

Silven Trumpeter

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Hello! Welcome to the 23rd issue of the Silven Trumpeter, in which I shall deliver one of the cheesiest letters from the editor to ever see the light of publication.

Heroes are the center of every story. Whether a 14th-level paladin on horseback rescuing a princess, or Link fighting alongside Zelda to defeat Ganondorf, the hero is the character we're cheering for. Even a traditional heroic villain such as Anakin Skywalker (Star Wars' Darth Vader) or Eric Lehnsherr (Magneto of Marvel Comics fame) rouses in us a sense of compassion, inspiration and awe.

We play heroes in our own games to try and experience what it's like to be one of the great. We want the attention, the applause, the rewards and the fame, and through gaming, we can achieve it all.

But what most of us don't think about in the usual gaming session or computer RPG is the impact that our actions have on everyone else. We don't think much about the random NPCs that we talk to, the kids playing in the street or the other patrons of the ubiquitous local tavern. Just think, if each individual in that ubiquitous bar were a real person, how much they'd look up to you and admire your accomplishments, your stoic will, your intensity.

Now think, for just a moment, of those people in the real world that you admire for their accomplishments, their stoic will, their intensity, their creativity, and all the other things that we admire people for. How many of them are actually aware that we admire them? Does your hero know that she has inspired you to do greater things than you would have without her influence? Or is your hero still searching for that bit of recognition?

Let your heroes know who they are.

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

The Elderly Adventure of Starlanko the Magnificent

KIDNAPPERS AND KITTIES

by Matthew J. Hanson

Starlanko the Magnificent, Archmagus, Wizard Extraordinaire, and author of several popular books (available at a reasonable price, found wherever arcane tomes are sold) was reminding his current apprentice that "magic is useless without a practical application," when he heard a soft whimpering. Upon further investigation, he discovered its source: a small girl, no more than six or seven, looking up into a tree.

"Do you think we should do something, sir?" asked Starlanko's apprentice, an aspiring young wizard named Merdel. He had kept the name Merdel against Starlanko's best recommendations. Names were important things, but for some reason Merdel insisted on being burdened with the name his mother (gods rest her soul) had given him.

"I suppose we probably should," Starlanko the Magnificent replied. He approached the little girl. "What's wrong, child?" he asked.

The girl looked at him with tearful eyes. "Mr. Pandington is stuck up the tree," she whimpered.

Starlanko looked up into the tree, and deduced that Mr. Pandington was a small, golden-striped cat. "Oh, is that all?" he asked. "I'll just have to get him down then, won't I?" Starlanko tipped his hat, stepped back, and with a few words floated into the air. He reached the height where the cat perched, and plucked it from the branch. Then as effortlessly as he had risen, he floated down toward the ground, the feline in his arms.

The cat purred against Starlanko's chest, sending vibrations down his whole body. It was one of the most peaceful sensations he had ever felt. Starlanko thought briefly about keeping it, but it was only a fleeting thought. He could never steal a kitty from a little girl. The cat turned its head to Starlanko, and the wizard noticed something strange: its eyes. They were not the normal slit eyes of a cat. The pupils were round, like a human's.

Starlanko soon reached the ground. With a smile that seemed bigger than her head, the little girl clutched Mr. Pandington. "Can you do magic?" she asked.

Starlanko smiled, "What do you think?"

The little girl nodded her head vigorously.

"You're a very clever girl," Starlanko said. "Now what is this you have behind your ear?" He reached behind said ear and produced a silver coin. "I think your mother must have left it there accidentally. Why don't you run home and see that it is returned?" He dropped the coin into the amazed girl's hand, and she scampered off.

"Now that we've done our good deed for the day," Starlanko said to his apprentice, "we should really get down to business. I've got to speak to some of my contacts in town. It could take a while. While I'm doing that, I want you to stop by the library."

Merdel did not know why his master had asked him to look up information about squids that shot invisible ink, birds that flew on four wings, or cats with round pupils, but then there was a lot about Starlanko the Magnificent that he did not understand. After two months of apprenticeship, Merdel now accepted such eccentricities, and tried to glean what magical insights he could from the

For regular readers of Starlanko the Magnificent, please note that this adventure takes place outside of the normal time frame of The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent. This story occurs nearly thirty years later, around the time Starlanko is writing his mass-market spell collections, including *50 New Ways to Blow Things Up*.

older wizard. And since he had so far gleaned a lot, Merdel agreed to the occasional oddball errand.

The four-winged birds were the easiest to find. There were several varieties, and all were commonly mentioned in any book that listed any sort of exceptional avian. The squid was a little more difficult to find, but while skimming through a tome about subterranean creatures, he came upon a variety of squid that lived in total darkness. Its ink clouded the sense of smell rather than sight.

But the cat gave him a great deal of trouble.

"Well, I do have one more idea," the librarian said after Merdel had reported another failure. The librarian, like so many others, was a withered old man with a long white beard. As far as Merdel could tell, librarians came in two varieties, those who had long white beards, and those who tied their long white hair in a tight bun. "I think you've exhausted our resources," the old man continued, "but there is a private collector in town. She has many volumes that even we, with our illustrious collection, are lacking. It's no guarantee, but it's worth a try."

The librarian wrote down the name and address of the private collector for Merdel, who gathered his notes and left.

The trip across town took longer than it should have. For one thing, the streets were crowded with visitors. Merdel remembered Starlanko had said something about a great meeting of ambassadors. For another, Merdel stopped for directions twice on the way to the house of Tanalia Shiladof, the private collector.

The house was in the high-end district of the city. Merdel knew he should have expected her to be rather wealthy, as it would take a lot of capital to buy such a large collection of books. He also should have expected to be greeted by a servant, but in actuality both took him by surprise.

"Yes, sir," the young serving man drolled, "can I help you?"

Merdel explained why he was there. "Oh, and I'm an apprentice of Starlanko the Magnificent," he added. Merdel found that dropping Starlanko's name often helped grease the proverbial wheel. In his travels his master had made a lot of friends. A number of enemies too, but far more friends than enemies. It was something Starlanko referred to as "networking." He insisted that it was very important, and tried to teach it to Merdel, but Merdel never got the hang of it.

"Yes sir, I shall let her know, please follow me." The servant led Merdel into a well furnished parlor, then excused himself to inform his employer of Merdel's arrival. Merdel hesitantly sat down upon one of the velvet-covered couches. Wealthy people always made him nervous. Starlanko the Magnificent said he would get used to it. Merdel would have been happy continuing his father's hog farm, but it had been his mother dying wish that Merdel make something more of himself, and wizarding seemed as good a way as any.

"You must be Mr. Merdel," a woman's voice said. Merdel had not noticed her enter.

"Please, just Merdel is fine. And you must be Ms. Shiladof," he replied. She was younger than Merdel

had expected, nearly as young as he was himself. But she did wear her jet-black hair back in a tight bun. She also wore a long black dress and several pieces of gold jewelry.

"Yes, I am Tanalia Shiladof," she said. "You are a student of Starlanko the Magnificent?"

"Yes, I am."

"You are lucky to have such a fine tutor," she said. "But I am sure you already knew that. Come, I will show you to my library."

Tanalia Shiladof's great-grandmother had started the library. It been had passed down through, and expanded by, the family ever since. Now it was so extensive that Shiladof herself had not read all the texts. She asked what he was looking for, so that she could give him a place to start, then said, "That's funny, you are the second person in a matter of weeks to ask about a cat with human eyes." Before leaving, she asked, "Is there anything else you would like?"

"No, thank you... actually, if I could get something to drink, that would nice."

"Of course, I'll have Gustuvan bring you something right away," Shiladof said.

Gustuvan, who was apparently the servant that had greeted Merdel, did not bring the wine right away. In fact, it was almost an hour later. "I'm sorry for the delay, sir. I was otherwise indisposed." And Merdel did not remember Gustuvan's feet being so muddy.

Merdel left the home of Tanalia Shiladof as the sun set. He had finally found the answers his master had been looking for. He walked nervously down the street, doing his best to follow the directions from the Shiladof residence to the Lone Magpie Inn. The street had cleared of much of its

early traffic, but the waning light combined with Merdel's poor sense of direction soon rendered the directions useless. When Merdel tried to trace his steps back, he wound up more confused than ever.

"Pardon me," a figure detached itself from the shadow of a nearby building, "are you the one they call Merdel?"

"Yes, I am," Merdel replied. "Who are you?"

The figure did not answer. Instead Merdel felt a blow to the back of his head. He realized why Gustuvan had taken so long. He realized there was something larger going on. And he realized, as he often did, that he had made a mistake, and that it was too late to do anything about it.

Starlanko the Magnificent looked out of the common room at the Lone Magpie Inn. It was getting dark and his apprentice had not returned. Starlanko checked with the innkeeper and there were no messages for him. Merdel was not the sort to stay out late, and while the young lad learned magic remarkably quickly, he was not good at more basic lessons, like how not to get mugged in a strange city.

Starlanko was just about to search out his student when a stranger approached his table. "Are you Starlanko the Magnificent?" she asked.

"And what if I am?" he answered with a question. He grasped his staff, which had been leaning against the table.

"If you are, then I have a letter for you," the stranger said.

"Well, I suppose you have a letter for me then." The woman handed him a letter, sealed with a plain circular seal. She was gone before he could break it. The letter was short and sweet, and rather clichéd. *We have your apprentice. If you*

wish to see him again, come alone... et cetera, et cetera. Well, that was all then, just a kidnapping. And here he had been worried.

The kidnapers, naturally, planned to meet in a warehouse in the darkest part of town. Starlanko scryed upon it before going, and encountered no attempts to block his magical spying. The only remarkable detail he could make out from this viewing was a hidden trap door in the floor. Probably how the kidnapers planned to enter. Starlanko had hoped they would be keeping Merdel at the abandoned warehouse already, but that was too much to ask for.

After he finished scouting the transfer location, Starlanko felt in the mood to do some shopping. His first stop was at the temple to Leolus, the sun god, the largest temple in the city, where he made a significant donation, and received, as a thank you gift, a number of useful potions. It was a pity toy shops were not open this late. Oh well, he decided. Maybe for a few extra gold, the owner could develop a sudden case of insomnia.

Starlanko arrived at the warehouse slightly before the appointed time. He cast a simple spell that let him see through walls, and an even simpler spell that allowed him to see in darkness. There were now two people in the warehouse, but they were doing their best to remain hidden. Hired goons, in case something went wrong. The actual mouthpiece, along with the ransomed Merdel, would be along later. If things did go wrong, Starlanko knew he could probably overpower the kidnapers, but he did not like to take chances, and he hoped to do this bloodlessly. Starlanko opened the door.

"Hello? Is anybody there?" Neither of the goons lurking in the shadows replied. "I sure hope I'm in the right place." Then he dropped his voice, as

if muttering to himself. "I'm probably just a little early. And to think, all this trouble for a guy I just met. I hope he's doing all right. I hope these men are reasonable. And if they are not... well, I'm sure they will be. I am Starlanko the Magnificent, after all. If I disappear, people will go looking for me." Starlanko paced back and forth on the dusty floor. "But if they are not reasonable, well then... I still have my staff. As long as I have my staff, everything will be all right. Won't it? Yes, of course, everything will be fine, as long as I have my staff." Starlanko continued to mutter to himself for several more minutes. Mainly it was about how everything would be all right.

Then the trap door opened. Merdel came out first, walking up a set of stairs rather than a ladder, which was fortunate for him because he was blindfolded, and his arms were bound. He was not, Starlanko noticed, gagged, which could prove a problem. Close behind Merdel was a woman with a short sword held against Merdel's back. She had tied a piece of cloth over her face.

"You got my message, I see," the woman said.

"Yes, allow me to introduce myself, my name is—"

"Starlanko the Magnificent. Your reputation precedes you."

"I'm flattered," Starlanko chuckled slightly, and flushed. "I knew that my exploits were common knowledge to my wizard peers, but I did not know they extended to people in... your line of work. I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage. I have not heard of you."

"You may call me... Miss Crimson."

"Of course, Miss Crimson."

"Now to the business at hand," the woman said.

"Yes. You know, I'm probably not the one you want to be talking to. I just hired the boy to do some

research for me. You really should talk to his family, or somebody else who has a greater vested interest." Starlanko stared as hard as he could at his apprentice, and willed Merdel not to contradict him. It seemed to work.

"He claims that he is a student of yours," said Miss Crimson.



"Hmm... maybe he was referring to that book I wrote recently: *The First Steps To Infinite Power: Starlanko the Magnificent's Introductory Primer in the Arcane Arts*. It's

really a good bit of work, if I do say so myself. You know, if you have ever thought of going into wizarding yourself, I might be able to give you a discount."

