Campaign Cartographer:

Extreme Mapmaking

COVER STORY

by Dana Driscoll

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Editor's Note May 1, 2005

Hello, and welcome to the 21st issue of the Silven Trumpeter!

My cat is lying on top of the world. She's spent a lot of time there lately, and I think the next time I need to use it to roleplay, she's going to be quite put out at me for unfolding her throne and hanging it across the wall.

My other cat likes to roll d20s. He'll settle for a d6, d10 or a d12, but after sending one under my bare feet on a wooden floor, his d4 privileges have been revoked.

What can I say? My cats are true gamers.

They've both had their own characters. Zoe played a delicate thief named Aeri, and .tif was a broad-shouldered fighter named Gorthal. Granted, they were both generally quiet characters, save for once when someone stepped on .tif's tail and Gorthal let out a mighty shout.

They aren't really active characters, either, but you can't say they don't enjoy the game. Sometimes, I think they really like it just as much as we do, if not more. I am known to get frustrated at my ability to roll exactly the opposite of what I'm supposed to be rolling for whatever system we're playing, and it can really get in the way of a good game. .tif and Zoe just lay back, content as can be.

They do that when I'm not gaming, too. Zoe sprawls over (the map of) the world, watching me while I scramble to make sure I have my crumhorn for that night's rehearsal as I'm trying to get to work early; she's silently reminding me that there is a game waiting to be enjoyed. While I'm poring over proofs of the Trumpeter, .tif skitters a stray d20 across the floor (where did it go?) to draw my attention to the abandoned character sheets and dungeon maps strewn across the coffee table. These two don't worry about the real world – they're just having fun. They're sending me a wordless message that I can hear clear as day: work less, play more!

And I think that's a good message. While we're all rushing to class, to work, to get the kids from school, and to manage the pile of other things we all do every day, we shouldn't forget to take time for the things we enjoy: in this case, gaming.

So those have been my cats' words of wisdom for the last few months, and I gladly pass them along to you. As spring finally warms up the Northern hemisphere, take a few moments to smell those flowers, enjoy the sunshine and, of course, work less and play more!

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell
Editor-in-Chief
Silven Trumpeter

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

by Matthew J. Hanson

An Uncooperative Construct

Starlanko the Magnificent was two hundred feet below the surface of the earth in an ancient underground structure created by a now-extinct civilization. He had heard rumors of great arcane secrets buried in this ruined complex, and after Starlanko had fought through throngs of traps, magical constructs, and a few monsters who now called this ancient vault home (with a little help from his associates Redreck the Fierce, and Vox the Lawful - Vox did not call herself that, only Starlanko called her that, and never out loud), he was certain that he was close to his goal.

Funbane, Starlanko's talking sword, was also present, though, as usual, he was proving less than helpful. "...and Nogrim begat Bleslu, and Blelsu begat Parnips. Parnips became the first Duke of Barondia, but choked on a herring bone before he could father an heir."

"I'm trying to concentrate," said Vox.

"My apologies, madam," said Funbane. He ceased his lecture on the early nobility of Androthia.

Vox was trying to concentrate on disarming a magical trap on a door that Starlanko believed led to the final room of this dungeon. According to her diagnosis, if she failed to this disarm the trap, it would turn whoever opened the door to stone. Starlanko and Redreck waited patiently.

"It's disarmed," Vox said, and stepped back. She and Starlanko hid in a corner while Redreck cracked open the door.

The fierce warrior remained unpetrified. Starlanko had to admit that Vox knew her trade well. He sometimes wondered how he had ever gotten by in those days before he had somebody to conveniently disarm traps.

Starlanko and Vox inched forward as Redreck opened the door the rest of the way.

"It took you long enough," a metallic voice creaked.

Through the doorway, Starlanko could see an animated statue, which evidently was the source of the voice. It was of a design that Starlanko had never seen before. It was small, only about four feet tall, and only had a general human-like shape. There were no specific facial features, nor a neck. The head was just a lump above the arms with two generic eyes and an opening below that could be a mouth. Most of the statue was a tarnished silver, but lines of green, perhaps jade, coursed throughout the body in a geometric pattern.

"Were you expecting us?" Starlanko asked, not having a better idea of what to say.

"I was expecting somebody," the strange construct said. "My creator told me to guard this treasure, then left me alone. It's been over a year since anybody has visited. At this point, I'd be happy to talk to anybody, even if they were robbers."

"You think you've been here over a year?" Starlanko asked.

"I believe so. It's so hard to tell in this room, completely devoid of natural light."

"Tell me," the wizard inquired. "Do you know how long after the Dragon Wars you were created?" The Dragon Wars were one of the few historical events known to have occurred during the existence of the ancient civilization that left so many ruins scattered across the planet. The Wars occurred right before the civilization's golden age.

"You mean they're over?" the construct replied. "I was told to be on the lookout for agents of the dragons."

"I'm afraid the Dragon Wars have been over for several thousand years."

"Oh dear. It seems it's even harder to keep track of time than I thought."

"So you see," Starlanko reasoned, "the people who created you long ago died of old age. Since they're gone, they have no need for the treasure you are guarding, so you might as well let me look at it." Starlanko took a step toward the construct.

The first flicker was in the metal man's eyes. Then all the jade lines on its body radiated bright green. It expanded, but without increasing the base amount of material. Its body split apart along the green lines, and each segment floated several inches away from the segment it had recently been flush against. Between each metal plate was nothing but green fire, yet magically the creature held its shape.

"You may not touch the treasure," it bellowed.

"Okay," Starlanko said. He took a step back.

The construct returned to its previous state.

Starlanko and his two associates stepped out of the room and closed the door. "Any ideas?" Starlanko asked.

"Why don't we just attack it?" Vox suggested.

"That's not a bad idea," Starlanko said, "Why don't you lead the way."

"By 'we,' I meant 'Redreck,'" the elven thief responded.

"Naturally."

"I must object," interrupted Funbane. "To slay a mindless automaton might not be reprehensible, but this guardian doth posses a mind and spirit like any living creature. His life cannot be idly cast aside for the sake of treasure."

"Oh, but didnst thou feel his aura?" Starlanko asked.

"Nay."

"It was a most foul and evil aura," Starlanko said. "Was it not so?"

"Aye?" Vox murmured.

"If it doth be evil, that is a different matter," Funbane concluded. "Pray continue."

"I could try," Redreck offered.

"I've used up almost all of my buff spells," Starlanko said. "I've got a *bear's endurance* I could offer, but that's about it."

Redreck nodded.

A round later they were poised at the stone door. The instant Starlanko cast his spell, Redreck flung open the door. He charged the iron monster, and again it expanded into its green fire and floating plates form. Redreck's sword clashed against the construct, but it seemed to do little good. The construct landed two crushing blows that nearly knocked Redreck to the floor. Starlanko summoned a celestial badger, but he knew it would have little effect. Two more blows and Redreck was forced to withdraw.

The party regrouped outside the room. Starlanko had a *teleport* spell prepared for this sort of occasion, but he noticed that the construct was not following them. Again, they conferred on the other side of the stone door.

"It was tougher than I expected," Vox said, as Redreck quaffed a potion. "I have another idea. What if you and Redreck attack the guardian, while I sneak in invisibly and steal the treasure."

"That might not be a bad idea," Starlanko said. "Except that Redreck is still fairly injured, I don't have any buffing spells prepared, nor do I have any spell that could make you invisible."

"Can't we just wait a day, and you prepare the spells tomorrow?"

"I suppose we could. I'd like to get out of this place sooner rather than later."

"Then you think of a plan. And if you can't think of something within a day, we try my idea."

***

The next day, Redreck was thoroughly buffed up, and Vox was invisible. The door swung open and Redreck charged.

This time the construct guardian did not expand into its more fearsome form. Instead, it activated a magic ability which Starlanko recognized as *dispel magic*. Starlanko watched most of his buffing spells disappear. Redreck hacked at the living statue, but it seemed to pay no mind. Instead it made another dispel attempt, and this time Vox appeared, tugging at a large chest, her invisibility having been canceled.

Then the construct transformed. It took one swipe at Vox and knocked her across the room.

Rounds later, the three were conferencing in the hall.

"It doesn't follow us," Vox suggested. "What if you stayed in the hall and used *telekinesis* to take the treasure?"

"I don't have *telekinesis* prepared," Starlanko replied.

"Well if you think of a better idea between now and tomorrow, let me know."

***

The next day, Redreck was thoroughly buffed up, and Vox was invisible. The door swung open and Redreck charged.

About an hour passed, with no incident. Vox was practicing her hiding and spotting skills. She placed a mirror on the wall, then tried to hide and see if she could see herself in the mirror. Redreck was reading a cheap pulp novel. Starlanko was puzzling over what to do about the guardian. He was seriously contemplating giving up. Instead, he slipped through the stone door.

"Hello, I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"No, not at all," the magical construct said. It remained in its compact form. "On the contrary, I quite miss having visitors."

"I'm sorry about my friends and I trying to destroy you earlier," Starlanko apologized.

"I understand. You're a robber; I'm a guardian. You trying to steal things, and I smash you to a pulp."

"I don't really see myself as a robber," Starlanko said. "After all, the people who owned this treasure are long deceased, as are all their heirs. If nobody owns a pile of treasure, I don't see how I could be stealing it."

"All the same," the construct said. "I have my orders, and since I don't have any emotions and never get bored, I'm going to follow my orders until the end."

"About these orders," Starlanko said. "You have been told to guard this treasure. What exactly does that mean?"

"I am required to stay here and prevent anybody other than my creator from taking it."

"You must stop people from taking the treasure? Could you allow somebody to look at the treasure?"

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Scary Construct

Medium Construct

Hit Dice:	16d10+20 (108 hp)
Initiative:	+0
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class:	26 (+16 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 26
Base Attack/Grapple:	+11/+15
Attack:	Slam +15 melee (1d10+4)
Full Attack:	2 slams +15 melee (1d10+4)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Fury, spell-like abilities
Special Qualities:	Construct traits, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 2, spell resistance 28, *tongues*, *true seeing*
Saves:	Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +5
Abilities:	Str 18, Dex 10, Con —, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10
Skills:	Spot +16, Listen +16, Sense Motive +10
Feats:	Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Overrun, Power Attack
Environment:	Any
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	12
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement:	17–24 HD (Medium); 25–45 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment:	—

These constructs were crafted by an ancient race to act as guardians for their treasure hoards. The scary construct's creators realized that golems were incredibly unintelligent and not very versatile, so they granted these guardians both intelligence and flexibility.

In its default form, a scary construct is to be a five-foot tall statue crafted of a silvery metal, with a highly organized pattern of green lines running across its body. When in its fury form, the scary constructs body splits open along the green lines, separating into dozens of plates. These plates float several inches from each other, but remain in roughly the same position as before, held in place by magic. Between the plates burns a magical green fire.

Scary constructs can speak and understand any languages as though affected by the *tongues* spell. In its fury form it cannot speak, but still understands all languages.

Combat

Scary constructs can deal with opponents either with their magical abilities or by entering a fury and using their brute strength. Typically they combat magic with magic and muscle with muscle.

Fury (Su): As a move action, a scary construct can enter a magical fury. In this fury, its size increases by one step; its Strength increases by +8 and its Dexterity by +4; it deals an additional 1d6 points of fire damage on a successful slam attack; it gains damage reduction 10/adamantite; and it receives Awesome Blow as a bonus feat. However, while in its fury, the scary construct loses it spell-like abilities, spell resistance, and *true seeing* abilities.

In its fury form, the following statistics are modified: hp 118; Initiative +2; AC 27, Touch 11, Flat-footed 25; Grapple +23; Attack Slam +18 Melee (1d8+8 plus 1d6 fire); Full Attack 2 Slams +18 melee (2d8+8 plus 1d6 fire); Space/Reach: 10ft./10 ft.; SA Fury; SQ Construct traits, damage reduction 10/adamantine, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 2, *tongues*; Abilities Str 26, Dex 14; Feats Alertness Awesome Blow [B], Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Overrun, Power Attack

Spell-Like Abilities: At will - *greater dispel magic*, *touch of idiocy*; 3/day - *confusion*, *deep slumber*, 1/day - *feeblemind*.

Tongues (Su): A scary construct can speak and understand any language as though it were constantly affected by the *tongues* spell.

True Seeing (Su): The scary construct constantly can see as though it were affected by the *true seeing* spell.

The holes which served for eyes glowed with a small point of light. It paused as though it were thinking. "I believe," it said, "as long as you did not try to take the treasure or damage it in some way, I could permit you to look at it."

"And if I found a spell book among the treasure horde, would it be okay if I copied it?" Starlanko asked.

"I believe that would also be acceptable."

***

After Vox had spent sufficient time hiding, she took a lock from her sack and practiced picking it. When she had tired of that, she constructed a number of traps, and then disarmed them. It was while she was doing this that she noticed Starlanko was gone.

"Where's the wizard?"

Redreck did not look up from his book. He pointed to door that lead to the treasure and its guardian.

"Alone? You didn't do anything?"

"I was in the middle of a chapter."

Vox sneaked through the stone door. Inside, she saw Starlanko seated on stool. He had two books in front of him. He alternated between reading from one book and writing in the other.

"What are you doing?" Vox asked.

"I'm copying all the spells I don't know," Starlanko replied. "Bernard said it's okay as long as I don't take them out of the room?"

"Who's Bernard?" Vox asked.

"Hi," the guardian construct waved its hand at Vox.

"How long is this going to take?"

"There's a good number of new spells in here. I'd say about a week. A week and a half at the most."

"And you want us to just wait down here a whole week while you copy down those things?"

"If you come up with a better idea before the week is out, I'd be glad to hear it. Until then, I'd appreciate it if you didn't disturb me. I'm trying to concentrate."

Dreamer of the Sea

by Chris McCoy

She was drowning.

That much she remembered. Her lungs burned in a silent plea for air. Raine gave them no heed. She would rather leave this world behind than attempt to be a part of it anymore. She had never been a part of this world, had never belonged to it…never found acceptance because of what she was.

Let me die…It is better this way…

Her dreams were all that she had ever had. Dreams of what it would be like to be part of her father's world, a world of infinite mysteries and boundless experiences. The world beneath the waves, the world of the sea elves. How she longed to forever become like her father and swim in the invisible currents, the "sea winds," allowing them to take her wherever their whims may lie. How she wished to see the coral kingdoms of her father's kind and to worship with them in their immaculate Citadel of Pearls. Her dreams gave her the strength to survive. Her dreams gave her the life she wished to live. But it was her dreams that her father had shattered with but a few words.

"Raine, you do not belong here…you are land bound and nothing more…" Her father's baritone voice resonated throughout her cloudy mind.

