegated the character to permanent supporting character status. Everyone needs the spotlight occasionally. If a player doesn't get it, he either leaves or disrupts the game until he does.

6) Find ways to keep each character AND player motivated.

This is related to tip 2 and 4. Everyone has something they need or want. Motivating the character alone is not helpful if the player does not care about the campaign. Find out what motivates the player as well. Motivated players are involved players. Involved players and playing motivated characters are good for your campaign.

7) All bookkeeping must be done out of game time.

Hitchcock once said that movies were "life with the boring parts cut out." GMs should take this statement to heart. While gaming, you should concentrate on the interesting parts (interactions, dramatic scenes, tactical events). Between sessions you should deal with all the boring parts (book keeping, updating, events that occur for only one player). This way, your "table time" will be as exciting as any movie or TV show. I don't know about you, but my game time is precious. I don't want to waste it.

8) The GM must keep notes on every aspect of the game. Those notes must be reviewed regularly. This helps keep you both organized and focused, even if you are adlibbing the game.

Note taking is a great tool. If you didn't learn that in school, you will learn it as a GM. The notes focus the GM's thoughts on the subject, they highlight events, and they remind the GM of the little details that are important for maintaining verisimilitude and the appearance that you have planned everything. Keeping your notes organized will help keep your thoughts and campaign story organized. While I recommend keeping everything on a legal pad, use

3x5 cards, a PDA, a spiral notebook, or what ever works for you. Just keep the notes handy and review them before each game.

9) Control each scene in the game. Each game scene should have a purpose that furthers the campaign. Each scene should be on the beat, bouncing between action and development.

Most people's players were raised on television and movies. They expect "a story" to be presented in a similar format. Professional movie and TV writers work with scenes and beats. Every scene is in there for a reason, to maintain the flow of the story. GM's should take as much care with their game. By using narration and paying attention to the purpose behind every "scene" in the game, GMs can easily push a story along (without any hint of railroading). If a GM is not paying attention to such things, the few times GM seem to "get it right" will be moments the players remember.

10) GM the game you would like to play in.

If you, the GM, are not happy with your game, your game will eventually grind to a halt. If you are not having fun, work with your players until you are, or scrap the game and start again

Runners Up

There are more than 10 top tips. Anyone who has seen one of my posts knows I am verbose. I pile on examples and give you more information than you need. So here are some of the runners up for the top 10.

GMs should always present a confident face to the players. You might not know what is really going, adlibbing everything, but if they don't realize you are confused or indecisive, they will simply accept what you say as The Truth.

You, as the GM, are the eyes and ears

and other sense of the characters. The players should be able to close their eyes and "know the setting" just based on your narration. If you are not narrating the scene well enough for them to do this, you are doing your players a disservice.

People think games are books. They think what works in that medium will automatically work in gaming. That is not true. Games are stories over time, like movies and television. Learn from movies and television and you will learn things useful in gaming. A recommended work on the subject is "Story by McKee" <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0060391685/103-2646381-3209404?v=glance>

Gamers are actors of a sort. Anyone telling you otherwise is probably trying to sell you miniatures and accessories (or has bought them).

Join Toast Masters. Not only will it improve your speaking skills, it will create contacts for you that will improve your chance of getting a really great job.

Practice presenting information in a mirror and create cue cards for yourself to capture good pieces of narration you think up before the game, so you don't forget them. This practice is normally called "Riffing," you just choose a subject and go with it. You can learn what seems to work by doing riffing in the mirrors, just like stand up comedians do. Cue cards are just three by five cards that you jot down ideas upon. These ideas are usually bits of description or tactics. If you add appropriate game mechanics or rule book pages numbers for them, they become useful game tools.

So grasshoppers, another April has come into my life. My quest for becoming a master of gamecraft and improving the gamecraft of the entire gaming community continues. To that end, I give you this gift, the 2004 model MoonHunter's tips. See you all next year.

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Dark Cult of Hisseesho

by Khaz Axzen

The stomp of booted feet and raised voices was soon followed by the clangor of steel on steel, grunts of exertion, cries of pain and feet shuffling. The telltale sounds of street fighting echoed as the night watch engaged a knot of loitering, drunken sailors, in their usual heavy handed, tyrannical method.

As quickly as it began, the fight was over. Outnumbered and inebriated, the sailors were overcome and disarmed. They were carried off to the local jail, despite the fact that many needed immediate medical attention and some would not make it through the night. There was no need to tell any onlookers to disperse, anyone with half their wits about them fled at the first sign of Isegoth's city guard, who were known to enforce the law with an iron fist and cold steel. Everyone familiar with the law enforcement on this side of the city knew the sailors would never be seen again, but no one would speak of it above a hushed whisper. The guard ruled these streets through fear and paranoia; the walls had ears.



Hidden in the deep shadows of a narrow alley between the Dragon's Den tavern and the Sea and Sand pawnshop, two sets of beady red eyes watched the fight with interest. As big as large dogs, the short haired, jet black forms were decidedly rat-like in appearance. Instead of a rat's typical, elongated front tooth, these giant rats had opposing saber-like tusks protruding from their top and bottom jaws that rubbed grindingly together when opening and closing their large mouths, naturally sharpening them to razor sharp points. Pointed ears poked out around horns that jutted out and back from their foreheads. Each of the three toes on their four feet ended in cruelly curved claws, uncanny intelligence gleamed in their hell spawned eyes.

One of the creatures, the smaller of the two, licked the

saliva from it's muzzle and took a step forward toward a tasty morsel left behind by the night watch, a bloody arm, severed at the elbow. The larger beast snapped at a smaller pack mate, grinding it's tusks menacingly while issuing a low rumbling growl. Lowering it's head submissively, the smaller rat slunk back into the shadows.



Avoiding the sparse yellow pools of light cast from the gas lamps and the open tavern bat wing doors along Isegoth's seedy Dock street, the unusual pair moved at a steady pace. They kept to the shadows cast by the three story warehouses along the docks. A chill, early spring wind carried the salty smell of the sea, as well as the stench of garbage barges and rancid whale fat. Only the potential for profit and an invitation from someone known to have no connection with Isegoth's corrupt government would bring these two outlaws of the empire within the city walls.

Ignoring the occasional beggars and prostitutes and keeping eyes and ears alert for any signs of further guard patrols, the taller of the pair, a frost elf by the name of Sarel Duthar, pulled his black hood and cloak tightly around his lean frame. His companion, whose short stature, broad shoulders and barrel chest marked him as a dwarf to even the casual observer, glanced up at the elf with barely disguised humor.

"Elves are so thin skinned, a little bit a wind and yer bundled like ya was back home on the tundra," remarked the dwarf known as Khaz Axzen in his deep, gravelly voice. Wearing nothing but leather boots, deerskin pants and a worn leather vest, and exposing hugely muscled, tattooed arms, chest and bald scalp, the dwarf never seemed to be overly affected by the weather.

Before the elf could reply, a hooded figure slipped from

About the Author

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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the shadows of an abandoned warehouse ten paces in front of the odd pair. With a quickness belying his muscled bulk, the dwarf pulled his axe from the sheath on his back, growling like a wild animal.

Hearing the oiled clicks of crossbow safeties being released from the windows above them and the stretching of bow strings from the tavern roof directly across the street, Sarel quickly stepped between the violence prone dwarf and the hooded stranger, letting his own hood fall back, revealing the long, snow white hair and pale, ice blue skin of a frost elf. The hair on the back of his neck stood up as he felt the sights of several crossbows leveled in his direction.

"We are seeking Kimba Truehart, from the druidic order of the cheetah," spoke Sarel. His voice was barely above a whisper, "we are answering her summons."

"Well met Sarel Duthar, it has been a long time," responded the stranger in the lyrical, female voice of a wood elf. She turned to the still bristling dwarf and said, "and you must be master Khaz Axzen. Greetings. Let us talk inside."

After some reassuring words from from Sarel, Khaz replaced his axe in its fur sheath on his back and stomped after the two elves, rubbing his bald head and grumbling about elven witches.

Kimba turned and strode to the corner of the warehouse; she moved with casual, feline ease. Her full length cloak, which appeared black in the shadows, shimmered and seemed to change color and hue,

turning dark gold with cheetah-like spots in the yellowish street light before fading to black as she turned down the dark, garbage strewn alley between warehouses.

They navigated their way through debris and refuse barrels. The sounds of reveling and music from the taverns on the street were replaced by scuttling, squeaking rats and the soft pad of feral cats on the hunt. The smell of garbage and feces was strong in the narrow, high walled space.

Sarel's keen elven night vision caught fleeting glimpses of furtive movement from the roof tops flanking them as the trio came upon a dead end in the form of a red brick and crumbling mortar wall. Extending her right arm, the druid traced elven runes on the wall with her long nailed pointer finger, making the sign of Doona Cheetahsoul, the patron goddess of the druidic order of the cheetah. The outline of an arched door appeared and silently slid open inward on a dark, empty corridor, leading to a heavy wooden door at its end. Stepping through the doorway, Kimba turned and gracefully motioned for the other two to follow. While Sarel quickly stepped over the threshold, Khaz hesitated, glancing behind him before entering.

Once all three were inside, the brick door slid shut of its own volition, locking with a barely audible snick. As soon as the outer door closed, the heavy wooden door was opened from within by a large man with short cropped black hair and a fresh-looking scar on the left side of his face. The scar ran from his forehead, through his eye, ending at his chin. He was wearing the red leather armor of the city guard, noticeably missing the blue and white crashing wave insignia of Isegoth. His hand was resting on the hilt of a huge broadsword.

Warm, inviting torchlight spilled into the corridor from the room beyond as the trio entered. The large man shut the door behind them and barred it with a thick steel beam before retreating to the opposite side of

the room, where he stood with his back to the wall, eying the two strangers warily.

Triangular in shape, the room had a high ceiling. Two sides were made of thick, mildewed timbers, lined with dusty shelves. One long wall, now occupied by the large human with the scar, was made of brick and held a sconce holding an oil torch. In the middle of the room was a square wooden table, laden with black bread, cheese, fruit and a large pitcher of a golden liqueur. Four sturdy looking chairs surrounded the table. The room was probably used as a hide room or safe room by the former merchant owners, where they would hide valuables or contraband they didn't want taxed by the empire, like imported hallucinogenic drugs sold out on dock street. Sarel sensed strong magic in this room, the druid probably had warding and anti-detection spells at work and magical alarms on the doors.

Kimba Truehart swept her hood back and motioned for her guests to sit at the table in the center of the room. Khaz studied the tall druid, noting the golden, almost white-blond hair and dark skin of someone who spent many years in the elements. She turned and looked the dwarf in the eye, searchingly. He returned her stare, then gasped as the color drained from his red bearded face—her eyes were yellow, flecked with black spots and slit like a cats!

"Shapeshifter," Khaz whispered aloud. I knew she was an elven witch, he thought to himself, displaying mountain dwarves inherent distrust for magic. Sarel on the other hand sat back and relaxed, smiling at his friend's obvious discomfort.

"Yes master Axzen, I am a shape shifter as you call it," Kimba replied with a warm smile while removing her cloak, revealing the live wood breastplate and armor favored by warrior druids of the northern forests. A slender sword was sheathed at her slim waist.

"This is a friend of my order," indicating the large

man in the livery of the city guard who opened the wooden door upon their arrival. "Dev Von Fritz, formerly a knight of the empire of Khor, and officer in Isegoth's city guard."

Sarel nodded in the big mans direction, but got an icy stare in return.

"Please, help yourselves to food and drink," Kimba continued, pouring herself a small amount of the golden liqueur in a metal goblet. She downed the liqueur in a gesture aimed to show Khaz it wasn't poisoned.

"Let's cut to the chase, I'm sure ya didn't call us here to catch up with your old friend Sar here," blurted Khaz impatiently, referring to the fact that Sarel and Kimba had crossed paths before.

Pouring himself a drink, the frost elf agreed, "Excuse my friend druid. Patience, as you know, is not a dwarven virtue, and I would be a liar if I said the same thought did not cross my own mind."

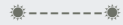
"I'll get right to the point then," stated Kimba, sitting across from Sarel. "I was sent by the druidic council in Stonemeet to investigate activity in the demon blasted wastes to the south, and the possible connection to the cult of Hisseesha and their leader." The elf paused, pushing her long hair back from her face and tying it back in a loose knot before continuing. "Have either of you heard of a wizard called Primus Creed?"

"I haven't, but not to many people in these parts are very eager to speak to a frost elf," said Sarel, referring to his peoples unsavory, if deserved reputation.

After a moments silence, Khaz spoke up, rubbing his bald tattooed head as if it pained him. "During my enslavement in the arena's of Siraq and Saumecca, the locals spoke of a powerful mage called Primus Creed, who was exiled into the Ikpycgen desert

two mercenaries nodded in agreement.

"It's done then. You can meet Dev and I outside the gates to the old cemetery on the edge of the Twisted forest south of Isegoth at midnight two days hence. Now I suggest you two get some rest; dawn is almost upon us, and I don't think either of you wants to get caught within the city limits, especially knowing what you know now. I bid you good night."



Khaz sat crosslegged with his back resting on the rear wall of the cave he and the frost elf, Sarel, had called home this past winter.

After carefully mixing the volatile ingredients of his explosive flash powder, the dwarf poured measured amounts in small, hollow, perforated steel arrowheads, usually used by assassins for poison. He then fitted a wooden quarrel with small pieces of flint embedded in it in the arrowhead's sleeve, leaving about a thumb's width of space between the flint and the sleeve. Shot from a small, one-handed crossbow, the sharp dart didn't look like it would be more than an annoyance, but upon impact, the shaft would slide the rest of the way into the arrow. The embedded flint would strike the steel of the sleeve, causing a spark and igniting the black, sulfurous smelling flash powder. The ensuing, small explosion would leave a gaping, shrapnel-filled wound in the unfortunate target.

In sharp contrast to the dwarf's calm preparations, Sarel paced back and forth past the cave entrance like a caged animal. Wearing soft, well traveled leather boots and black sheepskin pants, the frost elf barely made a sound, except for the scraping grind created by the stone he used to compulsively sharpen his throwing knives, which he wore in belts that criss-crossed his chest. Khaz had noted a change in his friend since their meeting with the druid. Sarel had withdrawn within himself at the reminders of his dark heritage. A fire smoldered behind his almond shaped,

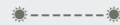
sky blue eyes in anticipation of possible violence and death.

As the sun set in the west, stars began to appear in the darkening sky above Khorian bay. Under cover of darkness the pair would make their way south along the coast. With warriors stealth they would skirt Isegoth and the ruins to rendezvous with Kimba Truehart and Dev Von Fritz in the ancient cemetery.



Oiled and sharpened, Dev's two handed broadsword lay across the table in front of him, torch light dancing along its carefully polished length. Next to it was the short, leaf shaped sword, favored by the city guard because it was easier to use in the close in street fighting and peace keeping.

After escorting Sarel and Khaz back to Dock Street, Kimba returned to go over the plans with the taciturn, former knight. She reached across the table and put her hand on his muscled, gauntleted forearm, "I know what your thinking Dev and you need to let it go," she said to him. "Not everyone that lives outside the law is a criminal; that's the guardsman in you, clouding your better judgment. I have seen into the frost elf's heart, he has forsaken the ways of his people." She then told Dev the unlikely tale of how a druid, champion of light and everything good, came to befriend a feared, decadent frost elf in the northern wilds of Brynhalla...



...Ambushed by a roving band of brezu, Kimba ran deeper into the foothills of the Graode mountains. If she could put enough distance between herself and her attackers to "shift" into her cheetah form, she would be able to quickly outdistance them. But they were closing in on the exhausted druid.

Winded, the fleet footed elf reached the end of the rocky trail she had been following here, she could put

her back to stone, a good defensible place to make a stand. Turning to face her closest assailant, she sent the man-beast a telepathic message. The creature skidded to a halt at the mental barrage. Panting from exertion, red tongue hanging out of its mouth between nasty looking, elongated canines, saliva dripping to the gray rock at its huge feet, it cocked its hairy head to the right, as if hearing something in the distance. But, unlike its more docile, herbivorous cousin the sasquatch, brezu were black of heart and soul, malicious and violent, more akin to tundra grendels and sand yeti's. Kimba's druidic powers over beasts would not save her here; combat was her only remaining option.

Taking advantage of the creature's momentary confusion, she whipped her druid's staff from her back, "Sulia fuere"! Kimba shouted the magical words, igniting the tip of the staff in greenish tinged fire. Hurling it like a spear, it struck the creature square in the chest, setting its greasy, charcoal gray fur aflame. The creature's anguished howl of pain and fear echoed throughout the foothills as it ran about, batting at the flames, bouncing off rocks and trees and igniting dry brush, before falling in a charred heap.

The acrid reek of burning flesh and hair stung Kimba's nostrils as the remaining five hungry brutes advanced more cautiously. Unsheathing her sword, the druid held it in a two handed grip, swinging it back and forth in great arcs while back stepping, keeping the setting sun behind her and the hungry brezu at bay. The continued to retreat until she felt the cold stone of the rocky outcrop at her back.

A fleeting shadow passed over the closest beast, shielding its eyes from the sun with its hairy, clawed hand. It looked up just in time to see the crude, but expertly balanced stone knife flying end over end, before burying itself up to the wooden handle in the creature's left eye socket, killing it instantly.

Following the knife was its thrower, leaping the twenty feet from the rocky outcrop to the trail below. Arms and black cloak outstretched like a giant vampire bat, he landed in a crouch in the midst of the parasite ridden, smelly creatures. Sun glinted off steel as the newcomer slashed the curved blade held in his right hand up and out to his right, parting flesh and muscle, disemboweling one brezu. Staying low to avoid a clawed swipe, he punched up and to his left with the stone skinning knife protruding from between the pointer and middle fingers of his left hand. Making solid contact with the swiping beast's crotch, he twisted the blade. Warm blood and fluids spilled over his hand and arm as he rolled to avoid the creature as it fell, writhing and howling in pain.

Quickly turning from hunted to hunter, Kimba stepped forward, slashing her long, slender sword from right to left. She felt an almost imperceptible tug as the razor sharp tip of her weapon passed through fur and hide, nicked off bone and came free, ropey strands of thick blood trailing in it's wake. She aimed her back swing a bit higher, neatly slicing through the already fatally wounded, wide-eyed brezu's wind pipe.

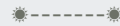
Having seen four of their pack slaughtered, the remaining two brezu turned tail and ran. Kimba's rescuer, adrenaline and battle lust still coursing through his blood, took a couple of steps in pursuit before coming to his senses, and turning back to the druid.

"Are you alright"? He asked in an elvan dialect slightly different from the standard elven tongue. He stooped over one of the dead beasts and wiped the gore and blood from his blades, never taking his sky blue eyes off her.

Still catching her breath, Kimba studied the newcomer. Long snow white hair framed a youthful,

pale, ice blue angular elven face. A frost elf, she thought. She wondered if she had been rescued from the frying pan only to land in the fire. But there was something about this frost elf, or Timborian elf as they were once called, something that contradicted their unsavory, depraved reputations.

"Yes, I'm fine, thank you," she replied, still unsure of this frost elf's intentions. Then she realized what was different about him, his aura was light and good, not dark and sinister like she had been taught frost elves, as a race, were supposed to be...



..."You see Dev, do you think if Sarel was dark of heart and soul, he would have selflessly risked himself to aid me?" Kimba paused, then continued, "I have seen the light in his heart, it is good."

Dev seemed more relaxed after hearing the elf's tale of how the two met. "And what of the dwarf, you don't get those scars and tattoos from doing good deeds," the former guardsman stated sarcastically.

"Khaz Axesen is a different story. I can see the goodness within him, but he has a shadow over his soul; he struggles with his own demons," Kimba replied. "The first century of his life was spent as a slave, the last thirty five in the barbaric arena's of Siraq and Saumecca as a gladiator. Unlike Sarel Duthar, who is running away from his heritage, Khaz is searching for his. But right now he is clanless, and to a dwarf, that makes him worse than a criminal, at least in his own eyes, and the eyes of most of his kin."

"In all mother natures creations, there is planted two seeds. Both seeds grow as we grow, like trees in the forest. Each seed struggles with the other to take root in the rich soil of our souls. One tree is evil, it grows black, and twisted. That tree bears the ugly fruit of anger, jealousy, greed, arrogance,

inferiority, lies, ego and hatred. The other tree is good, and it buds with the fruits of joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, kindness, benevolence, generosity, truth and faith. It shines with the warm, white light of goodness. Which seed wins this struggle is up to us Dev. The seed we nurture, feed and water will overcome the other and flourish." Kimba sat back and sighed, exasperated and tired.

"Khaz Axesen's hard life has dictated which seed to nurture, for survival, but the good one is still in there, fighting for supremacy. The good in you has been nurtured all your life, you can't allow it to be overshadowed by events you can not control or undo."

Cold, early morning wind off the bay howled outside, causing the wooden walls to creak and the torchlight to flicker. The druid saw the firelight dancing in Dev's dark eyes, which momentarily softened and moistened as the memories of his murdered wife tumbled through his mind. Murdered at the hands of Primus Creed and the cult of Hisseesha. She could see the war being waged within him and said a silent prayer for his soul.

To be continued...

THE WHITE WOLF INSIDER

by Amaranth

This month's White-Wolf Insider revolves around the new outlook White Wolf is planning on taking with the World of Darkness, and company as a whole. White Wolf has in fact announced that they are looking to take on a new outlook for the whole new World of Darkness setting with the launch of Vampire: The Requiem in August and others to soon follow. White Wolf has provided us with a sneak preview of Vampire: The Requiem at <http://www.worldofdarkness.com>. Please feel free to check it out.

In other news, White Wolf now owns a bar. In a strategic bid for diversification, White Wolf has purchased the Atlanta-based bar and pool hall known as Duprees. Currently finishing renovations, Duprees is scheduled to reopen under the name The Independent tomorrow, Friday April 2nd.

"We've always liked drinking here at White Wolf," commented Mike Tinney, White Wolf's President, "so when an opportunity to acquire a bar presented itself, the purchase seemed like a good and natural fit."

White Wolf intends to be relatively hands off in the day to day operation of the establishment, as the original staff are returning to operate the business. When asked for a follow up comment as to whether or not owning a bar would interfere with their day-to-day operations as a company, Mike Tinney, already at the bar, responded with an unintelligible "Blarrrgggg!"

Well, I look forward to next month's version of the Trumpeter and the new White-Wolf Insider that will be coming. I will keep everyone informed of new information as it becomes available including when everything is scheduled to be released.

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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MINI-FEATURE : THE BURNING WHEEL

by Dana Driscoll

In our special Burning Wheel mini-feature this month, Dana Driscoll takes a look at this two-book set and interviews the developer.

The Burning Wheel – Book I

Written and Produced by: Luke Crane (2002)

Price: \$15

Publisher / sales: www.burningwheel.org

Reviewed by: Dana Driscoll

Introduction

The Burning Wheel Fantasy Roleplaying System is a creative and highly innovative RPG. Relatively new to the scene, *The Burning Wheel* nonetheless has an impressive repertoire of excellent mechanics, game flavor and details. *The Burning Wheel* picks up where other gaming systems lack—especially in the way character advancement, the customization of characters, and the combat system are handled within the system. And with a price tag of only \$15 USD for both books, this game is a sure winner!

I was first introduced to *The Burning Wheel* at **I-Con**, a large convention in Long Island that took place during the last weekend in March 2004. I spent a lot of time in the game demo room during the con and kept noticing the crowds of people surrounding Luke Crane's table throughout the three days. One of the nights I was especially surprised to see Luke run a *Burning Wheel* game with 16 participants, all of which were looking like they were having a blast! After interviewing Luke and watching a few combat demos, I wanted to see what the buzz was all about. The last day of the convention, I got my chance. I got in on a four-hour game called *The Gift*, essentially a political game dealing in the diplomatic relations between a group of four dwarves and four elves. The game itself was amazing and kept all the players (along with Luke)

on the edge of our seats till the bloody end. Not only did we get a good taste of the *Burning Wheel* system, we also got to play test some of Luke's new rules the "Battle of Wits." If you are at a con and see Luke running demos, I highly recommend jumping in. And now, onto the review of the game system itself.

As the name explains, the *Burning Wheel* is a fantasy role-playing game. *The Burning Wheel* comes in a two-book set - *The Burning Wheel* and *The Character Burner*. While I certainly cannot attempt to give the reader a full grasp of this unique and innovative system, my intent is to cover the basic elements of how it works along with some comparisons to other gaming systems out there.

The Game in a Nutshell

What I Love

The Burning Wheel system encourages RP and character development like no other system I have used to date. Characters do not earn experience—rather, as they RP and use their skills during the game, those skills improve. While the mechanics are very detailed in this system, it is not a system with inherent rigidity. Instead I see the system as fluid, working with the art of role-playing instead of against it, like so many systems seem to do. The **Artha** system allows characters to shine in the most important and necessary situations. And finally, the whole game is based on realism—while this may put some gamers off, I find it a welcome relief.

What Worries Me

While a min/max character would be more difficult to accomplish in this system, your standard run of the mill power-gamers may still be an issue. Only now, the power-gamer will be forced to RP their characters in order to improve them (the GMs of the world unite for a moment of celebration!). What worries me is that

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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these types of players will hog the table and session week after week, attempting to use their skills in all situations in order to improve. Stemming from this, the other characters may not have a chance to be as active in the party, limiting their improvement. What I am outlining is a worst case scenario, but one that did strike me as a possibility throughout reading *The Burning Wheel*. So while the system encourages players to role-play, some players may go overboard.

Look and Overall Feel

The two books are both soft cover and measure 5.5" wide by 8.5" high. *The Character Burner* is a dark red while the *The Burning Wheel* is a bark brown color. One of the first things you will notice about both books just flipping through is the unique flavor of the books themselves. The pages have detailed line art borders, scattered throughout the book are other black & white line drawings, along with charts, graphs and diagrams. The art itself may not appeal to all tastes, but it gives the books a certain medieval / renaissance feel. I personally like it.

Once you begin to read, the style that the book is written in also stands out. Along with a thorough description of the game, the author has included three types of notes, quotations, short stories, and a host of colorful examples throughout the books. The detail and consideration that is present in both in both the writing and careful placement of artwork reflect the long hours and effort that Luke Crane has put into *The Burning Wheel*.

Interview

Q: Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about what you do and who you are?

A: My name is Luke Crane, and I am a game designer. I designed the Burning Wheel role-playing game from a 7-year-old homebrew. I decided to revise it, and publish it, and people like it.

Q: Can you give us an overview of Burning Wheel and how it works?

A: Only way to find out is to come to one of my demos and roll dice. But I will tell you it is a d6, die pool based fantasy RPG, which uses very, very organic, caste based advancement, which is my favorite part of the game. What you do and the way you play your character determines how your character is shaped as you play. You don't get lumps of points or anything like that. Every little bit of the way you play your character shapes them, including the way the other players react to you at the table. In addition to that it uses a very controversial mechanic called scripted melee, where you plan out your moves for melee in advance and then play them out in a situation of mayhem. Some people love it, some people hate it.

Q: When did you first have your system come out?

A: The system was officially released November first of 2002.

Q: Is the system more of a player vs. player system?

A: No the system is a very fluid, very versatile system. You can do the traditional get together, party adventure type of quests. I especially enjoy that in Burning Wheel you can play "the wrong guy" on the quest type thing like "I wasn't meant for this" and you can go on the quest and change,

and your character actually changes. You are out of place for a while, but then you grow into it. I love that kind of play. But then again, for con games I run a completely different game. And even in my home game its very character driven, as it's all about what the characters' agendas are - which is

Basic Mechanics

To start, this game is done entirely with trusty six-sided dice, so throw out your d20s! Each roll is made up of multiple d6s, and each is calculated as a separate result. Essentially, the dice are rolled in the game to determine the outcome of a given situation. Generally, rolling a four or better means that you have succeeded at a result, but often multiple successes are needed (this is based on what the game calls an obstacle score). The number of dice you roll depends on your skill in what it is you are trying to do. Additional successes are needed based on the obstacle rating of the test.

Characters are defined in *The Burning Wheel* by a number of areas - **stats** (raw abilities of the characters); **attributes** (complex characteristics of a character); and **skills** (specific fields of knowledge).

Character Burning

Character Burning (aka Character Creation) is a very fluid and creative process in *The Burning Wheel*. Characters are innately tied to their back story—this back story becomes the lifepaths that they take. Each lifepath is race and culture specific and composed of the six general categories that define characters in the Burning Wheel - time, traits, resources, stats, leads, and skills. Lifepaths are the closest equivalent to "classes" in most systems, although it is such an entirely different feel that it's hard to call them such.

Stats are not randomly rolled or arbitrarily decided; rather they are determined by the lifepaths that a character takes. Lifepaths also determine what skills are available to the character to progress in. Character attributes (sort of equivalent to d20 saving throws) are mostly determined by stats. Character traits are simply quirks or habits that a character has. Resources are any possessions, properties, personal contacts, spells, and affiliations an individual may have.

An excellent part of character burning is the contacts system. Contacts and affiliations must be bought with resource points. So if a character wants to have a very powerful friend, be a member of a noble family, or be part of a secretive organization, the character is going to have to spend a significant number of RP points. This is again a nice balance in the game, as all too often in other systems characters can have any background they can fathom, often creating balance issues within the game.

Beliefs and instincts are another important part of character burning. Beliefs are essentially a guide to RP a character. You determine beliefs by looking at lifepaths and history of your character. Instincts, on the other hand, are three "gut reactions" that are natural to the character.

If you are wondering about power level in character burning, not to worry - essentially, your lifepaths determine the power level of the character. So the more lifepaths a character has, essentially the more powerful the character is.

Overall, I was impressed with the base character creation process. Tying characters so innately to their back-story fits the game's theme of realism to the core. Your character is the sum of her experiences. I also particularly like the RP, traits, and beliefs systems. All of these represent successful attempts to bring more role-play opportunity and development to a character.

Skills

The back of the *Character Burner* includes a tremendous list of skills. The skills are not superficially general, but rather detailed, thorough, and specific. This large skill list allows for specialized characters with little or no overlap.

One thing I noticed about the skills is that some details are not given that should be. For example,

Interview cont.

part of the game. Each character has a set of beliefs and instincts, and the con games focus on those beliefs and instincts and resolving the purpose of the scenario through those elements.

Q: So do you have a setting that goes with it?

A: No, it is a setting-less system. The setting is implied. I really wanted to design an engine you could put in any car. You guys have thought of the coolest setting ever and want to publish it. Who am I to say, “my setting is better” or whatever. So I really designed the system with a little art, a little philosophy, to inject those elements into the setting that you play. It will change it, it will color it, whatever you put it into. I don’t have listed cities or countries or whatever, because frankly your countries and cities are better.

Q: So what do you think is the most important element when designing a game?

A: Oh I’m a Jared-ite [Jared Sorenson from Memento Mori Theatricks]. The most important element to designing a game is the answer to Jared’s first question—what is the game about? And if you can answer that question then you’re going in the right direction. That question is the most important one. And once you get the everything or something’s out, you need to look and say, ‘oh wow this is about x’ then start cutting out everything Y, and the other 25 letters of the alphabet, and focus on the thing that the game is about and how it encourages play.

Q: So what is Burning Wheel about?

A: Consequences. I wanted a system where choices that a player made were sacrosanct, and they could not be contravened by the DM and so on. But when they made those choices, they made them with full knowledge of how difficult it would be. So you have a very bare difficulty/obstacle system. So you know I’m rolling 3 dice, I need 5 successes, I’m going to fail. You know what your up against. You see the look on player’s faces like ‘what do I do.’ That’s right you engaged, you took on this task and now you’re up against the wall.

durations are not giving for crafting items. The blacksmithing skill simply says, “This is an arduous and time consuming task” but gives no time frame. With such detailed times for recovery and lifepaths, one would expect the same consideration to be given to craft skills. Most other tasks, however, do give detailed obstacle lists and timeframes.

Traits

The *Character Burner* also includes a huge list on character traits. I found many of these traits extremely creative and fun—and spanning 26 pages of the book, it’s hard to find anything missing. The traits range from **abnormally long tongue** and **alert** to **weather sense** and **world weary**.

Races

The Burning Wheel includes four playable races—Men, Elves, Dwarves, and Orcs. While some players may want more at first glance, once you see how extensive the lifepath system is, there is plenty of variety to make up for any lacking as far as the races go. *The Burning Wheel* is a fantasy setting with an overall Tolkien- esque feel, so these four choices for races are hardly surprising. Each race is developed

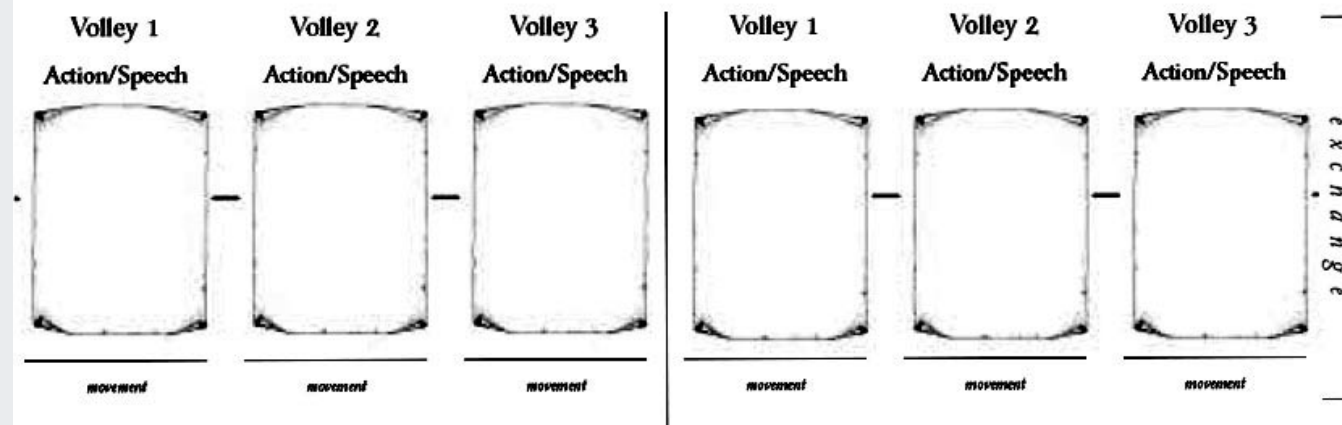
thoroughly and with a unique flavor, as detailed in the Lifepaths below.

Lifepaths

Each race has its own set of lifepaths. Within each race section, a series of “settings” with various lifepaths exist. So within the Paths of Man section, we get paths for **Pesants, Villagers, City Dwellers, Nobles, Noble Courts, Professional Soliders, Seafarers, Outcasts,** and **Religious**. Now note that these settings include usually 10+ paths each - making a very large, flexible amount of lifepaths to choose from when creating a character. Dividing it up into settings also allows a GM and players to have customization control over what types of characters will be adventuring together. This is certainly one system that will not get stale or have you playing the same 6 or 8 classes over and over again. Each character in this system will be extremely unique.

At the start of each Race section, a short story details the early life and stat block of a character. My only complaint here is that the stories and examples all portrayed male characters—seeing a female character in the mix would have been more appealing.

Reflexes Script Template



Interview cont.

So you want the players in addition to knowing that there are consequences to all their actions to be enabled with choices. This is the thing I found in all the other games I've played that there was really just one choice, even within the system. Part of it was a style thing, a do or do not do kind of thing. So part of the combat system reflects this, the beliefs and instincts section reflects this, the advancement reflects this, and the way you earn traits in the game reflects this.

Like I said your traits are earned by the way you play your character at the table. At the end of an adventure, players vote traits for you. You get nominated and you vote traits for the other players. And you can nominate yourself. You can say 'I was working towards this and I did this, this, this, and this, what do you guys think?' and they might say, 'you know, that doesn't get you super badass with a sword, it gets you murderous, because you killed all these people.' The outward perception is equally as important in Burning Wheel. So we want to focus on those aspects of the character, on those choices, on those decisions that you make when you make the character. And the way you build a character in Burning Wheel is all about the choices you have made to get where you are in your life, it's a lifepath based character generation system.

