

The Silven

# Trumpeter

The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

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August 19-22, 2004  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Indiana Convention Center

# 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](mailto:adriayna@yahoo.com)

## Letters to the Editor

Dear *Trumpeter*,

Thanks for the cool mag. I've been reading it for a few months now and look forward to new issues. I want to comment on the editor's note from the June edition of the *Trumpeter*. While I see what you are trying to say about the rules getting in the way of a good game, I don't think you should forget how important the rules are to a game. The rules can hamper game play, but without them, we really don't have a gaming system now do we? Furthermore, don't some gamers like to role-play and other gamers just like to be powerful? You shouldn't simply assume everyone who plays the game is more interested in role-playing than creating an awesome and powerful character.

Thanks,

Tom Windhull

Hi Tom,

*My intention with that editor's note wasn't to discredit those individuals who enjoy creating powerful characters but rather remind everyone one that the point of role-playing (or at least, the point as I see it!) is to get into a character and play out that character's actions. The point is NOT to focus on whether the grappled creature loses his dexterity bonus to other attackers or a thousand other rules-related issues. These things simply allow for combat and role-play to be resolved in a systematic way but shouldn't be the only thing that your game focuses on. Sure we all want characters that aren't weaklings, but we also want characters that are interesting and flavorful.*

--Editor

## The Episode vs. the Saga

With the advent of summer conventions and the summer releases of the hottest new CRPG games, an interesting question arises – episodic games or a continuing saga? This question is perhaps not so different from the other great questions of our time: the chicken or the egg? Kirk or Piccard? Coke or Pepsi? When we think of an episodic game, we think of the same characters getting into smaller “episodes” or quests that usually do not relate to each other or playing characters at a “one-shot” game session. The saga, on the other hand, is a long, usually complex story arc that continues throughout the RPG and somehow directly involves all characters. Most long-term campaigns and CRPG games fall somewhere in between these two—they have some non-essential and non-related quests but the bulk of the game directly follows the main plot.

I bring this up because recently I was chatting with some gamers at a small get-together and a large argument ensued over the episode vs. the saga in game-play. Before I get into the specific argument at hand, it is interesting to note that most gamers I spoke to do prefer the longer campaign with a related series of quests or events. Side quests are fine occasionally, but a larger string of unrelated quests with nothing to tie the quests together are generally not as appealing as an overarching story.

Back to the argument at hand. Some gamers, while they went to conventions, refused to play in those “one-shot” episodic-type games that consist of the major bulk of the convention gaming experience. The argument was that it “defeated the purpose” of role-playing altogether because a single session game (especially in the 4 hour slot) did not lend itself well to character development and

long role-playing scenes. The counter-argument to this is that convention gaming is inherently different than your standard once-a-week kind of deal. Convention gaming is for socializing, trying out new systems, and meeting new people. Sure role-playing has a part of that, but it isn't necessarily the main focus.

When it comes down to it, I won't deny that I do enjoy my weekly gaming sessions. At the same time though, I've had some of my best gaming experiences (even role-playing experiences) at conventions in those “one-shot” games. So for those role-playing purists out there, I say to give the convention gaming a shot. It will be a fun experience and in a way, a unique and challenging role-playing opportunity.

With the heat of the summer comes the advent of summer gaming conventions (at least for the northern hemisphere!). In the following months you can expect to see full coverage of the major gaming expos and conventions at the *Silven Crossroads* site with select coverage in the *Silven Trumpeter*. To start us off, our two featured articles for this month are indeed convention-related articles. The first is *GenCon 2004- A Look Ahead* written by Edward Kopp. This article details hints, tips, and points you as a gamer need to consider before making the trek to GenCon along with a host of GenCon facts and memories. Our second featured article is Patty Estill's coverage of the E3 gaming expo! Patty takes us through some of the hottest up-and-coming RPGs on the market and the latest news from the CRPG industry.

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

*Dana Driscoll*

Editor In Chief  
Silven Crossroads E-zine

by Gary Gygax and Kosala Ubayasekara

## Chatting with Gary Gygax

Welcome to the 13th edition of our regular monthly debate and informational pieces done in collaboration with Mr. Gary Gygax, the original creative mind behind the *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game. This month we focus on an update of *Legendary Adventure*, the latest undertaking by Gary Gygax.

**Q1) Lets begin with a question that I am sure a lot of our readers will be interested in knowing. Has your recent recovery from your illness and subsequent easing of your work schedule resulted in any changes to the planned release of new products for your *Legendary Adventure* game?**

Actually, I had a second bout of illness, a minor heart attack likely brought on by some of the medication I was taking. There has been no reduction in the release schedule of LA RPG products for the next couple of years. Fact is that I have had most of that work done and standing by for months or even years now.

**Q2) A boxed set to introduce gamers to the *Legendary Adventure* system was in development. Is that going to be released in the near future and what will the boxed set contain?**

Troll Lord Games will be releasing the LA game Essentials this summer. Here is a quote from their webpage (<http://www.trolllord.com/la.htm>) regarding the product:

**The *Legendary Adventure*™ Role Playing Game: Essentials comes with the following:**

The *Legendary Adventure* Rule Book Primer  
Complete Easy to use Glossary of Terms  
Over 10 Avatar templates for start up play!  
35 skill bundles

Optional Rules of Knacks and Quirks  
Legendary Beasts Folio with over 75 monsters!  
*The Moon Slaves* Introductory Module  
Character Sheets  
Six Playing Dice

Note that the primer material will be expanded very quickly by the release of *Living the Legend*, a campaign mini-setting with a village, adventure scenarios (a full-scale dungeon type amongst them) that includes many additional monsters, magic items, and new spells.

**Q3) Will the boxed starter set be available to gamers outside the US? In other words is distribution international?**

To the extent that Troll Lord games is able to obtain overseas distribution, I am sure it will. I know that the company is working towards more sales outside North America.

**Q4) You had licensed the *Legendary Adventure* game system to be developed into a massively multiplayer online RPG. How is the development of that going and when can we expect to see a release?**

Things are moving along very well in regards the LA Online game. The developer, Dreams Interactive, has been relatively silent because they have been working so hard to be ready for a beta test. I expect that to be announced early next year.

### 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, *Legendary Adventures*, he is a household name among role-playing enthusiasts.

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

### Contact the Authors

Kosala can be contacted at [kosala@silven.com](mailto:kosala@silven.com). Mr Gygax's email is not printed here for privacy reasons.

### 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.

### Contact the Artist

Contact Veli-Matti at [freelancer@surfeu.fi](mailto:freelancer@surfeu.fi)



**Q5) How true to the setting of the original pen and paper version of the game is the online game and can you mention a little about how the game play will work?**

The setting will be as close to the Legendary Earth world as a MMORPG allows. The same is true for the rules and Avatars interaction with the environment. The differences between the paper game setting with a Lejend Master and a small player group and an online environment accommodating thousands of players call for differing rules and systems, of course.

**Q6) Is the *Legendary Adventure* game system being licensed out to any other projects by third party developers at this time?**

We are considering a license for the production of adventure modules in pdf format, another for an ezine, but that's about it.

**Q7) Do you foresee a necessity to release a new edition of the *Legendary Adventure* system with updated rules/setting in the near future?**

Yes, in a manner of speaking. I have wished for some time now to publish additional material--a very few new Abilities, more Orders (archetypical figures), new spells and magic items, and a good number of changes for the original creatures and many new ones to be encountered. In all, rules changes and additions planned are very few; new material comprises over 90% of the effort. What I plan is to have two soft cover core rules supplements done early in 2005--*Tome of Knowledge* and *More Beasts of Lejend*. As soon as is practical thereafter, a set of three hardbacks.

**Q8) How have you perceived the growth of the game system since you released it? Has it been gaining ground consistently among the RPG consumers? Do you or your representatives demo the game at conventions on a regular basis?**

The growth of the LA game system has been slow. This has been because of a very limited advertising budget behind it, so that the game is quite unknown to a large number of RPG enthusiasts. Convention demos of the LA game do indeed take place. They have since 1999 on. That is a pretty ineffective way of getting the word out, although it is fun for the one demoing the system and for the interested players. I won't be doing demos, but we hope to have them at every con, so interested persons should contact Hekaforge Productions by emailing [FuzHero@aol.com](mailto:FuzHero@aol.com)

**Q9) Will there be any novels or short fiction being published set in the *Legendary Adventure* setting?**

Hekaforge currently offers a full-length novel in trade paperback, *The Eye of Glory*, by Martin Dougherty, There are no plans to release any additional fiction in the near future. If things go well, I might write an yarn or two using the LA game system and the LE world setting as the bases, but that will be a couple of years or so down the pike.

by Khaz Axzen

## Dark Cult of Hisseesha Part III : Primus Creed's Lair

*In the part one of our tale, an elven druid, Kimba Truehart, from the druidic order of the cheetah, recruited two unlikely allies, Sarel Duthar, a renegade frost elf from the frozen tundra, and Khaz Axzen, a clanless dwarven mercenary, to aid her in her quest against the growing evil beneath the Khorian city of Isegoth. The trio was joined by the former knight, Dev Von Fritz, who is hell bent for revenge for the death of his beloved wife, ritually murdered by the depraved cult of the demon goddess Hisseesha. When we last left the companions, they had been attacked and separated in the sewers by an army of horned rats and skeletal soldiers, minions of the vampiric warlock Primus Creed. Join us for the conclusion of Dark cult of Hisseesha.*

Thus far, Krog the Orc had stayed out of the fray, watching from a distance. It's not that he wanted to be an observer, he had no choice. Master had told him to hold back, wait for a sign. Disobedience was not an option, the hulking brute knew that even if he thought about disobeying, he would be greeted by immense, blinding pain rolling throughout his skull like thunder, bringing him to his knees before the blessed darkness of unconsciousness.

Krog spat in disgust. Being a slave in a sewer stinking of humans and their foul waste was no way for a proud, orc champion to live. The victor of many challenges to his title, he was now reduced to lighting candles and disposing of corpses. There where small rewards, a drop of drool dripped from his tusked mouth at the thought of the marrow extracted from Creed's latest victim. Still, it could not compare to the cheers and admiration of his warlike people when he bested another challenger or led his tribe to glorious victory in combat.

Watching the battle intently, he had to admire the intruders' ferocity, especially the human. Krog watched the display of strength as the large man wrestled one of the huge, vicious rodents, holding it by its teeth no less! Krog then cringed as the bellowing dwarf came to the human's aid, and hacked the rat nearly in two.

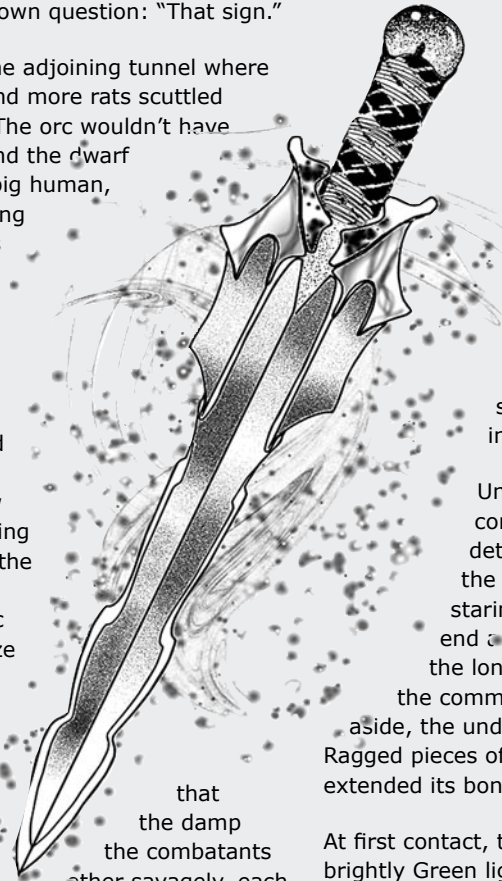
He heard the female elf yell something; the female conjured a ball of fire and hurled it into the adjoining tunnel. "Is that Krog's sign"? Krog asked himself, his hand reaching to the bone handled scimitar on his back. When he felt no pain behind his eyes, he answered his own question: "That sign."

Skeletal warriors emerged from the adjoining tunnel where the female elf threw the fireball and more rats scuttled from the shaft on the other side. The orc wouldn't have to wait very long, the two elves and the dwarf retreated away from him, as the big human, cut off from his friends, was stalking right towards him, brandishing his sword menacingly.

"Good", Krog said aloud, "Krog fight now".

Preferring to meet the human in hand to hand combat, Krog placed the bone tipped spear he was carrying on the walkway and drew his sword from his back. After taking a couple of practice hacks, loving the way the human thigh bone handle felt in his big, hairy hands, the orc pulled the visor down on his bronze helmet and walked toward the advancing human.

They met with a ringing clash of steel on steel that reverberated loudly through the damp tunnels. Sparks flew wildly as the combatants hacked and slashed at each other savagely, each taking hits as well as giving them. Momentum went back and forth, first one giving ground, then the other, but it was Krog who was slowly gaining the advantage. His full armor allowed the orc to take more hits, while the serrated edge of his scimitar poked through Dev's light chainlink armor



### 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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### About the Artist

VShane Studio stock artwork

in numerous places.

Dev redoubled his efforts, trying to use his speed and mobility to gain the edge over the orc's greater size and superior armor. Growling like a feral animal, the former knight launched an offensive, battering the orc's sword and armor with blow after blow of his own heavy blade, searching for an opening. But the orc fought with the pent up fury and determination of a caged animal, a fury that had been un-vented for six long years of degrading servitude. Krog swept the human's sword aside and jumped into his own offensive flurry.

Unbeknownst to either of the battle maddened combatants, a single skeletal warrior had detached itself from the rest. It stood looking at the druid's abandoned staff in rapt amazement, staring at the dark green light flaring from the end as if hypnotized. Something called out to the long dead being's damned soul, overriding the commands from its summoner. Casting its shield aside, the undead creature slowly reached for the staff. Ragged pieces of rotten flesh hung from its skeletal arm as it extended its bony fingers.

At first contact, the flame at the enchanted staffs tip flared brightly Green light traveled down the creature's arm and spread to envelope its whole bony frame. The ancient warrior threw its head back and silently screamed in pain before exploding in a flash of brilliant green flame. Flaming bits of bone and armor flew in every direction, each particle burning so hot that it was completely reduced to smoking ashes

within seconds.

The brilliant light from the explosion momentarily blinded the two combatants further down the tunnel. The following explosion sent Dev slamming into the orc, driving the wind from both of their lungs. Shaking his head and gasping for breath, the former knight disentangled himself from his hairy opponent and stood, sword at the ready, trying to blink away the stars obscuring his vision.

At first, Dev couldn't locate his fierce opponent until he almost tripped over the orcs prone form, lying in the muck at the bottom of the sewer. Its crude bronze helmet was dented and blood leaked from under the neck guard. Dev poked the bull orc with his sword, and the large creature groaned and stirred, causing the former knight to raise his sword for the killing blow. But something stayed his hand, something deep within Dev screamed through the battle madness and blood lust.

"Honor and my knight's oath," Dev said aloud as the blood lust faded, leaving an adrenaline headache in its wake. His oath as a knight would not even allow him to kill a defenseless orc. He stood over the unconscious beast, realizing for the first time that he had been separated from his companions. Head pounding, breathing heavily, and bleeding from a dozen minor wounds, Dev looked around him, as if seeing his surroundings for the first time. He then sat down heavily on the walkway to contemplate his next course of action and his current situation.

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"I need more time to unweave the web of protective spells on this door!" Kimba shouted to her two companions.

They had quickly outdistanced the slower moving legion of undead warriors that pursued them up the ascending tunnel. As it gradually widened and leveled out, they left the noxious, thick, brown water of the sewer behind. Finally, after an hour or so of running, the trio reached a huge, iron door lit by two torches on either side. According to the map, this was the entrance to the old maintenance area and Primus Creed's lair. Though rusty and very old, the door was magically sealed. The great horned rats had either fallen back or were destroyed by the druid's magical fireballs and Khaz's explosive arrows, but the undead still followed and

were catching up.

"We'll hold them off as long as we can Kimba", Sarel answered, gripping his sword with two hands, like a club.

"This ain't no place fer that slashing sword o'yers elf"! Khaz said sarcastically. "What're ya gonna do, tickle em? Now yer gonna see how a dwarf fights up close. Watch my back elf ". They had discovered that the only way to stop the unrelenting horde was to sever their spines, a task more suited to Khaz's heavy axe than Sarel's light sword.

Khaz met the enemy with brute force, bellowing what could have been dwarven curses, or just incoherent growls of rage. Swinging his axe back and forth, up and down, he cut a path of destruction into the hordes ranks, throwing their well formed lines into chaotic disarray. The dwarf was soon lost to sight as the skeletal warriors engulfed him; all Sarel could see of his friend was his death dealing axe rising and falling followed by bone fragments and armor flying wildly about the tunnel.

Protecting the druid's back while she concentrated on opening the door, Sarel noticed something odd while hewing the head from an advancing foe.

"They want us alive," he said aloud, before repeating himself louder, "They want us alive Kimba, they are loathe to deliver a death blow, why?!"

"There"! Kimba exclaimed as the iron door slowly opened inward on rusty hinges. The druid drew her sword and joined Sarel before answering, "Who can tell the insane machinations of a demon tainted mind. Lets us retrieve master Axzen before Creed summons any more hell spawn."

Khaz stood, back against the right wall of the tunnel, surrounded by fallen foes, his axe was a blur, glinting in the torchlight as it weaved a semi-circle of destruction around him. The crazed glint in the dwarf's eyes,= and gleeful look upon his face was a little disturbing to even Sarel, who had witnessed many abominations and horrors in his life.

Not wanting to get in the path of Khaz's axe, the two elves shouted to him while driving the enemy back. Recognition dawned in the dwarf's eyes as his friends dragged him reluctantly from the fight to the open iron door. They threw their combined weight against it, slamming it shut on

skeletal arms and legs that Khaz hacked at with his notched axe, growling in frustration.

"Elves are always retreating"! Khaz shouted, his battle madness obviously had not dissipated as he threw himself against the closed door.

"You need to regain your composure Khaz Axzen!" Kimba said firmly but soothingly to the angry dwarf. "The wizard will feed on your hatred and anger and use it against you. We need to concentrate on the task at hand."

If the druid's scolding had not calmed Khaz down, the fiendish, purring laughter they now heard echoing through the corridors did. Filled with joyous evil, it sent shivers down the trio's spines before trailing off like dry leaves rustling in the wind before a storm, leaving them in the torchlit stillness.

"I wonder what he thinks is so funny", Khaz commented nervously, breaking the silence.

They were now in a long, large corridor; one that looked more like a hallway in a modest castle than a tunnel leading to a maintenance area for the sewers. Arched and well kept, the hallway had support arches made of huge blocks of granite at evenly spaced intervals of about 80 to 100 feet. A slight, foul breeze blew down the tunnel's length, causing the torches on the walls to flutter, sending wild shadows dancing about the stone, and chilling the companion's sweat covered bodies.

Ignoring the laughter and the uncomfortable feeling they all had, knowing that Creed not only knew they were in the sewers but likely knew their exact location, the trio set off down the long corridor feeling very exposed. Kimba gazed down the corridor's length, searching for any tell-tale signs of magical deterrents. Sarel joined her while Khaz studied the mason work of his people.

As they rounded the last bend, the end came in sight. Large double doors, which stood open, the way was blocked by what looked like heavy tapestries, flapping slightly in the light, incense laden breeze, which now carried the scent of wax, from the candles flickering within.

Kimba passed her hand in front of her, palm open, and turned out. "Although I sense much oppressive dark magic

all around, there are no deterrents I can detect.”

“I’ll enter first,” volunteered the frost elf, switching his sword to his left hand while unsheathing a throwing dagger with his right. “I will go to the left. Khaz, you in behind and move to the right.” Sarel looked Kimba in the eye, mouthing instructions silently so as not to be overheard by the wizard or his spies, magical or otherwise. The druid could see the determination in his ice blue eyes, as she nodded her understanding and agreement.

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Creed saw the frost elf enter the chamber in a crouch, closely followed by the bloody dwarf, bellowing and swinging his axe on its wrist thong. They moved with practiced precision, obviously familiar with each other’s moves and infiltration tactics. Hovering near the high domed ceiling, in the form of a black mist which mingled with the shadows and candle smoke, the wizard almost finished his spell too early; the druid had held back. “How many heartbeats does she hesitate,” thought Creed. “Two, three, five.” Of course he couldn’t count his own heartbeat, the black lump within his own chest had not stirred for many centuries. But he could hear the pulses from his guests, and felt the blood pumping through their veins, deliciously laced with adrenaline and salty fear.

“Destroy the altar!” The druid shouted upon entering, pointing to her right at Creed’s altar of skulls, dedicated to his goddess Hisseesha.

“Ahh,” mused Creed. “The hesitation was diversionary, giving her time to divine the location of my power.” He continued to observe as the frost elf hurled his dagger at the altar, only to have it bounce off the protective wards, causing them to flash angrily like wood thrown on the hot coals of a fire. The female elf advanced on the altar, her sword held high. The magical enchantments of light emanating from the blade would surely cleave right through the dark magic weaved around the skulls.

Without further hesitation, Creed finished his earlier spell and watched as the stone beneath the intruder’s feet began to swim like liquid granite. The heavy footed dwarf instantly sunk to his knees in the thick, mud-like substance, while the lighter footed elves briefly danced upon the surface before

sinking to the ankles in the quickly solidifying slop. Tendrils of liquid stone snaked its way up their bodies, entwining them before returning to its former rock hardness, effectively rendering the trio immobile.

Returning to his earthly form as he floated to the floor, Creed bemusedly scolded his captives, pointing a long nailed still transparent finger at the dwarf to silence the steady stream of curses and incoherent growls. “Did you think you would be able to just waltz in here and slay me?” Magical energies rippled around him as the mist swirled into human form. He then angrily turned in the druid’s direction. “Fellagchwendu,” he spat, summoning a foul wind reeking of death and sulphur that blew the druids long blond hair wildly about her head and interrupted the enchantment she had been mouthing. When the wind subsided, she attempted the spell again only to have her thoughts and her words come out as unintelligible gibberish.

“Save your breath pretty one,” Creed purred as he approached Kimba’s entrapped form. He stroked the druid’s face with the back of his right hand, smiling at the involuntary shudder of revulsion his touch elicited. “Your slow moving, simple druidic spells will do you and your companions no good my dear.”

Creed then turned his attention to the bristling dwarf, the muscles in the dwarf’s huge arms straining in their bonds, sweat poured from his body, mingling with the blood from his many wounds. His axe had fallen from his numb hand and dangled from its wrist thong while his mouth formed silent curses. As the wizard approached, he was buffeted by his captive’s almost overwhelming life force laced with hatred. But Creed sensed something else, something not common amongst dwarves—magic! But it was not just the natural magic that wove its way through the earth’s fabric and intertwined with the life forces of all living things, but dark magic, necromantic magic. Of course the brute wouldn’t know how to use it, but Creed sensed with his magesight that the axe toting lout had the ability.



The wizard had intended to probe the dwarfs mind anyway as he would not have the mental capacity of his elven companions to resist the assault on his mind. Creed would extract what information, if any, could be learned about the rebellion and any ulterior motives they would have had other than Dev Von Fritz’ foolish revenge. Creed placed his right hand on the enraged dwarf’s bald head and scraped his long nails across the top, drawing fresh blood. With the blood poured Khaz’s memories.

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Khaz opened his mouth and silently screamed his anguish. Memories raced through his mind rapidly passing the inside of his tightly shut eyelids. Faster and faster until they became a blur, his head spun around and around and the vertigo increased until he started to lose consciousness.

Then it was over. He opened his bloodshot eyes and glared at the warlock with open hatred.

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“You are full of surprises Khaz Axzen,” Creed said with a smile, while removing the spell of silence over the mentally drained dwarf so as to hear his reaction to the information he was about to reveal. The wizard stroked the small horns on his forehead while he sorted out Khaz’s memories. “You are the bastard child, of an ill fated union. Your mother was a warrior priestess from the clan of the Bloody skull. They dwell in total darkness and are practitioners of the dark arts. And your father is a subterranean ranger from the elite slayers of clan Mauler, the most powerful and influential clan of dwarves in the world.”

Khaz stared at the wizard, wide eyed. Creed met the dwarf’s stare before continuing in a purring, captivating voice. “Your kind will never accept you Khaz Axzen, as I am sure you know, which is why you were sold into slavery. So I have a proposition for you.” Creeds voice had taken on a hypnotic tone, and he noted that some of the anger had drained from the dwarf’s face. “I give you a choice. Join me Khaz. You can achieve greatness with my tutelage. Soon, King Pharus will meet an unfortunate end, opening the throne for his nephew, my pawn, Dandyar Pharus.”

"Resist him Khaz!" Yelled Sarel, as he saw his friend's expression softening; Creed was hypnotizing him.

Moving with almost blinding speed, the wizard approached the frost elf and cuffed him across the left side of his head, tearing three gashes along his cheek and banging the back of his head against his stone restraints. Sarel saw blinding lights then slumped unconscious.

Kimba strained in her bonds; a fire burned in her slitted, cat-like eyes. She felt responsible for their current situation and helpless. Khaz continued to stare ahead, as if in a daze. Primus Creed chuckled at the druid's discomfort before returning his attention to the dwarf.

"This druid would have you wandering around the continent, fighting her fights, while you remain clanless and familyless, impoverished, living in caves and sleeping in mud. She almost led you to your death today!" Creed's eyes continued to hold Khaz's gaze. "When my hold on the Khorian throne is complete, I will turn my sights on Ghar and Reban. You will lead my army, Khaz Axzen. Only you will be known as Khaz the destroyer, Khaz the conqueror. Your name will invoke fear. Then our combined might will turn north, overrunning the horse barbarians of Brynhalla. As we speak, the Timborian elves are gathering an army to invade Ravenholt. And then, Khaz, the dwarves of the Graode Mountains and the great city of Graodolin will lay between the hammer of the frost elves, and the anvil of Khaz the destroyer's mighty army. You will walk through Graodolin's front door with your head held high and do what you will with the people who sold you into slavery."

Khaz's eyes were now vacant; they stared straight ahead, obviously completely enthralled with the wizard's empty promises. Pleased with himself, Primus Creed turned to Kimba and once again stroked her face with the back of his hand, pushing her hair from her face and neck. "And you my dear druid will be my consort." Quick as lightning, the wizard grabbed the back of her hair and painfully yanked her head back, exposing her neck. He paused momentarily, watching the blood pump through the veins and arteries in Kimba's neck. His vision and mind clouded with delight as he caught the glint of bronze armor to his right.

"Ah, Krog," Creed said dreamily. Kimba could feel the wizard's hot breath on her neck. "Prepare the frost elf for

the next ritual of the full moon and then leave us." Suddenly his eyes shot open; Kimba felt him exhale sharply as he staggered back, a bloody bone-tipped spear protruding from his purple robes. Losing his concentration, the companions stony bonds fell away to dust. Sarel sank to the floor, still dazed, while Khaz looked around as if waking up from a long slumber.

Everything in the large chamber seemed to move in slow motion. Kimba noticed the bull orc known as Krog throw off his helmet, revealing the hard features of Dev Von Fritz, his face contorted with rage. He pulled Kimba's staff from his back and tossed it her way before dragging his own sword from its sheath and advancing on the wizard who had fallen to one knee, holding the spear tip that protruded from his abdomen.

Dev covered the distance between himself and the wizard in several leaps; he was so eager to exact his vengeance. His sword swooshed through the air and should have made Creed's head explode with the force of the impact, instead it just caused the warlock's form to distort and reform, like mist. Primus Creed was slipping away.

Thinking on her feet, Kimba aimed the tip of her staff at the skull altar and uttered the words of a spell. White light crackled up and down the staff's length before gathering at the tip, releasing a white bolt of lightning that seared the air as it shot toward the skulls.

A blood curdling scream echoed throughout the chamber as the bolt hit the protective wards around the altar; it shimmered and wavered as the druid's energy bolt seemed to envelope the skulls. The dark magic held up under the assault.

Pulling himself to his feet, Sarel rushed the altar, bringing his sword down with all his might. The protective wards flared violently, throwing the frost elf across the room where he slid to a halt against a stone table, knocking the wind from his lungs, and several candles from their sconces that ignited several tapestries hanging from the walls.

Khaz looked around him, as if wondering what was going on. Dev was hacking away at a bloody, purple robed pulp which used to resemble Primus Creed while the druid

pointed her staff at the gray mist which issued from the corpse. The mist was taking on a humanoid form with huge, bat like wings, great horns, and burning red eyes. The form was laughing. Echoing through his skull, the eerie laughter seemed to trigger something in the dwarf's brain. Seeing his friend thrown across the room after hacking at the skull altar, Khaz felt the heaviness of his axe hanging from his wrist. In one fluid motion, he swung his axe into his meaty hand and stalked toward the grotesque altar. He brought the blade down with all his strength; his muscled arms bulged and strained as the axe bit into the pulsing protective wards. The wards held briefly before giving way, allowing the dwarf's axe to come down right in the middle of the pyramidal skulls.

It seemed to Khaz that the rift in the wards created a vacuum, sucking all sound from the chamber. He turned and ran toward the heavy stone table where Sarel was slumped, as the altar exploded, crackling loudly. The whoosh of wind blew outward, and the companions could see ghostly figures flying from within the destroyed altar flying outward directly toward Creed's misty form. The figures flew at Creed, rending his form asunder and scattering it before dissipating altogether.

"The souls of all Creed's victims!" Kimba shouted over the crackling flames that were quickly spreading to everything flammable in the room. "Come, we need to hasten from here!"

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Sitting in a roadside inn on the border of Reban and Khor, the strange quartet drew many curious glances. They tried to be as inconspicuous as possible; border inns were usually filled with rouges and outlaws, so they felt safe for the time being. But where there were rouges and outlaws, there were bounty hunters.

After hearing Dev's story of how he loosely bound the unconscious bull orc and swapped armor before coming to the rescue, Kimba leaned back and sighed. "Are you two sure you won't accompany us?" She pleaded to Sarel and Khaz. The latter just shook his head while shoveling horse stew into his mouth between huge gulps of watery ale. The druid and Dev Von Fritz were going back to Isegor, the Khorian capital, to clear Dev's name and present evidence of Isegoth's corruption.



"See us off then," Kimba said while standing. The former knight finished his flagon of ale and also stood. "I have parting gifts for the two of you," she finished with a warm smile.

Khaz belched loudly enough for all to hear before sliding across the bench of the booth they had been dining at. "Ahh, made more room for this donkey piss they pass off as ale!" He exclaimed, causing the bartender to glance nervously in their direction.

Leaving the inn, the companions turned right and walked toward the stables where Kimba and Dev's mounts awaited them. The cold night air was refreshing but chill. After tipping the drunken stable keeper and leading their horses up the road a bit out of the torch light from the inn, the druid stopped, handing the reins of her horse to Dev. She rummaged through her pack and retrieved two packages. The first of these she handed to the frost elf.

"Within is a druidic cloak, almost the same as my own. It will mark you as a friend of my order." She then bowed before him, "My thanks Sarel Duthar, again." Sarel returned her bow silently.

She then turned to the obviously uncomfortable dwarf, and opened the second package that contained a small axe. The slightly curved handle was obviously made of the same oak as her staff; the steel embossed head was fashioned from the claw of a giant ground sloth which was as hard as any steel forged by the best dwarven blacksmiths.

"For you master dwarf, a weapon worthy of your warrior skills." She presented the axe to him. The embarrassed dwarf hesitated before grasping the axe in his right hand. He tested its weight, then tossed it up in the air while it flipped, end over end, coming down in his waiting hand.

Clumsily, the red-faced dwarf bowed before Kimba and Dev who were both smiling bemusedly at his embarrassment. "It ain't dwarven make, but a fine weapon anyhow. Me thanks," he mumbled. "But I have a question fer ya, before yas ride off."

Kimba held up her hand, "I don't know if Creed was telling the truth about your lineage Khaz. I'm sorry." She paused briefly before continuing. "What I can tell you is that axe you now hold in your hand is a druidic weapon; if you were black of heart or soul, you would not be able to wield it." She then bowed at the waist and kissed Khaz on the top of his bald, tattooed head. He turned beet red and grumbled something while kicking at the dirt, drawing laughter from his companions.

"What he said about Ravenholt however, is true. The black order of Ta-Teharun is growing in power; demons once again walk our plane of existence. They seek to upset the balance and release chaos across the continent. I am sure that the two of you have a role to play in this struggle. Our destinies are intertwined in this, and our paths will cross again." She again bowed to her friends before hopping gracefully on her horse's back. "I bid you both farewell, and remember, Creed, or whatever demon possessed his body, was not killed. His spirit was torn apart and scattered to the four winds by the avenging souls of his victims. But demons are vengeful and possess long memories, so beware."

Dev clasped both Sarel's hand then Khaz's before mounting up. "I am proud to call the two of you friends. Thank you for your aid; I owe you both a great debt."

Sarel and Khaz watched as Dev and Kimba galloped north, closely followed on either side of the tree-lined road by secretive druids.

"We went an pissed of a demon huh?" Khaz growled half heartedly as he turned and stomped back toward the inn. "I knowed I shouldnta got mixed up with derved elves!"

Laughing, Sarel followed his friend. "I'm sure if you drink enough donkey piss you will forget all about it Khaz," the frost elf said, clapping the dwarf on his broad shoulder. "Maybe we can get into a fight with some bounty hunters; that will make you feel better."