Raine struggled to understand those words. Why had her father told her to leave? Why was she nothing more to him than a land bound half-breed? Land bound…she knew what that term meant to her father's people. She

was without gills, a half-breed of human and aquatic elf creation. She was a pariah in both societies, a miserable afterthought created by a moment of passion between her parents. Raine was alone, forever and utterly alone.

Her aquamarine eyes stared out into the cloudy azure depths, gazing out at the world that she so yearned to be a part of. Her ebony hair billowed out before her like the oncoming cloud of that darkness that she knew would soon take over her thoughts. She felt no fear, though. She knew she would at last feel no more pain, no more sorrow, no more bitter resentment for a dream that would never come true. She would know peace.

Peace…such a foreign concept to the daughter of an Aryial druidess. That goddess of pacifism and natural tranquility had granted her no peace when her mother, her only true guidance and companion in life, had died. Aryial had taken her mother away, calling her to her side without thought of its repercussions. Raine had turned to her father then…a man who she had never known. A man who had turned his back on her.

How cruel was this world when one's own father turned his back on his own daughter in her greatest time of need? Raine would leave the world of the flesh and her father behind…it was only a matter of time…how she prayed for that release to come sooner…

Raine had chosen the Sea of the Goddess's Tears as her place of release. It was here that she had known some semblance of tranquility, regardless of how illusionary and minute it may have been. Her small wooden boat had

cut across the waters at dawn, the wooden oars being pulled by a woman who had nothing to lose and all the determination in the world. She had chosen her fate to be given by the world she longed to be a part of. The early morning waves had lapped so calmly, almost invitingly, against her boat's wooden hull, calling to her. Calling for her to join with them, to forever be set free of a loveless existence. She had heeded that call, leaving all of it behind her.

Raine thought of her mother…the beautiful druidess who had fallen in love with the sea and with her father, an aquatic elf hunter of the Sea of the Goddess's Tears. Her mother and father had been happy for a short time. It was in that blissful time that Raine had been conceived. It was her very existence that had driven her mother and father apart. How ironic that her very birth was damning. Raine felt sorrow for her mother, a woman whose quest of peace had driven her to leave behind the world of mortal consequences and seek out her goddess. Her mother's beautiful face stared out at her now, beckoning for her to join her in the depths. Raine did not hesitate to follow.

Morning came to the misty shores of the Sea of the Goddess's Tears. A lone fisherman came upon a derelict wooden fishing boat and found no one on board. Nothing denoting ownership of the boat was found, so the fisherman set about pulling the boat into shore. Later on, he discovered something of interest under a folded cotton chemise. It was a pair of coral wedding rings, hidden in a golden locket in which were inscribed the words:

"For my beloved wife, let the sea be your sanctuary as it was what brought us together".

Interview with Will Wheaton

by Paul Wolfe

Wil Wheaton is an actor that appeared in moves such as *Neverland* and *Star Trek: Nemesis*. He also does voice-acting for games including *Everquest* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. In addition to acting, Wil is also an avid gamer. He shares his views on gaming with Silven writer Paul Wolfe in the following interview.

So, everyone knows about Wil the movie/TV star, and now Wil the famous author, but you haven't talked about your involvement with RPGs. How long have you been involved in gaming? What was your first gaming experience?

I have played D&D since the red box with the color-them-in-yourself dice, but it wasn't until ninth grade that I officially became A Gamer. The two most influential games in my evolution were *Car Wars* and *Illuminati*. Both of them were so wildly different from anything I'd ever played before.

Other than the sexy chicks, what drew you to the hobby and what keeps you interested in it?

Wait. There are sexy girls in gaming who don't work booths at trade shows? Who actually understand the difference between a d12 and a d20? Why have I never seen one?

What game systems do you play? Do you have a favorite genre?

I absolutely *hated* *AD&D*, and it was my inability to calculate THAC0 that drove me to try *GURPS* in the late 80s, so *GURPS* will always be atop my list of great systems. I loved playing Supers, Horror, and Space. I am also a big fan of the d20 system, and D&D 3.5 is currently rocking my world on a semi-regular basis. We play every two weeks in the Dawnforge campaign setting.

So, you're involved in the technical community online, on slashdot and others. Are you involved at all with the gaming community? ENWorld or Silven or one of the several online gathering places for RPG geeks out there?

Any ideas I had about possibly joining the online gaming community were discarded when my *Dungeon* column was announced, and all these people went berzerk that "Wesley is writing a stupid blah blah blah. I hate him! Pay attention to me now!

In doing my homework, I found that you're a huge *Star Wars* fan. Ever play the Star Wars RPG? Miniatures game? Favorite character/ character types? Have you seen Episode II yet?

I haven't seen Episode II, because I waited in line for twelve hours to see Episode I. Fool me once, you -- fool me . . . you . . . you can't get fooled again. Now watch this drive.

I read your column in *Dungeon* magazine (actually, that was how I knew you were involved in the hobby). Are you working on anything else for RPG publishers?

Not right now. I've had a few ideas for simple games flash through my head, but so far nothing that's new or different enough to justify the time and energy that would go into designing and playtesting it.

I know you're protective of your family with regard to the limelight, but do your kids or wife game with you, or are you like most of us - enduring the derision of our spouses and having to take time away to get in a few games?

My wife is not into gaming at all. She will play traditional board games with me and the kids, but that's more about doing something together as a family than it is about gaming. The kids and I are a different story entirely, though. Nolan is currently in love with *Magic: The Gathering*, so we play (using the Ice Age rules, because the new rules are really, REALLY stupid) almost every day. I'm still working on the d20 adventure I wrote about in *Dungeon* earlier this year, but I haven't made much progress. I'm just too busy with various commitments. I would rather do one thing at a time and do it really well, than do three things at 33.3%, you know? When I finally have time to put together this adventure and take my step-kids through it, it's going to be awesome.

There was a lot of talk, and a lot of fanboy gyration, when Vin Diesel came out of the 'gaming closet.' Any other closet Hollywood geeks you want to out? Play with any of them?

I like to play with people who respect the game, don't try to min/max their characters, and role-play interesting and unique characters. I don't like to play with hack-n-slashers or rules lawyers (who does?). If there were actors or other Hollywood geeks who fit that profile, I'd love to play with them, but I'm far more interested in playing with a good group than I am in playing with celebrities for the sake of playing with celebrities.

So, you've done sci-fi TV and movies and at least one fantasy movie (*Neverland* - disturbing and not your traditional hobbit-fantasy) in the past, are you involved in any other fantasy or sci-fi genre movies coming out in the near future?

Five seasons of Star Trek should help me in the SF and fantasy world, but it actually closes more doors than it opens. You know, it's just not true that "everyone hated Wesley," but it's been repeated so often, it's become accepted conventional wisdom, and I haven't had much luck convincing the entertainment industry otherwise. It's a shame, because I truly love the genre, and I'd love to work on something good, like *Watchmen* or *Ringworld* or *Foundation* or something. I got very close to landing a role in *I, Robot*, but that's been it for the last several years.

There's an elephant in the room in Hollywood, though: with rare exception, SF movies today are crap that follow

the action movie formula, and they set them on the moon instead of New York, or give the hero a laser gun instead of a .45. For every *Firefly*, there are ten *Demolition Man*s. Same with fantasy. For every *Lord Of The Rings*, there are five *Reign of Fires*.
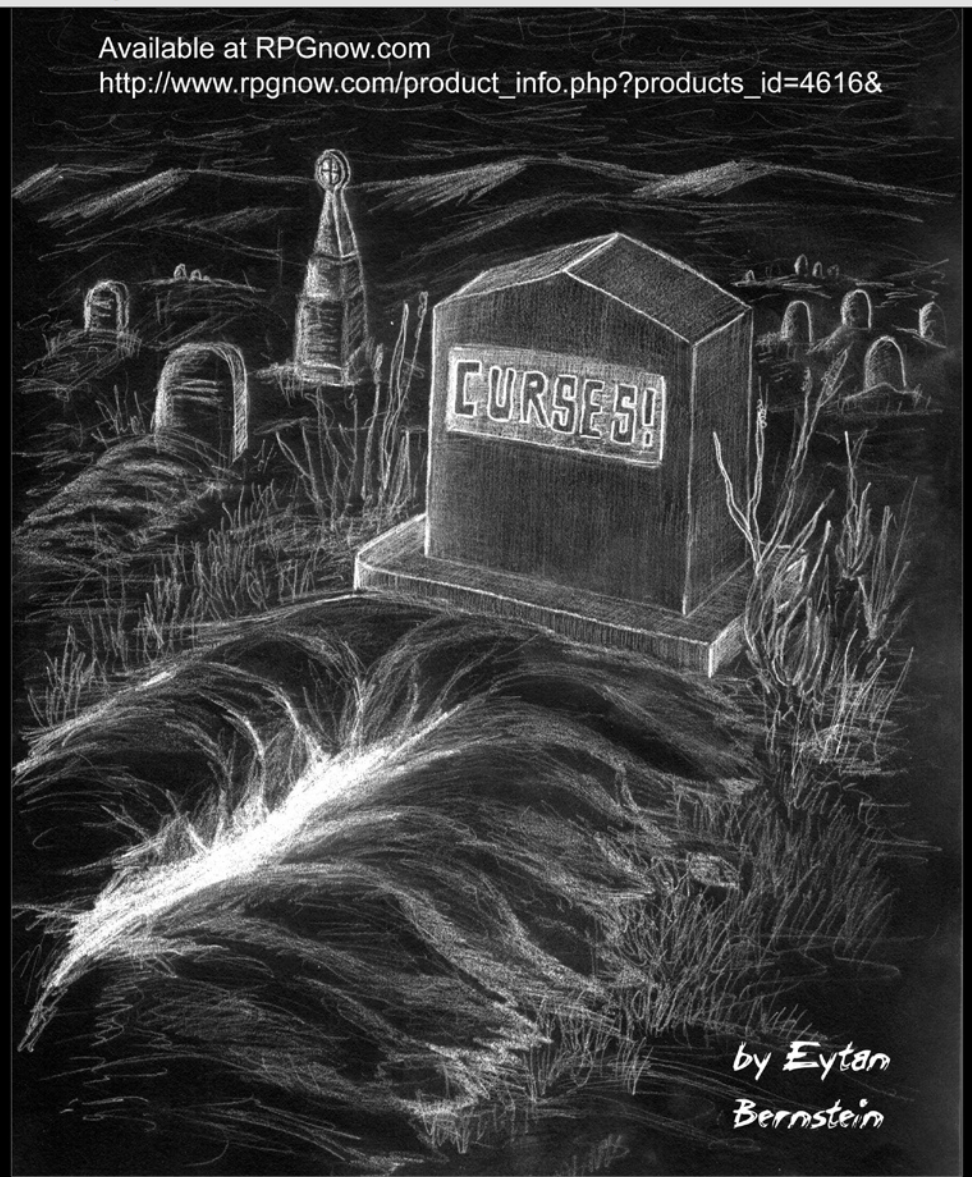
So maybe I'm not missing out on very much :)

Other than your autobiographical works, are there any other books in your head just waiting for you to pen? Any science fiction or fantasy?

"If I'm going to ever "make it" as a writer, I think I need to branch out past autobiographical stuff, so I'm working on some fiction right now. Everyone wants me to write SF, but I don't think I'm a very good SF writer, because creating SF just doesn't interest me as much as watching or reading it. James Ellroy once said something like, "don't write what you know -- write what you like to read and wish there was more of in the world." So I like to write noir-style stories about people who don't listen to that voice in your head that says, "uh, maybe you shouldn't do that, man . . ." and get into lots of trouble.

The Silven Trumpeter would like to thank Wil Wheaton for taking the time for this interview. It was our pleasure to have him here and we hope to hear more from him in the gaming community!

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CURSES!

by Eytan Bernstein

Zen and How to Get a Reputation as a Superhero

By Christian R. Bonawandt

I pretty much had things under control. It started with a fender-bender between a guy in a classic '67 Beetle and some Creatine-pumping Guido in a Lexus SC. After six months, my gig as a superhero was starting to pay off. Read: crime was beginning to find its way to me. I was eager to break this one up before the cops showed, so I could brag to them about what a great job I did.

Okay, full disclosure: my reputation as a superhero was just short of nonexistent. I had one go-round with a superpowered baddie my first day on the job, and nothing much since that would get me back into the papers. The name "Cobalt" meant almost nothing to anyone.

So I almost got a boner when the guy in the Beetle started hurling giant mucus balls at me and Mr. Lexus. Finally, I had it—a real fight with a superpowered Bad Guy. I was not sure if the gobs came from his face or his hands, but, either way, they looked and smelled like unnatural-sized wads of boogers. As powers go, it sucked.

Of course, mine is not much better. I can fire intense beams of energy that pack a real wallop, but the beams act like acid energy, burning right through stone and metal, making them incredibly lethal—not the kind of power one of the "good guys" uses on people.

So between my power and the Shop-At-Home katana that I used as a backup, I was more or less just trying to beat this sucker down. The fight lasted all of four minutes, and I was covered in snot as well as sweat (which had me furious since it was already 8:30 p.m., and I was supposed to meet up with Lara at ten).

The fight left the mucus master, a tubby, painfully out-of-shape guy named Ted German, winded from dodging and ducking my assaults. I eventually pinned him against

his car, one hand clenching both straps of his blue wife beater, the other glowing menacingly with my power.

"Why don't you just relax until the cops get here," I suggested.

He raised his hands in forfeit. I killed the glow and backed up from him. Police sirens began Dopplering not far away. The adrenaline caught up with me, and got me kind of high. I got ready for a nice pat on the back.

And dropped my guard enough for the little Snotzi to fling another gob at me. This one slammed me hard in the face. Some of the crud leaked into my mouth. The warm, salty-sweat taste made my stomach flip. My legs buckled as I gagged.

German had already reached the driver's side by the time I got back up. I took half a second to wipe some of the crud from my eyes. Then I heard the gunshot.

At least, it sounded like a gunshot. But I had no idea who would have a reason to shoot at any of us. The cops were still flying down the east-bound side of Sunrise Highway, and we were on the west-bound, so none of them could have pulled a gun.

At the same instant, German went flat against the open car door, which in turn snapped clean from its hinges and nearly collided with Mr. Lexus. I crawled around the Beetle to try to figure out what was happening.

I saw a little girl kneeling over German. She had flame-red hair and wore a gaudy red-and-blue bodysuit and tights combination. The girl stood and faced me. A red eyemask kept her disguised; a knee-length red cape hung awkwardly off her shoulders. The whole outfit looked homemade and ridiculous. Even I, now six

months a superhero, only went so far as cargo pants and a reversible hoody, with a handkerchief worked Martha Stewart-style into a facemask.

"Who the fuck are you?" I asked.