Q: So what exactly is the role of the GM?

A: The role of a GM in general, in a game, is to guide a narrative. The GM is not a player's tool, he is not an autocrat. This is a complete opinion, and my style, that a GM comes to the table with an idea that he wants to play, essentially you meet on common ground. And the players say 'we want to play Burning Wheel' and the GM says 'I have an idea for an adventure why don't you make four lifepath character urban setting, we are going to go against, we are going to start a revolution... what do you think about that?' and you start from there, like a negotiation. The GM comes to the table with an idea, then he is very much like the director in a film. I think it is the closest analog, although there is a far gap between them.

Because the GM's philosophy, the way he sees the world will color everything in the game, when you make tests, the descriptions that he gives you and the reactions from people to you on the street will be filtered through the color

Each race has multiple special rules / abilities that make them unique. For example, the humans have the ability to have Faith and Sorcery, while the Elves have songs (another form of magic) and the Orcs have hatred (yet another form of magic). Each differs in its own right and each helps really set these races apart. Along with the magic systems, each race has their own set of qualities and flaws.

The dwarves have a negative quality called "**Dwaven Greed**" which basically means the more resources a dwarf gains, the more chances for those resources to twist her and make her hoard it. The elves have their own negative quality—grief. Because elves

are immortal, they are exposed to a tremendous amount of experiences in their lives. Negative experiences eventually pile up, and can eventually force an elf to stop adventuring or worse. Orcs are immortal like elves, but are dark and twisted. The orcs have their own negative quality—hatred. All of these qualities and racial specialties make for an interesting and complex system—far more detailed than your standard run of the mill fantasy.

Character Advancement

Character advancement is not done by any set of arbitrary experience numbers or through a set pattern of levels, but rather is specific to the character's actions in game. This is reflected in the stats/skill system, racial abilities, and lifepath choices.

The skill and stats system in this game is highly realistic—the skills/stats you use regularly (determined by lifepath) get better over time, the skills/stats you do not use you slowly forget over time. Essentially, to raise a normal skill, you have to achieve a number of successes that are regular, difficult, and challenging. Training is also an option, but takes a very long time.

So there is not set experience or level ups, just a system that is fluid and depends solely on the character's actions in the game. And once again, what a welcome relief for those seeking a more realistic game.

Combat

The combat system is yet another area where this game really shines over some of the competition. The d20 superficial initiative system is no match for the streamlined scripting system. Each combat is made up of a set of exchanges; each exchange is made up of a set of three volleys. How many actual actions a character has during each exchange is determined by a character's reflex stat. To represent the convoluted and unpredictable nature of combat, characters and the GM 'script' their actions before the exchange begins. Scripting is done because often you don't know what the next move of your enemy will be—you can only guess before hand and plan a reaction.

To better illustrate how this works, see below:

After the actions are scripted, the players and GM read their scripts (volley by volley) and the actions are resolved in real time.

Actions (such as utter two syllables of a spell, slam a door, attack, defend, and interact with objects), movement, and speech constitute the three areas of combat. A character always can move and speak besides taking his normal action. All of these things must be scripted at the start of the exchange. To facilitate a smooth combat, the book includes a defined "script language" that is used for scripting combat.

Overall, combat makes much more sense from a realistic point of view. One well-placed blow can take you out while a suit of armor will save your life and detract from the damage you receive. The game has an emphasis on common sense - take cover from

Interview cont.

of the GM. Then this creates ground for the players to walk on, it creates energy for the players to react to and they begin react with the GM. And the GM says 'Wow you are really playing your beliefs and instincts you get Artha for that.' And you begin to have this interface where the GM is recognizing the way you play your character, your involved in this situation, your moving along, making tough choices, here you go points, points. Spend those points. And spending those points is involved in the process of making your character better.

Q: So do you think your game is rules heavy or rules light?

A: I completely do not believe in the rules heavy/rules light classification. Maybe it's a defensive reaction. The game is what it is. With *Burning Wheel* I tried to provide the players with enough information for them to be able to make those choices matter of factually. It is a very simple system to pick up. You can pick it up in 5-10 minutes of play. And then after that it's just adapted to a variety of means. And you don't need to know all the means to play the game. It's more detailed than *Sorcerer*, but it's nowhere near *D&D 3.5*.

Q: Future plans for *Burning Wheel*? Any supplements?

A: Right now I am just going to cons. I really like *Burning Wheel*, I like playing it. I'm going to continue to go to conventions; I am going to continue to play it. 90% of the copies I've sold have been from my hands to the players.

However, I hear the cries of the zealous and I seek to answer! Aside from the two books worth of the supplementary material available for free on the website, The *Burning Wheel* Team (i.e., me) is hard at work writing, editing and play testing the *Monster Burner*. I also hope to squeeze out the *Burning Wheel Annual* this summer, in time for GenCon. It'll condense all of the rules suggestions and alternate stuff into one book. I've got ideas for three more books after that, but I don't know when they'll be done.

*We thank Luke for his time and wish him the best of luck with his future *Burning Wheel* endeavors. We also eagerly await the next books in his *Burning Wheel* series.*

flying arrows and stay down when you are hit.

Preview: Duel of the Wits

Similar to the scripted combat system, when I ran in *The Burning Wheel* demo we were play testing out a system for "The Duel of the Wits." The system was a huge improvement over the superficial skill system that *d20* resorts to for Character / NPC interaction. This new system, which Luke Crane informs me will be released later this summer in the *Burning Wheel Annual*, has a series of actions that a PC must choose in advance (rebuttal, point, avoid, dismiss, etc). In scripting either combat or social negotiation, you must not only think about what actions you want to do, but also what actions your opponent may do and how you need to defend or react. Overall, both systems are extremely fun.

Weapons and Damage

In *The Burning Wheel*, there are three types of weapon damage-incidental, mark and superb along with three different types of weapon speed: fast, slow and unwieldy. To use weapons without a snapshot penalty, you must take an action to either aim or acquire a target before attempting to strike. Again, all this follows along from the realism theme.

The Injury System and Recovery

The injury system in *The Burning Wheel* is much more detailed and realistic than your standard hit point system. There are varying degrees of the types of wounds, and the more severe the wound, the more the wound will affect your character in combat. Mortal wounds are not necessarily insta-kills—if characters have enough **Artha** saved up (more about this later) they can stave off death for an hour in the hopes that a healer can attend to them. Characters with less serious wounds may have stat adjustments or be down a die or more until their wounds are healed. Several skills exist that can help the healing

process get going - **field dressing, herbalism, and surgery**.

Another potential "divide" I see in this game is how healing works. Realistic recovery times are a boon and a blessing. Recovery may take a character out of combat for months at a time, but for those who do want realism, the system hits the nail on the head. Not to say that a character can't jump back into the action after an injury—but because injuries subtract dice from your rolls, it will be substantially more difficult to participate and be successful. And with the chance of opening up those healing wounds, (another realistic mechanic worked into the game), it's a better idea to wait.

Armor and Shields

Armor in *The Burning Wheel* functions based on the place worn and the type worn. There is not an armor class, rather armor dice are rolled to try to ward off successful blows. All weapons in the game are not equal when it comes to armor types either. Some armor protects better against certain types of weapons, while other types of weapons easily penetrate armor. Both shields and armor can become damaged and eventually break. This adds yet another level of complexity to the game.

Magic in the *Burning Wheel*

Magic in the game is treated as a fifth element of nature - but the power to control magic is only for those gifted enough to practice sorcery. All magic in the game is based on verbal incantations - counted by the syllable. Since one combat action only allows for two syllables, some spells can take many actions to cast, balancing the fact that you can cast them at any point. There are eight elements of magic: air, anima, arcane, earth, fire, heaven, water, and white and six types of spell impetus: controlling, creative, damaging/destroyer effect, enhancing, influencing, and taxing. The element determines what part of

the world the spell can affect while the impetus determines how the element is affected.

While there are no spell points or spells per day, each spell requires both a successful casting and also a check to see if the caster is taxed after casting the spell. If the casting fails, the potential exists for very bad things to happen. If a spell-caster becomes too taxed, he may become sick and need to recover.

One thing missing from both the *Burning Wheel* and *Character Burner* are instructions on how to create new spells or songs for characters interested in doing such. A wide range of interesting spells are present in the *Character Burner*, but there should always be the possibility to create something new.

Faith in the Burning Wheel

While magic is a defined set of spells and mechanics, faith is unpredictable and open-ended. There are no taxing tests or failure results for most miracles (although most miracles still require an obstacle check on the part of the requester). For a miracle to work at all there must be a defined need. Even though Faith is an open-ended system, the author has provided a general list of categories, possible effects and obstacle ratings for requested miracles.

To request a miracle from a deity, the character must pray. This means that any priest player must invent and invoke the prayer. The syllables are then counted and the prayer takes as long to request as it does to utter. Again, this is another great boon for the enhancement of role-play.

Artha / Reward Points

Artha is simply a type of reward point that you can gain that can be used later in the game to produce a variety of different short term or permanent effects. Artha essentially allows characters to add those bonuses in when they need to make a save or want

to be the hero. It's not experience, rather Artha something similar to "hero points."

Conclusion

Overall, I am extremely impressed with this system. This system "fixes" most, if not all, of the major issues that I have had with other gaming systems and is truly a role-playing intensive system. We can only hope that more gaming systems follow suit and lend themselves so highly to character development and role-playing.

This Darkness, My Heart

by Pike Stephenson

Streams of cobalt and crimson dashed across an empty night sky as dozens of police cruisers surrounded several blocks of a normally quiet neighborhood. It was late, midweek, a time and day when most children were nestled down in bed, dreaming of school and friends, when tired parents attempted to enjoy a peaceful moment together. Yet, tonight, this tranquil suburban setting was a flood of activity.

From behind an unmarked squad car, a plain clothes site commander barked orders to uniformed officers that barricaded the streets, limiting the unusual increase in traffic. To the officers controlling the crowds of chatty locals pushing to get a glimpse of what tragedy provoked such a heated response. A S.W.A.T. unit broke into smaller teams and took up vantage points zeroing in on one specific home. The night was very much alive, a crisp night, swept by a chilled breeze that carried an edge of excitement and anxiety.

Hidden atop another home nearby, shrouded by wisps of shadow of his own making, the Prowler surveyed the activity, taking stock of the patrol patterns and routes. His vision, which extended into the infrared spectrum, allowed him to pick out the officers heat signatures against the numerous dwellings and flora. Prowler mentally tagged the two snipers on opposite ends of the surrounded home. They were well hidden from the naked eye, but not from him. The wind shifted and dropped a few degrees. Prowler shivered then looked up, noting for the first time that a police copter or news chopper had not arrived on site yet. Those birds came equipped with high-powered spotlights that could possibly blast through his ebon shroud. After reciting a silent prayer, a double beep in his ear alerted him of an incoming transmission from the Emerald Guardians, the elite metahuman hero team here in Emerald Bay. Prowler reached up and tapped the receiver unit tucked under his mask.

"Go ahead," he said in a voice just above a whisper.

"You're in position, good," replied the Revenant, the teams senior member and coordinator. The elder's voice tingled Prowler's spine, like the cries of the undead from a long forgotten horror film. In person, it was unsettling, however it lost some of its potency from the coded transmission.

"Care to clue me in," Prowler said with a hint of youthful indignance to cover his reaction.

"Your target is John Smith, estranged husband of Jenny Smith, father of two. Their address is 123 Apple Lane. It's across the street, second house north of your position." Prowler had already surmised his target home due to the intense concentration of activity; the Revenant only confirmed it.

"Got it. What's the sitch?"

"The Smith's are in the middle of a sticky divorce. Currently, they are legally separated and John had moved across town to live with his parents. The stress of the divorce appeared to be a determining factor in John losing his job last month. From reports I was able to uncover, he has a history of aggression and violence. The police responded to three domestic disturbance calls at this address in the month prior to the separation."

Prowler stiffened as the Revenant continued to recite documentation of the troubles within the home. Shades of his own past danced around his mind like evil gremlins jabbing hot brands into the memories he'd spent years suppressing.

"... and the parents are dead." The last piece of news jerked Prowler back into the present.

"Hold up. What was that middle thing?"

"Smith's parents were found shot to death in their own home an hour ago. John was seen leaving the area at the same time. That's his white sedan parked in the driveway." Prowler had to refocus his vision back to normal to see the car's color.

"Since the police arrived, there has been little communication with Smith. They know that he has his wife and two children held hostage and he may still have a gun." As if on cue, a shot blasted from the home. The crowds surged and their voices clamored as the police scrambled for secure cover. The site commander leaned against his car and shouted into his megaphone.

"Smith, what the hell is going on?! Talk to me!" There was a long pause after his tinny amplified voice faded.

"Nothin'," came a haggard cry from a second-story window. "Ain't nothin' going on! You ain't takin' my family. Nobody is!" A small red dot from a sniper's targeting site trained in on the sound of the voice. Prowler waited for the sniper's rifle to explode but the dot disappeared.

"The family's as good as dead," the Revenant said.

"You're full of Christmas cheer."

"No, just being realistic. He's already killed two people, and I'll lay odds he just killed another."

"No, no, no!" Prowler shook his head from side to side, not wanting to believe that this situation could turn from bad to worse.

"Quiet Prowler or the police will pick up your position."

The gunshot, the Revenant's words, both chiseled away the brick wall that retained the memories of Prowler's own past. His father's drunken rampages

that lead to the beatings he and his mother endured. Years of pain, fear and suffering that ground the spirit of a young boy into the dirt. Countless nights he would lie in bed, trying to ignore the screams and shouts of his parents. As Prowler grew he hoped and prayed that his father would disappear, or die.

One night his prayers were answered. It was a fight like a thousand others; loud, vulgar and relentless. Mother screamed and father yelled back with his fists. It was the same old song and dance, until his mother said she would rather be dead than live another day with him. Every sound seized, the violent words, the stamping feet, everything. "Fine," his father said. Prowler remembered that moment as if it were yesterday. He could hear the squeaky floor boards as his father walked to the master bedroom. Then came the clatter of a drawer. His father returned and his mother whimpered, pleading for mercy. Then the gunshot. He should have stayed in his room, should have punched curiosity square in the nose. He crept out to see the damage. Dad stood by the dining room table, a stone golem packing heat. Mom lay unevenly folded in a pool of strawberry jam, that's what he told himself. She was a freshly gutted fish, eyes bugging out and her mouth a gape.

Prowler ducked his head, curled himself up tight and sucked in lungful after lungful of air, trying to choke down the images that curdled within his stomach.

"Prowler, you still with us?" The voice cut through the horrors of yesterday and brought him back almost full circle. His mind cleared into a dull buzz that tingled down throughout his body.

"I'm going in."

"You'll be going in blind and without backup," replied the Revenant.

"I don't care. I can handle one lunatic with a gun."

"Maybe so, but what about Mrs. Smith or the kids.

Can they handle 'one lunatic'?" Prowler never considered the danger of his actions, only the alternative due to reluctance. He tilted his head from one side to the other. The vertebra in his neck made a slight popping sound under the carbon-fiber mesh if his jet black costume.

"I'll get them out alive," Prowler said, "no matter what it takes."

"That's a serious line in the sand you've drawn; be careful how far you cross it."

The receiver clicked, and then went silent. Prowler couldn't afford the time to reflect on the Revenant's final words; a family was facing death at the hands of a man they had once trusted.

Down below the roof top, a clump of bushes large enough to hide behind made for a perfect landing pad. A chilled wind swept across Prowler's face as he leapt from the roof, propelled by muscles far stronger than any normal human. As quiet as a cat, he landed at the base of one bush.

Prowler searched for the quickest, safest route to the Smith's home. There wasn't a back alley behind the houses and all of the lots appeared to be connected by a continuous chain link fence that surrounded the block yet dissecting the yards, separating each piece of property. Between the street lights, Prowler charged across the darkness. He skipped from the street to the raised rim of the sidewalk, planted both feet on the cement lip and vaulted into the air. He cleared the walk, the fence and with a tuck and roll, touched down at the corner of the neighboring house. He pressed himself against the side of the abode, thankful that the back porch light was off. Prowler switched his vision back to the infrared, concentrating on any heat patterns that could be man or animal. The yard was a wash of cool blues and swatches of black. Prowler scanned farther across, to the Smith's yard and could see two small piles of scarlet tucked under a dark, multi-legged structure. One of the

glows shifted slightly, and then held still.

A cloak of umbra swirled around Prowler until he blended in with the existing shadows that clung to the building. He was nearly invisible to the naked eye, allowing him to travel quicker to his destination.

At the corner of the house, Prowler used another clump of shrubbery to protect himself. The neighbors must have had a green thumb with all the vegetation flourishing in their yard. There were shrubs, flowering plants in near bloom, and a plum tree, thick with leaves and branches that crossed another fence. The tree provided ample cover for Prowler to cross the fence unnoticed. He scaled the tree's twisted limbs and tumbled down into the Smith's yard. The grass was tall and thick, long overdue for its first spring cutting. He dropped into a belly crawl and scuttled over to the house. The sounds of the gossiping neighbors and police radios echoed between the homes and nibbled at Prowler's raw nerves.

How to get in, he thought. Both ends of the home were covered by the police. An alternate route was imperative.

Prowler studied the house with his heat sensitive vision for a brief moment before noticing a window on the ground floor with a darker "cold spot" at its base. Physics 101, he mused. The cold air outside will follow the path of least resistance. He ran his gloved fingers along the sill and could feel a crack. Gently, he pushed the window up, creating a slim yet man-sized opening. After a quick glance to ensure his actions went unnoticed, Prowler pulled himself in.

Prowler settled into a crouch then closed the window. He was in an unlit living room full of the standard furnishings and clutter. He remained motionless, scanning the area until he was certain the room was clear. Like an ebon specter, he glided amongst the shadows, shuffling low across the floor until he kicked something small that squeaked. He picked up what looked like a doll. It appeared to have wild hair

and thread-bare clothes. This toy was well loved, unlike the family trapped upstairs by a mentally and emotionally challenged psychopath.

Faint whimpers and sobs echoed down a set of stairs at the far end of the room. Something surreal rested across Prowler's shoulders and prickled the hairs on the back of his neck. It was fear, not his own but painfully familiar to that of a small boy he once was. There was also mumbling, an incoherent mesh of words, jagged at times, nurturing the next.

He shot up the stairs, almost neglectful of a silent approach. At the top he peered to his right around a corner. There was a short hall that ended at a rear bedroom from which the sounds originated from. The door was ajar, allowing Prowler to see the heat patterns within. Against the back wall rested a larger form holding a smaller one as it rocked back and forth. On the floor, sprawled across a warm spot, lay a body cooling to room temperature. It was too big to be one of the children. Prowler swayed then caught himself against corner. There she lay, gasping her last breath, those eyes that refused to close... mother.

Prowler's rage erupted out like a cloud of black poison, spilling down the stairs, filling the hall, blocking the door that lead to the bedroom. He took the final step into the hallway, gliding through his shadows towards an evil that still tore him from a deep sleep, the same evil that drove him into the night, forcing him to protect those who could not protect themselves.

At the room's threshold Prowler stood, unconcerned if sufficient shadow masked his presence. The large body in the corner, presumably Smith, raised his right hand to scratch his head. He did so, clumsily, with the still warm pistol in hand. The smell of gun powder was heavy in the air. Prowler almost gagged but was able to quell the reaction.

"Please daddy, I'll be good, I promise," squeaked a small voice from behind the door. The pleas grated at

his stomach like a fist full of broken glass. He stared down at Mrs. Smith's cooling body; her breathing was shallow and near undetectable. She was so beautiful. Her long, dark hair had a vibrancy and life all its own. Her voice, strong and yet soothing, promised the Boogeyman wasn't waiting in the closet. Prowler shook his head, trying to free his mind from the images of his past and focus on the reality before him. Mother was right though because the Boogeyman sat against the wall, cradling a little girl while reciting a twisted version of some fairy tale. They were as good as dead, just like the Revenant said.

He had seen enough to know that to rescue both kids would be impossible if Smith still had his gun. That pistol was the primary enemy. To remove it would decrease the threat and improve the chances of survival. He had one plan, one opportunity and it all hinged on Smith's grasp on reality, or his lack there of.

Prowler called more shadows into the being, thin layers that mixed with the existing darkness, reducing what little available light there was. Slowly, the room took on an ethereal glaze, an Umbrian hue that would obscure any normal man's vision, but not enough to alert Smith of the hero's gambit.

Silent as a panther stalking its prey, Prowler crept into the room, one cautious step at a time. He ignored the ramblings of Smith but it was the continuous plea of the son that ate at his soul. Please daddy, please, how many times had he begged his own father for mercy that never arrived? As many nights as he lay in bed, bruised and battered and in too much pain to sleep. This man will pay for his torment.

He was no more than three feet away from his target when he misjudged his step and slipped in the cooling, viscous fluid congealing around Mrs. Smith. Prowler's speed and agility were phenomenal, allowing him to quickly adjust his weight, pivoting his

shoulders to the left and catching himself on the floor with his hands. The move was smooth and graceful, but disrupted his concentration. The shadows melted from existence.

"Who... what?" More words, mostly babble, spilled from Smith's mouth as he scooted tight into the corner. He pulled his daughter closer, squeezing her against his chest. He brought the gun around, pushing the barrel into her small belly.

"Wait!" Prowler turned and sat up on his feet, his bottom resting on his heels a few inches from the floor. He held out his hands, palms forward, in hopes that Smith wouldn't panic any more than he already had.

"You're not takin' them! I'm not done readin' the story." The heat from Smith was unbearable to look at. Prowler could almost hear the man's heartbeat over his own thundering pulse. He was so close to saving the children but one wrong step may have fatally ended the rescue. The little girl started to cry, her small voice penetrated the darkness with a tangible terror that heaved Prowler's heart.

Smith rocked his daughter and said, "Now look at what you've done! There, there, Cindy-girl, daddy's here and that bad man or mommy-bitch will never take you away... no one will." Smith pulled the revolver's hammer back with a sharp click.

A million thoughts raced through Prowler's mind, each more violent than the last. How could he feel any other way towards this man, this monster? Any parent capable of murdering their own child wasn't worth pity or spit. Prowler took a deep breath and with as deep and serious tone as he could muster, said one word, "Coward."

That halted Smith. He didn't relax his grip on the gun but strained to look at Prowler in the dusky room. He tilted his head a little to the right as if reality was off balance.

"What did you say?"

"I said you're a coward. You, mister daddy loves you so much that I'm ready to put a bullet in you. You, coward, who's to scared to admit that he screwed up a good thing and to cover his own shame decides to butcher his family."

"Shut up," Smith snapped.

"Piss off, you pathetic wuss. I've seen weaker men take greater blows and roll with the punches, but this- you're... you're pathetic!"

Smith clenched his jaw and puffed out his chest. "I'm not pathetic."

"Like hell you're not. Look at you, man. Your wife had enough of your crap and called it quits. Did you try to fix it? Did you apologize for the years of torment and abuse you forced down their throats? No, you blew her away and now you're about to commit the ultimate conformation of your stupidity and kill your kids. They're not the mistake, you are. Why don't you do the world a favor and erase yourself instead. They'll survive; they're probably past your cowardly crap already!"

Prowler stood up, slow and menacing, as shadows blacker than the hate in his heart reflexively formed around him. Smith moved the barrel of the gun to his daughter's head. His hand quivered, his lips quaked.

"Sh-shut up or she's dead."

"Go ahead coward, kill her. As soon as she's dead there'll be nothing left between you and me, and don't think I'll kill you. You'll be my own private punching bag to work over for the next thirty to forty years. Day after day I can pound on you, take out my frustrations, I'll beat you within an inch of your life and when you regain consciousness, beat you for blacking out. Do me the favor, coward, because I'm starving for a new toy."

Smith starred hard at Prowler, his eyes bulging from their sockets. His skin lit up as bright as the morning sun to the hero's heat sensitive vision. The boy, sitting behind Prowler, started begging loudly for his father to stop the madness. Prowler took a menacing step forward and prayed his ruse would pay off. It did.

Smith removed the gun from his daughter's temple and pushed her away. The little girl fell to her knees and cried louder. Prowler knelt down and scooped her up in his arms. As he stood back up he braced to kick Smith in the face, one sharp blow that would take his head off but the boy surprised him. He called out, as if he could sense the impending blow.

"Please don't hurt my daddy," he said. After years of abuse, neglect and an evening from hell he still cared for his father. Prowler was astonished at the forgiveness of this youth. How could he care for the creep?

Prowler turned around to ask him when, BANG! The gun exploded. Prowler instinctively lurched in front of the boy, shielding both children from as much danger as possible. He squeezed them both against his chest, while filling the room with a wall of black. Before Smith could fire another shot Prowler rolled him and the children around through the door. He stumbled as he stood but managed to hold the kids and not fall down. When they hit the stairs, Prowler stole a glance, looking to see if Smith was in hot pursuit. A crumpled mound of man lay in the corner of the room, his radiance fading from view.

End simulation.

Sharp halogen lights popped on in sequence from the far end of the training room towards the area where Prowler stood. The sudden shift in lighting only stung his eyes thanks to the polarized lenses in his mask. He closed his eyes for a moment, waiting for them to adjust. When he opened them, the Revenant stood below the manufactured staircase. He was tall, an

imposing figure covered in a ragged cloak as black as Prowler's body suit. A bulky hood covered his head, shadowing his face from view, even amongst the cascade of lights.

Prowler scanned the rest of the arena-sized training room as the "neighborhood" faded. The holographic setting winked out revealing automated platforms, steel barriers and a handful of sophisticated synthetic droids, including the children he still held. Scores of secured portals, ranging from the size of a fist to as large as a tank, pitted the walls and ceiling. On the far wall directly facing Prowler was the control room, twenty feet above the floor and surrounded by steel-hard safety glass. The Emerald Guardians coordinated dangerous scenarios from this room to hone their amazing powers. Today, it served as an observatory for the other members who sat in silence and judged the young hero. Prowler walked down the stairs as the hydraulics drew them and the other pieces back into the floor. The hum of the pressure-driven system echoed throughout the room and made communication near impossible.

A few feet from the Revenant, Prowler placed the children/droids on the floor. He marveled at the technology that made them so lifelike. Even in their inert state he could "see" the dreams and fears of the children he just saved.

When all was quiet, Prowler said, "Well, how'd I do?" The adrenaline rush was still there. He rocked on his feet and flexed his fingers at his side.

"Easy, Prowler." Each word clawed its way out from under his hood. Prowler fought back a shiver. No matter how many times he had talked to this man face to face it still unnerved him.

"I saved the kids and the tax payers a tidy sum."

"That's a rather jaunty attitude," Revenant said. "Four adults died in this scenario."

"The grandparents and wife couldn't be helped but Smith, he deserved it."

"So you're condoning murder?" Prowler recoiled from the Revenant.

"Who said anything about murder? I didn't pull the trigger but with a single lead injection, that nut eliminated a lot of red tape, senseless days wasted in court and years of stress on his family while he rots in prison, enjoying his three squares and free cable T.V." Prowler's voice picked up in volume as he started pacing around in a tight circle. "Am I happy he's dead? Hell yes! These kids will never have to worry again about 'daddy'. The physical and emotional abuse ends here."

"As they move into the care of the State and bounce from one foster family to another. But aside from that, you said you didn't pull the trigger yet your actions caused him to take his own life. That would be assisted suicide or murder in the 2nd degree."

"What is your problem?" Prowler stopped pacing and stepped back from the elder hero. Sweat built up around the edge of his mask which he wiped off with the sleeve of his costume. "We illegally enter private homes and businesses to gather evidence. We assault villains, either for information or to beat them into submission. We openly condone vigilante justice, bypassing the state and local police and you're getting all uppity over one fruit loop who intended on wiping out his entire family until I convinced him otherwise?" Prowler walked towards the other heroes who continued to watch yet had not joined in the debate. "I am not a murderer, but I will not allow that to happen if I can stop it."

Revenant stepped up behind him and said, "You still could have taken the gun or subdued him." Prowler spun around to face the elder hero. Swatches of shadow buzzed around him like a swarm of ebony bees.

"You didn't see the fear in their eyes! You didn't hear the terror in their voices! They were looking death right in the face thanks to that maniac. They were scared for their lives. Isn't that the ultimate in child abuse?" Prowler leaned in close to the Revenant, his face on the edge of the empty void under the other hero's hood, both hands held up close in tight fists. "Not again, do you hear me? Not ever again!"

"You're taking this rather personal, aren't you?" Revenant waved his black gloved hand out across the vacant room and said, "False walls, platforms, holographics and robots; this was a simulated session and you're carrying on as if it were the real thing." Prowler's jaw dropped. He looked down at the simulacrum that he had fought so hard to save, the lifeless droids that stirred such deep rotted emotions within him.

Revenant gently squeezed Prowler's left arm and said, "This session wasn't developed to test your powers or skills, but your psyche and mental state."

Prowler slid a finger under the lining of his mask and rubbed one eye at a time. "What are you saying?"

"You were right about how we bend the law to get the job done. All of us have had to make monumental decisions in our time but the important part is how we handled those decisions." Revenant let go of Prowler's arm and walked towards a recessed door just under the control room. "This scenario wasn't random; we researched you thoroughly before considering your admission to the team. I developed this session to observe how strongly your past haunts you. It's obvious how tight the grip is." Revenant pushed a series of amber-colored buttons on a key pad next to the door. There was a slight hiss as the door separated into two halves that slid into opposite sides of the wall. "You're carrying some serious emotional baggage that could get one of us killed or worse yet, an innocent."

"I saved those kids!"

"You played a deadly game of liar's poker that paid off because I programmed it to."

Prowler jogged to the open door and Revenant. "You let me win," he said.

"I helped you avoid another traumatic experience. Imagine if the session went sour and Smith started putting holes in the kids, how would you feel with us looking down on that?"

Prowler paused, then sighed. "It would have been ugly."

"That's putting it mildly," Revenant said. "I'm sorry but we will have to deny your application for Guardian membership."

Prowler stiffened. His upper lip twitched a little to one side. He held both hands up and said, "You can't be serious."

"Yes I am. I'm sorry."

Prowler stepped back so he could see the other heroes sitting high upon their collective thrones. He could see in their posture and faces, those which were exposed, the echoes of the Revenant's words.

"How many of you faced your past in the training room? Did any of you take a little session down memory lane or is this reserved for hazing the new guys?" Prowler pointed an accusing finger at the heroes and said, "You sit up there, all high and mighty, judging me when we all know that in the end you would do whatever it takes to save someone... wouldn't you? Wouldn't you?!" None of them commented, they sat above him, never batting an eye or pursing a lip. "Screw you! Screw all of you! I was fine on my own and never needed your approval. I'm outta here."

Revenant stood at the door's threshold and gestured him to leave. Prowler tossed his head back and strode

towards the doorway. As he passed, the Revenant said, "It's not always the choices we make but how we deal with the consequences of our actions. One should never be satisfied with another's death and consider one's self a hero."

"Maybe not in your book," Prowler said as he marched passed the Revenant, never looking at the grim avenger, never allowing him the satisfaction that he had won this battle. He stalked down the adjacent corridor, trailed by wisps of black smoke that consumed him until the Prowler disappeared from sight.

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by Kou and Ali

CHARACTERS: The NPC Exposed

by Matthew Conlon

A few words on The Non-Player Character

Game masters across the world over will attest that most character parties are not complete without the Non-Player Character or NPC. The NPC is a character that travels with the party and that is controlled by the GM. There are many reasons a GM might decide that there is a need for an NPC, not the most uncommon of which is that the GM is also a player and wants to opportunity to play as well! Whatever the reason for the NPC, there are some things that you should consider as a GM controlling an NPC as an adventuring companion and as a player interacting with one.

Game Masters

Every person in your world is by definition an NPC, save for the player's characters, of course. They are all going to have personalities, preferences and habits. They all have "lives." Of course, you don't need a character sheet for everyone in your world, but anyone who is going to be accompanying the players is going to need one. The good part about this is that you don't really HAVE to spend the time rolling stats or gaining levels. You want a 20th level fighter with 18's in all his attributes, go for it! It's your world! However, you don't want an NPC that out-shines the PCs too much as it makes things less enjoyable for the players when they are always trying to catch up to someone who eradicates enemies in one turn.

Your NPC is there to serve a purpose. You already know, in a general sort of way, where the adventure is going, and you know the types of things that the characters can do. You also probably have a good idea about what the characters can handle if you have been GMing for a while. Even if you are new to GMing, you should be able to give a guess at the kinds of situations that would be appropriate for the group.

For example, the characters are going to be entering a dark cave that leads to a den of owlbears. If all your characters have Darkvision, the darkness isn't a problem; likewise if they have torches or a light spell, no problem. However, if they do not have torches or a light spell, and they all happen to be human, then maybe you need someone who can see in the dark or cast a light spell. (Or maybe you need to find a human with a torch...) Maybe they are all elven spell casters; they can all see in the dark, *and* they can all cast light. The darkness isn't a problem now but a den of owlbears is. It might be a good idea to give them an NPC with a high strength and a big sword.

Sometimes the missing component has nothing to do with any sort of oversight on the part of the players, but just a lack of players to fill the gaps. Gaming in a smaller group is necessary due to lack of interest or conflicting schedules, so it's just the GM and a player or two. If both players want to play wizards or something else with low hit points, an NPC cleric and/or NPC fighter may be in order.

Perhaps there are enough players to cover all bases and they have thought of everything. They have spellcasters, fighters, healers, rangers, the kitchen sink and everything else under the sun. In this situation, the group probably won't need an NPC. If you still would like to add one, try making the NPC more interesting than effective. There's no gap that needs to be filled so maybe there needs to be someone of conflict. Try someone like a thief who keeps getting seen and is wanted in most cities. This would make for some excitement, and can also be the basis of the entire campaign. If you don't want to generate conflict, then maybe the NPC is there just as a friend to one or all of the player-characters. Perhaps the NPC brings music into the situation or is always trying to keep up the general spirits of the PCs. Maybe this NPC needs to get captured or killed in order to tempt the party to

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fight!

Something you must be mindful of when playing an NPC is that you must never let the NPC take too much away from the players. The whole point of you being the GM is to present the players with a story and let them be the players. It should remain up to them what the group does; avoid letting the NPC become too much of a group leader. He should not be the main character, but stay in a supporting role. (Unless it's necessary to help new players learn the ropes. In that case, an NPC group leader is a very effective role model.)

As I said at the beginning of this article, every person in your world is technically an NPC and not everyone is a good person. Your villains are NPCs who just happen to be of an alignment that conflicts with the characters. (Or simply have just a different point of view.) Sometimes adventuring companions can become bitter enemies. This gives the characters some history with the villain and makes things a bit more interesting. There are many movie examples of this; Professor Xavier and Magneto for example. Having a history with a villain like that gives the characters a reason to want to chase the villain, bringing the conflict to a more personal level. Maybe the villain is the father of one of the heroes... I know it's a little bit cliché, but so what? It's all about having fun.

Sometimes the need for an NPC isn't so obvious to a GM at the time of campaign creation and it would be

a very helpful addition to the party. Here are some rules of thumb when creating an NPC on the fly:

Assess the situation. What role does the party seem to lack? Are they taking too much damage? Are they not doing enough damage? Are they falling into too many traps that you had expected them to see through? Let's say the group isn't doing enough damage. They are all very high in armor class, so they aren't taking much damage, but the fight could last forever and in the end, the enemies might end up winning. A passer-by sees the fight and decides to help the party because he's some distant relation to one of them, or he's been a long time enemy of the people that are engaged in combat with the party. This person is going to need to come into the fight and do a lot of damage. Make him a similar level to the group, maybe a level or two higher, but give him a large weapon and a high strength value. Give him a hair color, clothes and a general height (and all the other things that a party would notice. Keep in mind, they are thinking about the battle, not the aesthetics of other characters.)

Don't spend time rolling up his hit points and attributes, fill in the ones that you need right at that moment. Remember the character's role—he's there to do damage, he doesn't need a high intelligence or a sack full of gold. Things like saving throws, skill points, and feats can all be figured out later, although you might want to pick a few on the fly. You know what level he is and you know generally how many skill points he should have, so take a few here or there.