"I'm sorry," Merdel interrupted, trying to address them both at once. "I'm not really his apprentice. It's just that I heard about how great you were. And I thought that if I said I knew you, they might let me go. Please help, I don't have any family."

Well, well, thought Starlanko. It looked as though some of his lessons were sinking in after all. *He needs a lot of work on his nerves though.* Hopefully Miss Crimson would attribute Merdel's shaking voice and rivers of sweat to the knife held to his back.

"You heard the boy. This was all just a big mistake. Why don't you let him go and we can forget about this whole thing?"

"I don't think so," Miss Crimson said. She moved the sword from Merdel's back to across his throat. "First I want some information. I don't think people would be very eager to buy your book if they knew you let a child die. Even if he was a stranger."

"What sort of information?"

"To start with, why were you researching cats with human eyes?"

The next move was one of the few elements Starlanko was unsure about. He knew there were good reasons to keep what he knew secret, but if his hunch was right, he could end up with a major bargaining chip. "No major reason in particular. It just happened that I encountered one on my way into town."

"You... you encountered one?" Starlanko could tell by her voice, the surprise and delight in it, that his hunch had been right.

"Yes."

"Well then," said Miss Crimson. "I propose a deal. You get this cat for me, and I will let the boy go."

"Don't do it!" Merdel shouted. "The Eralis, the cat, they have empathic powers. They make people calm but if—"

"Shut up or I'll cut out your tongue!" Miss Crimson shouted back.

Merdel continued. "But if you kill it, then bring it back as an undead, it fills people with hate, enough hate to start a war!"

"That's it," Miss Crimson said. She kicked Merdel to the ground, and with one hand tried to pry open his mouth, while holding her short sword in the other.

"If you damage him permanently, the deal is off!" Starlanko yelled.

Miss Crimson stood up, leaving Merdel's tongue intact, but giving him a swift kick to the ribs. "Then we have a deal?"

"We have a deal," Starlanko said. "Trust me, kid.

"I like to hurt people," Mr. Black replied.

Your life isn't worth it. If you will just follow, I'll lead the way to the cat."

"I think I'll wait here, with the kid."

Starlanko smiled the biggest smile he could muster. "Of course. I'll just go fetch the cat straight away, and come right back."

"And you'll take Mr. Black with you. Just to make sure you don't try any funny business." Starlanko dropped the smile. Miss Crimson beckoned to one of the men "hidden" in the shadows. The man went to her, and whispered something in her ear. Then she said, "And you will also leave your staff here."

Starlanko went from straight face to frown. "I don't think that will be necessary. It's just an old man's walking stick."

"If it's just an old man's walking stick," Miss Crimson said, "then you shouldn't mind giving it up."

"Well, it's just that I find it rather hard to keep pace without it. I've got an old hip injury from the time I fought the great dragon Rauthus. You can read about it in my memoir: *The Adventures of Starlanko--*"

"This isn't a game you're playing, Starlanko. Give up the staff, or the boy, your choice." Starlanko dropped the staff from his right hand to the floor.

"So, how did you get into the goon business?" Starlanko asked Mr. Black, who was the paragon of goonhood: very large, very muscular, and very dumb.

"I like to hurt people," Mr. Black replied.

"I guess that would be the natural calling, then. I have a somewhat ironic tale to my inspiration. I became initially interested in the Art, not because of any true magic, but because of coin tricks. I thought it was magic at the time. I thought it was magnificent, but it was really just sleight of hand.

"You know the thing about coin tricks," Starlanko stopped walking, which forced Mr. Black to also stop and turn to look at Starlanko. "The real trick is not in the moving the coin itself. Anybody can do that. The real art," Starlanko drew his right hand gently across the air and wiggled his fingers, "the sign of a true master, is all about misdirection." Starlanko quickly flicked his left wrist. A wand flew into his left hand. He muttered a few quick words, waved the wand, and Mr. Black became several thousand times cuter than he had been before.

Merdel leaned against Starlanko as they left the abandoned warehouse. He was glad to be safe, but was worried about the price.

"Here, drink this." Starlanko said.

The liquid was warm and tingled. Merdel felt his bruises fading, and the soreness left him. As soon as Merdel finished off the flask, Starlanko redoubled the walking pace.

"Do you remember the first thing I told you about magic?" Starlanko asked.

Of course he did. Starlanko the Magnificent drilled it into him every two seconds. "Magic is useless without a practical application."

"Exactly. Now you are about to learn the practical application for that magical steed spell I taught you."

"Shouldn't we notify the authorities?" Merdel asked. "I got a strand of her hair and everything."

"We can do that in the next town over. Right now I want to put some distance between us and them."

"Why, are you afraid that they'll try to kill us for what we know?" It was a grim thought that disturbed Merdel. He knew people had tried to kill Starlanko before, but this was the first time Merdel was caught up in it.

"Not for knowing what we know. For doing what I did, and they'll figure that out within a couple of hours. A man will stay a cat until somebody turns him back, but I can only keep a marionette acting as Mr. Black for so long."

About the Author

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

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Bonus Material

Eralis Tiny Magical Beast

Hit Dice:	2 d10 (11 hp)
Initiative:	+2
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class:	19 (+2 size, +2 Dex +5 deflection), touch 19, flat-footed 17
Base Attack/Grapple:	+2/-10
Attack:	Claw +6 melee (1d2-4)
Full Attack:	2 claws +6 melee (1d2-4) and bite +0 melee (1d3-4)
Space/Reach:	2.5 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks:	Improve attitude, spell-like abilities
Special Qualities:	Aura of deflection, low-light vision, scent
Saves:	Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +1
Abilities:	Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 20
Skills:	Balance +10, Climb +6, Hide +14*, Jump +10, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4, Sense Motive +5
Feats:	Weapon Finesse
Environment:	Temperate plains
Organization:	Domesticated or solitary
Challenge Rating:	2
Advancement:	—
Level Adjustment:	—

An Eralis appears nearly the same as an average house cat, except that it possesses eyes with round, human-like pupils rather than slitted cat eyes. Eralis are also identifiable by the peaceful feelings that they impart in those around them.

Eralis speak their own language. Those living among humanoids also understand, but cannot speak, the dominant humanoid language.

Combat

Eralis are poor fighters. They prefer to use their empathic abilities to dissuade enemies from fighting. If this method does not succeed, the eralis will flee, squeezing through small spaces where they cannot be followed.

Unlike most magical beasts, Eralis do not gain darkvision.

Improve Attitude (Su): At will, an eralis can attempt to alter the attitude of any number of creatures within a thirty foot spread. Each creature must succeed a Will save (DC 15) or immediately have its attitude regarding every nearby creature shifted one step closer towards helpful (unhelpful to indifferent, indifferent to friendly, etc). In addition, if the creature fails its first save, it must make another save, or again have its attitude shifted. This process is repeated until the creature succeeds in a save or it is helpful to all nearby creatures. This is a mind-affecting ability. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Bonus Material cont.

Spell Like Abilities: At will – *calm emotions* (DC 17), *sanctuary* (DC 16); 3/day – *charm person* (DC 16); 1/day – *charm monster* (DC 19). Caster level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Aura of Deflection (Su): Eralis receive a deflection bonus to their armor class equal to their Charisma bonus.

Skills: Eralis have a +4 racial bonus on Climb, Hide* and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus on Jump checks. Eralis have a +8 racial bonus on Balance checks. They use their Dexterity modifier instead of their Strength modifier for Climb and Jump checks. *In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, the Hide bonus rises to +8.

Undead Eralis

Tiny Undead

Hit Dice:	2 d12 (13 hp)
Initiative:	+2
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class:	17 (+2 size, +2 Dex +3 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple:	+1/-11
Attack:	Claw +5 melee (1d2-4)
Full Attack:	2 claws +5 melee (1d2-4) and bite +0 melee (1d3-4)
Space/Reach:	2.5 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks:	Decrease attitude, spell-like abilities
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., scent
Saves:	Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 3, Dex 15, Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 20
Skills:	Bluff +10, Balance +10, Climb +6, Hide +14*, Jump +10, Listen +6, Move Silently +7, Spot +6, Sense Motive +5
Feats:	Weapon Finesse
Environment:	Temperate plains
Organization:	Domesticated or solitary
Challenge Rating:	3
Advancement:	—
Level Adjustment:	—

An undead eralis appears similar to a zombie raised from a housecat, but retains its natural speed. The eyes of undead eralis are removed in the creation process. Undead eralis exude an aura of fear and hatred to all around them. Undead eralis speak and understand the languages they knew in life.

Combat

Undead eralis are poor fighters. They prefer to turn enemies against each other in furious destruction, or scare opponents away. If these methods fail, the undead eralis will flee, squeezing through small spaces where they cannot be followed.

Decrease Attitude (Su): At will, an undead eralis can attempt to alter the attitude of any number of creatures within a thirty foot spread. Each creature must succeed a Will save (DC 15) or immediately have its attitude regarding every nearby creature shifted one step closer towards hostile (friendly to indifferent, indifferent to unfriendly, etc). In addition, if the creature fails its first save, it must make another save, or again have its attitude shifted. This process is repeated until the creature succeeds in a save or it is hostile to all nearby creatures. This is a mind-affecting ability. The save DC is Charisma based.

Spell Like Abilities: At will – *lesser confusion* (DC 16); 3/day – *fear* (DC 19); 1/day – *dominate person* (DC 20). Caster level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma based.

Skills: Undead eralis have a +4 racial bonus on Climb, Hide, and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus on Jump checks. Undead eralis have a +8 racial bonus on Balance checks. They use their Dexterity modifier instead of their Strength modifier for Climb and Jump checks. *In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, the Hide bonus rises to +8

night hunter

by Øivind Stengrundet

The black clouds of early winter drifted slowly across the cold full moon, making shadows dance across the light layer of snow on the ground. Tall pines stretched their sinister forms ever upwards, as if they were struggling to reach the few visible stars overhead. Everything was eerily quiet, except for the frantic panting of a man running, obviously in frightened haste, across the frozen, snow-covered moss.

Miksha tried to curse, but couldn't quite find the breath to do so. His heart was threatening to burst out of his aching chest, and his lungs pumped frantically. He hadn't felt his legs for several minutes, and white specks danced in front of his eyes as he furiously blinked away the drops of sweat running from his forehead.

Finally he could take it no longer, and stopped behind the large root of a fallen tree, leaning against it to catch his breath. He strained his ears to hear any sounds of his followers, but the blood pumping around in his head interfered with his attempts at listening. He looked back over his tracks, to see if he could catch a glimpse of someone, or something, but the forest was empty. He almost managed to lower his shoulders half an inch before the calm of the forest night was shattered by a long, piercing howl. He was moving again before the sound died away.

His mind kept racing as he sprinted across a stiffened winter marsh. Why did he ever enter this area? Why couldn't he have followed his brother's advice, and let the rumors of an unprotected treasure remain rumors? But no, he had to gather his two best friends and go off searching. Now his companions lay cooling in the winter night somewhere behind him, their blood slowly seeping

into the pristine whiteness of the snow. He could still see the terror on Rimmoth's face as his life was ripped away.

There! What was that? Miksha almost tripped as he threw a glance to the left. Nothing. He was getting delirious from the running. He tried to stay focused on the ground before him, but couldn't shake the events of the evening from his mind. The three of them had entered the rolling hills north of Boklbol from the east, and traveled westward for almost two days before they had found the ruined tower. They had spent the last hours of daylight exploring the site, and had actually found a couple of items that would bring a nice profit. They had at first wondered about the lack of dust in the still intact rooms of the tower, but had contributed the fact to the fading magic of the wizard who built it. As night fell, however, they had met the real reason.

A snow-covered rock sent Miksha sprawling on the frozen surface. He could feel the icy particles scraping his face as he landed, and he could taste blood on his lips as he got back up. He gathered himself to start off again, but stopped dead in his tracks as another howl broke through the dark night, this time from ahead of him. He hastily scanned the surrounding trees as he silently drew his rapier with his right hand. With his left, he slowly loosened the small bottle of holy water he carried in his belt. He continued eyeing the shadows as his vision slowly calmed.

His breathing had almost returned to a passable level when the first werewolf attacked. Luckily, Miksha was facing the right direction as the beast jumped him. He managed to duck away from the furry leap, and the werewolf landed on two feet a couple of yards away. It turned rapidly on him, and eyed him

warily, going into a crouch. Miksha tightened his grip on the rapier as the beast started circling him. He feinted a thrust, and the fiend silently flinched away. The monster then swung a long arm at him, and Miksha barely got the sword up in time to block the claws only inches from his face.