\*\*\*THE END\*\*\*

### Convention Coverage

Check out our photos from the Origins 2004 Coverage here:

<http://www.silven.com/origins/2004/>

### PC RPGs

Preview: The Witcher

By Patty Estill

<http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=gamesp ace&id=64>

Preview: Advent Rising

By Patty Estill

<http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=gamesp ace&id=42>

Preview: Sentinel: Descendants in Time

By Patty Estill

<http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=gamesp ace&id=65>

### Silven Spotlight: Console RPGs

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

By Patty Estill

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News: True Fantasy Live Online

By Patty Estill

<http://www.silven.com/console.asp?case=games pace&id=37>

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by Kosala Ubayasekara, Tim Rikey and Bradford Ferguson

## Interview: JAMES MATHE OF RPGNOW

*RPGNow.com is the leading innovator in distributing electronic PDF products to role-playing games consumers. Recently, DriveThruRPG.com, a new entrant to the online PDF sales market, announced its intentions to service the RPG industry with an online PDF sales outlet that utilized an Internet based security protocol to manage and protect the rights of the publishers. This system, known as DRM (Digital Rights Management), and the method DriveThruRPG has utilized in bringing its services to the marketplace has aroused controversy in the RPG industry. We sat down with James Mathe of RPGNow, the original PDF sales outlet for the RPG industry, to hear his take on the issue.*

### Give us a short introduction of yourself and why you started RPGnow?

My name is James Mathe and I've been an entrepreneur on and off since the late 1980's. I was mainly a computer database contractor until the Dot Com industry took a dump. I decided then that I would need to concentrate on something new. That something new was online network and sales sites.

RPGNow.com is a site that helps RPG publishers release their products in electronic format (usually PDF format). The site is a virtual shopping center for out of print works, new Indie works, and co-releases from established print publishers. We give our customers a one-stop shop for inexpensive RPG resources while allowing our publishers to continue to concentrate on what they do best—writing. We charge a very reasonable fee to handle customer service, product delivery, and a host of other promotional features for our vendors.

RPGMall.com grew out of the concept of Print on Demand (POD) that we started offering our vendors on RPGNow. In short, **we provide** quality printed and bound copies with color covers of PDF products. It became bothersome and confusing to have those products listed at RPGNow along with the other electronic products. We also wanted to try to

highlight them as well as other Indie products so we created RPGMall.com

We cross-link these products to our mainstream sales site RPGShop.com Our other sites: RPGSheets.com, RPGHost.com, RPGNews.com, RPGGallery.com, and others we don't directly own are a part of our RPGHost Network that provides FREE resources to all gamers.

### Why do you think that the digital distribution industry is growing at this time?

I'd have to say the real kick in the pants for eProducts was the d20/OGL license. With that came hundreds of publishers who wanted to give it a try. Out of that, many creative and talented writers have found their calling. Today, more than ever, high quality products (many of higher quality than some print products) can be found only online or pre-released online. As such, more people are going to give the medium a try. Usually they are very pleased and return.

Thanks to great publishers like RPG Objects, Game Mechanics, World Works, EN Publishing, Ronin Arts, Skeltonkey Games, Microtactix, Expeditious Retreat Press, Malhavoc Press and more, this industry has made great strides in removing its amateur persona. We have created the ePublishers Guide ([http://www.rpgnow.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=1668](http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=1668)) that helps educate publishers on running an ePublishing business. We have many more initiatives in the pipeline like a publishers ezine focusing on marketing, a d20/OGL Guide and a PDF Creation guide.

I also believe with such a glut of RPG products out there right now, people are less likely to give the next \$30 book a try. With eProducts, prices are much lower (usually 1/2 what you'd expect to pay) and so "giving new products a chance" is much easier.

eProducts also have the added feature of consumers being able to cut and paste text or print out handouts for players. This ability to use "crunchy bits" wherever they want really adds value. This added value has even caused many people to buy the e-version of a product they already own in print.

Then, of course, there is the existence of RPGNow.com - without it, people would have to hunt and search all over the 'net for products. Many publishers would never have any visibility on the Internet if it wasn't for RPGNow. Our convenient payment methods, large selection of products, fast delivery and marketing have all helped this industry grow over the last 3 years.

### What has been the greatest challenge you had to face when you set up RPGnow?

Our greatest challenge was convincing publishers we were a valid option. Since I was a programmer the technology didn't scare me, but convincing publishers to give this medium a try has always been one of the hardest things to do.

At GenCon 2001, I went booth to booth trying to convince publishers to give us a shot. All I got was some lip service or flat out "no way." Publishers are afraid of loosing their intellectual property to pirates and the devaluing or reducing of sales of their work in print.

At GenCon 2002, things went a bit better, but only in that we got more lip service than we got "no ways." A few publishers were actually seriously considering it though they had little time to devote to the concept. Publishers were starting to warm up to the concept since.

At Origins and GenCon 2003, we handed out over 1700 free CDs with over 400MB of free and demo products. I personally visited 90% of the vendors at the conventions and got a "yes we'll do something with you in the future" from the majority

of them. Top company officials told me this to my face, but alas, very few had any follow through at all. At least this time the excuses were more about lack of time to devote to it than lack of desire.

At the Gama Trade Show (GTS) we rolled out a plan to attempt to convince print publishers to put their out of print products back to work (<http://www.RPGNow.com/oop.php>). This seemed to go well, but again, there was a lack of follow through from most vendors.

### **How does the first half of 2004 compare to the first half of 2003 in sales at RPGNow?**

Our sales have consistently been doubling over the last 3 years. See this chart: <http://www.rpgnow.com/images/SalesGraph300.jpg> The short answer is 2004 is looking to be yet another great year!

### **What do you think about the future of the d20 Industry?**

I have no crystal ball and I don't have my finger on the pulse of such things. Ryan Dancy might be able to help you answer that question. But in general I think it's around to stay. There are and always will be some one hit wonders (or even no-hit wonder-why-they-tried), but quality products will float to the surface. Customers are more cautious these days and don't just buy anything with d20 slapped on it. It's a hard segment to make a lot of money in without thinking of your company as a periodical publisher, but it can be done.

### **Do you feel betrayed by the companies that have left RPGNow in favor of other PDF distributors?**

"Betrayed" is a very strong word. No, I do not feel betrayed. These companies have to do what they feel is in their best interests. Business is business; I don't take it personally.

My only qualm with their leaving is the indication by some that they would rather play in the sandbox with the "professionals" instead of the "amateurs" and RPGNow. Sure RPGNow has some amateur publishers, but that's because we nurture them into better publishers. Many have gone into mainstream print over the years with great success.

This kind of old-boy network attitude helps no one. The majority of the online market is made up of customers who appreciate something different from the Indie publisher. Sure they are concerned with quality as is RPGNow—that's why we remove products that get bad reviews. We are a store after all.

### **What is the one thing you would do over in the setting up of RPGnow if you could?**

Interesting question. I was trying to think of something that might have been a glaring issue I could state here but I couldn't. On top of that, I don't think this question is very relevant and could only help competitors, so I'll decline to respond to this one.

### **How do you see the entrance of new players like DriveThruRPG affecting the print and electronic game business?**

The addition of more players into the electronic game business can only help the industry and in the end help RPGNow. We need more exposure and more customers right now and any competition that helps to bring in new blood will help everyone. Sites like DriveThruRPG and Steve Jackson's e23 Warehouse will bring a lot of these print publisher's fans online to try PDF products. With each new out of print product put online comes a group of fans willing to buy and willing to try new things.

Our experience has shown that offering a product electronically does not adversely affect print sales; of our publishers that also offer print products, over 90% reported that the PDF version had no negative impact on their print sales. 25% reported that the PDF release actually

increased sales of the printed version.

DriveThruRPG has managed to convince several print publishers (publishers that we've been courting for a while) to enter this market, and we should embrace that fact. It helps legitimize the business in the minds of other publishers as well as helping us with market research with regards to how retailers and publishers are affected by such releases.

One last note. Exclusivity is an aggressive marketing technique to gain market share. It doesn't help the industry or bring new buyers; it only shifts revenues. I'm sad to see our competitors use these tactics as it just makes it more difficult for a customer to shop for their eProduct needs.

### **Are there any plans you wish to publicly announce about upcoming changes in RPGnow to meet your new competition?**

RPGNow is the market leader, and we're not in the position of playing catch-up—that's our competitor's problem. I was against DRM [Digital Rights Management] before and I'm only more positive it's the wrong way now that I seen such a backlash in the industry regarding it. RPGNow is already the most feature rich (for customers and publishers) eStore around. We support coupons, automatic updates, dynamic registration, remote catalog, live sales notifications, wish lists, banner exchanges and more.

We stand strong with our product line, our pricing, and treating our customers the best we can. I think our 3 years of being in this business speaks for itself.

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by *Patty Estill*

SILVEN EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE

## ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO

The games.. the music... the exhibits .. the **GAMES!!!** So much to see, so much to do! **THIS** is E3 - *The Electronic Entertainment Expo* - the biggest electronic gaming party of the year. E3 opened on Monday with workshops and keynote speakers. Some of the major vendors also use this time prior to when the exhibits open to hold press conferences and make major announcements about their products, their company direction, and which products they will showcasing in the exhibit halls. Almost 5000 products were showcased at this event, but our mission here at *Silven Crossroads* is to provide you with the best information about current and upcoming role-playing games. While that will be our emphasis, I will mention of one or two of the other high profile games. So many games, so much to do, so little time... where to begin coverage of this event is always a challenge, so let's just get to it!

This year I had the opportunity to attend the Microsoft press conference, and as always, Microsoft did not disappoint. Their conference was complete with a pre-press event during which they served Xbox-colored drinks! Their emphasis in the press briefing and in reaffirming their stance for the next year is on software. The underlying tenet throughout the press briefing was that software drives their industry and drives their business. Some time was spent talking about the recently announced XNA, the new development technology that integrates new and existing tools and technologies from Microsoft and its partners so that developers can not only make better games but also produce them faster. What does all this technical talk mean to us as gamers? Better games, better looking games, and hopefully more games for both the Xbox and PC platforms.

Microsoft also showed gameplay video of key titles in their software lineup for the show including some impressive video of *Fable* and *Jade Empire*, saving their star performer and signature Xbox title -that would be *Halo 2* - for a spotlight of its own.

They capped off the press conference with the biggest

announcement - not necessarily the biggest for RPG fans - but an announcement that brought down the house, so to speak. Microsoft and Electronic Arts have finally decided to kiss and make-up. Electronic Arts will (finally!) be bringing its critically acclaimed games to the Xbox Live online gaming service starting this summer.

The exhibits opened on Wednesday, beginning a three day frenzy of sound, music, games, competition, celebrities, and more games. It was indeed a challenge to cover the entire show floor, experience hands-on gameplay with the thousands of games, meet with vendor representatives at the appointed times, or even *find* the correct person at the correct time! But we definitely got an eyeful and an earful of what's coming in the next year or so.

What did we learn from all this activity, talking and playing tell us? Well, for starters, this looks to be a very good year for role-playing games and us diehards who love to play them. I'm not sure I even saw every RPG at the show - although I tried valiantly to do so - but at last count, here's the breakdown by platform:

- PC - 61 titles
- PS2 - 36 titles
- Xbox - 20 titles
- Mobile (including N-Gage) - 15 titles
- Gamecube - 12 titles
- Handheld (GBA/PSP/DS) - 11 titles

That's over 150 RPGs and that doesn't count games in development that were not present at E3 2004 - or any I might have missed! With so much to talk about, our coverage will focus on one platform at a time. Let's see what's happening in the world of PC RPGs.

As gamers, we are always out to find the definitive gameplay experience. We want innovation in our games. We want new and different stories, better environments, more challenging enemy AI, and maybe even a different combat system. We

### About the Author

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want to see and hear our characters come to life with great graphics and voice-actors; we want voices that truly fit the characters and NPCs we encounter in our game worlds. Which of the upcoming games will meet all, or even *any* of our expectations? Judge for yourself as we take a whirlwind tour of the PC RPGs that were on display at this year's show.

After a quick tour of one of the large exhibit halls, I headed to Bioware's booth where I obtained some initial information on *Dragon Age*, their just-announced-at-E3 RPG for the PC. A brand new game being developed by Bioware, *Dragon Age* is described as the "spiritual successor" to all of Bioware's past role-playing games. It will include an open-ended epic storyline, full character customization, and a unique feature: the player will choose how the story begins. That choice will change how the story unfolds, and the player's choices will shape the destiny of the world. There is no release date at this time but this is definitely a game to watch.



Also in Bioware's booth was a new game that will be powered by Bioware's *Aurora* Engine called *The Witcher*. The game is set in a fantasy world created by best-selling Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski and features the player as a "Witcher," a warrior who has been trained to fight since childhood.

He earns a living killing monsters and is a member of a brotherhood that was founded long ago to protect the people of the land from the undead, werewolves, and a host of other beasts—but for a price. After all, nothing in the world, even a fantasy world, is truly free. The game play looked smooth and the story is a bit different than any we have seen as yet in the RPG genre. No release date yet but a preview revealing more details about the game can be found at: <http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=showreview&reviewid=42&gameid=64> in the PC section.

On to one of my most anticipated meetings of the show was a chance to sit down with Bill Roper, the charismatic CEO of the newly formed Flagship Studios. It was interesting to hear the details of his somewhat unexpected departure from Blizzard and the plans for the new development house. Flagship is indeed working on an RPG, and as soon as it has a name, we will let the world know.



Activision had a large presence as usual, but there was one specific game that I sought. Even though it had been shown last year at E3, we are still waiting for its release. *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* looks even more incredible this year than it did at E3 2003. It is an action/RPG in which you play as a fledgling vampire who will belong to one of seven vampire clans. Each clan, of course, will have its own strengths and abilities. The long awaited sequel to the popular *Vampire: The Masquerade* will be powered by the same engine as *Half Life 2*. The catch seems to be that *Half Life 2* must be the first title on the market using this engine, so sharpen your fangs and prepare to journey to modern day Los Angeles in October 2004.



Journeying on to meet with the fine folks at Bethesda, still and always one of my favorite developers, I was hoping that the quiet setting of their meeting room would be the ideal place to have a friendly discussion about the next *Elder Scrolls* game. Alas, no news on that front with the exception of *TES: Shadowkey* which is planned for the N-Gage.



I did, however, get a good look at *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners*, and it looks amazing. Headfirst Productions have made great strides on the game since last year when it was first shown, at which time it was only about 30 % finished. True to the setting created by H.P. Lovecraft, *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners* presents the player with an environment so complete that each player can approach and play the game in their own way and with their own style of gameplay. The "sanity" system is an important element and must be monitored throughout the game as the main character's sanity will determine how he interprets, interacts with, and survives in this dangerous and interesting world. It also features an advanced and powerful graphics engine that has the ability to truly draw the player into the dark and shadowy world of Innsmouth. Hold onto to your sanity and prepare to guide Jack through this frightening world in September 2004.

Majesco was showing *Advent Rising*, their third person intergalactic adventure/RPG. *Advent Rising* begins with an interesting story authored by Orson Scott Card. Last year this game was shown only in special sessions but this year was available for hands-on play and it looks and feels incredible. The gameplay is fast-paced but still pretty smooth with intuitive controls and what appears to be good camera angles during gameplay (for a nice change – too often the camera is your worst enemy!). Look for *Advent Rising*, currently scheduled as the first game in a trilogy, to hit the shelves in September 2004.



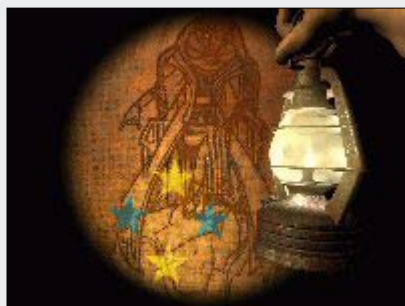
The 1C Company once again had a wide offering of RPGs showcased this year. First, we looked at *Artificial Intelligence Machine* (AIM), an interesting concept that rolls the mech, adventure, and RPG genres into one exciting game. *A.I.M.* is an action role-playing game unfolding in a sci-fi universe inhabited by androids. Humans are but a vague memory in a world where robots rule. Players assume role of an AI android traveling on a special floating vehicle with antigravity engines. The game combines combat action, trade, exploration, undertaking of various quests and missions, glider upgrades, armament purchases, and more. This game is currently available in Europe but we are still awaiting a US release date.

Also from 1C is *Borderzone*, an action-RPG that challenges players to assume the role of Olaf, one of the few remaining humans on the planet Terra. Centuries after the downfall of modern humanity, players find themselves in the world of Terra, an apocalyptic earth where the past and the future have blurred. The tales of the great catastrophe, the Collapse, have been passed down for generations, although the details have faded. Terran elders speak of a time when people possessed unprecedented power over nature through the use of an ancient and now forgotten witchcraft known

as "science". Players create Olaf from several disciplines, including thief, magician, or soldier. Characters are further developed in the game through group affiliations, moral classes and professions. *Borderzone* is scheduled for release Q3 2004.



*Star Wolves* was shown last year at E3 when it was still in early stages of development. This year it was playable and nearing completion. *Star Wolves* is a 3D space RPG with some strategy elements. The player controls parties of up to six bounty hunters, each with different skills, abilities, and personalities. There are a variety of weapons and space fighters from which to choose in attempting to complete the myriad of available missions. Prepare to engage in this space adventure also in Q3 2004.



Dreamcatcher Interactive and The Adventure Company showed some intriguing new games. The adventure game genre has come a long way in terms of graphics and gameplay from its historical roots of *Zork* and *King's*

*Quest*. Today's adventure games are more RPG/adventure and action/adventure and offer a gaming experience that includes not only puzzle solving, but exploration, interaction, and combat now and then.

*Atlantis Evolution* is the first episode of a new Atlantis series. In 1904, Curtis Hewitt, an adventurous photographer, becomes caught in a vortex that brings him to the heart of the lost city of Atlantis. A stranger in a land of high-end technology and archaic faith, Curtis begins an extraordinary adventure, assisting with the Atlantians' plight for survival as they fight to overthrow their gods.



*Aura: Fate of the Ages* is a game that draws you into a fantasy adventure of another kind. As challenging as it is beautiful, *Aura: Fate of the Ages* requires the player to uncover artifacts and explore new worlds on the quest for ultimate power and immortality. Since ancient times, a clan of "Keepers" has guarded a collection of sacred rings. Legend proclaims that with these rings one can travel to and create new worlds. The one who unites these rings with several hidden artifacts will be granted infinite power and immortality. The clan elder has chosen his prize student, Umang, to travel to Ademika to complete his training with Grifit, the old master. Upon Umang's arrival, he learns of the evil Durad's plot to steal the rings for his own sinister purpose. Umang must protect the rings as he searches for artifacts that he must deliver to Grifit. Plan on discovering the secrets of *Aura: Fate of the Ages* in late June 2004.

Also in the lineup from The Adventure Company is *Dark Fall: Lights Out*. A young cartographer, Parker, has been sent to draw up scaled and accurate coastal maps of the area around the bay of Trewarthan, an area that has claimed

many lives throughout the passing centuries. Upon arriving in town, Parker senses hostility. Is it simply his work that the local fishermen fear, or is there something more to Trewarthan than meets the eye? And why do the locals avoid any mention of the lighthouse on Fetch Rock? The story really begins at dusk on April 29<sup>th</sup> as darkness begins to fall across the coastline, the sea is calm, and all seems well. A fog horn breaks the silence. A thick mist creeps across the channel towards the town and rumors begin to fly that Fetch Rock lighthouse has been plunged into darkness. How will the returning fishermen guide their trawlers into the safety of the harbor, and what has happened to the lighthouse keepers? Parker may be their only hope. Armed with his compass, charts, and wits he sets off to uncover the mystery. Along the way he discovers that Fetch Rock and its lighthouse have a very sinister history. Is time running out? Or does it have an agenda of its own? Only you can solve the mystery. Prepare to challenge the dangers in *Dark Fall: Lights Out* in August 2004.



From the Dreamcatcher Interactive side is *Dungeon Lords*, an action/RPG set in

a land of ancient castles and dungeon lairs. Players engage in real-time tactical combat and face a variety of deadly foes using a wide range of weapons. It's not just about the battles though, as magic spells and hundreds of powerful weapons and artifacts play a huge role in the game as the players complete a variety of quests. The simple and intuitive design will suit RPG and action fans alike; *Dungeon Lords* also supports cooperative multiplayer for up to eight players. Designed, written, and developed by award-winning computer game author, D.W. Bradley (*Wizards & Warriors* and three of the legendary *Wizardry* titles) and Heuristic Park, Inc., *Dungeon Lords* is scheduled for release in Fall 2004.



One game truly stood out among the entire line-up from Dreamcatcher and The Adventure Company, and that game is *Missing*. Designed to be a truly interactive adventure, this game offers true innovation in gameplay. The story revolves around the disappearance of a journalist and his companion. The player must follow hints and leads that involve visiting real and imaginary websites in order to solve puzzles and progress in the story. This game has the ability not only to draw you into its bizarre world but also to scare the bejeezes – and maybe a few other things – out of you as you play! Its innovative style and gameplay earned it the Silven Crossroads E3 2004 award [href=http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=show&id=333](http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=show&id=333)> (INSERT LINK) for most innovative Adventure/RPG. Prepare to face this innovative adventure in Late June 2004.

I recently played the incredible RPG/RTS hybrid *Spellforce* and was happy to see the expansion, *Breath of Winter*, in playable form at Jowood's booth. As promised, the expansion will include a host of enhancements to the original game as well as a new story revolving around the awakening of an ancient dragon. There will be new units, new items, and new spells. While a skirmish mode will not be included, much to the chagrin of many fans, it will include "Free Mode" which allows play of certain maps of the player's choosing. Multiplayer will be available through Internet or LAN allowing up to three other players. In the multiplayer games, there will also be a marketplace where players can share and trade items. Gameplay was smooth, with graphic enhancements very evident. More details about the expansion can be found here: <http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=showreview&reviewid=34&gameid=58>> here

. Slated for a July release in Europe, the US release date was not yet available. I asked them to hurry, and as helpful and friendly as all the Jowood staff were, I was unable to

coax any more definitive release information.

Also on display in Jowood's booth was *Night of the Raven* the expansion to their popular, open-ended RPG, *Gothic II*. According to Jowood staff, they are waiting for a distribution partner in the US but the expansion is definitely planned for release worldwide. It also will probably release in Europe before it is available in the US. There were also some hints about *Gothic III*, but only in the sense that *Gothic III* is currently under development with a target release date of late 2005.



Last year at E3, I got a glimpse at *Dungeon Siege II* but all that was shown at that time was a short game trailer. This year the game was playable on the show floor, and we had an opportunity to pick some of the key people involved in the game's development. A detailed preview will be available soon here at Silven Crossroads but just to peak your interest, here are a few details. It takes place in the *Dungeon Siege* universe of Aranna but on a very different world from the first *Dungeon Siege*.

This time the world is in turmoil, having been torn apart by civil war. Players must choose their own path through the war and somehow find a way to put a stop to the evil Valdis before he unites the world under his tyrannical command. Combat is much more tactical in nature, environments are very detailed, and the enemy AI is much improved. The enemies will run and hide and use the terrain to ambush your party, but the hero's party can also use the terrain to her advantage. The combat formations are gone as combat requires control of each party member. It still uses the popular "learn by doing" system for skills advancement. That is, skills that are used will advance more than skills that are not used. The return to Aranna is slated for a November 2004 release.

Vivendi Universal Games also had a large presence as usual, and we are looking forward to the first *Leisure Suit Larry* we have seen in many years. More adventure than RPG, *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* is promising to be a true heir to the original LSL games, featuring this time Larry Laffer's nephew, college student Larry Lovage. Did you enjoy *American Pie*? If so, you will love *Magna Cum Laude*. Also showcased in Vivendi's booth was *The Bard's Tale* (2004). Inspired by the classic *Bard's Tale* of 1985, updated to today's standards but still containing the flavor of the original, experience this RPG with a sense of humor in late 2004.

Cenega Publishing has added more polish to their new RPG *The Roots*. A classic battle of good versus evil, Yan, the hero, must defeat the ancient forces and restore order to the land. The gameplay is very smooth and the interface is intuitive and easy to use. There are a variety of weapons, spells, and items to help the hero along the way, as well as many quests to complete. The game is shaping up nicely and looks to be on track for a winter 2004 release.

*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II*, recently announced, is in early stages of development. Shown in the Lucas Arts booth and being developed this time by Obsidian instead of Bioware, the story in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II* is set approximately five years after the events of the original *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. The Jedi are on the brink of extinction, the galaxy is in turmoil, and the Republic no longer has the strength to protect its worlds. And the news gets worse: Sith Assassins are hunting the one they believe to be the last of the Jedi – that would be you, the hero! Prepare to save the galaxy in February 2005.

Are there more? Yes indeed, a host of other RPGs for the PC were being shown and played at E3 2004. The new *Harry Potter* games for all platforms provide great environments, effects and some challenging puzzles. *Myst IV Revelation* will offer more story and puzzle solving in the beautiful *Myst* universe. Several games from Russobit-M look very intriguing but it is unclear if they will be available in the US. Watch for *Goldenland* and *Exodus* definitely in the European market, and we will keep tabs on them here at Silven Crossroads for any possible US releases.

Wow! That's quite an abundance of RPGs and these are the non-online-only games. Save your pennies, you'll need them to fund your library as these titles hit the shelves later this year. The hardest part might be deciding which games you want to play first. And save your vacation time – you'll need it to use later this year in order to have the enough game-playing time to experience these great adventures.

#### About the Author

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

#### About the Artist

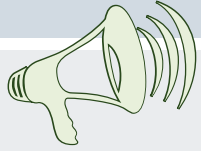
Elizabeth Ellis (KouAidou) draws the webcomic Fantasy Wars and the RPG Wars comic strips for the Silven Trumpeter. She graduated from the University of Maryland with a major in Japanese in 2003 and is currently at large. When not shackled to her art supplies, her hobbies include anime, translating, and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



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by Tim Rikey

## Exclusive Interview: RICK LOOMIS DIRECTOR OF GAMA

*Rick Loomis has by far one of the most varied and interesting careers of any of the Elder Statesmen of Gaming. Along with being the founder of Flying Buffalo and a co-founder of GAMA (the Game Manufacturers Association), along with being the designer of a multitude of games, Rick is one of the few people who have had the privilege of attending every single Origins convention since the beginning. We thank Rick for taking time out of his busy schedule preparing for upcoming conventions to talk to us.*

### For our readers, can you give us a quick overview of GAMA and its role within the RPG industry?

GAMA is the Game Manufacturers Association, a non-profit trade organization for companies that manufacture games and game products. Our members are primarily companies that make "adventure games" (rather than toys) such as wargames, RPGs, trading card games and so on. We manage the only industry-operated trade show for adventure games, the *GAMA Trade Show* in Las Vegas every March and organize *Origins*, the second largest consumer game show in the USA, in Columbus, Ohio every summer. Our trade show provides a forum for manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of RPGs to get together and exchange information about new releases, promotional plans and so on. In addition to managing our two shows, we try to provide educational opportunities for all parts of the industry. We have a program to promote games in education, and we put on seminars for manufacturers, retailers and prospective retailers at our shows and other shows around the country.

All of this is to further our goal: *To promote the general interest of all persons engaged in the buying, selling, licensing, or manufacturing of gaming products.*

### How exactly was GAMA started?

A bunch of small game companies got together at *Gencon* over 20 years ago and decided that we ought to have an industry association of some kind. We wrote up some bylaws,

and one of the GDW partners was an Illinois lawyer who filed the incorporation papers for us. We invited all of the other game companies to join us, and it grew from there. Our main job at first was to meet once a year at *Origins* and listen to bids from groups who wanted to hold the *Origins* convention in their city the next year. In the early years, *Origins* moved around from city to city and was run by various volunteer organizations.

### As director emeritus of GAMA, how has its role changed since its inception?

At its very beginning, GAMA was a sort of coalition of game companies that got together so that we'd have some kind of voice so that TSR (owners of *Gencon* at the time) would have to listen to our concerns. The initial impetus to getting started was anger over some things that TSR had done with their convention that had us all upset. I don't even remember what those problems were, but they seemed important back then.

GAMA was soon given control of the *Origins* game convention trademark. Then I believe it was Frank Chadwick who got the idea that GAMA should copy the "open house" concept of the Comic Book industry and start the *GAMA Trade Show* currently held in Las Vegas every March. That's what really made GAMA what it is today as [the show] is probably the most important trade show for the Adventure Game industry.

Over the years as we've grown, we've also started to do some of the things that trade associations do in other industries, such as lobbying for our industry in Washington. In cooperation with some of our members, GAMA spent a lot of money when New York and Washington DC were considering bills to regulate the use of lead in "toys." We actually hired a lobbyist at the time.

We have also started such programs as "Games In Education" and "retailer mentoring." But our primary purpose still remains making sure that two of the three most important

trade shows of the industry, *GAMA Trade Show* and *Origins*, remain successful and accessible. Any owner of a trade show has to listen to his customers, but with *Origins* and *GTS* you can become one of the owners by joining the organization.

### What does the future hold in store for GAMA?

If I could predict the future I would be rich by now. But I suspect that GAMA will become more of an international organization in the near future. Right now we are still primarily a North American organization, but we are making efforts to reach out to the many game companies in Europe.

### What was the first game you liked to play?

Sheesh! I don't know. I've enjoyed games as long as I can remember. I remember that we used to play *Monopoly* a lot when I was a kid, and I remember playing *Battleships* (the version you play with paper and pencil, not one of those fancy ones with plastic ships) at a summer camp when I must have been about ten. My grandmother used to play *Canasta* with me when I was a pre-teen. My first "adventure game" was *Gettysburg* by Avalon Hill (the first version back in 1965).

### What was the first game you designed?

I used to make up new rules for *Monopoly*. And I designed a variant of battleships too. But you probably mean one that was sold commercially. That would be the play-by-mail game *Nuclear Destruction*.

### What games do you play now?

In play-by-mail, I like to play an occasional game of *Starweb* or *World Wide Battle Plan*, the anonymous versions where the other players don't know which player is me. I'm in one of each right now. In our other games, I like to play *Nuclear War* whenever I get a chance. For other people's games, I like the Mayfair railroad games a lot (*Empire Builder*, *Iron Dragon*, etc). I also like *Settlers of Catan* and all of its variants. And

when I play with younger relatives, I like to pull out *Fluxx*. Unfortunately when you get into this business, you don't get to actually play games as often as you'd like anymore.

### How has the Internet helped or hurt the Play-By-Mail industry?

The play-by-mail market has been made up primarily of two types of people:

(1) Those who are somewhat isolated and don't have many gaming friends nearby.

(2) Those who like the idea of a multi-player game with lots of diplomacy and hidden movement.

Those in group #1 no longer need play-by-mail now that they have the Internet. But those in group #2 can now find us easier and participate in lots of diplomacy without spending all their money on phone calls. So it has helped and hurt.

### How many game systems or products have you helped produce over the years?

"Helped produce" has a lot of leeway. I really haven't kept track of how many. Hundreds, I'm sure. For play-by-mail games, I designed *Nuclear Destruction*, *Battle Plan*, *Time Trap*, *Moon Base*, *Raumkrieg*, *Starweb*, and participated in the design of *Heroic Fantasy* and *Riftlords*. I expanded and refined the *Illuminati* PBM game after we took it over from Draper Kauffman.

For published products I wrote *Buffalo Castle* for T&T, and the "Solitaire for the Intellectually Challenged" which is part of *When The Cat's Away* solo adventure; one of the characters in one of the Citybooks (I forget which book); many traps for Grimtooth's *Traps*; some of the cards for *Imperialism*; designed all of the supplements for the *Nuclear War* series; participated in the design of the *Berserker* board game and *TOM: The Origins Metagame collectable card game*; designed the *Dice of Wrath* dice game using the KODT dice; and too many others to mention.

### For our readers, can you break down the creative process of product design?

Sorry, no I don't think I can. I just do it, I don't analyze it.

### What do you liking about gaming? About designing?

I have always liked to play games of all types. I guess I like the competition, the sense of accomplishment when you win. I also like the sociability of a game with friends. I'm not much for small-talk at parties, so a game gives me something to talk about while hanging out with my friends.

As far as designing goes, the best part is knowing that your imagination has provided someone else with some entertainment. That, and seeing the final product come back from the printer, knowing that you've created something that didn't exist before. It's definitely not the money!

### You have seen numerous changes in the gaming industry, how do you see it changing in the future?

If I could predict that, I'd be a rich man already.

### If you could change anything about gaming what would it be?

That it hasn't made me rich yet.

*We thank Rick Loomis for his time and wish him the best of luck in his future GAMA and Flying Buffalo projects. For more information on the Origins International Expo, you can visit their site here: <http://www.originsgames.com/>. For information about GAMA, visit their homepage here: <http://www.gama.org/>. Finally, for information on Flying Buffalo, you can visit their site here: <http://www.flyingbuffalo.com/>.*

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by Aaron Todd

## A Murder of Crows : Part 1

"I tell you, sheriff, I did not kill that girl," the man behind the bars insisted.

"And I want to believe you, Martin. But the Prefect wants the man who killed his daughter, and you were there when we found her. What do you expect me to do?" The sheriff returned his concern.

"But I didn't do anything. I don't know what happened. I don't even know what I was doing there. The last thing I remember was sitting in my home, eating dinner by the fireplace," Martin gripped the bars of his cell as he pleaded with the man who held the keys to his freedom.

"Which is not helping you any. You've got no one to testify where you were. You tell me you were alone, at home, but when we found you, you were with her; her blood on your hands. Her blood was on your hands, Martin. What do you expect from me? You can't even tell me what happened last night."

"Look, I know this looks bad, but you have to believe me."

"I want to, Martin, I really do. But all I know is that you were in the room with a dead girl when we found you; a dead girl who just happened to be the Prefect's daughter. This wouldn't look good to a blind man, Martin," the sheriff said emphatically.

Martin released his grip on the bars as his spirit released what little hope he had of getting out of this with

his skin intact. He knew that it looked as bad as it could. His gaze shifted to the floor, away from the accusing eyes of a man who seemed as convinced of Martin's guilt as he was of his position to convict him. He had no idea what happened last night, but he was as sure that he had nothing to do with the girl's death. He had no way to prove anything. His fate was in the hands of others and there was no one outside this room who would risk anything to save him. He had friends, but no one he knew would fight against the Prefect.

The cell was as sparse as he could have expected. A few planks nailed together served as bench and bunk. A bucket for water and a bucket for waste stood on the opposite side of the cell on the stone floor. Bars made up two of the walls, while the same stone as the floor was built up to form the rest of his involuntary confines. It was one of only three cells in the entire town. The others comprised two of the other corners of this room.

Slumping down onto his hard bench, Martin sat, head in hands. He knew that he was going to be convicted of a murder that he'd only learned of from his jailer. The inevitability was sinking in as quickly his memories of last night seemed to have faded.