Of course, once the fight is over, the party is going to want to know where he came from, and why was he where he was. If the fight had happened in or around a city, the possibilities are very numerous. He lives in the city, and works as a blacksmith to the city guard. That would account for the high quality weapon, and a blacksmith with great strength is not unusual. Try to stay away from giving an NPC too high of a

station though. It's difficult to juggle things when you are trying to control an NPC who would have a large involvement with city politics unless the whole basis of the campaign is exactly that. If the NPC is going to stay with the party a while, make him from a place that isn't going to miss him too much when he's gone. Kings and queens make for complicated on-the-fly NPCs.

Remember too, that your players are the main reason you are GMing. Sometimes it is a good idea to talk to your players and get their opinions on having an NPC in the party. There's a chance that they don't want any part of it. Maybe they see it as something that they don't need or something that would take away from their playing experience.

Players

For those of you who have played with an NPC before, you probably have a good idea of what they are all about. Those of you who have *not* had the opportunity to play in a group that includes an NPC, there are a few things that you can expect for most GMs. There are several different roles for an NPC. If you are new to the role-playing world, the NPC is most likely there to help you along, show you the ropes, and the do's and don'ts of the gaming world.

As a guide, the NPC usually has a number of attributes or personality traits. Generally, if the NPC suggests a course of action and you are new to gaming and unsure of the consequences of your decisions, take it (...or if your character's nature would dictate otherwise, don't!) This is the GM's way of giving you hints. Sometimes the NPC might say something like, "You know, I don't think this is the best route. Let's go a different way." You really ought to seriously consider listening to her. NPCs in the guide position usually have an uncanny insight into the GM's plans. (They are being controlled *by* the GM after all.) This will get you used to thinking

as your character and not as yourself. Just because you understand something doesn't mean that you character does or should.

There is no such thing as a perfect GM, and you can expect there to be some oversights. If you feel that you are perhaps outgrowing the need for an NPC in the role which she was originally designed, let the GM know. In other words, you have been playing for a year now, all the time with an NPC cleric who used to routinely save your hide by healing or reviving your character, but now you're a little more battle-savvy and not taking the damage you once were. Maybe you picked up the heal skill and that works well enough. This might be time to bring to the GM's attention that she needs to re-evaluate the role of the NPC. Should this NPC take a back seat in the campaign, or maybe even pursue opportunities elsewhere?

Similarly, if the NPC has been there since the beginning and for a time you needed her to be there for you as a mentor, but you are comfortable enough now to go it without, there is nothing wrong with expressing your opinions (in-game) a little more strongly. Make some of the bigger decisions, suggest a different strategy; the GM will see this and the NPC will back off a bit. In this situation, there's no real reason to get *rid* of the NPC but only her role as guide or group leader.

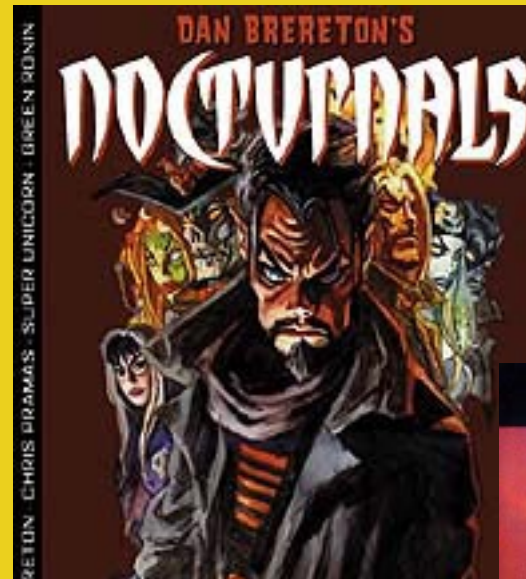
The GM may control the campaign but it's there for you to mold. This is your game too, and it's no fun to just have to sit there and let the GM control everything. Don't feel bad about assuming responsibility in game. This is, after all, what the whole point of you being a player is about! Doing this will alleviate some responsibility from the GM and allow him to concentrate on the story development at little more, resulting in a game that's much more fun for everyone.

Whether a guide, a strong arm, a source of knowledge, or just an irritant, the NPC has earned his place in our games and in our hearts! Without him, there would be nobody for the player-characters to interact with save for other player-characters. If you need him, he's there, if you don't want him anymore, he goes away. He is there for you to shape, to mold, and to take advantage of. Use the NPC! Exploit his knowledge and abilities as a player; manipulate characters and situations with him as a GM! However you use him, remember that he is there for a reason. If the reason is not so evident, maybe his usefulness needs to be re-evaluated—then again, maybe there's a hidden agent of which you are not aware!

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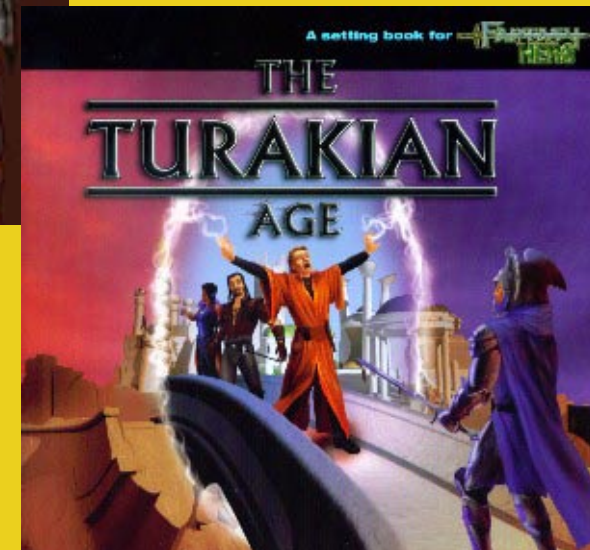
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The Content Of Drake Waters

by Artemis Jade Wetzel

I am sitting in the crow's nest, watching for land, ship, or whatever should happen along. As I sit here I reflect on my life, and what has brought me to the present. The crow's nest is a fine place for me, as it gets me away from the rabble that is my crew. As I sit quietly, my past unfolds...

I am assuming, due to the state of my being here, that at some point during the course of my family's history a dragon had sired my family. I cannot rightly say who this dragon was or give a full description of him, as it is only speculation. I can safely assume however that he had the normal run of draconic characteristics, such as wings, a tail and so forth. When I was young my mother and father, Thular and Anna, were the ones who spoke of these things. My father was on the High Command and sat at the right hand of the Highlord himself, and my mother was a very impressive woman. She held a high rank in the priesthood as a Cleric whose function it was to build relations with those who were not familiar with the Highlord, and take on her own healing service. I tried not to take much of what my father and mother had told me about our draconic history to heart. It was legend after all.

In my younger days I bounced freely from dream to dream like a bubble filled with fluffy clouds. One day I would want to be a combat cleric; I would dream about gliding on wings of crimson bronze, landing from wounded to wounded calling on the Highlord to guild my healing ability and then saving the allies of my country amid heaps of praise. Words. Loyal. Determined. Unrelenting fearlessness. The next day I would want to be a bard, so I could write stories of heroes and legends from ship to shore. It was simple enough, just take a few notes here and there, then turn them into grand stories known far and wide. On a rare occasion I would dream that I was the Captain of my own ship such as my father was. Many days I was seen building a small ship (big enough to sail on

our river), called "The Prowler." I loaded her up with supplies and sailed on my way for the night. I would return the next day, no worse for the wear. The details of the rest of my formative years can be summed up in a few choice details and hope that the rest become understood as this tale progresses.

When I was fourteen, father decided that I needed to become more educated and that it was time to think of my future. Thus I made it my mission to learn to be a cleric and Naval Officer. I have never been, nor will I ever be an impressive physical being, especially compared to my father who still has not lost the muscle added to him in his Military days of training. After all I am female, and females do not hold important positions in Torlenea (at least not typically, but there are the rare few). Nevertheless, we would spar every day after school, then I would learn to sail better than I did the day before, and learn to heal better by way of my mother. She taught me how to use divination and the skill of lore, in which I learn tales about people, places, and things. I am not sure what use that particular skill will have, but I am sure that mother had a reason for teaching me. She also taught me how to heal in a combat situation. Simulations were created, and I was then set to the task of healing under pressure. My mother was a great teacher, and I will never forget anything she taught me!

I never developed a great dexterity to myself, but I was a solid woman and had a good technical mind, so by the time I was sixteen I was a fair match for my father. One thing that always amazed me was how well he could still move. We only had one real fight, which I had insisted upon, soon after my sixteenth birthday. Father didn't like the idea, but he and I thought it would be good for my training. He always told me that I was a scrapper. The fight lasted one minute and thirty seconds. My nose still whistles to this day.

About the Author

Born in Flint Michigan in 1973, and raised on Military bases for the better part of her life, Artemis now resides in Wisconsin. She is a 15-year veteran of Dungeons & Dragons and was very happy when d20 came along. She also enjoys writing and has written many pieces including a short film. She has been married for two years now, and was lucky enough to get a husband gamer. Together they have two sons, Gaelen and Elijah, who are born gamers. Some of her writing inspirations are her family, all things chaos, Tim Ziehr, Wil Wheaton, David Eddings, Gene Rodenberry, George Lucas, Shrodingers Cat, all things Star Trek and so many more

In growing up father and mother often had stories for me about our family history and as I mentioned earlier, I tried not to put much faith into what father and mother said about our history. With this in mind, I tried to sift through their stories and find the truth within them, especially when they began talking about changes that could happen to someone who carried this particular draconic gene. As a child my skin started to change to a reddish color, and signs of scales were starting to develop. In my teenage years I noticed lumps where wings were starting to form, and an ache would frequent in the region of my tailbone. I was told my parents that they were the normal pains of a growing youth; this is where I learned I was wrong. They forced themselves to tell me about things that they began noticing in me as a child, on up to this day. Eventually, I started showing signs of bronzing skin and an affinity for the water. They were constantly pulling me from the depths of the river as they thought I was to drown. My features were slowly changing as well, though nothing to drastic or to noticeable to those outside our family. They told me stories from when I would wake up in a cold sweat from a prophetic dream: my desire to fly, and my unrelenting love of fish. They also told me that I would sleepwalk to the roof to try to fly. During an undocumented sleepwalking accident during the night, I had broken my arm trying to launch myself from a nearby cliff. Mother mended my arm and I eventually, became somewhat (but not totally) cured of sleepwalking.

During my days at school I never had another accident that I am aware of. While I enjoyed my home life, and admired both parents with fond memories, I would always long for my school days. The holiday breaks could not end soon enough, and I reveled in the fact that I would always be picked for demonstrations for most of my classes. I was popular with the teachers as I was a fast learner, and I excelled at all that I did, except for riding a horse. For one reason or another I felt horribly uncomfortable on its back, and could never get the beast to go anywhere. Upon graduation I received a gift from my parents—A War Axe of the Highlord Torak, which had special properties to it. My war axe was a fine looking axe and slightly resembled "TOG", the Highlord's own sentient war axe. I joined the Navy at sixteen years of age, and was immediately assigned to the ship "The Talon". "The Talon", was a beautiful ship, from stem to stern, from port to starboard. She was beautiful, and that very day I knew what I was put here on this earth to do.

I soon learned the ins and outs of the "Talon." It was the 13th of May, or possibly March. Suffice to say that it is sunny outside, the global thermostat is set to somewhere between cold and warm, and there is a gentle breeze that smells of the sea. There is no sweeter smell than that of the sea, and I will never tire of it. It was noticed that I was becoming an ill-tempered individual, due to the growing disappearance of any human traits that I possess. I guess the constant staring and whispering finally got to me. I would often find that the rest of the crew would stare at the nubs where my wings were beginning to come in, the slight elongation of my face, and the reddening of my skin. I soon became self conscious about they way I looked.

So now I journey to seclusion—to quiet peace. The

crow's nest was fast becoming my best friend, as I would volunteer to be there more often than anyone else.

As the years went on, and time passed I became promoted to the rank of "Boatswain", and gained more experience. I received this position by saving Captain Bill's life. We needed to clean the barnacles from the prow of the "Talon," as they seemed to be slowing her down a bit. So we decided to dock close to the cliffs of an uncharted island. Everything was going fine until a flock of Harpies began to attack without provocation. They swooped in snatched the Captain, and tried to make off with him. My natural instinct made me jump to the back of the one that grabbed the Captain. The Harpy dropped the Captain back on the Quarter Deck, and kept flying higher into the air. Had I not been grappling with the Harpy I would have enjoyed myself.

The Harpy lost control and we fell to the water. I'm not really sure how long I was down there, but it seemed like forever. I came back to the surface with the Harpy carcass in tow. After I was aboard I was promoted and congratulated for saving the Captains life. Even though I was promoted I was also reprimanded. It seems that in the flurry of the Harpy attack I was instructed to man the artillery, but disobeyed the order. I tried to defend my self as best as possible, as to why I disobeyed the order, but no one was listened. As my shipmates badgered the Captain to take action I stood there realizing that I did not really care, because I had saved the Captain's life! Finally I stormed out of site and went to the crow's nest, which eventually led to another reprimand, because I left while being reprimanded. We lost many lives that day. All who lost their lives will be missed. I do not think though, that I will miss the previous boatswain, as it was his death that gave me my currant position. That's not to say that I did not deserve it!

After spending five years at sea, we

were called back to the mainland. My father being the high admiral called me to his side. A long talk was had and in great detail. I was unofficially booted out of the Navy because of insubordination and not following orders. This was ridiculous; I was only doing my bloody job. As I stood there ranting and shouting explicitives, my father glared at me, and reminded me to whom I was speaking! It was then that my father handed me a note from the Highlord, and told me that it would explain everything in detail. The letter was a letter of Marquee; along with this letter I was given my own ship. The Highlord had made me a Privateer, and I was to follow orders that came directly from him and him only. I did not know what to say, but I was elated, and I called my lady "The Prowler."

"Sounds like a solid plan", I thought. My father voice echoed in my head "Don't forget where your loyalties lie." I won't father, I won't! My ship came with a full crew of my choice (well, all that I was allowed with my rank and experience), so I thought about it, for a while, but dared not linger too long on the subject. I hand picked each and everyone. All strong able bodied men, willing to take orders from a woman with no questions asked. "Don't worry none Captain, I'll see these men are kept in line," my first mate said.

It's been another five years on the high seas as Captain of The Prowler, and I regret nothing. We are now headed to a new destination. We must start a new city. I look forward to creating something new. I have a fine bunch of men, and do not regret any insubordination, or lack of order following at all. So as I am perched in the crows nest, my ship is at present sailing to our destination, going to make something a little better of a place for someone else. Going to our new home will be comforting in the fact that no one will know me. All anyone will know of me is my reputation for being a good, fair, and just captain. No one will have the opportunity to judge me by my appearance and that will be a welcome relief.

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► <http://www.silven.com/articles.asp?case=showreview&id=59>

BEYOND DIVINITY

Preview and Interview by Patty Estill

Divine Divinity, the great RPG with the odd name from Larian Studios, set new standards for PC role-playing games. It offered a huge world with lots of quests and side quests, giving the player the option of accepting or declining certain tasks. It allowed for character development, skill development and a whole world of magic. But most of all, it provided an immersive storyline that sucked you in and made you forget the clock in the real world.

Beyond Divinity does all that – and more. The story in *Beyond Divinity* has you soul-forged with a Death Knight, an unfortunate event that occurred at the hands of – you guessed it – the ultimate bad guy. In this case, that happens to be the Arch Demon Samuel, the evil-doer responsible for placing the soul-forging curse upon you and your unlikely companion. The story sound interesting but how does the game play?

I suspect the full game will include an opening movie that shows the story of the soul-forging curse. The demo is really just a teaser for the game and begins with your character creation screen. Some very nice options are available here. Again, the full game may include more choices but currently the character is created by making selections on a number of different variables.

- Gender – Male, female, child, custom. In this universe, your hero can actually be a child. For lack of any other way to allow that choice, it is included as a gender choice.

- Body type – Regular, Fat, Muscular, Slim. As has been mentioned in a number of forum threads and on other gaming message boards, it seems odd that our heroes all look alike in the different RPGs that we play. *Beyond Divinity* addresses this problem by including different body types. Hmmm, do I want to play a fat hero? That could certainly put a new twist on things!

- Face – five screens to choose from but they are all quite similar. All the faces are of the “human” variety.

- Hair – lots of choices of styles here, Short, Iro (looks kind of like a Mohawk of sorts), Ponytail, Long, Dutt (kind of a Dutch-boy cut), Plait (this looks like a ponytail that fell into some starch as it sticks straight back), and the ever popular style called Hair 7, which looks like Final Fantasy/Anime style hair. A great deal of attention to detail has been paid to this feature and I suspect the final game will include some additional choices as well, which is kind of interesting considering that most of the time your character will be wearing a helmet.

- Hair color – This offers some unusual as well as the standard choices: yellow, red, brown, black, white, blue and Xbox green.

- Combat Path: There are four choices here: Warrior, Survivor, Mage & Custom. Each character path has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of general stats. Fourteen points are distributed among you’re your six statistics:

Strength - Influences how hard you hit and how much weight you can carry.

Constitution - Influences health points and how long you can run.

Agility - Influences how accurate and handy you are, and how well you use agility based weapons such as bows.

Speed - Influences how fast the character can walk.

Intelligence - Indicates how smart your character is and determines mana points.

Survival Influences luck, initiative and how fast the character heals.

WARRIOR

Strength – 5
Constitution – 3
Agility – 2
Speed – 2
Intelligence – 1
Survival – 1

SURVIVOR

Strength – 2
Constitution – 1
Agility – 5
Speed – 3
Intelligence – 1
Survival – 2

MAGE

Strength – 1
Constitution – 1
Agility – 2
Speed – 2
Intelligence – 5
Survival – 3

In the “Custom” path, you choose how to distribute those fourteen points, allowing you to the freedom to create your own ideal character.

You then choose your Start Skills. You again have a choice of Warrior, Wizard or Survivor. This path determines which skills you will be able to learn first. As you progress through the game, you will find teachers and books that will make other skills available to all party members.

Name your hero (unless you want to go through the entire game known only as "Hero"), and choose your difficulty from easy, normal or hard. You then move on to the character screen for the Death Knight. You don't have as much control of this character. He's a mysterious fellow, and none too happy to be soul-forged with the likes of you, so you are unable to name him or change his appearance. You can, however, adjust his beginning statistics, choose his combat path and select his starting skills path. Once you've done that you are ready to start your adventure.

The demo is part of the first level in the game. You begin in a cell of sorts and are greeted by your unlikely companion, the Death Knight, who fills you on the sordid details of the curse and places your first quest in your journal – to escape the Citadel. The interface is mouse control (Thank you Larian Studios!!!) for movement and combat. The controls are very similar to those used in *Divine Divinity* but the characters movement is much smoother. The view is isometric but you can zoom in with the scroll wheel on the mouse to get a closer look at your characters and their surroundings.

Your character begins with nothing, in true RPG fashion, for your first objective is to find some kind of a weapon. Your Death Knight has a sword. Woohoo! Well, at least one of you has a weapon. Search the area and as usual pick up everything that isn't nailed down. You just never know when that decapitated head might come in handy... or maybe not, but you get the idea. Armor and weapons will be automatically equipped on your hero if the slot is not yet filled. For instance, when your hero, who is

weaponless, finds a club, it will automatically go into the weapons slot. If he later finds another weapon it will go into the inventory and you can then choose which weapon you want equipped. There is less control of your Death Knight's inventory. You will be able to equip him with an amulet or necklace, a belt, two rings, a shield and can you change his weapon. You cannot control his armor (helmet, body armor, boots, gloves or leggings).

Larian has once again done an excellent job of capturing the personality of the characters in the game. Conversations with (and between) NPCs are interesting to say the least, and your companion often has less than kind words for you, although your hero has some interesting responses as well. You will have the opportunity to make decisions on the outcome of quests, such as what action to take with an NPC. In the demo, you will encounter an NPC who begs for mercy and you have the opportunity to kill him or set him free. I suspect the full game will include many of those types of situations.

Your objective in this teaser for *Beyond Divinity* is to escape the Citadel, an underground/ underworld dungeon-style setting. As with *Divine Divinity*, you want to move objects to find hidden items and check every nook and cranny before moving on to the next area. Notes and manuscripts can be found, which give more information about the game or a hint to a possibly hidden quest. The environments are highly detailed and the voice-acting, often the source of loud complaints from gamers, is done very well. There are also more than a few surprises, to be wary at all times and remember "save early, save often" -- save yourself for that horrible feeling as you watch your characters lying on the ground and wonder when you last saved your game!

Even with *Divine Divinity* experience, *Beyond Divinity* looks to be an immersive and challenging game. An interesting addition to *Beyond Divinity* is the whole business of the soul-forging. This makes it necessary



to keep a close eye on both of your characters. Unlike your typical party-based game, if one of your characters dies, they both die. That, after all, is the whole idea behind the curse, so you must be very aware in combat. The interface makes it very easy to use skills and potions while in the combat screen – you just have to remember to do it.

All in all, *Beyond Divinity* is shaping up to be a very welcome addition to your RPG library. My biggest problem was when I reached the end of the demo – because it was the end! And I so wanted to continue to explore this exciting universe.

Beyond Divinity is on target for an April release at this time, so be prepared to once again venture into this exciting world. Check out the demo for yourself. And if you have not yet had the opportunity to experience the Divinity universe, go get a copy of *Divine Divinity* and play it while you wait for this next installment.



We were happy to have the opportunity to discuss *Beyond Divinity* with Swen “Lar” Vincke, the Project Leader for *Beyond Divinity* and Sandra McAuley of Hip Games..

Silven Crossroads: Good morning and thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me about this great game. It’s great to finally be able to put at least voices to the names of the people involved in this great project.

Swen: Good Morning! We are happy to be here.

Silven Crossroads: The Divinity universe is such a rich and immersive gameworld. Where did the influences for Divinity come from? What developers or games influenced the Divinity team?

Swen: My first influence, my first RPG was *Ultima 6*, then *Ultima 7* and the other *Ultima* games. They were a major influence for me. For the other guys on the team it was *Baldur’s Gate*. After we played those, we thought “yes, **we** could do something like this, and maybe better”.

Silven Crossroads: Obviously, *Beyond Divinity* has been occupying the bulk of your time recently but what games do you play when you do have some spare time?

Swen: We have a Killer Instinct machine in the office. That’s very good for all of us – very good for relieving stress! Other than *Killer Instinct*, I actually have not played anything for almost a year with the exception of parts of *Beyond Divinity* and parts of *Divine Divinity* when I needed to check details, NPCs, etc. that would be referenced in the new game. I have some games I **want** to play : *Gothic II*, that’s on my list; *Spellforce* - an artist who worked on *Spellforce* also worked on *Beyond Divinity*- so I want to play it; *Command & Conquer: Generals*; *Lineage II*.

Silven Crossroads: *Beyond Divinity* offers some exciting innovations in gameplay. Can you talk a little about the Battlefields?

Swen: The Battlefields is a great feature in *Beyond Divinity*. You can jump to the Battlefields, which is an alternate universe, at any point in the game. You can even go there in the middle of a battle or other encounter. There you will find a small village where you can talk to traders and other people who will give you quests. Completing the quests allows you to gain experience, allowing your character to gain levels and skills. You can then return to your previous point in the game at any time. Going to the Battlefields is not necessary but it does give you the opportunity to gain additional experience outside the realm of the main game.

Silven Crossroads: *Beyond Divinity* will also include a Random Quest Generator, an aspect of *Beyond Divinity* in which I have a personal interest. The last game that did a good job with random quests was **Daggerfall** (from Bethesda Softworks in 1996). How will the random quest generator work in *Beyond Divinity*?

Swen: Ah, I played *Daggerfall*. The random quest generator in *Beyond Divinity* is tied to the Battlefields. You won’t see great expansive quests, but more simple quests, excuses to find unique items and gain experience. The quests will be things like “go find this villain that killed a towns person” or “explore this dungeon to find a special item,” that sort of thing.

Silven Crossroads: Voice acting is a tricky business. Fans are fickle, it seems. They all want voice-overs in games but then it seems they are never, ever satisfied with the voices. There has been some feedback in several articles and websites, including here at Silven Crossroads, concerning the voices, especially the voice of the Death Knight. Do you have a response to fans on this subject?

Swen: We realized that the voices did not come out quite as well as we had hoped. We are currently considering if and what can be done. Any changes that are decided will be announced when that decision is made.

Silven Crossroads: In the same vein, I know Larian Studios put a lot of time and effort into developing the voice-over dialogues. Will there be an option to switch from voice to text? (Again, for those gamers who are never satisfied!)

Swen: Well, they can turn the volume down on their speakers, if they choose. Every dialogue also shows text on the screen, so they will not miss anything by not hearing the voices.

Silven Crossroads: The story in *Beyond Divinity* rests heavily on the concept of rift-running? What exactly is rift-running? How many parallel dimensions are there?

Swen: Your purpose is to escape from the world of Nemesis, the underworld of sorts where the Arch Demon cast his curse that soul-forged you with the Death Knight. Your first experience of rift-running occurs when you are summoned to Rivellon. You also experience rift-running when you go to the Battlefields; and later in the game you learn how to rift-run by yourself (with your Death Knight, of course).

Silven Crossroads: The music in *Divine Divinity* was superb. Can we expect the same in *Beyond Divinity*? Are you using the same composer / music director?

Swen: Yes, we are using the same composer. The music in *Beyond Divinity* will be similar in style but of course different from that in *Divine Divinity*, and will be more symphonic in nature.

Silven Crossroads: Along the same vein will there be a soundtrack? Or would it be possible to pull music

files from the CD or game-director and make them available for download?

Swen: You are not supposed to mess with the game directory files! I think Kirill is still working on a soundtrack for *Divine Divinity*. We will probably release a few tracks from *Beyond Divinity*; we will just see how things go.

Silven Crossroads: Can you talk a little about the skill system in *Beyond Divinity*? In *Divine Divinity* it seems the skill paths were a little more open – you could choose any skill from any path. In *Beyond Divinity* it seems a little more directed, or was that just a limitation of the demo?

Swen: That was a limitation in the demo. We wanted to get the demo out quickly so not all the skill path details were included. *Beyond Divinity* will include a total of 300 skills. You choose a skill path for your characters and then you must find teachers in the game who will open new skill paths for you. Your characters are totally customizable, and you can choose skills from any skill path, as long as that path has been opened to you. More and more skills become available as you advance in the game.

Silven Crossroads: The Summoning Dolls sound interesting. Will they only be available as treasure? Or can they be purchased (for some hefty price)? What about upkeep costs – what are they? How many different dolls are there?

Swen: Summoning Dolls are, or can be, virtual powerhouses in the game. They cannot be purchased anywhere; you must find them. A total of four Summoning Dolls are available in the game, each has its own abilities and can be much more powerful than the main character. You can level up your Summoning dolls by sacrificing skill points from the main characters, making them even more powerful. Summoning Dolls must recover periodically, and have limited range. That is, they can only travel

Beyond Divinity Feature List

Main Features

A deep and detailed storyline filled with plot twists and over 300 sub-quests.

New style of gameplay featuring the unique summoning dolls and total party control using a more intuitive and advanced combat system.

Simple, intuitive controls even for complex actions.

Complete and accurate diary including two automaps – one small overlaid map containing tactical info and one large map containing the entire world.

High object interactivity including the ability to combine objects with each other in a seamless world.

An open, free and deep character development system with over 30 character traits.

More than 290 skills to learn including advanced alchemy, craftsmanship, trap creation, nature & weather magic, equipment embellishing etc...

Over 300 equipment classes and plenty of unique items.

Over 140 different NPC & monster classes.

More than 600 different NPC to interact with.

Dialogs written by Rhianna Pratchett.

A completely new sound-track composed by Kirill Pokrovski, winner of IGN's 2002 "Outstanding achievement in music" award and Gamespot's runner up for "Best music of the year" 2002 award.

Updated graphics engine including real time 3D characters and monsters together with support for higher resolutions. Players can now zoom in on the action.

Upgrades to the Divinity engine

Updated graphics engine including real time 3D characters with support for DX9 & higher resolutions

Real time generation of dungeons, maps and quests

Total party control

Next generation character development system with new skills, attributes and advanced character customisation options

and more ...

within a limited range of where they were originally summoned. This range increases as the summoning doll increases in levels. They can be resummoned but resummoning is tied to the player's skill and skill levels. It will be necessary to have points in Summoning skill in order to resummon a Doll. Summoning Dolls add another aspect of the game and give the player yet another option in how to play the game.

Silven Crossroads: There has been mention that there will be some NPCs that can join the hero's party. Is this quest driven or do they join another way? Are they player controlled or AI controlled?

Swen: This was somewhat misconstrued or misinterpreted. The only NPCs that join to help the party are the Summoning Dolls.

Silven Crossroads: The demo has been out for a few weeks now. What kind of feedback have you been receiving?

Swen: Well, we have received a lot of positive comments and positive reviews, as well as some complaints. Approximately 80% of the negative comments have concerned the voices in the game. Some comments have been received concerning the style of play. In the final version of the game there will be four styles of game play to choose from: action, tactical, hardcore and a style that allows you to just head in and rush through the game is that's how you like to play.

Silven Crossroads: There have been some forum entries and other sources that compare *Beyond Divinity* to *Diablo II* (Not that is necessarily a bad thing as *Diablo II* is a great game which still retains a strong following). How do you respond to that type of comparison.

Swen: We realize that we made a mistake when we started the player off in a dungeon in the demo. Once

you exit the dungeon, the world is very different from that of other games, including *Diablo II*. You will travel back to Rivellon, where you will encounter NPCs from Divine Divinity. It is not necessary to have played *Divine Divinity* before playing *Beyond Divinity* as the stories are very separate, but if you **have** played the first game, you will recognize some of the people and events. There are also many different areas to explore including desert areas, swamplands, a mushroom forest and many other areas. These environments will provide a great deal of variety of terrain as well as quests. We feel these things set *Beyond Divinity* apart from other games.

Silven Crossroads: There has been reference to the fact that *Beyond Divinity* will contain a number of Easter Eggs, those fun surprises that gamers live for. Without revealing too much information (and thus ruining the surprise!) what kind of hints or advice do you have for fans to enhance their chances of finding *Beyond Divinity's* Easter Eggs?

Swen: I can't tell you too much or else it would not be a surprise! Look everywhere, look carefully at everything. Try things. Sometimes things happen when you perform ordinary actions like lighting or extinguishing a torch. Because *Beyond Divinity* has some random events in it, the Easter Eggs may actually be different each time so try everything!

Silven Crossroads: There seem to be a number of articles and websites comparing *Beyond Divinity* to *Sacred* (from Ascaron). I saw *Sacred* last year at E3 and while it looks very impressive I think it looks to be quite a different game from *Beyond Divinity*. How do you respond to this comparison?

Swen: I think the games are very different. Both are isometric games in a medieval, fantasy setting, but this alone does not necessarily make them comparable. *Sacred* is more of an action-RPG, more Diabloesque, but with less story. *Beyond Divinity* is a true RPG with an immersive story, many ways to

Beyond Divinity Factsheet

What: "Beyond Divinity"

Developer: Larian Studios (www.larian.com)

Publishers: UK: Digital Jesters (www.digitaljesters.com)

German territories: Ubi Soft (www.ubisoft.de)

US & Canada: HIP Interactive (www.hipinteractive.com)

Other territories: to be announced

System Requirements: Pentium III-500, Geforce 2 class 3D accelerator, 128 MB of RAM

Release date: Beyond Divinity is scheduled for a release in the first half of 2004

Forum: <http://www.larian.com/ubbthreads/ubbthreads.php>

"*Beyond Divinity* is an extension of the award winning *Divinity Universe*. It has pedigree. This is a true RPG players dream... totally balanced, a rich and absorbing storyline, and an unparalleled level of depth."

Websites

Visit Larian Studios' website: <http://www.larian.com>

Visit the Beyond Divinity website: <http://www.beyond-divinity.com/>

Visit the Divine Divinity website: <http://www.larian.com/Site/english/divinity/divinity.html>

Visit our forum: <http://www.larian.com/ubbthreads/ubbthreads.php>

approach what needs to be done, and total character customization. They are very different games. Just because they are being released at approximately the same time does not mean they necessarily compare.

Silven Crossroads: According to the latest entries on RPG vault, it seems there were a number of last minute challenges to face in getting the German version to press. How did you get through this without killing the parties involved or each other? Um, do you still have that big hammer?

Swen: It was a tough week. The real story was much, much worse than what I wrote but we survived. We're here (in San Jose for GDC) after all! We always keep the hammer handy – and we play a lot of *Killer Instinct*!

Silven Crossroads: One of the issues was related to the copyright protection used that caused some installer problems. I know the installer was rewritten several times and those problems appear to be fixed. but I recently purchased a game that nearly required membership in Mensa to install because of the copy protection used. I ended having to use Alcohol 120% and Daemon tools to install the game. Please tell me you aren't expecting any of those kinds of problems with *Beyond Divinity*.

Swen: We ended up spending a lot of time rewriting and testing but the installer also has a fail-safe built in for the copy-protection. It is the latest, state-of-the-art copy protection software and we do not anticipate that there will be any install problems. However, we also have good technical support and all you would have to do is contact them (email) and they will help you through the problem, should you have one. We really do not think there will be any problems, though.

Silven Crossroads: So has it gone gold now in all versions? What is the expected release date?

Swen: The German version has gone gold. We expect the English version to go gold next week or the week after. We are still shooting for an April 13 release date in the US.

Silven Crossroads: Rhianna Pratchett has written a 50-page plus novella set in the original fantasy realm of the *Divinity* universe. This is being offered as a pre-purchase bonus at Best Buy in the US. Will it only be available at Best buy?

Sandra McAuley: We have a limited printing of the novella and it is being made available as an exclusive with Best Buy, as they were the number one reseller of *Beyond Divinity*. It will also be available on-line from the Larian Studios website.

Swen: We are still working out the details but the plan is to make it available from the website at a nominal fee.

Silven Crossroads: Playing in god-mode and not entering the Battlefields requires approximately 40 hours of game playing time to complete the game. But since most of us will not play with those enhancements, how long can the average player expect to spend in *Beyond Divinity*? I know this will be affected by how much time is spent in the Battlefields, but just in general, what do you think the game play time might be?

Swen: Most players can probably expect to complete the game in 60 – 100 hours, depending on how they play, how much time is spent in the Battlefields, how many extra quests are undertaken, etc.

Silven Crossroads: I personally spent approximately 110-120 hours, maybe a little more, to complete *Divine Divinity* but I also spent a lot of time going back and forth between areas.

Swen: If you play *Beyond Divinity* in the same manner you will probably get more game play time,

maybe 140 – 160 hours. Depends on how much time you spend in the Battlefields as well as other factors.

Silven Crossroads: Can you confirm that there will be a *Divinity 2*? Or say anything about it yet?

Swen: Yes, there definitely will be a *Divinity 2*.

Silven Crossroads: And can you speak about the "secret project" that was alluded to in the entry on RPG Vault when you talked about your "busy day"?

Swen: Um, that is still a secret? .. but it is not an RPG.

Silven Crossroads: Aw, that's a bit disappointing!

Swen: But we're not abandoning the RPG. We are making *Divinity 2*!

Silven Crossroads: Is there anything else you want to tell me about *Beyond Divinity* that I haven't already asked?

Swen: Oh, I could talk for hours about the game! There is so much in the game and so many new things, that I believe we have made a very good game, one that many people will enjoy.

Silven Crossroads: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me, and thank you especially for making this game. I am anxious to see the final version. I think I'll go play the demo again while I wait for the real thing!

Swen & Sandra: You're welcome! And thank you for taking an interest in our game.

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

Neddit the Epic Commoner

by **Matthew J. Hanson**

Starlanko the Magnificent sat in the dinning room of the Five Hats Tavern. It was a little cleaner and a little better lit than Starlanko was comfortable with, but any place a client wished to meet him was good enough for Starlanko. And any place that served a breakfast of eggs, bacon, and hard liquor was good enough for Redreck, the brawn to Starlanko's brain.