She punched her hands onto her hips in that classic comic book manner. Her waist was a little thicker than I would have expected for someone that short, and she had thighs you could crack walnuts with. With a jolt of her head, she tossed her wavy red hair behind her shoulders and said, "I'm the Dynamite Kid, and I'm here to help you, Cobalt."

I felt the sudden overwhelming urge to point and laugh. I barely fought it off.

"Move," I said, "this is my catch."

Now the cops pulled up. Three cars. Four officers. And one of them did not come from this precinct.

"'Cobalt,' right?" asked Officer Tom Rutger. He was Long Island's official superhero: a legit policeman who, by genetic freakism, grew retractable wings. When people like me, people with superpowers, started appearing everywhere, he let out his little secret. That was why he was here, even though this was Lindenhurst, and his town was technically Huntington Station.

"And I'm The Dynamite Kid!" the redhead declared.

Rutger strutted over to me, while the rest of the pigs picked up German and talked to the guy with the Lexus. The redhead pranced to my side, fists still on her hips. She could not have been more than five-foot-two, and I noticed for the first time that her flaring red boots were ragged and frayed in a violent pattern, as though they had exploded from within. By contrast, the bare, bright, Irish-pale feet inside looked perfectly unscathed.

Rutger fingered some of the mucus still hanging off my mask, rolled it between his thumb and forefinger, and wiped it on one of the few clean spots on my hoody. We had never come face-to-face before; he towered some four or five inches above me. Built like a stone, with the man's bulky muscles were only gradually losing the battle with encroaching fat.

I resisted the urge to make a crack about pigs flying.

A glance from me, to the redhead, to me, and Rutger asked, "Sidekick?"

"No," I growled.

"Yes," she said.

I glared at her. "No," I repeated.

Even through her eyemask, she managed to look like someone had run over her puppy. Rutger caught it, too, and laughed at me. He slapped my shoulder and said, "You don't have what it takes, buddy. Leave the crime fighting to professionals."

***

I answered some questions, as did the redhead, before racing back to my apartment to shower, change, and swap my bike for the Buick before heading out for my date—not quite ten minutes late.

I caught up to Lara at the diner. A look of impatience had already wrecked the cuteness of her round face and Asian eyes. As I bolted up the handicap ramp to the diner's entrance, I could see her asking for a table. As soon as the hostess left us with the menus, Lara said, "We're not going to have one of *these* relationships, are we?"

My head shook in fierce contradiction. "I had a good night. Caught a guy who shot giant balls of snot from his . . ."

Lara cringed, hand over her mouth to prevent imaginary vomit from projecting forth. One of those moments when I wish someone would just staple my mouth shut.

"Well, the point is that I had to go home and shower," I finished, weakly.

"Forget it." She went back to the menu. "Let's just not make this a pattern."

"Easy for you," I retorted, "Not all of us are gifted with superhuman speed."

If I wanted anyone for a sidekick, it would have been

Lara. I may not like the traditional hero outfit, but she would look *so* sexy in spandex. Besides, we could get together more often if she would run around fighting crime with me.

After dinner, we went to a pool hall not far from where I live. Lara lives and goes to school in Nassau County. I have never traveled much in that area, and I try to stay around Western Suffolk County, both because I know the streets and because I want to establish it as my "turf."

Over a game of pool, wherein Lara killed me, I explained to her some more about my powers and how they had come about:

"I've never found any reference to it on the Internet or anything, but they call it the Sanders Institute. I think it was in Queens or something. They had fifty kids there, including me, all about the same age, I think."

Lara attacked the three ball, ricocheting it off the left bank. It sputtered around the right lower pocket but did not go in. She cursed. "Never heard of it either. But it doesn't sound far-fetched."

I should have been surprised by that, but it did not faze me for two reasons: 1) Lara was big on government conspiracies, and would believe in anything from Marylyn Monroe to Area 51 if it pegged the White House as the source of evil; 2) she also had superpowers and her own theory on how she got them.

"So the booger-thrower today came from the Sanders Institute?" she asked, as I set up to sink the nine ball. The eight sat right in the way, so I needed to put a funny angle on my shot—one of those things I stink at.

I took the shot. The nine went wild and did not end up anywhere near the middle pocket that I was aiming for. The eight bounced around, settling a half-inch from the upper corner pocket. "Yeah," I said. "Ted German. One of those fat kids who smelled and ate his boogers. Now he's all grown up, acne-scarred, and firing super-snot wads at people. The Untouchable, that first guy I fought back in November, he started in Sanders. Tom Rutger, too."

Lara picked her head up from the table. "The cop with wings? That's not what I heard about him."

"Fake history. I got fed the same crap."

She nodded and went back to aiming at the one ball. "But you remember the truth?"

"Yeah," I replied. She sank the one and moved right over to the five. "Had a traumatic experience; it killed the memory block." She dunked the five. The cue bounced off and dropped my thirteen, too.

"I almost died when I was a baby," she said. I had heard this story the first time we went out, and the third. "The doctors said my liver and thyroid and other things were under-developed. They gave me some kind of experimental drugs, kept me in the hospital for two weeks, wouldn't even let my parents see me. That's why my mother's such an overprotective freak."

I slammed the two ball, which bounced dumbly around table. The cue ball, apparently angry with me, collided with the eight and dropped it into the pocket.

Lara was re-racking the balls when, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a short, wide-hipped, muscular redhead coming into the place. She glanced around for a second before spotting me. Although she did not have the tights, the resemblance was too much to ignore. Adjusting a thick, overflowing schoolbag on her shoulder, the redhead made a bee-line for me. Lara, through some female radar, honed in on the fact that another woman was heading straight for me. She marched to my side, pool stick at her side like a soldier with a spear.

"Chad Balto?" the redhead asked. No pause for confirmation. "I'm Carol Rozzer, with *Suffolk Life*."

Suffolk Life was one of those cheesy weekly papers that never reported anything of value, yet somehow managed to maintain enough readership and bring in enough revenue to stick around. The name Rozzer gave me an instant memory jolt. In a split second I realized that not only was she one of my "classmates," but that I had met her before. A year or so before the episode that revealed my powers, we had spoken at a party. She knew a girl that Dane, my friend and current roommate, had been seeing. At the time she seemed a bit "off" in the socializing arena, but otherwise somewhat forgettable. The Carol Rozzer I recalled from Sanders had an explosive temper, but nothing, really, as a far as

powers went.

Lara picked up on the sudden recognition. "Do you know her?"

"Uh," I said, with as much smoothness as I could conjure on such short notice, "Yeah, she's from *Suffolk Life*. I mean, I've heard of her."

Rozzer took a couple of glimpses around the room and said, "Can we talk outside?"

My date appeared less than thrilled. Lara, who normally felt self-conscious about her height, let the six inches she had on Rozzer show in all their glory. I decided that I did not mind Rozzer's arrival so much after all, if she made Lara act like this. Something about strong, sexy women just does it for me.

"Can't this wait?" Lara demanded.

"Just gimme a sec," I said to Lara.

She stared daggers into my spine until I got outside. We ducked around the corner. Carol got uncomfortably close to me and whispered, "Cobalt, it's me The Dynamite--"

"I know who the fuck you are!" I said. "How the hell did you find me?"

"Your roommate, Dane, told me where you'd be." That officially marked the last time I told him about my date plans. "Listen, Ted German escaped custody not long after you left." Her tone reminded me of a 1960s episode of *Batman*. "A telekinetic crashed the police vehicles as they were taking him away. Two officers were badly injured, including Officer Rutger."

I put a few extra inches between us. "That's wonderful, but what am I supposed to do? I don't know who this telekinetic is, or where he took German."

"I do. His name is Jason Goldstein. I went to high school with him, and I know where he lives."

I stuffed my hands in my pockets, and started pacing the width of the sidewalk. The name connected with another kid from the Sanders Institute, and I did remember him being one of a couple telekinetics. "Then you save the

day. Don't play second fiddle to *me*. I mean, I want to be a hero and all, but I'm on a date right now, so you can have this one. And I don't wanna know how you found out where I live and who I really am."

A clever grin materialized on her face. "Yes you do," she said. Before I could refute, she explained, "I've spent the better part of two weeks researching you for a major article. Cover story. We've already sold four ads against it."

Score!

***

Lara did not take the news well. I tried to get her to come along, which did not go over well, even though I managed not to use the phrase "superhero ménage-a-trois." Lara was adamantly opposed the notion that having powers made her a hero. So was I, but I had reason enough. I think that it still irritated Lara that I had convinced her two months back to stop robbing convenience stores and get a real part-time job to help pay for school.

Dane agreed to drop Lara off while I traded the Buick for my bike (not that he had much choice, since I just sort of left her with him). Carol followed on a Yamaha with a police scanner built into it. She slipped on a bike jacket that disguised most of her outfit; I could not convince her to just go with the mask and ditch the tights.

Carol led me into Patchogue, down some side streets that I did not know. It was a decent neighborhood—not too upscale. At the top of a hill sat a small cul-de-sac with six houses, all very quiet. She pointed me toward the smallest, a Cape Codder with dirty beige stucco. A gray, metallic Mazda RX-8 with a gnarled dent blemishing its right side was stuffed at a hasty angle in the short pebble driveway. The driveway had room for one other car.

I killed the engine on my bike and looked at Carol.

"That's Jason Goldstein's car," she said. "I saw him drive off with Ted German in it after they wrecked the cops."

"And you knew Goldstein'd bring him back here?" I made no attempt to hide the suspicion in my voice.

She nodded, growing a little shy. "I know Jason pretty well," she said. I followed her around back to a concrete stairwell that led to a metallic basement door. Carol confirmed my hunch when she produced a key to the door—Goldstein was her ex.

Voices leaked through aged and rebuilt walls. German I recognized; the other I did not. Two-on-two. I would enjoy this.

The key jostled the tiny tumblers. A third voice reached my ears as the door swung open. Too late to rethink things. Carol and I raced in, my left hand glowing with a strong charge of energy. Goldstein and German had their backs to us, rolling joints on a dirty, L-shaped couch. The thickly-cluttered room held an assortment of things too old to belong to either of the guys. Two mattresses tucked between the couch and the wall constituted a makeshift bed. A fancy entertainment system glowed majestically in the corner opposite me, some random channel flickering on mute.

A shadow stretched gently from behind two dusty curios and a large oak beam. The third person turned and bolted before I could get a good look at him. Wood steps cracked and whined under his hasty retreat.

I started for the third guy. A curio slid into my path, its curled legs screeching against the floor.

"Carol?" Goldstein blurted, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Why don't you mind your goddamn business!" German yelled, hopping up off the couch. I had to laugh. He clearly meant the question for me, but it sounded like a response to Goldstein.

A fist-sized wad of snot flew my way. I sidestepped it and whipped out my sword, which was slung over my back using a modified guitar strap.

Carol ran and leaped over the couch like something out of a video game. She landed on the table between Goldstein and German in a solid karate stance. Her red boots crushed the dime bags and rolling papers. She slammed German with a well-rehearsed round kick; he toppled, hand over his head. His rib caught the top of the couch.

Goldstein gave Carol a squinty look. Like a cartoon, she flew off the table. Her tiny body felt like a medicine ball as it crashed into me. My feet lost all contact with the floor until I hit the wall. I went slack and fell forward onto Carol. She had dropped into a perfect fighting stance, fists thrust in front of her like a Tiger Schumann's commercial. She did not even budge under my weight.

One of the mattresses slowly rose, zombie-like, and hurled itself broadside at us. The sword fell from my hand automatically as I brought my hands to my chest. Summoning all the power I could, I let loose a wide blast. The evil mattress dissolved into two small chunks, which jumped backward against Goldstein's telekinesis.

Ever persistent, Goldstein tried throwing one of the curios at me. Again, I reached deep down and blasted it away. The curio shattered into a mess of glass and wood, none of which came anywhere near me.

But Goldstein did not give up. A collection of DVDs flung themselves at me. I blocked my face, but otherwise just let the plastic-cased projectiles jab at me.

I didn't panic until my sword lifted off the ground. It drew back, as though being loaded into a slingshot, with its point aimed directly at my chest.

Another explosion. Carol's small form propelled like a rocket at Goldstein. She shoulder-slammed him into the wall so violently that his upper back dug six inches into the drywall. A spot of blood appeared where his head bounced. Goldstein and the sword went limp simultaneously.

"Asshole," she muttered, staring down at her unconscious ex.

German, still holding his head, made as if to grab her. Carol held out one finger, daring him to pull it. German paused, rubbed his head, then reached, slowly, for her with one hand. Her finger *popped* like a small firecracker, exploding into thin air, then instantly reforming as if nothing had happened.

I glanced down at the two burn marks in the floor where she had been standing in front of me. She had the power to explode, and somehow come back together. Why would I *not* want this person as my sidekick?

***

The police arrested us, too. As they took us away, I noticed that the Mazda was missing. So was Goldstein, despite the concussion.

Rutger (apparently not as seriously injured as Carol had thought) accused us of breaking and entering, destruction of property, obstruction of justice (since Carol came to me instead of the police with everything she knew), and assault with a deadly weapon (my katana was not *nearly* as deadly as my power, but I let that one go).

It was a nice song and dance, but Carol's story rained on Rutger's parade. So did *Newsday*, Long Island's official daily paper, when it picked up on the story. Carol's and my secret identities were blown, but our names were all over the news. Cobalt and "Lady Dynamite" (still cheesy, but better than "The Dynamite Kid") had just gone big time.

Campaign Cartographer:

Extreme Mapmaking

By Dana Lynn
Driscoll

Tired of taping together sheets of 8.5 x 11" paper to make larger maps for your homebrew world? Sick of trying to fit the entire landmass into your three ring binder? Looking for a cool, portable way to display your homebrew geography? Look no further! Extreme mapmaking is here!

My past articles on mapmaking in the Silven Trumpeter have focused primarily on digital map making—high-tech, flashy map techniques you can use with Photoshop on your home PC. This article takes mapmaking to a new, extreme level and details some fundamental techniques of making large-scale, full color, cloth world maps measuring several feet across! In a step-by-step format, I will walk you through each step in the process, beginning with a plain piece of cloth and ending at a completed masterpiece! While artistic experience is a plus, this technique should work even for those less artistically inclined.