A deadly dance now ensued. Miksha and the beast slowly circled each other, both of them making feints and half-hearted attacks. Neither of them seemed willing to commit himself fully, but Miksha wondered how long he had before the other werewolf caught up with them. He could see the red pinpoints of light gleaming in his opponent's eyes, and knew that the monster waited for its companion to arrive. Miksha decided he had to make a move.

He took a tentative step backwards, and suddenly he pretended to slip, opening up his guard. The werewolf immediately took the chance and dove in, head first. But Miksha was prepared, and flung up the tip of his rapier as he regained his footing. The monster's eyebrows went up as it realized its error, but by then it was too late. It let out an injured shriek as it impaled itself on the rapier, and tried to free itself. Miksha let the thin sword go, and thanked the gods that he had spent enough money to get an enchanted blade. He could see smoke streaming out of the holes where the rapier entered and exited, and the monster fell to the ground. It started writhing in agony, before it let out a last piercing whine and lay still.

Miksha repressed a shudder as he saw the shriveled flesh around the monster's wounds, and drew a deep breath. Now, all he had to do was keep moving, and maybe he'd reach the mining camp they had passed on the way up in time. But perhaps he should bring his rapier, in case the other...

Too late he remembered his second pursuer, and he barely registered the figure leaping from the shadows behind him before a sharp pain shot through his shoulder. He was knocked over, and

the force of the fall made the werewolf lose its grip on him. Miksha felt his shoulder burning as he made it to his feet in time to see the beast leap at him again. He thrust his other arm up instinctively, and felt his hand enter the monster's maw before the werewolf landed on him and the world went black.

Miksha awoke with a smell of death in his nostrils. At first he had no idea where he was, but then the heavy damp form on top of him brought his memory back. He struggled for a moment to roll the beast off of him before he could sit up carefully. He shook his head to clear it, and looked around in the pale moonlight. The second werewolf still had shards of glass in its blackened cheeks, remnants of a bottle of holy water. Miksha looked down at his hand. It was bloody and torn from meeting the monster's teeth, but he found he could still move his fingers.

He painfully got to his feet, head spinning from the blood loss. He stared at the carnage before him, not really understanding how he could still be alive. He sent a quiet word of thanks to his patron deity before he started dragging his feet away from the two bodies.

Suddenly he became acutely aware of a strange sensation in his hand and shoulder. He held his hand up before his face to examine it, and gasped. He turned around again, and a sense of terror filled him as he felt his wounds close and his hair grow. The pale full moon overhead seemed to laugh mockingly at him, as he sank to his knees screaming – no, howling – his agony into the empty winter night...

Interview with Gary Gygax on Lejendary Adventure

by Rodney Lucas

I have been very interested in trying out Gary Gygax's Lejendary Adventure RPG (LA) but haven't had the chance to yet, so I decided to go to the source for some first-hand information. Mr. Gygax has taken the time out of his schedule to answer a few questions regarding LA. After getting the answers to these questions I've decided to pick up the source books and try a LA campaign with my regular gaming group. After reading this short interview, you may also want to pick up the game and give it a try!

When you first developed the game, what was your inspiration to create a new RPG system?

With the direction being taken by those promoting the D&D game, I believed that a different sort of [fantasy] RPG was much needed, so I began work on the Lejendary Adventure system!

Can you give me an abbreviated description of the core game mechanic?

There are only three main stats for an Avatar (player character) that are determined by point distribution, then augmented by die roll addition as well as addition from Abilities (skill bundles) selected for the Avatar. These stat scores are then used as the basis for the degree of capacity in each Ability, the initial range being from 100% of a stat score (usually about 60); to 80%, 60%, 40% on to a low of 10% for one's "background" Ability. Success at use of a skill bundle is then a simple d% roll,

often modified by relative ease or difficulty, as the Lejend Master decides. Combat is based on a d% result also, and harm inflicted is generally in the range of a d20 roll. This is not as fatal as it may sound as Avatars have Health scores in the 40-60 range and armor reduces damage inflicted, and is itself harmed, rather than making it harder for a target to be struck.

How does magic work in LA?

Activation Energy Points are expended in casting any magical power. The number of points possessed by an Avatar is found by multiplying Speed Base Rating stat by four, so the number available is typically in the 40-60 range. Very powerful spells can be cast by even beginning Avatars, but as these take both a lot of points and a lot of time, the wise player foregoes such in order to have weaker but rapidly usable, low point-cost spells.

What character classes are available?

There are no classes, as the game is based on skill bundles. The player is totally free to select whatever Abilities are desired for his Avatar. If an archetypical sort is desired, the player can use a template set forth for an Avatar Order—a member of an association, closely-knit group, guild, or society—such as: Augur (necrouge), Demonurge, Desperado, Ecclesiastic, Elemental, Forester, Jongleur, Mage, Mariner, Noble, Outlaw, Rogue, or Soldier. There are more Orders coming in a rules supplement.

How would you describe the fantasy world in which Lejendary Adventure (LA) is designed to be played?

One can use any world setting that isn't so loaded with other game system stats and like data as to be difficult to convert to the LA game. The Lejendary Earth world setting is actually a sort of parallel earth one, with a far different history but vaguely similar geological features. The information for the setting is broad and general so as to provide a vehicle for the campaign, not dictate its form and content.

Would you say that LA is best suited to single-session adventure play, ongoing campaign play, or both?

The game is definitely designed for the long-term campaign. However, as the rules are not lengthy or complex, and character creation is relatively easy; single-session play is both possible and enjoyable. There aren't many modules available for this now, but the able Lejend Master can manage that without difficulty, as both role-play and hack & slash and all in between are accommodated smoothly in the game.

Are there adventure "modules" available for game masters who may not have the time to create their own adventures?

Yes, there are several available now from Hekaforge Productions [<http://www.hekaforge.com>]. More will be forthcoming in 2005 from Hekaforge and from Troll Lord Games [<http://www.trolllord.com>].

Other than the core rule books, do you plan on expanding the game with supplements other than modules?

Troll Lord Games is about to release LA Essentials boxed set soon--most likely will have by the time this is [published]! They are also planning a

module of mine for that set, then a series of core rule expansion books leading up to the release of new editions of the rules in hardback version. After that we are looking forward to world setting sourcebooks. Meantime, Hekaforge plans to complete the LA world setting book series and continue publishing adventure modules.

Are there currently any novels based on the LA game world?

One only, *The Eye of Glory* by Martin Dougherty. It is a most interesting and fun read!

Do you run (or does anyone run) LA games at conventions that allow players to get a feel for the game?

Short answer, yes. There is also available [for] free download [the] PDF file, "LA Quick Start Rules" available on the Silven Crossroads website and several others too.

Last question. I know that a MMORPG game based on LA is in the works. Can you tell us how the development is going, and if you have an idea of when it may be available for players who are anxious to step into the LA world online?

The LA game online, LAO, being done by Dreams Interactive, is progressing well, if more slowly than all concerned would have it. Part of that is due to the fact that the LA game system is not just another D&D game knockoff, so the computer programming needs to be new and innovative too. Also the size of the world and what can be done in it are both remarkable.

My current guesstimate for commencement of the beta test of the LAO game is mid- to late 2005.

Big thanks go out to Mr. Gygax for taking the time to answer questions about a great RPG. If you haven't done so yet, take the time to try the game out with your regular group of players.

That Lejendary Adventure™ has indeed been released! It's full of all kinds of material for a starting group, including the Rule Book Essentials, an introductory module, the *Essential Bestiary*, skill bundles, Avatar templates, optional rules, a complete glossary of terms, and – who can live without them? – complimentary dice! You can find more information on it at the Troll Lord Games site, here (<http://www.trolllord.com/la.htm>)

Libem Liboriam

The Complete d20 Guide to Books

by Dana Lynn Driscoll

Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books is the most comprehensive guide to books and tomes available to the d20 industry ever published! *Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books* is an extensive, exhaustive, and creative resource that will be useful to many gamers as it was specifically written to cover the range of places and forms writing, books, and the quest for knowledge can take in a campaign world. The book details information about writing while adventuring, including a complete set of mechanics for writing, publishing, and marketing books from hand-publishing to mass book sales.

What others are saying...

[Crothian of ENworld.org](#)

This book does the job of being a complete book on books. It deals with the areas I wanted and showed me ones I did not think of. It seems to be the rare book that expands upon the campaign world in a way that no other has. It adds detail and levels of realism to the world without bogging down with irrelevant items.

» 4 out of 5

[Bill Perman of GamingReport.com](#)

...The amount of new spells and prestige classes found in later chapters will make this book a valued purchase. Beyond that you'll find write-ups for dozens of books, new deities and new mundane items. *Libem Liborium* also contains a random book generator that allows for GMs to create 100's of new books. In conclusion, while this supplement may not be as glamorous as say, a book about Barbarians, or a sourcebook on weapons, *Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books* is a treasure chest for the less combat oriented characters in your party, as well as an invaluable resource to bring the art of writing, researching, and learning to life. Those not interested in such things will still find plenty of useful tools for their fantasy game.

» 3.5 out of 5

Irezumi

The Fujiwara Demon

by Nghi Vo

In the seventh year of the rule of the shogun Iemetsu, there was a baby girl born to the noble Fujiwara family. Her birth was a blessing to her parents, who thought never to have children, and the entire clan rejoiced. She was brought into the world to the sounds of wooden clappers and drums, and they tied a red string around her ankle to ensure that her spirit would not stray from her new body.

For the first few years of her life, Machiko was the darling of the clan, a sweet-faced girl with a smile that brightened the darkest room. It was when she turned four - an extremely dangerous age for children, according to the sage Uchihatsu - that a demon came to nest in her body.

She woke at night screaming that a dark shape was hovering over her pallet, though her nurse never woke at all, and sometimes long red scratches would appear on her soft face only to disappear a few hours later. The demon followed her from room to room, pricking her with needles when she tried to sit and pulling her hair when she tried to sleep.

Her parents, heartsick at the anguish of their only child, brought every magician and exorcist they could find to their house, and thus they played host to all kinds of fakes and charlatans.

"It must be sweated from her body," said one, and so Machiko was plunged into a steambath until she fainted.

"The demon can be chased out with the ringing of blessed bells," said another, and Machiko nearly went deaf.

They tried to starve it, burn it, beat it and trick it out, all to no avail, and Machiko grew thinner and, as time passed, more wild.

"No! No more frauds!" she told her parents one day. "I will see no one!"

At the age of fifteen she shut herself up in her rooms, and refused to come out. Her mother begged her to open the door, and her father ordered her to do so, but she refused. Finally, they made sure that food was delivered every day, and a servant was sent to bring her clean clothes and to remove the old ones. Beyond that, they mourned their daughter as one dead, for so it seemed to them.

For two years, Machiko languished in the room. During the day, she slept and dreamed thin, fretful dreams, and at night, the demon raked her body with claws of fire and she howled like an animal.

Her father died and her mother grew silent and frail, and so the house and Machiko passed to her eldest cousin. They still brought food and fresh robes to her, but the servants developed a superstitious dread of the daughter of the Fujiwaras. By this time, they had forgotten that it was Machiko who was haunted by a demon, and instead, she became the demon, the Fujiwara's demon.

Though she was dressed in the finest gauzes and brocades, Machiko had become as gaunt as a ghost, with broken and bloody nails from where she had clawed at the floor. She remembered how to talk, and sometimes she would sing songs that were part of another life. She was dead, or might as well have been, she thought.

It was on a strange night in late autumn when she finally left her prison and found herself on the road

to Edo. The moon had filled her room, a room scarred and echoing with her cries, and it was as though her mind was clear, clean for the first time in years

The demon quieted under the moonlight, and for the first time since she had entered, Machiko slid open the door of her room. For a long moment she paused, regarded the world outside her madness, weighed the fear of the open and the cloying comfort of imprisonment. Inside her, the demon stirred, and she made her decision, fleeing out the main gates after taking a pair of straw sandals and large straw hat from the servants' quarters.

The road to Edo was not a long one, but Machiko knew she was lucky to avoid robbery or worse. Perhaps it was the demon who kept bandits at bay, and for the first time Machiko felt an angry affection for her tormentor, who had, after all, been her steadfast companion for over a decade. When she was hungry, she stole offerings from the roadside shrines, and when she was thirsty there were wells near the roadside inns. She spoke to no one, and, perhaps frightened by the woman in silk and tattered sandals, no one spoke to her.