Of course it was now several hours passed breakfast, in fact, as Starlanko observed the shadows had shifted from growing shorter to growing longer, it was just passed the appointed noon rendezvous. Normally this was nothing that would cause Starlanko concern, but this Client, a Ms. Korensyth had an unusual obsession with time. She collected sundials, water clocks, and most of all, spells that could indicate the hour. A rather interesting paradox, because, as any expert in the Art knows, the units used to measure time (round, minute, hour), were originally decided upon because they correlated with common spell durations.

In addition to being a collector, Korensyth was what people often called a fireside mage: those who use their magic to make a practical living, enchanting chandeliers, mending broken sculptures and the like. It was an honest living, though a rather dull one in Starlanko's opinion. Of course, if every wizard looted through musty dungeons to uncover ancient tomes, his own client base would dry up. Korensyth had purchased spells from Starlanko twice before, and she was a very good client.

There were only two other patrons in the tavern at that time, as well as the barkeeper and a tavern boy who looked just old enough to have seen twelve summers. The patrons and the keeper kept to themselves, but the boy stared at Starlanko with the wide eyes of wonder that often fell upon a wizard, especially one of Starlanko's caliber. Starlanko liked that look.

Starlanko gave the boy a mischievous smile. Then he held up both hands at eye level, palms facing out. He closed his right hand, and opened it again, revealing a golden coin, where none had been before. He then closed both hands, and coughed cacophonously into his right fist. When he opened it again, there was nothing there, but seconds later he opened his left to reveal the golden disk. With a final flourish, Starlanko tossed the coin to his captivated audience.

The boy looked at the coin with wonder, but dared not touch it. Instead he fled into the back room.

"Oh, well," muttered Starlanko. "Some people just don't appreciate a fine show." Then Starlanko cast a spell to call the fallen coin with his left hand, while he rolled the second coin he had been palming across is right.

Before the thrown coin returned to Starlanko, a large hairy hand grabbed it. "I wouldn't be so quick to show off if I were you," The barkeep said, then slammed the coin down on the table.

"Is there a problem sir?" Starlanko asked.

"Just a piece of friendly advice. I'm just saying Lord Laziaer doesn't take kindly to wizard folk."

"Lord Jonus Laziaer?" Starlanko asked.

"No, Old Lord Laziaer died up over a fortnight ago. His son holds the title now, and if his dad weren't buried more than five rounds before the younger started play all high and mighty, then I'll eat my hat," said the barkeeper, who Starlanko noticed was not wearing a hat. "He doesn't take to kindly to wizards and run them all out of town."

"But I thought Lord Laziaer's eldest dabbled in wizardry himself." Starlanko paid particular attention

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 senior 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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to nobles who practiced the art. He had courted the Laziaer son as a client once, but had met with little success.

"Sure Ermin was, but he ain't in charge. When's his pa died, he's nowhere to be found, and I for one, find that a might suspicious. So the second son, young Macrum's in charge."

"And Madam Korensyth was run out of town too I suppose."

"Yep."

"Then I guess our work here is done. Come on Redreck," Starlanko said to his friend at the bar. Then he spoke again to the barkeeper, "And if you see the new Lord Laziaer, let him know that I disapprove of his business strategy."

"Why don't you tell him yourself," said a new man who had just entered the tavern. His coat was made of green velvet, and his stocking looked like real silk. Around his waist he wore a belt made of tattered leather, with a rusty buckle.

"Nice belt," Starlanko said. "You are Lord Laziaer's son I presume?"

"I am Lord Laziaer."

"My apologize. You just look so youthful and vibrant. I assumed... No matter. My work here is done. If you will excuse me."

"You are not excused. There is still the matter of the fine," said Lord Macrum Laziaer.

"Fine? What fine?"

"Wizarding is illegal within city limits. You owe us a great deal of coin Mr..."

"Rassburn," said Starlanko, and "I'm afraid you're mistaken. It's the cloths isn't it? I get that all the time. You know just because I wear a pointy hat, shimmery robes, and carry a staff doesn't necessarily make me a wizard."

"A boy will testify to you practicing magic."

"What? Oh, the coin trick. I'm flattered that my skills are so impressive, but it is nothing more than a slight of hand I assure you."

"It's a pity I have to add resisting arrest, and disrespecting a member of the aristocracy to your charges. I suggest not making things any more difficult than they have to be Mr. Rassburn, if that is your real name."

"I must admit defeat Lord Laziaer. You are just too clever for me. Truly I assure you, you are the better man. And let me assure you also, that what I am about to do I do only out of scientific curiosity, not because I hope to defeat you in any manner." Starlanko removed any shadow of a doubt that he was a wizard, and let loose one of the wizard's most tried and true spells: a missile, made purely of magical force. It struck Lord Laziaer dead on, but he only smiled. "That didn't hurt at all, did it?"

"It only made me stronger."

"Right. Redreck, punch him in the face." Redreck had been waiting on the sidelines for these very words.

In half a round he was upon Laziaer, swinging at him with his iron clad fist, but Lord Laziaer dodged and hit Redreck in the stomach, with what looked like the strength of a giant.

"Okay then. Redreck, kick him in the groin, and let's run like scared little girls."

Of course by "kick him in the groin," Starlanko meant, "knock him to the ground," but while Starlanko realized this, and Redreck realized this, Lord Laziaer did not. He guarded the important bits, but that left him open to Redreck's foot hooking the back of his knee.

"Run like scared little girls," meant, "run like scared little girls."

Their horses, one magical and one mundane were tethered right outside the door. They mounted, Starlanko gave the horses a little something to up their rate of withdrawal, and they got the heck out of the town of Breedburg.

A lesser wizard would have given up then and there. A wizard who lacked cunning, talent, or a desire to maintain and increase customer base, would have simply cut his losses and written off Breedburg as hopeless, but not Starlanko, who after all, was not called "the Magnificent," for nothing.

The first step in Starlanko the Magnificent's plan involved sneaking back into town. It was not that difficult. One of the many advantages to the professional get up was that it was all that people really saw. Placing a few coins in the proper palms quickly got Starlanko what he needed.

For the next step he needed to visit a big city, and as Mazalax, is both the biggest on the continent, and the nearest to Starlanko it was the obvious choice. Here Starlanko purchased a few goods, but most importantly purchased the services of Dwendal the Diviner, who could locate an individual down to the

exact building.

The Donkey's Bottom bubbled over with the finest elements of humanity: dock workers, fish gutters, and muckrakers, looking to escape for a few hours. The air was filled with the smells of sweat and tobacco, and every now and then Starlanko caught a whiff of vomit or blood. The patrons' chatter was punctuated by drinking songs that sometimes swept the entire bar, and sometimes were a lone drunkard's failed cry for attention.

Starlanko and Redreck each got a pint of grog and sat down at a small table. Starlanko sipped cautiously at his drink, while Redreck downed half the pint in one swig. In very little time they were approached by a pair of woman, whose makeup was thick and dresses were thin.

"Hello there handsome. Don't get much wizards round these parts. You need any help with your magic wand?"

"No, thank you," Starlanko replied.

"How about you big boy?" the other woman said to Redreck. "That's a big sword you've got there. Lifting it all day must make you tense. Let me help you relax."

"I don't think you're his type," Starlanko said.

"Darling I can be any type you want."

Starlanko beckoned for her to lean in. He whispered something in her ear.

"Oh," she said, "I guess I can't be that type now can I?"

"While we do not wish to purvey ourselves of your usual services," Starlanko said, "my associate and I hoped that you could provide us with some information," Starlanko produced a pair of gold coins. "We are looking for a man. His name is Ermin Laziaer,

but I'm not sure that's what he would be giving. He would not have appeared here more than two weeks ago, though he arrived perhaps later. He is a tall man, and thin, with brown hair, and gray eyes."

"Hold on. You mean The Duke?"

"Tell me about this Duke."

"He showed up round two weeks ago. Sobbing about his brother stole the land out from under him. We all thought him an out of work actor, but... I mean he's not really..."

"Not quite a duke, but yes he is an estranged member of the aristocracy."

"Well I never." The woman said. "Hey Pats," she called across the bar to a woman of similar fashion, "you done bedded an aristocrat."

"Yeah, well your ma had two sheep last night."

"Aristocrat Pats. You know like royal. Mr. Fancy says the Duke's for real."

"No!"

"Yeah!"

"If you please," Starlanko said, "do you have any idea where the duke is right now."

"Oh sure, he's passed out, under that table," she pointed.

"Thank you," Starlanko said. He placed the coins on the table, and went to examine the limp body of Ermin Laziaer. He prodded the body several times, but got no response. He could see Laziaer breathing, so there was no worry on that part. Luckily Starlanko was ready with a little spell originally developed in his days at the academy, and still quite popular there.

After the spell Ermin Laziaer was awakened with only

a small effort.

"Who are you?" he asked. "And more importantly, why am I not drunk?"

"I'm afraid that's my fault," Starlanko admitted. "My name is Starlanko the Magnificent, and I'd like to help you."

"You can start by bring me a drink."

"I'd like to help you reclaim your land, and your title."

"Well, we can't always get what we want."

"Don't you want what is rightful yours."

"Of course I want it. I just to remain alive more," Ermin said.

"The two are not mutually exclusive."

"They are in my case. He killed our father, and he'll kill me, and with that belt of his, I can't do much to stop him."

"Tell me more about this belt," said Starlanko.

"First off it stops any spell that's cast on him, and if that's not enough, it makes him strong, faster, and tougher to kill at the same time. Magic is useless against him, and swords are nearly so, unless you've got a stellar swordsman." Redreck was quite handy with the sword, but maybe not quite stellar.

"Any idea where he got the belt from?"

"He hired a bunch of adventurers to get it for him a few years back. Real tough guys. They had to slay a red dragon to get it, and it wasn't a young one either. In the end they gave him the belt, he gave them gold, and they keep the rest of the hoard."

"Is there anything else you can tell me about the dragon, or the party?"

"I don't know. If you really want to hear about it you could talk to Neddit."

"Who's Neddit?"

"He's a farmer. Back when the adventures came around, they were looking for hands to carry some stuff. Most people were to afraid to go into a dragon's lair, even if they weren't asked to do the fighting, but Neddit owed a lot of debt, and was never to bright, so he signed on."

"Was he there, when the dragon died."

"I don't know. Why?"

"Tell me then, is anything else remarkable about this Neddit?"

"Well he's a good farmer. Great I might even say. The best on the estate. He's always got the healthiest animals, and the biggest crops. You can actually tell his plot from the rest by looking out the tower, just by the greener shade of green."

"He was always this good a farmer?"

"No, not always, I don't think."

"It started about the same time the dragons was killed."

"Yeah, come to think of it, it was about the same time."

"Thank you Lord Laziaer. I'm going to talk to Neddit now. I'll send you a message, when I have defeated your brother."

Ermin Laziaer had been right about Neddit. Starlanko the Magnificent could tell which crops were his by the brighter shade of green. Starlanko found Neddit among rows of potatoes, examining the plants. Redreck stood twenty feet away a bow in hand, while Starlanko approached.

"Farmer Neddit I presume?"

Neddit chuckled, "Well what do you know. I'm named Neddit too."

"No, my name is Starlanko the Magnificent."

"Well why did you just say it were Neddit."

"I didn't. I was asking if you were Neddit."

"It's a might funny way to ask of folk."

"Are you Neddit?" Starlanko asked.

"Sure as a dead skunk stinks."

"I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"What's a magnificant?" asked Neddit.

"Magnificent. It means, really good"

"I wish my ma, thought high of me like that. She always used to say I was duller than a lead brick."

"Excuse me Farmer Neddit, but I have some very important things I need to talk to you about. It's about Macrum Laziaer."

Neddit backed up, and scratched his forehead. "I don't know what you been told, but it ain't true. I never said those things about him. They just says that to get me in trouble."

"You don't sound like your too fond of him."

"So I owed him money once, but I paid him back now didn't I? No reason for me to hold a grudge of all sorts."

"Farmer Neddit, I assure you I am not here to get you in to trouble. I need your help. Macrum Laziaer killed his father. His brother fled because he feared he might be next. I need your help to put an end to Macrum's tyranny, and reinstate the rightful lord."

"I think your mistake. I'm just a farmer."

"Your not just a farmer. You're the greatest farmer in the county."

"Well shoot, I don't know. Plants just have a way of talking to me. Let me know what they need."

"Are you familiar with the concept of Power, Farmer Neddit?"

"Ain't that some kind of wizard thing, makes you able to cast spells."

"Sort of," Starlanko said, "but it's much more general than that. The word Power is a little misleading, it a close approximation of the Draconic term Xellos Perxawak. Some people call it XP for short, but for our purposes Power should do the trick. All things have Power in them to some degree or another, but somethings have a lot more, which lets them do stuff others are incapable of. You, my friend, are a blazing star of Power. That's what makes you such a good farmer."

"But that ain't right. How's it that I got so much of this Power, but none of those around me do?"

"There are many ways to get Power. Practicing your skills, challenging your abilities, but the quickest and easiest is through the death of others. Whenever something dies, it lets of a tremendous burst of power, which is absorbed by all those around it. The more powerful the creature is, the more each of the surrounding creatures absorbs. If it's something as powerful as a dragon, one could go from being an ordinary commoner, to the greatest farmer in the land."

"But I didn't even hurt that dragon. All I did was carry stuff."

"It doesn't matter. You were there. You contributed in your own way. That's enough."

"So what you're saying, is killing a dragon made me real good at farming?"

"Exactly. Power manifests itself differently in every person. Often they just get better at what they already do well. But there are also certain truths that run across the board. When people get a lot of power, they always get tougher, and always become better fighters."

"I ain't no fighter."

"You aren't as good as somebody who trains to fight, and has equal power, but you are a lot better in a fight than you would think."

"That can't be true."

"Redreck. The demonstration please."

There was a twang and a thwack, and all of a sudden Neddit had an arrow sticking out of him. Neddit's head slowly panned down to the arrow. The light dawned in his head, and he collapsed.

"Oh, get up. It's not hat bad."

"Help! Bloody murder."

"Relax, nobody is trying to kill you. I just wanted to prove a point," Starlanko said.

"By shooting me?"

"Yes."

"You're crazier than two rats sown together."

"You're fine. Let me help you up."

"You shot me."

"Yes, yes, I shot you. Life moves on. I would appreciate it if you would stand up, so we can continue this discussion in a civilized manner."

"Easy for you to say. You ain't been shot," Nedditt said.

"Fine. Redreck." Twang. Thwack. An arrow pierced Starlanko's shoulder. "Now I've been shot too. May I please help you up?"

"Okay, I... I guess." Nedditt grabbed on to Starlanko's outstretched hand, and pulled himself too his feet.

"Again."

"What?" Twang. Thwack. An arrow lodged into Nedditt's chest. "Will you stop that!"

"How do you feel?"

"I feel like I've done been shot! Twice!"

"Yes, and how does it feel to be shot twice? Don't answer right away. Take a round to think about it. Take a deep breath."

"It feels..." Nedditt inhaled slowly. "It feels..." Then he exhaled. "Well actually, it don't feel much bad."

"Precisely my point. It's because of our Power. You can suffer blows that would kill the average man, and shrug them off like water off a duck's back."

"Still that don't mean I can fight."

"Redreck."

Redreck dropped the bow, and drew his sword. He advanced towards Nedditt.

"Please not again."

"Defend yourself." Starlanko placed the farmer's hoe into his hands. "Don't think about what you are doing just do it."

Redreck lunged at Nedditt, but Nedditt sidestepped. He brought his hoe around and crashed it against

Redreck's skull.

"How did that feel?"

"Felt alright I guess. But not right. Like it weren't fair that I can hit like that."

"It's not fair. But if Macrum Laziaer isn't going to play fair, than why should we? That's also why I brought these." Starlanko found two boxes he'd brought. The first was short and fat, the second was long and skinny.

"What are those?" Nedditt asked.

"This," Starlanko said, opening the first box, "is a mythrall shirt. Finest armor available. You won't even notice you are wearing it. And this," he opened the second box, "is a hoe of hoeing +10."

Nedditt whistled. "She's really pretty like. I think I'll call her Bonnie Lou."

"...I'm not saying Macrum Laziaer is stupid, but when he heard about the blue dragon, he tired to cheer it up." The main street was bare except for Starlanko and Redreck, but they were not alone. From every window on the street the people watched to see what would happen to this mad wizard spouting ever insulting, but increasingly unfunny jokes about Macrum Laziaer.

Starlanko paused when he saw the figure coming towards him from the direction of the Laziaer estate. "Well, well. What do we have here? If it's not the escaped criminals back to pay their dept to society."

"I was wondering when you would show up. I was starting to run out of material."

"I don't know what you think you're doing, but you're in a lot of trouble," Lord Macrum Laziaer said.

"As I see it Macrum, you are the one in trouble. I have orders to arrest you, and as I am now an officer

of the peace, recently deputized by Lord Laziaer himself, it is my sworn duty to bring you to justice."

"I am the Lord here."

"No sir. Lord Ermin Laziaer is the rightful lord of these lands. You are nothing but an interloper and an imposter, and what is more you are wanted for the crime of patricide."

"I never harmed a hair on that old man's head."

"Interesting, because I know of at least two servants in your household who would be willing to bear witness against you."

"Let them try. The law can't touch me. I am the law."

"Then you won't resist arrest I hope," Starlanko said, rather ironically.

"You're not taking me anywhere."

"Then I guess we'll just have to take you by force."

"What's that? A wizard take me by force?"

"No not a wizard. This is no job for a wizard. It's a job for a farmer."

On cue on of the nearby doors opened, and Nedditt sprung out, with Bonnie Lou in hand. The hoe arced sideways and caught Macrum in the ribs. He took a step or two back, but still had a lot of fight left in him.

"You look familiar," Macrum said.

"I thinks it's on account that you hornswaggled me out of a fair share of money a few years back."

Macrum drew a rapier from his belt and lunged at Nedditt. The blade bent as it met the armor beneath Nedditt's shirt, but refused to pierce it.

"That money was rightfully mine."

"And you take no account my ma had none else to support her." Nedit swung Bonnie Sue again, now striking Macrum's kneecap. "You would have just left her to starve. But lucky I took a big job that could pay really fancy like."

The two continued, Macrum lunging with his sword, and Nedit sweeping arcs with his hoe. Anybody who watched could tell the simple farmer had the simple advantage. He scored two connecting blows for every one of Macrum's.

"You know what's funny," Nedit said, as Macrum got closer to a pulp like status. "What's funny is that if I hadn't been so needful to take a job. I don't think I'd be able to do this to you right now." Bonnie Lou flew through the air, and cracked into Macrum's jaw. The lord swiveled around and fell. Starlanko check his vitals.

"He's just unconscious," he said, and dropped a tiny vials worth of liquid into Laziaer's throat. He removed Laziaer's belt and handed a few potions to Nedit. "Drink these."

At the end of the day things turned out well for all but Macrum Laziaer, who was found guilty on all charges and executed. Nedit became a local celebrity, the wizards returned to the town, and Ermin Laziaer was restored to his estate. Things turned out well for Starlanko too. He sold his spells to his intended client Korensyth the time aficionado, his role in the activities earned him several new client, including Lord Ermin Laziaer. And if that was not enough the new Lord Laziaer set him up with a host of gifts to show his appreciation, which warmed Starlanko's heart enough, that he decided not to present Lord Laziaer with his bill.

Lord of the Rings, The Third Age

by **Patty Estill**

The big electronic gaming party known as E3 is less than two weeks away and already some major announcements, as well as the usual slew of rumors, have surfaced. Today Electronic Arts announced that gamers will once again have the opportunity to adventure in the world created by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings™, The Third Age*. This roleplaying game is scheduled for a Fall 2004 release. *The Lord of the Rings™, The Third Age* is designed to provide players with an epic adventure in which they will take on the roles of new characters as they choose their own paths through Middle-earth. There will, of course, be opportunities to interact with the heroes and villains of the trilogy, complete quests and all the other usual RPG fair.

The Lord of the Rings™, The Third Age is based on New Line Cinema and Peter Jackson's acclaimed film adaptations of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It allows players to adventure through Middle Earth, building a party of heroes as they journey. Players battle on the side of the Fellowship, but can unlock additional encounters where they fight on the side of Sauron as they progress. In the game, players will interact with the characters of the Fellowship in a unique structure, taking on individual quests while intersecting the major events of the film trilogy that drive the story forward. Parties will traverse through both familiar and seldom-

glimpsed locations, using an innovative turn-based battle system as they fight. They will encounter the demonic Balrog in the Mines of Moria, defend the fallen city of Osgiliath, or try to destroy Helm's Deep.

The Lord of the Rings™, The Third Age will be available for the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system, the Xbox® videogame system from Microsoft, Nintendo GameCube™, and Game Boy® Advance under the EA GAMES™ brand. It is being developed by EA's Redwood Shores studio, the same studio that developed the hit *The Lord of the Rings; The Return of the King™* game. The Game Boy Advance version is being developed by Amaze Entertainment, Inc., d/b/a Griptonite.

Under an exclusive licensing agreement with New Line Cinema, EA has the rights to create and publish interactive entertainment games based on the movie trilogy. A real-time strategy game for the PC, *The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-earth™*, is under development for release in the fall of 2004.

Information on both games should be available in some form at the Electronic Entertainment Expo next month. Look for an update right here at Silven crossroads when we return from the big show.

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Antipodean Adventures : "Mad Dog" Morgan

by Shane Cubis

G'Day all. This month we are going to look at the life of one of the meanest, most brutal men to stalk the face of Australia. That man was Dan 'Mad Dog' Morgan, a tall and imposing figure with a wild black beard and an almost psychopathic cruel streak. Morgan shows that not all bushrangers were peasant heroes thrust into circumstances beyond their control in a harsh, unfeeling world. Although he liked to blame his wildness on his upbringing, Morgan had a well-developed streak of cruelty not found in men like Ned Kelly or Ben Hall. Oddly, despite his clear villainy, Morgan was still liked by a significant number of locals. It may have been that they feared his temper if they stood against him, or it could have been genuine admiration for anyone who caused trouble for the police.

What Happened?

Morgan was born of convict parents in Campbelltown, near Sydney, around 1833. For the first few years of his working life he was employed as a stockman by an adopted father, but found the work hard and uninteresting.

The gold rush was a time of excitement for many people, and Morgan was no exception. He left home to seek his fortune in Melbourne but soon realized that robbing people was easier than digging for financial wealth. He grew a reputation as a notorious horse rustler, and in 1854 was arrested for stealing £80 worth of goods from a local hawkker. He was sentenced to twelve years in prison (although he only served six before absconding and fleeing back to New South Wales). During his stint in gaol Morgan nursed a hatred for the police that would stay with him his whole life.

Morgan commenced full time bushranging in the 1860s, quickly gaining a reputation for unwarranted brutality. One of his more notorious exploits involved the bailing up of a police magistrate from Wagga named Henry Bayliss. Morgan decided to let him go when Bayliss

commented on how brave he was. Soon after, the magistrate organised a search party to hunt down the bushranger. Offended at this audacious response to his mercy, Morgan snuck close enough to shoot Bayliss in the hand and shoulder.

He headed to a homestead where he had once been employed as a labourer. Morgan believed that the man who lived there had made reports about him to the police, and intended to settle the score. The man was not home, but his wife was. Morgan ordered her to cook him some eggs, which was the only thing he would eat since he was paranoid about being poisoned with arsenic or strychnine. He checked the shells for signs of tampering, then wolfed them down. After his meal, he built the fire up and forced the woman up against it, demanding money. Eventually he let her go, and threw a bucket of water over her, but she had already received severe burns to the backs of her legs.

One day Morgan rode past a policeman on horseback who did not recognise him as the 'mad dog' bushranger. Morgan paused, and called out to him, "You're one of the bastards looking for bushrangers, aren't you?" before promptly shooting him dead. When other police came to look for their comrade, Morgan crept up and murdered another trooper as he lay sleeping in his tent.

Over a drunken meal, Morgan once shot a stationhand. Almost immediately he felt remorse, and asked another stationhand to go and get the doctor. Before he had left the room, Morgan had another change of heart and shot him too. Again he felt remorse, and nursed the second stationhand until he died. In essence, Morgan was volatile and unpredictable.

Following a boast from the Victorian police that they would catch Morgan in two days if he ever crossed the state border, Morgan crossed the state border. He began by holding up the occupants of a station at Whitfield, where he had been employed in the past. Morgan had

About the Author

Shane Cubis is a young, fit, Australian plagiarist with an affinity for Spider-Man. He has recently succumbed to internet peer pressure and now secretly refers to himself as a 'gamer.' He wrote and starred in an award-winning short film, "Dream Date" (also starring Aussie cricketer Brett Lee), has had an article published in 'Knights of the Dinner Table,' as well as regular articles in such publications as 'Tertangala,' 'The Northern Leader,' and 'Beanz Baxter.'

He has an Honors degree in History/Politics, and is currently studying to be a primary (grade) school teacher. On Saturdays he calls bingo - a job his nana got him five years ago. His favorite book is 'Catch 22,' his favorite band is TISM, and his favorite movie is 'Back to the Future.'

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quarrelled with the owner four years ago and set fire to a large haystack there as revenge for a wound suffered. He left Whitfield, holding up every carriage he met on the roads, until he arrived at Peechelba Station.

By this time the police were hot on his heels, following his trail of crime and terror. He entered the station, taking everyone present hostage. One of the women, Alice McDonald, claimed she could hear a baby crying in an adjoining room and demanded Morgan let her go and soothe the child. He refused, and received a hearty slap in the face. Amused and unused to such a strong response from a woman, he let her go. Of course, there was no crying baby. McDonald had snuck off to alert a stable hand who, in turn, notified the police.

Dinner had just been served in the house, and Morgan ordered his prisoners to eat their meals. He chatted with them, regaling the group with stories of his life, his problems and his neglectful parents. Morgan invited the wife of the station owner to play the piano for him. He sat next to the piano, drinking whisky and smoking a cigar. He claimed not have slept for five days, and told those present that he would have a nap and that he always slept with one eye open.

The intrepid stationhand got word to the police, and throughout the night they surrounded the Peechalba Station. They lay in the darkness, waiting for Morgan to make a move. This came at dawn when Morgan stepped out onto the verandah. Witnesses later said that he seemed to sense something was up. He stepped back inside, drank a shot of whiskey, and ordered four of the hostages to walk ahead of him. He directed them towards the stables. One of the men spotted a policeman hiding in the bushes and stepped away from the bushranger. Morgan turned, but too late as a bullet struck him in the back. Crying out that they had never given him a fair chance to defend himself, Dan Morgan fell to the ground and was immediately set upon.

Mad Dog died six hours later. The bullet that hit him had pierced his shoulder and exited through his windpipe, the blood from the wound slowly choking him to death. His body was propped up on a board so that photographs could be taken of his corpse.

Morgan's body was subject to some of the worst desecration evinced by the New South Wales police force. His hair and beard were shaved off to be sold in lockets, the skin of his face was flayed off and hung "out to dry like a possum skin" by Police Superintendent Cobham, his head was cut off for phrenological study, and his genitals were turned into a coin purse.

Description

Bail Up! by Geoff Hocking has a perfect physical description of Morgan. I felt it would be remiss of me not to include it here:

"This large, brooding man, with a dark, luxuriant beard that flowed across his chest, hair swept to his shoulders in gypsy ringlets, aquiline nose that tipped almost over his upper lip, and deep-set hawk-like, bright blue eyes

was sure to strike fear in any who met him".

Dennis Hopper played the bushranger in "Mad Dog Morgan"(1976). If you can get your hands on a copy, it might help you to set the tone of his character. The movie isn't that great, but Hopper's portrayal of this insane criminal is masterful.

Adventure/Encounter Ideas

1. The PCs are bushrangers themselves, but of a more heroic type. They must bring Morgan down before he turns popular opinion against all of them. Alternatively, the PCs are troopers, hunting down a madman who shoots on sight and seemingly has the backing of the countryfolk.
2. Similar to the above, but Mad Dog has murdered a friend or ally of the party. They are fast becoming rivals. For some reason, the locals are on Morgan's side, despite his apparent lunacy.
3. The party must help Morgan evade the police, to serve their own ends. He is belligerent and hostile to them, and does all he can to hinder their assistance. Nonetheless, the party depends on his escape.
4. Morgan, as a recurring character, appears from nowhere to interrupt the PCs' plans, terrorising and making demands when they are at their most vulnerable.

Other Genres

Horror: People are being brutally murdered all around the place, in a similarly ghoulish manner. The PCs have to discover the link in this series of grisly killings – the connection being that all the victims owned a piece of Mad Dog Morgan's corpse.

Science Fiction: The slave abolitionist movement on Cubisia-6 must disassociate themselves from or shut down an insane rogue vigilante who is killing slave owners.

Authorities are starting to blame the abolitionists for his crimes.

Pulp: Some mad scientist has collected up Morgan's body parts and rebuilt him as a mechanical killing machine. His thirst for revenge has caused him to develop a level of intention, breaking away from the mad scientist's orders and acting unpredictably.

Modern: An unbalanced thug has been imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Now that he has had time to nurse a hatred for the cops who put him away, he is being released on parole. Has he been rehabilitated, or will the PCs have a more dangerous man on their hands than they ever imagined?

Dan 'Mad Dog' Morgan is not a sympathetic character. He is an interesting adversary, but his instability means that he will probably never be rehabilitated. Perhaps he may show signs of seeking the same goals as the PCs, causing them to waver in a decision to shoot him. Play this up, as he is a great recurring character in an Antipodean Adventures campaign. This will be doubly effective if your players have never heard of him, or seen the Dennis Hopper movie.

Feeding

by Christian R. Bonawandt

She washes clothes in the river. The sun trickles down on her smooth, peach neck. Her hair is up in a twist. As she brushes the shirt against the washboard, the subtle, snaking vein in her neck becomes more prominent, swelling with the rush of sweet life coursing through it.

He sits on a rock, thirty yards behind her. His hand is clenched around my hilt, squeezing both for comfort and out of hate. He is forgetting which thoughts are his, and which are mine. There is an urge to take her life. Oh, but she has given him so much. No child just yet, but there is still time for that, he thinks. For now she alone gives him purpose. He loves his crops, his cattle, his cottage. None of it would mean anything without her, though.

Why then, does he yearn to run the edge against her throat, watch her blood pour from her vein and down her beautiful and perfect body, soak that sweet breast that he has retreated to so often when trying to forget his memories of past battles? Why then, does he want to watch her life flow from her as the river flows away from his farm, toward whatever mass of water it touches, ending that inevitable journey toward something larger, less defined.

My blade is still shrouded from the sky by the sheath. I sense nothing, feel nothing. Nor have I ever. I only know myself as that object he has held for these past four months. I am not truly separate from him in much of a sense. Yet I control him. As I controlled all who have had the great fortune and misfortune to wield me.

He was known as the hero of his land. He led a battle for his king against a neighboring enemy. Hordes of men fell before him. An endless river of blood ran down the blade of his sword. For days he fought. While most men slept, even on both sides, he skulked the campgrounds, grasping the hilt as though the

handle and the hand were one and the same. It was not his desire to be the greatest warrior in his land, only his destiny.

But then, I know nothing of men's destiny. I do not know if it was his destiny to kill my former wielder, a lord of the enemy kingdom, said by his own men to have gone mad. The lord betrayed his king, took the crown, and declared war on all who would not follow him, even some who did.

He slew the lord. Five strokes it took for the madman to fall. A sixth, across the throat, was required to kill him. The lord's dead hand held fast to my hilt. Even in death the lord would not give me up. He severed his enemy's hand to free me. Raising my immaculate form in the air, he declared the battle won, the war over, and an era of peace to have begun for the kingdom he served.

Peace his kingdom can have. So long as I am still fed.

I do not question my existence. Nor do I question my thirst for life. It is simply beyond me to understand. For the first several hundred years of my existence, I was not even aware of myself. Perhaps it was consumption of a powerful sorcerer's life that gave me my sense of presence. Then again, it is possible I have simply consumed so many lives that I have constructed my awareness of their collective thoughts. All these things do not truly matter, so much as the fact that I have what could be construed as thought, and desire, and power.

My form is mundane, a simple pointed blade, flat aside from marks so ancient that even the wisest of scholars cannot read them. My handle is smooth and perfect. A curved crossbar protects the wielder's wrist and can be used to catch and hook an enemy blade. A single jewel rests in my pommel. It is faded and unclean, but if there were a man of this world strong enough to

remove it, the jewel would make him wealthy beyond imagining.

So it was my beauty that he used as his excuse to take me back to his farm. Three days he spent carving a mantle of rich oak, on which I was to rest until the end of his days. The mantle hangs over the fireplace, but has been empty these four months. It likely always will.

Having noticed him observing her, she goes to him. His body quakes. He cannot fight me any longer. Unlike the faceless dozens he dispatched in his days of battle, her body and skin are smooth and clean. She is not weak, but her skin bares no calluses, no scars. She was never meant to be near weapons of death. But what do I know of men's fate?

He unsheathes my blade. She steps back. He whirls me over his head as he had so many times at the end of a battle. His thick yet agile arms make sweeping arcs in the air. He hopes to exhaust himself, to sweat out the rage, the festering urge to strike someone down. She cries out, shocked and frightened at his sudden outburst.

I bite deep into flesh. Blood washes over my blade. The blood rolls down the length of the steel, splashes against the crossbar and drips to the soil. It is not the blood itself that I taste, but the life of the slain. Blood is but a component of this thing sometimes called a soul. It carries it like the wind carries weather. My true purpose is unknown even to me. However, the consumption of souls has allowed me to linger on for centuries longer than would be conceivable for such a construction of steel. I imagine that the same would be true of a wielder, were he able to claim me long enough.

Her cry lingers in the air. It changes and shifts; once a cry of fear, now a cry of sorrow.

His callused, blood-stained hands push me further into the body. They quiver with weakness. Still, he holds fast to my hilt, refusing to release until the last drop of blood has leaked from the body. Only then, upon that moment called death, can I feed. He does not wish that to happen, for me to feed this time. But it is not his will that is working now.

At last, I feed. There is new presence among my own. For a brief moment, this soul feels as though surrounded by many spirits. Then there is loneliness. There is thought, but it is my own. We are now one. These memories are my own, this life my own, this soul my own. There is only me. And I am still thirsty for life.

Reluctantly, she wraps her lithe and able fingers around the hilt. She sobs over the body of her former love. The warrior, the farmer. She speaks of being lost without him, not understanding his action, demanding that his corpse speak the answer to, "Why? Why?"

This is not the first time. Unlikely to be the last.

As she pulls me free of his body, she notices for the first time just how intricately carved the markings on my blade are, and just how valuable that jewel in my pommel is.

And suddenly, she understands. She understands that I must still be fed.

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Is Gaming Close to Death?

by Lawrence John Howard

Looking back on my life as a gamer, I am thinking how my RPG purchasing has gone in stages. There was a time when I visited my local game store, a little shop called "Swinton Hobby's & Crafts" to buy the latest supplement for *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*. After that I learned the joy of buying a system just for it's own benefit – not as something to directly play or run, but to inspire ideas for other games. Some of these systems I liked, and ran. I look back with fond memories on a clunky campaign of *Vampire* I once ran, set around a ruined theatre. As I've grown, I've built a collection of systems that range from the genius to the terrible, from the popular to the obscure. Recently however, my choices have become limited. The creative writer has, seemingly, vanished from the shelves and this article is a response to this trend.

At first it was *Dungeons and Dragons*, across all it's incarnations. Then came *Vampire* and all the other games. I don't know if it was something about the late 1980's and early 1990's or if it was just me, but all of a sudden, the games world exploded – everyone with a few hundred dollars and space to store a few boxes had a game out there. I've looked back on that heady time, and the concept of the complete system & setting book was one of the innovations. *Cyberpunk*, and in particular *Shadowrun* started this trend, producing a world and asset of rules together, ensuring the two fitted together like a hand in a tailor-made glove. Quickly, this idea spread, leading to many of the greatest games of this golden age of gaming to be produced, including the still popular *Vampire: The Masquerade*.