Throughout this article you'll see examples from three maps I'm working on for my own and a friend's homebrew settings. These maps should give you an idea of the variety and versatility you have with different colors of paint. The brown map is for Ruxenmar, the large green map is for Aeth (Terun layer) and the small island map is for the Pirate Isles within Aeth. While this article focuses specifically on creating a world map for a homebrew game, the techniques presented could be utilized for other extreme mapping projects such as dungeons, keeps, spaceships, and more!
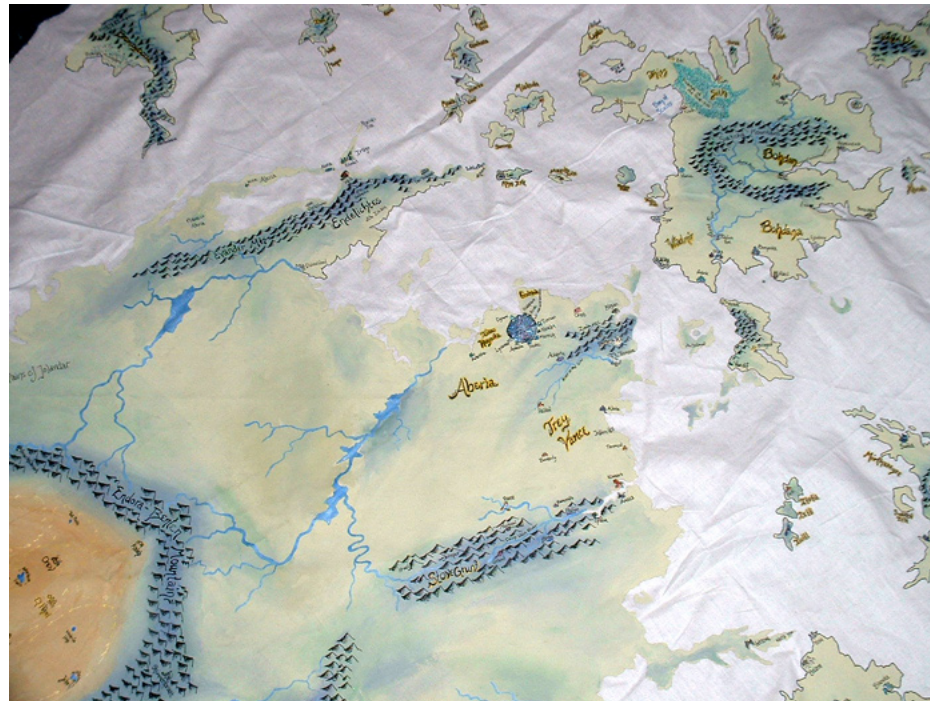
Image1 - Aeth Extreme!

Materials

Before you begin to create your extreme map, you'll need to gather some supplies. All are available at your local craft store (or one-stop department store). The supplies shouldn't cost you more than $20.

- **Several yards of unbleached muslin (or any other cotton-based cloth).** Muslin can be found at any fabric or craft store. The muslin takes paint well and is relatively cheap (I got mine at JoAnn Fabrics for 1.30 per yard). Try to get the widest stuff possible; the larger the piece you get, the more map you can create! Remember when you are buying the material that the muslin comes on the bolt doubled, so you are getting twice as much as it looks like you are buying.   This cloth will serve as the background of your map, so choose something that you like; most craft stores will have several shades of whites and tans available.   While I haven't experimented with colored cloth, I would assume it is just as possible to use a darker cloth such as blue or black for a really unique feel.

- **Paint brushes of varying sizes.** The key here is to have both a brush for fine detail work and a bigger brush for large-scale paint application.

- **Containers for mixing paint.** If you are going to mix your own paint, it's key that you mix enough of it to cover your whole map to avoid inconsistencies in coloring.

- **Several lead pencils with good erasers.** 'Nuff said.

- **Scissors.** These should be suitable for cutting fabric, but usually your standard desk scissors will work just fine.

- **Several black gel pens.** I've only used the BIC Gel brand, but I'm sure others will work as well. Alternately, you could use a very thin

paint pen.

- **Paint.** Your local craft store will sell craft paint (I use Apple Barrel brand) in little plastic containers for less than a dollar each. They have a very wide assortment of paints, so you can pick the colors you want to use for the map and avoid mixing problems. Choose at least a base color (for the bulk landmass); two shades for the mountains/geographic features; a shade for waterways; and maybe an accent shade or two (the metallic ones are particularly nice for this feature).

- **A way of finishing your edges.** Because you are using a piece of material/cloth as the base of your map, you are going to need a way to finish the edges so that they don't fray. You have several options here: you (or your grandmother) could sew the edges with a needle and thread or a sewing machine. You could also glue the edges back, and there are some other options. Since this is the last thing you'll have to do, we will come back to it later.

You'll Also Need:
- A large, flat workspace where you can work, such as a dining room table.

- Some old magazines, newspapers, a tarp or a drop cloth to protect the table from the paint (yes, the paint will soak right through the muslin).

- A mixing board for paint (anything that is flat and won't soak up the paint).

- A jar for holding water

Shape and Size
So you've gathered your materials and you're ready to begin.

Image2 - Barebone Outlines

The first thing you want to do is decide how big and what shape you want your map. As you see from some of my example images, you can create maps of weird shapes if your world requires it. One of the examples shown in this article is a rectangular map, while the other is a circular map. The shape is based on the geography of the world itself.

Once you've figured out how big your map should be, go ahead and cut the fabric to that size. Remember that you will be needing to finish the edges in some way, so leave at least a half an inch (or a full inch to be safe) extra when cutting.

Barebone Features
The next step is to draw in your basic landforms – your coastlines, if you will. To do this, you simply take your pencil and begin to draw in the shapes you want. If you are translating a smaller drawn map to the larger shape, be sure to stand back from the map every so often and make sure you have the proportions right.

It is important to note at this point that you won't want to draw in any of the inland details like mountains or rivers. Instead, just focus on the bare outline. If you are at a loss on where to begin, start by opening up a world atlas and looking at the coastlines and geographic structures of real-life landforms. Be creative!

While it is possible to erase pencil lines on the cloth, if you make a large-scale mistake it might just be easier to turn the entire cloth over and start again.

The picture to the left features the outline of the Pirate Isles map and is at the barebone traced stage.

Basic Landforms
Once you have your basic landforms drawn, it's time to fill them in! As with a coloring book, you want to stay in the lines and apply an even layer of paint (it's ok if you go over them a bit, but you want to try to keep to your basic shape). Those edges you are creating with the paint will end up being your final coastlines, so be careful.

It is at this stage that you have to decide on your basic landform paint color. If you aren't sure what shade you want to use (or how it will look) take a scrap piece of cloth and paint a bit of it. This will be your "test strip" where you can test out possible paint combinations without messing up your actual map! A word of warning here—for those of you who are more artistic in nature, you might be tempted to mix your own paint into a shade you like as you go along. While this is fine, if you want to do this, mix A LOT of it. You'll need enough to give the base a solid coat, and then you'll need probably half as much again for mountain and geographic feature application.

As you'll see in the image below, I began painting my own map by using a very thin brush to outline the edges of the map before painting the interior. I found that this is a great way to keep your edges nice and apply the paint to the insides quickly.

You'll also note in my maps that I only painted the landforms, not the surrounding water. If you want to paint the water as well, you can do so, but it will be a lot of extra, unnecessary work. The muslin makes a nice background for the landforms (and you can always add some nautical stuff later on). If you really want those waves, try purchasing another color of fabric, such as a bright aqua or navy blue, and painting on that instead.

Image3 - Filling in the basic landforms

Achieving the blended effect is simple—although you have to work fast! There are two ways to do it. For an overall lighter effect, you can paint the area with your base shade a second time—then paint the mountain shade on top, blending as you go. I've found that your fingers work better than anything else for blending! A second way to do it is to paint the darkest area first, then add the background shade around and blend it in.

You'll also notice on the map above that I've not only added mountains, but also areas of higher elevation (signified by the darker green areas) and a desert (in orange).

Once you have your geographic features, you may want to give the rest of the map a second coat to get rid of those paint lines near the shore. I gave my maps a second coat as I was filling in the mountains and surrounding geography.

Adding Other Geographic Features

Once you have your mountains done, you'll want to add in your rivers, forest patches, lakes, and any other geographic features your world has. I've mixed silver and blue for the rivers in the Aeth map (below) to give them a bit of sheen like water. In the map of Ruxenmar (next page), I've done the rivers in a solid silver.

If you aren't familiar with the way geography works when planning your rivers, you may want to pick up a geography book and read a bit on
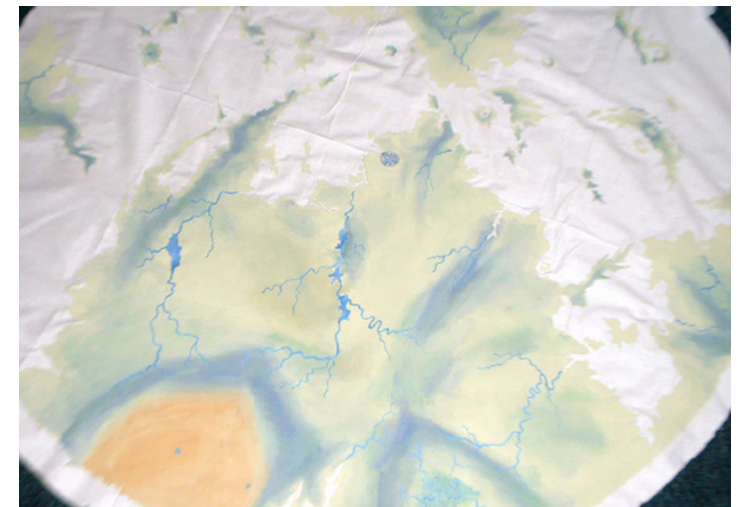
You may notice that your paint makes a thin overlap a bit on the edges where you painted the outside first and then the inside. Don't worry about this just yet—we'll get to that in the next step!

Geographical Features

At this point you should have all of the areas that will be landmasses painted in a solid shade, as in the image above. If you made a "test strip" before, go ahead and pull it out. If you didn't, you'll want to make one now to test the different color combinations before you begin painting on the map itself.

You'll want to choose at least varied shades for mountain masses, lakes and rivers, deserts, and other prominent geographical features. Note that for the mountains in the maps in the images, I choose two mountain shades—a lighter and darker version—to have more variation and for a nicer effect.

You may also choose to omit the mountain shades entirely, but I've found that they really do make excellent additions to the maps and give them a rich sense of topography and depth.

If you are unsure of where to put the mountains, or want to plan ahead, you can **lightly** draw on your landmasses with pencil. Make sure that's where you want them to go though, otherwise you'll probably have to paint over the pencil! The same can be said for planning cities, rivers, and anything else that will end up on your map.

Once you've got your shades picked out, practice blending the layers and working with the shades together on a test strip. If you'll notice in the image below, I haven't just painted the mountain shades on the map starkly; rather, I've blended them with the surrounding area.

Image4 - River and blended mountains

Image5 - Ruxenmar Mountains/Rivers/Lakes Region

Image5 - Ruxenmar Moon Isle Complete

in and your map is complete! If you don't have access to a sewing machine (and you don't want to sew it by hand) you also have the option of buying "liquid stitches" or some similar product. Liquid stitches essentially functions like glue and keeps the edge from fraying. I suppose you could use glue too, but I haven't tried it on my own maps. A more interesting option is to buy a few yards of felt or velvet, glue or sew it along the edges, and so give your map a very professional-looking finish.

Depending on the size of the map, you may also want to hang it on a dowel rod to display it prominently near your gaming table. Dowel rods of various sizes are available from your local lumber yard or hardware store (such as Home Depot, Lowe's, etc.).   The nice thing about using a dowel rod is that if you want to transport it or store it, you can roll it up on the rod.

Closing Thoughts

You've done it! You've gone from a plain piece of cloth to a map of monstrous size—and next all your gaming buddies will want one, too. Feel free to experiment with the methods I've described here, and send me your results! While I've attempted to cover all of the basics, if you have questions or there is something that you feel I've overlooked, you can leave a comment in the comments section or drop me an email at adriayna@yahoo.com. Have fun and happy mapping!

continental divides and river drainage basins. It will help you make sure your rivers are geographically sound.

Details, Details, Details!

The details are where you break out the gel pens or paint pens and add in everything else! While it is possible to use normal paint and a fine brush to do the details, it will be even more time consuming. I've tried several methods for adding detail, and I've found that the gel pens work the best. Since they come in multiple shades, you can use several colors for your fine details.

The key to executing this stage of the process is preplanning and organization. I highly recommend you at least pencil in the names of things and decide where everything should go before digging in. If you make a mistake at this stage in the game, it's going to be messy to fix!

I begin with a black gel pen and draw in the basic mountain ranges and outline the entire island, as shown in the image above. I've found that outlining the islands and continents really makes the landmasses stand out more!

As you'll notice from the image above, I've gone for a "Lord of the Rings" feel with the details of the mountain

ranges. The way you do it is totally up to you, but the LOTR DVD box sets do have nice reference maps if you are interested in creating the above effect.

At this point you'll also be adding in the rest of the details as you see fit: roads, cities, towns, river names, mountain names, continent names, everything! You may want to paint dots or small boxes for the city locales in a different shade of paint (metallic gold or bronze works well for this task) or even draw in mini cities as in the LOTR maps.

Finishing Touches

At this point, you are nearly finished. One thing you may want to do now is seal the map to protect your hard work.   Sealing the map is pretty easy—you can buy a clear polyurethane sealant in spray can form and go over the whole thing. This stiffens the map a bit though, so you may opt to leave it the way it is (and be careful with it).

The step you should definitely take is to finish the edges. If you know someone with a sewing machine, this step is a snap! Simply sew the edge at 1/2"

Ekimmal

By Jerel Hass

Chapter One: A Word from our Sponsors

 "Well students, time's up, time to pass your tests to the center of the aisle. Quiet, quiet now, you've all had plenty of time. So you all thought you were prepared, did you? Thought you would simply come to my class, hear my lectures, devour the study work and regurgitate it back up for the test. I'm sorry, but the lessons you have to learn are far too important for that. You'll never survive in the field unless you're able to take what you've learned here and apply in ways you never would have thought of…."

"If everyone would be so kind as to reach under their seats, yes, under your seat. Don't worry, you won't find any gum or other nasty surprises lurking under there."

"Good, everyone seems to have found the packets I have hidden for you. Inside of these packets, you will find the real test."

"Please, everyone open the packets, reach your hand in and pull out the object inside."

"You might feel a slight stinging sensation, that it to be expected."

"Ok, very good".

"What each of you hold is the egg sac from a new,

incredibly poisonous breed of wasp."

"I wouldn't drop that if I were you, you're liable to cause the sac to open and free a very angry hornet."

"So students, you are learning several lessons right now."

"First, when in the field, it is important to always know what you are doing and who is giving the orders."

"Second, never put your hands anywhere you have not completely checked for safety first."

"I told you not to drop that egg sac. The hornet has your scent, since you're the one who last touched its egg. If I were you I would hope that I had an inborn immunity to its sting."