Edo in those days was a strange jewel of a place, where one might meet a Tibetan mystic as easily as a gallant young samurai. Miracles were sold on every corner, and pleasures strange and twisted were promised in every darkened doorway.

Machiko, lost but curious as a cat, had found herself in a strange neighborhood indeed, where yellow dogs snarled at her and the children were strangely quiet.

"You have a demon on you, daughter," remarked a disheveled young man.

He was tall and very thin, and he moved as though he were nursing some wound inside himself. Despite all of that, however, his eyes were mild and there was something about his smile that made her want to smile in return.

"Many have said so," she said to him carelessly, "but no one has been able to remove it."

The man laughed, showing a rotten canine tooth. "Why should they remove it?" he asked. "It's a part of you; they may as well cut off your hand because it's clumsy."

At that, she felt a dozen hot needles prick her stomach. Though tears started in her eyes, she squinted through the pain and looked at the young man carefully.

"Who are you?" Machiko asked cautiously.

"A problem-solver," he said with a sunny grin. "An artist, sometimes."

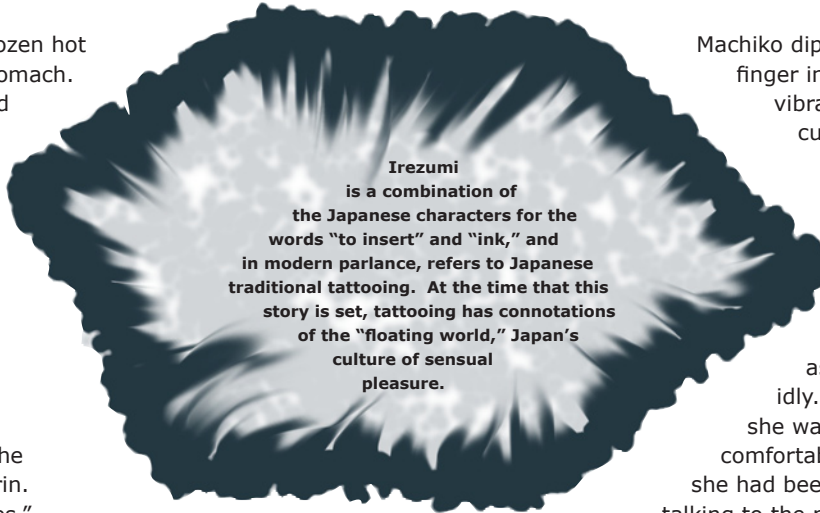
He held up a live fish in a damp wicker basket.

"Come on. We can eat, and then we can talk, and then we'll see if I can fix your problems."

Together they stripped the flesh clean from the bones of the perch and they drank the coarse rice wine that was all the man had on hand. During the meal, they were silent, but when he broached the wine cask, they began to talk.

The strange pair talked until the sun went down and continued while the city fell to night, and when the sun showed her face again, they had fallen into a contemplative though content silence. They slept then, though not together, and while Machiko slept only briefly, her dreams were calm.

At twilight, they were ready to begin. The bamboo needles he used were small, no larger than a brush that a woman might use to apply cosmetics, but their tips were wickedly sharp, and the pots of ink that lined the floor around them were in colors that no woman would use on her face.



Irezumi
is a combination of
the Japanese characters for the
words "to insert" and "ink," and
in modern parlance, refers to Japanese
traditional tattooing. At the time that this
story is set, tattooing has connotations
of the "floating world," Japan's
culture of sensual
pleasure.

Machiko dipped her finger into a vibrant green curiously.

"Do you think this will work?"

she asked him idly. Already she was more comfortable than she had been in years, talking to the man who called himself Kado.

Kado shrugged, a half-smile on his face, and Machiko settled onto her stomach, her back bare.

When the first point loaded with black ink entered her flesh, she felt the demon stab her leg with a line of fire. The two pains were similar, and Machiko clenched her teeth tight to keep from crying out. Throb for throb and pain for pain, the demon expressed its displeasure as Kado worked through the night and into the next day.

Every hour or so, he would turn from the woman who had stumbled into his life and walk to the window, shaking out his hand. Machiko, even if she had wanted to, could not move, and when he would return to his work, she would smile and wait for him to continue.

She lay in the floor in a hot sweat, beads of blood welling up on her skin. When she realized he had stopped, she struggled to her knees.

Kado laughed and pulled her to her feet, supporting her weight easily.

"Come and see," he said. "Come see what was inside you."

He guided her to a grimy bronze mirror, larger and finer than anything Kado should have been able to afford. Looking into the mirror over her shoulder, Machiko gasped with something between pleasure and pain and recognition.

It was the Fujiwara demon, it was her demon, it was her.

Bright and livid, the demon glared from the reddened skin of her back. It was striped and clawed like a tiger, but the body was strangely slender, almost deer-like. On the strange mutable face, there was an expression that was almost gentle, though it was fanged.

"I'll never be like anyone else again," she murmured, looking at the tattoo that would forever be a part of her.

"You never were to begin with," Kado replied with satisfaction.

They silently regarded the demon, and with eyes etched with needles, it looked back at them.

The Silven Bestiary

Monsters of Flame

by Kyle Thompson

The Silven Bestiary is a monthly article that contains new monsters on a monthly basis. It will generally contain two to three monsters and occasionally a special bonus that includes other new material such as magic items, etc. This month's topic is monsters that deal with flame and fire.

Lava Mite

Small Elemental (Fire)

Hit Dice: 2d8 (8 hp)

Initiative: +6

Speed: 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (poor)

Armor Class: 17 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/ Grapple: +2/-

Attack: Claw +1 melee (1d6 and 1 fire damage)

Full Attack: 2 claws +1 melee (1d6 plus 1 fire)

Space/Reach: 2.5 ft./2.5 ft.

Special Attacks: Breath weapon

Special Qualities: Continual glow, immunity to heat, vulnerability to cold, unbearable heat

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will -2

Abilities: Str 8, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 7, Wis 5, Cha 12

Skills: Spot +1

Feats: Improved Initiative

Environment: Volcanically active areas and the elemental plane of fire

Organization: Solitary, pair, or troupe (1-8)

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Usually chaotic evil

Advancement: 3-5 HD (Small)

Level Adjustment: -

A small creature flies toward you. It is glowing red and as it nears, you realize it is extremely hot. Its eyes are filled with fiery malevolence as it comes closer...

Lava mites were first discovered by Korl the Mage on one of his travels. Korl didn't even know that he had discovered something new until he returned home and told his companions how he had almost been burned by what he called a 'hellhound on wings'. He later found another one of these creatures and appropriately deemed it the lava mite.

Since the discovery of lava mites, adventurers have known them to be fiery annoyances. Most adventurers are capable of handling a single lava mite, but they can be threatening when they are in groups.

Lava mites have small bodies with short arms that end in long claws. They have tiny feet and their eyes glow brightly. Their wings are pure flame, which allows limited flight and provides enough light to see by.

Lava mites speak Undercommon (or the equivalent in your campaign) in light crackling voices like the sound of a campfire.

Korl the Mage

Korl was a half-elven mage who filled his life with adventures with his two companions, a mischievous halfling named Middik and Daria, a proud elven warrior. He also undertook several solo journeys to gain knowledge about the local ecology and the magic surrounding the outside world.

When he wasn't adventuring, Korl could be found either in his study just outside Silven or in the local taverns with his companions. Korl and his companions are most famous for their defeat of the psychotic, maniacal prophet Jozz who, in true villain fashion, plotted to slowly destroy the world.

Korl himself is famous for his many discoveries across the world and the very planes themselves.

Combat

Lava mites enjoy combat even though they are not extremely powerful. They specialize in being extremely annoying and often fly in and out of combat, burning whatever they can, such as scrolls, robes, etc.

Lava mites are unable to successfully grapple due to their short arms and long, stiff claws.

Breath Weapon: The lava mite can emit a small stream of fire from its mouth every 1d4 rounds. This is a ten-foot line of fire that deals 1d6 damage. The target must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 12) to avoid the attack.



Continual Glow: Lava mites are always glowing and act as natural torches.

Unbearable Heat: Lava mites are constantly surrounded by extreme heat. Each round, any creature within five feet of a lava mite must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 10) or take 1 subdual damage. Any attacks on a lava mite that are made with small size or smaller weapons or natural weapons also deal 1d4 damage to the attacker.

Soul of the Flame

Medium Undead (Fire, Incorporeal)

Hit Dice: 14d12 (84 hp)

Initiative: +4

Speed: 40 ft.

Armor Class: 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+12

Attack: Flame +11 ranged (2d8 fire damage)

Full Attack: 3 Flames +11 ranged (2d8 fire damage)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./ 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Flame

Special Qualities: Continual glow, incorporeal traits, immunity to heat, vulnerability to cold, unbearable heat

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +11

Abilities: Str 20, Dex 18, Con -, Int -, Wis 21, Cha 17

Skills: None

Feats: None

Environment: Any warm

Organization: Solitary, pair, or gaggle (3-7)

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: 15-17 HD (Medium), 18-20 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment: -

What appears to be a living bonfire glides slowly towards you. It has no discernable features within the raging flames, but you feel as if sorrow and pain seeps from it.



Souls of the flame are undead generated from the spirits of those who were killed in a tragic fire. Many of them have a deep feeling of sorrow surrounding them. Others emit a feeling of anger because the fire they died in was not coincidental. Souls of the flame have largely varying backgrounds. Some are arsonists who made a fatal mistake,

some are criminals burned at the stake, some are murder victims and some are simply victims of accidents.

They appear as human-sized fires about ready to burn out of control. It is not uncommon to see souls of the flame that burn different colors as well. They often are colors that were important to them in life, but the most common color is still red-orange.

Souls of the flame cannot speak.

Combat

Souls of the flame wander the earth in search of victims to destroy or to 'share' their pain with. They are mindless and care of nothing more than revenge.

Flame: Souls of the flame may send out three 20-foot long streams of flame in any direction every round. Each line of fire deals 2d8 fire damage, Reflex save (DC 20) for half damage.

Continual Glow: Souls of the flame are always glowing and act as natural torches.

Unbearable Heat: Souls of the flame are constantly surrounded by extreme heat. Any

creature within five feet of a soul of the flame must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 10) or take 1 subdual damage. Any attacks on a soul of the flame that are made with small size or smaller weapons or natural weapons also deal 1d4 damage to the attacker.

Next month: two new fire monsters and a description of all the special abilities from this and the next episode of *The Silven Bestiary*. Also look for the game statistics for Korl the Mage and his companions.

About the Author:

Kyle Thompson was born in Hawaii and is now sixteen years old. He enjoys writing and drawing. He currently is being schooled in West High School and is working towards some scholarships to get him through college. He plans to finish college with a degree in writing and continue on to write fantasy novels. His teachers, family and friends (including his roleplaying group) all support and encourage him. They all tell him that he has to take them to dinner when he gets paid, and his mom says that he will be moving her back to Hawaii.

Performing at Renaissance Faires:

The Ultimate Adventure LARP

by Amanda Rosen

Long before I discovered Renaissance Faires, I was a roleplayer. A gamer. A LARPer. My father playtested some of the early games in the 1970s; I grew up gaming with my brother as my fellow adventurer and my father our gamemaster. Having gamed my entire life, I could not imagine a time when I would find a creative outlet more satisfying than gaming and LARPing. But about five years ago, I went to my first Renaissance Faire, and since then I have rarely looked back.

A Renaissance Faire is in many ways an adventure gamer's paradise. You walk into a world of medieval buildings housing all kinds of shops, selling wares from weapons (Sword? Staff? Bow?) to armor (Chainmail or leather?) to boots (Ankle? Knee? Thigh?). Other shops cater to those interested in jewelry, crafts, clothing, and fragrances, all in competition for patron attention with musicians, jugglers, jousters, the royal court and various games of skill. Sometimes you will even find elves and fairies wandering around.

Gamers in this world are called "playtrons," those patrons who come in complete costumes, or garb; speak in vaguely British accents; and take on the persona of a Renaissance lord, lady or peasant while playing with the various performers and other patrons. Many playtrons adopt full-fledged characters and play them all day; others simply call each other by faire names and are happy to direct a lost patron to the closest privy. It is still role-playing—you might be amazed how a well-fit doublet and pair of hose can transform the shyest of young men into a charming rogue.