A second influence was the growing range of older gamers – role-playing then was mainly a hobby of the university student (or the less popular but bookish high school pupil), and the gamer continued his hobby in later life. Many of these gamers suddenly found they had the resources to publish their home-brewed

systems and the skills needed to write a well-produced book. Publishing a book at the physical standards of the day was something within the financial reach of many people, and games stores, and even more significantly gamers, were ready and willing to snap up new and creative games from outside the mainstream market of the day, which was dominated by several big players. When a licensed product was produced (such as the *Star Wars* role playing game or *Middle Earth Role Playing*) the system was generally new, or at least heavily modified, rather than the licence being used to create a setting book for an existing rules engine.

Dragon Magazine at the time was radically different than today, covering many different systems (in addition to it's core content of *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*), even occasionally including entire systems of its own. As part of this general commitment to the wider games industry, it reviewed every single new system that was published. I remember one review they once carried for a Spanish art-house game that hadn't been translated into English and was produced on an office photocopier. The editorials in *Dragon* discussed major trends in gaming, mentioned the campaigns that they played, including those of obscure products and producers (Such as *Bunny's and Burrows*, which includes the martial arts system known as *Bun Fu*).

It was a exhilarating time – you could get all sorts of games with systems ranging from the clunky to the elegant. What happened next is that rules began to get stripped down, with smaller and smaller systems existing for games that placed style where it needed to be, WAY over substance. *Shadowrun*, published in 1989 is still recognised as the first system where this happened, using the flavour of *Cyberpunk*, throwing in elements of traditional gaming, and being the first popular rules system based on the same principles now seen in *Exalted* and the *World of Darkness*.

About the Author

Lawrence is a long-term gamer, who was actually born the same month and year as the First Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*, way back in the heady days of the early 1970's. In his head, he lives a glamorous jet-setting lifestyle of international occult espionage, which clashes somewhat with the reality of a social-worker who lives in a sleepy English village and who's social life revolves around old friends who he still games with (and, enjoy the odd bottle of rather good wine in the process) and a very happy romantic relationship.

People would own a broad range of games, playing *Vampire* one day, *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* the next, and *TORG* the third. When *Dangerous Journeys* was published, it was seen as a massive back-step, a rules heavy game that placed combat over character, with page after page of spells, stats and skills. Games and gamers grew up and realised that what they enjoyed doing was not killing monsters and getting their treasure, but spending time with their friends, doing something they enjoyed, and getting to pretend to be someone else for an evening.

Now, in the new millennium, gamers were getting younger again, and the games world was re-segregating back into people who played a single system exclusively. And, those systems are taken from a VERY small list. *World of Darkness* became the game of choice for the more mature gamer; with *Exalted* being what they played when they were feeling young. One entity has overtaken all of these though and that is D20. Now, don't get me wrong, I like D20, it's a good system, it brings *D&D* forward and makes it more accessible to the Collecting-Card-Game playing generation, but that's where it's problem lies. Like the *Matrix*, it's built on rules, but The One is yet to come and show us how to break out of those rules. Running a session of *D&D* is now a science, not an art, and the very idea of something based on "GM's discretion" is almost as blasphemy. The ethos that a rules system would provide a few examples and then leave a GM to build his own style within a framework of cooperation and mutual fun was gone with d20. Now when I see a group of new gamers playing, it looks like a gladiatorial word-battle of rules and references,

all with at no point is common sense or judgement used. In fact, the system is deliberately designed this way, with exact interactions of every single feat, spell and skill explained and categorized with "spell subtypes" and "enhancement bonuses" detailed and cross-referenced to something that resembles a legal document more than a game that's supposed to be fun.

D20 is also pushing those smaller games of the shelves. Apart from a few noble resistance fighters, who like the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar stand up to be counted, there is little innovation in the games market today. *Nobylis* died a death; it's got a gloriously loyal following but was hardly the next big thing that it deserved to be. *Ars Magicka* is now a little known system, condemned to be passed from publisher to publisher. Whereas five years ago, you could walk into any game store and find shelf after shelf of interesting small-print run independent games, now because that store is part of a national chain, it will only sell games produced by international corporations. Even when a small store has managed to hold on to its business by the tips of its claws, it's finding it harder to allow shelf-space for the independent publisher who is sitting up at night creating an innovative system with a vibrant setting.

So, what am I suggesting as solutions to this problem? First and most importantly, I'm writing this article as a plea for people to demand the weird and wonderful from their game stores. The big wholesalers do stock the less well-known systems, but without the marketing, many small games stores don't know such systems exist. Use articles in ezines, web-reviews and obscure recommendations to track down the exotic in gaming, go into your store and order a copy. Many of these books are cheaper than the glossy offerings from the bigger companies (I got a copy of the delightfully ironic *Soap* for £5.99

from my games store, the wonderfully creative *Starchild* for £15.99 for an entire system AND setting). My glamorous editor has pressed me to mention *Burning Wheel* at this point, but it is a system that even I, the expert on obscure systems, have never come into contact with (however, gaming friends of mine have assured me that's it is a great system).

Secondly, I'm pressing for writers to write the unusual. There are plenty of clever, creative writers out there, who for the understandable pull of bigger remuneration, are sticking to the D20 cash cow. There are also, however, hundreds of people with an idea, who are convinced that because it's not part of the *Dungeons and Dragons* collective none will want to play, yet they are not willing to be assimilated. To these people, I point out the game, *Sorcerer* (<http://www.adept-press.com/>) which is as far from D20 as possible, yet has a respectable following and survives by the glorious creation that is the Internet. The site also has links for information for the small games producer and provides a network for those wanting to join the thankless, but emotionally rewarding world of the defiantly independent games producer.

I'm making one final request and that is that this article is not seen as a rant about d20. Like any game, d20 fantastic in its place. It's got a lot of clever writers producing excellent material for it. White Wolf has kept my credit card going with its *Scarred Lands* sourcebooks. Like any system, d20 can be wonderful when it's run properly. More than that, it's keeping many small games stores in business, and regardless of any other issues, this is a good thing. It is important to remember we are all gamers, and though a system is bad, or clunky, or too rules heavy, too rules light or filled with rules too weird for anyone but the clinically insane, it's a game. Some writer somewhere has struggled to create it, and somewhere there will be one gaming group, in a university dorm, in a parent's garage, in a Manhattan

apartment running it and having fun.

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Old CRPGs should never die: Protecting Abandonware

by Carl Batchelor

When an old CRPG is no longer talked about in its web boards or sold new at the local Gaming store, it begins its long journey towards being called Abandonware. Unlike other forms of entertainment, games are not treated very kindly in their old age. Whereas a great black and white movie like *Casablanca* will be remembered forever, an old CRPG like *Pool of Radiance* will not. Though both of these examples have had to suffer from a huge technology gap when compared to modern versions of their particular brand of entertainment, it seems that unlike movie fans, most gamers are unwilling to compromise when it comes to dealing with outdated visuals.

Even though these classic CRPGs can be considered old and decrepit by today's standards, they still hold a huge appeal. Most of the obsession over classic CRPGs can be blamed on childhood memories and the desire to relive one's past through the games one once played. Yet another reason is that in an era where graphics and needless complexity take precedent over gameplay, a classic game harkens back to a time when challenge and simplicity were king. While there are a fair number of gamers who still hold on to their classic CRPGs in this "Gamestop trade-in era," much of the software is unplayable. Game cartridges erode over time, back-up batteries die, game systems break down, install floppies get lost or written over, and copyright protection documents are thrown away. To put it simply, those who want to play their classic CRPGs are often unable to due to uncontrollable circumstances. It isn't their fault that one of the four floppies needed to install the game became corrupted or that the decoder wheel used to decipher the pre-CD era copyright protection was lost, yet still they are punished by never being able to play the game again.

Due in part to these huge stumbling blocks, there is a great demand for what has been dubbed "Abandonware." These old CRPGs, most of which

haven't been seen on a store shelf in over a decade, are still played by gamers who crave gameplay over graphics. Websites devoted to the online distribution of Abandonware, though clogged with advertisements and slow moving downloads, make it easy for everyone to take a trip back into the CRPG's past. Unfortunately many of these sites have been taken offline in the past few years due to obvious legal issues, while those that remain often have to remove certain popular titles due to the copyright holders threatening them with a lawsuit. This has all contributed to make locating these classic PC CRPG's a difficult and illegal endeavor.

Unlike console games which have been preserved through both emulation and constant remakes on modern systems, PC CRPGs do not get a chance to introduce themselves to gamers who missed them the first time around. Whereas the *Final Fantasy* games from the 1980's have been redone and most of the Super Nintendo's biggest RPGs have been re-released for the Gameboy Advance, finding a copy of PC RPG classics such as *Wasteland* or *Ultima Underworld* is akin to searching for the Holy Grail. Although Interplay did release a special "RPG Archives" boxed set in 1997, its availability was limited and most game stores I visited at the time quickly sent it back to their warehouse due to it collecting dust. Sadly, this is the one big difference between old PC RPGs and old console RPGs—one is looked upon as "cool" and the other is seen as a sad and somewhat pathetic attempt at placating nostalgic veterans. Part of this difference can be blamed on console emulation, which helped to create a huge new user base for old Nintendo and Sega CRPGs. Thanks to emulators, younger gamers who had never played the first few *Final Fantasy* games or the original *Dragon Warrior* were now building web pages and filling up message boards devoted to these ancient pieces of software. PC CRPGs, which have always been looked on very harshly by most console gamers and console-centric

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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gaming magazines like *EGM*, are seen as an even bigger waste of time once they attain "ancient" status. Walk into any gaming store and tell the mall-rat after dinner crowd congregating within that you are a big fan of a PC RPG like *Ultima Underworld* or *System Shock* and you'll swear you have monkeys flying out of your backside because of the looks you're getting. On the other hand, mention your undying devotion to *Lufia* or *Shining Force* and you'll end up besieged by people wanting to tell you their strategies for beating the game.

Since it is obvious that none of the major PC RPG development houses will no longer support or re-release their classic games, it falls upon the fans to keep these titles alive. The only problem with this is that distributing so-called "abandonware" is still very much illegal.

Why should it be illegal to download a PC RPG that hasn't been seen on a retail store shelf in over a decade? After all, many of these games are rooted in DOS and require such large amounts of extended memory that configuring them is difficult for even knowledgeable PC veterans. When PC Gamer released a special CD that contained *Ultima Underworld*, they were inundated with emails from gamers who could not get the game to work. I know from my own experience that getting games like *Daggerfall* or *Ultima* to work on an a non-DOS gaming rig can be very difficult, and this alone should be enough of a hurdle to prevent the kind of mass "piracy" that the individual copyright holders are afraid of happening

with their games. After all, how many modern PC gamers understand the intricacies of DOS or are willing to build a DOS-only machine to play these games without any hitch? How many are willing to download DOS environment emulators and learn to use them in Windows XP? I'm willing to bet the number is so enormously low that very little damage would be done to the copyright holder's wallets, if any damage was done in the first place.

Furthermore, allowing RPG gamers new to the PC platform to enjoy the games of its past would in turn create excitement for the sequels these games spawn in the future. What better way to get more people into PC RPGs than to give new players the chance to experience the games the new ones were influenced by? Not only that, but these games may spark the interest of veterans who have forgotten about your RPG and create interest for its future sequels. Imagine how great of an advertising tool *Wasteland* would have made if it was released on Black Isle's website only a couple of months before *Fallout 3*? Though that is a moot point given the series' fate, my argument still remains valid.

Unlike typical steal-online-for-free "warez," these games do not hurt any company's profits and they exist solely for the recapturing of one's misspent youth. If these games were painless to install and get running, I could see how they could still be classified as "warez." However, they are not, and the few people who do know how to properly configure them are the kind of gamers you don't want to anger or alienate. Though abandonware's underground distribution techniques will never go away, it wouldn't hurt publishers to make their classic RPGs public domain and loosen restrictions on their availability. After all, it has worked for ID Software and has kept them at the top of the first person shooter genre for a decade. The question is, when will RPG

publishers follow suit? Seeing Bethesda re-release and distribution of the original *Elder Scrolls* game is a step in the right direction, but the journey isn't over yet.

An excellent solution to the PC RPG side of this problem that would make both parties happy is for a law that says if a particular game hasn't been sold in a major retail outlet for a decade, then the company has no right to stop its distribution online or even through more traditional means. This would mean that the games you want to play again would either be re-released in new packaging for your gaming enjoyment, or you could legally and confidently download them online. The chances of getting the unusually cruel and close-minded IDSA to agree to such a mandate would be so low that I would sooner expect a million dollars to fall from the sky in a giant bag and hit me on the head. Still, a gamer can dream, and in the end, that's all that keeps me hoping.

Games to watch this year:

2004-04-30

Neverend
publisher:TBD
developer:Mayhem Studios

2004-05-31

Sabotain: Break the Rules
publisher:Akella
developer:Avalon

2004-06-02

Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion
publisher:Funcom
developer:Funcom

2004-06-15

Black 9
publisher:Majesco Games
developer:Taldren

2004-06-15

Everquest 2
publisher:Sony Online Entertainment
developer:Sony Online

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It Still Tasted the Same

by Aaron Todd

It still tasted the same. After decades of tasting it from every cammot and city of the world that I could get to, it still tasted the same. It was salty and bitter and often tasted as though it was part of something else. That part of it drove me wild. I could hardly stand to drink more.

But I still love it. With the very taste of life pulsing out of every drop, I could hardly imagine a time when I didn't enjoy the guilty pleasure of drinking another's blood.

The life of a man or a woman or even that of a child meant so little to me that my thirst for the taste of it would drive me to forget that these people had families and lives of their own. None of that mattered as long as I could just taste the liquid that made their heartbeat and their brain function. If I had been concerned with their soul, that was lost, too.

This man in my arms fit the description of every other victim I had: He was there and he was alone. Well not alone exactly.

I was walking through the woods when I knew that I could smell a battle going on. Blood was being spilled somewhere near enough that the hint of large quantities of it burned at the air like incense. I knew the scent as well as a mother knew the smell of her baby. I had to find the source of the smell.

I walked for nearly a day before stumbling on the remains of what must have been a grand battle. Hundreds of bodies lay strewn about the open field in varying states of humanity. Some were missing limbs, others impaled, while some appeared dead for no cause. There were those who did not appear to have blood coming from anywhere, and yet they were dead. Perhaps it was for some sort of blunt force trauma. It didn't matter. They were dead and I didn't need their blood. They could remain there and rot.

The thieves hadn't even found these people yet. After battles such as this, it was inevitable that wandering thieves would soon find the remains of what had been a battle and remove every scrap of value that remained. Swords would fetch a few grommels in the right market and a suit of armor a few more. Not much else carried any sort of value that was worth carrying for trade. No one had yet found the remains of this battle. The field was empty but for the wounded, dead, and dying that littered the ground with their mortal husks.

I roamed the field searching for an ideal candidate. Battles always left many wounded that could not walk on their own or were simply left unconscious and thought dead. These were the ones I sought. I wanted the blood of those who could still feel it writhing in their bodies. They would put up little struggle, but just enough to give rise to my predatory instincts. A meager thrill at best, but it would do for now. The smell of this place had made me hungry.

The barbarians that held this battle didn't even respect their soldiers enough to remove their dead. The generals would return home after observing their small war and send out lieutenants to the homes of the deceased to let their families know that their fathers, husbands, and sons would not be returning home. Such was the life of a soldier in these times.

I sniffed at the air as I smelled the blood of someone nearby still throbbing from its wounds. That renewed burst of magnificent odor would desanitize the air with each arterial pulse. His wounds must not have been fatal. It was time to satisfy my thirst.

His eyes were open, but he did not move until he saw me approach. Even then it was just enough to roll his body in my direction and raise one arm barely above the ground. He was signaling for my help.

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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I would help him. I would help him to his long sought after death. If only he knew how much better death would be for him than suffering. Well, he would find out soon enough.

I knelt next to his nearly limp form and softened my face to lend him some short lived sense of comfort. My eyebrows raised just slightly so that he would think that I was going to listen to his tale and care about what he was about to say. He would never know that my ears were to be as deaf to his pleas as my skills to save him were inadequate. "Please, help me," he gurgled with a raspy, dry voice. There was blood in his mouth when he spoke. This man would be dead soon.

"Please, I am thirsty," he pleaded for my help. The fool!

"I'm sorry, but I have no water. I am lost myself and have not had water for days." Which was not untrue. The only thing I needed to drink was that which coursed through his veins, albeit slowly now.

"Please ... one of the other soldiers ... Silver." He was nearly gasping for air now as a small rivulet of blood dropped from the lower corner of his mouth.

"Silver," I said to myself. Silver was one of the only things that could deter my attention from the blood that he cherished more than he would ever have the chance to realize. Blood was everywhere, but Silver was far more scarce. With Silver, I could satisfy all of

my lusts.

I glanced around at a few of the bodies closest to me. One of them had a flask. I couldn't reach it from where I rested on my leg, so I got up to get it. It was empty! I found two other bodies with empty skins before I came across one that had some in it. There wasn't much, but he wasn't in a state to complain.

"Here, soldier, drink," I offered him the opened vessel.

He coughed and spat some blood on the ground next to him as he took the first gulp. He still only had the use of one arm. The other had grown dark. It must have gone necrotic from his wounds. I couldn't see the wound, but it may have been in his spine. He rolled slightly more to get the blood out of his mouth. He drank the rest of the water.

"Thank you," his voice was only slightly clearer now. He must have known that his light was growing dimmer by the moment. He did not want to die alone, even in the midst of his allies and enemies. The soldier grimaced as he shifted back again. He was definitely injured in his back somehow. It didn't matter much, but I like to know how people die. It's kind of a hobby. Nearly everyone I see that dies is by my cause, so to witness other forms of death can be rather enlightening.

"Now, you said something about silver?" I wasn't trying to sound excessively eager, but I did want to know where the silver was before this man died right in front of me.

"Yes, thank you," his voice had just grown a bit softer. He tried to reach around his back, but didn't have the strength to raise his body. Realizing this, I aided him by pulling him up into my lap. I supported

his weight with my arms and rolled him up in them, bringing him closer to me than he probably expected, but he was in no position to mind.

With his left hand, he was able to reach just far enough around his back to pull out a small satchel no bigger than his hand. Somehow, it had escaped the blood that was covering the spot on the ground where he had been laying. As he handed it to me, I noticed a small band on his third finger. He was married. There would be a widow. But then, somewhere, on this day, there were many more widows than they even knew.

I opened the small bag to find only two pieces of Silver inside. Two pieces! It had hardly been worth my time to coddle this man.

"Thank you," he said yet again, his life waning away before me. I'd seen it enough times before, but I was far more used to being the cause of one losing their life.

"No, thank you," I stared directly into his eyes as I said it. Leaning into him, I looked into his eyes one last time and the look of concession had swept over him. He did not appear to be shocked as I bared my teeth before piercing them into his neck.

I gorged myself on what remained of his life-bearing fluid. I had not eaten in more than a day since before I first smelled the battle. This warrior's blood was good and rich and strong. He may not have been a wealthy man judging by his pocketbook and his clothing, but his blood contained all the value I would need. My wants could be taken care of later.

Feeling sated, I discarded the man's hull and looked around the crowded field for other vultures to be wandering through. I listened for the stirs of others like the man I had just exsanguinated. I heard nothing. The fields were quiet on this day. I could wander around from man to man, searching for more silver,

but I could always let the thieves do it, then find them, later.

I looked at the two pieces of silver that the man had willingly parted with in exchange for a small drink of water. There was the face of a king on one side (as there was on just about all money in these parts). Which king appeared on it was unimportant. The money changed every time there was a new king. This one may have been king more than a generation ago.

The back of the coin told a slightly different story. There was a picture of a small dwelling set in the side of a hill. Underneath the dwelling it read Dunshire. Within this kingdom, they had taken it up as a good idea to make provincial coins instead of a universal coin system. It was something to do with easing the burden of the tax collectors. If they knew where the money came from, it would be easier to keep track of. It all seemed ridiculous to me.

I knew that town, though. I'd been there many years before. It must not have been far. It might be time to visit again. After all, there would be many widows, sonless mothers and fatherless children to be found in such a town that had just gone through a major battle such as this. There are those that would need comforting, caring, and guidance through these difficult times.

I would, of course, provide none of that, but I would provide them some release from their suffering. Yes, it was time to make the journey. It would be a relatively short one, but rewarding nonetheless. There was plenty of silver to be found there. Let the thieves have this battlefield. I had a town to steal.

A sliver of blood had escaped the corner of my mouth and ran down to my chin. I licked at it, hoping to savor every drop this man had to offer.

It still tasted the same. After hundreds of victims, it still tasted the same. But it tasted good.

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Confessions of a Legendary Mind

A Berserk for all Seasons

by Dale Holmstrom

"Here I am, just as helpless now as I've been all my life---

Just

his heart pounded, a beat like a bass drum

as helpless

a red film descended over his eyes, a fire in his head

as I've been

his skin tingled with a rush of blood, his tendons sang

a hymn of power

all my life.

he went berserk."

Ahira the Dwarf going berserk from "The Sleeping Dragon" by Joel Rosenberg

For reasons unknown, the ability for Avatars to utilize pent up rage in order to survive melee was omitted from the *The Legendary Rules for all players*. Perhaps Mr. Gygax did not want to see an LA Order such as the D&D Barbarian class, which makes little sense. Others have attempted to make optional rules for Berserker Orders in LA, but to me, they are just limiting their imaginations to our own history. Berserkers, by their very chaotic nature, do not seem to fit as an "Order." A Berserker Order also poses limitations of who may go berserk. With all of this swirling through my mind, I present the Psychogenic Ability of "Berserk" to the LA rules system along with some Extraordinary Items. Next month I will be addressing the social settings for two of the maligned Alfar: oaf and orc.

Psychogenic Power: Berserk

NOTE: this Power uses all rules concerning Psychogenic and Extraordinary Abilities found in *Legendary Adventures*.

Berserk

This Extraordinary Power enables an individual to channel pent up rage and use it during combat. Upon activation, the user adds 100 to his Physique Skill, increases his ability to move (current Speed rating) by 1.5, and increases his Health by 1.5. He is unaffected by any attacks that would render him unconscious. If his current Health is reduced to zero or below, he will remain conscious and alive up to his full health rating (as opposed to ten percent of his Health), but upon coming out of Berserk, will die.

It costs 10 Activation Energy Points to become Berserk. An Avatar will remain Berserk until: 1. The Avatar makes a x2 Intellect Rating roll to come out of Berserk, or 2. The Avatar comes out of Berserk after ½ his Berserk Ability rating in ABC's.

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, Bowbery, 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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While Berserk, the Avatar may not use any other Extraordinary Abilities or activate any Extraordinary items. The Avatar is focused on killing and smashing anything in front of him. If all enemies have been killed that are in front of the Berserk, and the Avatar is still under the affects of the Power, the Avatar must roll to see if he can come out of Berserk, or he will do one of the following: 1. If any enemies have surrendered he will attempt to kill them. 2. If any enemies have run away, he will run after them in order to kill them. 3. If there are dead enemies, he will mutilate them. 4. If there are enemy charges, animals, or even equipment, he will attempt to kill or smash them. 5. If none of the above exists or by LM's discretion, he will attempt to attack a friend or ally.

Upon coming out of Berserk, the Avatar will be severely fatigued. Avatars with remaining positive Health ratings must make a Disaster Avoidance x2 check. Those that fail fall into a deep sleep for a minimum of one to 6 hours. Avatars that remain conscious will desperately wish for sleep, and all ratings used until sleep will be at one-half their rating. As stated before, if the Avatar incurred damage that went over ten percent of his Health rating, he now dies, unless treated.

This Power is only available to Humans, Dwarves, Orcs, and Oafs.

Extraordinary Items

Bear Shirt

Extreme

A tunic that appears to be normal Bear Hide, to any that do not possess the Berserk Power it is just armor that provides 6 points of protection. To those that possess the Berserk power, it will allow the avatar to ignore damage from any edged weapon while the Avatar is actively using the Berserk Power. Blunt weapons have full damage effect.

One Eye's Canned Pickled Bear Heart

Good

To the unknowing, this jar just appears to have pickled meat inside of it. Upon eating the meat (sliced Bear heart), the effected will immediately become under the influence of the Berserk Psychogenic Power. There are 8-12 applications per jar.

Berserkgang Horn

Extreme +

This horn from a large bull is inscribed with Runes, and has an ornate silver mouthpiece and beautifully worked gold lining. An Avatar that blaers the horn causes himself and any orc, oaf, dwarf, or human to make a Disaster Avoidance check x2. If anyone fails, they immediately are under the effects of the Berserk Psychogenic Power.

Freya's Calming Crown

Good

A crown made of lavender wands and sage leaves, empowered by the Tenuric Theurges. If successfully placed upon the head of someone using the Berserk Psychogenic Power, it cancels its effects and causes the Avatar to fall into a deep sleep for 1D6 hours. Upon awakening, the Avatar is restored to his full Health rating.

Free LA Monster of the month

White Mouth (created by: Dale of the Bow)

Monstrous Water Moccasin

H: 120

P: 30

S: 12

Arms:

Bite-See Attacks

Venom/Toxin from bite-See Attacks

Special Attack-Pheromone realease-See Attacks

Armour:

Defense: A White Mouth has 6 points of protection due to its scaly hide.

Defense:

As noted above---6 points of protection due to scaly hide.

Attacks:

Attacks: The White Mouth can bite for 4-20 points of harm plus VT for 30-40 harm. Musky pheromone release once a day causes dizziness (+20 to all activities failing a disaster avoidance check) for 2 minutes.

Any attack that does not encounter actual armor inflicts the VT as noted. Attacks that penetrate armor inflict VT as well.

Notes:

White Mouth's have slightly above bestial intelligence and can summon from 2-10 other indigenous snakes by releasing musky pheromones. Summoned snakes will arrive within 1 AB. White Mouths are found within the dark forests and River Swamps of Southern Anatis. They are between 20' and 35', resembling a large water moccasin in all other aspects. It is believed that some forest humanoids revere the White Mouth as a god, and conduct sacrifices to them.

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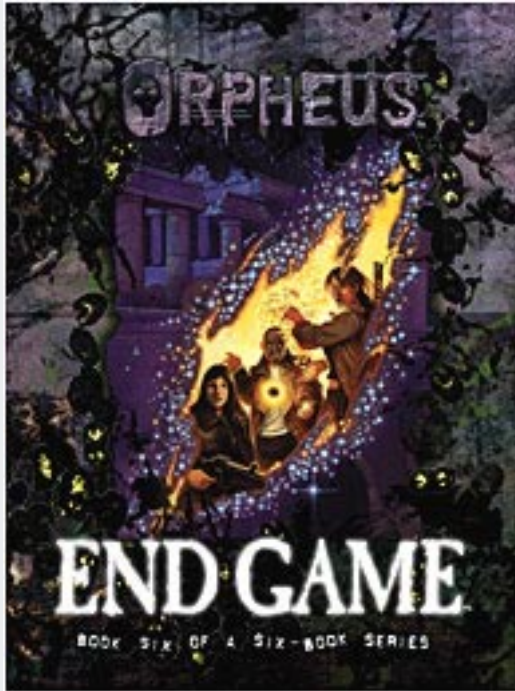
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Orpheus : End Game

by Nash J. Devita

Orpheus: End Game

Authors: Kraig Blackwelder, Genevieve Cogman, Michael A, Goodwin, Dean Shomshak, & Greg Stolze
 Publisher: White Wolf Publishing
 Review Date: Apr. 20th, 2004



Reviewer Bias: I have been following Orpheus with quite a passion since the line was first mentioned. I have been a fan since reading the core rule book. This title was received both for play and review.

The final book (in a six (6) book series) to be published for *Orpheus* (and the actual final release for the current (?) World of Darkness), *End Game*

is a 176 page perfect bound trade paper back with interior black & white art from Avery Butterworth, Travis Ingram, Becky Jollensten, Vince Locke, & Chris Martinez. The cover illustration is from William O'Connor (who's color work I have really grown to love throughout this series!).

From the Back Cover

"Is Anyone Out There?"

They're all gone. For a second time in memory, the world of ghosts falls silent... but that's about to change. It's time to take the fight across the Shroud, back to where it began... back to the Shadowlands. You have the means and abilities to make a difference, but beware. You'll need every trick in the book to survive this new battleground.

Civil War

In this terrible, lonely place where the wind has teeth and a howl to shrivel the soul, salvation awaits among ancient ruins and forgotten citadels. This is only the beginning of a new fight, one that will forever change this world and the next. A war of Spectres is brewing, and you are caught in the middle."

Presentation

The cover features a group of three (3) individuals who are seen in an orange rift. Beyond this rift are ancient looking ruins. The one man has a glowing black and yellow sphere of energy between his hands while one woman has is wielding a sawn-off shotgun and the other woman who has a sword strapped to her back has what appear to be tiny glowing butterflies(?) emanating from her hands. As has been the case with all of the *Orpheus* books, the entire image is set upon a mostly grey & purple background and the same kind of 'yellow splotch decay'.

Review snapshot

Archetype: Chronicle Book / Rule Book

Body: 10 (*Game Mechanics*): New info fits perfectly.

Mind: 11 (*Organization*): Just like books 2 through 5.

Spirit: 11 (*Look & Feel*): Dark & spooky - highly fitting. Great book for the end.

Attack: 10 (*Value of Content*): \$22 for 170+ pages = great deal.

Defense: 11 (*Originality of Content*): Great book for the end of an era.

Health: 9 (*Physical Quality*): Slight damage and scratches are possible.

Magic: 8 (*Options & Adaptability*): More amazing meta- plot with plenty of options for storytellers & players alike.

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.

The page borders vary from chapter to chapter. These borders include (as best as I can describe them) shredded newspaper, chains, steal plates and bolts, & wispy lines with 'glowing' white crosses. These should look familiar to anyone who has read any of the other books in this line as they are the same page boarders that appeared in the core book and the other four (4) supplements.

Content

Just as I have said before and applies just as strongly in this title - before reading any further, I must warn anyone that might play through a chronicle that there are spoilers following this point. *Orpheus*, as it is written, is designed to be a 'story from book' heavy game with a ton of character involvement in the plot & meta- plot. If you do not want your playing experience

spoiled, proceed only with extreme caution.

End Game is set up much like all four (4) of the other paper back supplements that have been released in this limited book series. It is divided into one piece of short fiction and four (4) main chapters. The first chapter tells the (final) piece of plot that is unveiled in this section of the *Orpheus* story. The second describes the Wasteland (the underworld, if you will) though this time around, this chapter is for the story teller only since the players, through their characters, will be living out what is described here. Chapter three is another portion of the ongoing 'Player's Guide'. Chapter four, as would make sense, is part of the ongoing 'Storyteller's Guide'. Unlike some of the others, this book contains a fifth chapter. Chapter five contains some material on ending or even continuing an *Orpheus* game that has followed the meta- plot through to the end (this book).

The characters have come across the final twist in this great plot. They now travel across the **Shroud** into the **Shadowlands**. Here a great battle rages between the forces of **Grandmother** and the **Malfeans**. Sadly, for the characters, this is not a simple battle between good and evil. Alas, this is more along the lines of a turf war between two very powerful and highly destructive gangs. This will not be an easy fight since both of these forces are quite potent. Tactics and timing along with a lot of luck will be necessary to see this battle to its end – for good or bad.

The characters are going to need every possible advantage they can get. Thankfully, an all new level of power is introduced in this title. First off is a brand new shade, the **Marrow**. They are capable of shape-shifting and even animating the flesh of the dead to create packs of zombies.

There are also new advantages for the other shades. **Fourth- Tier Horrors** are finally presented. These represent the pinnacle of individual power. These are listed for the shades from the core book and those introduced in the supplements (for a grand total of eight (8) shades with four (4) horrors each and a crucible horror to each).

The fourth chapter, as stated previously, is a part of the ongoing "Storyteller's Guide". This chapter offers advice on telling this section of the story, introducing new characters into the game based on recent happenings, and offers a number of possible allies and enemies – the forces of the **Malfeans** and **the Grandmother** herself! Also given here is a fairly complete time line of the **Breed War** - the battle between the two previously mentioned groups and details on **The Nameless City** (which I am quite sure was, at one time, Stygia – see *Wraith: the Oblivion*) – "the former capital of the civilization of the dead".

The fifth and final chapter of this, the sixth and final book, offers a great deal of advice and a number of possible scenarios that could be run to either completely end an *Orpheus* chronicle or continue it beyond the plot that has been written for the series.

The meta- plot has not ceased to amaze me. The originality and the plot twists that have been present through the story thus far continue until the end. As nice as the meta- plots in the other White Wolf products have gone, this tops them all thanks to the heavy character involvement. I have not seen a cleaner WW meta- plot before this limited series. My hat is off to the line developer for the *Orpheus* series, Matthew McFarland. You have done amazing work. I pray that this kind of quality continues in the new World of Darkness from both Mr. McFarland and the rest of the White Wolf team.

Conclusion

Not to repeat myself too much but, this is a fantastic book and a fantastic series. This title is superbly written – from the fiction and 'fluff' to the plot and the characters. The adventure is awesome and is a lot of fun, the characters are original and believable, and the advice is all pertinent. There is not a page of this book that I would like to see go to be replaced by another!

Orpheus: End Game was everything I had hoped it would be and more. This was a great and highly fitting end for a great series. The reasons why I love this series are nigh- incalculable, so I won't bother listing them. None the less, it has been a great ride. Thank you once again White Wolf Publishing. You never cease to amaze and delight me.

Where to Buy

You can buy this product at a discount at our retail partner FRP Games here:

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Through the Lens of History Using History for Better Gaming

by Sean Holland

Vision 7: To the End of the World and Beyond - Alexander the Great, Conclusion

The lens continues with Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, Emperor of the World. Alexander is one of the most well known and dynamic of history's great conquerors, conquering the greatest empire of his age and making it his in a few short years. Macedonian armies were invincible when Alexander led them, no army could defeat him, no city's wall could resist him.

This vision covers Alexander's history from the beginning of the invasion of Persia to his untimely death at the age of 32.

Part I - The History

Alexander had reimposed his control over the wayward Greek city-states, leaving Antipater with a small army to remind the Greeks who ruled them, and began his Persian expedition in the Spring of 334 BCE. After a symbolic visit to the ruins of Troy where he sacrificed to Athena and asserted his link to the legendary hero Achilles by visiting the hero's tomb. Soon after crossing over the Dardanelles straits to Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) Alexander's army of 32,000 infantry and 4,500 cavalry soon faced its first test.

The satrapies of Asia Minor raised their forces. Along with a large number of Greek mercenaries they moved to stop Alexander, confronting him along the Granicus river. The Persian forces outnumber the Greek armies but they were not prepared for Alexander's audacity. Alexander personally led his elite Companion cavalry which broke the Persian line, the Persians were soon overwhelmed, losing a huge number of men. The Persian losses would have been higher except Alexander stopped pursuit of the fleeing army to slaughter the Greek mercenaries who he viewed as traitors. After

the battle 300 captured Persian shields were sent to Athens as a sacrifice to Athena (and as political theatre).

Alexander spent the winter of 334-3 BCE consolidating his hold on Asia Minor and bringing over more troops from Macedonian and Greece, while the Persian Emperor, Darius, gathered soldiers from all over his Empire. The Persian Emperor raised a huge army (estimated between 312 and 600 thousand men) while Alexander had perhaps 60,000 soldiers. Summer of 333 BCE would see the first battle between the Emperor and King.

The battle took place at Issus on a narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains. Darius was cautious and took defensive positions against Alexander. Unawed by the Persian numbers, which could not be fully deployed in the narrow battlefield, Alexander attacked. The fighting was hard. As Alexander came close to a breakthrough, Darius fled the battlefield and insured the collapse of his army. Persian losses were huge, estimated at over 100,000 men, and Darius' mother, wife and children, who had accompanied the Emperor, were captured. Alexander treated his royal captives as guests and went on to become close friends with Darius' mother.

Over the next two years, Alexander expanded his control down the Mediterranean coast (of modern day Syria, Lebanon and Israel). Most of the cities surrendered and accepted Alexander as their new King. City by city, as Alexander acquired the port cities on the Mediterranean coast, he also gained the Persian fleet piecemeal.