"Well, I'm going to guess you don't, by the convulsions and froth coming from your mouth."

"Leave the body be, the hornet will spend the rest of the lecture cleaning it up for us."

"Personally, I'd worry more about yourself then about those that can't be helped any longer."

"This brings us to lesson three. In the field, there is only one person you can afford to look out for: yourself."

"That wraps up the final exam. You all should notice that your egg sacs are squirming by now. They'll hatch soon. By waiting for me to finish this lecture, you have all doomed yourselves. Had you destroyed the egg sac twenty minutes ago you may have been able to kill the

hornet, but it should be far enough along now to fend for itself."

"The good news is that there is a good chance one of you will prove to have an immunity to the toxin. Of course, we at the CSX will need a sample of your blood, so try to not lose too much to the hornet."

CSX Case File #7: Ekimmal

The Ekimmal are an infant form of the Ekimmu. An infant Ekimmal, once successfully integrated with a host, develops into the entity known as the Ekimmu after about ten years.

Ekimmal appear as a large arachnids or, even more accurately, squids with a body about the size of an adult human's fist and legs about 8" long ending in flat 'feet'. The creature moves about on its six rear legs Its front legs are approximately 1.5" longer than the rear and end in sharp points. These points are hollow and are used by the Ekimmal to inject itself into a host. The Ekimmal is a white/pale yellow in color and has a very soft, rubbery skin.

Encounter

You will never encounter a solitary Ekimmal. When not out looking for a host, they gather together, usually with an assortment of Guards. This gathering is usually referred to as a hive. Ekimmal are normally easy to kill, which is why we hunt them before they become Ekimmu (discussed below); however, their Guards can often pose a time-wasting problem. Remember, agents, even though a Guard looks like a normal human, it is simply a shell devoted only to protecting the infant Ekimmal.

Now, dealing with an Ekimmu is a completely different issue. Once an Ekimmal has taken a host, they join together into a semi-symbiotic relationship known as Ekimmu. Ekimmu use a shared memory that can extend centuries back, and also the memories of its host. An Ekimmu is hard to distinguish from a normal human being, with the exception of their vampire-like qualities of pale skin, sharpened teeth, and receding gum line. An Ekimmu is also incredibly resistant to being hurt, often regenerating even bullet wounds instantly. Finally, an Ekimmu has a tendency to display certain psionic capabilities, which makes hunting an Ekimmu a group event.

However, there are several weaknesses that can be exploited. First, only fire and acid cause any real pain to an Ekimmu, and an Ekimmu who experiences pain is usually an Ekimmu that runs away. An Ekimmu must eat often, otherwise it loses its near-supernatural powers, so finding a way to starve an Ekimmu can make the battle a little more fair. Finally, an Ekimmu is a creature of

Based on Darren Millar's "Ekimmal"

Diminutive Aberration
Hit Dice: 1/2D8+2 (6 hp)
Initiative: +7
Speed: 30ft.
Armor Class: 15 (+2 Size, +3 Dex), touch 15, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple: +0
Attack: Slam +3 melee (1d3-4)
Full Attack: Slam +3 melee (1d3-4)
Space/Reach: 1ft./ 0ft.
Special Attacks: Attach, infest, lunge attack
Special Qualities: Improved jump
Saves: Fort -4, Ref +2, Will +2
Abilities: Str 3, Dex 16, Con 3, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 12
Skills: Jump +11*, Hide +6, Move silently +7
Feats: Weapon Finesse
Climate/Terrain: Any
Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 1
AI: Ekimmu
Advancement: None

*Racial bonus to jump +8

Combat

Attach (Ex): After the Ekimmal has made a successful slam attack by which damage is done, it is considered attached. While attached, an Ekimmal is considered grappled, but the creature the Ekimmal is attached to is not. While attached, the Ekimmal automatically Infests the victim on the Ekimmal's action.   An Ekimmal can be removed with a successful grapple check; doing so, however, inflicts 2 points of Constitution damage to the victim. If killed while attached, the Ekimmal attempts to Infest the victim, who can make a Reflex save (DC 13) to avoid becoming infested.

Improved Jump (Ex): Ekimmal are not limited by size when making jumps.

Infest (Ex): An Ekimmal attempts to Infest a sentient victim with the Ekimmu virus—attach, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d4 Con and 1d4 Wis. The victim must also make a Will save (DC 12) in an attempt to fight off the Ekimmal's infestation.

Success by 5 points or more	The Ekimmal dies, but the disease continues to ravage the host's body.
Success by less than 5 points	The Ekimmal can try to take over the host again after a 24 hour period of rest.
Failure by less than 5 points	The Ekimmal only partially takes over the host and the disease stops. The host gains the Ekimmu template; however, she is only partially in control of her body. The Ekimmal can force the host to make a Will save (DC 12 + 1 per week infested). If the host fails, the Ekimmal can completely control the host body for 1 hour per each 5 by which the host failed.
Failure by more than 5 points	The host personality is completely suppressed; the host gains the Ekimmu template but has no control over its actions, and the disease stops.

If the victim dies due to Constitution lost by the disease, its body breaks down, reproducing itself as two more Ekimmal. Each of these Ekimmal contains half of the Ekimmu's known skills and feats. The personality of the Ekimmu they become is also very similar, sharing the memories and experiences of that shared host up until the split. This process happens over the 8 weeks following the death of the victim.

If the victim's Wisdom is reduced to 0 by the disease, it takes on the Zombie template (see the MM for more details).

Lunge Attack: An Ekimmal can make a jump action and an attack action in the same turn. This jump action does not provoke an attack of opportunity from the victim; however, it does provoke such an attack from others who threaten the squares the Ekimmal jumps through.

habit, and has a tendency to fall into a routine even when it knows it's being hunted.

Habitat/Society

The original Ekimmal reached the Earth through a doorway over 3000 years ago. These creatures eventually evolved into the Ekimmu of today. Until recently, the Ekimmal were extinct on this planet. In 2001, a doorway opened in England, and 23 Ekimmal came through. In the 12 months since their arrival, the original creatures have evolved thus: 3 completely controlled hosts, 8 Guards and 30 Ekimmal. It is obvious that these creatures reproduce very slowly. In a typical Ekimmal community, any controlled hosts will integrate with a local community to "recruit" new hosts, usually from the homeless community where individuals are unlikely to be missed. The Guards watch over the Ekimmal lair, protecting any incubating hosts. Guards require large amounts of meat; in a human community, this usually requires grave-robbing to provide such amounts of nearly 'fresh' meat. Five Guards could live from one human corpse for one week. Controlled hosts will try to maintain the secrecy of a community at all costs; however, if the community is uncovered, the individual Ekimmal will scatter in order to allow them to develop into an Ekimmu.

In the end, Ekimmal are nothing more then parasites that are only capable of attacking sleeping or unconscious prey, typically humans. They attack their prey by stabbing the two front appendages into the spine. The Ekimmal then injects itself into the circulatory system of the target and into the brain. The discarded exoskeleton remains attached to the host for approximately six weeks while various nutrients are absorbed into the host to aid in the development of the Ekimmal parasite.

Adventure Hook
The Center sends the Agents to investigate the finding of the discarded skin of some creature. Upon arriving at the designated town the skin is examined and found to contain human cells! Further investigation uncovers that a number of hard drug users have gone missing in the area. The team investigates and is attacked by crazed drug abusers!

Behind the scenes, an Ekimmal has successfully infected a local drug pusher when he was high. Through the distribution of large amounts of free heroin, the Ekimmu/pusher has managed to create a large community of Ekimmal and is intent on defending this easy supply of hosts!

CSX Case File #8: Ekimmu

Ekimmu is the name for the adult form of the viral species known as Ekimmal. Once an Ekimmal has secured a host and transferred its viral self, the Ekimmu takes over the host, controlling from the inside. The virus spreads throughout the host, controlling the host's brain stem and bodily functions. The virus also works with the host's system, improving function, durability, and life span. As the Ekimmu is in total control of the host, it also absorbs all the host's previous knowledge and skills, adding them to its own.

Ekimmu Template

Ekimmu is an acquired template that can be added to any sentient being with a circulatory system. An Ekimmu uses all the base creature's stats except those mentioned below.

Size/Type: The base creature's type changes to Aberration. There is no size change, but some physical changes do occur. The Ekimmu's skin grows pale, its gum line recedes, its teeth sharpen, and its fingernails grow long, sharp, and retractable.

Hit Dice: Increase all current and future HD to d8.
Speed: Same as the base creature.
Armor Class: By strengthening the creatures natural defense structures, the Ekimmu increases the base creature's natural armor class by +2.
Attack: An Ekimmu retains all the attacks of the base creature and gains a weak bite and retractable claw attack. If the base creature lacks a bite attack, the Ekimmu must first grapple the victim before making a bite attack.
Full Attack: An Ekimmu fighting without weapons will only make use of its claws if it can do so without witness, or if threatened with death.

Damage: Ekimmu have a weak bite and claw attack. If the base creature lacks these natural attacks, use the table below for damage values.

Size	Bite Damage	Claw Damage
Fine	1	0
Diminutive	1d2	0
Tiny	1d3	1
Small	1d4	1d2
Medium	1d6	1d3
Large	1d8	1d4
Huge	2d6	1d6
Gargantuan	2d8	1d8
Colossal	4d6	2d6

Special Attacks: An Ekimmu retains all the special attacks of the base creature and gains those described below. Saves have a DC of 10 + the Ekimmu's HD + the Ekimmu's Charisma modifier, unless noted otherwise.

Blood Drain (Ex): An Ekimmu can suck blood from a living victim with its bite attack by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1 point of Constitution damage each round the pin is maintained.

Create Ekimmal (Ex): Once during the existence of the Ekimmu, it can create an Ekimmal. An Ekimmal is created by the Ekimmu causing a very drastic change in its body. First, the Ekimmu must gorge itself on food, usually eating up to 4 times its weight in meat. After the gorging, the Ekimmu enters into a hibernation state that lasts 8 weeks. While in this state the Ekimmu appears to dead, unless examined closely through the use of an x-ray or similar device. The Ekimmu is completely vulnerable while in

hibernation, unable to regenerate or react to the world around it. After the 8 week period, the Ekimmu expels the Ekimmal from its body. The newly created Ekimmal contains all of the Ekimmu's personality, experience, and knowledge up to the point of its creation. Once outside of the Ekimmu, the Ekimmal is fully functional and in telepathic communication with the Ekimmu. The Ekimmal will then strive to infect a host, after which it will lose its telepathic communication with the Ekimmu, no matter the result.

Change Host (Ex): An Ekimmu is capable of switching hosts when the current host becomes unsuitable. All that is necessary is that the Ekimmu pass its vital fluids from its old host to its new. This switch is accomplished through blood transfusion, sex, a bite, or many other ways. Once the transfer is complete, the old host falls into a coma while its systems attempt to recover from the changes the Ekimmu wrought. This coma can last from 8 months to 12 years, dependent on the amount of time the Ekimmu maintained residency. After awakening, the host remembers nothing of the time spent with the Ekimmu.

Psionics (Su): The Ekimmu as a race are naturally psionic, a trait which they carry over to their host. An Ekimmu manifests powers as a psion (Psychometabolism) of 5th level. The saves are Intelligence based. Typical powers known (power points 25, save DC 10 + intelligence modifier + power level) 1st—*Charm, Thicken Skin* 2nd—*Animal Affinity, Aversion, Brain Lock, Chameleon, Suggestion, Read Thoughts* 3rd—*Ectoplasmic Form, False Sensory Input, Hustle*

Special Qualities: An Ekimmu retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains those described below.

Protein Diet (Ex): In order to maintain its extraordinary body functions, an Ekimmu must maintain a diet extremely high in protein. Protein-rich mammal blood is worth 10 times its weight. These proteins are quickly adapted to their necessary uses; almost none go to waste. An Ekimmu's body no longer digests any other food product other than protein, turning everything else to excretory waste. If an Ekimmu is unable to consume at least its weight in protein matter daily, it begins to starve. Instead of taking damage from starvation, after failing its starvation Constitution check the Ekimmu loses its extraordinary abilities. If the Ekimmu goes longer then a week without sufficient food, it must make a willpower save (DC 10+1for each additional day after the week). Failure means the Ekimmu mentally degenerates into a beast, hunting and killing out of instinct. After slaking its hunger, consuming at least 3 times its body weight in protein matter, an Ekimmu regains its sanity.

Regeneration (Ex): Using its high protein diet and its ability to recover damage quickly, an Ekimmu gains regeneration 5. Only extreme damage like fire and acid are considered lethal damage. An Ekimmu can regenerate a severed limb within 3d6 hours or reattach a limb immediately by connecting the stump to the severed limb. If an Ekimmu's head is severed from its body, it is killed instantly.

Resistances (Ex): By shutting down non-essential organs and hyper-extending its immune and endocrine systems (or the host'sequivalent), an Ekimmu gains a +10 bonus to its Fortitude save to resist toxins and poisons.

Sleepless (Ex): An Ekimmu does not need to sleep daily; instead, it hibernates every ten years.

Fatigueless (Ex): By maintaining a constant diet of proteins necessary to keep its muscles functional, an Ekimmu never suffers from muscle fatigue.

Hibernation (Ex): Ekimmu must hibernate every ten years, needing this time to rest and sort memories and experiences. Before hibernating, a Ekimmu must consume twice its weight in protein matter. While hibernating, the Ekimmu's body appears pale and lifeless. A Treat Injury (DC 30) or Knowledge (Medical) (DC 20) roll is necessary to identify that the Ekimmu is still alive.

Abilities: Increase from base creatures as follows: Str +4, Dex +4, Con +4, Int +4, Wis +4.
Skills: An Ekimmu can have any set of skills dependent on its age and background.
Feats: Like skills, an Ekimmu can have any set of feats from the present and past hosts.
Challenge Rating: +2
Advancement: By character class.
Level Adjustment: +8

The Order of the Peaceful Hand

Landon J. Winkler

History

Some would say the Peaceful Hand Monastery has roots older than recorded history. Although this may be true, the order itself was founded around two hundred years ago by a group of monks seeking to establish eternal peace. The first century of the order's existence was spent in study and contemplation about how this might be achieved.

The order quickly rejected that any humanoid lord could unite the world to bring true peace, and began looking into other options. Dragons, gods, celestials, and even fiends were considered, then rejected, as too divisive. Eventually, the order found records of the Quirim, an ancient race that had almost achieved the permanent peace the monks desired. The Quirim had no physical form, but instead existed as tendrils of pure thought woven into a group mind.

The monks found an ancient sealed portal to the race's home plane and, with great effort, established contact. The Quirim seemed interested in joining with every living being, which fell perfectly in line with the Peaceful Hand's desires. Although the creatures were far beyond the monks' understanding, they accepted whatever price would need to be paid.