For me, exploring the world of Renaissance Faires was like discovering an entirely new system of gaming. There were no real rules—other than those supplied by history and chivalry. No dice to roll, no rock-and-scissors or other ways of determining an outcome. Instead, victories were won with wits, charm, and daring. The character was not some fancy drawn entirely from your imagination, but a better version of yourself, with only the tools and skills that you as the player can bring to the table. Some take the game more seriously than others; some are unaware that a game can even be played. But at the end of the day, playtrons can go home just as satisfied with their performance as if they had been playing a LARP with their friends—and just as likely to spend days talking about what happened.

LARPing and faire-going are not, in fact, all that dissimilar. In both, you adopt the dress and mannerisms of a person or character who lives in a different time, place or reality. Both provide a creative outlet for the imagination and a chance to explore a world of sword and sorcery: facets to which so many gamers are attracted. The major difference is in purpose: LARPing is more focused on plot and story, while faire-going is largely character-driven. There is no real storyline to pursue, no quests to complete. The goal is simply to enjoy yourself while playing a character that is a Renaissance version of yourself.

I found, however, that the enjoyment found in attending Renaissance Festivals as a playtron was not enough. I missed the plots, the quests, the interaction between character and story. It was

Where's a Faire Near Me?

There are Renaissance Faires all over the country (indeed, all over the world!) Fairly comprehensive, searchable listings of Faires within the United States, with locations, dates, and often links to an individual Faire's website, can be found at <http://www.renaissance-faire.com> and at <http://scribe.faire.net/scribeSearch.html>. Faires welcome patrons in garb or in plain clothes, allow patrons to carry period weapons, and often have camping facilities nearby to allow for a whole weekend of fun!

only when I moved beyond playing and began performing at Renaissance Faires that I was able to fulfill all of these needs in a satisfying way. Performing at faire combines the character creation and originality of gaming with the free-form and story-driven focus of LARPing, but brings in that magic component of an audience. How many times have you said something incredibly witty during a game, or performed an amazing physical feat, only to have no one really notice because they were too involved in their own characters? At faire, your performance—the witty repartee, the swordfighting, the romance—is all being watched and appreciated, even by people who have never gamed before in their lives.

I am now a member of the Medieval and Renaissance Performer's Guild at the Ohio State University, a group that performs each year on campus at the annual festival held the first Saturday in May. The glow has not yet faded from my performance at that faire. At the end of the day, the happiness and satisfaction I felt far exceeded anything I had felt when my party had completed a mission and survived during an adventure LARPing session. When I asked myself why, the answer was rather easy to find: we bring that happiness and satisfaction to everyone that participates. As performers, my group entertains more than just itself—family, friends, and complete strangers are watching us fight, interact, and tell our story. More importantly, they can participate in the creation of the story, without wearing period clothing or carrying weapons or checking with a GM first.

For example, as I stalked across the faire, playing the role of one of the Sheriff of Nottingham's villainous 'henchwenches,' I came across a woman with her two sons. I asked her if she would be interested in becoming one of the Sheriff's tax collectors, and she immediately responded in the affirmative. After officially making her a tax collector, she turned to her sons and demanded taxes from them—much to their surprise! As they turned out their empty pockets, I mentioned that she would probably have more luck demanding taxes from Robin Hood's band of outlaws—they had no idea, after all, that she was no longer a poor peasant in need of money. I parted from her, and discovered much later that this lady had indeed found Robin Hood's men and demanded taxes from them. They were so surprised that they almost broke character—but ultimately they played the scene out to perfection.

It is incidents like that which make performing at Renaissance Festivals a wonderful substitute—and for me, a replacement—for LARPing. This lady's participation furthered the storyline of the faire, while challenging the actors to deal with a completely unplanned interaction. And that

lady went home happy, having not just been an audience member but an active participant in our roleplaying. Perhaps she'll spread the word that faire-goers and gamers are not freaks of nature, but just ordinary people out to have a good time and use their imaginations in creative, productive ways.

Performing, of course, has certain requirements that can be difficult to accept. The grueling rehearsal schedule, practicing various scenes and fights, and perhaps hardest of all, the fact that we only perform one day a year. This is a far cry from LARPing, where you can play every week (as I used to) and nothing need be rehearsed. That is why I continue to role-play in other forms, both pen-and-paper and the occasional LARP. Ultimately, it does not matter what kind of role-playing we engage in—pen-and-paper, LARPing, or Ren Faire performing. The point is to be social, have fun, entertain ourselves—and sometimes, to bring other people along for the ride.

About the Author

Amanda was lucky enough to grow up gaming with her father acting as gamemaster. She's mostly stuck with *Dungeons & Dragons*, but has enjoyed dabbling in *Rifts*, *Vampire*, *Seventh Sea*, adventure and White Wolf LARPing, online RPGs, and the occasional homegrown system. When not studying for her PhD in political science at the Ohio State University, she can be found attending and performing at Renaissance Faires, knitting, horseback riding, reading fantasy fiction, and desperately trying to avoid being sucked into *World of Warcraft*.

Old Friends

by Christina Talley

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"Hail to you, pretty miss," said the bearded, stinking man.

The portly mage snorted and tugged at the arm of his bride. The Lady Priestess' fair eyes popped open as if to gasp at the vision they held.

"Dearest, wait," the lady said to her husband as she stared in awe at her addresser. "By the gods' words, is that truly you?"

What all young men want is easy to see: women and coins, and countless numbers of each. What ladies desire is a talented gentleman of wealth, despite what gossip or worried fathers might otherwise suggest. But ladies also need a man of delicate tastes and sensibilities that offset his power. They want an artist, if you would consider the term fitting for a youth proficient both with power and the style its use demands. And there is no true art aside from the Art Above Arts, the craftsmanship of magic.

Bryce Bywren had to choose between holding the power of creation and destruction with a breath and a motion, or overseeing olive sales. Was there truly ever a contest of which occupation was superior? Bywren Olives were good, for those who liked olives. Bryce Bywren hated olives. However, he did love women and gold coins.

Even in his first years at the wizards' seminary, the smallest tricks could bring him a few coins when he needed them. Soon he no longer needed to write home for his father's olive-stinking coins. As he advanced in his studies, his increasing

powers attracted the attention of others whose abilities were also budding. By his second spring term, Bryce made the acquaintance of many men and women on their way to momentous accomplishments.

He also met Skinks.

Skinks wanted the same thing Bryce did, that all young men of honest mind want: girls and gold. However, Skinks lacked that which Bryce had. Behind the young Master Bywren stood his forefathers and wealth grown on their olive trees. If Skinks' forefathers stood behind him, he would have found find his purse cut from his belt.

"Do you really recognize me still? I know I'll never forget your lovely face," said the tattered vagrant.

The Lady Priestess smiled at her lost friend, who she could still make out beneath his poverty. Although that cloak of misery covered him so heavily as to seem to suffocate him, under it the good woman saw again her once love. Her eyes brimmed with tears at his poor state and his continued flattery despite his circumstance.

"Oh, you poor thing," she cried, throwing her velvet-wrapped arms around him.

"Melina, don't touch him!" chastised her husband.

Skinks would do anything for coin. He once wondered aloud in my presence that it was a damned shame he wasn't born a girl, so that he could have his fun and gain coin at once, rather

than spending coin on fun. Regretting his sex didn't do him any good. Making nice with a mage boy did.

Being a target wasn't so hard. Being an errand runner wasn't such a poor job either. At least both were fairly legal, and at least they wouldn't get him hanged.

When Master Bywren finally finished his schooling, Skinks and I were the first to know. Bryce said, "I am going to buy you both a drink. Then I shall buy myself one. Then I am likely to buy quite a few more drinks. And for the first time, the tab will not go to my father," he said with a smile.

Melina ignored the concerns of her groom, searching her friend's body for signs of disease or injury.

"Oh, Melina, are you so worried about me?"

"Of course I worry about you! How are you? Do you need anything? A place to stay?"

The vagrant looked over the lady's shoulder to see her companion's gaping expression mold itself into a sterner resolve. "Melina, we can't let him stay with us! I mean... our room is so small."

She beamed down at him, ignoring her husband's feint, and caressed her lace-gloved palm across his bushy chin. She turned her soft, blue eyes up at her companion. "Lend me the purse, dear."

"What!"

"Darling," she said, her eyes glistening with pity. "We can't leave him like this. Not like this."

Skinks had been a good thief in his time. That's not to say that he was past his prime; Skinks thought he was in fact maturing. You can only be a street rat for so long, and if you can't be one of the powerful, he said, at the least you can tie yourself to someone who is. And if you hung out

” **Something went wrong. His mind slipped. His laughter distracted him. His training failed him. What was tame now was horribly free. Hungrily, it came toward us, its tormentors.** ”

long enough, the potentially powerful will buy you a drink.

It was a good drink. After several good, free drinks, we felt great. Skinks' master was now a fully-fledged mage. In no time, all of Master Bywren's promises would come true: wealth, power, women, and possibly apprenticeship, if Skinks showed any talent. Then he would have all that luxury, all that comfort that his master had. Yes, this was a great day.

Never had he seen such amazing things before. The graduating wizards rented out an entire tavern and, after a fair many drinks, began to display their capacities. One conjured up a shadowy form that lifted the skirts of the barmaids. Another called up a dog-like beast to tear at a girl's corset strings. One wench ran from the room screaming as a nearly substantial dragon breathed its transparent fire. I said nothing; the boys were having their well-merited amusement. My own staid studies had numbed my mind to common pleasures. How different things would have been had I kept my mind more perceptive that night.

We were having such a wonderful time. Bryce was in fine spirits, and it seemed nothing could bring him down. That was until his drink was spiked with the taste of offal.

He would show them, he muttered to us. He knew a spell he knew no one had ever seen before. It was just a conjuring spell, but he could see why it was not often shared. Disgusting and dangerous as the spell could be, most of those so-called masters of magic were definitely not worthy of such a powerful spell. But Bryce had the power, and that power would knock their boots off.

"He's a tramp, dear. He'll just spend it on drink and whores."

Melina looked back at the ruined man, her beautiful blue eyes still weeping. She took her silver blessed symbol, the white of the afternoon day ringing its holy form, and placed its weight in his hand.

"Although I already know the answer, swear for my husband's sake you will take this coin to better yourself and not to abuse my charity."

He cupped his filthy hands around the holy symbol. He felt his eyes also beginning to brim up as he said, "I swear, my lady."

The girls screamed like he had not imagined. I could only stare. Bryce staggered only slightly in surprise, but he continued to grin drunkenly as he maintained his mental hold on the creature.

Skinks dropped his ale mug at the sight. His hand covered his mouth as the creature's stench hit us. The dripping monster growled at the humans surrounding it, at the power-wielder who dared to summon and control it. Its flesh hungered for the wizard's life force; its soulless form desired, like no mortal desire known, to devour the living. Bryce laughed as his classmates fled screaming in fear. Skinks froze in terror. I began to weep.

"We live in Carthas now," she said.

"I always wanted to go there," he replied.

Her husband crossed his arms, eyeing his purse as his wife's generous hands emptied it.

"If you ever find yourself there, please seek us. You're more than welcome." Melina placed the

coins in the beggar's hands and sighed. "I wish I could do more."

"To see that you're well is enough," he said.

The mage huffed.

Something went wrong. His mind slipped. His laughter distracted him. His training failed him. What was tame now was horribly free. Hungrily, it came toward us, its tormentors.

Skinks could not think, could not move from his master's side. I, too, was petrified, clinging to Skinks without care for our castes. The groups of bawling patrons scattered like ice broken on a hot pan, shattering apart and evaporating away. I stared as a grin seemed to swell up on the face of the fetid abomination. My bowels chilled. That thing would enjoy eating us all.

Bryce fell back onto an ale-stained wall. His face was slack, his body weak with the terror of his fate. His eyes were empty, as if looking down into an endless void. His body failed to react to the oncoming beast. My holy training eluded me. Here it was, the beast my instruction had shaped me to defeat, and yet I could do nothing. I had no prayers. The promise of self-salvation seemed to vanish.

We stared, weak as babes, at the looming death. Skinks' eyes rolled to see his master, searching for a promise of deliverance. He saw that the man had wet his silk pants.

Yes, Skinks thought, the pants-wetter deserved to be scared. He deserved to get eaten. If he was stupid enough to bring that thing here, then Bryce was stupid enough to get chewed into nothing by it. Skinks knew he was many things, but he was neither stupid nor a pants-wetter.

Skinks pushed Bryce into the life-draining claws of the ghoul, grabbed my hand, and ran toward the door behind the creature.

The beast swatted at us, snagging my chain as I came abreast it. Its cold, clawed fingers tugged on my holy symbol; the monster clutched its holy form without fear. Glancing from its dead eyes to the symbol it clasped, I felt no comfort or strength in our gods. All their virtue abruptly meant nothing. This beast was going to eat me, soul and body, regardless of gods or man.