Tyre was a city that would not submit. Its walled citadel stood on an island half a mile off the coast. Believing that they could defy Alexander, the citizens of Tyre refused to acknowledge Alexander as king and killed his heralds in a show of defiance. Alexander

Writer of the Month : Sean Holland

Sean Holland is 37 years old and the last 27 of those he has been a gamer. Moving from war games to the original D&D, he has been an avid RPG player and GM since discovering them. Proud owner of a Bachelor's degree in History (*cum laude* with a minor in Philosophy) from the University of Portland (Oregon), he has completed much of his work for a Masters in History from the University of Georgia but is not currently pursuing that degree.

Gaming is his primary hobby, followed by history, politics, science fiction, fantasy and the occasional comic. He loves to travel but can rarely afford to do so. Game-wise he is primarily an imaginative role-player, but enjoys some CCGs (Legends of the Five Rings and Shadowfist mostly) and a very few board games. He is currently DM'ing a *D&D* campaign set in his own campaign world (The Sea of Stars) while playing in his wife Laura's Drakkonhold campaign. Sean is, however, always interested in playing and DM'ing more campaigns than he has time for.

Sean is trying to live the dream of being a freelance writer. He is currently working with AEG (where he is the D20 Rules Maven) on the *World's Largest Dungeon* and has several other gaming projects in the works. (You can see his full list of credits at <http://www.tychesgames.com/WriterResume.html>) While he curses the Web as a constant distraction, he tries to be a helpful member of the Silven online community.

Sean currently works as the Manager/Man of All Work at Tyche's Games, a small games and anime store in Athens, Georgia. He lives in Athens with his lovely wife Laura and three cats, Edwina, Paisley, and Aeolif.

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responded by building a causeway out from the shore to the citadel. Supported by the ships of the cities that had joined him Alexander took Tyre in a matter of months. Another siege at Gaza further slowed Alexander's advance south, but he soon conquered that city and continued into Egypt. The Egyptians welcomed Alexander as a liberator and proclaimed him Pharaoh and the 'son of Ra'.

In 331 BCE, Alexander moved to finish Darius who had raised another huge army. The two met at Gaugamela, on the plains of Northern Mesopotamia. Darius had assembled a huge number of infantrymen supported by fine cavalry, heavy chariots with scythes mounted and even a few elephants. Advancing at a time and place of his own choosing, Alexander refused to fight the battle that Darius wanted. To deal with the scythed chariots, Alexander's soldiers opened their ranks to let the chariots through and let the Macedonian javelin men kill the Chariot drivers as they rode past. While his infantry engaged the enemy, Alexander led his Companion cavalry straight for Darius. Cutting his way through the Immortals, Darius' bodyguards, Alexander came close enough that his spear killed Darius' charioteer. The Persian Emperor again fled. Alexander chose not to pursue Darius returning instead to the battle to aid his men who were still fighting. With the Emperor's flight, the Persian army collapsed once again and Alexander seized another magnificent victory. Darius' prestige would not recover from this battle.

Alexander swung south into Babylon and the heartlands of the fertile-crescent. There, Babylon welcomed him as a liberator and granted him all of the honors of its king. After a few weeks of rest Alexander continued on to take the administrative capital of Persia, Susa, and its vast treasury. The treasury included valuables and ancient statues looted from Athens during Xerxes' invasion of Greece; Alexander returned these stolen treasures to the Athenians.

From Susa, Alexander decided to drive hard towards Persepolis, en route he was ambushed in a narrow pass by the Satrap of the region. Alexander's forces were driven back with heavy losses after a failed frontal assault. Not to be kept from his goal, Alexander found a trail and led part of his force around through the narrow mountain tracks at night to strike the Persians from behind. The Persians were routed and Alexander continued to Persepolis.

Persepolis, the spiritual heart of the Persian Empire and capital of the Persian people themselves, surrendered to Alexander in 330 BCE. Alexander seized the Persian treasury for his own use and rewarded his troops with a day to loot the wealthy city. Alexander rarely allowed his soldiers to loot, preferring to reward them from captured funds. This allowed him a greater degree of control over his army and avoided offending the people that he conquered. Shortly after the city's capture, Persepolis burned. Sources differ on what happened, the fire may have been a deliberate act by Alexander or accidentally started in the aftermath of a drunken party. In either case Alexander directed his men to fight the fire but much of the city was destroyed.

From Persepolis, Alexander resumed his pursuit of Darius. Before he could meet his adversary, Darius was betrayed and killed by treacherous Persians. Alexander used his own cloak to wrap the body of the Emperor and had it returned to the Persian Queen Mother for a proper burial.

Now Alexander had to deal with Bessus, Darius' cousin and satrap of Bactria, who proclaimed himself Emperor of the Persians. Alexander announced his intention to bring Bessus to justice, blaming him for the murder of Darius. Oxathres, Darius' brother, appealed to Alexander for justice and was made a Companion in order to join the effort. Alexander needed time to gather his forces to crush Bessus, and was forced to double back from his first expedition in order to destroy a rebellion by the satrap of Aria.

The beginning of the next year (329 BCE) saw the continuation of Alexander's campaign against Bessus across the mountains of the Hindu Kush. To Bessus' surprise, Alexander crossed over the 3,550 meter high Khawak Pass in winter. Due to the scorched earth tactics of Bessus, the Macedonians quickly exhausted their supplies and were forced to eat their pack animals, but it did not stop their advance. Terrified by Alexander's arrival Bessus fled across the Oxus river to Sogdia, burning his boats behind him. His army dispersed and Bactria fell to Alexander without a fight. By filling their tents with straw, the Macedonians were able to cross the fast flowing Oxus over the course of five days. Alexander's friend and general Ptolemy captured Bessus and brought him back to Alexander who in turn had him flogged and sent back to the Persian court for trial, there Bessus was executed.

From this point, the north-eastern edge of the Persian Empire, Alexander campaigned to expand his control. Fighting against rebellious Persians and the Scythians from across the borders, the years 329-328 BCE were marked by harsh fighting far from home. In early 327 BCE, Alexander turned to the Sogdian Rock, a massive fortress on a towering rock outcrop. When Alexander offered to negotiate, the defenders laughed and told him to find men with wings. Alexander offered 12 *talents* (a small fortune) to the first man to reach the top of the sheer rock. Three hundred volunteers climbed the steepest, least guarded part of the rock by night, when dawn broke 270 of them had reached the summit. Alexander again came fourth to deal with the Sogdians and informed them that he had found "men with wings" and indicated his soldiers above them. The fortress surrendered.

Among the Sogdians was the daughter of the Bactrian nobleman Oxyartes, Roxane whom Alexander fell in love with and married that spring. But trouble was waiting for Alexander. In his attempt to combine Persian and Macedonian tradition, Alexander asked his loyal men to perform *proskynesis* (the Persian

ceremonial bow) to him and then receive a kiss, a traditional Macedonian mark of kingship. Normally Macedonians only bowed before the gods but all went well, until Callisthenes, the court historian, did not bow before Alexander and was refused a kiss. Angered at such a snub, Alexander began doubting the loyalty of Callisthenes. This coincided with a plot by several of his pages to murder Alexander. The plot failed and Callisthenes was implicated, the pages were stoned to death and Callisthenes died in prison before he could be sent to Greece for trial.

In the late spring of 327 BCE, Alexander began his campaign into India, marching to the Indus, which had been the eastern border of Persian for more than 150 years. Alexander called the Indian kings to him and many came, some of them allied themselves with the conqueror of Persia. Alexander spent the rest of the year securing his lines of communication before resuming his advance against those who would not accept him as king. The next spring, 326 BCE, his campaign began anew. Cities and fortresses fell before Alexander and his army as he advanced ever further to the Indus river which the Macedonian engineers successfully bridged. With an allied Indian troops, Alexander confronted King Porus and his army, which included 200 war elephants, on the banks of the Hydaspes river. While the main army acted as a diversion to focus Porus' attention, Alexander made a flank march. Crossing the river 29 kilometres north of the camp, Alexander forced Porus to fight on two fronts. King Porus was captured and when asked how he wished to be treated by Alexander, Porus replied, "As a king." Alexander was so impressed by Porus' bravery and nobility that he restored him as king and Porus remained loyal to Alexander.

Alexander and his men had to endure the wet of the monsoon season as they prepared to move further east; Alexander intended to go the Ganges river and beyond. But in the foothills of Kashmir, the Macedonians mutinied and refused to cross the Beas

river. Alexander's loyal soldiers, who had served for eight years, had finally had enough. Hundreds of kilometres from home in a foreign land, they were exhausted, their equipment ruined by rains and many were sick. Even a personal appeal by Alexander could not convince them to continue. So, Alexander turned back from the furthest reaches of his territory, marking the occasion with great games and the building of twelve massive altars to the Olympian gods along the border line.

Alexander gathered his soldiers, leaving the newly conquered territories to be administered by King Porus, and began travelling down the Jhelum River to the Indus River. Alexander built and assembled a great fleet of ships to carry men and supplies on this journey. He travelled with the fleet while separate divisions marched on each side of the river and followed behind to insure the safety of the supply line. Most of the tribes and cities along the river submitted to Alexander peacefully but a few did not. The Malli were one of these and while storming the fortress of Multan, Alexander was badly wounded and even thought dead for a brief while. But he survived and the Macedonians finally made it to the coast.

Alexander sent the fleet along the coast while he led the army marching parallel along the coast. This proved to be a terrible mistake as it shoreline soon turned to desert. The fleet had to be sent on while the army moved inland in search of water and supplies. Food and water ran short, and through it all, Alexander suffered the hardships with his men. When some of them found a small trickle of water in a small gully and brought it to Alexander in a helmet, Alexander accepted it, thanked the men and poured it on the ground in full view of his troops. Finally, after sixty days of torment, Alexander and his army finally emerged from the desert but the losses were terrible, the worst he had suffered on the entire Indian campaign. Reunited with the fleet in 325 BCE, Alexander prepared to return to the heart of the Persian Empire.

In early 324 BCE, Alexander returned to Susa where he tried to build upon his policy of unification of the people by marrying a pair of Persian princesses, one of whom was the eldest daughter of Darius (Macedonian Kings often had multiple wives for political reasons). At Alexander's request ninety-two of his Companions married Persian noblewomen. Alexander provided the dowries for all of the Persian brides. Further he gave wedding gifts to the ten thousand odd Macedonians who had already taken Persian wives. While this won him favor with his men, the arrival of thirty thousand Persian youths, who had been trained and armed in the Macedonian style, caused resentment among the Macedonian veterans as they feared being supplanted in the King's esteem.

Later that year Alexander began letting soldiers no longer fit for duty retire and return home with generous payouts. The Macedonian veterans, already upset by the new Persian troops, protested that Alexander was turning them away in disgrace. Alexander angrily reminded them of everything he and his father had done for them and withdrew from them, surrounding himself with a purely Persian staff. This caused the Macedonians to come to their senses and they camped outside Alexander's palace for three days until the King at last forgave them.

That summer of 323 BCE, Alexander's closest friend Hephaestion fell ill and later died. Alexander was unable to be at his friend's side when he died and fell into a madness of grief, ordering a state of general mourning throughout the empire and for sacrifices to be made for Hephaestion. Memorials were built for Hephaestion and his embalmed body was sent to Babylon where Alexander held a grand funeral ceremony for his friend.

When Alexander returned to Babylon, he ignored both oracles and omens that foretold ill should he enter the city. Once there he received envoys from across his empire and from other states. He set in motion

preparation for a campaign against the Arabians. Other dark omens followed him and shortly before the Arabian campaign was to begin, he fell ill. Ten days later, Alexander was dead.

Within a year, the empire was at war with itself as Alexander's generals each moved to seize the throne. Alexander's dream of a unified empire died with him, no one else could match his charisma, leadership or drive and unite the various faction. But that is a story for another vision.

Alexander remains one of history's greatest conquerors. In a matter of years he conquered the largest empire of his age and pushed beyond the boundaries of what had been the known world of his era. He built dozens of cities, most of them named after him (most called Alexandria), created a new empire on the ashes of the old Persian empire, and tried to forge his subject peoples into a greater whole by blending what he saw as the best of the Macedonian, Greek and Persian traditions. In the end, only Alexander could maintain Alexander's dream and without his inspired leadership it shattered into warring states.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Alexander was an amazing man –successful politician, brilliant general, masterful leader of soldiers– a true renaissance man (though pre-dating that term). Any conquering hero or heroine can easily be based upon his life. Alexander was larger than life, a true hero among men, but like the legendary Greek heroes he admired so much, he was flawed as well. Alexander was full of pride bordering on arrogance, prone to rash actions and fits of temper, he had a dark side to his golden personality.

An interesting campaign or scenario would be to place the characters in opposition to a conqueror like Alexander. Letting them match their wits and heroic deeds against the conqueror, hopefully coming to respect him (or her). It would be difficult to pull off, but very much in the mould of Alexander, for the characters to be defeated in the end by the Alexander analog only to be welcomed as friends and allies in recognition of their bravery and talent.

Supplemental d20 Material:

New Feat

Elite [General]

You have served with distinction in the military and are among the best of the best and you know it.

Prerequisites: Character level 5, Base Attack Bonus +3, Base Will Save +2, having served as part of an organized military unit.

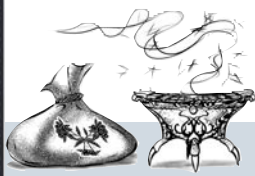
Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Initiative rolls and a +2 morale bonus on Intimidate checks, Fear saves and to opposed checks to resist Feints in combat. Further, you receive a +1 circumstance bonus on all social interactions with military and martial types.

Special: This feat may be selected as a Fighter bonus feat.

You may receive a -1 or higher circumstance penalty on social rolls with those who are opposed to the military or who are pacifists.

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Faith Based Initiative : Spirituality and Gaming

by Eytan Bernstein

This month's column will take a step back from the crunchies of the last two articles to focus on a more esoteric subject: spirituality and gaming. For the purposes of this article, spirituality is defined as "Of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material."www.dictionary.com.

In this regard, spirituality can be used to express the search for meaning and self-exploration. Most people do not associate gaming with spirituality. The majority gamers are not religious (often vehemently so) and many have a fascination with the occult – a matter that certainly ticks off some of their more traditional parents or peers. Despite the seeming lack of congruency between these two parts of a gamer's life, there is an underlying form of spirituality in every good role-playing game. This month's Faith Based Initiative will be examining the following question: Can gaming be a spiritual experience? In this exploration, the article will be looking at a few past comments from readers about their own perspectives on religion and gaming. It will then focus on specific games and whether or not spirituality is invoked within them. Finally, suggestions will be made on how gaming could be a more meaningful experience for all involved – no matter with their spiritual inclinations may be.

In previous articles in this column, readers were asked to share their own spiritual perspectives relating to gaming. One mentioned, "I realize that many Christians criticize **D&D** in ignorance and there is no excuse for that. However, I hope gamers will take into account the sincerely held beliefs of Christians before they criticize in turn." This was a response to the Faith Based Initiative: BAFOON: Bothered About Fundamentalists Offering Opinionated Nonsense article. That article asserted that there is a form of hypocrisy among fundamentalist critics of D&D in which they condemn the game for partaking in witchcraft while believing in it themselves. The reader made a good point to counter this. She suggested

that many gamers are quick to criticize the beliefs of religious groups, especially Christians. They don't acknowledge their own biases, but have no problem condemning the beliefs and biases of others. I still maintain that much of the activities of Jack T. Chick and associates are of undeniably hypocritical nature, but this is out of no disrespect towards religious groups or Christians in general.

Another reader made an interesting follow-up point, "...No one is great with religion. 70 percent of Wiccans used to be Christian. In most cases, people changed because they hate their religion. Most of the time, it is not game related..." It is possible that D&D might have turned some people on to Wicca or other forms of paganism. The game has, to at least some extent, solid foundations in mythology. Playing a Druid might jive quite well with many who find nature exploration appealing and might be a final step that catalyzes a change. The reader is correct in her assertion that most Wiccans come from Christian backgrounds. Clearly, those who connect poorly with traditional religion, might find a great deal of support and meaning on other forms of belief.

What the readers alluded to was a clear conflict between various groups over gaming. Many people go from one path to the other. A lot of former Christians turn to Wicca or other alternative religions. Some Christians apparently are reborn or have renewed faith after rediscovering Jesus – they often portray this as a salvation from the temptations of power that occur in gaming. Gamers who have had bad experiences with religion often use gaming as a means of expressing the freedom they feel now that they are no longer burdened by that yoke. The upbringing of an individual often has a distinct impact on their attitudes towards religion and towards gaming. These sentiments are what fuel such strong feelings between the different sides of the spectrum. What one group considers an abomination is

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the bread and butter of the other. Many Christians do believe in the supernatural and thus gaming might be a dark path to them. Many gamers grew up among those who held such beliefs and thus find them disdainful.

There is rarely an admixture among gamers; few are both committed to their game as well as firm in their faith and beliefs. Most of the time a gamer who still has interest in her religious upbringing is in conflict about religion and gaming. This can be due to parental backlash in their early gaming years to a greater awareness of other forms of belief. It is a great testament to those who maintain complete faith in their religious beliefs without having that interfere with their gaming. Few however, have managed this. Many gamers are passionately anti-religious – I see a great deal more atheist characters (other than clerics) than I do devout ones. While I have a sincere issue with this – which has been explored in other articles – it is certainly representative of the trend of gamers towards religious backlash. What is interesting to consider is how a game is used as an outlet for such feelings. People who are frustrated about religion often make characters that eschew as a means towards catharsis of past frustrations.

There are other ways that spiritual backlash can be expressed. Some people create worlds or religions that express the problems they have with their upbringing. Others choose to play religious characters who embody the things they dislike as a statement on the hypocrisy of such ideas. Yet others do the opposite and live out their true beliefs in their characters. Some choose the route of the atheist to

live out their fantasies free of any religion.

There are other ways of expressing spirituality in a game. Some do this by establishing a deep mental connection with their characters and the characters played by others. To them, the game becomes more than entertainment; it is a source of not only catharsis, but the exercising of their ego and id. They reach down deep within themselves to explore their deepest desires. They can use the game to satisfy more immediate needs or curiosities. This is why the exploration of intense violence, the playing of another gender or sexual orientation and the success of romance and life goals can be deeply fulfilling. This is also why the death of a character, the failure of a plot or a real conflict between players can seem devastating. It is important to keep in mind the fact that it's only a game, but at the same time, such a loss or failure can be very difficult.

Certain games make it easier to establish spirituality and meaning than others. The use of polytheism in *D&D* (and occasionally monotheism) allows players as well as GMs to explore their spiritual inclinations. Players can choose to explore a truly devout persona or plunge into fundamentalist or extremist religion. If they wish for a more internal expression, they can delve into their own attachment to the psyche and life of their character. The fantasy setting is romantic to many people and might allow them to open up and look into their internal mystic or philosopher. They can explore their existential and epistemological questions. If they are tired of existing conceptions of gods, they can create their own (as both a backlash against existing traditions or a look into other possibilities.) The same setting allows for the exploration of nature worship, monotheistic clerics, vile death cults and chivalric paladins. It's not always (or often) realistic, but it does allow for a creative exploration into such possibilities.

Whitewolf's *Vampire the Masquerade* allows for a different sort of search for meaning. Players of

the game explore what it is like to play a vampire – the descendants of Caine who was cursed by god to wander the earth for his sin. These characters typically maintain a guise of mortality and civility, while battling against their predatory instincts. The more inhuman acts they commit, the closer they get to “the beast,” a form in which all vestiges of mortality have been exhausted. *VtM* plays with concepts of mortality, divinity, humanity and faith in its explorations of the inner workings of the human and inhuman psyche. Players can be vampires who are desperately struggling to stem the inevitable tide towards evil. They can also explore the utter inhumanity of a vampire who triumphs in brutality and animalistic urges. Through the game, players can explore their own humanity and morality. They can empathize with characters they commit acts they would never consider, or strive to play characters that resist these urges. This role-playing game allows people to explore “what if” scenarios. They can play out a story arch that includes betrayal, redemption, sin, atonement and other possibilities.

The article has covered three basic issues so far. The first is how our upbringing and personal religious beliefs can affect our outlook on gaming. The second is how this outlook on religion and spirituality is often channeled into gaming. The third is how individual game systems can bring out a sense of spirituality on their own. The final thing that will be explored is how gaming can become a more spiritual experience for all involved.

The GM and players can work together to create a more meaningful environment for their game. This can be done a number of ways. The simplest thing is to establish an atmosphere with more mood – appropriate music, lighting, staying in character, prologues and possibly a few props. Another thing that is necessary is an encouragement of players to open up and explore real emotions with their characters. The game will always feel weak if the motivations and emotions of the characters seem

false and one- dimensional. It helps if both the GM and players make an effort to stay on the same page; they need to come up with real backgrounds and drive for their characters and keep in mind the necessity of staying in character. Players and GMs are encouraged to incorporate philosophical and spiritual concepts into their game such as the search for

knowledge, the meaning of good and evil, the exploration of morality or the origins of the world. It might even be possible that those involved could learn something about themselves or these ideas by exploring the possible permutations. This functions under the notion that people can get more out of gaming than mere entertainment. People go to movies to experience the lives of others – to live variously through them. Gaming should be an even better environment for such an exploration, but only if people are willing to open themselves up to such a possibility. This is not to suggest that gaming has to always be serious and stuffy; rather, these ideas can be applied to some games where a more philosophical bent might work.

Checklist for Creating a More Meaningful Gaming Experience

- 1) Establish the proper mood and environment through appropriate music, lights, staying in character, prologues and possibly a few props.
- 2) Encourage the exploration of real emotions and motivations in play. Good backgrounds and a commitment to staying in character can work wonders.
- 3) Consider the possibility of exploring philosophical concepts in game. The ability to do virtually anything in a game allows players to perform the equivalent of experiments on existential questions.
- 4) Finally, keep in mind that you are still there

to have fun and any explorations of morality, catharsis, and philosophizing should stay within bounds. There's no point in exploring these things if nobody is enjoying themselves. If you are not with a group that would enjoy this, there is no harm in keeping things simpler.

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A series of articles about evil in gaming.

Introduction

I have played in and heard of many games where the main thrust of the conversation (no pun intended) prior to the game is: "What are we going to slaughter tonight?" I've observed that evil probably does not want to be slaughtered any more than the player characters do. In fact, the GM has an entire book of sentient evil that is probably thinking, "What are WE going to slaughter tonight?" Are we giving evil its due? I think that evil is something more than just hostile dudes and dudettes in black leather team jerseys which they wear to distinguish themselves from the good guys who are in the white silk team jerseys. But if evil is something more than just "the guys in black" then what is evil? What makes something evil-as opposed to merely bad-and what does evil do? Let us look at these questions here, and then in upcoming articles we will see how this plays out in a campaign.

Views of Evil

First of all if we are going to talk about evil in our campaigns we need to have a general idea of where the evil in our world came from. There are four primary views to the origin of evil. One view is that evil is just the counterpart of good. In this view, divinity contains within itself both light and shadow (even as we do) and that what we perceive as evil is simply our perception of something that we don't understand (this makes for a grey-scale game that doesn't lend itself to Tolkien-esque battles against good and evil but can be good for a low-fantasy type game). The second view is that an all powerful creative force created servants with free will and that some of those servants rebelled against the divine will and turned their abilities to evil through pride or some other character flaw. The third view is the view that

there are two co-eternal forces in the universe, one of these is the author of "good," the other is the author of "evil" and these two forces are in constant battle for dominance. The final view is that chaos predominated in the universe and predates the urge for order. Order was imposed by the "good" god by defeating the dragon of chaos. Thus the good god imposes an artificial order upon the universe which became good because it is the victor who defines what was good and what was evil. In my game evil uses this view in its own propaganda campaign but at some point my players have to notice: "Hey, the Good Dudes were right. Evil really IS evil." Lovecraft does this revelation of the existence of evil quite well and his universe fits in this last view.

So we have four general views of evil. Which should we use in our games? In order to have convincing evil it really doesn't matter which of these views you build upon because you can create convincing evil with any of the above premises. The key is that evil should be convincing and to be convincing it needs to be insidious, dangerous, and palpable. But what gives evil these qualities and what does it look like vis-à-vis good?

Contrast & Struggle

The dominant ideas that contrast good and evil are creation and dissolution, respectively. The struggle between good and evil is the struggle of "good" to preserve a "good" creation from the forces of "evil" which desire to destroy it and/or its value to the "good." I have found that the Judeo-Christian paradigm has a useful understanding of good for our purposes. In that milieu "good" creation is one that is characterized by "shalom." Shalom is the way the powers of good created the world and is characterized by a webbing together of the divinity, humanity, and all creation in a harmonious interaction of justice,

fulfillment, and delight that brings a universal flourishing and wholeness to the entire circle of life. This is the vision of the good that the forces of good want to promote and preserve. However, this vision of good is actively vandalized, corrupted, warped, and despoiled by the forces of evil. In this paradigm the forces of evil are either unable or unwilling to directly overcome the divine forces of good. Therefore the powers of darkness strive to destroy or contaminate what those divine powers love. It is the classic military strategy of striking at the weak point in the enemy's battle line. A campaign that focuses on such epic conflicts occurs when the forces of evil strike at what they believe is a weak point. However, instead of victims, they find our heroes at the proper place, at the proper time, and perhaps even placed there by the divine forces of good "for such a time as this." This is the eternal struggle of good verses evil.

Bad vs. Evil

Please note that this entire concept of evil is very different than something that is simply bad or mean. While "bad" things may happen and there may be "bad" people (such as a bully who dominates a school playground) it is not the intent or goal of such "bad" people to obliterate, warp, or destroy creation either for its own sake or as a means of striking at the divine forces of good. Things which are merely "bad" occur either through happenstance or through the desire of something or someone to wrongfully acquire something "good" for itself. For instance, the bully may wish to have power, respect, or something similar as part of an inappropriate goal that will compensate it for other inadequacies it has. Each of these goals could be good but they become "bad" because of the means used and their effect on others. "Bad" is not so much evil as it is self-interested. Evil can, however, use the bully's wish for power, respect, or whatever to control the bully to accomplish its evil goal. Evil is not merely

self-interested but also enjoys the destruction of good. But that discussion will wait for a later time; let us leave the bad behind and return to the truly evil.

Evil is Insidious

I had said that evil must be insidious, dangerous, and palpable. Making evil palpable is for our later discussions and making evil dangerous probably needs no explanation. Therefore let us look at being insidious. Something insidious works by spreading harm in a subtle manner. Something that is insidious has the intent to entrap. It is dangerous yet beguiling, harmful yet alluring (such as insidious pleasures—both tempting and dangerous). . Evil has the intent to betray, crush, corrupt, defile, warp, contaminate, and/or pervert that which is intended to be life-giving, nurturing, and fulfilling. Evil is parasitic in nature and desires to latch on to, entrap, or enslave that which is whole and wholesome and turn it into that which is despoiled, broken, and deeply wounded. Evil will then take this broken and twisted being and use it in its own plans as an instrument of evil. ONLY after it has done so (and evil has become bored with the show), will the agent of evil then destroy his or her own instrument. If possible, evil will destroy the instrument in that very same moment. For it is often in that moment that the unsuspecting instrument realizes it has been a pawn of evil, that the tool has outlived its usefulness. At this point the tool may even no longer be a willing agent. That which is evil will attempt to bring about despair before death and ideally will facilitate a despair that leads to a desire for death on the part of the target and the instrument. Once this point is reached, evil can enjoy a little more fun by denying the death which is desired, but that too will eventually become boring.

In the example of the playground bully mentioned above, the difference between a bully and an evil lord would be that true evil would dominate the playground with the intent of destroying the “play”

and anything else “good” that came about in that environment. Evil would want to create an environment of fear and despair where children trembled at the very idea of recess approaching. Both the bad bully and the evil agent may have this effect on the playground. However, with the agent of evil, it was his or her intent from the beginning to destroy all that was good in the play environment. Evil is that which loves, is infatuated with, or has a passion for death and dying on every level: spiritual, mental, and physical. It is the killer of hope and the antithesis of all that is beautiful or wholesome.

Evil’s Masquerade

“Wait,” you may say, “What about beautiful evil?” This brings up an important part of evil. Evil, to be effective in the world, must present itself as something else. Are your characters facing or serving an agent of evil, or just someone who is bad or overly ambitious? This ambiguity is where evil thrives, for evil does not wish to reveal itself until it is sure that victory has been achieved. After all, if someone put an ad in the paper that said: “Evil mastermind seeks minions to annihilate all that is good and wholesome; will train. E.O.E.” How many applications do you think it would get? Evil thrives best when it has masked itself in the trappings of good. This is the origin of the concept of a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” Were the “wolf” of evil to be unmasked too soon, the “sheep” of the flock of good would flee in panic and terror. Now, while this may be satisfying in its own way for the wolf, it is not nearly as satisfying as crushing the jugular of some helpless little innocent and tasting the warmth of its life-blood, hopes, and dreams as they spill out and are lost forever.

Even in the Christian Bible it says that Satan masquerades as an “angel of light.” Something evil can be as beautiful as it is dangerous. However, while good may be beautiful and enjoy beauty for its own sake, something evil would more likely use beauty as a tool. Evil uses beauty as one of many tools to

accomplish its ends. We mentioned above that the method of evil is to lure, entrap, and enslave those who are unsuspecting or unable to resist, and beauty can be a strong lure indeed.

Corruption & Destruction

Once something has been ensnared in its web, evil endeavors to despoil or to twist it to a darker end. Evil twists, weakens, snaps, and ultimately strips away the fiber that holds us together and that joins us with others in an atmosphere of harmony, freedom, justice and delight. Evil has consciously chosen the path of evil and opposition. It has consciously rejected the divine plan for shalom and is on a quest to destroy or mutate creation into something that no longer brings joy. It is a quest to shatter the very integrity and wholeness of both creatures and creation as a whole. Evil intends to destroy and from the beginning will revel in the chaos, alienation, and pain that are realized by its machinations. Evil strives to break anything that is whole, as wholeness is something that is inherently offensive to it. Wholeness, purity, delight and harmony are all offensive to evil because in the presence of that which is truly good, evil is revealed for the cheap caricature of life that it really is. In its malevolence, evil is revealed as being anti-life or anti-creation and as such it is inherently hostile to all that lives.

Finally, before you run off and create an evil mastermind to darken your campaign, you must remember that there is another important aspect that we must consider. Not only should evil in your games be convincing, insidious, dangerous, and palpable, as game masters we must add “balanced” to this. Unless your characters have always dreamed of being the key characters in a Lovecraft or Poe story, the evil that we create is created to ultimately be beatable. Without this balance your game is liable to wind down into despair. To avoid that, I would suggest that you follow the old Hollywood adage of ensuring that evil

gets soundly thumped in the end. Further, it needs to be your player characters that are doing the thumping. Evil in my game gets soundly thumped (eventually) but is never completely destroyed. In a well-constructed campaign, even as the heroes begin to pick up the pieces and heal from the adventure, we should already have the hidden seeds sown for their next confrontation with a new evil. Evil is like the Hydra, constantly raising up new heads against the heroic adventurers.

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Quillion's Quill : Feats

by Steven Russell

Welcome to the third edition of "Quillion's Quill." Each month this column will present d 20 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 feats and a new way to present them.

CHARGE BREAKER [General]

"The spear is a weapon few truly know anymore as these days it is all about the sword, but remember this child, the spear killed the god-child. Remember The Morrigan's Spear of War not the sword, for the spear is her symbol. If you forget all of that, well many young warriors will rush headlong into war, but if they live to be old warriors they learn the spear of war will often rush headlong into them." Excerpt from *Sentan* by Mamoru Silverbeard, Bushi to House Lord Botan Tigerclaw of Taskdragon

You can stop a charging opponent even if you are not set.

Prerequisite: Proficiency with weapon, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, +8 BAB

Benefit: Chose a specific weapon. You do not need to ready an action to set this weapon against a charge, you may do it in response to being charged once per round. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

DEADBANG [General]

"The Brass Dragoons of House Azad are perhaps the deadliest marksmen in all the kingdoms of Marux. They have driven off the dragon Fafnir Skyfire and held their own against the cursed Untold Legion of

Ashenfall. Perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that no member of the Brass Dragoons has yet to leave its service. No matter the bribes or honors offered to them by other noble houses they remain loyal." Excerpt from *To Ward the Dens* by Ailen Catchpole, 13th Warden of Marux

Prerequisite: Exotic Weapon Proficiency: any firearm, Point blank shot, Precise Shot, +8 Base Attack Bonus, You may add +1d6 for every four character levels you possess to the damage dealt by your attack with a firearm. Use of this feat must be declared before the attack roll is made. The character may use deadbang a number of times per day depending on his or her character level (as shown below), but never more than once per round. Creatures immune to critical hits are immune to this affect.

Character Level	Times per Day
8th	2
9th-12th	3
13th-16th	4
17th-20th	5

DISCERN FEINT [General]

"I used the maneuver known as the wyvern's tail, it had never failed to score me a win in the battles of the arena, the duel, or in the ruins of Questspire, yet that day it failed to even touch Sir Tem Ironhorn, known today as "The Iron Knight" Excerpt from *A Guide to Slaying* by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

You easily spot the difference between a feint and a true assault

Benefit: You gain a +10 bonus to your Sense Motive skill, but only for the purpose of opposing a bluff check for feints. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

About the Author

Steven Russell is a Game Designer for Pencil Pusher Publishing (3P) and 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 and play testing the designs for his current project for 3P (www.pencilpushers.net) "Here there be Monsters" and eventually a Epic Level Campaign Setting Code Named: Heaven'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

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GREATER SPELLS OF HATE [General]

"When Jonath Faithseed released his venomous curse upon the great defiler Ulad Ashenfall, he was reckless. In his recklessness to enact vengeance upon a monster, the monster consumed him and became him. When Ulad died the curse did not end and was passed on to the innocents that came after him." Excerpt from *Hunting Monsters* by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

Your spells are even harder for one type of creature to resist.

Prerequisite: Spells of Hate

Benefits: When you take this feat choose a creature type. Your spells DCs and caster level checks are increased by +1 when cast against creatures of the chosen type. This stacks with Spells of Hate and Spell Focus.

IMPROVED SUBDUAL [General]

"You can walk with me or be carried by me, it is your choice' is a common saying amongst the Wardens of Marux surprisingly most people prefer to walk." Except from *To Ward the Dens* by Ailen Catchpole, 13th Warden of Marux

You keep the peace and deal with brawls extremely well.

Prerequisites: Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm,
Benefit: You deal +1d6 additional points of subdual damage when attacking to subdue. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

NEAR AT HAND [General]

"I don't care if he snored louder than a geyser, or smelled like a goblin compost pile in mid summer, the day we saw him surrounded by eight Azad cutthroats and take them all down with a Boar-spear we decided Vadim Orcblood was just the warrior we needed."

Except from Adventuring Days by Guildmaster/Field Marshal Thurstan Dreadwand of the Questor's Guild and the Nameless Legion

You are expertly skilled with your long weapon

Prerequisite: Weapon Focus, Greater Weapon Focus.
+8 Base Attack Bonus

Benefit: Weapons with reach that you have Greater Weapon Focus with in your hands may also attack adjacent foes. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

ONE WITH THE BOW [General]

"Heir Lord Wiktoryn Stalkmortal of House Ashenfall is considered the foremost bowman and hunter in all of the Kingdom of Marux. He claims it is simply a mater of studying the behavior of his prey, knowing that a predictable move is a move that can be exploited. He once hunted and killed the giant known as Cort Archbeast simply because it loved to frighten travelers by using their horses as clubs." Excerpt from Hunt the Hunters by Gharghest Redroar, Ryth Mage.

You seek out opportunity with the bow.

Prerequisites: Combat Reflexes, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, +12 BAB

Benefit: You may take a ranged attacks of opportunity using a bow within 10 ft.

Special: You still provoke an attack of opportunity for using a ranged weapon. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

OVERWHELMING PRESCENCE [GENERAL]

"I have never in my life met a woman with more will and internal strength than Our Lady of Quests. When Gunra Highglyph brings her will to bear upon you, you move the way she wishes or you will be moved by her wishes." Excerpt from My Kingdoms by King Gyrtu Marux

You use a great force of personality within you to leave those around you in awe.