Beginning with the order's leader, the monks began to permanently bind themselves to individual Quirim. The leader described it as being paired with "a second soul, a stream of pure, flowing *ki*." The Quirim-bound monks never lost their free will; in fact, even the ones desperate for orders from the Quirim have difficulty receiving them.

Eventually, over many years of being paired with Quirim, the monks became capable of communicating with the creatures while in the deepest trances. The elder monks treat these short exchanges as cherished secrets.

Interestingly, those monks who have died after being bound to the Quirim didn't pass into any afterlife, and instead became part of the Quirim. These individuals are exceptionally hard to contact, but seem to be quite happy with their fate.

The Peaceful Hand was never a public organization and has become only more secretive since its deal with the Quirim. Members will often reveal their allegiance in the monastery, but leave people with the impression that it is like any other monastery or dojo, with its own selection of secrets and martial techniques.

Present Activity

Having found the answer they were hoping for, the monks of the Peaceful Hand are still lost, wondering what to do with it. The order has divided itself into many separate missions, each engaging in their own studies and crusades while the masters determine what to do next.

Some members, the ones players are most likely to encounter, work actively to prevent suffering in the here and now. They can be found anywhere with war or misfortune, directly confronting tyrants or petty local thugs. Most of the society's members joined as children after their parents or communities were helped by this aspect of the Peaceful Hand.

The Quirim seem distressed by the undead, constructs, and planar outsiders, so traveling monks will often stop to find and destroy these creatures. Occasionally a group of monks will form to destroy such beings or those creating them. One particularly militant group has begun hunting practitioners of summoning magic, although the

> Landon J. Winkler has been gaming for about fifteen years and GMing for almost all of that. He blames his long-time interest on secret societies entirely on the shiny letters from the cover of *GURPS Illuminati*. In his spare time, Landon is training to become a Certified Ethical Hacker, among other far less interesting things.

Peaceful Hand as a whole doesn't yet realize this group's activities.

By far the largest portion of the monks remain in the monastery, communing with the Quirim in an attempt to find a course of action. So far, the Quirim have been cryptic or unresponsive. Masters wait for the moment that they do begin to respond, and the entire monastery will be mobilized for the new mission within hours.

A handful of higher-ranking members, unknown to the rest of the order, have been researching a technique to bind Quirim to unwilling subjects. They began the research under the guise that their mission may require it at some point, but at least one member plans to begin the process as soon as it becomes available.

The Quirim

Although the Quirim are fairly ominous, seeking to extend their psychic web to every living being in the world, their story seems fairly sound. The Peaceful Hand isn't likely to share this information, even among the order's membership, but interrogation or stealing personal documents might reveal some of the background of the Quirim.

In ages past, when the Quirim were a race of psions, their homeland (be it a nation, plane, or world – the entities are not specific) became the unfortunate battleground for a conflict between the celestials and fiends. Their homeland was left a shattered, desolate land ruled by demons. To this day, the Quirim hold a vicious grudge against fiends and celestials alike for destroying their home.

A handful of these psions were able to escape and form the Quirim, leaving their physical bodies entirely behind. They vowed to return to their homeland and rescue their lost cousins, but they were beaten back time and again. Centuries became millennia and there's now nothing left for the Quirim to return to. Instead, they've begun looking for a new homeland.

Their collective vision is one where every living thing is connected to every other, instantly understanding and sympathizing. Every time the Quirim begun stretching

telepathically, their targets have struck back, suspicious of the race's intentions. The Peaceful Hand became even more secretive knowing this, afraid that anyone learning of the Quirim would respond badly out of those same suspicions.

It may come up that PCs become Peaceful Hand monks or devise some other method of communicating with the Quirim. The Quirim are spectacularly bad at communicating with humanoids, even other telepaths. The best most humans will get is a few flashes of color, a strange ringing sound, and slight nausea.

Even if a character has become adept at communicating with the Quirim, they tend to answer questions with irrelevant off-topic information. So a long, frustrating period of talking to the Quirim is needed to find anything of real value. Even the most experienced monks set aside a month for basic questions, while the more complex may take years.

On the bright side, the Quirim will also occasionally bring up information that the character would never have thought to ask for, but is extremely useful. Some monks, for example, when asking about the nature of a magical item, have been told about nearby bandits setting up an ambush or the location of ancient ruins.

Now, whether the Quirim are telling the truth is up to each GM and each campaign. The obvious choice is that the Peaceful Hand are dupes for some maniacal force from another plane. This doesn't make for a very interesting hidden agenda, since taking over the world is the Quirim's primary goal.

It could be that the Quirim, or an extraplanar force behind them, want to destroy another outsider group on the planet. Or perhaps that force wants to unite the world under a single banner to guard some valuable resource or prevent it from being conquered by others. The celestials could use a mortal army as much as the fiends, perhaps more.

Even if the Quirim are telling the truth, the PCs have to decide whether the Peaceful Hand vision is something they agree with. And the Quirim, although potentially very powerful, will still have many enemies that don't want to see the world bound into a single telepathic web. Neither the celestials nor the fiends would want to see

the Quirim rise to power. Even if the PCs begin directly working with and for the Peaceful Hand doesn't mean the campaign is over; rather, it means quite the opposite. If the Quirim have a hidden agenda, it probably relates back to their ancient history. They may want to seek revenge against the celestials and fiends alike, after pooling the might of several worlds. Although they can't return to their homeland, they may seek to recreate it, down to the finest detail. They might try to destroy magic, trying to prevent a recurrence of the tragedy that destroyed their homeland. The Quirim could have had an enemy during ancient times, perhaps the ones who unleashed the demons in the first place, that they now wish to exterminate.

A stranger option is that the Quirim are actually searching for some piece of information. The entire group mind could be a mystical creation, a massively powerful spell designed to reach out and find the one mind with the knowledge it needs. That knowledge could be as powerful as the true name of a god or the hiding place of an artifact. It could also be an attempt to gather the world's magical knowledge into one place. Perhaps the Quirim are looking for information that's been lost in the eons since their creation, dooming them to an eternal, fruitless search.

In the end, the best option is probably to let the players see evidence and arguments for many of these possibilities and sort through them by recovering some of the very few ancient records that mention the Quirim. If those don't shed light on the matter, perhaps questioning some sort of outsider might help. Or, you can leave the Quirim's true nature a point of conjecture and discussion for the entire campaign.

Peaceful Hand Members
In fantasy settings, members will most likely appear as members of the monk class, likely taking levels in the psionic fist prestige class as they progress. They could also be psions working towards dissolving their physical forms (and becoming a member of the Quirim) by becoming a psion uncarnate. Clerics or even sorcerers wouldn't be overly unusual as members.

If you wish to treat the Quirim as a god, they would be lawful good with domains of Animal, Good, Knowledge, and Law. Trickery would also be an option, based on the necessity of keeping the faith hidden. The Quirim do not

have a favored weapon, but for the purposes of spells a quarterstaff can be used.

In modern games, the telepath and battle mind advanced classes are excellent choices, as are any FX-using advanced classes. The martial artist is also an obvious choice if you stick with the idea of martial arts monks.

Peaceful Hand Monks
For members of the Peaceful Hand that are actually members of the monk class, the Quirim can provide some special benefits. The changes are immediate when a character has a Quirim bound to them, but cannot be reversed. The character may have the Quirim removed by powerful magic, but will not regain their original monk powers. All members of the Peaceful Hand Monastery have Quirim bound to them.

Flowing Ki: [Su] Instead of gaining *ki* strike, Quirim-bound monks gain flowing *ki*. The monk may then use flowing *ki* abilities a number of times a day equal to one plus her Wisdom bonus (if any). She may use any combination of different flowing *ki* abilities to make up this total, but cannot continue using such abilities once she has exhausted her Quirim-granted *ki* for the day.

At 4th level and every six levels thereafter, the Quirim-bound monk can choose a bonus feat from the flowing *ki* list (see below).

Flowing Ki Feats
These feats are all restricted to monks who have gone through the ceremony to have a Quirim bound to them. They also must be at least character level 4th to gain the flowing *ki* class ability. Flowing *ki* feats are all considered Supernatural abilities.
* indicates a feat presented in this article.

Dual Mind [Flowing *Ki*]
You can take advantage of the Quirim bound to you to resist mental attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Iron Will, *Ki* Memory*, Wis 17+
Benefits: By wrapping the *ki* of your Quirim around your own mind, you can protect yourself as though with a *mind blank* spell. Using this ability requires a standard action, but no verbal, somatic, or material components. Unlike the spell, this ability only lasts a number of rounds equal to one plus your Wisdom modifier. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Improved Flowing *Ki* [Flowing *Ki*]
You may use your flowing *ki* abilities more often.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability
Benefits: You may use flowing *ki* abilities two more times per day.
Special: You may take this feat multiple times. The effects stack.

Flowing Dodge [Flowing *Ki*]
By channeling your Quirim-endowed *ki*, you can easily dodge magical attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* and evasion as class abilities
Benefits: You may choose to use your flowing *ki* to attempt to evade a single attack that grants a Reflex save immediately before you roll that save. This gives you a +4 *ki* bonus to that save, but counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses. You may not use this ability while caught flat-footed.

Flowing Step [Flowing *Ki*]
You may use your flowing *ki* to use abundant step more often.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* and abundant step as class abilities
Benefits: If you've already used your abundant step ability for the day, you may activate it again at the cost of two of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Flowing Strike [Flowing *Ki*]
You can channel your Quirim's *ki* to add damage to your unarmed attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability
Benefits: When you hit with an unarmed attack, you may choose to have that attack deal 1d6 additional damage. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Improved Flowing Strike [Flowing *Ki*]
Your ability to increase damage with unarmed attacks has improved.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Flowing Strike*
Benefits: When you use Flowing Strike to add damage to an attack, you may add 1d12 damage instead of 1d6.

Forced Critical [Flowing *Ki*]
With your flowing *ki*, you can avoid having to confirm a critical hit.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Flowing Strike*

Benefits: When you roll in the threat range for a critical hit, you may choose to use this ability instead of rolling to confirm the critical. It is automatically treated as though you rolled high enough to confirm. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Hard Block [Flowing *Ki*]
By focusing your *ki*, you can protect yourself from attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Con 13+
Benefits: When you are attacked with a melee weapon, you can choose to block that attack with your *ki*. You are treated as though you have DR 5/adamantine for the purposes of that attack. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses. You may not use this ability if you were caught flat-footed by an attack.

Ki Healing [Flowing *Ki*]
With your Quirim's *ki*, you can heal your wounds more effectively.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* and wholeness of body as class abilities
Benefits: When you use wholeness of body to heal your wounds, you may immediately heal an additional six points of damage. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Ki Lash [Flowing *Ki*]
You can use a physical manifestation of your *ki* to make short ranged attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Flowing Strike*, Penetrating *Ki**
Benefits: You can create a ribbon of pure *ki*, resembling the Quirim's form, to attack opponents. This allows you to make one attack as a ranged touch attack, with a range of 10 feet, dealing your normal unarmed damage. The attack is treated as if it were made with a magical, ghost touch weapon. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Ki Memory [Flowing *Ki*]
With the aid of your Quirim, you can enter a meditative trance to learn more about a person or object.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Sudden Epiphany*, Quirim Sense*, Wis 15+
Benefits: You may manifest the *identify* spell as a spell-like ability; this counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses. You may also spend a long period in meditation (as per the spell description) to mimic the *legend lore* spell.

After using *legend lore*, you cannot manifest any flowing *ki* powers for one full day.

Ki Nexus [Flowing *Ki*]
You may transfer your flowing *ki* to others bound to the Quirim.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Improved Flowing *Ki**
Benefits: As a free action, you may transfer any number of your flowing *ki* uses to another character you can clearly see who possesses the flowing *ki* ability.

Lashing Blows [Flowing *Ki*]
You make many attacks using *Ki* Lash as a single action.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, *Ki* Lash*
Benefits: When making a flurry of blows (as the monk class ability), you can make each of them as a *Ki* Lash. The entire flurry of blows counts as a single use of your daily flowing *ki* ability.

Penetrating *Ki* [Flowing *Ki*]
You focus your second *ki* to bypass armor with unarmed attacks.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Flowing Strike*
Benefits: With this ability, you send out a wave of *ki* before your fist, bypassing mundane armor. Before you make an attack roll with an unarmed attack, you may choose to have that attack be resolved as a touch attack. This counts as one of your daily Flowing *Ki* uses.

Sudden Epiphany [Flowing *Ki*]
The Quirim grant you strange insights when you are looking for information.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Wis 13+
Benefits: You may call on the Quirim's wisdom when you make any sort of knowledge or gather information check. You receive a +4 *ki* bonus to that check. This counts as one of your daily flowing *ki* uses.

Quirim Sense [Flowing *Ki*]
Your connection with the Quirim lets you feel their uneasiness at unnatural forces.
Prerequisites: Flowing *ki* as a class ability, Wis 13+
Benefits: You can feel the presence of undead, constructs, and outsiders through your connection with the Quirim. Looking at a creature, you immediately know if it falls into one of these categories (although not which one). You also have a +2 *ki* bonus to all Listen, Search,

Spot, and other checks to find or sense such creatures. This does not require any activation, but reduces your flowing *ki* uses by one per day.

Special: Native outsiders are affected by this feat normally, but monks who became outsiders through the perfect self class ability are not.

Reviews, Reviews
.....reviews!

This month we take a look at...

d20

The Elemental Dimension of Magic

Come visit other worlds of adventure! This product is compatible with any existing campaign, and is perfect for throwing a curve to your players when you feel that things are getting predictable.

Bits of Darkness: Caverns

Bits of Darkness: Caverns is here to bring new excitement to your subterranean adventures by adding short "bits" of description and colorful settings.

d20 Modern

Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch

The human spirit shines greatest during the darkest of times. Never was this proven more fully than in the year 2196.

Non-d20

Eldritch Ass Kicking

The cover features, well, two old men with sticks, just as one would expect.

read on...

The Elemental Dimension of Magic

About: 18 pages, PDF, black & white interior, $2.50.
Publisher: Red Anvil Productions (2005)
Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*
Review date: *3/22/2005*

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover

Come visit other worlds of adventure! This product is compatible with any existing campaign, and is perfect for throwing a curve to your players when you feel that things are getting predictable. Use this new plane to offer a new threat to your characters, or a puzzle that will require their utmost challenge to solve. Useable as a destination or as an importable element, this book is a must have for any Dimensional Travelling campaign.

The Elemental Dimension of Magic is an 18-page book that details the addition of another Dimension to an already existing campaign. It includes three races, two creatures (the Arcane Dragon and the Magic Elemental) as well as a template to create others using other d20-based creatures. Further, it includes the topology of the Dimension as well as rules for how to help characters survive (or not survive) while visiting.