Skinks pulled me; the chain broke. We were out into the streets.

"After the... accident, I took care of him. Given his courage to save one of the Holy Order, the seminary adopted him during his recovery. He had nowhere else to go, so I made sure he was given good tending personally. He took up studies on his own time. He graduated just three moon phases ago." Melina's eyes seemed to apologize, although he knew no apology was needed.

"Take me home!" I cried to him. Skinks lifted me from my feet, carrying me across the chaotic city back to the seminary. Word of the monster in the tavern was spreading; the people were panicking.

I wept into the folds of his dusty, ale-stained tunic as he ran. The gods had failed me, my education had failed me, Bryce had failed me, and this common man, a thief, had saved me. The realization was cruel, menacing, and enlightening.

"Are you hurt?" he asked me.

He stood me on my feet. We were at the chapel doors. I meant to say I was actually unscathed and to politely thank him for his help.

I looked down at him. He was breathless. His hands trembled as he smoothed out my robes. His eyes were searching me over, full of fear, concern, and passion. I had never before seen a man so transparent in nature. There was no style or polish to this lowly man. Certainly, he was not a gentleman. I let him stay with me until dawn.

"We were married just after."

"I'm happy for you. For you both."

"We need to be going," he said putting an arm around his wife's waist. "Good to see you again."

"Likewise, Skinks," the sullied beggar said.

The mage sneered. "Call me Master SkiAx. Good day, Bryce."

He watched as the newlyweds continued their walk down the city street. He knew she was with a better man. Bryce was a lesser being than Skinks, by all accounts, even that of Melina's charity-filled heart. Even if he had made her an honest woman, he doubted he could have given her the honor of his exclusive affections. He had been a lustful youth, fully driven by his need for power, his desires for influence, coin, and female attention. Now he had none of those things. All had forsaken him. He spent it all on one spell, one spell that had consumed all his talents between the sapping jaws of a creature not meant to exist. He was a better person for it all, even if he was only a fraction of the man he once was.

Bryce smiled as he thought of what his first purchase would be: a jar of Bywren Olives fresh from the field.

INVASION OF THE TEMPLATES!

INVASION #6: OTHERDIMENSIONAL UGLIES

by Jerel Hass

case file #11: Cerberus

Based on Cerberus by David Tormsen

A Cerberus is an extradimensional organism with the ability to open and close doorways at will. A Cerberus usually has a purpose for its existence, a purpose given to it by the higher powers of Enochian magic. Cerberus has many roles, but the two most common are the guarding of doorways and ancient artifacts or the hunting of extradimensional creatures. These pertain only to the Guard and Hunter Cerberus; the rare wild Cerberus (below) care only for their own survival. A Cerberus set to guard will stay at its post constantly, watching for threats. They often guard doorways or ancient artifacts of arcane value in deep underground caves and labyrinths.

Cerberus, being extradimensional creatures, do not need sleep or sustenance as we know it, and thus do not suffer from fatigue and only sleep for healing purposes. They also have nearly endless life spans, so they can guard the same doorway for millennia and still be prepared to meet any threat.

Hunter Cerberus are responsible for capturing any entities that have escaped from their home dimensions and returning them to their proper places of existence. These include both the spirits of deceased humans, such as ghosts, and more malevolent creatures such as Bering demons. The ratio of Cerberus to such entities has always been low, and with the rise of the dark matter levels and the increased tendency for ghosts and demons to manifest, it has become even lower. Subsequently, Cerberus are often used to target individual

entities rather than being wasted as guards against every restless spirit and two-bit demon to walk the earth.

Wild Cerberus are known to exist, but they seem to be exceedingly rare. While like the Hunter and Guard varieties of Cerberus they have no need for physical sustenance, they seem to have developed a taste for extradimensional entities, Bering demons, ghosts and even Elohim. Thankfully, Wild Cerberus are very rare on Earth.

Combat

Tear: If the Cerberus succeeds in a bite attack with all three heads (a full attack), the Cerberus deals the additional damage listed.

Anchored Bite: Any creature bitten by a Hunter Cerberus must make a Constitution-based Will save (DC 21), or be considered under the effect of *dimensional anchor* as if cast by a level 8 sorcerer.

Spell-Like Abilities:

Guard: *gate, teleport, greater teleport, find path, long strider, locate object, dimension door* (at will).

Hunter: *blink, gate, greater teleport, dimension door, long strider, locate object* (at will).

Wild: *greater teleport, dimension door, long strider, locate object* (at will).

Tireless: Cerberus do not need to sleep and cannot suffer from any adverse fatigue affects.

Ghost Touch: The Cerberus can make bite attacks against incorporeal, without any penalty. Also, the Cerberus can attempt to grapple with incorporeal creatures by holding them in its jaws.

Description

Cerberus are large, three-headed hounds equipped with sharp teeth and claws. Their coat is rough

and scratchy, and colored brown or gray. They are a meter tall, a meter and a half from nose to tail and built like tanks. Other than the obvious three heads, the most distinguishing feature about Cerberus is its glowing white eyes.

Guard and Hunter Cerberus have cleaner coats and brighter eyes than their Wild cousins. Wild Cerberus are slightly larger, as well as mangier and possessing a pungent odor.

Encounter

When seeking Cerberus, an agent will most likely succeed near points of dimensional convergence. It is at these points, where the dimensional barriers are the weakest, that a Hunter Cerberus (chasing its prey) or a Guard Cerberus (placed to protect the weak dimensional point) are normally encountered. Unless you are the target of a Cerberus hunt or interfering with a Cerberus mission, the Cerberus are normally neutral to outside approach. If forced into combat, however, a Cerberus can be a vicious opponent. It will attack directly, snapping at its opponents with its three jaws, and sometimes scratching at them with its stubby claws. If its opponents retreat, it will let them go unless they have done something truly evil. A Guard Cerberus will never stray far from that which it is guarding.

These rules also change when a Hunter Cerberus encounters an extradimensional entity such as a ghost or demon on Earth. It will attack the entity unless the entity is able to convince the Cerberus otherwise. The Cerberus will attempt to bite onto the entity with at least two of its heads and hold it in place. Any penalties due to its opponents extradimensional nature (intangibility, etc.) is negated by the Cerberus' own nature. It will then open a small doorway (which more often than not appears as a glowing ring of fire suspended in the air) and drag the unfortunate entity through it. After a few moments, the Cerberus will emerge from the doorway, alone.

Cerberus cannot speak but can understand languages. Most Cerberus can comprehend Elohim as well as an additional human language. They appear to be able to perform certain spells, though they do not tend to rely on them.

Habitat/Society

Exempting for a moment the Guard Cerberus, who stay in the same location for millennia, most Cerberus wander the universe, fulfilling their missions. They have little society of their own. Most Cerberus are in constant contact with the higher powers of Enochian magic which direct them. Cerberus have been seen in the company of Elohim. There is one example on record of a Cerberus who had seemed to develop a close relationship with a Luciferan, but this may have been an isolated incident.

Wild Cerberus, lacking outside mastery, move across the universe in packs of between three and twelve, hopping from world to world by extradimensional doorways, seeking only freedom.

Adventure Hook

The heroes are sent to contact the spirit of a former colleague who was gunned down by assassins because of some information that only he possessed. Luckily, his spirit did not cross over to the other side, and he was able to contact the Hoffman Institute. The heroes have to meet the spirit of the deceased and get the information before he crosses over to the other side. Unfortunately, when they arrive at the site of the meeting, a large cemetery; they witness their ghostly contact being dragged through a ring of fire by a Cerberus. The Cerberus reappears several moments later, then runs off. Investigation reveals that a three-headed dog has been reported across the city, as have reports of a red-skinned humanoid with clawed hands and horns. Is this Cerberus in pursuit of a Luciferan, or a Bering demon? Will the heroes be able to convince the Cerberus to bring their deceased colleague back to the earthly realm long enough to get the critical information from him?

	Guard Medium Magical Beast	Hunter Large Magical Beast	Wild Large Magical Beast
Hit Dice:	12d10+24 (84hp)	14d10+48 (128hp)	16d10+56 (126hp)
Initiative:	+1	+1	+1
Speed:	30 ft.	40 ft.	60 ft.
Armor Class:	16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural)	18 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural)	15 (-1 size, +6 natural)
Base Attack/ Grapple:	+12/+17	+14/+22	+16/+25
Attack:	Bite +13 (1d6+1)	Bite +18 (1d8+4)	Bite +21 (1d8+5)
Full Attack:	3 Bites +13 (1d6+1)	3 Bites +18 (1d8+4)	3 Bites +21 (1d8+5)
Space/Reach:	10ft./5ft.	15ft./10ft.	15ft./10ft.
Special Attack:	Tear (3d6+3)	Tear (3d8+12), Anchored Bite	Tear (3d8+15)
Special Qualities:	Spell-like abilities, ghost touch, scent, tireless	Spell-like abilities, ghost touch, scent, tireless	Spell-like abilities, ghost touch, scent, tireless
Saves:	Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +9	Fort +14, Ref +9, Will +9	Fort +13, Ref +9, Will +8
Abilities:	Str 13, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 12	Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14	Str 21, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 5, Wis 8, Cha 12
Skills:	Listen +14, Spot +14, Search +10, Hide +14, Knowledge (Planes) +17	Listen +17, Spot +17, Search +14, Hide +14, Knowledge (Planes) +17	Listen +16, Spot +16, Search +12, Hide +14, Knowledge (Planes) +19
Feats:	Awareness, Lightning Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Improved Grapple	Awareness, Lightning Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Improved Grapple	Awareness, Lightning Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Improved Grapple, Improved Trip
Climate/Terrain:	Astral Plane	Astral Plane	Astral Plane
Organization:	Solitary	Solitary	Pack (3-12)
CR:	9	10	12
Alliance:	Owner	Dimensional	To the Pack

Interview with Paul S. Kemp

by Chris McCoy

Paul S. Kemp (<http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=books/bio/Paulkemp>) is a Michigan-based fantasy writer and is the author of four Forgotten Realms (FR) novels, including the concluding novel to R. A. Salvatore's "War of the Spider Queen" series, *Resurrection*. His Forgotten Realms novels are by far some of the darkest novels in the Realms, amongst them being *Dawn of Night*, *Shadow's Witness*, and *Twilight Falling*. He is also a practicing corporate lawyer and big time sports fan. The Silven Trumpeter recently had the chance to interview Paul via email and he was kind enough to answer our questions. Now enjoy the journey into the mind of fantasy writer Paul S. Kemp!

Thank you once again for taking the time to do this interview. Would you mind introducing yourself to our readers?

I'm Paul S. Kemp, a thirty-something FR author who lives with his family in Michigan. My wife recently gave birth to our twin boys and I could not be happier with life. Yankee baseball is my summertime passion, along with good scotch, good beer, good cigars, and good company.

What influenced you to become a writer and how has that affected your style of writing?

Reading, reading, and more reading. In the fantasy genre, I started with Tolkien in fifth grade (that's later than for many, I realize), followed that up with Fritz Leiber, and followed that with Moorcock's Elric tales and the other classics of the genre. I was a fantasy addict from then on. I even threw in some Doc Savage, but I found that pulp of that kind was really not for me.

Anyway, it's hard to pinpoint and isolate the influence that all of that has had on my writing. After all, everything you experience in life influences your writing in one way or another. I suppose that between Tolkien, Leiber and Moorcock (and their respective heirs), I got a nice feel for the different directions that fantasy could take, from Tolkien's epic fantasy, to Leiber's sword and sorcery, to Moorcock's anti-hero-driven dark fantasy. In some ways, my Erevis Cale stories are much more in line with Moorcock's Elric stories than they are with Tolkien or Leiber, but elements of the latter two are present, too.

Here's how I conceptualize my writing (and the fantasy genre, in general). Maybe you can derive some conclusions about influences from this. Fantasy is appealing because it posits a world where, in general, good and evil are clearly defined and moral certainty exists. I accept that kind of world and that role for fantasy, but find it interesting to write about 'heroes' who do not fit easily into the given moral framework. This, I think, is a somewhat delicate line to walk. Move too far into the realm of moral ambiguity and you may lose a lot of readers who read fantasy because they enjoy (consciously or unconsciously) the moral certainty that it offers. But move too far toward easy moral certainty and your book may become boring. Some writers navigate between these two poles with such deftness that I'm left astounded – G. R. R. Martin is one such.

When did you decide to become a writer?