The sheriff stood in disbelief outside the bars. He had known Martin for a long time. The very idea that Martin could have done such a thing was abhorrent. The man had never done any wrong to anyone. He disliked seeing Martin in this state, but had no idea what else he could do. Unless some convincing evidence came forth, and quickly, to prove Martin's innocence, his fate was sealed.

The Sheriff felt a chill across his back. Instinctively, he turned to face the door as his hand dropped to his hip and the reassuring feeling of the hilt of his sword.

### 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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There would be no official trial. The prefect had already rendered his decision based solely on seeing his daughter dead and Martin near her with blood on his hands. Martin held little doubt that his public execution was mere days, if not hours, away. He could only wait.

A stranger walked briskly into the Sheriff's office with the confidence of a man who had survived more dangers than all the residents of the town combined. A long animal skin coat fit snugly over his broad shoulders and barely avoided dusting the ground as he walked. His boots were made of a similar, thick hide and fell silently with each step. The rest of his body was clad in very timely woolen pants and a shirt. A March wind preceded him through the open door.

The Sheriff felt a chill across his back. Instinctively, he turned to face the door as his hand dropped to his hip and the reassuring feeling of the hilt of his sword. "You ought to be more careful than that, stranger. Coming into my office unannounced could have gotten you hurt."

Martin too, responded to something intangible. As the Sheriff turned around, Martin looked toward the door. With the sun coming in behind the stranger, Martin could see only the dark form of what appeared to be a large, ominous man. As his eyes adjusted to the light, Martin sensed that the stranger had a definite purpose. This was a dangerous man, and Martin's luck wasn't going his way today. There was little doubt in Martin's mind that this stranger could only be trouble.

"Sheriff," the man addressed him respectfully. "Could I ask the two of you a few questions?"

"Before I answer anything, I'd like to know who you are." The Sheriff wanted the stranger to be aware that anything he wanted would have to come through the proper authority.

"My name is Tharon. I understand that there was a murder last night. I assume that man is considered responsible?" He gestured toward Martin.

As Martin listened to the man speak, the invisible shroud that covered the stranger seemed to lift, just a bit. Perhaps it was the fact that the man spoke at all. When the stranger first walked in, he seemed little more than a dark, hollow vision.

"Yes, there was, and yes, he is, but what concern is that of yours?" The Sheriff asked, now entirely focused on the stranger.

"I am a traveler; a hunter, if you will. I believe that man is no more responsible for that girl's death than you are." The man's voice was steady, smooth, and strong.

"And just what makes you say that, Master Tharon? You say you're a hunter, just what is it that you hunt?" The Sheriff eyed him very suspiciously. He looked the man over. Something about the stranger he didn't like; but he couldn't quite identify what it was.

"Sheriff, I believe that the truth is not always the most obvious answer. We all seek answers, but seldom are willing to look past the obvious to find the truth," the stranger's voice remained steady and firm.

"Truth? You're seeking the 'truth'? The truth about what exactly?" The sheriff mocked him. "This man is suspected of murdering the daughter of our local prefect. But what sort of 'truth' do you seek out of that? Do you expect to find some way of determining whether or not he did it? Is that what you would have me believe? You have some special power to tell me that Martin did or did not do it?" The Sheriff said derisively.

"Sheriff, I have been following a creature that is entirely capable of committing an act of murder and making it appear as though someone else did it. I believe that the truth may be that this man has been set up to look guilty."

"So, you and I have something in common, then, Tharon. We both seek the truth. You want whatever it is you are looking for and I am looking for the truth behind a murder. Now, everything I have seen and heard since last night tells me that this man murdered a young woman. What's your truth sound like? 'Cause if you've got something that will get this man out from behind bars, I'd like to hear it. I don't like the idea that anyone in this town is capable of such an act."

"Well, Sheriff, having already gathered your evidence, you have the advantage. If I may be permitted to ask some questions, I may be able to answer yours."

The Sheriff raised both of his hands and nodded in an open gesture to proceed.

"Now," Tharon turned to face Martin. "Sir..."

"Martin. Martin Jaspers."

"Master Jaspers, do you remember anything about what happened last night?" Tharon began.

"I remember coming home from my work in Lord Grady's fields. We're preparing for the spring plantings. I sat down to eat some dinner," he paused briefly. "Then nothing."

"While you were having dinner or before then, did anything unusual happen that you can recall? Did you see anything? Hear anything that gave you pause?" Tharon continued.

"I'm not sure I follow you, Master Tharon," Martin was confused.

"Just Tharon will do, Master Jaspers. And what I mean is, did you notice anything unusual? Perhaps a large bird a little closer to your home than might seem normal? A loud sound, perhaps, like a squawking bird, very loud, outside your home?" Tharon asked knowingly.

Martin pondered the questions for a few moments while his eyes drifted to the floor. He raised his head and his eyes widened as he looked back at Tharon. "Why, come to think of it, Tharon, yes. It had gotten kind of late and I had just sat down to eat and I'd only just started my stew. I

heard what sounded like a really loud crow just outside my window. Well, it isn't corn season yet, so I couldn't figure what a crow would be doing squawking outside my window.

I got up and looked out the window, but it was dark and I didn't see anything. Then I heard it again, louder this time, like it was right above me. A crow cawing that time of night just wasn't natural. So I quick closed the shutters on my window. I went back to the table to finish my dinner, but I didn't take my eyes off that window. That's the last thing I know that happened."

Both men stared intently at Martin as he finished.

"How did you,..." The Sheriff turned back towards Tharon as he started to speak.

"Now Sheriff," Tharon interrupted. "Did it seem to get dark too early last night? Cloudy, like a storm was coming?"

"Now that you mention it, it did seem kind of early. And it was awfully cloudy. But it didn't rain last night. Just what are you driving at, Tharon?" The Sheriff

"Sheriff, did you hear anything last night? Same as Martin over there, perhaps?"

"Martin and I don't live anywhere near each..." the Sheriff paused. "You know I did hear a crow last night. I didn't think much of it at the time, but it did get my dog all stirred up. He started jumping all over the house. Acted like something was chasing him. Once he settled down, I'd forgotten about the bird."

"I think, Sheriff, that if you ask everyone in this town, they will all tell you they heard that crow last night."

"What are you getting at, Tharon?"

"The girl who was murdered, was there anyone else with her? Besides Martin?"

"Far as we know, she was alone. No signs of anyone else," the Sheriff replied.

"Sheriff, I believe that your town is unfortunately the next in line for something I have been studying for

years. I believe that your town may have attracted a Piasa."

"A Piasa? What the hell is that?"

"A Piasa is a spirit from the animal world. Have you ever seen a ghost before, Sheriff?"

"I've heard people tell of seeing them, but I've never seen one myself," the skeptical Sheriff interjected.

"Well, this Piasa is particularly mean sort of spirit. But it is most real, Sheriff, I assure you of that. If you should be unfortunate enough to see it, you will probably not survive the night."

"So, what does this Piasa want with us? What did we do?"

"Well, you may have done nothing more than live your lives. Just as you hunt to survive, so does the Piasa."

"Are you a hunter, Sheriff?"

"Well, of course I am. Man's got to eat, doesn't he?"

"And when you hunt, do you look for animals that are clustered together, or do you try to find one that stands alone?"

"Well, it'd take the sport out of it if I hunted them in herds. It'd be too easy. I hunt them when they are alone."

"Exactly. And that is what the Piasa does. It selects a victim and kills them, then it finds another person and places them at the scene. That way, another human gets blamed and the Piasa moves on to its next kill without anyone suspecting anything."

"Just hold on, Tharon. You're saying that an animal is capable of this sort of thing? I think you're giving animals a bit too much credit. They're dumb! They kill to feed, that's all."

"You'd like to think that, wouldn't you, Sheriff? Perhaps animals themselves are dumb, but the Piasa is something else entirely. The Piasa is the suffering spirit of the hunted animals."

"You've got to believe me. In every town that I've been to, there have been at least two, usually three killings before it moved on, depending on the size of the town. How many people live in this town, Sheriff?"

"I think we had around three hundred at the last gathering, why?"

"Just how many of those people are you willing to lose before you listen?"

"Let's say I believe you, Tharon. So what do we do? Can we kill it? Capture it? What *can* we do?"

"The first thing you can do to help yourselves is to get as many people together as possible. Like you say, hunting in packs takes the sport out of it." Tharon replied.

"But we don't have a building in town that would hold everybody. Closest thing is the tavern, and that wouldn't hold us by half. We'll have to meet outdoors." The sheriff believed that he knew just the place.

*To Be Continued....*

### **Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - A GM Pack:**

A set GM pack allows a GM to be more organized with a minimum of effort. The GM pack should include all the books, magazines, GM binders, supplies, miniatures, and dice required for the game. It can be a backpack, a duffle bag, a plastic organizer, or even a plastic milk crate—whatever fits the amount of gear and your needs. By having everything in a single place and knowing where it is, a GM pack will allow you to be organized, access things quickly and easily, and never lose anything.

Plastic magazine holders are a good thing to use for a GM Pack. The holders are light, inexpensive, and very useful. They keep the books/magazines organized and protect the cover corners during travel. They have the advantage that they allow for rapid deployment. By lifting them out of a GM pack, the books are all unpacked and easy to get at.

### **Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Campaign Binder:**

A campaign binder is the penultimate GM tool. This binder contains everything the GM needs to run the game minus the rulebooks. It contains, at minimum, a copy of all the character sheets, a campaign log, notes for each session, notes on all NPCs, possible scenarios and story arcs, world packs, maps, special rules being used in the campaign, experience logs for all the characters, and helpful lists, charts, and such to make running the campaign easier. Each section should be tabbed for ease of access. The GM can bring this and some dice to the game and be ready to run. If your binder is too large, do not be afraid of breaking it into two or three smaller binders. Smaller binders can be more handy than larger ones. Sometimes, making a backup copy of the campaign binder is a good idea.

by Pike Stephenson

## Player Characterization: Character Quirks

Pop quiz: Here are two fantasy-type characters you might see at the gaming table. Which one grabs your attention the most?

*#1- Gungar, the seven-foot tall barbarian that systematically straightens his clothes and repeatedly checks his gear.*

*#2- Skudge, the five foot tall, pot-bellied thief who reeks of garlic and filth.*

So, whom did you pick? Hopefully, you picked both of them. Based on their physical descriptions alone, neither of them would be considered unique. A tall barbarian or a short thief wouldn't attract much attention but looking closer at the other details, something deeper and more enriching can be told about them. These are what I call Character Quirks, little peculiarities that enhance a character and entrenches that person in the minds of the players. In Gungar's description, he is seen fussing with his clothes. The typical barbarian is commonly considered a savage, a powerful man without worry or peer yet this one is fidgeting with his belongings as if he were uncomfortable or perhaps nervous. How unbecoming. And Skudge's distinctive body odors would send many upwind from him, even if it meant death at the hands of a hidden enemy. Also as a side note, the potbelly shows that he must be proficient at some level of ledgermain to feed that gut.

In this installment of Player Characterization, let us explore what can be done to make a character from any setting or genre stand out through the liberal usage of Character Quirks. Why give my character some ridiculous flaw you say? You have spent years gaining levels, amassing power and building the ultimate kick-butt character and now some hack says you should incorporate a negative characteristic? Relax game-aholic, these quirks are intended for fun and inventive role-playing and shouldn't be considered handicaps. After playing the same character for a couple of years, players can find themselves wanting something different. Adding a quirk even later in the game grants players a new avenue

to explore with their beloved character. Starting with a quirk provides a goal for your character to overcome through time. In either case, or in any other you can think of, quirks go farther than livening up a gaming session; they tell a deeper tale about the character. Quirks don't appear out of the blue, they are bred over years of hard or excessive living. You could call them habits formed by one or several persistent and/or traumatic experiences. Use this list as you and your game master see fit. Use several combinations of quirks but remember the old saying: a little goes a long way.

There are two varieties of quirks: physical and mental. Physical quirks go beyond the initial description of the character; they can be used as a prop to spice up battles and lengthy role-playing sessions. Mental quirks are a tremendous tool for role-playing and for Game Masters, and possibly better involve the players in a campaign by playing up to the quirk. Here is a list of possible quirks.

### Physical Quirks:

**Ticks and spasms-** Ticks and spasms are sporadic, involuntary and often violent muscular movement. Shoulder jerks, unprovoked cringing, and cranial twitching are just a few minor examples of spasms. Think about Nick Cage in *Matchstick Men*. I found myself wondering when his face would explode next on the screen. These can be used to exaggerate battle fatigue, cellular damage, or synaptic overload. Incorporating this quirk into your game can create interesting sessions. Often times, ticks and spasms can intensify during tense situations, opening a window into the character's emotional state. Maybe the character only twitches when they lie. Maybe their eyes flicker around the opposite sex. Keeping a consistent portrayal of your character's mental state helps anchor the others from gaming session to session. Just one word of advice: when playing up this quirk use caution. No sudden striking of other players, spilling drinks or scattering dice. Gamers are well known to retaliate swiftly and without warning.

**Fidgeting and nervous behavior-** Where spasms happen occasionally, a fidgety character is in a perpetual state of motion. Spasms can be quickened gestures, leg shaking, and eyes darting from side to side as if they expect the room to fill with catastrophic violence. Imagine personifying rats, squirrels, or smaller birds like finches or starlings; they are quick and anxious, always alert of danger and never sitting in the same spot for more than a few seconds. This kind of behavior tells you that the individual has been hounded for most of his life or is under constant fire. He could have survived a great, extensive war or spent the better part of a lifetime dodging enemy fire. This doesn't have to be a roguish character either; he could be from any class or profession: a nervous wizard whose spells tend to backfire, a priest whose religion isn't heartily accepted or even a warrior that came to battle at a young, naïve age and has yet to recover. These examples are geared towards a fantasy setting but can be easily adapted to any that you choose. Again, these behavioral traits clue you in to how the character must be feeling. You wouldn't want them in on a bluff against insurmountable odds, the opposition would certainly know the truth.

**Odd speech or unusual vocal patterns-** Playing a character that isn't "from around here" comes across better if they don't sound like everybody else. Adding an accent to your character separates them quickly and continuously from the rest of the table. What, not good with accents? How about a lisp or stutter. Some folks may take offence but should also understand that you are trying to give your character new life and establish his or her identity so no one will be confused as to who you are when in reference to In Character vs. Out of Character game speak. If others do take offence be respectful and try a different approach. Other ideas include a squeaky voice, a low growl, a nasally twang, proper enunciation, as in someone coming from a wealthy up bringing and they speak each and every syllable with perfect clarity and diction. Talk about a royal pain in the ass, literally!

**Insatiable appetite-** Does this guy have a tapeworm? A hyper metabolism requires massive quantities of nutrition to sustain life. You can use this quirk to have lots of fun displaying your character's knowledge of fine cuisine, aching desire to stop and eat at every interval, or her ability to attract unwanted attention from wild animals thanks to the smoked sausage hanging out of her pocket. In *Dragonball Z*, Goku, the main character of the series, is the ultimate fighting hero and constantly looking for his next meal. When the chips are down and the other characters are looking for the answer to the deadly dilemmas that plague them, you can bet that Goku is rubbing his belly and moaning for a snack. Have fun with this one. Does your character crave a certain food that is a rare delicacy? Do they eat some of the most repulsive food? You could mix this quirk with the fidgeting quirk for a modern character. Envision a hard-wired adrenaline junkie, pushing his body to the upper limits thanks to severe usage of modern chemistry and technology. This high-flying techno geek would be burning the candle at both ends, demanding more fuel to feed his abused body.

**Bodily odors-** This isn't easy to work into a game but can be fun if played upon sparingly. In a fantasy setting, bathing was something of a luxury. Body odors were not uncommon, but pungent stench from working the pastures, eating strong, spicy foods or just ignoring the bath due to religious beliefs and/or personal fears says something about one's character. In a post-apocalyptic society, bathing would be the least of someone's worries. Individuals working around foundries, smelters or refineries carry their work odors home with them. Necromancers from any genre would have a stench about them from dealing with the dead and the raw materials used to call and control their abominations. Another odor that could be exemplified would be over usage of perfumes and body oils. They smell wonderful in limited quantities but can be over indulged and cause many eyes to water. Is someone trying to cover up a smell or do they want others to take instant notice of them?

## Mental quirks:

**Compulsive liar/ honesty-** Factually challenged can be a haunting trait. White lies and massive whoppers can create doubt and suspicion amongst the character's teammates. Why does this character find it so difficult to tell the truth? Are they afraid of what someone might think? Are they trying to avoid reality and by creating their own version of the truth to make the world an easier place to live? Maybe they find life too boring for their own taste and flex their mind to spin impressive tales out of otherwise normal circumstances. You might consider this person a god in his own mind, repainting each moment and event of worth to his liking. And for the compulsively honest... never tell her secrets! She grew up under the assumption that it's always better to tell the truth, no matter how brutal it may be. She'll blurt it out, at any moment to relieve the weight that burdens her soul. It could be little tidbits overheard, secretive deals concocted in dark alleys, or the fact that she doesn't like the way you dress. This person is a spy network's worst nightmare and best friend all rolled up into one. Never tell her the important stuff but feed her full of misinformation. Yes, honesty is such a lonely word.

**Pristine-** When you come from a higher station than the common riff-raff it is difficult not to stare down one's nose at their vulgarities. This quirk, which is easily a combination of both physical mannerisms and a serious mental attitude, suits the character from a prestigious and royal upbringing. Toss in perfect posture, proper diction, precise gestures, sneering, snobbery, disassociation with commoners and other elitist attitudes and you've got a character that others will love to hate. This doesn't mean that this character is undependable or incapable of performing his fair share of the manual labor; just don't expect him to silently object. Pristine could also mean that the character is effeminate, less aggressive, one you might call dainty or foppish. In the exploits of Zorro, the hero is depicted in his normal identity as a whimsical socialite that would never knowingly endanger himself by engaging in rough behavior. The deception hid his true nature well.

**Braggart-** No one has ever out drunk, out fought or out anything this person, just ask her. Akin to the compulsive liar, she can tell tall tales about her exploits, some of which may be true. Normally, this quirk is associated with a person who is trying to avoid confrontation by bullying the

competition. She could also be making up for past mistakes or trying to make herself feel better about greatness that never came. Names such as jerk, loud mouth, and blow hard are often thrown at these individuals but what do they care: sticks and stones, right? This belligerent attitude can be quite entertaining if sparsely interjected during slow role-playing sessions, tense encounters with warring tribes, or meetings with important dignitaries from foreign nations. Life is never dull around a character like this.

**Melancholy/ lethargic-** Are you tired, worn down or (yawn) feeling humdrum? Can anyone light a fire under this person's posterior? Life is so full of woe and misery that it stifles his spirit and will to live leaving him hoping that a two-ton brick falls from the sky and ends this miserable day. Depression is a serious illness not to be taken lightly and not an easy quirk to portray without becoming melodramatic or a gross charaquette of the feeling you're trying to display. This quirk can be a downer but it can also invigorate others into proving that life is one slam-bang roller coaster ride that should not be missed.

**Superstitious-** Never step on a crack, watch out for black cats and sudden feelings of *déjà vu* mean impending doom. These are common superstitions that plague many. They come in all varieties and sizes. Many sports enthusiasts wear a lucky article of clothing to every game. Other people won't pick up a penny if it's lying face down. Superstition drives many people and is most always grounded on irrational personal belief mixed with skewed facts and fiction. Superstition can work well into most fantasy settings, with many classes of people lacking a proper education combined with their fear and prejudice of the unknown and outsiders. Modern and horror role-playing games should revolve around a hefty dose of the irrational. Superstition has been a grounding rod for most societies, making this quirk easier to develop. Just about any role-playing game comes with enough background detail for characters to develop their own superstitions to match the setting. They work especially well if they have some connection to a running scenario or if the game incorporates a recurring theme.

## Conclusion

There you have a sampling of possible quirks to add to your characters. This is by no means an exclusive list. I suggest that you visit your local library and check out books on

abnormal psychology, behavioral studies, and anything on human character. So much about ourselves and how we operate goes on without any question as to why. Watch folks at the local malls and eateries and notice how some act/ react to similar situations and ask, "What prompted that?" Try to envision where they were coming from and build that into something you can add to your characters and hopefully this will compel others to do the same. Your gaming sessions will never be the same again.

When adding quirks to a game, talk it over with your game master. Let them know that you would like to add some flavor to your character and ask how she feels about it. Does she think the other players will handle this without it distracting from the game? Make certain that the others are up for this change in your character. As you add a quirk, do so sparingly, so as not to upset the initial session and see how your fellow role-players feel about it. As stated before, this is intended for fun and if your idea doesn't sit well with the others, scrap it and try another quirk. Always strive towards fun and exciting role-playing and accept that most ideas may sound good initially but after a trail run lack the luster you had anticipated. That is one of the joys of role-playing; fantasy and has no control or bearing on reality.

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by Edward Kopp

## Gen Con 2004 - Looking Ahead

### Introduction

Fifty days and counting. I refer, of course, to the GenCon gaming convention held in Indianapolis, Indiana this August 19 – 22. GenCon is considered by many to be the greatest gaming convention in the world with four days of RPGs, board games, miniatures, CCGs, and traditional card games. After decades of growth to over twenty-five thousand strong, GenCon had to move from Milwaukee to Indianapolis to have enough hotel space to accommodate all the gaming fans. There is much more at GenCon than can be done in four days. I've even heard the cry for a fifth day to fit in more gaming goodness. Wouldn't that be something!

The whole GenCon experience can be overwhelming to a first-time visitor. Even if you're a veteran of many smaller gaming cons you can get lost, misprepare, and have a less than enjoyable time. GenCon is a major outing and requires serious planning to maximize your gaming fun. This article gives an overview of what GenCon is, how to prepare, and more importantly, how to have fun at this great gaming convention!

After attending six GenCons over the past ten years, I have a number of suggestions and precautions which I hope will prepare you for the world's biggest game fair. I have tried to collect a bit of wisdom compiled from my experiences and observations. If you take heed you'll find your experiences at GenCon that much more pleasurable.

### Preparing for GenCon

**Pre-registration.** The first and most important thing you can do for yourself is pre-register. Pre-registration ends on July 12<sup>th</sup> so be sure to register by then! Pre-registration is easy to do via the Internet ([www.gencon.com](http://www.gencon.com)) and saves you ten bucks, which you're going to need for the Dealers Room at the event. Besides putting a ten spot back in your pocket, you've also just saved yourself hours of standing in line to register with all the other attendees who waited

until the day of the con to scrape up the \$70 for four days of extreme gaming. If there's just no way you can pre-register by the 12<sup>th</sup>, then at least try to get to the con and register Wednesday evening before the crowds.

**Necessities.** It's important to remove as many barriers as possible to ensure the best gaming experience. Be sure to pack your medication, some pain killers, digestive aids and any other necessities. Getting sick because you forgot to take your medication as scheduled is not how you want to spend your time at GenCon.

**Books and Dice.** Think carefully about what you really need to bring to the con and try to bring as few books as possible. If you're only coming to play games, not judge or GM, then bring only those books necessary to play. Since there are tons of opportunities to purchase and/or win new gaming supplies, you're going to need all the carrying capacity your backpack has to haul all the great stuff home. You also want to travel light because you rarely have time to go all the way back to your hotel room and empty your loot before the start of your next event. Remember it's a four-day con; you don't want to be lugging anything extra.

**Shoes and Clothing.** Since GenCon is four over-packed days long, make sure you wear your most comfortable shoes. It would even be better if you had two pairs of comfortable shoes and switched them daily or before going out at night to hit the town. Don't buy a new pair of shoes for GenCon right before you leave. Get them a couple weeks earlier and break them in to avoid painful blisters.

What do you need to wear? GenCon takes place indoors and the convention center is air-conditioned. Even so, I'd suggest light layers. The ever-present gaming T-shirt, jeans and a light sweater or sweatshirt is a good start. Some rooms are poorly ventilated and once filled with gamers they become stuffy and warm. Others rooms are nearly empty and had a slight chill. Just pretend you're a Boy Scout and be prepared. You're physical comfort will directly related to how much fun

### About the Author

Edward Kopp, staff writer for the *Silven Trumpeter*, polished his gaming skills in his teens with a large network of friends in the Battle Creek, Michigan area. After his entry to the US Navy in 1987, he continued to expand his expertise with the many gamers he met in the military until his discharge in 1993. His many years in the gaming community have contributed not only to his GMing skills, but also to his current writing projects as well. Current projects include a totally improvised Arcana Unearthed campaign, judging rounds of his favorite RPGA Living Campaign: *Living Arcanis*, and working on a new setting for publication based off of cutting edge archeological and geological information; code name : Little Monster.

### Contact the Author

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you will have.

**Meals and Food.** You'll discover that your overall energy level will be higher if you eat at least one meal that doesn't consist of candy bars, chips and caffeinated carbonated beverages per day. Food at the convention center is at convention center prices, so expect to pay a lot for snacks there. You can't get a real meal through them and I doubt many of you are willing to pay \$4.75 for a hot dog.

Plan ahead and bring food with you. Get granola, trail mix, and protein bars to supplement your diet at the con. You can bring a bag full of granola or nuts and snack on them periodically through out the day. Put a protein bar in your dice bag and you're certain to get the nutrients to be at your peak for the great role-playing challenge you'll be facing that afternoon. I can't stress this point enough. GenCon is four days long. Eat well.

**Cell Phones/ Communication.** Don't forget your cell phone and phone charger. The convention center is big and you're going to need your cell phones to keep in touch with your friends if you get separated. If you don't have a cell phone make sure you set a place and time to meet up if everyone goes their separate ways. Your group may not be able or even want to do everything together. When you are in the mood to browse the art room your friend may have a demo she's interested in. It can be hard to meet up again in the vast sea of gamers that is GenCon.

## At the Con

**Event Tickets.** You are there. You've paid the registration fee, received your schedule of events, and are looking for that game you've come all the way to GenCon to play. Now you get in another line—the event ticket line—and hope it isn't sold out. You can register for events in advance on the web and I recommend doing so. There are also generic tickets and if there's a slot available for you at any given event the GM will take generics. If a ticketed player comes along at the last minute, you will lose your spot with just a generic ticket. There are lots of events that you can get into with generics, but say you're interested in trying True Dungeon this year. You will not get in with out an event specific ticket. I suggest pre-registering for the events you want to attend to make sure you don't miss out. I also recommend you leave yourself some slack time to scope out the con and make decisions there.

**The Dealers Room.** As you're scheduling in your events and making sure you have the most game-packed weekend ever, don't forget to schedule in some free time for the Dealers Room and the art show (10AM-6PM Th, F, S and till 4PM Su). I do the Dealers Room very specifically. I try to get in to the Dealers Room at least twice during the con. The first time I go is early on Thursday or Friday to beat the crowds and browse. I take at least four hours to do this as there is always a lot to look at there. During those four hours, I look for things that catch my interest. I buy whatever gaming books I know I want and am afraid they will sell out of, like happened last year with Monte Cook's *Arcana Unearthed*. I wasn't positive I'd be able to afford it until Sunday and by that time they had sold out of the second load of them the day before.

I avoid the Dealers Room at all cost on Saturday because of the crowds. Saturday is the peak day of the convention and is a total mad house.

I go back to the Dealers Room Sunday for a much more leisurely look at those items of note from my earlier expedition. Sunday is much more sedate and dealers may be willing to cut a good deal with you so that they don't have to lug their stock back home. Asking for a discount is fine but a discount should not be expected. What I do is try to make the request a bundled deal where I can buy a few items for a reduced price. The vendor gets rid of more

stock; I get more stuff and everybody is happy about the price.

Negotiating the Dealers Room is difficult. I've studied the layout and it seems to be designed perfectly for consumerism. Along the short axis of the hall the booths are lined up in neat columns. If you try to walk from one end of the long axis to the other you are forced to weave around groups of booths so that you are exposed to more vendors. And be aware there are only three entrances to the room and no bathrooms on the floor.

**The Art Show.** Give yourself an hour or two to browse the art show. I peruse and chat a little with the artists. I might come back and look again just to kill some time if I have a slow period late in the con, but since I'm not buying art I don't feel the need to spend too much time there. I like to meet and talk with the artists that I enjoy the most. There's lots of great art and this is another place where you can try to get bundled deals.

**The Auction.** What else is there to do at GenCon when you're not busy gaming? There's always the auction if you're looking for gaming stuff at a bargain. It only costs a couple of bucks to register for the auction and you can bid as much as you want. Registration for items is Wednesday from 12PM-6PM and the auction itself takes place from 10AM-10PM Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and till 3PM on Sunday. A word of caution if you've never participated in an auction before: know the maximum price you're willing to pay before you make the first bid, otherwise the next thing you know you're paying twice as much as you were willing to spend. It's easy to get caught up in it all and loose perspective. Losing control can cost you those precious GenCon dollars. But hey, it's fun and you can get some great deals.

**Finding a Game.** So how easy is it to find a pick up game? Well, in this respect GenCon is a lot like summer camp. You need to find someone to play with. So finding a game is as easy as you make it. Start talking to the people next to you in line while registering. Talk to the people you're sitting next to. Everyone is there to have a good time and interact with other gamers. This is the one place where you can feel at home.

It's really amazing that GenCon started out as a small war gamers convention in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Hence the name Gen(Geneva)Con. The birth of the grand daddy of all gaming cons had humble beginnings.

For years GenCon was held at Mecca in Milwaukee. The last few years it was held at a new Midwest Convention Center. Even with the new center, 25,000 gamers were just too much for Milwaukee. Now with plenty of hotel and accommodations in downtown Indianapolis, GenCon has found a new and perhaps permanent home.

The Indiana Convention Center is connected to a domed stadium and the first impression is overwhelming because everything is so big. As you drive down Maryland Street, the convention center and hotels tower up from the street and you can see the skywalks connecting the Marriott and Westin Hotels to the convention center. It gives the sense of a healthy tourist and commercial destination.

Last year I stayed at the Crown Plaza which is also connected to the center by way of the stadium. It was kind of a strange experience there because of the strong train motif through out the hotel. There are even suites that are actual train cars you can reserve if you want. Scattered everywhere are white replicas of people doing everyday things. It looked like a bunch of ghosts to me and startled me more than once late at night. Other than the lobby and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor looking ghostly, it is a nice place. A lot of industry and RPGA people were housed there too, so I figure it can't be too bad.

That was my sixth GenCon. I had been to the last year in Milwaukee to say good bye and I made sure I went to the first year in Indy to check out the new home. I spent a fair amount of time snooping around and asking questions of the Indy City representatives at their booth. I also talked to a number of con goers Thursday, Friday and Saturday to gage how the new site was doing. There were some major computer problems and the average wait for registration was four hours. I had come in Wednesday night like I always do and worked out all my own registration details then, so I felt really lucky to be walking around so easily. There were a number of other glitches, but the registration issue was the biggest. In the end I wore a photocopy of an RPGA judges badge because they never got the regular ones to print more than one at a time. Overall, the transition to Indy was a smooth one and GenCon was great as always.

**Gaming Demos.** Besides pick up games, there are demos of games going on in the Dealers Room. Remember the vendors are there to talk to you and teach you about their product. They want to teach you how to play so in that eternal struggle of looking for a little joy you will buy the cool new game you just learned. The vendors like it when this happens. Go and learn new games, they're out there. Most vendors will have an event highlighting their product in the event schedule. It usually says in the write up if it's an introduction to the game and if rules are taught at the table or if experience with the game is needed. Even though your favorite game is running throughout the con try to take some time to expose yourself to new game systems.

**Sleep!** Don't forget to get some sleep with all the fun. You will find yourself having more fun if you're at least a little bit rested. I won't go into who needs how much sleep, but suffice it to say, whatever your personal sleep threshold is you're going to push it at GenCon. I'm not saying don't have late night fun, but if the opportunity comes and there's a lull in the action at 4AM then it might be worth jumping into bed for a four-hour nap.

## GenCon Etiquette

**No Gamer's Funk.** I have to be blunt. You must bathe every day. Gamer's Funk is no joke. Sitting near someone who reeks of putrid body odor ruins your event. It's difficult to role-play if you can't breathe. I'm willing to bet that if you asked someone to let you take a shower in their hotel room, because you can't afford a room but you're at GenCon anyway (it happens all the time), they won't turn you away. If they do they're ignoring the decades-long tradition of gamer generosity. It isn't healthy for you or those around you to go all that time with out bathing. And you're never going to get laid smelling like four-day-old gamer funk. Do every one a favor and bathe.

**No Rabid Fanboys.** I know you really love Monte Cook's *Arcana Unearthed* but please don't stalk him at the con. I'm sure your idea for a variant witch or champion class is excellent and unique, however, it's just not polite to be a rabid fanboy. This goes for your favorite artist of that cool *Magic* card too. Just remember these people have private lives and despite all the joy they've given you, they are not your close intimate friends. They want to enjoy their time at GenCon as much as you do. If during conversation while

browsing the Dealers Room or art show you happen to hit it off with someone it's okay to invite them out for a drink. But don't hound them with the adventure tales of your campaign.

**Characters or People?** Characters are a personal thing. They are a cherished alter ego that brings us camaraderie and joy. The more you discover about the persona the more intimate you feel. They become alive in your imagination. However, at GenCon I'm more interested in getting to know you, the real person. Tell me about all the cool stuff you've done or where you're from and I'll gladly sit and chat for a while. I know I am not alone because I have seen t-shirts with the "Do NOT tell me about your character" slogan written across the chest. Enough said.

**Taking Pictures.** There is a great costume contest at GenCon. Many talented people put hours of hard work into some pretty amazing costumes. They will be all over the place at the con. If you want to take their picture it is proper and polite to ask permission first. And conversely, if you're wearing a costume around the con expect a lot of people to stop you and ask to take your picture. I've seen some women in costume get stuck in one spot for five minutes with picture after picture.

## Places to go after gaming

There is a bustling downtown that sprawls out next to the convention center. The Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association has an ultra slick magazine detailing the surrounding area and highlighting some of the local hot spots. You can go to [www.indy.org](http://www.indy.org) for details. It has pages of bars, and restaurants, and their hours. Friday and Saturday there are a number of places that are open late. After last year I think the local merchants are wise to the fact that twenty-five thousand gamers eat and drink mass quantities and want to be up late! While finding food in the wee hours of the morning was a problem last year and I hear that they are better prepared this year.