Introduction

Note: This is not a playtest review.

The first product from Red Anvil Productions, *The Elemental Dimension of Magic,* is another dimension/plane that DMs can add to their campaign, and the product includes material for individuals on both sides of the DM screen.

Presentation

The product looks clean and reasonably attractive. Xiaochiang Liu's cover, a strange mirror-like object surrounded by twisted gold on a red field, reminded me of the cover of *The Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun* for some reason (likely its simplicity), although it did not make me as interested as that product's cover did. It felt, after careful consideration, rather bland. On the upside, the interior illustrations, all by the same artist, were nice, with a shaggy/sketchy pencil style that made the

illustrations feel very warm to me. The drawing of the arcane dragon attacking a castle on page 10 is probably my favorite piece — the way Liu uses white space for the dragon's breath weapon really worked – a nice touch.

For a new publisher, Red Anvil seems to have learned from some other companies' mistakes. Their layout is clean and free of laborious, over-designed page borders, although there is a lot of white space. I would have preferred fully-justified margins, but that is, admittedly, a personal preference.

As nice as the layout is, the writing style leaves something to be desired. At the risk of being blunt, it's overwritten: "One must understand that mortal beings are complex creatures, with multiple layers that make up who they are. When all of these run amok and are unleashed at the same time or in the wrong place, potent forces are unleashed." I chose this passage, as it was one of the first things I read, and it really jumped out at me. It's vague (When all of these "what" run amok? How do you unleash layers?), redundant ("are unleashed" appears twice in the second sentence), and wordy ("composed of multiple layers" says the same thing as "with multiple layers that make up who they are" in half the words). I find this problem to be fairly common in gaming products, but it never fails to bother me. And it's not that I feel like Emmit Other, the writer, can't write; it reads like he's trying too hard. A more relaxed (and possibly conversational) style might have helped here.

The Elemental Dimension of Magic

The body of the PDF is split into four sections: Topography, Denizens, Creatures, and DM Material. I'll consider each of these in turn.

The Topography section, which describes the nature of the Dimension of Magic, did not make a lot of sense to me as I read it. I liked the idea of magical currents, yet I couldn't conceptually describe them to a group of players. Unlike the elements in the standard elemental planes, no analogue to magic exists in the real world. I can tell a player that the Elemental Plane of Water is like being submersed in an infinitely large tub of water. I have no corollary for a plane made from magic. The core of the Dimension, surrounded by an almost impenetrable barrier of split thoughts (what?), is where most of the inhabitants live — a somewhat counterintuitive concept,

as the idea of a core of an elemental plane implies (to me, at least) that the elemental magic should be strongest there; it would be almost like living on the surface of the sun. The PDF's explanation for the inhabitant's ability to live here is that they create stable zones built upon "chains of increasing self-definition" that ward off the powerful magic and wish storms (roving fields of tainted magic). I think there's a germ of a neat idea here, but the vagueness of the whole section really undermines anything cool. If I can't describe it effectively to my players, then I can't use it. And I can't describe the Dimension, at least not as written.

The Elemental Dimension of Magic presents three new races in the Denizens section: the Jeshatan, the Void Elves, and the Knah'tan. The Jeshatan are the amoral masters of the Dimension, while the Void Elves serve as slaves or pets and the Knah'tan function as adversaries for the Jeshatan. As written here, the Jeshatan and Knah'tan are unbalanced to the point of being unplayable. The former receives +4 Int, +4 Wis, and +4 Cha and are completely immune to aging and disease, all for a level adjustment (mislabeled as "LI") of +2, while the latter has +4 to every stat except Wisdom and can detect magic at will out to 200 feet for an LA of +3. Ignoring the level adjustments (they're low), there aren't any listed drawbacks to either of the races; you might accumulate experience at a slower rate, but you'll be able to trounce most of your opponents and most puzzles with bonuses like these. Also, other standard information is missing: favored classes, typical names, alignment tendencies, and so on.

I had the same misgivings concerning the two creatures, the arcane dragon and magic elemental. Even a wyrmling arcane dragon would mop the floor with a lower-level party, as it (1) is immune to magic, according to its stat block, (2) does 4d4 damage with its breath weapon, and (3) has a high AC and good saves. I have no idea how much damage its claws or bite do, as the damage isn't listed in the description. Magic elementals cast spells, but no description of their spellcasting ability appears (what spell list do they draw on? what ability are the save DCs based on?). On top of that, they can burn out magic items and spellcasters by creating a magic surge. I liked the idea, but it can be brutal to casters, as the minimum save DC is a 20 for even a small elemental and it destroys any temporary items, like scrolls or potions, which are the type most low-level parties would have. It might have

only 9 hp, but it can really do some damage, and quickly. The arcane template, which rounds out the chapter, is free of major mechanical issues, but isn't very exciting, either. I didn't feel that it made anything that much more magical than it ordinarily would be.

The final chapter has some neat ideas, such as rules for using the Dimension to power spells (an arcane caster can channel spells of a higher level if he has an appropriately high Intelligence score and makes a Spellcraft check) and describing the nature of travel, stable zones, and wish storms. The mechanics here seem better than in the previous chapters, but I'm still leery about using any product where a PC has to save or take damage because of the sheer power of the place (especially when no immediate way to counter this is described — elements can usually be resisted) and could be subject to wish storms (DC 40 Will Save or die, essentially, although a "kinder GM might allow 10d20 a round").

Conclusion

Although it has moments where the ideas seemed interesting (I do like the idea of using the Dimension's essence to power spells), the majority of the material is vague, unbalanced, and simply poorly thought-out, in my opinion. The art, particularly the two full-page illustrations is excellent, but I do question the need for them in an 18-page PDF, especially when it has so much white space. DMs looking to add an elemental plane of magic might want to check the product out, but should be cautious. Even at this price point ($2.50/18 pages), the product's quality is low enough to make it an iffy purchase.

CLASS: Supplement
STR: -- *(Physical)*. This score does not apply to this product.
DEX: 12 *(Organization)*. Clean, logical organization.
CON: 8 *(Quantity of the Content)*. A decent amount of material, but the product has a lot of white space and two full-page illustrations.
INT: 4 *(Quality of Content)*. Unbalanced races, poorly constructed monsters, unclear descriptions.
WIS: 6 *(Options & Adaptability)*. Unadaptable. The poor mechanics interfere with adaptability, and it'll either fit a campaign or it won't.
CHA: 8 *(Look & Feel)*. Clean, but lots of white space.

Bits of Darkness: Caverns
About: 53 pages, PDF, black & white, $5.00.
Publisher: [Tabletop Adventures](#) (2004)
Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*
Review date: *3/28/2005*

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover

Bits of Darkness: Caverns is here to bring new excitement to your subterranean adventures by adding short "bits" of description and colorful settings. This is created to be an "on the go" product, which means you don't need to read the entire work before you can use it. The descriptions are designed so that they can be randomly generated as you play or placed carefully ahead of time. It is written to be of use to both experienced and inexperienced Game Masters, particularly those who (for whatever reason) find themselves short on time or creativity.

This book includes 100 Bits of description, and 20 Shards. The Bits are small pieces that can be stuck in, anywhere a little description is needed, and are numbered so they can be used randomly. Shards are slightly larger, and may depict a particular place or event, or set a feel for an area. The material is also indexed a number of ways to allow a GM to easily find a description to fit a particular circumstance. Each Bit is also provided in index card format for ease of use by Game Masters.

As a special bonus, we have included a brief description of the way caverns are formed and information on the real-world and fantasy aspects of cave exploration. There are also two new Swarms – cave beetles and serpents. In addition, some descriptions are graphically depicted in the excellent interior art by the Carmona Brothers.

Bits of Darkness: Caverns uses material from the System Resource Document, but could be used in any fantasy setting with very minor modifications.

Introduction

Note: This is not a playtest review.

Tabletop Adventures' *Bits of Darkness: Caverns* provides a bunch of distinct pieces of flavor text that GMs can use to add some depth and flavor to their caverns without spending hours detailing every single nook, cranny, and rock formation. In addition to the descriptions (either called "Bits" or "Shards" depending on length and intended use), the product includes two brief articles, a review of the Climb skill, stats for various swarms, and pre-formatted index card pages to print out, including each of the book's various cavern bits to print out and use.

Presentation

Gillian Pearce's cover for *Bits of Darkness: Caverns*, a warrior and a mage looking over a map in the center of a slew of different images, is nice, but unexciting. I'm not saying that there's anything technically wrong with it, so much as I was simply underwhelmed on the whole. That said, I did like the montage approach she took; it's a different choice for a cover than I've seen on a lot of d20 books, and it works fairly well here. The interior art, by the Carmona Brothers, on the other hand, really worked for me. It felt (and I really loathe this term) somewhat old-school. It reminded me of the art from old *AD&D* adventures and mid-80s/early-90s CRPGs for some reason. It's sketchy, but warm somehow.

The book's layout is pretty basic, although I do question a few choices. For starters, the borders on the top and bottom of the pages (of stalactites and stalagmites) might be a bit too much, even in the grayscale, for most folks to print out. Also, the text uses three different type-faces for its text — one for read-aloud text, one for game rules material, and one for the DM's notes. On the whole, they're used well, but I can't help but think there might have been a more elegant way to handle delineating the different texts. One thing the product *does* do well, however, is use reasonable borders for the main text. There's not a lot of extra white space, but the product never feels cramped. It's not as smooth a layout as you'll find in products from a lot of the big boys in d20 gaming, but it doesn't hurt the product, and it uses the space given without being oppressively crowded.

I found that the writing was solid and readable. It jumps the tracks a few times (most notably in longer sentences with dependent clauses), but the writers (Daniel Brakhage, Nicholas Brakhage, Mark Potter, and Vicki Potter) generally acquit themselves well. I didn't find any intrusive typos or bothersome editorial choices and the product has a stable tone.

Bits of Writing: Reviews

The book has two main parts: twenty Shards, aimed at describing particular locations such as entrances; and the hundred Bits, for adding a bit of life to random caverns and spots. Most of these descriptions focus on unusual rock formations from salt-flows to geysers to underground rivers to rock trays, while others examine encounters with previous adventurers and cave inhabitants. For the most part, aside from the sections where the swarms are encountered (bats, rats, cave beetles, serpents) or the lone combat encounter (a giant constrictor serpent), there's no real combat presented here. This is a feature, not a bug, as, although the different descriptions of locations might imply eventual combat (e.g. the "drums-from-the-Deep" bit) the product avoids being concrete in order to maximize its utility.

As to the content itself, its usefulness will largely depend on how frequently your players will find their characters in natural caverns and how much time you want to devote towards describing them. DMs running Underdark-based campaigns or something inspired by Spiderweb's *Exile* CRPGs will probably find the shards and bits most useful. Unlike most sourcebooks on underground areas, the descriptions present mostly mundane areas, which would complement the more fantastic aspects described in a product like Wizards of the Coast's *Underdark,* where the only mundane things were perhaps the rules about air quality. Rather than trying to make the fantastic more fantastic, *Bits of Darkness: Caverns* goes about trying to make the mundane seem more fantastic through careful research into the nature of caves and rock formations. Although this might seem a bit dry for reading, it fascinated me, and I couldn't stop reading once I started.

The mechanical material here, what little there is, helps the DM out, as it gives Climb DCs and Reflex save DCs to back up potentially hazardous terrain in some of the bits. The nice thing is that most of these DCs are fairly low, enough so to pose a threat to those who fail them, but not so high that the game switches from a game of heroic adventure to a game about the treacherous journey on the way to heroic adventure. Similarly, the swarms seem appropriate, and the idea of a serpent swarm (very evocative of some sequences in the Indiana Jones films) really worked for me.

Finally, I should note the presence of the pre-formatted Bits index cards in the back. It's a nice touch that really enhances the PDF's utility. DMs that have to wing it for some reason (say the party follows the odd path that leads from the dungeon into the Underdark) could definitely use these — just shuffle them up, get your MM out, and you're good to go. The play style might be rougher than it usually is in *D&D*/the d20 System (a prep-heavy rules set), but these bits could be a huge help if a DM needs to improvise extended parts of a campaign.

Conclusion

The product definitely has a specific audience in mind (DMs that run or might run adventures in caverns), and, between the game material and the two brief articles (slightly redundant when taken together, but potentially helpful to ground a DM in the setting), it has a lot of useful stuff to offer. Perhaps the best thing about the product, however, is that it is fairly setting-neutral. There are minimal rules for d20 here, and it could be easily adapted to other systems, such as *HARP/Rolemaster*, *Exalted*, or *Ars Magica* (to pick three games that I'm fairly familiar with where folks might find themselves in caves). With some of the flavor text taken out (references to orcs, for instance), it could even be useful in games set in modern times or the real world. All in all, a neat product with tremendous potential.

CLASS: Game Aid
STR: -- *(Physical)*. This score does not apply.
DEX: 14 *(Organization)*. Solid. Things are where they belong.
CON: 14 *(Quantity of the Content)*. 20 Shards, 100 Bits, lots of potential use.
INT: 14 *(Quality of Content)*. A topic with a narrow focus, executed well.
WIS: 16 *(Options & Adaptability)*. Despite using d20 system rules, the product could be used for any system.
CHA: 12 *(Look & Feel)*. Clean, but nothing special.

"Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch"
About: 208 pages, PDF, black-and-white interior, $13.00.
Publisher: [Blue Devil Games](#) (2005)
Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*
Review date: *3/15/2005*

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product. This is not a play-test review. It may contain some spoilers.

From the Back Cover

"Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch is the highly anticipated science-fiction campaign setting from Blue Devil Games built on *d20 Modern* and powered by *d20 Future*.

The human spirit shines greatest during the darkest of times. Never was this proven more fully than in the year 2196. With certain doom hurtling toward our planet, the free countries of the world united and prepared for a mass exodus aboard a score of gargantuan transports. But our escape was just the beginning of the adventure. By some freak occurrence, our ship, the Dawning Star, was sent hurtling across the galaxy. We found ourselves alone, cut off from the fleet, in alien territory. It was not in our nature to give up. We found a habitable planet and began our new life. In the intervening years, we have encountered strange new species, overcome dire threats, and taken the first few steps in building a new life.

Operation Quick Launch introduces the **Dawning Star Campaign Setting** and provides everything you need to launch a high-adventure, science-fiction campaign on the planet Eos:
• A full description of the velin, the other primary species on Eos.
• Dozens of talent trees, occupations, skills, feats, species classes, advanced classes, and prestige classes.
• An exhaustive list of equipment, weapons, armor, gear, cybernetic implants, vehicles, and starships.
• Strange, new xenomorphs, including the exotic Eotian fauna, the mysterious tentaari, and the shadow-shrouded vaasi.
• The Eotian lands presented in exacting detail, including maps, regional descriptions, NPC's.
• A full-scale introductory adventure to start your campaign with all the energy of a Davinger Ion Drive.