That's a tough question. I don't remember ever having some epiphany that I wanted to be a writer. Instead, thinking about it now, it seems like it was more of a gradual process. I've always

written, though I did not do so in earnest until my undergraduate college years. As I improved, I guess it must have dawned on me one day that, yeah, I might be able to do this professionally. When that happened, I began to work hard at improving my skills. I joined some workshops, wrote, wrote, and wrote. Then.....see the question below.

How did you first get published?

After collecting a decent number of rejection slips for short stories and a novel I had written, I submitted what I thought was the best chapter of my novel to Wizards of the Coast. This was at a time when Wizards had an open submissions policy, but before they started holding formal open calls. One of the editors there liked my sample and asked me to contribute a proposal for an upcoming series, the Sembia Series. That's when I came up with [my character] Erevis Cale. The editor liked my proposal and gave me the job. That was my first professional print publication (I had an online sale or two of short stories prior to that), and Cale was born into the FR universe.

What other occupations have you had throughout life?

Oh boy! I've delivered pizza, loaded packages for United Parcel Service, worked for a laboratory, supervised a manufacturing line in a circuit board plant. The usual, get-through-college type of stuff, I guess.

You are the author of four Forgotten Realms novels. Which of your characters is your favorite and why?

Erevis Cale. No doubt. He's fun to write because he's a hardcore guy who is trying his best to do the right thing. But he never lets his desire to do the right thing get in the way of his actually doing the right thing, if you take my meaning. He's also struggling with faith, fate, and his place in the world. All of these are things that I can

sympathize with. It appears that lots of readers do, too.

You are also the writer of *Shadow's Witness*, the second novel in Wizards of the Coast's "Sembia" series. Can you tell us a bit about this novel and your experience writing it? What was it like to work with other Realms authors, such as Voronica Whitney-Robinson, Lisa Smedman, Richard Lee Byers, and Dave Gross?

It was great. Most of the collaboration occurred indirectly through our editor, Phil Athans, but many emails flew between the authors themselves. I now number Dave Gross and [Richard Lee Byers] as friends as well as respected colleagues. The experience was a good one for that alone.

Forgotten Realms fans around the world can't get enough of Erevis Cale, from the "Sembia" series and your "Erevis Cale Trilogy." What can you tell us about this character, and could you offer us some insight into the third and final book, *Midnight's Mask*? Any teasers?

It's hard to say too much about Cale without spoiling plot elements from the various books. He's constantly evolving, and I think that is the secret to his appeal. Check out the question above [regarding my favorite character] to get at least some insight into his character.

As for *Midnight's Mask*, it starts fast and keeps building up speed until the finale, which is the best ending to a book that I've ever written. As a teaser, I'll say only this: I think it will surprise readers. Sorry I can't offer much more.

One of my favorite Forgotten Realms books that you have written is *Resurrection*, the final book in R.A. Salvatore's "War of the Spider Queen" series. This series was

written with other Forgotten Realms authors, who include Richard Lee Byers, Thomas M. Reid, Richard Baker, Lisa Smedman, Phillip Athans, and of course, R.A. Salvatore himself. Now that all the novels have been released, please tell us what the experience was like.

Like Sembia, this experience was great, and allowed me to add R. A. Salvatore and Thomas M. Reid to my list of friends. Both are great guys.

In some ways, this was the hardest book I've ever written. I had to do a lot of research to prepare and the deadline was tight. Also, expectations among the fans were high. Because those expectations varied so greatly across a broad reader base, I had to remind myself that *Resurrection* could not satisfy all of them. If the story resulted in Event A, a host of readers would be unhappy; if it led to Event B (or not-A, for you logicians), another host of readers would be unhappy. Similarly for the fates of the characters. If character A died, some readers would be unhappy; if character A survived, some readers would be unhappy and would claim that I lacked the guts to kill him or her off. In the end, I decided to write the best story I could, focusing on the internal struggles of the characters. I'm exceedingly pleased with it and with the reception it's received.

What is your favorite novel of all time? Who is your favorite Forgotten Realms author, and what is your favorite novel?

Michael Swanwick's *Stations of the Tide*, because it makes you think long, long after you've put the book down. *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco is a close second.

And all FR authors are my favorite. I will admit, however, that the *Icwind Dale Trilogy* forever holds a special place in my memory.

What do you feel is your strongest novel that you have written to date?

That's a toss up between *Twilight Falling* and *Resurrection*.

What preparations do you make when preparing to work on a new writing project?

I do any relevant research – whether from other novels or sourcebooks – and then outline. I'm a big believer in outlining and mine tend to run long. I do not adhere slavishly to it – if the story needs to divert from where I thought I was taking it, so be it – but I've found it to be an invaluable tool.

Do you have any new projects that you can tell us about?

Sure. I'm in the process of writing a novella for inclusion in the upcoming *Realms of Elves*, an anthology tied to Rich Baker's *Last Mythal Trilogy*. I'm also beginning the process of writing my next FR trilogy, one that will feature the survivors of the first "Erevis Cale Trilogy", and that will revolve around a Realms Shaking Event. Should be fun. In between those projects, I'm writing a novel entirely my own – kind of a religious thriller.

What advice would you offer to aspiring writers who want to get published in the fantasy genre?

Read, read, read; then write, write, write. Understand going in that breaking into the business is hard and is sometimes the result of pure luck. You will get rejected – often. Deal with it and learn from them. It is probably not the case that your work is too sophisticated for the rejecting editor to understand. Instead, it is probably the case that the market you chose was the wrong one for your story, or that the writing needs improvement.

I found it quite helpful to join an online writers' workshop. There are many and they are free. Getting your work critiqued by someone other than friends and family is often eye-opening and productive.

The market is very tough right now from all I understand, so if you REALLY want to write, in the sense that you've got that fire in your gut that won't let you NOT write, then be prepared to persevere for a long while. It will be rewarded.

If you could go back and change one thing about your career as a writer, what would it be?

You know, I wouldn't change anything. I'm about as pleased as I could reasonably expect to be at this point in my career.

I hear you are a big sports fan. What appeals to you about sports and which sports do you enjoy?

I'm hyper-competitive, so that's what appeals to me about sports. It gives me a vent for my competitive nature.

I'm mostly a fan of baseball and football, but I do watch the Pistons and Wings come playoffs. In terms of what I play these days: leagues and tournaments in softball (I play left field and hit third or clean up) and wallyball (which is much like volleyball, but played with only three or four members per team on a racquetball court).

Are you a gamer? What gaming systems and settings do you play, if any? Care to share any gaming memories with us?

I am a definitely a gamer. Over the years, I've played just about all fantasy roleplaying games, from *Man, Myth and Magic*, to *Runequest*, to *Tunnels and Trolls*, to *D&D*. We

play mostly *D&D* and mostly in FR, but I'm about to start a *Warhammer v.2* campaign. Gaming memories are only funny when you're there, so I better keep those to myself or my would-be funny story will leave a resounding thud in the interview.

Besides writing and sports, what are some of the other things you enjoy in life?

The company of my wife, my boys, and my friends. Intellectual debate, especially about political theory. Good cigars, Glenlivet scotch, French wine and British beer. A good drama (I'm not a fan of comedy), whether a movie or TV show. A tense, extra-inning ballgame with implications for the post-season. A fire providing the only light in an otherwise darkened room. Classical music. Jazz. Blues. Rain at dusk.

What are some of your goals in life?

Hmm. On a personal level, I want to be a good husband and father. In particular, I want to provide my boys with a grounding in concepts that are not currently in favor in our culture – behaving honorably, acting chivalrously.

Professionally, I'd like to retire from the law in the next five to seven years to pursue writing full time. I'd like to revisit the [New York] Times' bestseller list with my Cale stories. I hope take the family to visit every major league ballpark.

If you could go back and change one thing about your career as a writer, what would it be?

You know, I wouldn't change anything. I'm about as pleased as I could reasonably expect to be at this point in my career.

And finally, the age old question. Which is better: Guinness or Guinness "Black and Tan"?

I'll take my Guinness unadulterated, thank you.

I would like to thank Paul S. Kemp on the behalf of the Silven Trumpeter for taking the time to answer this interview.

A chalk-drawn illustration of a graveyard at night. In the center is a large, rectangular tombstone with the word "CURSES!" written on it in a jagged, blocky font. To the left of the tombstone is a tall, thin, conical monument with a circular top. In the background, there are several other tombstones of various shapes and sizes, some with arched openings. The scene is set in a dark, grassy field with some bare trees and a dark sky. The overall style is dark and atmospheric, using white chalk on a dark background.

by Eytan
Bernstein

Curses! is a comprehensive d20 guide to the use of curses, hexes and other magical afflictions. ***Curses!*** provides background material for expanding the notion of curses in your game and includes several new prestige classes, new feats, spells, and a number of variant options. From voodoo dolls to sweating blood, ***Curses!*** is everything you need to torment your PCs or spice up your favorite evil game! If evil isn't your style, there are also a variety of tools for vengeance and punishment and material to make your NPCs more interesting.

Curses! is not only useful to spellcasters but also to other classes. There are options for traditional hexers as well for those looking to add a little misery to their character - or that of others. The book also offers some rules that clarify and expand the existing d20 curse rules.

Curses! features the following:

- ▶ Background material for curses based on many traditions including: Ancient Greece, the Judeo-Christian Tradition, Voudoun and the Evil Eye
- ▶ A list of spells from the core rule books which gain the curse subtype - a new subtype for magical spells
- ▶ Variant rules on the use of the curse subtype
- ▶ New uses for the bestow curse and mark of justice spells
- ▶ 17 new spells for bards, clerics, druids, paladins, rangers and sorcerer/wizards.
- ▶ 12 new feats
- ▶ 4 new prestige classes

Reviews, Reviewsreviews!

Vampire: the Requiem - Nomads

This book is very simple in its ideas, layout, and execution. This simplicity is what makes this book damn near perfect. It is what it need to be and tries to be nothing else...

page 30

Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne

Tékumel is based in a setting unlike any other I have ever played in or read about...

page 31

Exalted: House of the Bull God

Being as that this title contains information on a fairly limited region, the book has only a limited scope of use. This can really only be fully used if the characters are traveling through the Southern nation of Harborhead...

page 33

How we rate

Scoring definitions for d20 products:

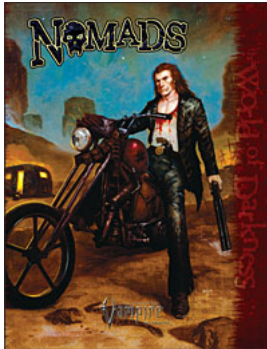
18 = Superior. *Best of the best.*
16 = Very Good. *Part of a Baker's Dozen.*
14 = Good. *Most gamers would like this.*
12 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*
10 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*
8 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*
6 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*
4 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:

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

read on...

Vampire: the Requiem - Nomads



Authors: Brian Campbell, Patrick O'Duffy, & Greg Stolze

Publisher: White Wolf Publishing [<http://www.white-wolf.com/index.php>]

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: March 16th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes.

Nomads is one of the first supplements for *Vampire: the Requiem*. This is a 128-page hardcover with black & white interior illustrations, most of which are by artists I am not familiar with - Aleksi Briclot, Shane Coppage, Rik Martin, Ben Timplesmith, Andy Trabold (a familiar name), and Cathy Williams. The cover illustration was provided by Brom.

From the Back Cover

Exile me? Fools!

It is you who are the exiles, trapped in this festering cell of a city. I go where I please and call no Prince master. I have wandered the wilderness and I know its terrors well. Can you say the same?

-Heinrich Diehl, unbound nomad.

This book includes:

- An in-depth look at Kindred who forsake the rule of Princes and seek their fortunes as nomads, traveling from city to city.
- Breakdowns by clan and covenant, including new Cruac and Theban Sorcery rituals and nomadic Devotions.
- Numerous plot hooks and a detailed sample story, illustrating the temptations – and perils – of the road.

Presentation

The cover of *Nomads* features a blood-stained man, a vampire, sitting on a somewhat busted motorcycle and holding a sawn-off shotgun. In the background, one can see a number of burning objects.

All of the interior art work is black and white. Most of the pieces are half page, either across the page or taking up the space of one full column of text.

Content

This book is very simple in its ideas, layout, and execution. This simplicity is what makes this book damn near perfect. It is what it need to be and tries to be nothing else.

Nomads is broken down into four chapters and an appendix.

Also, specific character creation tips are provided. These can cover everything from how to spend attribute points to what specific backgrounds are a good idea and what kinds of supernatural powers one can possess (in the instances that there are actually powers).