At the GenCon message boards (<http://forums.gencon.com/>) I have seen postings about a place called the *Red Eye Café*. Apparently it is co-owned by a gamer, is in walking distance of the con, and is open twenty-four hours for the late night gamers who will be pouring in Friday and Saturday. And while you're eating out let's not give gamers

### Tim Riley:

My best GenCon memory is also a Gary Gygax memory. My friend Robert Kindel had lost his *Players Handbook* and went to get a replacement from the TSR Booth. As my friend was standing in line, Gary grabs the book and writes "May the dice be with you" and hands it back to my friend. He then looks at the cashier and says "Do I get a discount since someone wrote in it?"

### Edward Kopp:

In 1993 I went to my first-ever GenCon. I had just gotten out of the Navy and had a pocket full of cash. I was feeling great. I scheduled myself every available slot I could and gamed like a madman for four days straight.

The highlight came when I played in an innocuous round that had us playing people from the here and now in a fantasy setting. It started out with you being manacled and in the dark, all you heard was the sound of five other people around you. The game was being run by the author, the then Paragon ranked DM Jay Tummelson. He was the number-one rated DM in the RPGA. It was *awesome*.

That round is the standard for how I think a DM should run the game. He knew the story and rules so well that all the mechanics ran smoothly. I never broke character and he even got to young guys to really role-play for the first time. Getting gamers into character and seeing them enjoy themselves so much is heart warming to me. That session was magical and I look for that same role-playing experience this year.

### Bradford Ferguson:

GenCon 2003 was my first GenCon. It was pretty hectic since I was covering the event for *Silven Crossroads*. Chris Harris (IkusaGwai) was there covering it with me. The first thing we did was a press-only walk-through of *True Dungeon* by its maker, Jeff Martin. It was amazing to see how much work went into True Dungeon—which sold out at both GenCon and GenCon SoCal. The *True Dungeon* preview really put me in the mood for the rest of GenCon and made me really excited to see the exhibitor's hall.

Chris and I got our Press Badges and we had an interview with Anthony Valterra of the Valar Project at 10am. 10am happened to be the same time the exhibitor's hall opened up. There was a mob of people around the doors of the exhibitor's hall and an elated

a bad reputation by poor tipping. If you can't afford to tip don't eat at a full service restaurant. Working for tips, staying out late and not making any money is a sure way to ruin a Friday or Saturday night as a server.

## Ways to do GenCon

What do I mean by that? Well, I've gone to GenCon six times and done it differently each time.

**The First Time: Blocking.** During my first GenCon I helped a friend pay his way. I didn't spend as much money as I could have because I scheduled myself for every slot available and never made it to the Dealers Room. Yes, I forgot to go to the Dealers Room. It still amazes me, but I had a blast. Blocking out every single hour of the con works if you remember to schedule in things like the Dealers Room and eating.

**Free Form Style.** Another year I did it just like everybody else and waited in line after line for an exceptionally long time to get event tickets. That year I did it totally free form. I waited to see the schedule until I arrived Wednesday afternoon. I decided to do things that interested me that I had never done before. I had an excellent time, learned a lot of new games, and made some really cool gaming friends. When I compare a completely filled schedule to total free form it's a draw. They were both great con experiences.

**Judging Events.** Last year it was my friend's turn to treat me to a con. I judged four rounds of RPGA and got my entrance fee waived. My friend paid for the room, helped feed me, and gave me a little spending cash, but by the time we knew he could afford it they had sold out again of Monte Cook's *Arcana Unearthed*. There is a long tradition of helping out your fellow gamer at GenCon. It's good karma and you need all of that you can get for good die rolls.

**Volunteering.** There's a way to get your entrance for free: volunteer. The convention runs on volunteers. These folks make every year go as smoothly as possible. For all their efforts they get their entrance fee refunded for sixteen hours of volunteering at GenCon. For thirty-two hours you

get the refund and hotel reimbursement. Check out the GenCon web site for all the details. You can also judge four rounds as an RPGA judge for free entrance. Running seven events gets you a free room to boot. Not a bad deal at all.

I dream of a totally decadent GenCon. Spending freely in the Dealers Room, staying in a high priced suite with all those cool amenities, and buying lots of really cool art. But that's another day and another GenCon.

## Conclusion

This year my girlfriend and I are sharing a room with another couple to save on the expense. I've registered for the con and the few events I want to make sure I don't miss, and I've gone over the event schedule looking for events of interest that I may want to check out while I'm there. I've noted a few demos, a couple seminars, and blocked out my time in the Dealers Room Thursday and Sunday. I'll have a list of "must haves" for the Dealers Room and you can bet I'm hitting the grocery just before we leave for fruit and all the good crunchy stuff. I have just broken in the most comfortable walking shoes I've ever owned and they're ready for GenCon. So am I.

Just remember to plan ahead a little bit and you will have an excellent time this year at GenCon. Keep in mind that everyone is there to have fun and a little common courtesy goes a long way. Enjoy yourselves. Good gaming and have good con.

cry went up when the clock struck 10 and the doors were opened. I remember thinking that I had to get a copy of Monte Cook's *Arcana Unearthed* but as I was heading to Valar's booth, I look back to the Sword & Sorcery Studios booth where Malhavoc was selling AU and I saw that it is swarmed. So I reluctantly headed to the interview, but luckily I got a copy later on that day. *Arcana Unearthed* sold 400 copies on Thursday and 400 copies on Friday.

After the interview with Anthony Valterra, I remember running around the convention hall like a chicken with its head cut off—trying to see what all was out there. I made it my goal to canvas the whole convention hall, check out all the d20 publishers, and also check out some stuff that I thought was interesting such as *Mechanical Dream* and *Obsidian*. I also checked out the gaming software such as mapping software and the real-time online combat tracking software. There was also cool new terrain from *Dwarven Forge* and some other accessories.

On Friday we interviewed Peter Adkinson and Monte Cook. That was a dream for the both of us. While Peter Adkinson did have his PR game face on, he seemed to genuinely love gaming and to be pleased about the success he had achieved so far.

We talked about past, present, and future with Monte Cook and we could see the passion that he had for doing what he's doing. Unfortunately, the tape for Monte's interview was a bust, so we scrambled after the interview to write down the stuff that he talked about.

I ended up running around everyday, talking to more publishers and writers—GenCon is the best game store ever. Nearly all the publishers, writers, and artists are there and you can ask them questions about their product, have stuff explained in some detail, or simply get your stuff signed. Just think about the dilemma you face between choosing a few things at the normal game store, and then multiply that by a big number. I definitely felt like a kid in a candy store.

This year, Silven Crossroads will have four people covering the event and we will definitely have bigger and more prompt coverage (and two recorders at each interview). We plan on interviewing many more folks and getting the scoop on GenCon release products as quickly as possible. I think I will have to do a strict physical regimen prior to GenCon.

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by Artemis Jade Wetzel

# HERO

The times are few and those few we have should be valued. Never forsake those whom you love in your life, for they are the ones who will carry you in your time\_of greatest need. Like those who have come before, let us hold onto the hope that one day we will all see each other again. Let us hope that we have the knowledge to repair that which is broken and forever forge on into stories of legends.

Heroes come in all forms, and it is sometimes the smallest that prevail and shine through the darkest times. I shall walk with you into death and accompany you into the halls of heroes. And they shall call your name from the highest mountain, and it will be heard from one end of the world to the other. They will call you friend.

Monuments shall be fashioned where your boots have trod, and your deeds will be taught in the halls of learning. For it is you have brought peace, and restored the light that had faded.



# THE SHADE

"Lie before me" said the Shade.

"Nay" says I. "For I do not wish  
to become a course carrion,  
from which the buzzards feast!"

Says the Shade, "If you come with  
me  
then you shall have the life of a  
great king."

"Nay" says I,  
"For me to leave my hopes,  
my dreams, my family would  
be sheer folly and betrayal.  
For my soul would wander,  
without meaning, without  
purpose!"

## 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.

Says I to the Shade,

Death's repose is not for me today, for even  
if you promise a time without pain,  
I cannot justly leave this worldly domain."

"For I am life renewed.

I am what is good and kind, and loving.  
I am the knight on white horse,  
who is meant to save the damsel from despair.  
I am the prophecy that is meant to  
be fulfilled, as the end of the world draws near."

Says I to the Shade,

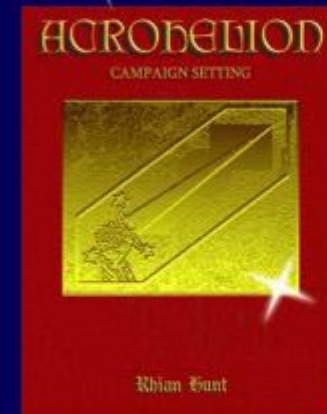
"Shade, Shade go away,  
and come again when I'm old and gray.  
For you are not welcome here,  
and must be on your way."

Said the shade to me  
"I will part from you this day,  
but be forewarned, that I shall return,  
upon the field of battle."

Says I to the shade  
"Until then my dark friend,  
may we meet again."

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by **Matthew J. Hanson**

## The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

### *The Prettiest Adventure Yet*

Starlanko the Magnificent, magician of renown, who, according to a recent poll (conducted by himself) was one of the most handsome wizards on the northern continent, looked at himself in the full-length mirror. He had to admit the dressmaker knew her craft. The lush blue fabric fell away from his hips like a fountain, and somehow the dress managed to bring out curves Starlanko did not know existed. With a wig and the proper application of makeup the disguise would be perfect.

Perfect looking at least. Maybe not perfect to wear. The corset was rather tight. Starlanko, for the record, had always disapproved of corsets. They were uncomfortable, unhealthy, and unnecessary. To that end, Starlanko always tried to help as many women as possible out of their corsets. (It was for their own good, after all.)

From a separate changing room emerged Redreck the Fierce, Starlanko's associate and one of the boldest warriors he'd ever known. Redreck had slain orcs, trolls, ogres, and hand single-handedly defeated the giant chieftain Bloodskull.

Redreck the Fierce looked at himself in the mirror, and then asked Starlanko's opinion. "Does this dress make me look fat?"

Several days ago, and a great deal farther to the west, Starlanko the Magnificent arrived early. It was his style. Kings and princes could keep people waiting as long as they liked. A salesman should always be on time. Besides, it gave him the opportunity for one of his favorite pastimes; listening in on other people's conversations.

"Y'know what I heard?" A group of four soldiers sat around a nearby table. From what Starlanko gathered they were part of Androthia's northern border guard on a few weeks leave. The one who was speaking had a gruff voice, and a quality that made Starlanko think the soldier had seen many battles. "I've heard that the higher ups want to make a move on the offensive. They mean to take out Golgath."

"Are they crazy?" asked another. He was younger, maybe a raw recruit. "The orcs have made that place into death trap."

"No, it makes sense," said the only woman at the table. Her voice was soft and warm, like a fine wool blanket on a cold winter night. "The orcish raids become more costly everyday, and we all know they come from Golgath. Plus the powers that be want a secure trade route with the Dwarves up in the Morlians. That's not going to happen while Golgath remains." "And it fits with the build up," said a forth soldier. His voice was deep, and resonated like a massive church bell. "The extra ground troops, the high powered, the wizards."

"But it can't be done!" The young soldier exclaimed. "Golgath is built into a mountain. The orcs'll have the high ground. There aren't even walls to scale, unless you count the walls that will be formed from the piles of corpses."

"If we don't act soon, it cost more live in the long term," the woman said.

"But I don't want *my* life to be the cost."

A silence fell over the table. Even without seeing, Starlanko knew the three veterans were all staring at the young recruit, and he knew what the look meant. They were all willing to die.

#### 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](http://www.matthewjhanson.com).

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Starlanko looked down the bar. At the end, his associate Redreck was drinking alone. Starlanko knew that Redreck had once served on Androthia's northern border, but it was not something the warrior talked about much. Not that he talked much about anything in his past. Not that Redreck talked much.

Starlanko was not a stranger to violence, but he always had an exit strategy. He always got out alive.

"Starlanko the Magnificent, a pleasure as always," came a voice from behind him. Even before turning Starlanko knew the ear-to-ear grin that he would see: Mayburry, the man who he had arranged to meet.

Starlanko turned and shook the man's hand. "Good day, Mayburry. What news do you have for me?"

Mayburry was a traveling performer by trade, but he also kept an ear out for news that might be of special interest to particular clients. For Starlanko, Mayburry brought news of new spells, and, to a lesser extent, news of customers for those spells.

Mayburry listed off all of the new spell creations that he had encountered. Starlanko could tell he was in for a long list, and most of the spells were only "purple fireballs," magic that had a few new cosmetic changes, but was not much different from what was widely available. After the first couple of spell descriptions Starlanko continued to smile and nod accordingly, but only listened with a small portion of his a brainpower. Just enough to alert the rest if something interesting came up. The rest of his mind, the part not paying attention to Mayburry, focused on other topics, including the

nearby soldiers. Starlanko's well trained mind did fade into focus for a couple of novel ideas that might be marketable, though none had that extra 'oomph' that Starlanko so loved.

"There's just one more; I mention it only for the sake of thoroughness," Mayburry said. "There's a man in Bacarus named Dresdil, you may have heard of him." Starlanko knew he had, but he was a little fuzzy on the details. "Dresdil inherited a prosperous business from his father, and he likes to study wizardry in his spare time, which he has quite a bit of. Anyway, word has it that he has developed a spell that lets you shoot a ray through a wall."

"Sounds intriguing," said Starlanko. "Though why would a merchant want to shoot through walls?"

"I'm not sure, but Dresdil is known to be bit... eccentric."

"I beseecheth, thy pardon sir," came a voice from Starlanko's direction, which was not the mage's, "however I do knoweth some of this Dresdil, and alas, he is not an honorable man."

Mayburry looked for the voice's source. "Who said that?"

"Relax. It's just my sword Funbane," Starlanko said.

"I didn't know you used a sword."

"I don't. I just carry it around in case I need to annoy somebody to death."

Stories were coming back to Starlanko about Dresdil's dwelling, filled with guards, automatic magic detection, and wards against everything from teleportation to loitering. It was almost a fortress: a fortress with impenetrable walls. Who needs to penetrate the walls when you can shoot right through them? "Perhaps he developed the spell out of paranoia," Starlanko suggested.

"Some would call him paranoid yes," Mayburry admitted. "The question I have though, is not so much why a merchant; it's why at all. You might be able to shoot to the other side, but how would you hit anything?"

Already the wheels in Starlanko's mind were turning.

"Thank you Mayburry, for your thoroughness," said Starlanko. The wizard handed the agreed-upon fee to Mayburry, who left with a wink and a nod.

Starlanko stayed in the tavern long after Mayburry left. He spent part of his time listening to scraps of conversation, part scribbling on scraps of paper, and part paying other people's bills.

Starlanko felt the gaze of the four soldiers fall upon him when they heard the news. "Just doing my part. If there is anything else I can do to make your stay more... enjoyable," Starlanko said, with a wink to the female soldier. "Please do not hesitate to ask."

Dresdil was a man like most others, and Bacarus was a city like most others. A few proper words in the proper ear, a few proper coins in the proper palms and Starlanko learned everything he needed to know about Dresdil and his establishment.

He was just as paranoid as the rumors made him out to be. High walls surrounded his dwelling; a small army of guards patrolled the halls and grounds. What worried Starlanko the most were the magical wards, including an alarm that sounded anytime foreign magic entered the compound. That meant Starlanko could not simply cast invisibility on himself (or any other spell for that matter), and stroll in. Well, if Starlanko the Magnificent could not use magic, he would just have to break in the old fashioned way.

Like every suit of armor, Dresdil's security, too, had its chink. The merchant had a certain fondness for the ladies. However, in his excessive paranoia Dresdil did not follow the standard method of courtship. Instead his servants would approach eligible ladies and explain the situation. If the ladies were agreeable they would appear at the compound later that evening. Usually more than one woman would show up to give Dresdil a choice of partners.

In general, Starlanko would not have approved of this method, but if it afforded him entrance to Dresdil's house, Starlanko would not complain too much. Besides, he felt better stealing from people if he disliked them.



As for Dresdil's spell book, sources indicated that Dresdil kept it in his bedroom, and the book would not be easy to miss. The tome was covered in gold and had enough gems to make a dragon green with envy.

The incursion into Dresdil manor was not a task to be rushed. The planning stage alone took several days. After the planning stage Starlanko had to gather certain materials. The dresses where just a start. Makeup and wigs were needed to complete the disguise. Several other items needed to be procured as well: ropes, pry bars, special alchemical compounds that could eat through steel. The most difficult item to obtain was a poison that could knock a person unconscious on mere contact with the skin.

In the few moments that Starlanko was not working on the plan, he was working on a spell of his own composition. He usually trafficked in spells written by others, merely collecting and consolidating. Occasionally inspiration struck, and Starlanko the Magnificent had no choice but to craft a spell himself.

Finally, after eight days of preparation, Starlanko and Redreck were ready for step one.

"That's funny, you don't look like sisters," said one of Dresdil's servants.

"I will not have you insulting our mother's honor like that!" Starlanko protested. He was using highest possible register without going into falsetto. If he was not yelling so angrily, his voice might be described as velvety. "If I were I man, I would challenge you to a duel." In addition to his blue dress he now wore a long blond wig, skillfully applied blush, eye shadow, and lipstick. It was a very special crimson lipstick. Unlike most lipsticks it required a protective layer be first applied beneath it so that it did not come in contact with Starlanko's skin.

Dresdil's servant eyed the two women. It was not an unreasonable observation, he thought. The two women



looked quite different. One was fair and slender. She was tall, but not unusually tall, and she had elegant bone structure. The other one was dark and built like a stone keep. Her jaw was square, but she had well curved hips and a generous allotment of certain other assets that might make her appealing to his master.

"Names?" the servants asked.

"My name is Marabella," said Starlanko the Magnificent, "and my sister is called Lira. She's a little shy." Redreck batted his eyelashes, and gave a meek finger wiggle of a wave. Redreck had chosen a more conservative tan-colored dress, and a dark brown wig. Redreck was also wearing the protective coating on his lips, but he had not gone so far as to apply the lipstick. (Red was not a good color on him). Still Starlanko had insisted he carry a sample of it in his handbag, "just incase,"

At last the servant nodded. He commanded them to follow him, and they did so. It was not a long walk to the entrance of Dresdil Manor. As they passed through the front gates, Starlanko saw the manor house proper for the first time. "Wow, it is so big," he said. Thirty feet from the house to the gates, guards at each set of doors, as well as some on the wall. Starlanko hoped he and Redreck would be able to leave just as easily as they entered.

They were soon inside and escorted to a lavish waiting area, filled with flowers and fainting couches. Several other women were already waiting in the room. A few looked like they had done this sort of thing before, others seemed more nervous.

At last Dresdil himself appeared. He was short and squat. He wore several layers of expensive fabric, the outermost of which was a red velvet suit, and on his head he wore a floppy green hat. Starlanko could not help thinking that the ensemble made him look rather like an apple.

Dresdil traveled around the room, greeting each of the woman in turn. He was a soft-spoken man, and despite Starlanko's best efforts, the wizard could only make out the occasional snippets of dialogue. In the course of his rounds he came to Starlanko.

"Good evening, mademoiselle, you are the one called Marabella if I am not mistaken?"

"Quite correct," replied Starlanko, "and you of course are the great Dresdil."

"Naturally. That is a lovely dress, my dear, may I ask where you purchased it?"

"You may indeed. I obtained it from Madame Chenet's boutique. I wear it only on the specialest of occasions."

"So you would consider this a special occasion then?"

"Oh yes, sir. The chance to meet a man as rich, powerful and intelligent as yourself? It is an opportunity that a girl gets only once in a lifetime, and then only if she is blessed kindly by the Lady of Fortune."

"Indeed, mademoiselle, you are too benevolent."

"No, good monsieur, it is you who are too modest. I have heard there is no challenge too great for you, from commercialism to wizardry, you are a master of it all."

Dresdil's eyes narrowed. "Why do you want to know about wizardry?"

"I did not want to know anything, I simply mentioned that I had heard... please forgive me, good monsieur, if I caused any offense. Let me assure you that if I have offended, it was simply through ignorance, and through no form of malicious intent."

The merchant's eyes relaxed again, "Well, my dear, I fear you have already monopolized too much of my time. If you will excuse me, I must attend to the other invitees," Dresdil said and he tipped his hat. He took several steps to the left and introduced himself to Redreck the Fierce. "And you, my dear, are simply too much beauty for the eye to behold at once."

Redreck held his palm up towards Dresdil, and flicked her wrist, in the classic, "oh stop it," gesture.

"That's my sister Lira. She's a bit shy," Starlanko said.

"Perhaps, or perhaps she simply never finds the opportunity to say what is on her mind." Dresdil took Redreck's large hand and lead him out of earshot of Starlanko.

Starlanko watched the two converse. Redreck's artificially feminine frame towered a good foot and a half over Dresdil. He could not make out any of the exchange, but they both seemed to be enjoying themselves. Redreck smiled, and fanned himself, while Dresdil giggled with laughter. Starlanko noticed that Dresdil talked longer to Redreck than he had to any of the other women. He just hoped Redreck did not forget anything important.

Eventually Dresdil parted from Redreck. The former continued his way to around the room while the latter drifted back to his "sister."

"Did he say anything important?" Starlanko asked.

"Just small talk," Redreck responded.

"Don't forget your make up, dear sister."

They sat in silence while Dresdil focused his attention on the last couple of woman, but Starlanko could tell that it was a superficial act. Dresdil had already reached his decision.

"Mademoiselles, I have reached my decision," Dresdil announced with great authority. "You are all beautiful. It is true. Nonetheless, there is one among you who truly stood head and shoulders above the rest. My companion for the evening shall be the enchanting Mademoiselle Lira. Dinner shall commence immediately."

Redreck took Dresdil's hand, apparently ready to be wined and dined. The rest of the woman filed out of the room, while Starlanko lingered. "I promised I'd wait for my sister," she explained to one of the guards.

Before the guard could respond, Dresdil himself doubled back. "Can't you wait for your sister at home?" he demanded.

"I was hoping I would not have to return home alone," Starlanko said.

"I can have an armored guard escort you if you desire," Dresdil proposed.

"Please, let her stay. For me," Redreck interrupted.

Dresdil looked up at Redreck and his face softened. "Very well. Have a guest bedroom made up for her," he said to one of the servants. "And make certain there is a guard posted outside the room at all times."

The guest bedroom that Starlanko the Magnificent soon found himself in was obviously meant to impress visitors with Dresdil's wealth. There were silk sheets on the down mattress of the velvet-draped four poster bed, an ebony writing desk inlaid with gold stood in the corner and a clock of gold and silver hung on the wall. It was nearly eight. In addition to everything else he had to worry about, Starlanko needed to make sure they were out by midnight. Midnight was the hour that the sword, Funbane, always returned to its master (currently Starlanko). The sword, being magical, would automatically set off the alarms in place, and that would probably be only the beginning of the trouble it would cause.

At this point Starlanko had to wait, and trust Redreck. It was not the warrior's intentions that worried Starlanko, it was his inexperience. Subterfuge was not Redreck's forte, but Starlanko had prepped him for this eventuality. There was nothing Starlanko could do now, except find a way to pass the time.

He thought briefly about making use of the writing desk. There were still one or two details he needed to work out on his pet spell, but he decided the risk of being observed was too high. He would have to do something else while he waited.

"Hello, Mr. Guard? Are you out there?" Starlanko called through the door. "Will you say something?"

"I am not allowed to fraternize with the guests ma'am."

"Oh, well I don't want to fraternize, I only want to talk to you," Starlanko explained.

"Oh, well I guess that's okay," replied the guard, who did not really know what fraternize meant, only that he should not do it.

"And it might be easier if you opened the door," Starlanko suggested.

"Well, I suppose that'll do," the guard said. He unlocked the door, and opened it a crack. "But you be sure to stay in there, and I'll have to stay out here."

"Well I should hope so. You don't think I'm the sort of gal who invites strange men into her room."

"I did not mean to suggest anything of the kind ma'am."

"No, of course not." There were a few minutes of awkward silence. "So... you been a guard for a long time?"

"About five years now. My father and his father were both city guards, so I guess I've sort of got it in my blood."

"It's nice to see family traditions get passed on."

"Yeah."

"What do you do when you're not guarding?"

"I don't know. Not too much."

"Surely you must have some sort of life outside your job? Are you married?"

"No."

"You have a girl?"

"No ma'am," the guard said. Starlanko could hear the blush in his voice.

"What do you do for fun then?" Starlanko asked.

"Well... sometimes, me and the boys, we have a good game of Trolls and Ogres."

"I'm not sure I'm familiar with that game."

"Oh, it's really good, see, you split into two teams, calling them Trolls or Ogres. That's where they get the name I reckon. So, there's the two teams right, and there's just the one ball, but both the Trolls and the Ogres, they want to take the ball down to the opposite sides of the side of the field. So everybody's throwing the ball, or kicking it, or running with it, and everyone else is trying to get in the way or steal it or knock you to the ground, cause if a Troll's down then the Ogres get the ball and vice-versa.

"You know this one time we were playing, and Skinner—he's my pal, Skinner— Skinner had the ball and was heading down the field like a panther, and this big guy, we were Ogres then, so this guy was a Troll, he was coming right at Skinner, and I could tell he was just hoping to squish him. So what I did, is I ran right for this guy and got my shoulder in him right good. Skinner gets the ball in for a point, and this big Troll looses three of his teeth."

"Wow, that sounds mighty impressive," Starlanko said.

"Ah, it weren't nothing."

"Forgive me, I never introduced myself. My name is Marabella. You are?"

"Well, the boys all call me Brightly," said the guard, "but Alleric's the name my mom gave me. Speak whichever you'd rather."

"Alleric? No. It's not?"

"It is or may Hadarus's blade find me now as I speak."

"No, I believe you, it's just... something else."

"What?"

"No, it's silly."

"Ah, come on, who am I going to tell?"

"Well... promise you won't laugh? All right, it's just... ever since I was a little girl I just had this feeling, this feeling deep down inside that I couldn't explain, but I felt to be true, that one day I'd be marrying a man who'd be named Alleric. Even when I played that game with the apples, you know that one that girls are like to do, where they twist the stems till it come off, and then that's the first letter of their husband's name? Well every time I tried it the stem come off right on the first twist."

"That ain't silly. What's silly would be thinking that it were me, and not some other fellow by the name of Alleric."

"What's so silly about that?"

"I'm just a plain simple sort of man. I'm sure I'd not be the kind of man a fine lady like you would be interested in."

Starlanko laughed in a way that he hoped would sound bubbly, and not as though he was laughing at Alleric. "Me, a fine lady? Oh, if only wishing made it so. No, I'm just a simple farmer's daughter. I borrowed this dress from my great aunt who received it as a gift from some high gentleman or other, though I know not why. I couldn't come to visit the rich and fabulous Dresdil in my poor farm clothes, now could I?"

"No, I guess you couldn't."

"So tell me, Alleric, how long have you worked for Mr. Dresdil?" Starlanko asked.

"Coming up on three years now."

"And do you like it?"

"Sure, it's a job ain't it? Pays better than any other. A bit more demanding, but the money's more than enough to push that."

"How's it more demanding than other jobs?"

"It's... well, you know. We do a lot more patrolling, checking stuff out. In a lot of my old jobs, guarding meant just standing there, but here we've got to be a bit more active. We do exercises every day and special training at least once a week. There isn't that much real call to have to strong arm anybody. The idea, I think, is that if everybody knows how capable we are of finishing a fight, then they will think twice about starting one."

The alarm sounded. It was a shrill ringing, going up and down in pitch, coming from the walls themselves.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to lock you up again, ma'am."

"Please," begged Starlanko, "my sister is out there. I need to check on her to make sure she's all right." He reached his hand through the door and touched Alleric's palm.

The guard drew his hand away. "I'm sorry ma'am, but it's for your own good."

Then from down the hall came the sound of an armored man falling to the floor and cursing. Alleric rushed from the door to help, and Starlanko popped his head out to investigate.

Right before the hall turned the corner, Alleric was helping another guard to his feet. The new guard was slightly shorter than Alleric, with a little lighter build. He still had plenty of ferocity in his eyes. There was a small puddle of blood on the floor beneath him, evidently leaking from a wound in the shorter guard's left leg.

"I've got to warn Dresdil. There's an intruder," said the injured guard.

"Here, I've got you," Alleric put his arm around his wounded comrade, supporting his weight, and acting as a human crutch.

"What about me?" Starlanko asked. "Please, I don't want to be alone with a strange man on the loose."

Alleric thought about it for a second. "All right, you better come with us. Here, support his other side." Starlanko did. The guard was actually lighter than the mage expected. Not light. Just lighter. Or maybe Alleric was just bearing the lion's share of the weight (being the tiger that he was).

They went through a maze of halls and up a flight of stairs. Before long they came to Dresdil's room. Guards swarmed like confused bees trying to, and at the center of the buzz was Dresdil barking orders like a mad king.

In one corner was Redreck, his disguise unbroken. Redreck and Starlanko's eyes connected, both with a profound sense of relief. Starlanko also noticed that Redreck had applied his lipstick, though evidently had not yet had occasion to use it.

"What's happened?" Dresdil demanded.

"Sir," the injured guard spoke, "there was a man dressed in black. As soon as he saw me he attacked. We fought briefly. I think I injured him in the shoulder, but as you can see he hit my leg. Then he ran, and in my present state I was unable to keep up, sir."

"I see. A man in black you say?"

"Yes sir, from head toe with only his eyes uncovered. About six foot two, very thin. He had brown eyes."

"And what is she doing here?" Dresdil referred to Starlanko.

"I'll take responsibility for that sir," Alleric said. "I was guarding her room, when I encountered Silverton." Silverton must be the injured guard Starlanko concluded. "He was in need of help, and I did not want to leave the lady unattended."

Dresdil nodded. "Right. Thank you. Please escort her back to her chamber and see that she remains there. Oh, and please take Mademoiselle Lira as well." Dresdil turned to address Lira. "I'm sorry, dear, that our evening was so rudely interrupted. I assure you that I shall do whatever is in my power to make it up to you."

Starlanko was again escorted to the guest bedroom, though this time Redreck was with him. A slightly more comforting thought, but it also meant that the plan had gone awry. As he walked the machinery in his head whirled to find a solution.

"Please understand, ladies, it's nothing personal," Alleric said when they returned to the guest room.

"Excuse me for being so forward," said Starlanko, "but I might not have another chance." He grabbed hold of Alleric's waist with one hand, and wrapped the other around the back of his head. Starlanko drew the guard close, and kissed him full on the lips.

At first Alleric's lips were rigid with surprise, then he relaxed into it, pressing firmly but gently against Starlanko's mouth. Then it just got sloppy, but that wasn't really Alleric's fault, he'd lost feeling in his lips.

Alleric pushed away. "What have you—" he began, but rather than finishing the sentence he fell unconscious.

"Please understand, hon, it's nothing personal."

Starlanko double checked the hallway, then pulled the unconscious Alleric into the room. He quickly found Alleric's keys, then, with some rope that Starlanko had stashed beneath his petticoat, he bound and gagged the poor guard.

"What's the plan?" Redreck asked.

Starlanko paused. He seriously considered riding it out. Let the night run its course, and try again later. Yet they were already close, and the distraction caused by the other visitor might just be worth more than a fresh start would be. Besides, if the alarm had already sounded, what would it matter if Starlanko set it off? It was as though his hands had been unbound.

"The first thing we do is get to the roof. From there we'll try to get into the master bedroom, through the window. Then we get the book, and get out by the quickest means necessary. Ready?"

Redreck nodded yes.

"Right." Starlanko cast a spell, and the bars that were on the window gave way. Another alarm sounded of course, but it felt so good. While Starlanko was at it he quickly dashed into the hallway, where he wove a two more spells. The first created an illusionary double of Alleric outside the door. The second summoned a magical mount.

"Go cause some mischief," he said to the horse, and gave it a motivating slap. The horse ran down the hall.

Back inside the room, Starlanko took another length of rope from beneath his skirt. He tied one end to the window bars where they still seemed solid, then dropped the other end to the ground as a red herring. More magic made both Starlanko and Redreck invisible, then gave Starlanko the ability to fly. It was a little rough, but he carried Redreck out the window and onto the roof. Having studied the plans he knew precisely where to drop down. He was soon hovering beside the window to Dresdil's bedroom. Redreck stood on the ledge beside him.

Not surprisingly the spell that enabled Starlanko to burst the bars on the other window had no effect on these. Fortunately Starlanko had a special alchemical compound that was able to eat through steel. It took a little longer, but it still did the trick.

The room was empty, and the spell book was as gaudy and as obvious as anybody could ask for. Next to the bed, the book glittered on a large stand. The covers were made of solid gold, inlaid with gems, and in the center of the front cover was the biggest emerald Starlanko had ever seen.

As Starlanko climbed through the window, he felt the magic that allowed him to fly and kept him invisible fade away. Doubtless another magical ward, he observed. As soon as he was in the room Starlanko heard a scuffle coming from the other side of the door, followed by a thud, not unlike the sound a human body makes when falling to the floor. The door slid open.

A man slipped in. He was wearing armor, and blood tricked down from a wound in his left leg. It was Silverton. The "guard," looked cautiously around the room, and of course, saw a blond in a shimmering blue gown.

Their eyes met, and they both froze for one brief second to acknowledge the work of a fellow master.

Then Starlanko and Silverton both made a mad dash for the book.

The guard, who had barely been able to walk before, had no trouble dashing madly now. Meanwhile Starlanko had not anticipated the difficulties of dashing madly in a skirt, and fell flat on his face. Needless to say, the guard reached the book first.

"If I scream it will call the rest of the house down upon you," Starlanko threatened.

"Yeah, but you won't. You'd be in more trouble than I."

Redreck was inside the window now, daintily stepping over Starlanko. "Hand over the book or I'll set her loose on you."

"I've worked too hard for this emerald to let somebody else steal it."

Starlanko crawled out from beneath Redreck's skirt.

"Emerald? All you want is the emerald?"

"While I'm at it I figured I'd take the other gems, and some of the gold," the guard said, "but the emerald's the main target." It made sense, an emerald of that size and quality must be worth well over ten thousand gold pieces. "What? Did you want the book itself?"