Prerequisite: Intimidate ranks 15, Charisma 15+

Benefit: Using a standard action, you use your force of personality to cause creatures of your type within 30 feet to become stunned with awe for 1 round unless they make a successful Will saving throw (DC 10 + half your character level + your Charisma modifier). You may use overwhelming presence a number of times per day depending on your character level (as shown below), but never more than once per round.

Character Level Times per Day

12th 3

13th-16th 4

17th-20th 5

RANGED CLEAVE [General]

"We who belong to House Taskdragon have a philosophy we teach all our students. When you attack someone you must do it with all your heart. Fight with the intention of killing your opponent by striking at, through and beyond your enemy." Excerpt from Secrets of the Dragons by Lord HaruTaskdragon completed shortly before his death.

You can shoot directly through one foe to hit a second.

Prerequisite: Point Blank Shot, Dex 13+

Benefit: If you deal enough damage to "drop " a creature (typically by reducing it to below 0 hit points) with a ranged attack, you may immediately make another ranged attack on the next enemy along the weapon's current trajectory. The second attack is made without taking another shot as the first shot simply went through the original target. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

REACTIVE INSIGHT [General]

"We had fought our way from Castle Taskdragon to the streets against Bushi decorated with the rising sun of House Lady Genji Lightheart of Taskdragon. When we stumbled into a group of Monks who studied the Way of Southern Dragon, they reacted to our appearance with such a calm manner, I would have sworn they were expecting us. " Excerpt From A Guide to Slaying by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

Prerequisites: Wis 13+, Alertness, Improved Initiative, Spot 11 ranks and Listen 11 ranks

Benefit: Add your Wis modifier to your initiative roll in addition to your Dex modifier.

Note: a fighter or monk may take this as one of his bonus feats.

RECKLESS ABANDON [General]

"The House Azad believes that nothing is worth doing if it is not done with style. For life without art is not life at all, but mere drudgery of existence bereft of joy and color, that which makes life worth living." from The Freedom of Azad by Lady Hala Moonhalo Azad

Scorning armor, you defy death with style and panache.

Prerequisite: Dex13+, Cha 13+, Dodge, and Bluff 11 ranks

Benefit: You gain a dodge bonus to Armor Class equal

to your Charisma modifier vs. your dodge target. This bonus is lost if you gain any form of armor or shield AC bonus. You lose this benefit if you are ever denied your Dex modifier to AC. All other opponents gain a bonus to hit equal to your Charisma modifier. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

REND ASUNDER [General]

"Sir Tem Ironhorn, known to some as "The Iron Knight" is an unshakeable and stoic man often more concerned with the letters of his oaths and vows than with understanding the spirit their intent. When you fight against him you must brake him or be broken there is no compromise." Excerpt from Knights of My Realm by House Lord Wayne Aldertale of Oathtaker

You follow through when you sunder an opponent's weapon or shield
Prerequisite: Str 13+, Power Attack, Improved Sunder, Cleave, Base Attack Bonus +8
Benefit: When you successfully perform a sunder action, you can immediately make another attack against the same opponent. You can use this ability only once per round.

ROLL AND ATTACK [General]

"You only roll in john woo movies" Excerpt from SWAT by Samuel Jackson

You perform a rolling melee attack.
Prerequisite: Dex 13+, Dodge, Mobility, Tumble 14 ranks
Benefit: You can tumble up to your speed; this move never provokes an attack of opportunity.
Special: You lose the benefits of this feat if you are in any type of armor.

SPEED AND GRACE [General]

"The House Azad knows, that nothing is done but for the grace of the Presence. For life without grace languishes on the shore to die unmoving in the sun.

Movement and Grace are that which makes life worth living." Excerpt from The Freedom of Azad by Lady Hala Moonhalo Azad

You can change and pick up weapons with amazing grace and speed.
Prerequisite: Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Perform (juggle) 11 ranks

Benefit: You gain a +2 initiative bonus plus you can juggle, spin, and make a display of weapons and similarly sized objects during combat without provoking any attacks of opportunity. You can draw, sheathe or shift them as a free action. You can even pick them up from the ground as a free action, as long as you can kick at them. You can only do this at the start and end of your turn. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

SPELLS OF HATE [General]

"When you think upon the Faithseed Curse laid upon Ashenfall understand that you cannot hate something that you could not love. Hate is not the opposite of love, it is love twisted in some fashion that your emotion overpowers your judgment. Thus was Jonath Faithseed's hate his undoing because he loved the lands of Questspire too much." Excerpt from Jonath Faithseed by House Milady Laryssa Doubtlor of Ashenfall

Your spells are harder for one type of creature to resist.
Benefits: When you take this feat choose a creature type. Your spells DCs and caster level checks are increased by +1 when cast against creatures of the chosen type.

WARWALKER [General]

"The Tribes of the Wilderlands are secretive and gifted in the arts of war. In truth they are the only truly free people on the Continent of Vastterra. They had been fighting the Freedom war since

the first day the Illren Empire arrived on their world. They followed them to this Primal Plane of existence seeking to destroy tyranny. Now, after six generations, the war is finally over. I wonder what they will do." Excerpt from The Freedom War by King Gyrtu Marux

You pin down the enemy, making it difficult for him to flank you or retreat unscathed.
Prerequisites: Dex 13+, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, BAB+12,
Benefit: Any opponent who leaves a square threatened by you always provokes an attack of opportunity (this does not include 5' steps).
Special: You make and opposed sense motive vs. your opponents tumble when an opponent attempts to tumble out of a threatened square. A fighter may take this as a bonus feat.

WARY POISE [General]

"I have lost seven of my company in the Dungeon of Colossi Ferric, half the group in the Vale of Whispers, three friends in the Ruins of Questspire, and even the whole party on the Isle of Jannath. Eventually I grew to be ready for danger whenever I walked around the corner." Excerpt from Another Guide to Slaying by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion.

Prerequisites: Alertness, Improved Initiative
Benefit: When an initiative roll is required you may take a 10 instead of rolling. Modifiers are applied after this feat.
Note: a fighter or monk may take this as one of their bonus feats.

Item Creation feats

EXPERIANCE SACRIFICE: [Item Creation]

"A weapon is only truly your weapon if you are part of it and it is part of you." Excerpt from Sentan by Mamoru Silverbeard, Bushi to House Lord Botan Tigerclaw of Taskdragon

Prerequisite: Any item creation feat

Benefit: You may use the experience of another willing creature in place of your experience for the cost of item creation.

Normal: You must sacrifice the experience yourself.

Metamagic feats

CEDE SPELL [Metamagic]

"A caster's greatest enemy is not the spell or the sword wielded by his enemy, but his own arrogance. The caster wields such great power that many have begun to think that they are that power. Only Weldon Charmpiece has learned that from humility comes even greater power" Excerpt from [Mage Myths and Outright Lies](#) by Zanna Barterhex, Tradewizard of Questspire.

You transfer control over a spell to another creature.

Benefit: You can transfer the control over a spell to another willing creature that you touch any time during the spell's duration. This changes the beneficiary of spells like True Strike or transfers the control of a spell like Command Undead. This includes spells with a Personal range. In all other ways, the spell functions as normal. A Ceded Spell uses up a spell slot 1 level higher than the spell's actual level.

COMBINE SPELL [Metamagic]

"As we continued exploring the great ruined mines beneath the city of Questspire, we were in a "loot dispute" with the adventuring company known as the Seven Sorcerers of Starstone. When the negotiations failed, the sorcerers began casting spells. An ax, a dagger, an arrow and finally a bolt struck at them but it failed to stop the sorcerer Tren Jagtail from finishing his casting. Rowan Runestaff our mage-for-hire shouted "That's impossible" as a fireball and a lightning bolt erupted from that single casting. Now, I am not a mage by any means, but I would think by definition, magic means nothing is impossible." Excerpt from [Another Guide to Slaying](#) by Ragnar

Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

You can combine two spells into one casting.

Prerequisites: Heighten spell, Quicken spell

Benefit: A combined spell is actually two spells to be cast as one higher level version so that the spell can create two simultaneous spell effects. The spells must be two different spells and only two spells may be joined by use of this feat. A combined spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spells' combined levels.

Normal: Each spell must be cast separately.

Special: This casting functions as if the mage had cast the two spells individually for the purposes of determining all other costs and effects.

CONDUIT SPELL [Metamagic]

"That bloody staff did not look to be magical, but when that skinny little pointy eared bastich hit me with it, I would have sworn it was. Every damn wound I had given him healed on the spot, and I sure as hell, felt like I had just had all the flaming life sucked out of me. Later on Lorien, another pointy eared bastich, explained to me what Vampiric Touch was." Excerpt from [A Guide to Slaying](#) by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

You can use your melee attack for a touch spell.

Benefit: You can make a standard armed attack and inflict normal weapon damage plus the effect of your touch spell on a successful strike. You must wait until your next attack action in order to make your armed attack after you cast the spell. When resolving your attack, compare your attack roll against your target's normal AC only if successful the spell discharges. If your attack roll fails to beat the targets normal AC the spell is not discharged. A Conducted Spell uses up a spell slot 0 levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Normal: You can discharge a touch spell as either a touch attacks (no armor, shield or natural armor bonus to AC) or a normal unarmed strike.

EXPEDITE SPELL [Metamagic]

"Speed kills; it is a true fact of reality and time, the faster you go through life the faster you reach death. Life is about speed, no one gets out of life alive, so do not be in such a hurry young one your wasting life not time." Excerpt from [Natural Philosophies](#) by House Lady Genji Lightheart of Taskdragon

You hasten the casting of your spell.

Benefit: Expedite Spell reduces the casting time of a spell from 1 full round to 1 action, and halves the casting time for spells that take longer than a full round to cast. Expedite spell has no effect on spells with a casting time less than 1 full round. An Expedited Spell uses up a spell slot 1 level higher than the spell's actual level.

Special: Unlike most metamagic feats, an Expedited Spell does not increase the casting time of the spell when used by spontaneous casters.

FORCE SPELL [Metamagic]

"The Sennin maybe a zealous order of entirely male eunuch wizards dedicated to the service of House Taskdragon. Yet they are also masters of force magic. Force is perhaps the greatest of all magic it is like the numeral zero, it is the base equation of all magic, it is near to the raw naked power of the arcane as one can get without tearing the fabric of the universe apart." Excerpt from [Adventuring Days](#) by Guildmaster/Field Marshal Thurstan Dreadwand of the Questor's Guild and the Nameless Legion

You can infuse your damaging spells with force energy.

Benefit: Half of the damage inflicted by a spell modified by this feat is treated as force and gains the force descriptor, enabling it to affect incorporeal creatures and making it resistant to protection from elements and similar magic. All other damage is treated normally per the spell. A Force Spell uses up

a spell slot three levels higher than the spell's actual level.

HANG SPELL [Metamagic]

"As we entered the Unsealed Prison of Souroc Unlife, Known today as the Dungeon of Colossi Ferric, a powerful necromantic spell erupted that had probably hung there waiting since Souroc had been set free by King Marux to help defeat the Illren Empire, It killed The Lady Teal Soullight of House Oathtaker before any of us were even aware of the fell traps Souroc had left behind." Excerpt from [Another Guide to Slaying](#) by Ragnar Questseeker of the Nameless Legion

A spell cast upon a spot or object is held in stasis until a specific condition is met.

Prerequisites: Extend Spell

Benefit: A hanged spell is cast on an item or spot, a triggering condition must be uttered aloud at the time of casting, (See *magic mouth* for specific conditions.)

Conditions cannot be alignment, individual beings, or have more than ten qualifiers, and they will only be met if fulfilled within 30 feet of the item or spot that the hanged spell was cast upon. Otherwise any condition may be used. Only one hanged spell can function within 30 feet of another or they disjoin each other. A hanged spell uses up a spell slot four levels higher than the spell's actual level and costs 10xp per level of the hanged spell.

Normal: Spell effects occur immediately upon completion of the spell.

Special: Hanged spells can linger indefinitely if their conditions are not met. Standard Search and Disable Device DCs apply (for the discovery and disarming of a magical trap) to Hanged Spells.

INSTINCTIVE SPELL [Metamagic]

"Those like the Ryth and those who share their bloodline grasp magic without study and without discipline. This combination of power without

discipline is perhaps the greatest threat to the universe the world has ever known. Interesting times indeed" Excerpt from [Threats to the Kingdom](#) by House Lord Wayne Aldertale of Oathtaker

You spontaneously cast metamagic spells without increasing their casting time.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast spells Spontaneously (like a Bard or Sorcerer), At least one other metamagic feat.

Benefit: Despite the fact that you do not prepare spells, you cast any instinctive spell without increasing the spell's casting time this applies to the increase in casting time from other metamagic feats as well. An instinctive spell uses up a spell slot 1 level higher than the spell's actual level.

LEGERDEMAIN SPELL [Metamagic]

"The trick is not letting them know there is a trick the first place." From *Running a Great Game* by Quillion, Sage of Questspire

Your spell is cast in a difficult, wily, and unique manner Benefit: It is harder to identify and dispel your spells. The check to dispel or identify a legerdemain spell is an opposed Spellcraft roll. A legerdemain spell uses up a spell slot 0 levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Scaling Feats: Questspire Feats are intended to have a dramatic impact upon the game so they may not be suited for every adventure. You may want to make changes to scale their power level to suit your game. Perhaps the easiest piece of a game to scale, the simplest way to scale a feat is to increase or lower the prerequisites to suit your game, You might change *Spells of Hate* to require the *Favored Enemy* class ability or you could lower the number of ranks required in a skill. The other way easy way to scale a feat is to maximize or minimize its benefit: *Spells of Hate* could be increased to +2 or you could reduce *Deadbang* to only being usable once per day and only adding +1d6.

d20 review: *Players Guide to Faerun*

by Bradford Ferguson

"Forgotten Realms® *Player's Guide to Faerûn*"

About: 192 pages, hardcover, full color interior, \$33.
 Authors: Richard Baker, Travis Stout, James Wyatt
 Publisher: Wizards of the Coast (2004)
 Review date: 04/05/2004



Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover

"Make your mark on the Realms. The heroes of the Forgotten Realms® are as diverse and varied as the regions from which they hail. This collection of Faerûnian lore and arcana allows you to create and equip an endless array of characters braced for the challenges they'll encounter. From races, feats, and spells to prestige classes, magic items, and more, *Player's Guide to Faerûn* provides a v.3.5 update to the Forgotten Realms® setting, reintroduces some old favorites from 1st and 2nd Edition, and offers all-new character-building material. Over 60 feats; Over 30 prestige classes; Over 90 spells.

To use this accessory, you also need the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, the *Player's Handbook™*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide™*, and the *Monster Manual™*."

Presentation

Player's Guide to Faerûn is a 192-page hardcover with a full color interior that retails for \$32.95. The cover art is excellent and the interior artwork is superb. The racial line-up art, where all the races are shown together, features Steve Prescott's excellent work. The layout is superior, though there is an advertisement for the computer game "Hordes of the Underdark" instead of an index at the end of the book. To their credit, the table of contents is two pages long and lists virtually everything for which you would normally go page hunting. This book was released after 3.5 was introduced and it is compatible with D&D v.3.5. The combination of the layout and the art makes the book very easy on the eyes. All the art is color, unlike the FRCS.

Review snapshot

CLASS: Setting Supplement

STR: 16 (*Physical*). Sturdy sewn-in binding.

DEX: 16 (*Organization*). Excellent reference book as it combines material from various sources.

CON: 16 (*Quantity of the Content*). Plenty of new feats, prestige classes and spells.

INT: 14 (*Quality of Content*). A decent amount of the material is revised versions of old material. The original material is creative.

WIS: 16 (*Options & Adaptability*). Many options for the player.

CHA: 17 (*Look & Feel*). Color art and layout make this a really attractive book, very easy on the eyes.

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.

Introduction

Player's Guide to Faerûn revises a significant amount of material from *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, *Magic of Faerûn*, and *Races of Faerûn*. I don't personally own *MoF* or *RoF*, so I am unable to make the comparison. As far as FRCS think of the *Player's Guide* as an update to the mechanics and a mechanics supplement that is mainly for players. FRCS contains a ton of flavor information to run a game in the Forgotten Realms. I will primarily review *Player's Guide* on its own merits.

Races and Feats (41 pages)

This chapter really expands upon the regions that appear in the FRCS. The authors first sort the

regions by race: human, dwarf, elf, gnome, half-elf, halfling, orc and half-orc, planetouched, and other miscellaneous races. I think this is handy because when people create characters they usually decide upon race and class first, so if I was making a dwarf in the Forgotten Realm then I would check out the Dwarf Regions Table and see the recommended subrace and then be able to narrow down a list of where the dwarf would likely be from and what qualities those dwarves have. The art in this section by Steve Prescott is excellent and it illustrates the differences between the subraces.

As far as feats, they doubled the number of them compared to *FRCS*. The feats here really help to lend flavor to the characters. Some of them are revisions of old feats like Bloodline of Fire or Insidious Magic, while other feats like Dreadful Wrath and Furious Charge are new to me. Dreadful Wrath is pretty restricted in which regions it is available to as it gives the Frightful Presence ability to its possessors. Furious Charge gives you an additional bonus to hit from a charge without an additional penalty. Finally, Knifefighter allows the character to be very good at using light weapons in grappling situations.

Prestige Classes (31 pages)

The old *FRCS* had only 13 prestige classes (PrCs); with v.3.5, three of those PrCs made it into the *Dungeon Master's Guide™*: the Archmage, the Heirophant, and the Red Wizard. The "Over 30 prestige classes" in the hype is misleading because 12 of the PrCs are epic prestige classes which I think that few groups would get use out of - not because they are bad, but because they are epic. Seven of the PrCs are located in the appendix and they require the referencing of either the *Book of Exalted Deeds* or the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

I digress, twenty prestige classes are presented in this chapter:

Arcane Devotee: pious sorcerers and wizards that

devote themselves to a deity.

Divine Champion: generic holy warrior.

Divine Disciple: clerics and druids that become the living embodiment of their patron deity.

Divine Seeker: rogues and rangers that use their skills and stealth to serve their deity.

Evereskan Tomb Guardian: elves who guard the tombs of their ancestors. Somebody's gotta do it.

Eye of Horus-Re: divine casters specialized being through the darkness to combat undead.

Hammer of Moradin: dwarven warriors attuned to the earth and masters at throwing hammers.

Harper Agent: semisecret agent of the semisecret Harpers.

Hathran: the "Witches of Rasheman," a version of a shaman.

Incantrix: masters at using metamagic to manipulate spells indirectly and then directly.

Justicar of Tyr: clerics and paladins that impose the Law of Tyr upon their enemies.

Monk of the Long Death: monk assassins who are obsessed with the macabre aspects of death.

Morninglord of Lathander: clerics of light that combat the undead.

Purple Dragon Knight: knights from Cormyr who inspire their allies.

Runecaster: divine casters who master the use of runes.

Shaaryan Hunter: horse archers.

Shadow Adept: spellcasters that use the Shadow Weave to acquire power

Shadow Thief of Amn: specialist thieves who are members of a Shadow Thieves' Guild.

Spellguard of Silverymoon: wizards who specialize in the defense of Silverymoon.

Zhentarium Spy: agents of the evil Zhentarium that are adept at achieving "deep cover."

As another internet reviewer noticed, both the Evereskan Tomb Guardian and the Spellguard of Silverymoon prestige classes are of limited use to adventuring characters unless the Dungeon Master really makes an effort to "bring the adventure" to the

heroes instead of the characters seeking adventure. As my library of d20 books grows, I'm coming to realize more and more that PrCs are really for the DM and not the player. Prestige classes are a tool for DMs to create non-player characters (NPCs) that are mechanically unique. Keep an eye on this section of Silven for a future article that will address this in greater detail.



For me the Hammer of Moradin, Zhentarium Spy, and Morninglord of Lathander are the brightest spots of the Prestige Class chapter (pun intended). They have great mechanics to back them up. The **Hammer of Moradin** gets the ability to have his thrown hammer return to him as a free action (like the dwarven thrower); he can imbue his hammer with bane against goblins, drow, and eventually giants; he can also slam his hammer against the ground and cause the earth to quake - always a cool ability. The **Morninglord of Lathander** can virtually wield light as a weapon against undead; their levels in the PrC count toward the turning check and they gain ultimate turning abilities such as Greater Turning and Maximize Turning. The really vicious thing about **Zhentarium Spies** is that they can assume cover

identities which give them bonuses to Bluff, Disguise, and Gather Information while using the cover. At 5th level, the spy gets so deep into their cover ID that scrying attempts only reveal the emotions and thoughts of the cover persona and not the persona of the spy. *A Nitpick*: skill points per level are not listed for the Morninglord (I assume it is 2+Int bonus per level).

Domains and Spells (40 pages)

Like *Pantheon and Pagan Faiths* (Mystic Eye Games) has, *Player's Guide to Faerûn* (PGoF) has deity-specific spells that are only available to worshippers of the particular deity. This concept reminds me of the specialty priest from old 2nd Edition AD&D *Faiths and Avatars*; specialty priests had some minor special abilities and they had access to deity-specific spells. PGoF uses the initiate feats from MoF that allow the character to have minor deity-specific abilities and know several deity-specific spells. For example, the Initiate of Cyric gains complete immunity to normal and magical fear and the add the following spells to their cleric list: *Black Talon*, *Dread Blast*, *Skull of Secrets*, *Skull Eyes*, and *Triple Mask* - all of which can only be cast by an Initiate of Cyric. I believe that the initiate feats combined with deity specific spells aids in distinguishing clerics of the different faiths - game mechanics enforcing a certain feel or flavor. I found the deity-specific spells to be interesting and flavorful as a whole, though there were some that seemed underpowered for their spell level.

This chapter also lists what deities grant which domains and in the case of domains that are specific to the Forgotten Realms - and not in the *Player's Handbook*™ - PGoF gives us the granted power of each domain and the domain spells. Interesting enough, the deity specific spells are only available to characters who have taken the appropriate initiate feat - or as the initiate feats say, "You have been initiated into the greatest secrets of (Lathander's) church." I wonder if deity specific domains will come

down the road where only one or two deities have access to a domain, but there are too many intermediate and minor gods in the FR pantheon for them to be exclusive unless they got rid of the wimpy godlings (not likely). One cool thing about *Pantheon and Pagan Faiths* is that the pantheon is focused and usually only one god has a specific domain, though sometimes two gods have a domain. There are sacred and secret domains in P&PF, but I digress. If you want to find out more, read my [preview of Pantheons and Pagan Faiths](#).

But enough of the holy (or unholy) blessings, what about the arcane spells? I counted 42 spells that can be taken by sorcerers or wizards. The arcane spells have a good range of levels but seemed to focus on energy type stuff like electricity and fire. There are some high-powered spells like *Elminster's Effulgent Eputation* and *Eye of Power*. Now, the how's and why's of why Elminster would let a spell like this get out into the public is beyond my grasp, but *Elminster's Effulgent Eputation* allows the recipient to negate a number of spells or spell-like effects that target the recipient directly regardless of the level of the spell. The *Eye of Power* spell functions as an *arcane eye* spell but allows the caster to cast spells of up to 7th level through the eye, but unlike an *arcane eye* the *eye of power* is visible and can be destroyed. If you are playing along at home, then you are right in that both of these spells are 9th level spells.

Magic Items (8 pages)

The Equipment and Magic Items is short but there is something for everyone as the authors included multiple items of every type: from armors to rings to artifacts. The magic item types that have the most items in PGoF are magic weapons, wondrous items, and unique magic weapons. Unique magic weapons are special in that there is only one such item in all of Faerûn. One of the unique items, *Calathangas* would be ideal in the hands of the leader of a gang of wererats as it changes its user into a wererat and

gives the wielder the power to summon rat swarms or a pack of dire rats. While the unique items are cool and useful to have, they are really for the DM to decide where they are and who has them; this is a Player's Guide so the unique items don't quite fit into the concept - though both DMs and players will likely buy this book.

Epic Levels in Faerûn (12 pages)

This chapter presents the following epic prestige classes: Eye of Horus-Re, Hammer of Moradin, Hathran, Incantrix, Justicar of Tyr, Monk of the Long Death, Morninglord of Lathander, Runecaster, Shaaryan Hunter, and Shadow Adept. I did not find these epic PrCs compelling because nearly all of them do not gain new abilities - most of them advance the in existing abilities or gain additional epic level feats. Two other epic PrCs, the Netherese Arcanist and the Spellfire Hierophant, did gain new and interesting abilities but they would be better served as NPCs because of the role of the Netherese and the power of spellfire. 11 new epic feats and 8 new epic spells are also provided.

Cosmology of Toril (26 pages)

I found this chapter to be of dubious value to players. The cosmology describes the plane that each god of the pantheon inhabits and a few other planes in the Realms Cosmology. For players, they can use it to find the patron deity of their character and see what their "heaven" or "hell" afterlife would be like. This can help solidify character concepts as the various afterlife descriptions hammer home the outlook of the character's race and god. This chapter is more for Dungeon Masters looking to have their players adventure and travel across these planes that are closely tied to the Forgotten Realms®. That said, while the material here does not go into great detail, it makes for a decent read and could be useful for higher level games.

Campaign Journal & Appendix (25 pages)

The Campaign Journal gives a synopsis for both of the novels: *Return of the Archwizards* and *the War of the Spider Queen*. It also give DMs a timeline to look at to see when important events in the story occur and *PGoF* provides a half dozen adventure hooks for DMs to use to take advantage of the events in the novels. While this info also is not for players, I think it isn't very harmful for players to see, unless they purposefully try to be in a specific place at a specific time in order to affect the events of the novel. I am personally not a big fan of incorporating novels into actual gameplay because it usually shackles the heroes into a certain role, especially if they are put in the place of the heroes of the story and asked to "Save the World."

The book then loses a bit of its focus in the appendix with material that goes with the *Psionic's Handbook*, *Book of Exalted Deeds* and the *Book of Vile Darkness*. I can't speak to the quality of the *Psionic's Handbook*; however material from both the *BoED* and *BoVD* could definitely spice up the magic-heavy nature of Faerûn and help the DM make evil characters truly vile and good characters truly exalted. Five psionic organizations are presented for a DM to drop into Faerûn and plot hooks are provided with each organization so that you can gradually incorporate psionics into your FR campaign. The cognition thief prestige class is included, but it requires the *Psionic's Handbook* for its use.

Player's Guide to Faerûn has seven prestige classes that are themed to *BoED* and *BoVD*:

Black Blood Hunter: vile lycanthrope servants of the evil beast lord, Malar.

Celebrant of Sharess: pure-hearted seducers that are hedonistic, pious champions of good.

Harper Paragon: an exalted and necessarily good version of the Harper Agent.

Maiden of Pain: vile sadists and masochists of Loviatar, the goddess of pain.

Martyred Champion of Ilmater: these exalted champions persevere through immense suffering

Slime Lord: vile worshippers of Ghaunadar who eventually transform themselves complete to slime. Yuck!

Yathrinshee: vile theurgists who utilize arcane and divine magic to master necromancy.



The mechanics and the flavor of all these prestige classes are superb and the cool thing is that these PrCs are tied into some of the forces and themes of Faerûn. *A Nit Pick:* the Celebrant has a flirtation ability, but the book doesn't say mechanically how that should function.

Conclusion

While the *Player's Guide to Faerûn* seems to lose focus near the end, overall it is an excellent book and is one of the top 3rd edition or later Forgotten Realms® accessories. If you are playing in or running a Forgotten Realms® campaign, you should find this book extremely useful especially for the mechanics that resemble the specialty priests of the old *Faiths and Avatars* book. It's one thing to have your character say, "I'm Samuel, Dawnbringer of Lathander." But, it's an entirely different thing to have that character be able to blast undead with beams of pure sunlight as a Morninglord. **BAM!** The feats and prestige classes and spells are definitely something to sink your teeth into.

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d20 review: Expanded Psionics Handbook

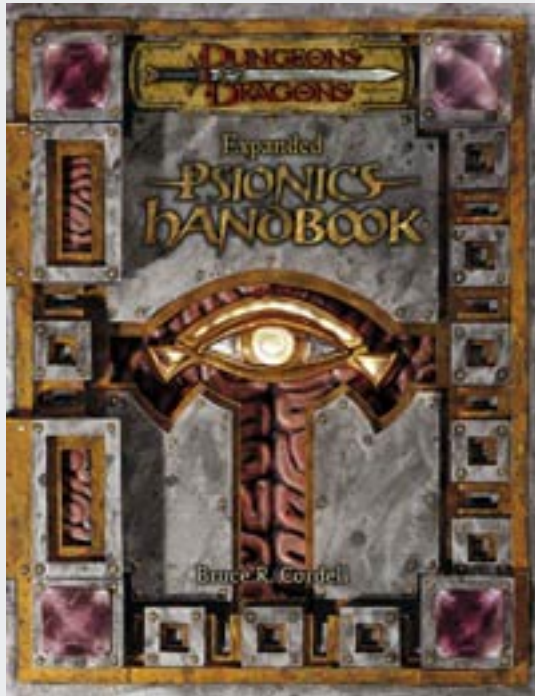
by Lance Kepner

"Expanded Psionics Handbook"

About: 224 pages, hardcover, color interior, \$35.

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast

Review date: 4/26/2004



Reviewer's Bias: The Expanded Psionics Handbook is an anticipated product for me. I have numerous psionic characters in campaigns, and was looking forward to the revision of the 3.0 materials. This is a basic review of the materials as presented. If you are looking for a comprehensive comparison of 3.0 vs. 3.5 psionics, check the d20 section early in May for a complete comparison.

Expanded or Revised?

There are two camps when you talk about the *EPH* (*Expanded Psionics Handbook*). The first camp says that the book is not an expansion of the rules, but a complete revision of them. The second camp argues that while the revision to 3.5 from 3.0 was utterly necessary, the contents expand more than they revise. As usual, I am caught somewhere in between the two camps.

I feel that that the name of the book is a marketing ploy to get people to actually buy the book. Before you all go spouting off, I understand the tactic of naming and product appeal and market audience and all that. But really, doesn't the book just sound more appealing as the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* rather than the *Revised Psionics Handbook*? In any case, Billy S. said once upon a time that 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet'. So let's just take his [word](#) for it and leave the name for what it's worth.

The book, which is both an expansion and revision of the core psionics rules, is a 224-page hardcover written by one of the original 3.0 psionic designers Mr. Bruce R. Cordell. If there's any weight to that name then you know that this guy is all about psionics. So whether you like the revisionist or the expansionist (are we talking about critical theory here or gaming?) mindset, the book will appeal to everyone... except those with Psychic Warriors. Sorry, you pretty much got screwed; but more on that later.

The book is divided 8 chapters with an appendix. The chapters follow your typical supplement format going through races, classes, skills and feats, psionics, powers, prestige classes, psionic items, and monsters. The appendix deals with spells and deities.

The introduction is kept to a small portion of one page

Review snapshot

CLASS: Variant Rules

STR: 16 (*Physical*). Strong, hard cover. Typical WotC binding.

DEX: 14 (*Organization*). Good layout, in logical progression.

CON: 10 (*Quantity of the Content*). Although its 224 pages, much of it is reprint. Same as old book but revised.

INT: 8 (*Quality of Content*). New races, feats, classes, prestige classes are all subpar, nothing even close to a Wizard's book.

WIS: 8 (*Options & Adaptability*). Psionics only, with minor concerns for core system rules. Even this system has bad options in and of itself. Not backwards compatible.

CHA: 16 (*Look & Feel*). Art is great as expected, a redeeming 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.

that is more about psionics in general than anything else. Although there is a small paragraph or two on the need for a revision that reads like a marketing seminar in George Orwell's 1984. Beware of disagreeing with it or you will be reprogrammed.

Chapter One: Races

Jumping right into the book you are confronted with nine new races. Then you realize that four of them aren't really new at all. The nine presented races are the insect-like Dromite, the gray dwarves (Duergar), the mysteriously created Elan, the all-to-popular Githyanki and Githzerai, the monstrosity big Half-Giants, the emotional race of Zoloft users the Maenad, the scary and awesome Thri-Kreen, and the exotic Xeph. But now that you see the list, you are saying, 'hey I already have four of those races' to

which I respond, 'Yup'. In all fairness those races are slightly changed to fit into the psionic mold and are presented in the normal way races are presented in Wizards of the Coast (WotC) books. Each race is also listed with a level adjustment (+0 for those without) for easy reference. All of the races have some sort of inner psionic talent, whether that talent is psi-like abilities or resistances to psionic powers.



The **Dromites** are a genderless insectoid race that are small in size have some keen abilities like scent and an *energy ray* attack. The **Duergar** are the same as they were before but instead of having their two powers as magical abilities, they now possess *enlarge* and *invisibility* as psionic powers. The **Elans** are a unique race of humans that transform themselves psionically into (you guessed it) psionic humans! This change grants them some neat abilities like one of the longest life spans of any race, the ability to go without food or water, and even sleep. The two Gith races make a comeback with the return of the evil **Githyanki** and the mild mannered **Githzerai**. It's nice to have the two of the most psionically-integrated races listed conveniently in the book. The **Half-Giants** are a race of slaves (seeing the same pattern?) that managed to escape and eek out a life in the hot deserts. Perfectly suited for psionic warriors, although they are medium size, they are treated as large for most purposes. The **Maenads** are a strange race that fights with some inner fury that can bubble to the surface and give them rage-like powers. The **Thri-Kreen** also make their return, as they should being another psionically adept race. These guys are great, but you pay for their greatness with a +4 ECL. Anyone who has played a Thri-Kreen monk can attest to that greatness. Again a natural for the book, and its good to see them listed in a nice racial format. The last race, the **Xeph** are exotic speed freaks that come from a dark, far away place and are naturally psionic resilient.

The background and flavor for the races are interesting, but do not jump off the page and scream 'play me'. Most of the abilities are geared towards the race's favored class.

The races also tend not to fit in too well with the concept of standard campaigns. Sure you can drop them in here and there in your world, but generally, unless your world is as psionic rich as magically rich, you might have issues. Generally though, those gripes aside the races chapter isn't a complete waste and if you need to start a new area of your world, or a new world altogether to be complacent with psionics this is a good place to start.

But where are the Illithids? The Blue's? Sure you find them later in the monsters section... but the most psionically important characters in all of the **Dungeons and Dragons** mythos are no where to be seen in the races section. And if they can make baby beholders, they can make baby illithids.

Chapter Two: Classes

As I said in my reviewer's bias, this is not a comprehensive comparison. So I will only give brief details about the changes, and save the long-winded discussion for another article. In the meantime, however, we have four classes presented in chapter 2. The base Psion, the Psychic Warrior, the Soulknife, and the Wilder.

All psionic characters do not cast their 'magic' in the same way as other magic users. Essentially psionics and magic are different. Psionic characters have things called power points and manifest (cast) powers instead of spells. If it barks like a dog, looks like a dog, and acts like a dog... most likely it's a dog. Power points are basically then a spell point system, like magic points or MP from those Final Fantasy games you may have heard about. So right off the bat, you should know that if you've never dealt with psionics before, you have a small learning curve ahead of you. Also, like spells a psionic character can attain bonus power points for high ability scores.

The Psion is the first class up on the chopping block, and its revised list is pretty much the same as before,

except for the following. The base Psion is now the only class, that is there are no more Seers, Nomads, or Telepaths as pure classes. Instead the Psion chooses a discipline (out of 6 choices) at level one, and then has a specific list of powers from which he can choose. He can also learn powers off the general list. Think of it as a cleric taking a domain, but the domain is expanded to include many more spells. The Psion also loses the automatic psicrystal (familiar) that they had in 3.0. Much like a wizard in the *Player's Handbook*, the Psion is the core casting class of the *EPH*. And just for your information the Psion class is more powerful than its 3.0 counterpart.