Introduction

A new science-fiction setting using the *d20 Modern* and *d20 Future* rules, Blue Devil Games's *Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch* details the planet of Eos, its inhabitants (including a large group of refugees from Earth), and the various obstacles they encounter as they settle a new planet, including faction, aliens, and environment. The book describes life and culture on the planet and aims to establish solid rules and reasons for everything being the way it is, something the introduction points out when it refers to itself as a "firm science" setting. The world it describes must be plausible, but never to the extent of damaging the fun. For me, how successful the book is as a campaign setting will ultimately come down to this: is it fun, and is it reasonably believable?

Presentation

Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch is a sharp-looking book. The cover art by Danilo Moretti, which consists of a rune lit up by a sun in front of a cloudy sky, is simple but nice. Most of the interior art has been done in a pen & ink style and works well for the text, particularly in Chapter VI, "Xenomorphs," with the Eotion wildlife, vaasi, and tentaari illustrations being perhaps my favorite string of artwork. The details of their features, such as what their feet look like, really do wonders for helping to bring the creatures to life. It's good stuff. If I have one complaint about the artwork in the book: it occasionally looks a little sketchy or rough, but for the most part, it fits the text well.

Blue Devil Games does a nice job with the layout, as well. The fonts and tables in the text are easily read, and the sidebars stand out from the normal text without becoming intrusive. I liked the border art but felt that it might be a bit of an ink-suck for folks printing out the PDF. The only other thing that I did not like was the text's use of a ragged right margin on the stat blocks. It's a pet peeve of mine, and it never fails to rile me up a bit. A fully-justified stat block looks so much sharper and more professional. Editing and style were good; the book feels cohesive and reads well. I did not find any typos.

Mechanics

Like most campaign settings, *Dawning Star* opens up with a slough of new options for character creation, including things to personalize the setting. Like Wizards of the Coast's *Eberron*, it aims to use of most of the existing rules as well. I like the effort, but I also like the flexibility in design. One of the primary criticisms of *Eberron* has been that it attempts to shoehorn *everything*, with mixed results. To give an example of what I'm talking about here, Progress Levels (PLs) are closely tied to culture in the world. The standard PL is set at the edge of PL 7 with mostly PL 6 tech and some PL 8+, but different cultures are at different points. The tentaari can use equipment from PL 9 or even 10 but can't fix it; their knowledge is set at a certain point. Objects like mecha exist on Eos, but they cannot be built, as the resources just aren't there. This design choice gives the GM flexibility in deciding what he or she wants the game to include without eliminating ideas that might be more appealing later.

Other mechanical choices the book made that I liked included the following:

• The **Investigative** talent tree, which models the preternaturally-observant detective fairly well.
• Racial classes. Although it seems a little funny here with only two PC races (humans and velin), with the additional races to be found in *Helios Rising*, it works well, and I always like the idea that creatures can have an overarching nature to tap into. On top of that, the top-level abilities require action points to activate, which is a nice way to utilize action points while making the uses of those skills more special.
• Equipment exists within the confines of the setting. The Eos Defense Force and Eos Freedom League design their own guns, for instance, and carrying some things can be considered really bad if you're in the wrong place.
• Flexible economy. Different things have different values depending on the week.

I really like that the mechanics fit the setting without needing to be rewritten in wild ways. It just makes it easier to run out of the box.

I was, to be honest, less than excited by the professions, advanced classes, and prestige classes, but none of them struck me as wildly unbalanced so much as just a

trifle bland. Other than that, I found the book to use the existing rules in nice, interesting ways.

Setting

In short, having been forced to evacuate Earth, a shipful of human refugees stumbled across the planet of Eos after they encountered an interstellar gate and were separated from the rest of their convoy. Finding that Eos was roughly similar to Earth, they landed their ship and began settling it, building the city of Dawning Star out of their transport. The city of Dawning Star eventually became the Dawning Star Republic and grew, with dissident elements forming their own settlements (the Faction Camps) elsewhere. Eventually, the refugees came into contact with the velin (a local race of humans that claim to have been on planet since the dawn of time) and the ancient ruins of a great civilization.

Thematically, the setting seems to rely on a few main binaries, with trust/suspicion, knowledge/secrets, science/faith, past/present (with both this and the previous binary having a strong interest in memories), individuality/community, nature/civilization, and, of course, good/evil, with echoes of these ideas popping up in interesting places. [**Warning: major spoilers for backstory ahead.**] For instance, the velin, the main alien race in the setting, are a double for humans (at the risk of being reductive, it's most instructive to think of them in the context of Native Americans) seem to represent humanoids in their natural state, yet they're the result of cloning. All the memories they have of old Eos have been implanted: although they seem to be a link to the past, they're extremely recent. Their community is the result of their homogeneity; they're the same because the race (only three years old) hasn't had the time to evolve and differentiate itself according to geography and the like.

In addition to the thematic oppositions, a lot of thought went into how the setting was created and what the people who live on Eos are like or what they do. Culture from Earth carried over – the Dawning Star Republic has a baseball league, for instance – and evolved. People have created new holidays and a new calendar. In other words, the setting is close enough to the world we know to make it familiar and easy to GM (the choice of baseball rather than the creation of a new sport is excellent; it's

far easier for me to work in an existing sport than to create one wholecloth with new rules and a different paradigm), yet it's different enough to not feel just like they've transported Earth to another planet. Really, this is just another instance of a binary: familiarity/unfamiliarity. The settlers might think, "Oh, this is like the old frontier in the American West," which it sort of is, only to find out that there's more to life in Dawning Star and the Faction Camps than just cowboys, Indians, and hunting for gold (or in this case, relics). The planet has a richer and more nuanced past than they can expect. The new Eotians aren't the first ones here. They might be the last if they don't play their cards right.

The short adventure included in the back of the book does an excellent job in conveying the feel and themes of the setting without being ham-handed. The ticking-clock scenario presented could be both challenging and fun, particularly as things progress to the end, where there's the potential for a Mexican stand-off as the Faction Campers, the Dawning Star terraformers, a Vaasi warhound, and the PCs could find themselves at odds depending on allegiances. It's a simple but tight adventure.

Conclusion

One of my favorite things about the setting was its adaptability to a wide variety of play styles. Groups interested in hack-and-slash have something here for them, as do groups that prefer intrigue and espionage. Best of all, the setting doesn't require a drastic amount of reinterpretation to provide for these styles of play; the default setting provides for all of them. Players looking for blaster fights against alien races have the Vaasi to deal with, and players looking for politics have the strained relations between the Eos Freedom League and the Dawning Star Republic. It's a great design choice that could have been extremely difficult to pull off while maintaining a cohesive setting.

As far as mechanical adaptability, the setting utilizes all of the material from *d20 Future* without having a "kitchen sink" feel. It's a wonderful setting that doesn't reinvent the wheel just for the sake of reinventing the wheel.

So does it seem like it would be fun? Yes, I think so. It provides me with options and a cohesive setting to set a campaign in. Is it believable? Most certainly. The variable

nature of PLs and the strange familiarity of Eos work. I never felt myself straining to believe the setting, or second-guessing the choices made by the authors.

With the possible exception of Malhavoc Press' *Arcana Evolved*, *Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch* is the most stunning book that I've seen over the last six months. It's a terrific resource that any gamer interested in a cohesive, interesting science fiction setting should own.

CLASS: Supplement

STR: -- *(Physical)*. This score does not apply to PDF products.
DEX: 17 *(Organization)*. Logical, although a trifle spread out.
CON: 16 *(Quantity of the Content)*. Complete, so long as your campaign stays on Eos.
INT: 18 *(Quality of Content)*. Well thought-out and evocative.
WIS: 18 *(Options & Adaptability)*. Supports a variety of styles of play, from Wild West style shoot-em-ups to pulpy trips into ancient ruins. Takes advantage of most options in *d20 Future*.
CHA: 17 *(Look & Feel)*. Superior design and layout.
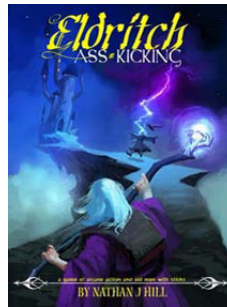
Eldritch Ass Kicking
Author: Nathan J. Hill
Publisher: Key 20 Publishing
Reviewed by: *Nash J. DeVita*
Review Date: *3/30/2005*

Reviewer Bias: This title was received primarily for review purposes. This title is not one I was overly familiar with prior to receiving it. This is a sad fact because, in my eyes, it has a really interesting premise and a very smooth system.

Eldritch Ass Kicking is a roughly ninety page long, perfect-bound paperback of standard height and width (just like the rest of Key 20 Publishing's current releases, I do believe). The (mostly) comedic, rough comic-book-style illustrations found throughout this book are provided by Tom Weighill, while a piece by Thomas Denmark appears upon the cover.

From the Back Cover
"Behold, the once-fair land of Anhelm has been torn asunder!

Mad wizards, dark and powerful, waged war and almost all was lost. To save themselves from machinations of those crazed fools, the neighboring kingdoms banished Anhelm to a distant astral realm and here we fight for our lives.

The wizards still plot each other's downfall. Dark times have indeed fallen upon us.

We fear this war will continue until only one wizard remains…

Lo, thou ist cruisin' for thine bruisin'!

Eldritch Ass Kicking - a game of arcane action and old men with sticks."

Presentation

The cover features, well, two old men with sticks, just as one would expect. The primary figure in this illustration we see only from behind. His hair is pure white and his robes, a royal shade of purple. Yes, he is in fact an 'old man with a stick'. Of course, this stick is helping him cast the other old man down via a lightning bolt! The other poor old man (sans stick) cannot be made out so clearly. What we can see is that he has now lost his stereotypical pointy hat and is now in a fairly comedic, again stereotypical, struck-by-lightening pose: arms and legs outstretched, shocked off of the ground itself.

The artwork throughout the product carries a similar feel. Much of it is clearly not meant to be very serious at all. The thick-line, comic strip style helps further that very feeling. The fonts chosen for the text of the headings really struck me. Normally, I would not say much about the font (unless it is unusually hard to read,

and this isn't) but it spoke to me. They were obviously chosen with care to help give an almost arcane feel to everything. This font, combined with the art, really helps set the proper tone for much of the book – arcane yet comedic.

Content

As with the vast majority of books in the fair hobby of ours, *Eldritch Ass Kicking* opens with a piece of fiction. It is not a bad thing in the least that it opens in this manner, since it sets up the entire premise for the game in one convenient place that really can't be missed. Here is described the history of the area and the machinations of these (at least at one point in time) mad wizards. The land in which the characters roam was once part of a broad landscape of many kingdoms.

The wizards of one such kingdom had grown mad with power and laid siege upon one another. Thanks to the magnitude of power that these individuals showed and their lack of constraint, the neighboring kingdoms could not help but feel threatened, and they banished the wizards' kingdom to another plane.

The dice system is very simple and smooth. It uses 2d10. The numbers from the dice are added together along with a number from the character sheet (stat, skill, or whatever else is appropriate). When subtracted from the target, this number determines the degree of success or failure. Depending on that degree, the player decided exactly what happens. Here is the example from the book, shortened for this use:

Nathan is playing Grethor, his wizard. Grethor is primarily an Air mage, a tall, willowy fellow with a very intense personality. In the game Nathan is playing, the GM, Laurie, describes the situation: Grethor and his companion wizards are in an underground library built beneath a volcano, attempting to find priceless tomes of magickal power. A tremor shakes the cavern. The floor breaks open and tilts and the prize book of the collection slips from its stand fall to the floor, sliding toward the lava that's pooling only feet away!
Nathan wants to save the tome, obviously, so he describes Grethor's actions. 'Grethor sees the tome slipping toward the pool of lava, and so with great determination, he weaves a sturdy gust of wind to carry it to safety. As he concentrates, sweat pours from his face.'

…Nathan looks at the Degree of Success table and sees that he has a solid success. The tome is saved!

He describes the outcome for his group: 'Grethor cackles in glee as the tome lands next to him. He pushes himself up onto his feet, grasping the ancient book of knowledge in his gnarled hands. 'The treasure is mine!''

I note this for a number of reasons. 1) It asks for a certain degree of descriptive detail from the player before the action is attempted. 2) It asks the player, not the GM, to describe the details of the success or failure. The first point is a given for many games, but the second is not. I have found that the vast majority of RPGs ask the GM to describe the final outcome, not the player. This helps make the whole game the players', not just their characters.

As is seen in the example above, character wizards are classified by the magic type they like to use most often. The most basic elements are represented here – Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. These are numerically represented as Skills. There are tips for creating 'new' skills beyond those four – life and death, light and dark, etc. One of the biggest things to keep in mind is that the direct opposite must be determined when the skill is created.

The values of these skills as well as the wizard's primary Attributes are determined by the player from a pool of points: separate pools for attributes and the skills. While skill points are distributed among four skills, attribute points are distributed among only three attributes: Agility, Endurance, and Concentration. The other three attributes, Speed, Life Points, and Focus, are secondary; they are calculated from the primary attributes.

Characters must be much deeper than numbers on a sheet. Actually, most of the character sheet is set aside for descriptive text. One of the many important items found here is the Description. This describes what the wizard looks like as he or she makes an entrance.

As one can see from the numbers on the character sheet, *Eldritch Ass Kicking* is focused around combat and high action. The degree to which this is true is completely up to the gaming group. This game can be run as a *Mortal Kombat*-esque game if you like, just as it can include high levels of storytelling and drama. In the end, much of it still comes down to high action, as can be seen in the example above.

Conclusion

Though this game is focused on action and combat between wizards, it plays quite well as an adventure-style game. In my view, it handles this even better than it does a gloves-off style throw-down. The game is intended for heavy action and it can do this quite well. Thanks to the stupendous writing throughout the product, with the right individual as a GM, almost any kind of campaign can be handled superbly with this game.

Archetype: Core Book
Body: 10 *(Game Mechanics)*: Nice simple system, nice execution.
Mind: 10 *(Organization)*: I was briefly confused on a couple of items.
Spirit: 10 *(Look & Feel)*: Great for the subject matter.
Attack: 9 *(Value of Content)*: This is a great, complete game for $20.
Defense: 9 *(Originality of Content)*: It works off of the wizard stereotype. Of course, that is what makes it work.
Health: 9 *(Physical Quality)*: Perfect-bound paper back.
Magic: 9 *(Options & Adaptability)*: A number of different ways of running this game exist. It is all up to the group.

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