"Yes."

"Why, is it valuable?"

"No, don't go down that route," Starlanko said. "I'm no good at fencing gems. You're not good at fencing spells. You get the emerald, I get the book. Classic division of labor, everybody wins."

"Nobody wins here." Dresdil was standing at the door. He held a glowing ball of flame in his hand. Naturally the wards were set up so Dresdil's own magic did not set them off.

"Sir, I'm glad you're here," the Silverton said, and clutched his wound. "These two were trying to steal your—"

"Do you really think I'm that imbecilic?" Dresdil asked rhetorically. "I must say, Lira, I intuited that you sister was no good all along, but I did not suspect this of you."

"Dresdil, we should talk," Redreck said, as he crossed to Dresdil. Gingerly the slayer of Bloodskull gave the apple-like merchant a kiss on the cheek. Then Redreck spoke again, but this time in his natural voice, the deep gruff unmistakably masculine voice the gods gave him. "There's a lot you don't know about me."

Dresdil collapsed, just as Alleric had before him.

"It feels good to get out of the armor," said the guard, after they found a safe place to stop and slip into something more comfortable. Starlanko was not sure which revelation came as a greater surprise. The pair of ears that marked him as an elf, or the other pair, that marked him as not a him at all.

"Quit staring or I'll kill you in your sleep," she said.

"I'm sorry, it's just not what I was expecting."

"You should be one to talk."

"Fair enough," Starlanko conceded. "But I hope you won't leave without telling me your name."

"What does it matter?"

"In the event that I ever need to commit grand larceny again, it might prove to be beneficial."

"I work alone."

"Still, it doesn't hurt to know."

The male guard, turned female thief looked Starlanko up and down. "Professionally, I'm know as Vox," she said. Then she left with her share of the heist, without even asking for his name in return.

Of course she did not have to ask. Everybody knows Starlanko the Magnificent.

"I'm sorry. Who did you say you were?" ask Tyrdial, a major in the northern border forces, and the highest ranking officer that Starlanko had been able to arrange a meeting with.

"Starlanko, Starlanko the Magnificent."

"And you are here because you have some sort of new magic spell, is that correct?"

"Yes. Rumor has it that your forces will be assaulting Golgath in the near future. I'm sure penetrating the walls is of utmost concern."

"And your spell will help that, I'm guessing?"

"Not exactly. The spell I have will allow you to shoot a ray that can travel through a wall and injure or kill whoever is on the other side."

"Do you still have to aim the spell?"

"Yes."

"Then I feel the need to point out, that this spell is virtually useless, since we would be firing blind."

"I foresaw that of course," replied Starlanko, "which is why I also developed a spell of x-ray vision."

Tyrdial look confused. "I'm sorry, what's x-ray?"

"It's an anachronism," Starlanko replied, but apparently this explanation was not sufficient. "It lets you see through things."

"Oh," Tyrdial replied. Then as it really sank in, "Ooooh."

### **Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Campaign Pad:**

This is either a spiral notebook or a legal pad that all the campaign notes are written on. It includes all the combat records, NPC notes, anything created on the fly. All the notes will be in one place until they can be transcribed into a campaign binder. The campaign pad either supplements or replaces a campaign binder. Some GMs keep a campaign pad in their binder as part of their binder.

### **Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job -**

**Godgram:** Godgrams little squares of paper, upon which, from time to time, I write things that one or more characters see and/or hear and/or sense, etc. For example, one player may receive a slip of paper that reads "The scratches around the lock were clearly made by a titanium blade." By using these notes, only the character involved knows the potentially important information and can decide to do with it what they will. To prevent other players from gleaning something is up by the passing of notes; you should give random messages to other players. If you do it often enough, all they will know is some piece of paper has been given out. To speed play, you can prepare the notes before play. During play, keep a large stack of scraps of a paper at the gaming table for ease of use. The name Godgram came from "Telegram from the God(s) and the Landshark skit from SNL.

### **Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Dice:**

Almost every game uses dice. Some of the best dice advice is to: A) Have a set of dice. They should match, making them easy to identify as yours. Make sure they are a different color and size than other people's dice. B) Make sure the dice are easy to read. C) Keep them in a craft or tackle tray so you can always find the right type. Tossing them in a bag slows play as it takes time to get them out.

by “Dregg” Carpio

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: Hollywood rolls a Crit!

### Crumpets and Steam: Cinematic Role Playing in the Victorian Era

Welcome back to Lights, Camera, Action! In this month’s installment we will look at role-playing in the Victorian Era and how this time period had a large impact on what we can refer to these days as “Pulp.”

#### The Victorian Period

The first place to start our journey into the past is to look at the Victorian period itself. Although the true Victorian era did not begin till the 1850’s, most of the period’s fantastic fiction focuses on a broader time frame. This was the time of the industrial revolution, the renaissance of iron and steam, and the time of great inventions and wondrous dreams.

The Victorian era was the reign of Queen Victoria, the time of Otto Von Bismarck, the stage of America’s Civil war, and a time of many other battles. It was filled with science and learning; everyone had theories on how things worked, what outer space was like, and believed that the future was dependant on things like the steam engine and textile factories. Many of the tools, standards and practices, and the way we view fiction and even movies stems from this period. The era was also filled with poverty, oppression, sickness, and war. In England and Scotland, children were forced to work hazardous jobs because their parents were sent to debtors prison for owing mere change in taxes or rent. In America, countrymen fought each other over the issues of keeping other humans as slaves. The Germans were trying to reunite their torn forces and relationships, and Russia was starting to find new faith in Socialism.

The Victorian period was the dawn of modern science and technology. The invention of the Gatling gun, the telephone, the refinement of the “Iron Horse” or locomotive, and the 1<sup>st</sup> prototype automobile were all created in the Victorian area. Near the start of the Victorian era, Charles Babbage built the

world’s first computer prototype, a steam powered abacus of sorts. This monster of a machine, referred to as an “Analytical Engine,” was created to perform mathematical number crunching. While idea had merit and charm, if Mr. Babbage would have gotten the funding to continue his study we would have seen the first computer 100 years before its time. The whole idea of punch cards to store information was created by Joseph Marie Jacquard, a Frenchman, in 1804 when he used cards to store textile patterns. Later Babbage and Lady Augusta Ada Lovelace expanded on the idea. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling’s *The Difference Engine* is a great book that gives us an alternate past where Babbage’s engine makes an odd impact on the state of the UK and the world.

One could go on for chapters about the excitement of this era. For those who might be interested I strongly suggest *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist: The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England* by Daniel Pool. This book has never left my side since I bought it and has been total inspiration and great knowledge in writing period fiction and gaming material.

#### Writings of the Victorian Age

The next step in examining the Victorian era to look at fiction of time. With all these wonderful ideas and inventions being made reality, it was no mystery of why the authors of the time had taken these concepts and made them into the classics of the period. The larger than life and over imaginative fiction of the period began in small novelettes from the 1860’s known as “Dime Novels” or over in Europe the “Penny Dreadful.” Named after the cheap cost of the literature, this forum gave a lot of the period’s writers a chance to explore at the time outlandish ideas, social commentary, also to create science that defied the total lack of any real scientific explanation.

Jules Verne is a great example of a writer before his time. *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), *From the Earth to*

#### About the Author

“Dregg” aka James Carpio is a native of San Francisco, California who now lives in the wilds of Suffolk County, NY. James has written for the likes of Eden Studios, Fuzion Labs, random gaming E-Zines and is currently designing games for his own gaming company Chapter 13 Press ([www.chapter13press.com](http://www.chapter13press.com)). James can be found at most Northeast conventions and game days with his family doing demonstrations for other gaming companies he supports and running promotional support for I-CON, Gotham Gamers Guild and Wild Gazebo Productions for whom he is affiliated with.

*the Moon* (1865), and *20,000 leagues under the sea* (1870) are good examples of the cinematic ideal that can be applied to adventure gaming. In *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, Professor Lidenbrock and his nephew take off in search of the origins of mankind after finding an ancient piece of parchment stuck in a book (how many times have we seen this plot device used). With the author using the suspension of disbelief, the good professor finds lost cultures, hidden enigmas, and of course dinosaurs (what lost world story would be complete without dinosaurs!). In *From the Earth to the Moon*, we find the members of the elite Gentleman’s Society (A staple of the period, but more on that later) at the close of the Civil War proposing that they build a gun big enough to launch a rocket to the moon. Our last Verne example is *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. This tale gives us a great use of the ideas of science of the time. Captain Nemo (which translates to “No-One”) uses his high-tech fish shaped submarine “The Nautilus” to destroy battleships in an attempt to put an end to war.

The second Victorian author has had many of his works represented as movies, TV shows, and even a famous Halloween prank that had America believing that aliens were invading the town of Grover’s Mill. Herbert George Wells was a man who took his ideas of social change and turned them into some of the most fantastic stories of past and present. Where Verne gave us logical science fiction, using preexisting imagery to tell his stories, H.G. Wells gave us Martian invasions with death rays and tripod spacecraft in *War of the Worlds* (1898). In *The Island Of Dr. Moreau* (1896) we had a mad scientist who played god with creating animal/human crossbreeds, and with *The Time Machine* (1895) Wells introduced us to a dark future through the use of time travel. Each story within itself has inspired many tales and ideas since they were first published in the late 1800’s. Is it to say that we would never have these flights of fantasy if Mr. Wells

and Mr. Verne had not chosen to be writers? It's hard to say, but lets be very thankful that they did. It truly was an age of dreams and imagination.

Before I touch on the gaming aspect of that which is referred to as "Victoriana" or "Steampunk," I think I should point out some more modern retellings of the period's famous literature. The one that jumps to mind and should be a must read for any gamers is Alan Moore's and Kevin O'Neil's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Not only does this story (both volumes) capture the feel for each of the characters involved, but it brings to life the essence of the era. In a nutshell, *League* follows the adventures of some of histories greatest heroes such as Alan Quartermain, The Invisible Man, Dr. Jekyll, and Captain Nemo who are all lead by Dracula's bride Mina Murry. If this is not your cup of tea and wish to see more hard science fiction in the time period, pick up *Scarlet Traces* by Ian Edginton. This fantastic tale takes us to England after the Martian invasion told to us in *War of the Worlds*. It give us a look at a dark England corrupted by the new found technology stolen from the Martians and what price mankind has to pay in order to use it. The film *From Hell* is an adaptation of Alan Moore's comic about an almost psychic detective and the search for Jack the Ripper. Finally in the film category check out the movie *The Resurrectionist* by Jason Soles. This is an independent film that takes us to an eerie old west where the job of grave robber brings on an interesting tale of the times.

### Steampunk and Victorian Settings

I have rattled on enough about the various media that brings us this time period and genre, and now on to its implementations on role-playing and gaming. Where do we start? Let's look at the definition of the word steampunk. **Steampunk** is a subgenre of [cyberpunk science fiction](#) with [dystopian](#) and [noir](#) themes, usually set in an [anachronistic Victorian](#) or quasi-Victorian [alternate history](#) setting.

In creating stories in the time of "Victoriana" or steam one should be very loose with how and why things worked. Is your story going to take the characters to outer space? Remember that the science of the time believed the earth was surrounded by aluminiferous aether, a breathable substance that if a vessel were to be launched into it, on could just float as if it were on the ocean. So space travel could be quite the interesting voyage. At the time we had

very little data on the planets as well and the ideas of what lies out there. This is a good setting for great high seas adventures in space, imagine pirates and merchants traveling along to the moon and getting into great ship battles and swashbuckling hijinks. Toss some Martians in there and you have some great adventure gaming. Better yet look at *John Carter: Warlord of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Carter a Civil war hero was lifted to into space without the use of a ship at all.

Getting more planet side, you can base your ideas off of the great inventions. Imagine a world where the Babbage engine actually worked (as in Gibson and Sterling's *Difference Engine* novel); you can take an entire cyberpunk campaign and make it steam powered.

"Dark past" adventuring can be quite interesting. Don't stop there with inventions--make up your own! Martian technologies can be used, Dr. Frankenstein can make a visit to your games setting, and the "what if" factor can be fully implied. What if the automobile came 20 years earlier; what if giant steam-powered robots were battled for pleasure; what if the Zulu's were holders of magical powers and fought the Brit's with demon bound spears?

The time period is a fountain of ideas and can be fit into settings other than Victorian era gaming. Try sticking airships and steam-powered gadgets into your fantasy games or instead of a magical sword or axe, try putting a black powder musket into the hands of your paladin. Need to travel to the other side of the world? Well those metal carriages that run on steam can take you there faster than any horse. What is to say the local dwarves start to manufacture steam powered work mules to carry your treasures?

In the past few years, game manufacturers have heard the cry for some good old fashion steampunk goodness to be added to the ranks of RPGs. So without any effort you can bring the excitement of the Victorian period to your table with little to no research at all into the genre. Some of these great games are still in print and I would suggest taking a look at them when next at your FLGS (favorite local gaming store). Even if you don't plan on running a steam-powered game, some of the ideas can be blended in to even the fussiest of campaigns.

### Deadlands: By Pinnacle Games

*Deadlands* is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> games in the genre. Shane Hensley took the concept of "what if" to the next level with his re-telling of the Civil War and what would happen if an obsessed indian shaman unleashed the forces of the "Hunting Grounds" on the white man. *Deadlands* is a great mixture of Wild West, Steampunk, and Horror all blended into a great little game.

### Space 1889: By Heliograph Games

The 1<sup>st</sup> of the true "Victoriana" RPGs. *Space 1889* tells the tale of "what if" the British were to colonize space only to be fought back by the Martians and their forces. More of the classic Wells and Verne ideas are in this setting, but it is still a great game if you like the idea of colonial England and "the empire."

### Castle Falkenstein: By R. Talsorian Games

R. Talsorian, who gave us the Cyberpunk RPG in the late 80's, brought to life a original genre all of its own. In *Castle Falkenstein* we see an alternative Europe told to us in the memoirs of a game designer who was swept into this alternate reality and has learned to cope with its new and interesting cultures. In this Victorian England we see not only the old trappings from our past, but the introduction of the fair folk (elves, dwarves, brownies, sprites, and nymphs) to the mix. With the dwarves new steam powered gadgets life has become more than interesting.

### Victoriana: By Heresy Games

In the same vein of R. Talsorian's *Castle Falkenstein*, *Victoriana* gives us a tromp through an alternative Victorian empire. In Heresy's vision of this dark past, we have not only elves and dwarves, but also beastmen and ogres roaming the world. *Victoriana* gives us a more political look at the events of the real time period, than its predecessor, which gave us a very fictional Europe with fictional countries. All and all a solid game, and a lot of nifty steam powered gadgets to have fun with.

**Iron Kingdoms:** By Privateer Press

There is not much to say about this game except "pure brilliance." No matter how many imitators have released "steam-fantasy" RPGs, the *Iron Kingdoms* setting is the 1<sup>st</sup> and best in my opinion. It gives us a hard fantasy setting like Middle Earth or something out of a Piers Anthony novel, yet puts it over the backbone of a steam and magic powered society. Here we find war torn kingdoms and races trying to survive the coming of a new age.

**GURPS Steampunk & Steam Tech:** By Steve Jackson Games

Although not campaign worlds in themselves, these two GURPS books bring a bit of the history, technology, and flavor of the Steampunk genre for the GURPS system (or any RPG for that matter, as all GURPS sourcebooks are pretty universal). In *Steampunk* we get a collection of character templates, actual history of the world of the time, and ways to incorporate it into your campaigns. As with any GURPS supplement, it gives you great examples, scenario seeds, and references to even more material. In the follow-up *Steam-Tech*, the writers give us a book full of wonderful inventions and tech to add flavor and a bit of bite to any steampunk game.

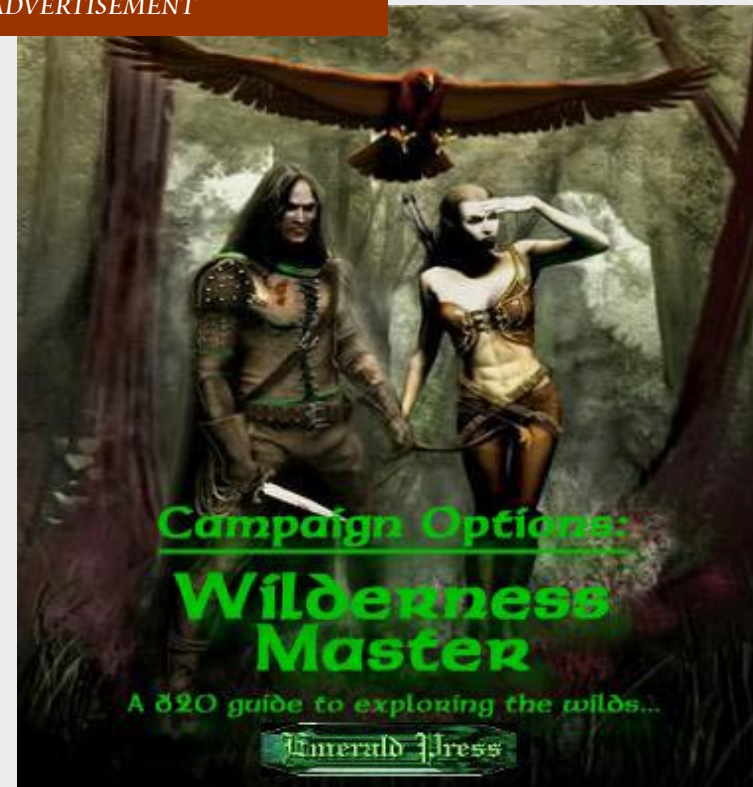
**Steam and Sorcery:** By Fantasy Flight Games

The last of these books I will mention is the newest of the lot. Fantasy Flight games gives us a collection of classes, gadgets, magic, and ideas to use in any of your D20 or OGL based games. Even though this sort of idea is fully covered in *Iron Kingdoms* and WoTC's *Eberron* campaign setting, this book has merit and charm and that is a rarity in today's D20 market where many are publishing just to do so and at the expense of leaving out any flavor. *Steam and Sorcery* is well worth your money if you are running a D&D or any D20/OGL steam-powered games.

This ends this month's edition of "Light's Camera, Action!" I hope that I was able to give some examples of what is best in Victorian and steam-based gaming in the Cinematic light.

Next month we look at the Genre that may have started the Cinematic fire we see today in all mediums. Next month we visit "The Pulp Era."

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by Shane Cubis

## Antipodean Adventures : *Burke and Wills*

G'Day all. In 1860, the Royal Society of Victoria put up a cash prize for the first expedition to cross the interior of Australia from south to north. It was hoped that this would assist in the mapping of the interior of the broad, brown continent and open up new areas for settlement. Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills declared themselves up for the task despite their lack of experience, and on August 20th they set out from Melbourne with a party of eighteen men, twenty-two horses, twenty-one tons of supplies, and twenty-five camels. Both men had come to Australia in the 1850s looking for gold, and saw the challenge as a good way of making money and a name for themselves. Within a few months Burke and Wills would be dead.

£15,500 were sunk into the venture. What was the explanation for such a huge investment? There was rivalry between the colonies of South Australia and Victoria. The latter had experienced huge growth due to the success of the wool industry and the gold rush and could afford to spend up big. The Victorians had a vested interest, of course. If they crossed the continent first, they could lord it over the South Australians. They could also get a head start on setting up a cross-country telegraph.

The leaders of the Victorian expedition thought that their rival, John McDouall Stuart from South Australia, was already prepared to embark. Upon hearing this news, Burke cut preparations short to get the jump on the other group. At the outset, Burke was the leader of the expedition, and the man who had brought along the camels, George Landells, was the second-in-command.

There were arguments very early on. Burke, a stubborn and argumentative man, ditched sixty gallons of rum which were included to keep the camels from getting scurvy. Landells saw this as a very bad move, and the pair had a huge argument in the town of Menindee. This ended with Landells being replaced with Wills as second officer. Burke also used the opportunity to appoint William Wright (who knew the way to northern waterholes) as third officer and to employ Charles Gray.

The main party was left in Menindee to wait for the Royal Society to confirm Wright's appointment. Meanwhile, Burke, Wills and six others carried on to Coopers Creek. Before long, Burke grew tired of waiting for them to catch up. He, Wills, Gray and a soldier by the name of John King headed off into unknown territory – quite a foolish and brash decision, but Burke was sure that the South Australian Stuart was ahead of them. Ironically, if they had waited for the main group to arrive in Coopers Creek, they would have received the news that Stuart had been forced to turn back. There was no need to rush or take risks. Victoria had it in the bag.

The rest of the trip north was uneventful for the small group. There had been an unusual amount of rain, and the northern part of the country was characterized by green grass and a small amount of boggy ground. In early January of 1861, they realized that the water in the creeks around them was tidal. They had reached their goal! Burke had told the main party to wait at Coopers Creek for only three months, so after one day of rest they headed south. Despite low supplies, Burke did not allow time to shoot birds for food. He was eager to get back home as soon as possible. The group was marched, day and night, for five solid weeks. It was not until all of their food was gone that Burke allowed them to stop and shoot a camel. Even then, they left most of their meat behind because they shot and ate parts of Burke's horse ten days later. Gray had fallen ill and begged for a rest stop but Burke – thinking the man was faking to get extra portions of food - would have none of it.

A week later, Gray died of scurvy. The weary group, now only three, buried him and continued on their way. Three days later they staggered into Coopers Creek, only to find the camp deserted. The main party, having waited four months for Burke and Wills to return, had left that very morning – a mere nine hours earlier! The main party had left a message in a bottle buried under a tree, upon which was carved "DIG 3 FT. N.W. APR.21 1861".

### 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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A very tired and sick Burke left a note reading "We proceed on tomorrow slowly down the creek to Adelaide, but we are very weak" buried under the tree. Here, he made another couple of incorrect decisions. The first was not altering the carving on the tree. When an envoy from the main party returned to Coopers Creek, they assumed that Burke, Wills et. al. had not dug up the original note – and hence had not been back to the town. The second decision was to follow the creek back to Mt Hopeless, and then to Adelaide instead of returning home the way they had come (through Menindee).

After a few days of wandering, Burke died of exhaustion. Wills followed soon after. A tribe of Aborigines took in King, the only survivor of the group who had made it to the northern edge of Australia. They nursed him back to health, and he lived among them until a search party found the skeletal bodies of Burke and Wills, and then King himself.

King was hailed as a hero back in Melbourne. Burke and Wills were hailed as men who sacrificed their lives for the common good and in 1862 they were given Victoria's first state funeral. Two years later, a large bronze statue was erected of the men. Although they had failed to return home, the small group of explorers had succeeded in crossing the continent and had proven false the long-held suspicion that Australia held an inland sea. Another unexpected benefit was that the various rescue parties sent out to find the troubled crew added layers of understanding of various areas in previously unexplored

areas of the land. Australia's pastoral industry found wide new areas to flourish.

### **Campaign Thoughts**

In a sense, the PCs are always explorers; a Burke and Wills style campaign merely cements this. The PCs could be a group of intrepid character going out into the great unknown with little more than a horse and a backpack full of iron rations.

Of course, a man against nature campaign probably isn't the most exciting of tales to role-play, but throw in some dangerous wildlife and the ever-present danger of hostile native tribes, and you have a decent amount of adventure. Personally I feel that a strictly historical exploration campaign is best run in small doses, as this genre of game seems to thrive on contact with NPCs.

Perhaps the best way to retain the key interaction with NPCs is to have a Burke-like leader of the expedition, run by the GM. The party should have some reason for keeping him alive and some reason why they have to follow his orders. Perhaps he holds something dear to them in his hands, and they cannot risk offending him. Or maybe they are just loyal to him, no matter what his faults. The party may not even know he is incompetent until after the game.

Mapping an unknown land can be an important goal, however, especially if the party requires a favor from someone with a keen interest in building telegraph lines or buying up acres of scrub and desert for pastoral use.

### **Boiling down the story**

'Burke and Wills' is a story about a government sponsored exploration of dangerous and unknown territory, involving minimal supplies, a strong chance of failure, very little preparation, and limited experience. Incompetent and headstrong leadership takes the group from disaster to disaster, and they face the possibility of a rival group reaching the goal before they do.

### **Other Genres**

Science Fiction: A randomly selected small group of slave miners are chosen to explore the dark side of Cubisia-6. The rulers of the operation are looking for fresh sources of ore. They give the expendable group minimal supplies and one mount each.

Fantasy: An eccentric mage proposes a competition to determine how far down the ocean goes. The first person or group to return with the answer will receive an Apparatus of Kwalish (or generic equivalent) from the wizard.

Horror: The explorers find more than they bargained for in the center of the Australian desert. Vampiric spirits surround and taunt the group, which is quickly running out of supplies and energy. Their only chance is to find a haven with one of the local tribes - who are not necessarily friendly themselves.

Modern: The PCs are the most recent initiates into a global conspiracy. Their first mission is to find out all they can about a new and relatively unknown power group. The conspiracy of which they are a part gives them \$250 and a pistol each.

### **D&D/D20 Section Articles:**

Darkness Falls II - The Masters of Evil

Written by: *Daniel Brakhage*,

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=341>

Feat Factory IX - Finishing Touches

Written by: *Lance Kepner*

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=349>

### **D&D/D20 Section Interviews:**

Interview with Ed Cha of Open World Press

Interviewed by Dana Driscoll

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=351>

### **D&D/D20 Section Reviews:**

d20 Review: Village of Oester

Reviewed by: *Lance Kepner*

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=350>

d20 Review: 3.5 Warrior Strategy Guide

Reviewed by: *Bradford Ferguson*

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=352>

d20 Review: Poisoncraft: the Dark Art

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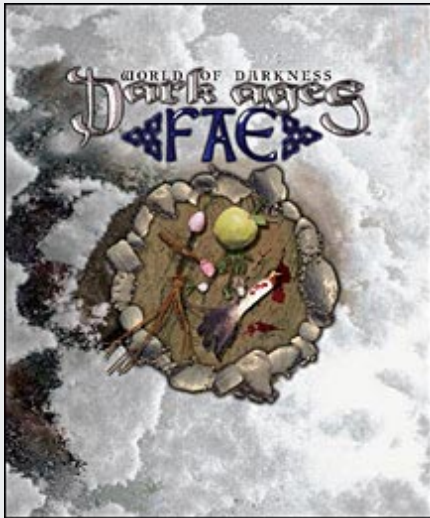
by Nash J. Devita

## Dark Ages : Fae

### Dark Ages: Fae

Authors: Aaron Dembski- Bowden, Carrie Ann Lewis, Forrest B. Marchington, Deena McKinney, Krister M. Michl, Matthew J. Rourke, & Malcolm Sheppard

Publisher: White Wolf Publishing



*Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. I have a massive library of White Wolf Publishing titles but only a limited number of Dark Ages books.*

*Dark Ages: Fae* is the latest release in the *Dark Ages* line. This title requires the use of *Dark Ages: Vampire* for some of the basic rules and flavor information. Now that the modern World of Darkness is over (until the new games start coming out this fall / winter), I am really getting into the *Dark Ages* series.

*Dark Ages: Fae* is a 220 page hard back. The interior black & white illustrations are from David Day, Vince Locke, James Stowe, Timothy Truman, and Melissa Uran. This line up includes a number of artists that White Wolf has used on other occasions. This being the case, most of the art work is marvelous. The cover design is Becky Jollensten, another veteran of White Wolf illustration and cover design (the *Dark Ages* line in particular).

### From the Back Cover

"Oaths of Gold and Iron

You promised us, when we gave you the world to go to war, that you would remember your vows. You promised to leave our sacred places intact, to leave sacrifices for us, to remember us in your songs. You promised that when the War of Seasons ended; you would stand aside for us, the true rulers of the world. You lied.

The Truce Falls with the Blackened Sun

*Dark Ages: Fae* is the book for playing the "Good Folk". Some have bred with humanity and inherited our understanding of the world, some are born of the Earth and the elements, and the rest spring from the very stuff of Creation itself. This book provides complete information on playing fae characters, including details on their society, their magic, and their perception of the world. This book requires the use of *Dark Ages: Vampire*.

### Presentation

The cover, like most of the others in this line is tastefully simple. The majority of the cover is a textured- looking light grey background with some darker areas of stone (or moss maybe). In the center of the cover is a stone circle. Within this circle are a few items – an apple, a bloodied hand (of some sort) and some sticks tied together (somewhat resembling a doll, play or voodoo possibly). The same font

### Review snapshot

**Archetype:** Core Book

**Body:** 10 (*Game Mechanics*): Perfect.

**Mind:** 11 (*Organization*): Just like the other DA books 0 nice.

**Spirit:** 10 (*Look & Feel*): dark but fantastic and exotic.

**Attack:** 10 (*Value of Content*): Over 300 pages for only \$30! This is a great deal.

**Defense:** 10 (*Originality of Content*): Some feels re-hashed but most is new and great

**Health:** 10 (*Physical Quality*): The only damage I would ever expect to see are a few scratches (except to the reader – I go a scratch on my foot from a corner while unpacking the box it came to me in)

**Magic:** 9 (*Options & Adaptability*): This adds a great new level to the *Dark Ages* setting.

### 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.

from the other books' covers is used for this title while "fae" is in a royal blue and is book ended by a pair of Celtic- style knots.

The border on most pages resembles a tree growing in between the pages. The tree branches out over the top of the pages while the roots grow underneath them. The boarder on the chapter opening pages and the other 'special' pages is a very curvy, fine line squiggle (as scientific as that term can be, I suppose). This style of drawing is also seen in the various insignias that are seen throughout the title.

### Content

*Dark Ages: Fae* harkens back to *Changeling: the Dreaming* to a slight degree. Personally, I like this game a bit more than *Changeling* since it fits within the World of Darkness a little more cleanly. I do think some of the major fans of *Changeling* may be slightly put off by this title due to the lack of resemblance to that title. I do not see a lot of connection this

game to “its modern counterpart”. There are some definite major connections, but on the whole, I do not see too many. Maybe I am just missing them since I never got too into *Changeling* while it was being published.

## Chapter One: The World of the Fae

This gives an excellent look into the society of the magical creatures known collectively as the fae. Discussed here are details on how their ‘world’ relates to the ‘real world’ (of humans) both physically and socially and how this relationship came to be. The fae believe that they used to rule the world but ‘gave’ control to mortals when the varying sects of fae went to war with each other.

As the war began, the fae gave control of the world to the mortals so they could all focus their attention on the war and not damage the world and the mortals through this war. As a tenant of this ‘transfer of power’, many mortals made certain agreements with the fae so that while the mortals were in physical control, the fae still had some control over the mortals (just not as much as they did prior to the war) ‘If you protect this town, we’ll give you sacrifices,’ is just one [vague] example of these agreements.

Following this war, a truce was signed. This truce is / was only limited in its span of time. When exactly this truce is supposed to end is unknown, even to the oldest living fae. Each sect has its own tales and theories as to when this is to occur. One thing that they all agree upon is that this truce will end when the sun is blackened (an eclipse, in laymen’s terms). Another item that is agreed upon is that this is going to occur soon – very soon.

## Chapter Two: Origins and Courts

Unlike *DA: Vampire*, *DA: Fae* uses not just one major category to classify individuals, but two – similar to *Orpheus*, the final game released by White Wolf in the (now ‘defunct’) Modern World of Darkness. Characters belong to one type and one alliance. There are three types of fae and five different alliances.

Fae types are based on their origin. **Changelings** have a mortal background as well as a fae one – either born fae and raised mortal for some time or born mortal and raised fae until magic sets into their being. **Inanimae** are created

when magic combines with an element in nature (air, water, lightning, earth, grass, etc). They then become ‘humanoid’ and completely sentient. The final type of fae are the **Firstborn**. They are the direct spawn of magic or two firstborn mating.

There are also five alliances (four, really, plus one outcast group), or **Orders** within the society of fae. Each order is tied to a season. **spring** fae are most in tune with change and mortals. They wish to “change anything and everything to their advantage, before humanity either forgets them, or banishes the fae forever. Those of the **Summer** order are elitists and fierce warriors who wish to punish mortals for the degree which they have forgotten the fae thus far. **Autumn** fae, while seeking to keep hidden from the mortal world, wish to work with humanity so as to “restore themselves as half- hidden overlords while others seek to use humanity and the old oaths as weapons in the War of Seasons”. The fae of the **Winter** order seek to inspire terror in mortals and control them through fear as well as reclaim their ‘rightful place as rulers’ through force. Finally there are those fae who belong to no order for one reason or another. They are the **Solstice** fae. Generally, they are despised while working for the highest bidder as mercenaries for the other four orders.

A fae’s magical power is determined by its type while its affinity is determined by its alliance.

## Chapter Three: Characters and Drama

Though most of the details on character creation are detailed within the pages of *DA: Vampire*, there are some details that are unique to *DA: Fae*. *There items are all detailed here. This game uses some new backgrounds, abilities, merits, and flaws. Fae characters also have some scores and unique to them as well. A characters mists and weaving, magical tie and ‘reality’ tie respectively, are detailed here as are their oaths and echoes. Oaths are the deals that are made with humanity that give the fae power over mortals while echoes are the ideals that humanity hold over fae to keep some control over them.*

## Chapter Four: Dominions

Dominions are the ‘magical’ powers that the fae wield. These are divided into four major groupings, one for each of the orders (not counting solstice since they hold a true order). The four dominions are Dawn, Day, Dusk, & Night. Each one of the four orders has an affinity for one of the dominions. This affinity means that the powers, or cantrips, that fall under that dominion are easier to ‘cast’. These cantrips range from the ability to “nudge” thought and emotions to teleportation to learning what events occurred in a specific area. As can be clearly seen (even here), cantrips really range in power from simple to devastating. Thankfully, no one group gets ‘screwed’ from good powers since all dominions have cantrips that can achieve healing, direct damage, and movement – some dominions are just better at it than others.

Instead of utilizing a specific cantrip to achieve a specific result, one can unleash a dominion. This has far greater reaching possibilities than cantrips, but there are severe inherent dangers that go hand in hand with it.

## Chapter Five: Kingdoms & Quests

This chapter goes into details on some of the various societies or collectives of fae as well as some of the greater personalities. Also in here are some cool ‘magical’ items and creatures. Of course, no new game would be complete without a sub- section on character interaction (and / or history) with the various other character types from the other games in the line.