The next class is the Psychic Warrior. If you remember my comments above 'except those with Psychic Warriors. Sorry, you pretty much got screwed' I was referring to the backwards compatibility of the class. You will be a changed character from 3.0 to 3.5. Wisdom is their key ability for manifesting, they lose some of their abilities, but gain more versatile powers. Many people are divided on the Psychic Warriors, some say they are weak and pretty underpowered (average BAB, 1 good save, 2+ skills, bad skill list, and few powers/power points), other say they are much better and more balanced (psionic feats, great powers, versatile). The class is primarily geared around the powers, and has no unique abilities.

The next class is a prestige class that was in the 3.0 *Psionic Handbook* and turned into a core class for this book. The Soulnife is a class that manifests a blade of pure energy on the end of her hand and has some abilities that focus on that ability. Not really a rogue, not really a fighter, and with no manifesting abilities, the Soulnife is a unique class stuck somewhere in psionic limbo.

The final presented class is the Wilder, a wild and reckless manifester akin to a sorcerer. Although a Wilder gets few powers known but a lot of power points and 9th level powers, some do compare them

to a psionic sorcerer. The Wilder does have some abilities that she can use to enhance her manifesting abilities, but overall I feel there is no benefit in really taking this class over a pure Psion.

The last section of Chapter 2 deals with epic-level psionic characters. The section discusses all things related to running and creating an epic level psionic character. It also contains six epic psionic feats.

Overall chapter 2 is what you would expect. With only four classes it may seem dull, but remember that the base psion is still essentially six classes based on each discipline. I would have liked to see at least one more base psionic character class, but that is just wishful thinking.

Chapter Three: Skills and Feats

There isn't too much in the skills section that is new. The skills listed are autohypnosis, concentration, knowledge psionics, psicraft, and use psionic device. Autohypnosis is the most interesting of the skills, allowing psionic characters to focus their minds to overcome obstacles of all kinds. Such obstacles include checks to ignore caltrop wounds, fear effects, and resist poison to name a few. There are new uses for concentration based on the new ability called the psionic focus, more on that in a bit. The other skills are basically their counterparts in standard D&D, just geared towards psionic intentions.

Now, back to psionic focus. Many people just downright think this supposed 'balancing feature' is pointless. Many also believe it is bad design (as many feats are simply necessary to have a well functioning character). They may be right, no one will know for a while. Essentially the psionic focus works like this: A psionic character needs to focus their mind, and does so using a concentration check. If successful they are now considered focused and do not lose that focus until they get knocked out, fall asleep, or expend it. Keeping your focus is important to keeping certain

feats 'active'. Without the focus the feats do not function. Essentially if you know the 3.0 rules, a focus is equivalent to having reserve power points. Strong feats require you to expend your focus, in which case you must re-focus to gain the benefits of any focus-required feats you may have. It does seem overly complicated and micro-managed, but can be balancing. The focus required and focus expend feats are quite powerful.

In the feats section of chapter 3 there are a lot of feats, more than in the original book. Some from the original book return and some do not. There are four classes of feats presented, general, psionic, metapsionic, and item creation. Without going into great detail my thoughts are varied. Some of the general feats are interesting, but not mirrored in the core books. Many general feats have abilities that negate psionics, which can be problematic because magic counterparts to these feats do not exist. Why are psionics able to be negated when psionics can be rare and magic is more abundant? Many of the psionic feats require different focus states, focused and expend. There are feat combos and chains that seem to pop off the page, and can lead to many interesting character builds. Some feats are absolutely required, like psionic meditation a feat that allows one to re-focus as a move equivalent action.

In general, however, the skills and feats chapter serve as necessary rules in the book. You will probably be impressed with the autohypnosis skill, and with the variety of feats. If you are hoping your favorite 3.0 feat is still around, don't get your hopes up too much.

Chapter Four/Five: Psionics/Powers

Chapter four is all about manifesting powers. This is basically a reprint of the magic casting rules as found in your *Player's Handbook*. It details all the information needed to manifest powers, from manifest time, to displays, ranges, durations, etc.

Most of the information is the same. A few changes along the way make it a quick browse for those familiar with 3.0, namely there is no more power save (1d20+key ability), instead all powers have set DC's like spells (DC 10+spell level+ key ability modifier). The chapter does go into some other detail in section on how to run psionic campaigns, sections on magic vs. psionic differentiation, and psionic creatures.

Chapter five is a listing of powers. The general psionic list is presented and then there are lists for each discipline, and finally a list for the psychic warrior. A power is listed with an ^ if augmentable.

Augmentable powers are interesting and probably the most important addition to the new system. Many of the powers were condensed from lesser, medium, greater powers, to one single augmentable power. An augmentable power allows the manifester to choose to spend more power points to enhance the power's effect. In most cases this includes increasing the duration, changing the monster types the power can affect, increasing the range or effect, and some other miscellaneous actions.

The power's are also listed individually as one would expect. They saved some space by referencing the *Player's Handbook* instead of reprinting the spell as a power. The necessary information is still supplied. The powers are varied and unique to psionics, and many of the old powers were kept as well.

Chapter Six: Prestige Classes

Talk about dropping the ball. I don't know if they didn't want to re-print a lot of Dragon material or what, but generally, the nine presented prestige classes are bland, uninteresting, and in most cases completely worthless.

Their worthlessness comes from many PrC's lack of manifesting abilities (while still trying to remain focused on manifesting). This could be a sign of

powerful and well-balanced core psionic classes, or a lackluster approach to the prestige classes. Take your pick.



The first PrC is the Cerebremancer that is the mystic theurge of psionics, combining arcane and psionic casting/manifesting abilities. The Elocater is somewhat interesting if you're a multiclassed

Soulknife/Psychic Warrior or Psion. This PrC tries to focus on speed and opportunity rather than brute force. The Fist of Zuoken is pretty pointless. You basically need to be a monk to qualify, and when you do you lose all the great high-level monk abilities for some meaningless manifesting abilities. Maybe its for NPCs? (weren't all PrC's NPCs in the first place?) The Illithid Slayer is actually one of the better PrC's. Slightly modified it would be a good Psion hunter in general. The Metamind tries to be the master of sudden psionic power, but with its every-other approach to manifester levels, a pure psion is better. A Psionic Uncarnate is an interesting concept, but by the time the PrC becomes interesting, you are far behind the power curve. Powers also can emulate this PrC enough to make it unworthy to take. The Pyrokinetisist is another example of this lackluster approach. You want to set things on fire, that's nice and a Pyrokinetisist can do that, without gaining manifester levels of course. Again a psion can take more powerful fire-like powers and be as good, or better. The Thrallherd is a very interesting class, and is pretty useful, but contradicts itself to make it pretty much useless. The point of the class is to have thralls, but you cannot have both thralls and cohorts, although you can have followers. The Thrallherd also gains some good charm-like abilities, but again pretty good for multiclassing psions, but a pure Psion with the telepath discipline can do much better. Finally the Warmind is a weird version of the Psychic Warrior and may only appeal to a few.

Chapter Seven/Eight: Psionic Items/ Monsters

Chapter seven deals with psionic items. There are less uniquely psionic items than before, but they do prove powerful and interesting, as well as generally balanced. There are rules for psionic armor and weapons, which have interesting abilities but suffer from "critical hit mania". Many of the weapon abilities only function on critical hits, and are otherwise limited in power, but prove to have higher than normal

market bonuses. In a pure psionic campaign they would be balanced, but in a mixed campaign, many might not shell the extra cash for abilities that won't function often. There are also cognizance crystals that store power points kind of like pearls of power. Dorjes are psionic wands, and power stones are like scrolls. Psionic tattoos return along with the psionic universal (wondrous) items. In addition a new kind of item was added, the psicrown that is a headband like item that holds specific powers and acts as a psionic staff. Cursed items and artifacts are also discussed at the end of the chapter.

The last chapter deals with psionic monsters. Many of them are reprinted and updated from the 3.0 book, and some are new. I have mixed feelings about the addition of the core races listed in chapter one being duplicated and listed in chapter eight. I may find it useful, and I may find it lazy. I won't know until I have to use the book as a DM and reference those races. A new subtype, the psionic subtype has been added and rules for converting some spell-like ability monsters into psi-like ability psionic monsters are present. Astral constructs also seemed to get a big boost in the new revision with more abilities, better abilities sooner, and higher attack bonuses with construct traits. Sample astral constructs in expanded block format are listed for convenience. It seems when flipping through there are less monsters, and you'd be right. Every other listing seems to be a core class already listed in chapter one. And while Blue's and Mind flayer's are listed they were not even expanded upon! I mean come on, talk about dropping the ball. There could have been a whole flayer society developed (like Gauth beholders) but nope.

The appendix deals with new spells, both arcane and divine, that interact with psionics, as well as details two new deities with psionic ties.

Conclusion

As I discussed in my opening comments, the book is neither a true expansion nor a true revision, but a mixture of both. This mixing of focuses in the R&D department has shown through on this product, as it comes off as raw and unrefined. Many issues could have been explained or expanded upon by "designer notes" sidebars. It seems that many areas of the book (monsters, prestige classes, core classes) were simply glossed over and taken from other sources, meshed together hastily, and sent to the printer. The artwork is mostly carried over, but what is new is typical WotC full color yumminess.

Should you buy this book for a MSRP of \$34.99? That depends. If you play psionics heavily, and are OK with no backwards compatibility with your 3.0 psionic characters, then you might want to pick it up just for the sake of playing with the latest rules. If you are a hardcore 3.0 psionics demon, you will most likely either be overjoyed at the changes or hateful of them in every way possible. Revision for the sake of profit is abhorrent, but I don't think that was the ultimate intent behind this product. I will say that what I thought to be Wizard's true attempt to officially adopt psionics has done nothing but reinforce my belief that psionics is still the bastard child of the D&D universe. The treatment this product received is proof enough.

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d20 modern review : Urban Arcana

by Melissa Piper

"Urban Arcana"

Authors: Eric Cagle, Jeff Grubb, David Noonan, Bill Slavicsek, Stan!

Publisher: Wizards of the Sword Coast

Review date: 03/28/2004



Reviewer's Bias: When I bought Wizard's Urban Arcana last summer, I was hoping that it would give me ideas for a new modern campaign I was starting. I wanted to play a drow in the modern era, and Urban Arcana looked to be the perfect resource. In case you have not heard by now, Urban Arcana is a supplement to the d20 Modern Core Rulebook that introduces races such as elves, gnomes, and dwarves into the modern

world. The original d20 Modern rules did not account for other races aside from humans, leaving many role-players wondering why d20 Modern would be worth their time. I set out to find out if Urban Arcana itself was worth a d20 Modern player's time.

From the Back Cover

"Explosive action and epic adventure fill the modern world when fantasy and reality collide. In *Urban Arcana*, heroes armed with swords, spells, shotguns, and cell phones dive headlong into trouble with monsters, mobsters, cabals, and corporations. Take a deep breath, and discover the realms of fantasy within the gritty shadows of the modern world."

Introduction

Wizards of the Swords Coast's *Urban Arcana* is a campaign setting whose concept was first introduced in the *d20 Modern Core Rulebook*. Basically, the idea behind *Urban Arcana* is that the familiar non-human races from D&D, including elves, gnomes, halflings, and dwarves, are now in our world. They are the owners of clubs, bars, and corporations. They hold positions in government, churches, and the military. Worst of all, many humans do not even realize that these races, known throughout the book as Shadow, have set up their homes in our world.

Urban Arcana was a welcome addition to the still-young d20 Modern RPG. It introduced the races familiar to those fans of the standard D&D to the modern world. It also presented more advanced classes, such as the Techno Mage, Archaic Weaponsmaster, and Mystic, as well as four prestige classes. While the advanced classes progress up to 10th level, the prestige classes only advance up to 5th. I saw this as a disappointment, especially since there are no defined rules for progression past the 10th level

Review snapshot

CLASS: Campaign Setting

STR: 14 (*Physical*). Corners frayed after little use. Although it is a hardback, the cover is made from a softer material that beds and tears easily.

DEX: 15 (*Organization*). Items are generally easy to find through the table of contents, and similar items are grouped together well. Could be improved by the addition of an index of tables.

CON: 16 (*Quantity of the Content*). 316 pages. Contains a plethora of information about race statistics, magic items, and feats.

INT: 16 (*Quality of Content*). All 316 pages are loaded with useful information on how to successfully add new races to your campaign. Contains information for both GMs and players.

WIS: 13 (*Options & Adaptability*). Does not provide for various options for handling the new races. Provides theories on why the non-human races exist and expects you to follow one of these provided theories.

CHA: 12 (*Look & Feel*). Cover art and overall layout and modern theme of the book are nice, but the inside artwork subtracts from the appeal. Some pages contain great artwork, while others contain works of questionable 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.

of any class as of yet. Classes aside, there are several other aspects of the book that I enjoy, and others that bother me to no end.

Why You'll Love This Book

As mentioned, *Urban Arcana* makes new advanced and prestige classes available to the player. There are twelve new advanced classes, most of which center around the combination of technology and magic. Most

of the classes were developed for use by characters of basic classes with more than just brawn. Advanced classes, such as the Shadowjack, require six ranks in computer use and craft (electronic or mechanical). The ability to handle a gun is not required for all but one of the advanced classes, giving players more variety and a chance to be imaginative throughout the campaign. The four prestige classes (archmage, artificer, ecclesiarch, and holy/unholy night) require the use of magic and are not suited non-spellcasters.



Along with the introduction of new races, *Urban Arcana* supplies new feats and spells that were not seen in the previous book. This campaign setting also introduces the concept of "Initial Feats," which are feats that can only be taken when a character is first generated. For example, you can choose to give your character the Divine Heritage Feat, which grants three extra divine spells (orisons) to the level 1 character. This feat is great for level-1 aasimar characters who need a boost with the quantity of spells he/she can cast. Magical heritage, another initial feat, is the mage's equivalent to the Divine Heritage feat. With this feat, you are granted the ability to choose three additional cantrips at level 1.

The spells that were added with *Urban Arcana* were developed to affect modern-day gadgets, such as bullets, cars, and computers. With the use of this book, your arcane spellcaster can now cast spells that attach themselves to emails like viruses or teleport your friends via the Internet. Spellcasters can also cast variances on old spells, such as summoning phantasmal limousines or enchanting bullets. The normal spells from D&D, such as Cure Light Wounds and Lighting Bolt, are still present.

I very much enjoyed how rules were set to pretty much keep all races in the party at the same level at any given time. For instance, one member of your group may choose to play as a good old halfling, while another may choose to play as a bugbear. At first glance, it may appear that the bugbear has a distinct advantage over the gnome. But a glance at the Shadowkind Level Adjustment table will show that this is not so. A GM who follows the table will end up with a second-level bugbear that is equivalent in level to a fourth-level halfling. The d20 Modern rules account well for keeping the balance of party members by continuously making sure that no PC race has a distinct advantage over another.



The new magic items that were added to the d20 Modern rules in *Urban Arcana* are a welcome addition. These items have the opportunity to add humor to your game that members of your group will certainly enjoy. For example, you wouldn't laugh at the narcissistic gnome who was given the Bad Hair Day Clip as a birthday present? And who wouldn't enjoy owning a Trench Coat of Useful Items, where any patch on the coat can be torn off and used as cash, a fire extinguisher, or a cell phone? Many of the Wondrous Items in *Urban Arcana* are more humorous than serious, but you can find Potions of Vehicle Handling and tattoos of spell resistance in the book as well. There are even special swords, such as the Ghost Touch Cutlass, for those fans who prefer the weapons of the olden-days.

Urban Arcana is useful to both players and GMs. While players will find the stats for races and advanced classes useful for character development, GMs will find the Adventures section a great help. The Adventures section provides GMs with pre-planned one-time and ongoing campaigns that will help the aspiring GM develop his/her own ideas for his/her own campaign. The book also contains a section that gives hints about where you can look to come up with your own ideas and what you can use as props to aid to creative GMing. Over half of the book consists of information for GMs, even though players will find the book useful as well.

Why You'll Hate This Book

Even though I enjoyed the time I spent looking through *Urban Arcana*, I have several gripes about the layout and the concept behind the book. First of all, the entire premise of *Urban Arcana* is that all the non-human races came into our world through a mystical source called "Shadow." The book gives possible ways that you can incorporate this fact into your own Modern campaign. One suggestion is that somehow, the races during the D&D time were sucked in through the Shadow and were transported

into our world. Another theory concludes that these races were in a completely different dimension, and that somehow these Shadow portals appeared and transported the other races from their world to ours. All are interesting theories, but none of them seem to account for what I base a modern campaign around as a GM; the fact that these races were always a part of our world, living side-by-side with humans. I always saw the D&D era as the past, and today's modern era was just the future of the D&D times. Therefore, why are we, according to how the book is set up, supposed to make special rules about how the other races came to live with the humans? There is even a special advanced class, called the Shadowhunter, which is specially made to hunt creatures of Shadow. I cannot find a place in this book that accounts of the fact that non-human races were always here beside us, and this was a great disappointment to me.

Although the new prestige classes are interesting, they do not provide many options for players who are not magically inclined or who are specialists in using weapons. The prestige classes in *Urban Arcana* were specifically geared toward magic users, leaving other classes out in the cold. Players who want their characters to become masters in their field must continue to take levels in other advanced classes, or wait until more prestige classes are developed in the future.

Another gripe that I have with the *Urban Arcana* book is the artwork. Some of the drawings are decent, but others are below what I would see as the standard for any book published by Wizards. The art in D&D books, such as the Monster Manual and the Player's Handbook, far surpass the artwork of the d20 Modern books. I understand that Wizards is trying to integrate the feel of modern comic books into their

own books, but the *Urban Arcana* artwork does not even come close to that of the top comic books on the market. That's not to say that there isn't any good art in the entire book. Some of the best art is contained in the section on organizations. Overall, in my opinion, the Modern books would look much better with the same style of art that is used in the D&D books.

Conclusion

Urban Arcana retails at stores for \$39.95 in the United States. I picked my copy up on eBay, but I would highly recommend this book if you want to play a modern campaign with your favorite races in it. I don't recommend it solely on the basis that it is the only book of its type for modern, because there is some worthwhile material contained inside. If you are a modern GM that is looking to add your favorite races and new magic items to your campaign, the *Urban Arcana* is the book for you. With this book, you will never be at a loss for races for your players to use.

If you are new to the d20 Modern setting and are just trying to learn the rules, then you may want to lay off purchasing *Urban Arcana* until you are comfortable to the system. *Urban Arcana* contains a vast amount of information that may become overwhelming to new GMs. It is also an add-on to the *d20 Modern Core Rulebook*, so knowing the original rules is necessary before adding this campaign on top of the rules.

Overall, *Urban Arcana* accomplished its goal of introducing ways to integrate non-human races into modern campaigns. It provides a brave new world for your characters to exist in, and adds that extra flare that will make your campaigns interesting and exciting for everyone.

Where to Buy

You can buy this product at a discount at our retail partner FRP Games here:

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=1873&ref=sil

Comment on this article online at this URL:

► <http://www.silven.com/modern.asp?case=show&id=272>

The City of Thralassan

Cartographers Index : Map ID 12

This city was once a small fiefdom, but in the last 100 years has bustled into a growing metropolis. The Thromos River and surrounding rich farmlands can be credited for most of the city's recent success. The city serves as a midway point between the newly established trade routes from the Cirocita sea and the capital city. It is also the intersection of three major highways—The Wayfarers Road to the north, the Old Thane Highway to the west, and the King's Road to the south. It is in Thralassan that merchant vessels and caravans can restock their supplies, travelers can relax at a fine inn, and visitors from abroad can sample some of the local fare.

The innermost wall protects the castle, where the Lady Vegnal makes her residence. She rules with a firm yet fair hand, and has profited greatly from the established businesses and trade. Lady Vegnal's grandfather, Garis Vegnal, saw to the building of the city walls to protect the city from troublesome raids. Since then, the city has expanded even beyond the walls and across the river as new merchants and individuals looking for lucrative opportunity call Thralassan their home.

Items of note within the city include seven fine eateries, the Golden Chalice, The Captain's Table, and Karakas Fine Feasts. There are twelve inns of varying quality, the most prestigious of note being the The Bow and Bowl and The Featherdove. The most famous inn is a middle-class establishment called The Rusty Bolt which hosts world-famous bards and traveling troupes on their indoor stage.

Thralassan's exports include fine hickory and maple woods from the nearby forests, seventeen different varieties of fine wines grown in the surrounding farmland areas, and a special form of blue-clay pottery made from the clay dug from the banks of the Thromos.

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.

Cartographers Index : Map ID 11
The City of Thrlassan



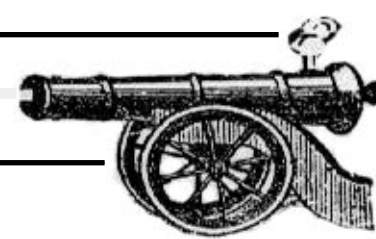
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The City of Thralassan





The Fodder Canon

Serving the City of Silven for over 1,000 Scribes!



Fodder Canon Exclusive: Annual Conglomerate Meeting Ends in Sparks!

By Moss Willowwhite

We all know about it—the annual meeting of the Conglomerate, the inventor's guild that spans the continent. Only a city as great as Silven is unlucky enough to host each year's annual event. Each year, hundreds and hundreds of inventors and those more magically inclined bring their best creations and compete to capture the hearts of the judges. Every year, the residents complain about the gnomes running underfoot and the city streets being clogged with inventors selling mechanical mirrors, ghosts of goop and magical trinkets. And every year, something goes terribly, terribly wrong.

This year was no exception. In a brilliant display of ingenuity and stupidity, the famed Orph Maloney revealed his newest invention—the fabulous mechanical dragon golem! Impervious to all physical and magical attacks, it was truly a sight to behold. During the demonstration Orph and apprentices, hoping to appease the crowd's cries, impress the judges and their boost own egos, threw sticks and stones at the beast and pummeled it with their best line of spells. The creature remained unscathed. The judges were impressed and declared Oprh Maloney the winner for the 17th year in a row!

As the crowds were cheering for Orph, the dragon had apparently gotten fed up with all of the magical attacks and began blasting the bleachers with electric bolts. Your own Fodder Canon reporter, Dak Tamble himself, who is apparently not as quick as we all thought, was damaged by the blow and had to be taken to the local church for healing. Meanwhile, yours truly skillfully dodged the blasts and followed

the beast to bring our delightful readers the entire tale. Orph began screaming orders wildly at it but the dragon paid no heed. Apparently, while Orph had created the mechanical dragon golem to be the ultimate fighting machine, he forgot the "off button."

And so, after snatching up a scantily clad half-elf in one of its claws, the dragon began its rampage through the city of Silven. First hit was the meeting hall itself, where a large band of adventures from the crowd, who apparently did not pay attention to the demonstration, did their best to engage the beast and stop its pillage. But since the mechanical dragon golem was immune to all of their attacks, it simply blasted them with bolts and continued south to the market district of the city.

Crashing through vendors booths and carts stuffed with wares, the dragon dropped the cute half-elf in favor of a more solid hostage—Garik Stonebalm, the local blacksmith. With hammer still in hand, Garik was grabbed through the roof of his shop and carried about the market district while the creature did its worst. Garik could be heard throwing out a long line of dwarven insults (which I am not at liberty to print here) to the beast throughout the ordeal.

Next the beast roamed to the seaport, still with the dwarf in hand, and proceeded to jump from ship to ship in the harbor, blasting any sailors or creatures that moved. Even the seagulls were not free from the dragon's jolting blasts of energy. All the while, your daring reporter followed hot on its heels in pursuit.

At this point, Orph and his group of apprentices caught up to the beast and were ready to put their plan into action. From atop the nearby Freddie's Fish Market, Orph bellowed at the creature, "Stop Mechanical Dragon Golem! I am your master!" The

dragon turned from the ship it was in the process of tearing apart, leapt up onto the building, and blasted all within range. Orph and compatriots scattered to avoid the jolt and think up a new plan.

The mechanical dragon golem proceeded to the crossroads in the center of the city of Silven, where a local group of thirty or so singing goblins had gathered to practice. At the sight of the dragon, the goblins began shouting cries of disbelief and protesting the dragon's intrusion because "they had rights too!" They were quick to quiet when the dragon blasted them with electricity. As the remaining two goblins geared up for what was sure to be a glorious fight, the dragon froze in place. Not a gear moved, save the dwarf, who was wildly kicking and tinkering his hammer off of the metal beast's claws. The two goblins began to cheer wildly, screaming 'Good for Goblinz! Wes Winz!' while the rest of the estranged citizens of Silven came out of their hiding holes to take a better look at the beast. Orph Maloney could be heard muttering from amidst the crowd, "Should have used Energizer."

And so, the Mechanical Dragon Golem to this day still remains frozen in place at the crossroads. The mayor originally demanded the dragon be removed from the spot, but protests by the local goblins, and pressure from the Conglomerate chapter has ensured that the Mechanical Dragon Golem be declared a city monument. We are certainly looking forward to next year's events and the trouble they bring!

The Fodder Cannon is a monthly humor section by Lance Kepner and Dana Driscoll. Readers are encouraged to contribute their own amusing shorts. Send to adriayna@yahoo.com.

Adventurers Disrupt Peace

Four adventurers arrived in the city of Silven on Tuesday at 2:34 in the afternoon says city gate guard Darvin Hamlin. Hamlin states, "They were rude, arrogant and haughty, like they were kingly or something. I informed them that Silven worked differently. They still refused searching and peace bonding. I went to blow the whistle and poof, they vanished into thin air."

At 3:45 that same afternoon a mysterious plague afflicting the city's chickens and elderly was just as mysteriously cured.

At 4:56, just four minutes before his lycanthropy would become permanent, resident wolf-man Wild Willy was touched by one of the aforementioned adventurers and stripped of his curse.

Later that evening three domestic altercations in the local tavern occurred at 6:12, 7:08, and 10:43.

At 1:26 the next morning, in the deep of night, the adventurers were seen fleeing the residence of Silven's own Ima Bhadhuy. Ima later appeared in the city jailhouse with a note reading 'AKA Bhighbhad Evalghuy'.

If this utter lawlessness and disrespect for the fine community of Silven Crossroads continues the citizens will demand recompense. Until further notice the Mayor has issued a writ making it unlawful and punishable under threat of death for an adventurer to set foot in Silven Crossroads.

Points from Poot: An Advice Column by Poot Fenbottle

Dear Poot,

My son has dreams of becoming a hero—a blasted adventurer! He practices outside with makeshift weapons when he should be plowing the fields and

tending the cattle. My husband has attempted to knock sense into the boy, but with each new adventuring party that comes through our small village, the boy only worsens! What can be done to dissuade him from this path?

Signed, Desperate

Dear Desperate,

Some people are meant to be farmers, some are meant to be adventurers. Think of the glory, prestige and coinage that could be his. Adventuring is a fine career; even I took it up for quite a time. A mother has every right to worry about her son's future, however! If you really want to dissuade him, send him to "help out" in one of the nearby gnomish villages. Chances are, the gnomes will drive him crazy with thousands requests for assistance in trivial matters that he'll become overwhelmed and give up adventuring all together. And if he survives the gnomes, there is no stopping him anyways, so why bother!

Dear Poot,

One of my traveling companions stinks. It's not so bad when we are on the road, but when we end up sharing the last room at the inn, the stench is unbearable. What can I do?

Signed, Choking

Dear Choking,

Have you talked to your companion about his problem? Perhaps confronting him and talking is the best solution. Asking him to bathe or change his clothes could do wonders for the stench. If it's more of an inherited odor because of his lineage, however, then soap and a change of socks is not going to cut it. In that case, few magic items or a cantrip or two may save the day. Also available is a small magical box with sweet-smelling powder you could sprinkle on objects or people. Good luck!

Obituaries:

Dug, Loyal Hound. Died in the kobold attack on the Hamlet of Smelie Fiet. Will be sorely missed by his master, Ganome Gnublinking.

Buhik, Terig, Huk, Fukuq, Zikg, Buckneg, Pogben, Chigh, Namming, Way, Humg, Kugun, Cjkmuk, Quinkjg, Pikgnum, Hubgnm, Trumdr, Giek, Mung and Ugruyu. Singger Goblinz and Goblin Friends. Killed bye da Golum Draegun. Uder goblinz will mis dem.

Garli Tyrnblade, Petty Thief. Killed by the Mechanical Dragon Golem. We will miss her but not her mouth.

Classifieds

Lost: Guk the Troll. Will respond to "Guk" and "Big Guy." Guk is about 10' tall, dark green in color, wears a smelly loincloth, and often says, "Guk smash humans! Guk smash good!" If spotted, do not attempt to engage. Contact Scratch the Beggar at the Mill inn with any information.

For Sale: Suit of Banded Mail Armor. Fits a large human. Other than a few dents and some dried blood, in excellent condition.

Wanted: Adventurers willing to face danger. Yes that's right folks! Step right up and sign up to go on a raid to the southern goblin caves! You keep all that you find and rid the world of vermin.

Wantd: Addventurerses. NEEDED to difend are caves frum da nastie human raders. Will pay in reel coper peises and stoin stuffs. See Guthu da Goblin at da Fish Maerket. Gob!

For Sale: One Potion. I have no clue what it does but its magic. In a silver stoppered bottle with pink liquid. Price negotiable.

Editorial

Welcome, lovers of freedom, to the first issue of the *Prompeldia Post*. Under the current city administration, we are forced to compile and print this newspaper under conditions of strictest secrecy. Until the injustices have been done away with, and the government recognizes the benefits of a free press, we shall continue to publish the **truth** from a hidden location.

The *Promeldia Post* promises to bring you all the latest news from near and far. Our revolutionary system, relying on a combination of hard-hitting investigation from foreign correspondents and strong divination magic, makes us the most cutting edge and knowledgeable newspaper in the whole of the Young Kingdoms. To begin with, let us take a look at the rot which lies at the core of the current city administration: that notorious halfling, Gremply Slivers.

"Mayor" Slivers, the biggest thief in the city, has done it again! Another feeble attempt to legitimise his reign, when no-one has forgotten the means by which he came to power. This consort of hobgoblins should stick to what he does best, robbing innocents blind and stabbing peaceable folk in the back. Perhaps when we have a proper taxation system instead of a glorified protection racket, we can once again feel pride in our city. Until then, Prompeldia belongs to the thieves, the slavers and the rest of the scum.

The Promeldia Post calls upon the King in Eldor to reclaim this city, and our honour.

-Editor X

And now, all the big news from across the land.

Kalamar™ : Sword of Kings - Recovered?

BET KALAMAR: Chaos has broken out in Bet Kalamar, as a palace leak revealed that the location of the legendary Sword of Kings has been found. The blade, which dates back to Theodorus I, disappeared many years ago under mysterious circumstances. Details are sketchy, but a full investigation was allegedly launched within hours of the story's breaking, headed by Emperor Kabori's personal diviner Shifan.

Members of the notorious Namir family are assisting him in his enquiries, and whatever the outcome of this investigation, heads are certain to roll. "Rumours" Shifan was quoted as saying, "Idle tavern talk. No weapon will bring down the power of Kabori in the foreseeable future". This comment was presumably in relation to the ancient prophecy that the wielder of the Sword of Kings will dethrone Kabori, taking his place.

Meanwhile, in the streets of Bet Kalamar, people seem to be running scared. The Sword of Kings long served as a symbol of the might of Theodorus and his line, and its possible return to Bet Kalamar is seen as a powerful omen of change. Locals have been spotted glancing nervously at the sky, and viewing people they once saw as friends with a suspicious eye. According to locals, the civic economy has suffered from this loss of faith almost immediately, as more people choose to hoard their silver instead of carousing and gambling. Our correspondent was directed to the "Sleeping Dragon Inn" for more information on the impact of this tale on the gaming industry, but sadly was unable to find it.

Brandobia: Local Businesswoman Accused of Demihuman Smuggling

PREMOLEN: Local businesswoman Helga Minstren (43) has been embroiled in the centre of a controversy this month, standing accused of demihuman smuggling. Demihumans are forbidden from entering the city of Premolen, where Minstren runs an equipment store for adventurers wishing to test their

The Prompeldia Post is a newspaper from the world of Kenzer & Co's Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. It is written entirely in character, from the point of view of an editor and publisher in the town of Prompeldia. The reporters from the paper are entrenched in various locales around the continent, from where they report back to the mysterious Editor X (who grates under the thumb of a crimelord mayor) through an undisclosed system involving divination and teleportation magic.

The stories may not always be accurate (due to the vast distances and general unreliability of magic, sources and reporter bias), but hopefully they will sell the editor enough papers to keep in business.

If there is anything you'd like to see reported in the Prompeldia Post, or if you have a story to break to the readers of that city, please send in on to Shane Cubis at rubikcubis@bigpond.com He'll forward it on to Editor X at his earliest convenience.

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www.kenzerco.com)

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mettle against any of the nearby dungeons. The city guard were tipped off by a paladin of Brovadol, who heard "the animalistic chittering of the lower species" emanating from behind Helga's counter. Further investigation revealed a concealed trapdoor, under which were found a group of unwashed gnomes, staring up in slackjawed wonder. Minstren has denied knowledge of their existence, claiming that "they must have burrowed their way in with badgers or somesuch". A spokesman for the Premolen city guard have reported that they find Helga's knowledge of gnomish connections to badgers highly suspicious.

The gnomes are being held for further questioning, after which they will be desexed and released into the wild.

Svimohzia: Elven Prince Seeks Ancient Idol in Vohven Jungle

Atavius, heir to the elvish throne of Japethania, has mounted an expedition into the deep of Vohven Jungle in search of an idol that once belonged to his great grandfather. The idol, known as the Shimzei Verdun, was allegedly stolen by anti-human separatists during a minor civil war centuries ago. Upon hearing of the idol's current location, Atavius put together a small group of fellow explorers to accompany him. These intrepid investigators include his political advisor Versus and childhood friend Delphinus, a Moonknight of the church of Shimz. When asked about what he thought the chances of recovering the Shimzei Verdun were, Atavius is reported to have grinned and said "We'll be back by [Mid-Season Harvest], laden down with riches!" Witnesses said Versus seemed notably less optimistic, although he maintained an air of loyalty to his charge. Prompeldia Post correspondent Ibus Canesh has opted to join the party as an embedded journalist, swearing to report all that he sees with strict impartiality. Atavius has welcomed Canesh, promising him a 5% share of all treasure found if he will bear the torches. Canesh is considering the offer, and whether it would represent a conflict of interest.

Atavius has previously explored a number of exotic locations, including the Cave of Doom, the City of

Black Lightning and Giant's Cloud, where he picked up his fashionable set of angelic wings. More news of this most recent foray into the unknown will be delivered in the *Prompeldia Post* as it happens.

Reanaaria Bay: Gnoll Incursion Brutally Crushed

An incursion of gnolls in Geanavue was shortlived last month as militia forces, including a pair of off-duty stone giant soldiers, drew up and crushed the humanoids in a lightning manoeuvre. The gnolls launched their raid from a base north of the Keenoa Tors, where they have apparently been lying in wait for several weeks. In the face of veteran defenders, the gnolls routed. The ringleaders of the group scattered, evading capture in what has been called "the only failing of the Geanavue response". Dwarven commander 'Rocky' Stonerock is confident that the gnoll leaders will be brought in soon for questioning and possible execution.

Gnolls have long been a difficulty in the area, a problem stemming back hundreds of years. This most recent attack may be a sign that they have acquired a central leader, or it may just be another inexplicable action from the barbaric humanoids. Whatever the case, Commander Stonerock is recommending swift retaliation, claiming that he will "hunt these dog-headed beasts to the ends of the earth". Lord Haar has issued a statement calling for calm. "This was an isolated incident. Geanavue has nothing to fear from uncivilised monsters". He went to to praise the efficiency of the militia response.

Gossip and Rumours

As a special feature, the *Prompeldia Post* offers a few interesting tidbits. We have excised the names of the relevant parties, but please do not allow that to stop you guessing!

- Which high-ranking foreign general was seen consorting with an orcish maiden whilst on campaign in the region?
- Which stumpy mayor is rumoured to prefer wine to women?
- Which acclaimed bard has a self-playing lute? "No talent here"!
- It seems a certain priest has fallen out of favour with her deity, after a night of debauchery. Or was the chastity the problem???

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