This is a great chapter, in my mind. It really helps being *DA: Fae* from just some other game into a Dark Ages game. I really did not feel the setting too strongly until reading this chapter.

## Chapter Six: Storytelling

Running a game with such exotic creatures is not an easy task. This chapter helps give a bit of a boost in the right direction, though. As with most other White Wolf games, this chapter gives some advice for starting and running a game. In addition to the usual basics, a couple of sample chronicles are provided.

## Conclusion

This is a fantastic game that many fans have been waiting for - for a very long time (since the original Dark Ages line in my case). The execution is clean and very fitting within the rest of the current Dark Ages line. It is a little tough, when reading, to see this within the Dark Ages as opposed to any other time frame, but it is still clean. As stated above, once I hit chapter five (5), I felt that the setting was alive, not just an 'insert setting here'. I don't personally like this quite as much as Dark Ages: Inquisitor but this is a great game none the less. This is a game I highly recommend for any fan of Changeling: the Dreaming.

### Where to buy

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[http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product\\_detail&p=12258&ref=sil](http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=12258&ref=sil)

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# Through the LENS of HISTORY Using HISTORY FOR BETTER GAMING

by Sean Holland

## About the Author

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

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## Vision 9: "Message for you, Sir!" - Part I

### Mail and Messengers from the Ancient World to the Early Middle Ages

Hand in hand with the development of writing was the use of writing for long distance communication. Written messages did not need to be memorized by the messenger and they were almost guaranteed to be delivered without being accidentally changed. As literacy spread, so did letter writing and the demand for messengers.

Various courier systems appeared, both private and official, to deliver messages throughout the ages. This month we will look at messengers from the Ancient World through to the early Middle Ages with next month covering the late Middle Ages to the early Modern World.

#### Part I - The History

The earliest known private letters date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the early Assyrian Empire. They were on clay tablets almost three inches (7.5 cm) square and enclosed in clay envelopes bearing an address. They were used by the merchants to exchange information and organize purchases and sales. At least some of the messages were carried by official couriers and the system was highly reliable.

The Assyrian and Persian Empires that followed both maintained a royal post system to communicate the Emperor's wishes to his subjects. The Persian network was maintained from the city of Susa, the administrative capital of the Empire. Messages were dispatched and received from messengers from all over the Empire, using a multitude of way stations where one messenger would hand off messages to the next rider allowing for great distances to be rapidly covered. Unfortunately, there is little information about how private messages and letters were transported in the Persian Empire.

The Egyptian Kingdom relied on a network of trained priest-scribes to record government and commercial records. The Kingdom used both waterborne (along the Nile) and mounted messengers, while private citizens relied on slaves or hired messengers to deliver their correspondence.

While official decrees were usually sent on clay tablets, the Egyptians primarily used papyrus as their writing medium. Papyrus is made from the pith of the papyrus plant cut into strips, soaked, pressed together and then dried. The papyrus was written upon with reed pens and sealed with wax. Papyrus was exported and circulated widely as the primary writing material of the ancient world.

The Greeks of the city-states relied upon runners who carried verbal messages within a city-state for local communication. These runners, both official and private, were capable of travelling and delivering messages easily within the confines of the city-state. Alexander and his successors co-opted the Persian courier system for official messages. The chaos of the Successor kingdoms destroyed that system but ushered in an era where the Greek language unified a large area, a boon to private messengers.

The Romans were inveterate letter writers; some of their correspondence has even come down to us in the present day. The Romans used a wax writing pad marked with a stylus to take notes and compose letters and other writings, but actual letters were sent on papyrus and, later, on parchment. Parchment was developed in the city of Pergamum (in modern Turkey) around 100 BCE from whence it gets its name. Parchment is made from finely cured skin, usually from a calf or kid, of which both sides were usable for writing. Parchment became very popular in Western Europe especially after 400 CE.

The Roman upper classes made extensive use of personal messengers, often slaves, for delivery of local messages. For more distant locales, private messengers were employed. Couriers for hire could be found at the gates

of any large city. These couriers used the excellent Roman network of roads to travel quickly, covering as much as 30 to 50 miles (48 to 80 km) in a day. Sea travel was faster but more problematic though required for some messages.

The Roman government maintained a postal system (*cursus publicus*) for official communication and the transport of officials that stretched across the entire Empire. Courier stations were located between 5 and 12 miles (8 and 21 km) apart. When speed was required it could be obtained, a journey by post from Rheims to Rome (about 1,400 miles/2,250 km) in 9 days was recorded. The courier stations and roads were maintained for the Empire by the local government, which meant that they occasionally fell into disrepair due to negligence or corruption.

The Chinese Dynasties maintained an Imperial courier system from the earliest dynasties (circa 900 BCE) on. Homing pigeons were also used to deliver official messages. During the Tang dynasty, the Chinese state maintained a courier network of 1,297 land stages with stations every 10 miles (16 km), 360 stages by water routes and 86 stages connecting both land and water routes. The conquering Mongols had their own system of horse messengers and foot messengers which they imposed over China following their conquest. The Mongol horse messengers could cover 200-250 miles (320-400 km) a day riding both during the day and at night guided by torchlight. Marco Polo believed that the Mongol messenger system used 300,000 horses and 10,000 courier stations.

Only Imperial messages were carried by the Chinese

system until the Ming Emperors opened it to private letters in 1402 CE. The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) saw private mail companies (*min-chii*) proliferate. They were extremely reliable and reimbursed the sender if valuables were lost. Originally created to serve the needs of banks and merchants, the *min-chii* expanded to deal with the private letters of anyone willing to pay a suitable fee. Express delivery was offered, at greater expense, and was indicated by allowing the tip of a feather to protrude from the envelope.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, it would take centuries before communication networks were re-established in Europe. This was partly due to the low level of literacy that prevailed across the West. The Byzantine (or Eastern Roman) Empire maintained the Roman roads and postal system as long as it survived.

The expansion of the monastic institutions, cathedrals and universities throughout Europe meant that by the eleventh century correspondence networks were coming into being once more. Many groups maintained their own courier services; the University of Paris had its own messengers to carry correspondence and money between parents and students. Most of these messengers travelled by foot, they were called *Parvi Nuncii* ("petty messenger").

## Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Messengers and couriers have been an important part of the world for nearly as long as there has been writing. Instructions from kings and emperors, business transactions, reports and rumors, all were carried by messengers.

The delivery of an important message is a classic scenario. As there are always those who do not want to see the message delivered, requiring the messengers to be alert and clever to overcome the obstacles put in their way.

One way to start such an adventure is to have the character encounter a messenger who has been mortally injured in an accident and who charges the characters to complete his mission. This request has more weight if the messenger is an official messenger and the characters should be impressed that lives will be lost if they fail to deliver the message. What is in the message? warning of an attack on the kingdom; information about a plot on the ruler's life or anything else of dire importance. In any case, bad things should happen if the characters choose not to try to deliver the message.

Acting as messengers is also a way a group of travelling adventurers can supplement their income, especially if they have ways to travel quickly and a reputation for reliability.

### Supplemental d20 Material:

#### New Feats

##### City Messenger [General]

You know the city like the back of your hand and can remember complex messages word for word.

**Prerequisites:** Int 10, Wis 10, Knowledge (local) 1 rank.

**Benefit:** You receive a +2 bonus on your Knowledge (local) checks and a +1 bonus on Listen checks and Disguise checks when the imitation of voices is involved. You further receive a +2 bonus to any check involving remembering something you heard (or overheard).

##### Endurance Rider [General]

You, and your mount, can ride forever.

**Prerequisites:** Con 10, Handle Animal 2 ranks, Ride 4 ranks.

**Benefit:** You and your mount both gain a +3 bonus on the following checks and saves: Constitution checks made to continue running, Constitution checks made to avoid nonlethal damage from a forced march, Constitution checks made to avoid nonlethal damage from starvation or thirst and Fortitude saves made to avoid nonlethal damage from hot or cold environments. Also, you may sleep in the saddle without becoming fatigued.

Further, you receive a +2 bonus on all ride checks and on all handle animal checks involving riding animals.

**Special:** Combined with the Endurance feat, the rider gains a +5 bonus on the shared checks and saves.

### Prestige Class

#### Courier

"Yes, I can get it there for you."

There is always someone needed to deliver messages, whether it is for the king, a merchants' guild or someone in love. The courier is an expert in such tasks, taking messages and goods to places near and far. Her livelihood is based on her ability to get messages through in a timely manner and her knowledge of the tricks of the trade are extensive.

**Hit Dice:** d8

#### Requirements

To qualify to become Courier, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

**Base Fortitude Save:** +3

**Skill:** Knowledge (geography) and Knowledge (local), a total of 6 ranks between both skills.

**Skill:** Diplomacy 2 ranks

**Skill:** Gather Information 2 ranks

**Skill:** Survival 2 ranks

**Feat:** Endurance

**Feat:** Run for Foot Couriers *or* Skill Focus (ride) for Mounted Couriers

**Special:** Must have a reputation as a successful messenger.

#### Class Skills

The Courier's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy

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(Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (geography) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Courier prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The courier gains no weapon or armor proficiencies.

**Courier Style** (Ex): The courier must choose to be either a foot courier or mounted courier depending on which feat is used to qualify for this class.

Foot couriers gain a +5 ft bonus to their movement for calculating overland movement rates only. Mounted courier confers upon her mount a +5 ft bonus to movement for calculating overland movement rates only.

**Smooth the Way** (Ex): The courier has become adept in dealing with petty officials and overcoming minor obstructions. The courier adds her courier level to any check involving coping with bureaucracy, bribing officials and other such task.

**Token** (Ex): Each courier has a token to mark both her identity and who, if anyone, she works for. The token will give a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks when dealing with other messengers, gate guards, and other travelers and people involved in business.

**Conceal Message** (Ex): Some messages must not be found if they are to be delivered safely. The courier gains a bonus equal to her courier level to any check involving hiding or concealing a message.

**Mobility** (Ex): The courier gains *Mobility* as a bonus feat, even if she does not meet the prerequisites for this feat.

**Improved Courier Style** (Ex): Foot couriers gain a +10 ft bonus to their movement for calculating overland movement rates only. A mounted courier confers upon her mount a +10 ft bonus to movement for calculating overland movement rates only.

The courier can now encourage others to pick up the pace,

conferring a +5 ft bonus to the appropriate movements type (foot or mounted) for overland travel only for a number of people or mounts equal to twice her courier level.

**Sense Danger** (Ex): The courier gains a +2 bonus to Spot and Listen checks to notice ambushes and anyone attempting to steal from them.

**Reputation for Efficiency** (Ex): The courier is well known as one of the best couriers in her area. The bonuses she receives for her token are increased to +3 and she gains a +2 to all gather information checks.

**Uncanny Dodge** (Ex): At 4th level, a courier retains her Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) even if she is caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. However, she still loses her Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized. If a courier already has uncanny dodge from a different class, she automatically gains improved uncanny dodge instead.

**Courier Style Mastery** (Ex): Foot couriers gain a +5 ft bonus to their base movement which stacks with the earlier Courier Style bonus for calculating overland movement rates (for a total of +15 ft to movement for overland travel). A mounted courier confers upon her mount a +5 ft bonus to base movement which stacks with the earlier Courier Style bonus for calculating overland movement rates (for a total of +15 ft to movement for overland travel).

The courier also gains a +2 bonus to her initiative checks.

Notes: This is designed as a generic courier class, there is obvious room for customizing it for particular campaigns or settings. In fact,

without such customization it is on the weak side for a prestige class.

Example additional abilities:

**Nimble Rider** (Ex): While mounted, the courier gains a +1 circumstance bonus to her armor class as she uses her mount as a shield. If she has the Mounted Combat feat, she gains a +2 competence bonus to her Ride checks to negate a hit against her mount.

**Nimble Runner** (Ex): In any round the courier moves half or more of her base move she gains a +1 dodge bonus to her armor class, she gains this even if performing a run action (which usually denies Dodge bonuses to AC).

**Requisition Mount** (Ex): A royal messenger has the right to demand the use of any mount while delivering a royal message. How willing the current owner will be to give over their mount is up to the DM.

As a design choice, the class as written has only extraordinary abilities (to simulate a 'historical' courier). However, for a high magic D&D campaign, there are several spell-like abilities that could easily be added to this class: *cat's grace*, *endure elements*, *expeditious retreat*, *locate object*, *longstrider*, *mount*, *pass without trace*. An option would be to allow the courier to choose one for each level of the courier class, each cast once a day at the courier's class level, with a mounted courier being able to cast *expeditious retreat* and *longstrider* on her mount. If your courier class is given spell-like abilities, you should add Concentration (Con) to the skill list.

Class Level	BaB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1 <sup>st</sup>	+0	+2	+2	+0	Courier Style, Smooth the Way, Token
2 <sup>nd</sup>	+1	+3	+3	+0	Conceal Message, Mobility
3 <sup>rd</sup>	+2	+3	+3	+1	Improved Courier Style, Sense Danger
4 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+4	+4	+1	Reputation for Efficiency, Uncanny Dodge
5 <sup>th</sup>	+3	+4	+4	+1	Courier Style Mastery



by Dale Holmstrom

## Confessions of a Legendary Mind : Orcs!

Orcs! Those generic baddies that populate dungeons, realms, and multitudes of RPG campaigns as fodder for gaining player character experience. I can't remember a campaign I have participated in throughout the years in which Orcs have not played a large role as bad guys; receptive to dying by blade or spell for our entertainment. They are such common foils for characters that in a recent campaign, one of the players would always say, "Let's kill us some orcs!" before a session.

But where do those multitudes of orcs come from? What is their society like? They are often used to represent the epitome of swarming evil bad guys, but how and where do they procure food and goods to support such a large, waiting to be killed, population? The following was written by using inherent knowledge of history, fantasy, geography, and hints from the three source books of *Legendary Adventure*. No D20 OGL's were consulted, and if any plagiarism does occur, it is truly coincidental.

### What are Orcs?

Orcs are similar to humans in that they have created a diverse array of cultures and technology levels for themselves. Unlike humans, Orcs lack intellectual and creative acuity that is the catalyst for higher cultural and technical levels of civilization. This does not mean that orcs are stupid. On the contrary, orcs possess unrivaled cunning and are adapt at trickery (Lejend Master's Lore page 108).

Orcs are a tough, brutal race, but are also known to cower at strength. They will beg, break oaths, and do just about anything to save their hides. These basic concepts of the orc psyche play largely into the rationalization of their culture.

### Orc Culture Types

The long ago import of orcs to Aerth has since seen the race disperse to almost every corner of the world. With that dispersal, many various orc cultures have arisen. Orcs have followed three paths of culture. Primitive hunter-gatherer, Nomad, and Agrarian barbarian are currently found on Aerth.

**Primitive Hunter –Gatherers** are de-evolved members of the orc race. These small bands of orcs may number at most 20 members and are located in the most desolate areas of the world. These bands migrate in order to survive and will be led by the strongest orc. They take shelter in caves, cliff overhangs, and make lean-tos if necessary. Tool use is limited to fire-hardened spear points and sharp-edged stones. They use simple forms of common speech.

**Nomad orc tribes** roam the plains of Aerth. A tribe of orc nomads may total up to 500 members. They typically follow herds of grazing animals such as bison, mastodon, elephant, and water buffalo for sustenance. They may ride a variety of mounts, all dependant of the continent they live on. Tool use ranges from stone-age spears to borrowed/stolen/traded metal alloys. Communities live in simple tents made of various animal skins. Great orc tribal leaders and shamans are typical physical and spiritual leaders of nomadic communities.

**Barbarian-Agrarian Clans** constitute the majority of orc cultures found on Aerth. These communities may number in the thousands. They may be found on the fringes of human civilizations and in remote areas. Barbarian orcs depend upon domesticated animals, simple-easy to cultivate grasses, and hunting for sustenance. Settlements range from semi-permanent villages to utilizing conquered or abandoned settlements of other races. These orcs belong to *clans* that are based upon familiar heritage and form simple political groups. Usually the strongest clan and its chieftain will be the leader of a community. Like nomads, tool use varies from stone-age flint items to ones acquired from other races.

### Culture Dynamics

Orcs have unique cultural dynamics, which often pits them against otherwise commonly goaled other cultures. The most fascinating difference is the role of male and female in orc culture. Orc males are the meat finders and warriors for the community. All duties of war, raiding, hunting, and

### 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.

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politics are the male's realm. This does not mean that males dominate all aspects of society. Orc females dominate and rule in areas such as food management, agriculture, settlement determination, and most importantly, lineage.

Orcs do not form lasting marital unions. An orc may have more than one female, dependant upon the wealth he can bring his household, but females and males can part ways any time. Females determine a male's clan name and hold all relics of that clan. This situation arises from the fact that orc males are constantly away from their hearths doing "bad" orc duties. Logically, male orcs are not usually long-lived so family determination rests in the female. Female orcs carry their clan surnames over to any female of male progeny.

### Settlement

Females determine settlement locations. Most often these are secluded areas that other races overlook due to lack of productive resources or for health reasons. To the orc, this makes perfect sense; lack of competition from other races allows them to thrive. Orcs will live in the middle of a swamp, putting their shacks on stilts. They also thrive in mountainous areas above the tree line and in mine complexes abandoned by dwarfs and/or other races.

### Politics

Orc politics and government rarely stray further than the clan. Only a very powerful orc, or a powerful leader of another race can keep a confederation of clans together. As with any culture based on bullying, the most powerful orc will head a counsel, whether it's a male counsel concerning a raid on a

human village, or a female counsel addressing work duties for food production. Often, these counsels devolve into combat, where the victor determines policy.

### Food and Cannibalism

The vilest cultural aspect to most other races that all orc cultures practice is cannibalism. For the average orc, it is a normal, almost honorable way of taking care of the dead. An orc that states "He is/was good eats," is merely saying that "He was/is a good man." When consumed, the best cuts of meat go to the warriors and any females with child. Offal is for any lesser orc, swine, or slaves. The only body organ orcs do not consume is the brain, which they consider the source of the soul. An orc that is prominent will be dismembered by the clan members and eaten. The females of the clan then gather the bones and take them to a clan relic house of the dead. This house is constructed of the skulls and bones of vanquished foes and monsters killed by the clan.

Orcs consume just about anything, allowing them to live in almost any environment. "A handful of worms keeps me living today" is an old orc saying attests to their lack of food preference. Barbarian orcs often grow crops to supplement their foodstuffs. Usually, crops such as millet and barley are staples, as well as onions, turnips, and any other easily grown crop. Domestic animals such as swine and goats are often kept. Cattle are highly valued, but orcs consume beef quicker than they can raise it!

Orcs love strong drink, and will drink any beverage that is fermented. Some of these beverages are toxic to humans and elves. In most cases, the drinks crafted by orcs are vile to most other races; trollkin excluded.

### Language

Orcs use the common language, as most other races on Aerth do. They have adapted the language into simpler terms, most of them specific to their culture. Here are some orc sayings and their definitions.

Orc	Translation
Bone cracker	a diplomat, counselor
Grunt	common orc
Leg Eater	a powerful person
Ham Fist	a rich person
Ceiling Scratcher	Great Orc, tall person
Ankle Biter, Appetizer	young orc, <i>negative</i> -a smaller orc
Pus Mouth, Bone Tender	female mate
Pot Licker, Lazy Brow	male mate
Skull Eater	Crazy person
"He has many heads."	"He is a powerful person."
Arrow Ears, Meat kabobs	Elves and their kin

### Physiology

Physiologically, orcs are divided into three categories: Great Orc, Orc, and Lesser Orc. Great Orcs can be compared to overgrown bullies. As in *The Legendary Rules for All Players*, Great Orcs are often the elite warriors or chieftains in orc society. Lesser Orcs are much smaller but smarter. Due to the practice of infant abandonment, lesser orcs constitute a minority of orc populations. If they survive to adulthood they often become Theurges or act as advisors and counselors to other orcs.

### Interaction with Other Races

As stated previously, Orcs often collide with other races. Most often this is due to resource competition, but the orc psyche of raiding and ambushing to obtain food and wealth does not help matters. Orcs are racial enemies of elvenkind and dwarfs. When confronting these races, there is a 70% chance that they will react negatively.

Orcs and Oafs, being distant cousins, often interact with one-another. It is fairly common to have a few oaf families in an orc community. Oafs often are used by orcs to do heavy work such as wood-felling and fortress construction.

Human barbarians sometimes trade, or rarely, form alliances with orc clans. Orcs are known to trade hides and meat for crude jewelry (which they prize) or weapons in wilderness settings.

Few orcs live in human cities and towns. Orcs that do form racial enclaves in the more depressed areas in order to escape discrimination from others. "Civilized" orcs often work as transient laborers such as stevedores, construction laborers, or sailors. Those that grasp the concept of trade are often tanners, rogues, butchers, kennel keepers, fletchers, or bowyers.

Orcs are often mercenary warriors. Their overall lack of discipline make them unreliable in large army make up, but small numbers of orcs are renowned for their military prowess and brutality. They do not make good garrison troops. Once they have accumulated enough "stuff" they will usually slink back to their homes, awaiting the shrill shrieks of their women.

### Conclusion

That's all for this month. For those few that read my column, I am open for suggestions for next month's article. I will be more than happy to create player aids concerning orcs (village, town maps, Orc archetypes) if you so desire. Just send me a note by July 10<sup>th</sup> and I will get right on it.

by Melissa Piper

## Modern Gaming: Adding Non-Human Characters to a Modern World

I first began my career as a GM about a year ago when I started a campaign based off of the then-new d20 modern system. My campaign was an extension of a campaign that a group of friends and myself played over the previous summer. I started the campaign in order to learn the ins-and-outs of GMing, as well as to give my friends something entertaining to do in our spare time. Although the original modern campaign permitted humans as the only playable characters, I eliminated this rule and allowed all of my players to play as any race they desired. After all, one of the things that first drew me towards modern settings was the idea of my favorite D&D-type races working and functioning in the modern world.

It was at that time that I learned that many players have a difficult time imagining anything but humans in a modern setting. The first modern setting that I played in was developed before the official modern rules even hit the bookshelves. Back then, we took the *D&D* 3.0 rules and altered them in order to make them fit the modern world. Having D&D as a background meant that we could take any armor, any weapon—and any race—that we liked and use it in our modern world. I decided to play as a drow police officer, because the very idea was an oxymoron and appealing to play. Since *D&D* was the background for our pseudo-modern campaign, we played as if everything that happened in a typical *D&D* campaign was just our current setting's past.

Ever since then, it has been embedded in my mind that a standard *D&D* fantasy setting was to be thought of our past. So, with this narrow thinking in mind, it always struck me as odd that anyone had problems understanding how other races could be incorporated into a modern campaign. After all, no effort seems to have been made to explain why elves and the like existed in classic games like *D&D* and worlds such as Tolkien's, so why must it be explained in modern times? Then, as I was planning this article, it finally hit me; games such as *D&D* are not normally viewed as our past, but as an entirely separate fantasy world. The name "modern," on the other hand, implies that the setting is our world, here and now.

Understanding this, I soon discovered that adding other races into a modern world is not a question of "how to," but a question of origin. It is a part of human nature to question how things in our world came to be, so it is only natural that players will ask how elves and other races could possibly exist alongside humans. If, as a GM, you plan to allow other races into your world, your first and greatest challenge will be to explain their existence.

There are five theories that I have come to use in order to answer the question of origin. For all theories, I refer to elves as the race to be added to the campaign, but these theories work equally well for all races. If you are struggling with how to explain how outside races exist in your campaign, you may want to take an idea or two from one of the following theories.

### Theory 1: Mutants and Experiments

The first theory that I propose is well suited for campaigns that lend themselves to conspiracy theories and a world full of corruption. The premise of this theory is that elves are the result of a series of experiments performed by the government or another large organization that has a mad scientist or two lying around. A scenario implementing this theory could work as follows:

*"After seeing the pattern of violence and corruption that has been prevalent throughout the world, the government decided to begin a series of experiments in order to create the perfect being. These 'perfect beings' were created from humans, but were given both mental and physical enhancements in order to make them 'perfect.' The specimens were given improved hearing, better eyesight, and an ability to see in the dark. Although the experiments were successful, some side effects occurred as a result. The 'perfect beings', though similar to humans, are shorter*

### About the Author

Melissa Piper is an artist, writer, and computer programmer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She enjoys creating webcomics and websites in her spare time, in addition to role-playing. Melissa got her first taste of role-playing from Baldur's Gate, and she has been hooked ever since. In fact, she praises Baldur's Gate as her main influence in her choice to major in computer science in college. She would someday like to pursue a career in game programming and development so that she can produce and manufacture her own RPGs.

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*in stature, have pointed ears, and have expanded lifespans. In the end, the experiments led to the creation of modern-day elves. The new elves have been released into human society and strive to fit in among their human relatives."*

Although I have used elves here as an example, any race's origin can be explained as the result of an experiment or a mutation. Even if you are looking to integrate a race that you feel would not have been created as the result of the search for the "perfect being," you can add a twist to this theory and still have it make sense. For example, let's say that you want to explain the origin of ogres in the modern world. Instead of explaining their beginnings as the result of the creation of a perfect being, you can always say that ogres were an experiment gone wrong. A scientist may have accidentally (or purposely, for that matter) injected the wrong formula into his subject and inadvertently twisted him into a warped, less-intelligent version of what the subject once was.

With this theory, you could even go as far as to create a secret division of the government that specializes in experimentation and mutation of humans. The races that your players encounter or play in your campaign would be escapees of the program, or those that were willingly released by the government. As always, shape the idea so that it works with your campaign and is believable by your group.

### Theory 2: Evolution

Although similar to the first theory, evolution is another way you can explain the origin of new races in your modern campaign. If you prefer to take the Darwinist approach, you

may want to explain that races such as elves evolved in other areas of the world in order to be able to adapt and survive in their environment. An example of an execution of such a theory may work as follows:

*"Elves are believed to have evolved from their stay in the depths of the darkest jungles. Since these exotic jungles make seeing and hearing difficult, the people who have come to be known as 'elves' had to develop improved sight and hearing in order to survive."*

Although the second theory can be used in any modern setting, it is best suited for futuristic settings. Since evolution is a process that takes place over thousands, even millions, of years, it may prove difficult to make your players believe that new races are only now being discovered. If this theory is used within the context of a futuristic campaign, however, more is left to the imagination, since no one can be sure what the future holds.

### Theory 3: Another Dimension

If you do not like the idea of elves evolving from humans or being the results of inhumane experiments, you may want to take a sci-fi approach to explaining origins. Many science fiction plots center around the idea of other planes or dimensions from which extraterrestrial creatures come into our world. If you are willing to take this approach, there are many ways you could implement this. Take, for instance, the following example:

*"Scientists have known for years that there is a weakness in the fibers that separate our plane from that of an alternate reality. However, they have attempted to keep it under wraps for fear that the public may panic over this unsettling news. As of late, a few inhabitants of the other world have slipped through the weakened division and landed in our world."*

There are modern role-playing books that have touched upon this idea as an explanation for otherworldly inhabitants. *Urban Arcana*, for example, calls the substance through which creatures travel through "shadow."

### Theory 4: Today is Yesterday's Tomorrow

The fourth theory is my personal favorite out of the five that I have developed. In this theory, the modern world is viewed as the future of classic fantasy game settings such as D&D, and vice versa. Therefore, all the races that existed in the medieval era survived as time continued. They have shared the same experiences and lived through the same events as humanity. If you can sell the fact that the other races have lived on this planet along with humans, then you have little left to explain. This theory makes the transition from fantasy to modern smoother since you do not have to explain how a race came to be, as with the other theories.

### Theory 5: Back to the Future

Theory 5 is much like the previous theory in the fact that both assume that medieval fantasy was the past of the modern setting. However, the main premise of the final theory is that other races came to our world through time travel. The idea of time travel may be a bit overdone, but it gives you the chance to keep medieval fantasy in a modern campaign if your players are accustomed to everything medieval. For example, you may want to create a story of an elf who finds a way to travel to the future:

*"Concerned that the elven race was in great peril, Siskin hired the services of a grand mage to conjure a spell to take a glimpse at the future. Unbeknownst to Siskin, however, the mage was of great evil and enjoyed the thought of eliminating the elven race once and for all. So, upon casting the spell for Siskin, the mage put a twist to the end of the spell that sent the unknowing elf and some of his fellow villagers to the heart of New York City. The elves were greatly confused and terrified of where they found themselves."*

Utilizing this theory places the first-generation of outside races into an awkward situation. They would not, at first, understand the workings of their new world

and would therefore resort to using medieval weapons, magic and methods. It is best to use this theory when your group is new to playing in a modern campaign, or is bent on playing a "modern-medieval" campaign.

### Conclusion

No matter which theory you choose to implement, there is always a way to incorporate non-human races into your modern campaign. Before you even start your first session, your first task should be to establish how these other races came to be in your world. It is best not to focus on "how" you should implement these races, but to concentrate on the origins of outside creatures. Once you have established an origin, the rest of the story will flow smoothly. Always remember to settle on the situation or event that makes the most sense for your campaign. If your theory makes sense to your players, then there is a great chance that your players will keep their interests in the story and will find a modern campaign enjoyable.

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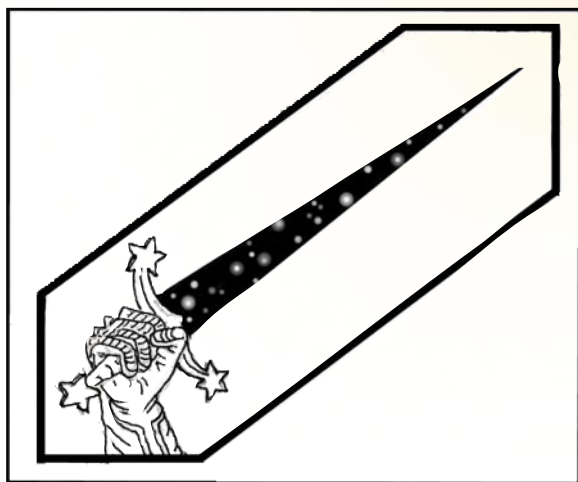
by Rhian Hunt of Great Mastiff Corp.

## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT : ACROHELION CAMPAIGN SETTING

A million years ago there was no magic in the world. Only plain beasts lived in its woods and hills. Men could do no more than steel and sinew could achieve. No dragons streaked the sky with flame.

But all this changed one night when a young fisherman lay in his hut, gripped by fever. While dreaming, he heard strange words and cried them out aloud. The blast of his spell smashed his hut to dust around him. His voice rang in the sky like thunder, so loud it was heard for a thousand miles. In all of heaven and the world the sky was filled with colored lightning. Magic had been loosed for the first time.

The young fisherman became the first wizard-emperor of his nation, Lecila. Although his empire is gone, its dominion once stretched from pole to pole. Brought by the Lecilan mage-lords, Magic is now everywhere: from the deep seas to the sky's blue towers to the mighty sword of the Solar Monarchs. That sword, the Acrohelion, is the weapon that symbolizes the noble paladin-realm of Aesios and its power to resist the onslaught of darkness.



### THE CAMPAIGN SETTING

Dynamic, unique, and fantastic, the world of the *Acrohelion Campaign Setting* offers exciting new possibilities to players and gamemasters alike. Deadly monsters and dreadful enemies give heroes the action and challenges which they crave. Mighty magic illuminates the world with its eldritch flash. Grand themes of history and sorcery inspire memorable quests and exciting adventures. Rich detail conjures up a living, vibrant world to explore – and to change with valorous deeds or subtle intrigue.

The Acrohelion campaign setting has been designed to invoke a whole fantasy world in the imagination of gamers. With its distinctive flavor, it offers the possibility for hundreds of campaigns and thousands of adventures. There is enough material to inspire countless quests, the far-flung scope needed to evoke heroism, and the detail that is needed to make unforgettable adventures. There is room – and support – for every kind of game and campaign in this world: heroism or horror, action or intrigue, battle and parlay – or a mix of all.

The campaign setting is fully compatible with the d20 system and describes a semi-medieval fantasy world.

### MAGIC

The fate of the world is a tapestry woven of steel and spells. Strange and mysterious, the magic of Ahystria (the world of the Acrohelion campaign setting) is a force even powerful wizards do not understand. The secret of Ahystrian magic is Kyrophorion – the language that the fisherman cried out in his delirium so long ago. Nobody has ever translated this language. They only know that speaking it or writing it evokes magical power in a way that no one understands.

Kyrophorion written on ancient Lecilan ruins is especially prized. Fierce wizards, banded together into secret societies, seek out these buried ruins. They hope to gain new insights

into this language of power or even translate it and so gain complete mastery over it. Ruthless and fell, these mages carry out bizarre rituals to achieve their ends. Other wizards and creatures also make use of Kyrophorion. Some beings even require its presence to complete their life cycle, and those who seek Lecilan ruins often watch them from afar, hoping that these creatures will lead them to new troves of ancient knowledge.

The dependence of Ahystrian magic on Kyrophorion gives an exciting new twist to the fascinating world of spells and sorcery. The uniqueness and mystery of Kyrophorion has been woven into the Acrohelion campaign setting in many ways, bringing new approaches to spellcasting, new uses for magic items, and new possibilities for the imagination. Magic is a powerful, unknown, elemental force, majestic and enigmatic, not simply a different kind of electricity or an alternate internal combustion engine.

As an instance of the unusual effects of Kyrophorion, there are certain mystic hermits who plant special trees over Lecilan ruins buried in the earth. When these trees grow, their bark is patterned with Kyrophorion runes. The hermits observe these runes, drink potions made from the bark of these Kyrodends (as the trees are known), and thus gain the power to cast spells known to no others but themselves. Half-mad and perilous, these men and women know also that their secrets are desired by many other ruthless seekers after Kyrophorion and guard their Kyrodends with spells and cunning traps. (The Kyrodendric Hermit is a 10-level prestige class which can be downloaded for free from the [www.greatmastiff.com](http://www.greatmastiff.com) website).

### RACES

New, intriguing races populate the land and seas of Ahystria. Their strange cities rise like dreams of stone upon the horizon. Their traders ply the roads of the world, and their armies march to the music of inhuman instruments, carrying war and conquest. From the noble molossovirs to the cruel, driven quaiishi with their lethal sense of honor, from the roguish spivs

to the oceanic imbalths who spend their days pondering the mysteries of Kyrophorion, these beings and more bring new spice and excitement to the game world of the Acroheliion campaign setting.

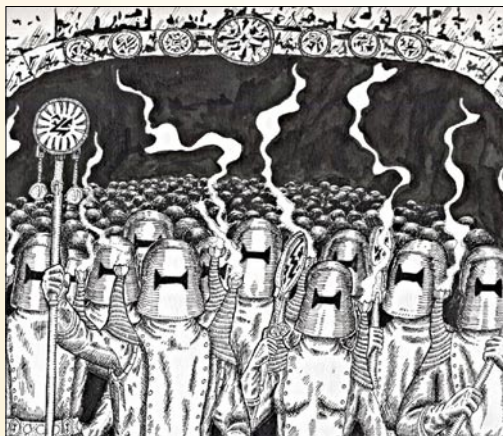
Not only are these creatures fully developed with information for use as d20 characters – there is also a wealth of background information about them as well. Each race is distinctive, fantastic, yet believable, with many traits that make them much more than just “humans in strange costumes.” The cultural information gives an excellent start for role-playing ideas. It also provides inspiration for many extraordinary adventures dealing with these creatures. There are 6 new, fascinating PC core races with +0 or +1 ECLs, several others with higher ECLs (which are therefore suited to more advanced or high-powered campaigns within the world), and refreshing new approaches to some more familiar races as well. Invigorating options abound for both players and gamemasters to bring an innovative style to their characters!

## CHALLENGES AND VILLAINS

Heroes need challenges to face and villains to overcome if they are to be worthy of the name of hero. The Acroheliion campaign setting includes many intriguing, deadly adversaries with whom to match wit, sinew, steel, and spell. The heartless, honor-driven quaishi from the southern continent of Uldaesos have begun to expand into human territories. Evil dragons pursue grotesque, lethal pastimes, toying with the lives and deaths of ‘lesser’ creatures in unexpected ways. Medusae rule the human land of Arar, resisted only by a few valiant freedom fighters. Secret societies and cults pursue their own agendas at the expense of great and humble folk alike.

The focus of evil in the world, however, is the realm of Insarc. Ruling Insarc is a great council of diabolic mages, the Black Summoners. They worship the Despot God, Chond, and their cities are palled by the smoke rising from his sacrificial braziers. Their obsidian fist on the battlefield is the loathsome Blood Guard – a picked band of 3,000 knights, led by the Dread Marshal, who have been warped into monstrous slayers by diabolical magic. But the Black Summoners have many other powers at their disposal, and many extraplanar allies and servants, including the devils known as chondizu – the dreadful warriors of the Despot God. Perhaps most

dangerous of all, they have discovered temnosul – a mineral found where the Despot God long ago threw down his javelins of black ice, seeking to slay all life. From this mineral the Black Summoners fashion many instruments of power, from the deadly temnosul eyes to the fangs of the Blood Guard.



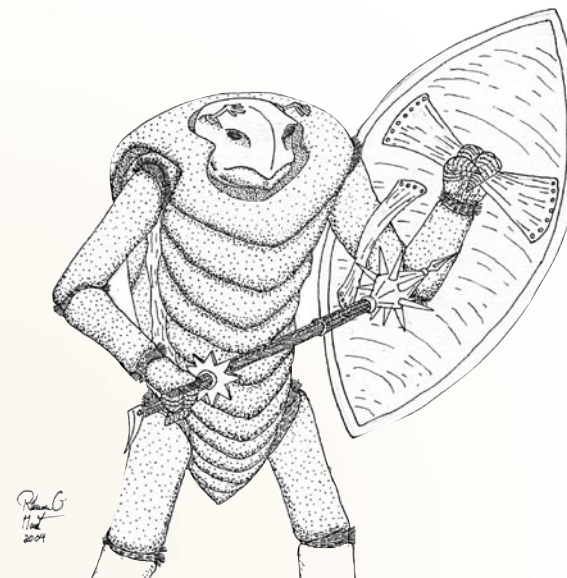
## THE REALM OF THE SOLAR MONARCHS

Opposing the vileness of Insarc is the realm of Aesios, the land of the Solar Monarchs. Founded by the “One Just Man, Aesios is a realm of light, ruled by paladins. Its armies are poised to march to combat evil’s spread. Its temples flash with the sunrays of its priests, whose prayers make the invaluable potion known as Effulgent Wine. Its skies are swept by the wings of griffins, ridden by the vigilant Knights of Boreas. The good dragons lair on its borders, and many a hero issues forth on quests from the realm between the Starspears Mountains and the Sea of Velvet Stars.

## REALMS AND CULTURES

Many nations and cultures, both human and inhuman, rub shoulders in the Acroheliion campaign setting. Countless opportunities for adventure are to be found in these well-described realms. Politics, wonders, strange locations, unusual customs, creatures, wars, and more all provide the hooks for innumerable quests and campaigns. From the huge woodlands of the Greenwhisper to the hot islands of Ozopian Archipelago to the bitter-cold Troll-Kingdoms of the north, from the Land of the Pillar Folk of Anch to the

brutal tribes of the Exetharian Plains, a vast array of places, peoples, and surprises await discovery. Mysteries and perils abound, but so do ancient treasures and the key to mystical power.



As part of this setting, a full pantheon of 17 gods and goddesses is detailed – including d20 rules for their priesthoods, descriptions of their creeds and temples, and more. The struggle between the Bright Gods and the Doom Gods is often echoed in their followers, fuelling more challenges, intrigue, and action – from the skirmishes of adventuring parties to the march of crusading hosts.

## NEW CHARACTER CLASSES

To offer gamers yet more exciting new options for their games, the Acroheliion campaign setting includes 6 new character and prestige classes. There are 2 full 20-level character classes and 4 10-level prestige classes. These imaginative classes are usable in any d20 game. However, they are specially designed to augment the richness of the campaign world itself. The Black Summoner, the Solar Peer of Aesios, the Knight of Boreas, and others, are provided – with full background information and statistics. These well-balanced classes are fully compatible with the 3.5 update of the d20 system. Their role in the world is described, and they

provide stimulating new ways for players to develop their characters and for GMs to enhance the interest of an already fascinating campaign world!

### **NEW MONSTERS, SPELLS, AND FEATS**

In a dangerous world, many beasts prowl in the darkness, seeking for their prey – and hunted in turn by nobles and heroes who seek for sport or fame or a worthy deed. 14 new creatures lurk in the pages of the Acrohelion campaign setting. These imaginative monsters have unusual abilities and traits sure to provide a challenging new threat to the heroes who dare to pursue them. Each has full, 3.5 compatible statistics of very high quality – these statistics have been carefully crafted to conform fully to the highest standards of 3.5 monster design and were reviewed for content and accuracy by those familiar with the rules system. Each monster has full “ecological” information as well – interesting data which can inspire whole adventures and integrates them dynamically into the campaign world. Among other creatures, there are the small but lethal brem, which the arrogant nobles of Vervenao fling onto their enemies like living weapons; the woodcreeper, a cunning beast of the forests which uses its magic and its killing ground to hunt the speaking creatures whose flesh it craves; the strange bookblades with their vorpal pages; the savage chondizu warriors of the Despot God; and many more, all described with the same detail and imagination.

There are also dozens of new spells and feats usable in any campaign! Some of the feats are related to the use of Kyrophorion or are regional feats that enhance the richness and uniqueness of the setting’s cultures. For example, the Kyrophorion Strike feat allows a mage to use written Kyrophorion to cast spells beyond his or her normal limit of magic – at a terrible price. The Zeal of Darkness feat allows Black Summoners and others of Insarcish heritage to bring the full power of the Despot God, Chond, into play against the followers of the light. Spells have also been crafted to be balanced, unique, and interesting. Imnaphia’s Candles allows a mage to hurl back grenade-like missiles powered by the energies of their opponent’s spells, while Supple Slithering gives infiltrators unprecedented power in entering dangerous places unseen or escaping from traps and bonds. These are only a small sample of the new spells and feats.

### **ACROHELION AWAITS!**

The Acrohelion campaign setting is available now as a high-quality 284 page book from Great Mastiff Corp. at [www.GreatMastiff.com](http://www.GreatMastiff.com). This 8.5” x 11” book includes more than 170,000 words of exciting material for any fantasy game, printed on thick 60-pound paper, with a sturdy perfect-bound cover for years of use. Over 40 magnificent interior illustrations bring the setting and its creatures to life and help to set the mood and flavor the campaign. Adventure modules and supplementary books are also in progress at this very moment, and some are already available for pre-order on our website.

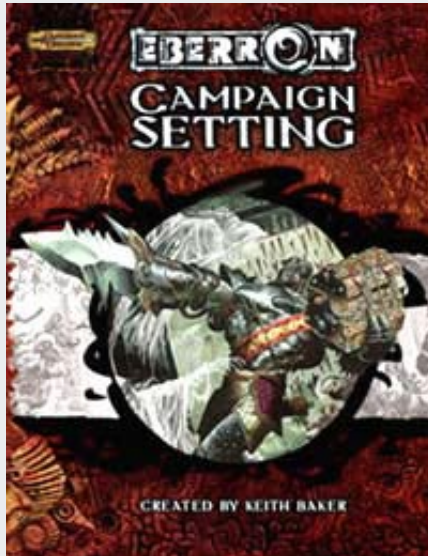
Are your heroes ready for the new and fascinating challenges of this vibrant and perilous world – ready to alter destinies with steel and spell and the strength of valorous hearts?

by Lance Kepner

# d20 review : Eberron Campaign Setting

## "Eberron Campaign Setting"

About: 320 pages, hard cover, full color interior, \$40.  
 Authors: Keith Baker, Bill Slavicsek, James Wyatt  
 Publisher: Wizards of the Coast



*Reviewer's Bias: Having a very high-fantasy, high-steampunk homebrew I approached Eberron with interest and anticipation. The hype Wizards of the Coast put out was tremendous and since I've been burnt by hype before, I was going out on a limb when I bought Eberron.*

## Introduction

Eberron is the newest campaign setting released by Dungeons and Dragons producers Wizards of the Coast. The setting was the finalist in the Setting Search, hosted by Wizards of the Coast, that received over 10,000 submissions from professional and amateur designers. Keith Baker's Eberron made the final cut and began production for a fully embraced campaign setting by Wizards of the Coast.

In the months that followed, Wizards of the Coast hyped Eberron at every opportunity, in ads in magazines, in articles stretching back issues of Dragon, and online with a series of spotlights. The focus was definitely on this new product and the hype machine was in full swing. So the answers I go into this review with are the following. Does Eberron live up to the hype? Is it a real setting, or a bunch of fluff and crunch? Is it true to its design philosophy (swashbuckling action and dark fantasy) or does it fall prone to the bottom line lowest common denominator? I will take the perspective in this review of a DM looking to use the Eberron setting in my upcoming campaign. This is the best approach from which to launch an unbiased, unimpeded view of the product.

The introduction of the product starts out by explaining the nature of much of what I just summarized. The first few paragraphs dictate a timeline and insight into the creation of Eberron. The tone of the setting is discussed along with a brief overview of the world of Eberron. There is a numeric list of 10 things 'you need to know' about Eberron that quickly summarizes the key elements of the setting such as its integration with core D&D, tone and attitude, magic in the world, dragonshards, new races, the Last War, etc. This chapter lays a good foundation for the book. In fact if you can read this short 3 page introductory chapter in a browse at the local gaming store you may get much more out of it than this review. But since you are here reading the review anyways, let's move on to what you really want to know.

## Review snapshot

**CLASS:** Campaign Setting

**STR:** 14 (*Physical*). Hard bound, strong physical bindings, pages don't smudge.

**DEX:** 14 (*Organization*). Easy layout, great index. I didn't find one editing mistake.

**CON:** 18 (*Quantity of the Content*). 320 pages of exceptional material.

**INT:** 18 (*Quality of Content*). All of it is top-notch.

**WIS:** 14 (*Options & Adaptability*). It is its own setting. You can steal, but it might not work as well as the whole.

**CHA:** 18 (*Look & Feel*). Best looking product yet by WotC, art, maps, symbols all superior.

## 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.*

## Chapter 1 - Races

There are **four new races** that are introduced into the world of Eberron. These are the Changeling, Kalashtar, Shifter, and Warforged. Each of the other 11 core races is also discussed in some detail about their role in the world. I will briefly describe each race and their position.

Humans are, of course, the main inhabitants of the continent discussed in the core product, Khorvaire. Humans hail from a number of houses (important due to their Dragonmarks, more later) and generally control the governments of the kingdoms of Khorvaire. Humans have no special abilities or penalties in Eberron (aside from Dragonmarks, which are open to other races as well).

Changelings are the first new race discussed. A mixed breed of humans and doppelgangers, this race is neither fully one nor the other, but a distant cousin of both. Having no ECL or Level Adjustment, the changelings are capable of using a minor shape-changing ability like that of the spell *disguise*



self at will. Most changelings operate as spies and assassins.

The Dwarves are mercantiles and smithwrights. They hail from their mountain holds and control much of the banking and commerce in Khorvaire. The elves live within the human lands or their own kingdoms on Khorvaire. They hail from the distant continent of Xen-Drik, destroyed in a cataclysm of the ancient world. Elves in Eberron are both high and aloof and dark and manipulative. The gnomes of Eberron are the knowledge seekers and scribes. While in control of only one Dragonmarked house, the gnomes are known for their scholars and researchers, as well as their innovations. Half-elves exist in the setting and are common in the continent of Khorvaire where they all hail from. They are much unchanged from their core counterparts. Half-orcs, however, differ slightly in both social structure and appearance. Half-orcs have a more human appearance with slightly orcish features, the picture provided provides a much better explanation. They are also quite rare and hail from the far reaches of Khorvaire. The half-orcs are also just as civilized as their human counterparts. The halflings also exist on Khorvaire, but are nomadic and hail from the expansive plains.

The next new race is the Kalashtar, a race that used to exist in a plane of dreams. In the past they escaped and merged with human bodies to form their new race. These beings are inherently psionic, and FINALLY add a reasonable and logical psionic integration to a setting from Wizards of the Coast. The next race is a mixed hybrid of humans and lycanthropes called Shifters. These bestial humanoids take on aspects of their lycanthropic heritage when they shift their form.

The last race is one of my favorites and is the Warforged. These half-constructs/half-humanoids are neither fully one nor the other. They exist as both biological and construct. They have sentience and were created primarily to be warriors in The Last War.

The new races of Eberron add a distinctive flair to the setting, but also account for much of the development of the setting. One of the things I have noticed about the setting is that everything exists for a reason, and not just 'because its cool'. In addition to the standard racial descriptions, this chapter also provides area-specific suggestions for characters. You may be familiar with this from other settings like Forgotten Realms, and it works just as well here in

Eberron. Being from a different area can suggestively limit classes, skills, feats and prestige classes. These are not mandatory requirements as exceptions always exist, but merely suggestions, and can help formalize the world.

## Chapter 2 - Character Classes

I was looking forward to this section to see what new core classes were in Eberron. Unfortunately I was slightly disappointed that there was only one, the Artificer. Fortunately, however, for Eberron, this core class is not only essential, but a driving force behind some of its key tones. **The artificer is a master of crafting items**, and does so with unheard of skill. They do not need to have the spells for the items they craft, and can make any item from any spell, arcane or divine. They gain the crafting feats throughout their progression, as well as gain a set of craft reserve points to which they can freely use as XP in crafting items. This is essential as the class needs their items to function, and making them lose XP for their necessary involvement would hinder the class. The craft points are lost at each level so it reinforces the class' affinity for crafting. They also gain up to 6th level of special artificer only spells called infusions (not to be confused with druidic infusions). Overall the artificer is a wonderful and fun class to play based on their abilities and fits into the overall theme of Eberron.



Also discussed in this chapter are each of the other core classes and how they can be optimized for use in the Eberron campaign setting. Each class is listed with suggestions of where they might fit into the world, and potential mechanical choices like feats and prestige classes. Clerics have a choice to worship in much the same way as the core D&D rules. They can worship a pantheon, a single deity, or even an ideal. New deities and churches are briefly discussed for clerics, as is the way divine magic works. Divine magic is seemingly a given in Eberron, and represents a more 'hands-off' approach by the deities. These entities concern themselves with things other than the world of mortals and grant their power freely. While this may seem destructive and power-gamey, it actually lends itself to having churches deal with corruption and deception without immediately knowing when Bad\_Cleric01 loses his powers. Druids are also discussed in some detail, and a list is provided for which animal companions by region a druid may have. There are also set orders of druidism that a character can belong to, which represents an in game choice and a mechanical shift in some of the druids abilities. Psionic classes are discussed as well and are fit snugly into the world in a nice and believable way.

In addition, each class entry has a 'character portrait', a written excerpt of what is assumed to be the iconic Eberron characters. They begin with an italicized story element and then are followed up with a brief character history. No stat blocks, no combat entries, just the character.

## Chapter 3 - Heroic Characteristics

Chapter three discusses first the use of Action Points, then skills and feats, followed by dragonmarks and religion. The first few pages are devoted to action points, their use and effect in game. If you have Unearthed Arcana or d20 Modern you may be familiar with this system. Basically a character attains action points at level up, can only have so many, and can use them to influence a series of actions. They could add to a d20 roll, use another class ability, or revitalize a lost or used spell. **Action points are one of Eberron's main selling points, and serve the system well because of the integration of their use with certain feats and even prestige classes.**

Only a few skills are discussed with Craft being one of them to talk about the new alchemic items. Speak Language is

discussed for the new languages introduced and Spellcraft deals with the identification of dragonmarks.

The feats section of chapter three will probably be the most talked about section for people who want to snatch something from Eberron. And while the book in the introduction says that many elements from Eberron can be used in your D&D campaign, many of the feats are keyed to the new races, classes, or abilities in the world. Dragonmarks are a feat, and give characters spell-like abilities as well as guildship in a house (more on dragonmarks a little later). There are feats that increase your action point potential, feats to increase your power as a Warforged, feats to increase your druidic options, feats to increase your shifter abilities, and in general some damn fine feats. Some of the feats are new uses for skills, such as the Investigate feat, which allows the character to use the Search skill to look for Clues. Or the Research feat that of course allows the character to research in libraries with efficiency and speed. There are also many feats for bards, a class sorely lacking in good feat choice.



The next section details the use and acquisition of Dragonmarks. Eberron is one of three ancient dragons, and is the dragon of the middle world. Dragonmarks are marks that manifest on the bodies of races in Eberron. Because of their power and specialized nature, and the

fact that most of the marks (except for aberrant marks) manifest on individuals in the same house(bloodline), these dragonmarked houses have come to prominence in the world of Eberron. Each house provides a unique and valued service to the world. Whether it be the halfling house of healing Jorasco that runs the hospitals, or the dwarven house of Warding Kundarak which provides protection and banking services, the dragonmarks play an important role in Eberron. The dragonmarks take 5 forms, an aberrant mark which is a mark separate from the normal line, and the normal progression of Least, Lesser, Greater and Siberys mark. As the dragonmark increases in power the player gets access to new abilities. Dragonmarks are acquired and advanced through feats and prestige classes.

The religions of Eberron are quite different from the normal Greyhawk pantheon most of us are familiar with, but not so detailed as the pantheons of Faerun. There are two main pantheons discussed and a few separate deities. The 'good' pantheon is called the Sovereign Host and has very intermingled and intermixed relationships between each of the deities and the dark pantheon called The Dark Six. The Silver Flame, The Blood of Vol, The Cults of the Dragon Below, The Path of Light, and The Undying Court are the separate 'deities' that exist in Eberron and represent a unique facet of the people and world.

## Chapter 4 - Prestige Classes

In chapter four there are eight detailed prestige classes the Dragonmark Heir, Eldeen Ranger, Exorcist of the Silver Flame, Extreme Explorer, Heir of Siberys, Master Inquisitive, Warforged Juggernaut, and Weretouched Master. The PrC's are all relative to the world of Eberron, which is always a good sign of a setting, and indicative of the types of specialists available to the world.

The Dragonmark Heir gains powers with their dragonmark and that power continues to manifest allowing her access to more and more abilities through her dragonmark. The Eldeen Ranger hails from the Eldeen Reaches, a vast forested region in Khorvaire. While not a true ranger PrC it follows up on some of the Ranger's abilities but may be more applicable to druids. Remember that in Eberron Druidic Sects exist in different parts of the world, so druids can belong to the sect

Wardens of the Wood or the sect Children of the Winter, and have different abilities. The Exorcist of the Silver Flame is a devoted destroyer of foulness based on the religion of the Silver Flame. Most will find Paladins make the best exorcists with Clerics also following the ways.



The Extreme Explorer is the first PrC in Eberron to focus on enhancing a character's action point potential. The PrC allows the character access to more action points per level, and some action point enhanced abilities. The Heir of Siberys gains a special and ultimately powerful dragonmark, the Siberys dragonmark. This is the only way to attain such a dragonmark and no dragonmarked character can enter this prestige class. The Master Inquisitive is a master clue finder and mystery solver, able to deduct and deduce the game afoot. The Warforged Juggernaut takes the Warforged to the next level, perfecting their role in combat by sacrificing their biological side. The final PrC, the Weretouched master expands the abilities of a Shifter by unlocking their lineage, granting them access to fearsome lycanthrope-like martial abilities.

The Dragonmark Heir, Eldeen Ranger, Extreme Explorer, Master Inquisitive, Warforged Juggernaut, and Weretouched Master prestige classes are all 5 levels. The Heir of Siberys is a 3 level prestige class, and the only 10 level prestige class is the Exorcist of the Silver Flame.

As I said earlier, the **prestige classes define the world's minute details**, and do so in a wonderful fashion. It is to be noted that there are no true spellcasting prestige classes, so don't buy Eberron thinking the next best arcane or divine PrC is contained within. Although a Warforged Barbarian 5/Warforged Juggernaut 5/War Hulk 10 is an utterly fearsome and grotesque thing that should be locked in a box and thrown off a cliff into the churning ocean lest it get free and stalk you like a primal baboon. You know what I'm talking about? and if you don't bless your ignorance.

## Chapter 5 - Magic

Magic in Eberron is common, at least low-level magic. Trains run on magical power, airships float through the sky on magical power, and documents from banking to courier services are marked with spells like *arcane mark*. All of these services, because of the dragonmarks, are relatively cheap to the common person. High-level magic is still a rare and wondrous thing. People in Eberron rarely go to churches or temples for healing, but rather hospitals. The dragonmark house responsible for entertainment and housing hosts banquets featuring *hero's feasts*. Magic is a part of Eberron, not an intruder. Streets lined with magical lanterns are common. In this high-magic world certain components aid in the casting of spells. Always a great addition to the magic system of any setting, metamagic spell components in Eberron are unique and stylistically great for role-playing.

**One of the sections of the book that many people have said strikes them immediately is the discussion of the planar cosmology.** Released online a few months ago in a preview, the planar cosmology of Eberron is closed. You won't find, at least easily, connections to the outer planes or Sigil. What you will find are thirteen individual planes orbiting the material plane of Eberron. The Plane of Shadow, Ethereal Plane, and the Astral Plane still exist in this cosmology. Each of these thirteen planes orbits Eberron and that means that some great interactions can occur when an orbiting plane, say Fernia the plane of endless fire, becomes coterminous with Eberron. This allows someone standing in a certain spot in Eberron, like a volcanic mount to pass seamlessly into Fernia, and beings in Fernia can pass seamlessly into Eberron. Good thing certain planes only become coterminous once in a long great while. The opposite effect of coterminous is remote. When a plane is remote that plane's effects are lessened on Eberron, while

when a plane is coterminous those effects are obviously heightened. This whole cosmologic system is so interesting that reading this chapter allows one to formulate endless campaign ideas. Let me just quote from one paragraph about the plane Dolurrh, the Realm of the Dead

"When Dolurrh is remote, spells that bring back the dead do not function, and it is impossible to reach Dolurrh by means of *plane shift*. Only by journeying to Dolurrh, finding the soul of the deceased, and bringing it back to the Material Plane can a deceased character be returned to life during this period."

See my point? Each of the planes is detailed in the beginning pages of this chapter. Each plane's entry is listed with the planar traits, inhabitants (small note here, an entry for inhabitants from the Monster Manual 3 is included) and when the plane is coterminous and remote, and the effects of that time.

The next section in the chapter details possession and channeling rules as taken almost verbatim from the Book of Vile Darkness and the Book of Exalted Deeds. These sections detail outsiders in Eberron and how they can possess mortals or channel through them.

The last section is the section devoted to spells. I won't get into too much detail about this section, but let me tell you that there are a plethora of new domains obviously for the new deities, there are the 6 level of spells for the artificer, one new cleric spell of 9th level, four new druid spells, and 7 new sorcerer/wizard spells of which includes the reprint of the 4 Repair Damage line of spells. A little disappointed by the lack of spells? I was too until I remembered that down the line we can probably expect Magic of Eberron. I will say that most of the good spells are courtesy of the artificer and fit the class perfectly. All the spells fit into the world of Eberron, and are not just thrown in for the heck of it to meet a page requirement.

## Chapter 6 - Adventuring Equipment

This short chapter details some of the new exotic weapons and armor available in the world of Eberron. It also details other items and services that are available including the different forms of magical transportation as well as special materials.

The first part details five new exotic weapons, each with their own description and picture. Two special types of armor are also explored as well as four new alchemic items. The class tools and kits document a few unique items to Eberron such as the Inquisitor's kit, and Warforged Repair Kit. How clothing is handled, how documents are handled, food drink and lodgings, as well as mounts and related gear are discussed with how anything special interacts in the world of Eberron. While too numerous to name, all of this section is important to an adventure in Eberron.

### **Transportation in Eberron is done by mundane means like horse and carriage, or courier or by magical means like Lightning Rails, Skycoaches, and Airships.**

These magical means are not overtly expensive either, costing only silver or gold pieces per mile. So the average commoner can potentially afford a trip every now and again.

The last section is dedicated to the new materials available in Eberron. For the most part the special materials are not magically enhancing but rather enhance certain aspects. Of the nine special materials they are all for weapons and armor. Flametouched weapons are sacred to the church of the Silver Flame, while Reidran Crysteel is a natural psionic enhancer.

## Chapter 7 - Life in the World

This is the meatiest section of the book, weighing in at 96 fact-filled pages of 99.9% detail and flavor and .1% mechanics. The chapter opens up with a rather brief but poignant discussion on Eberron generalities, which serves to lay the foundation for what is acceptable and what is not in the world. Most of the campaign specifics are touched on so you will find charts for timelines, days and months, the Draconic Prophecy, language and a map key for the area maps.

Following is an area-by-area account of each of the 16 zones of the continent of Khorvaire. While I could get into the good and not so good of each area that would take up far too much space. Each area is thankfully organized in the same manner; a brief stat block for the area describes the population demographics, exports and languages. A brief history is provided along with sections detailing industrial output, life and living in the area, the government and politics of the zone, a large map of the area, the power

groups (each listed individually), religion, major settlements (again listed individually with population), important sites, and finally adventuring in the area and adventure ideas for the area. OK. Now take a breath. That was a lot to absorb and they were just the section heads. Each area is roughly an average of six pages and contains much of the information you need to know about the area.



The .1% mechanics I referred to above is represented by important figures being given an alignment, race, level and class right next to their first mention. The areas of the continent of Khorvaire are unique and interesting. Each area exists for a reason and serves a purpose, which is a general theme of Eberron. Everything has its place. This section takes a very long time to digest but also serves as the heart of the setting. It is full of great ideas, ironic twists of fate, and mind numbing plots of deception and intrigue. Beyond the regions of Khorvaire there are other areas of the world that this chapter deals with, albeit in a

less thorough manner, but enough to stave off any fear or doubts about running a campaign through these areas. A timeline ends the chapter. In these 96 pages a world comes alive.

## Chapter 8 - Organizations

Similar to chapter 7, this chapter details out the organizations of Eberron including the dragonmarked houses, religious cults, and ethnic groups. A sample character is provided in stat block form for each of the organizations; sometimes it's a sample fighter, sometimes a sample priest. This section is quite long as well; so expect Eberron to be full of active groups.

## Chapter 9 - An Eberron Campaign

An essential chapter that is a welcome return to the game from the previous two chapters, this section of the product describes the methods for running an Eberron game, and gives DM ideas for running such games. Styles of play are discussed along with information that any DM should take to heart. How much will my campaign affect Eberron? What kind of game do I want to run? These questions and more are answered in this chapter. Sample recurring villains are also supplied to tease and torment your PCs. Plot themes are discussed and exemplified. The magewright NPC class is expanded in this section as well.

## Chapter 10 - Magic Items

For a world as magic-rich as Eberron, one expect a magic-rich item world. In Eberron you have just that. Dragonshards open up entirely new possibilities with magical items. Different types of shards can be acquired, producing different effects based on type. There are all sorts of components and implants that different races can use, from Warforged additions to Quori embedded shards. Some, but not many at all, standard magic items are listed. I was hoping for more, but the addition of the new magical items makes up for this lack. Artifacts and wondrous locations are provided. Wondrous locations are interesting areas that are like magic items that do not move.

## Chapter 11 - Monsters

Eberron is a magical place, and a place of magical and mundane danger. Its past has seen the coming and going of civilizations and some of those ancient orders still harbor animosity and resentment to the now civilized races. No one is safe in Eberron, and this chapter details the new monsters available to the world. The monsters listed are new and unique to Eberron of course, and a few of note include the Living Spell, Karnathi skeletons and zombies, and the horrid animals. But the most important aspect to remember is that Eberron is integrated D&D. Every D&D monster is available to be used in Eberron, and most fit into the world like a puzzle piece completing the whole picture. The core D&D monsters are listed with how they integrate into the world, an excellent and often overlooked area of many campaign settings.

## Chapter 12 - An Eberron Adventure

A free 1st level adventure for Eberron is provided. I won't go into detail about it because I don't want to mention spoilers, but it has many maps, is about 20 pages, and should entertain your group and introduce them nicely into the world.

By the way, a nice 3-page index follows and ends the book.

## Art

The art in this book is top-notch. The white-backed pages really make the artwork spring out of the pages, and you can find artwork all over the place. Each house symbol is shown and is drawn amazingly, each dragonmark is revealed. The production quality on this product far exceeds anything to date by WotC. The maps must be mentioned as well, for they are detailed, varied, and exceptional for conveying the explorative theme of Eberron. Looking at the map or maps of an area will want to make DMs and players walk the roads, visit the ruins and take the lighting rail.

I also want to mention that pure Kudos have to go out to the editing team that worked on this flawless product. I know some print runs were messed up, and some mechanical errors were printed, but the editing is the best of any WotC to date. Congrats Michele Carter, Christopher Perkins, and John Rateliff.

## Conclusion

Of the first part of the book that is Eberron, the crunch definitely comes out, but in a way that is always reinforcing or reiterating the flavor parts expressed so far. Dragonmarks define houses and services, the new class defines Eberron's magical flavor, the new races expand the notion of what is civilized and sentient, and the magic and prestige classes solidify the pre-built foundation. The second part of the book details the flavor of the setting, the story elements as well as touches on the magical items, monsters, and details running an Eberron campaign.

The book is by far one of the highest value books for sheer volume. Sure it retails at a lofty price, but there are discounts all over the place right now. You simply get what you pay for and more. Everything about Eberron makes

sense; there is a reason for everything. Nothing is 'just because'. This approach lends a believable and interesting feel to Eberron that, I think, will be the main draw of the setting for years to come. DMs will want to play in Eberron because it makes explaining things much easier. Players will want to play in Eberron because they know the system already, not much is changed, and things are only added.

Would I suggest that everyone go buy this book and read it? No. But I would suggest every DM read through this book at some point to get some great ideas for your homebrew. Even if you have a great homebrew, trust me, you can benefit from reading this book. Even if its only to find out how to format and organize your homebrew for publication. If you play or plan to play in an Eberron game, this book is also for you.

### **Where to buy**

Through our affiliation with FRP Games we can get our readers a discount to this product at:

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by Bradford Ferguson

## d20 review : The Bonegarden

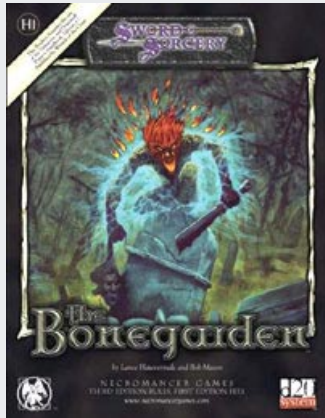
### "the Bonegarden"

**About:** 128 pages, soft cover, black and white interior, \$22.

Authors: Lance Hawvermale and Rob Mason

Publisher: [Necromancer Games](#) [Sword & Sorcery Studios]  
(2004)

Preview Material: [Downloadable Preview PDF](#)



*Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product. This review contains minor spoilers, so if you have a character that is starting to get close to 13th level, you may wanna stop reading the review and refer it to your DM.*

### From the Back Cover

**"Ages of Buried Evil.** The Bonegarden is a small nation ruled by the dead, a circular cemetery 1 mile in diameter, surrounded by a magical containment field that keeps its denizens from spilling into the innocent world beyond. Within the gate lies one of the true blights of the Domain of Hawkmoon, an immense graveyard that serves as the prison for the doomed spirits of thousands of history's most awful criminals. Those inside are determined to escape, and one of them may have found a way...

**An Endless Forum of Adventure.** The cemetery is a self-contained battlefield that abounds with undead of types the heroes have never seen, each with its own special plan for escaping its eternal confinement. The Bonegarden contains dozens of new spells, feats, monsters, and magic items. All the action takes place inside a mile-wide arena where the dead are the majority and the living are hunted like wild game. The heroes have come to the cemetery in search of adventure. The only question is... can they get out?"

### Presentation

*The Bonegarden* is a 128-page soft cover adventure book that utilizes the d20 System mechanics. The interior artwork is black and white and features the works Brian LeBlanc and Mike Chaney. The art is successful in depicting the macabre scenes of the adventures and the new creatures that appear as monster entries in the appendix. The cartography is done by both Jason Walton and Ed Bourelle. It is clear to me which pieces were done by which cartographer; the maps done by Walton stick out like a sore thumb while the maps by Bourelle are smooth and clean. The border is easy on the eyes and appears on the left and right outside edges and the layout and fonts are nice overall.

However, there are some pretty major editing mistakes and a little extra work is needed to run the adventure

### Review snapshot

**CLASS:** Adventure Module

**STR:** 13 (*Physical*). "Perfect" bound soft cover holds up well.  
**DEX:** 8 (*Organization*). Missing map and I wasn't sure where to find some monster statistics.

**CON:** 15 (*Quantity of the Content*). Good price ratio at \$21 for 128 pages, I wanted some faction possibilities presented though.

**INT:** 14 (*Quality of Content*). Good mood preservation. Some excellent writing in parts and characters are explained. Some encounters seemed superfluous to me.

**WIS:** 16 (*Options & Adaptability*). Very adaptable. You can drag and drop many of the locations to your campaign even if you don't use the *The Bonegarden* as a whole.

**CHA:** 10 (*Look & Feel*). Art is good. Walton's cartography did not excite me. Missing map and mislabeled map annoyed me.

### 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.

without needing to use the *Tome of Horrors*. To the credit of Hawkmoon Adventures and Necromancer Games, the mistakes were fixed quickly online. They forgot to include a map of the major settlement that is detailed in the book, and they also mislabeled an entire map (the map is area 15, but all the locations are 13A to 13"O"). Also if you don't own *Tome of Horrors* you will need to print out a 48-page document. Both the map and the document are available from the [Product Support Page](#) of Hawkmoon Adventures. Additionally, when several monsters were presented in the book, the authors didn't tell us where the monster was from, so I wondered whether it was in the *Monster Manual*, monsters from *Tome of Horrors*, or from the Appendix of *The Bonegarden*.



Though there are some living creatures in the Bonegarden, many of the creatures are undead. A cleric that could turn undead would be very handy, but even a cleric has his/her limits and needs sleep like the rest of us.

## The Adventure & Factions

Overall, I like the characters and the setup of *The Bonegarden*, however I did have a beef with the setup of some of the encounters. There are six encounters with between 30 and 100 creatures, one encounter with between 100 and 200 creatures, and two encounters with 200 or more creatures. Though 13th level characters can likely take on hordes of creatures, that doesn't necessarily mean that I want to try and represent the battle with the miniatures when I run the game. While it's realistic that there are hordes of undead in a magicked-up cemetery, sometimes I think it is better to put realism to the side and design for the fun factor. Beyond these huge encounters and the fact that nearly all the creatures are undead which can get tiring to player and DM (it's similar to throwing too many orcs up against your players, "Oh, not ANOTHER orc!")... beyond these potential drawbacks, I thought the adventure/location was really well done.

One thing that is really cool about many of the encounter write-ups is that the authors tell us how the creatures got there if they aren't native to the cemetery. There are many tales of woe relating to the undead and some of the spectres and wights are the tormented souls of characters that either stumbled upon the cemetery or purposely went there. Many characters that are encountered in the cemetery are there for greedy or nefarious reasons, but there are a significant number that had noble intentions when they went there. There are three prominent factions on the surface of the graveyard that make themselves be heard, so to speak; there is a fourth faction that could potentially be helpful to the player characters (PCs).

That's the cool thing about this adventure. It's a toss up. Anything could happen. If they encounter faction X before they encounter faction Y, that playing group's version of *The Bonegarden* is going to be significantly harder than the next group's.

A lot of things are taken into account for in the writing. Your adventuring group is not the first group that has made



a significant expedition into *The Bonegarden*, there are remnants of failed expeditions - some have been turned into undead abominations while others are holed up and looking for a means of escape. There are lots of choices for your group to ponder. Who should they save and how, who should they align themselves with and what pacts should they make? **The adventure plays out like a kickass Bioware computer RPG where you can join any side and play it however you want.** This makes it a little harder for the DM, but the players will get a big kick out of it unless they are used to getting direction from the DM. Another thing that is similar to computer games is that there is some interplay of clues from one location to another. For example, there is a painting of a significant figure of a faction that can be found in the quarters of another faction's leader. There are keys or creatures in some parts that are important to other parts. The interlinking nature helps to get players to explore more once they figure out that these things exist in this adventure.

## The Settlement

There is a major settlement that is associated with *The Bonegarden*, I can't really say how it is associated because I don't want to spoil anything. There are two major factions operating in the settlement. The factions really did not seem to be that different to me. There are some differences between the leaders of the factions and the members of the factions, but they still seemed the same to be. The important thing is that the factions are fighting and the other residents of the town are caught in the crosshairs in the meantime.

## What Is It?

*The Bonegarden* is an adventure location book that is set a graveyard that is roughly circular in shape and is a mile wide. It is designed for characters of roughly 13th level. There are five major factions in *The Bonegarden* and while the locations are numbered, the adventure is non-linear and there is no set ending. There are 33 locations, but at least a half dozen of them are buildings or complexes with at least a dozen rooms. If the DM is adequately prepared by reading the adventure a couple of times through, then the adventure should have a very flexible feel to it to the players.

DMs can choose to make something written in *The Bonegarden* the goal of the adventure or they can add something that is world-specific to their campaigns to comprise the goal, or they can simply introduce their players to the location and see what happens.

There are two pairs of factions in the adventure that are at war with each other and while the authors of *The Bonegarden* leave it open for players who want to broker peace between the factions, they do not give any suggestions as to what the factions would settle on for the peace. I think some suggestions could have been made while still leaving things open to the DM.

*The Bonegarden* is made to be fairly world neutral, though there are references to a large town or city nearby where a crime family is operating. I thought about it a little and you could even take many of the locations from the adventure and use them separately in your game, though you may need to figure out some new motivations or alliances.

What is really cool about the characters in the some is that some of the vendors are simply bizarre. The description of one of the vendors will stun your players. The character is one of the freakiest character descriptions that I have read. Freakier than any of the circus freaks in the HBO *Carnivale* TV show... And there's a picture in the book that shows the character! I feel corrupted :(

## The New Stuff

One cool thing about *The Bonegarden* is that the authors state specifically what material is borrowed from other d20 Open Gaming Content instead of simply listing the source in Section 15 and leaving you wondering what is original and what is not. The back of the book is a little misleading in that it says there are "dozens of new spells, feats, monsters, and magic items." There are not dozens of each as there are 12 feats, 15 monsters, 9 spells, 19 magic items. 10 of those things come from Open Gaming Content. The new magic items are fairly interesting. Some of the new monsters and monsters from *Tome of Horrors* are simply vicious. There is a monster similar to a beholder, but it's undead. Or an undead version of the mimic. Scary.

## Conclusion

Overall, I think the Bonegarden is good, but not great. The editing mistakes, eventhough promptly corrected, and the presense of some huge encounters are drawbacks. But, there are some cool characters, motivations are described and you learn how the monsters got there. If you're characters are getting close to 13th level, and you haven't done a lot of stuff with them battling against or dealing with the undead, then I would definitely recommend that you check this out. There is a lot of material to play off of and I think your players will enjoy the non-linearity of the adventure.

## Where to buy

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[http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product\\_detail&p=11115&ref=sil](http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=11115&ref=sil)

### Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job

**– Miniatures:** Small figures covered in paint representing a character is the one lasting legacy role-playing games have from their war game ancestors. The use of individualized figures can add a great deal to play, especially if the GM is willing to use a large hex/square map. While miniatures can be expensive, especially for GMs who have to field monsters and enemies, they add a great deal to the game.

### Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job -

**Tackle/ Craft Box:** A tackle/craft box can be used to hold miniatures, dice, and supplies. If you need organization, craft and sporting good stores make a wide variety of containers that have compartments. These allow you to keep everything organized and easy to get to. If you are working only with miniatures of various sizes, you can go to sporting good stores and get cases for a variety of sports equipment that have light and solid outer casings and soft egg crate foam on the inside. For a less expensive substitute, use bubble wrap as the insulator.

### Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job -

#### **Screen? We don't need no stinkin' screen!**

Most game systems can be summed up on single page. For each game I play, I create a sheet of shortcuts: formulas, abbreviations, page numbers for important sections, and other useful bits. I make a copy and tape it inside the front cover of my GM binder/ notebook. It is always right there for my needs.

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by Nash Devita

## d20 modern review : d20 Mecha : Military Vehicles

### "d20 Mecha: Military Vehicles"

Authors: David L. Pulver & Rich Spanhour, Major USA w/ additional material from Shawn Fisher, Kenneth Peters, & Hans- Christian Vortisch

Publisher: [Guardians of Order](#)



*Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. I am quite familiar with the d20 Mecha system which this title utilizes. It was an absolute joy review this title thanks to my great interest in military vehicles and arms.*

*d20 Military Vehicles is a supplement to d20 Mecha. This title takes real military vehicles from the world over and presents them in d20 (d20 Mecha, that is) format.*

### From the Back Cover

"d20 Military Vehicles provides detailed reference information and d20 System game statistics for over 100 real- world military vehicles from around the world.

d20 Military Vehicles covers land, air, and sea vehicles from the Russian UAZ-469 4x4 to the USA's devastating M1 Abrams main battle tank; the classic UH-1H Iroquois "Huey" helicopter to the billion dollar B-2 Spirit stealth bomber; the special ops high performance Mark V SOC to the Ohio class ballistic missile submarine.

Usable with any d20 System campaign featuring d20 Mecha, this is the essential d20 System military engagement reference for gamers!"

Also on the back cover, next to a beautiful image of an F- 15C fighter in flight is this blurb:

"Over the Pacific Ocean  
An F-18C from the 67th Fighter Squadron (Kadena Air Base, Japan) prepares to refuel in flight from one of the 909th Air Refueling Squadron's KC-135Rs, while on a routine training mission over the Pacific Ocean."

### Presentation

The cover features three different military vehicles - an HMMWV (Hummer or Hum- Vee) in green camouflage, a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter (also in the default green), and an F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter jet. All of these images are photographs and fairly clean and detailed photographs, at that.

As was stated above, the back cover features an absolutely beautiful photograph of an F-16 in flight over the Pacific Ocean.

### Review snapshot

**CLASS:** Equipment Supplement

**STR:** 16 (Physical). Hard cover with strong binding.

**DEX:** 16 (Organization). Beautiful thanks to the chapter and sub-section division.

**CON:** 13 (Quantity of the Content). Good for the cost.

**INT:** 16 (Quality of Content). Well written. Well informed authors.

**WIS:** 13 (Options & Adaptability). Niche but easily adaptable.

**CHA:** 16 (Look & Feel). Absolutely beautiful artwork, especially the back cover!

### How we rate our reviews

#### Scoring definitions.

18 = Superior. Best of the best.

16 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.

14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.

12 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.

10 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.

8 = Subpar. Flawed, but not without promise.

6 = Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.

4 = Very Bad. Among the Dirty Dozen.

2 = Inferior. Worst of the worst.

The internal artwork is made up of two types - illustrations and photographs. All of the illustrations were provided by Jeff Mackintosh (who also provided the line development, art direction, and graphic production! Got enough to keep you busy, Jeff? \*grin\*). The photographs that were provided graciously by the US Air Force, US Army, US Coast Guard, the US Department of Defense, US Marine Corps, and the US Navy. I have to say that it is great to see so many photographs in this title. I am very familiar with the restrictions on photographs of military equipment (being as that I am married to a photographer and am living near a major US Air Force base, Whiteman AFB which is located in western Missouri, USA and is the home of the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber and a great number of A-10 Warthog attack aircraft - both are featured in the 'bombers' sub- section of this book.), so it a great pleasure to see so many photos of equipment included here.

## Content

This title is intelligently divided into four chapters, each being one category of military equipment - land vehicles, aerospace vehicles, water vehicles, and weapon systems. There is also an appendix which presents a few special rules. Each of the chapters is further divided into sub sections of like vehicles (e.g. tanks, personnel carriers, helicopters, submarines, etc.).

Chapter one, **Land Vehicles**, opens with a one page scenario describing a Tank Platoon Leader and his battalion on tanks. This is a great mood setter if playing in a military-type campaign. Following this is half a page of tactics that are applied in military campaigns (not a gaming reference, this time). This is described as "the 4 Fs" - **Find** the enemy, get a **Fix** on the enemy, **Flatten** the enemy, and watch the **Flanks**. What this is saying is utilize reconnaissance, keep track of vehicles and troops, isolate and overwhelm when enemy and keep all aspects of the battle field in mind and view.

Now the stats and descriptions begin. First offered here in Land Vehicles are **Tanks**. Following a brief overview of tanks in general are the stats and specifics of ten different tanks from the United States, France, Israel, and more. Following tanks are slightly similar looking vehicles, APCs - Armored Personnel Carriers, and armored scouts. Next are air defense units, heavy artillery, and closing out the land chapter, military tricks. This chapter is pretty evenly divided between photos and illustrations. Remember, the military is very picky about what can be photographed and what angles they can be photographed from.

Chapter two, **Aerospace Vehicles**, opens in a similar manner with a (roughly) one page scenario featuring a soldier who is flying cover for a group of fighters with the task of ground strikes via bombing runs and air-to-ground missiles. **Modern Air Combat Tactics** are also given, in brief.

This chapter opens with jet fighters, including the famous American craft - F-15 Eagle, the F/A-18 Hornet, and the

Soviet MiG-29. Next up are **Bombers and Attack Aircraft**, which contains the previously mentioned A-10 Thunderbolt II (AKA Warthog) and B-2 stealth bomber as well as seven other attack / bomber aircraft. The final (conventional) planes that are presented here are air transports. Next we get into **Attack Helicopters**, "Utility" Helicopters, and the final grouping, **Reconnaissance Satellites and UAVS** (UAVS are remote, recon aircraft). Obviously, the satellites and the UAVS are only illustrations. Many of the other images in this section are also illustrations. Planes are one category the military restricts most when it comes to photos and media presentations. Thankfully, Guardians of Order did manage to get some photos for this section.

**Water Vehicles** opens just like the last two chapters - scenario and tactics - before getting into stats and descriptions. This chapter's opening craft are **Carriers**. Next up are **Surface Warships** (Destroyers, Frigates, and Corvettes), quick moving patrol craft (and missile boats), and **Submarines** (ranging from diesel to nuclear). The water craft chapter closes with a number of special use craft - landing units (boats and hovercraft), refueling ships, etc. The majority of the images in this chapter are photographs.

The scenarios that open each of the first three chapters are excellent for mood setting if this book is to be used in a modern military gaming campaign. I was especially impressed with the story from the **Land Vehicles** chapter. I really felt as if I had experienced (or at least seen) most of this.

Finally we have the chapter on weapons. This chapter offers no pictures (thankfully, since if there were it would be kind of like this - 'gee, it is a large shell casing, ohhh... that is a slightly different, slightly larger metal shell casing.') It is presented as a great number of stat blocks. These stat blocks are divided into groupings, just like the vehicles. This is divided into Machine Guns & Mini-guns, Automatic Cannon & Grenade Launchers, Tank Guns, Artillery Pieces, Unguided Rockets, Bombs, Anti- Tank Guided Missiles, so on and so forth.

## Conclusion

If you are running (or are in) a d20 game that is utilizing d20 Mecha and are looking for military equipment or just inspiration for your own equipment, modern or futuristic, this is the book for you. If you are a gamer who just loves military equipment, as I am, this is a book for you. Beyond that, it is some what questionable since this is a somewhat focused niche book. Focused or not though, it is a great read which contains an absolute treasure trove of information.

The first campaign I expect to use this book with will be a heavily *Transformers* inspired, mecha game. This will be perfect for stat-ing a good deal of the vehicle modes for these mecha.

Before ending this review, I'd like to thank the US Department of Defense and the various military groups and especially Major Rich Spanhour. Thanks to your input along with the fine writing of David Pulver, *Military Vehicles* is an absolutely superb title.

### Where to buy

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## The Crypt of Elnin Rhaq

*Cartographers Index : Map ID 13*

### The Crypt of Elnin Rhaq

Elnin Rhaq was once a great king of the ancient desert peoples. In planning for his death, however, he was very secretive. Only the most loyal of his servants and family knew of the location where his tomb was being built and where he was laid to rest. His family used the tomb for several generations, burying the royal family, their servants, and storing up their treasures inside.

The crypt can only be entered from the bottom of the oasis. By swimming down, one can see the open doorway that leads into the first hallway of the crypt. The air is stale and a thick layer of dust rests on everything inside. The chambers are carved from the hardened sandstone, with hidden trap areas lining most of the hallway walls and the door.

Exiting the entrance chamber, a set of four stone cases contain the guardians of the crypt. The right section makes up the main area of the crypt. Sarcophagi line the walls on both sides leading down to the rightmost chambers. The rightmost chambers contain the skeletons of the servants of the noble family, buried to serve the king in the afterlife. Many of these individuals were buried alive, their tormented souls seeking retribution with the living.

The first chamber to the left contains the corpses of most of the Rhaq family. Cousins, uncles, and close family friends lie in an undisturbed slumber. Moving on, the two double doored rooms to the north and south of the left chamber are the chambers of Queen Milyute and Elnin Rhaq's only daughter, Princess Albeyla. The final, leftmost chamber is Elnin Rhaq's tomb itself. Guarded by a set of triple doors, the innermost chamber contains the wealth of the dead King.

### 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.

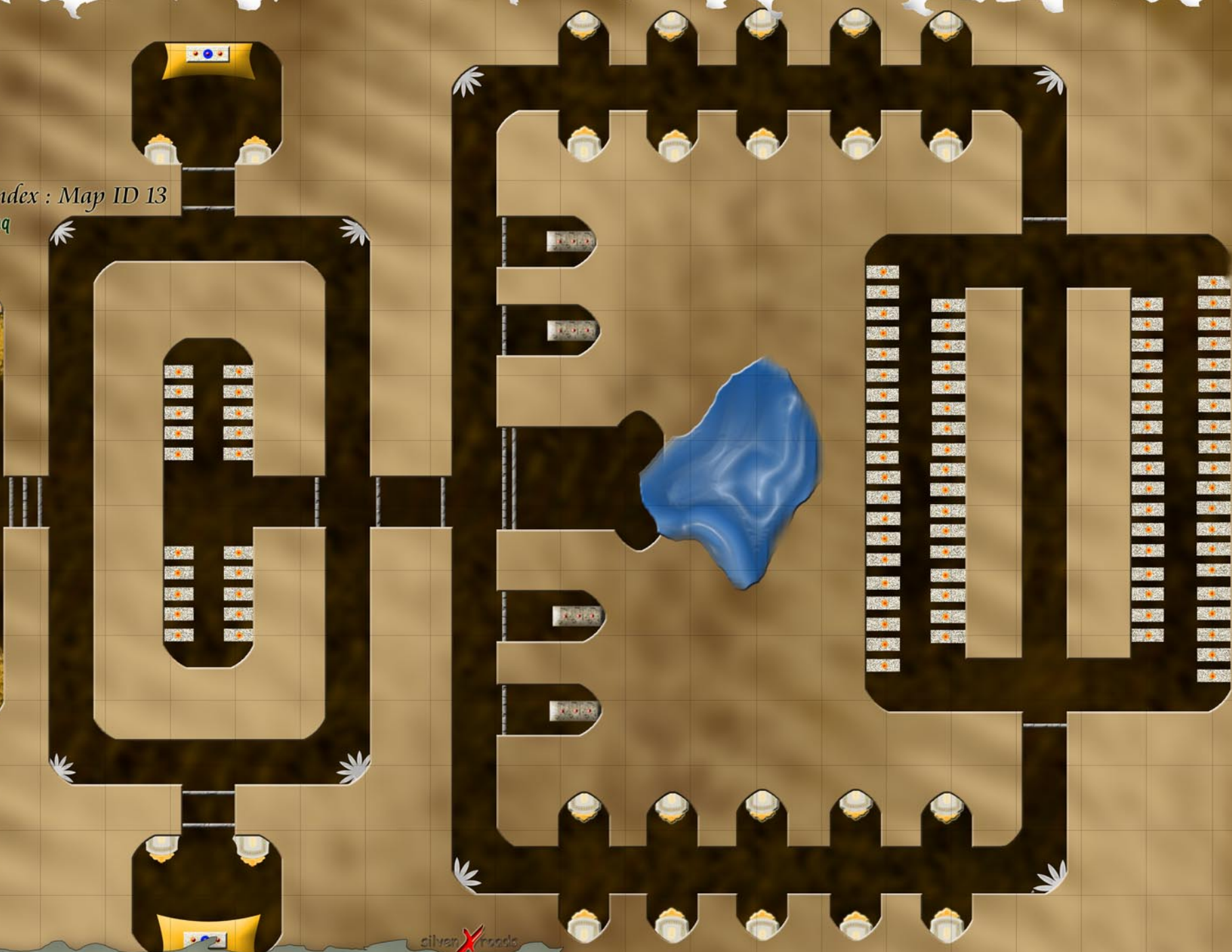
### Contact the Author

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### About the Artist

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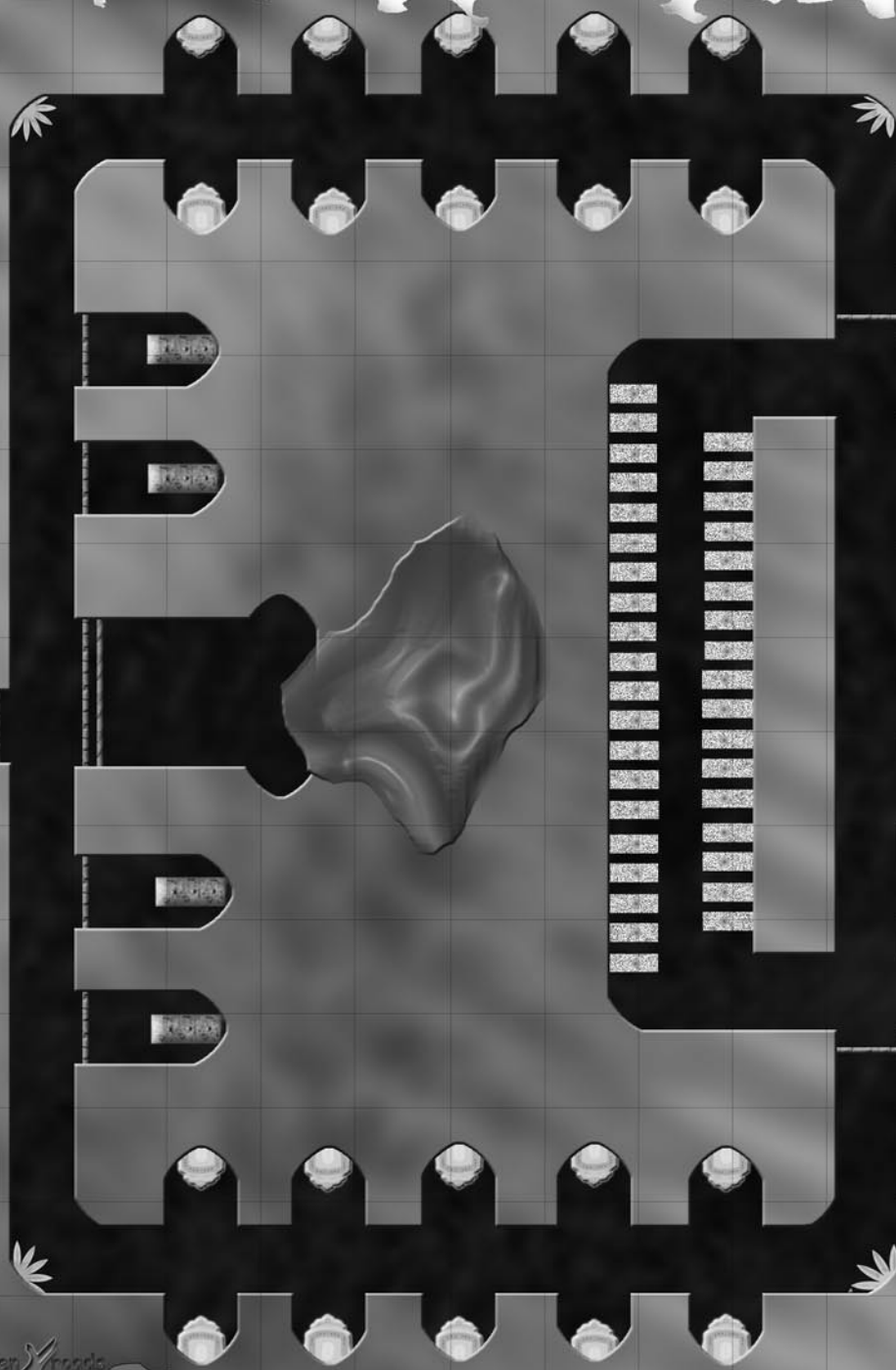
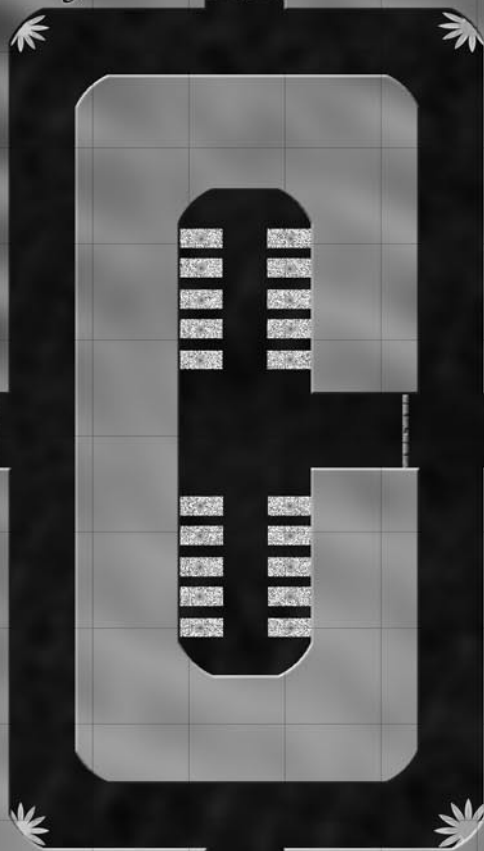
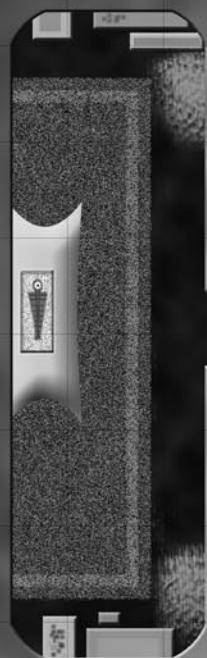
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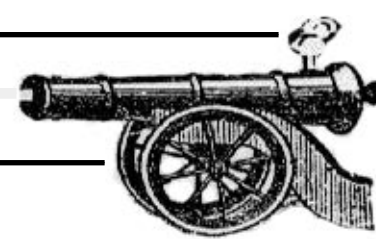
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# the fodder cannon

Serving the City of Silven for over 1,000 Scribes!



## Eberron Found! Gnomes Unimpressed.

By Dak Tamble

In a recent discovery by local gnome astrologer and loremistress Fimble Ulisproken, the world of Eberron was revealed to the rest of the cosmos. This exciting news comes at a time when the wizened sages believe they have discovered every world in existence (yes, even yours).

According to Ulisproken, the world of Eberron was shrouded in a dark veil that mysteriously lifted. She could not account for the strange occurrence, but stated that it was probably some greater cosmic force at work, like gods, ooze, or cheese.

After a viewing of the world by a panel of experts, a suggestive sigh was heard around the room. "Will they never learn," stated one of the experts. "What a sham," spoke another. It seems that the world of Eberron is full of mysterious contraptions and gizmos that are but ancient and inferior technology to the current world.

"Eberron is a nice place. I would like to visit, but it would be like primitive camping. Sure they've got neat things like dragonmarks, lighting railroads, and skyships, but where are the truly impressive social advances like Pizzerias and Starbucks around every keep?" says Ulisproken.

Eberron was apparently hard to find because of the shadowy veil spoken of earlier. Fenbottle's research also pointed out that Eberron has a unique cosmology, with planes floating about its core. "We've seen something like this before, and let me tell you, it wasn't a nice place," says Ulisproken.

How the panel will accept Eberron is anyone's guess at this point. They are unsure of whether to craft a giant portable hole and bag of holding and suck the entire plane of Eberron into the void, or gate a tarrasque over and take bets on which house gets eliminated first. In all of the discussion and all of the debate, only one quote rings true about Eberron, "On second thought, let's not go to Eberron. It is a silly place."

## City of Silven Launches 'War on Magic'

By Dak Tamble

In a stunning turn of events, Silven has launched a pre-emptive strike on the arcane world. This 'War on Magic' was announced last night by the newly elected Mayor Von Shrub in a press conference at city hall. Here is his entire speech.

'For too long we have stood idly by as magic invaded our city. For too long we have fallen back. Well, we will not fall back any longer! Magic poses an imminent threat to our fair and great city, and I believe it is in the best interest of not only Silven, but also the entire world that we strike out these magicists. Their freethinking, academic ways are a travesty to the world. We cannot allow their barbaristic march to go unimpeded. We, my fellow citizens, are launching a pre-emptive strike on the Arcane Academy. Too long have they denied our inspection program access to their secret arcane documents. It is the belief of this administration that Orph Maloney, and the Arcane Academy are secretly, and purposefully developing Magics of Mass Destruction. Our righteous and glorified sneak attack will ensure that we capture all of these MMD's and see to it that Orph Maloney is

removed from his elected position and replaced by a puppet. I know that you, my citizens, are with me in this hour of crisis and for that I am glad. But the price for peace is a high one and some of you will die. I am instituting a mandatory draft. Collectively we will not fail. The arcanes might throw fireballs at us, or call raining meteors from the sky to decimate our peasant armies, but our resolve is true. It must be true. Good night my fellow citizens and may the gods bless Silven.'

Mayor William Von Shrub is the son of former Mayor Jack Von Shrub who, in his 2-year term as mayor of Silven, launched a war against the Arcane Academy for their implementation of magical streetlights and sewage control systems.

## Goblin Protests Lead to Hostage Situation

By Moss Willowwhite

The goblin protests are a common occurrence in the city of Silven. The citizens have grown accustomed to the picketing goblins and even the mayor has been rumored to have commented on the occurrence. But a new string of events has led to a possible hostage situation. According to Biron Levine, resident of Silven, Biron's wife Shilly was abducted by the goblins on her front porch, put upon a bone and wood throne decorated with skulls and animal skins, and carried off to the goblin caves. Neighbors say she did not resist.

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](mailto:adriayna@yahoo.com).

The goblins normally congeal at or near the Silven Crossroads for their weekly protest on the destruction of their caves, their lot in life, and the fact that apples take too long to get ripe. Since the Levine neighborhood is only half a block away from the crossroads, residents there have been plagued with a goblin protest infestation. Biron says, "Once dem goblins started that protestin nonsense, dey was outside our house all da time!" Shilly Levine was reported by neighbors and friends to have "taken a liking" to the goblins and was even accused of feeding them. Neighbor Eima Snaub states, "Cookies! I saw her feed those rats cookies! Then they were all over the place. I had to shoo them off my porch."

Mayor Von Shrub has yet to take action on the occurrence. When asked for a comment, he stated, "Goblins? Why are you crazy press making up stories? I tell you the goblin protests are a myth created by a sour press. Nothing more!" When the Fodder Canon reporters pressured him for a comment about Shilly Levine's disappearance, he stated, "Shilly Levine has probably just gone to visit her dying grandmother or something. I'm sure it is of no consequence."

Biron Levine and neighbors who witnessed the event maintain that Shilly was abducted by the goblins. Biron says, "Mah wif was taken by dem goblins! I say we kill 'em! But dey might protest dat."

## Points from Poot: An Advice Column by Poot Fenbottle

Dear Poot,

I'm not sure how to put this but our party fighter is stupid. And not just annoyingly stupid, but REALLY stupid. He's so dumb he walked into the orc lair taunting the orcs to fight and alerting them to our presence without any preparations or scouting to see what numbers they had. He's so stupid he challenged a Minotaur to a fight after he had been drinking all

night. He's even so stupid that he walked into a church and pissed on the altar before getting jacked up by the priests. What should I do?

Being a seasoned adventurer myself, I assure you that fighter stupidity is a very common occurrence. Parties are constantly having to keep a watchful eye on their dumb brute and occasionally smoothing over messes that he has made.

There are a few different ways to handle the fighter stupidity situation. First, try getting the fighter a leash. I know it sounds like a bad idea and may cause him to distrust and/or smash your head in, but if you can convince him that it is a magic item that makes him stronger, he'll put it on without the slightest hesitation. Then you simply hold the leash and keep him from getting too far off. Leashes have a number of problems, including irritation at the neck and a short range of mobility, so it may not be your best option.

A second choice is to get him a small furry animal. He may go through two or three of these a week, but its sure to keep him occupied while the rest of the party takes necessary precautions. Your fighter may even grow protective of the animal, which you can use to your advantage. By yelling out something similar to, "Big dumb brute! The orcs are going to kill your kitty!" You'll be sure to have him fighting his hardest.

The final choice is simply to have the fighter kill a wizard and take his headband of intelligence. Of course, you may be wanting it more, but giving up one magic item in exchange for a more intelligent companion is sure to increase your party's survivability. Good luck and be sure you don't let him read this.

### Public Poll:

What are your thoughts on the War on Magic?

"I'm part of the news media... what do you think?"

*Dak Tumble, Bard Wonder*

"What inspection programs?! They told me to build the bombs!"

*Orph Maloney, Regime Leader*

"Whut do dem wizards dun again?"

*Vorm, Half-Orc conscript*

"He hurt my daddy!"

*Mayor Von Shrub, Mayor*

"As long as the administration has a clear plan, everything will be fine."

*Poot Fenbottle, Wizened sage*

### Wanted Ads:

Fresh or Rotten Flesh. I don't care what it is or how you got it, but I need it. Contact Hallop Shasto in the Graveyard District for more information.

Small Furry Animals. Candice Camri is taking up a collection of small furry animals to donate to the local goblin shelter. No questions asked, but no familiars or magical beasts please. For more information, please contact Candice at the Red Apple Inn.

Information about Disappearance. Two weeks ago a series of prostitutes disappeared from the corner of Silven and Smith streets. Any individuals with information will be paid top dollar. Contact Fritz at the Rusty Bolt Inn.

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