Chapter One – The Call of the Road

Wanderlust is not determined by one's clan or covenant. Anyone, vampire or human, can be struck with this sensation. Being as that vampires can live forever, it is much harder for a vampire to

stay in one place for his entire existence. Travel is more difficult, however, since they are feared by man and must cower from the sun.

One's clan and covenant do hold some sway over all facets of a vampire's "life." This being the case, some aspects of a nomadic vampire's existence are easily classified or determined by these things. Gangrel are always outsiders. This makes a nomadic existence quite natural for them. The Ventrue have a much harder time beginning travel and keeping on the road, however. Sometimes the Nosferatu are forced from their homes, forced to flee and live as a hermit or nomad. Those are just a few examples of clan influence. Covenants follow similar patters.

Chapter Two – Those Who Wander

Why anyone travels as a nomad is not easy to classify as a whole. Each and every individual does it for his or her own reason. This chapter breaks down, mostly by reason or mental ideology, why these people take to the road. Some are Hunters in the darkness. Others are exiled from their homes and forced to move on.

Techniques on survival are also provided, since vampires tend to congregate to one another, at least to some degree.

Chapter Three – Surviving in the Wild

Chapter Two touched upon tactics. This chapter is chock full of advice on how NPCs could and PCs should endure the existence of an outsider. There are a great many pitfalls for anyone, even the greatest hunter, when constantly on the road, in foreign territory, in enemy territory. Travel, feeding, shelter, and much more are covered here.

Also provided are the "crunchy" bits of this book. Nearly twenty new Rituals and Devotions are provided for nomadic characters to utilize.

Chapter Four – Notable Nomads

Here we have a who's who of nomadic vampires. A full dozen characters are provided for "road" stories. There is enough information on each and every one that each character could easily be used as an ally or an enemy.

Conclusion

The title is fairly narrow. If you planning on sticking to cities, even for the most part, this book is skippable. If taking a chronicle on the road is appealing to you, however, this book would be a great investment.

Archetype: Character Supplement

Body 9 (*Game Mechanics*): The core rules are followed.

Mind 11 (*Organization*): It does not get much better.

Spirit 9 (*Look & Feel*): Some of the art was lacking. There could have been a little more art, too.

Attack 8 (*Value of Content*): \$25 for a book this thin is a bit much.

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): Some was expected, some was not.

Health 10 (*Physical Quality*): The only damage I would expect to ever see are banged corners.

Magic 7 (*Options & Adaptability*): Fairly narrow use.

Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne



Created by: Professor M.A.R. Barker

Authors: Patrick Brady, Joe Saul, & Edwin Voskamp with additional material from Bob Alberti, M.A.R. Barker, Barbera Kennedy, Lisa Leutheuser, Jeff Mackintosh, & Victor Raymond

Publisher: Guardians of Order [<http://www.guardiansorder.com>]

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: April 11th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. There have been previous attempts at a Tékumel RPG in the past. I have no experience with them so I can not compare this version to any of the others.

Tékumel is a science-fantasy universe that M. A. R. Barker developed over the course of 50 years. This is not the standard science-fantasy setting or roleplaying game. It is rich in its own background, unlike anything I have ever read (or experienced in any other format, for that matter).

Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne is a 238-page hardback that offers complete Tri-Stat derived rules for this highly original setting. This is not the first time a publisher has attempted to capture Tékumel as an RPG but I do believe that this will be the most successful, thanks to the inherent flexibility of the system.

From the Back Cover

Experience the Revival...

In a pocket universe, millennia removed from our own lives, lies a system of five planets engineered by forgotten planetary-scale technologies. The vibrant world of Tékumel, once a busy interstellar crossroads, terra-formed to suit the needs of its brutal rulers, was isolated over 30,000 years ago when the stars went out. What emerged from this Time of Darkness was a world forged in disaster, but strong in custom, history, life...and death.

Professor M. A. R. Barker has devoted over 50 years to creating the Tékumel universe, developing it into a vivid science-fantasy setting with rich backgrounds and unique cultural identities. Inspired not only by the pulp SF and fantasy of the mid-20th Century, but also by the rich civilizations of Moghul India, Ancient Egypt, and the Aztecs, Tékumel sets the stage for a roleplaying experience unlike any other.

This core rulebook features a system derived from the popular Tri-Stat System, customized to enhance the intricate setting of Tékumel's Five Empires. Inside you'll find non-human templates, a new magic system, alternate combat options, details on clans and military/priesthood service, a select bestiary, and much more. Whether you are a long-time devotee of Barker's work, or a player new to the setting, join us in celebrating the revival of Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne.

Presentation

The cover illustration contains two major points of detail. The largest is a man in what appears to be royal garb. He is wearing an armor vest of gold with two flowing capes from the back. His crown is also golden but features a number of skulls. No, this is not a pleasant looking man (though he is well-illustrated). I wouldn't cross him, that's for sure. Superimposed over the lower half of that man is another man. He is dressed far more



image copyright © M.A.R Barker

shabbily. His clothes are more rags than a robe. He looks as if he is fleeing something or someone. He is pictured much smaller than the first man. In fact, thanks to the size of the two individuals and the position of the royal man's hands, the first looks as if he is manipulating the latter as a marionette.

There are a number of different types of black & white illustrations within the pages of this title. Despite the number of styles, they all fit the feel of the universe that has been so carefully created. Llyn Hunter, Eric Lofgren, Jennifer Meyer, Chris Miscik, Jesse Mohn, Torstein Nordstrand, Andrew Trabbold, and Ursula Vernon all contributed illustrations to the book. I must warn, just as the back cover does, that some of the illustrations may be deemed offensive by some people. A number of illustrations feature nude and partially nude individuals. Said illustrations are not done for the shock value. They are all done in taste and

properly reflect the various civilizations.

Also contained is a full color, pull-out map of the primary playing areas. The cartography on here is quite nice. The map is divided into areas controlled by different peoples.

Setting

Tékumel is based in a setting unlike any other I have ever played in or read about. It is not based on the typical European culture. It has an intense Indian feel and, as the back cover clearly states, draws much inspiration

from Moghul India, Ancient Egypt, and the Aztecs. Also, though the setting is filled with a great number of humans, they are not the only race. The alien races that are featured here are far from human. These two factors can make *Tékumel* a difficult game to play or even conceptualize. I have experience with a great number of roleplaying games. Even I had trouble really understanding the game and setting at first.

Though the peoples of *Tékumel* are derived from advanced humans from Earth, they are now technologically low. The easiest way to picture the society, for me at least, is to think of ancient Egyptian or Aztec culture – just with a major lack of metal. The technology is low, it is hot (damn hot), one's clan is one's family, and the cities are made up of temples, pyramids, and other impressive stone buildings.

Another tough idea for many to grasp is the idea of ethics in *Tékumel*. There is not much of a set code of actions or ethics. Instead, one's personal

code sets ethics. So long as one's actions are consistent, those actions are noble. This is an easy fact for players to take advantage of and a big one for GMs to watch out for.

The society is somewhat caste-driven. One is born into a clan and some clans are considered higher than others. If you are born into a higher clan than someone else, you are instantly more respected than them. The GM can choose to set the game within a specific clan or allow players to choose their own from the vast list (there are over 100 clans listed in the text).

Characters

While a number of the facets of the character, such as character concept, are much like those of other roleplaying (and specifically other Tri-Stat) games, *Tékumel* uses just as many unique steps and sides.

One necessary step is choosing a clan, since each character is a member of a clan, with some exception. One's clan determines standing in life and status in the eyes of society. The clan-less are much like serfs, individuals who are nigh-worthless in the eyes of others.

Religion is another major factor in the lives of characters. There are twenty deities given. Most characters worship any given one of these gods.

A pool of points is divided among the character's stats to determine value. This is much like other Tri-Stat games though not exactly the same since this is Tri-Stat derived.

The same pool of points that is used for stats is used for Attributes: special, well, attributes that are unique to each individual. These attributes range from physical beauty (Attractive) to combat prowess (Multiple Weapon Use).

Once 'who the character is' is determined by stats and attributes, a player needs to figure out 'what the character can do' via skills. A separate pool of

points is distributed among skills for this purpose. They range from what languages the character knows to how well he can fight and how well he can cook to how well he can seduce.

Beyond these numbers, there are others that are derived from existing numbers and previous choices (such as clan).

If one needs more points, defects can always be chosen. These apply negatives directly to numbers or hinder the character only in specific situations. Different defects give a different number of points that can be spent on stats or attributes.

Not everyone in *Tékumel* is human. There are four very alien races that are described and given stats. Most of these aliens are looked down upon by most of society because they are so different. To the players, this is also negative aspect. Because they are so inhuman, they can be difficult to play. Be sure to take great care if you are playing as one of these non-humans.

System

The game's system is derived from the Tri-Stat system. Normally, there are three stats within this system. In *Tékumel*, those three stats are classifications of types of stats. Each classification holds two stats each for a total of six stats. Body consists of Strength and Dexterity, Mind contains Intelligence and Psyche, and Soul holds the stats Charisma and Willpower.

Beyond the stats, skills are a great part of the system. Any time skills (or just stats) need to be rolled against, a single d10 is used. This is another difference from the 'normal' Tri-Stat system which utilizes two dice.

Generally speaking, for more simple tasks, if your character has the ability to do something and you feel the rating is sufficient to do it, a roll is not necessary. This is the intent of the system, but, of course, the game need not be run that way.

Conclusion

From what I can gather, this is the best representation of M. A. R. Barker's universe thus far as far as roleplaying games go. I have no experience with the others, so I can't really say for sure. What I can say is that this is a very clean game and a clean system.

The universe is well thought-out (and after 50+ years it should be) and well executed. It is diverse and exciting. Because of those facts, it deserves a solid RPG. Guardians of Order has delivered with this execution of Barker's work.

It may be a difficult game to run and to play but that difficulty makes it all worth it. It is a different type of roleplaying experience thanks to this unique setting.

Archetype: Core Book

Body 10 (*Game Mechanics*): The Tri-Stat derivative is clean.

Mind 11 (*Organization*): Beautiful. About perfect, actually.

Spirit 10 (*Look & Feel*): The art is perfect for the setting.

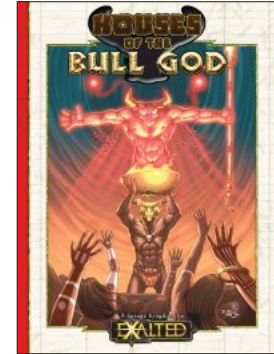
Attack 8 (*Value of Content*): It is a little pricy for the page count - \$40.

Defense 9 (*Originality of Content*): Nice take on the licensed setting.

Health 10 (*Physical Quality*): Damn solid. Bent corners and minor scratches on cover are all the damage I'd expect to see.

Magic 9 (*Options & Adaptability*): It is a huge universe with many possibilities.

Exalted: House of the Bull God



Authors: Michael Kessler, Geoffrey Skellams, Andrew Watt, and Voronica Whitney- Robinson
Publisher: White Wolf Publishing [<http://www.white-wolf.com/index.php>]

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: April 11th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: I have been playing and thoroughly enjoying Exalted for about three years now. This title was received both for play and review.

The latest setting book for *Exalted*, *House of the Bull God* is a 125-page perfect-bound trade paperback with black & white interior art from some familiar faces (and some not so familiar ones) such as Ed Bourelle, Ross Campbell, Sherard Jackson, and UDON (with Greg Boychuck Noi Sackda, Chris Stevens, and Jim Zubkavich). The cover art here is provided by UDON with Roberto Campus and Jim Zubkavich.

From the Back Cover

Driven by the War God

Created by the machinations of Ahlat, the Southern God of War, Harborhead is a nation in turmoil. A state built on conquest and blood sacrifice, it has had its warlike, expansionist tendencies and

intertribal violence curtailed by the Realm's force of arms. Its armies conquered, its people enslaved and its resources stolen to enrich the Empress' coffers, Harborhead has suffered under the Realm's yoke for hundreds of years.

Exploited by the Realm

House of the Bull God details the nation of Harborhead, a long-time satrapy of the Realm. Though subjugated by the Scarlet Empire, its Five Peoples yet harbor dreams of freedom – and of conquest. Now, with the Empress gone and the Great Houses busy preparing for civil war on the Blessed Isle, the opportunity to realize those dreams seems to be at hand. But the realm isn't likely to give up such a rich territory without a fight. Inside are presented the important players on both sides of this coming conflict and the War God Ahlat and his retinue, the only ones who will profit from the impending struggle regardless of its outcome.

Presentation

The cover features a man wearing a golden mask in the shape of a bull's head. He is holding a large golden bowl. From this bowl spouts flame and (much more impressively) a fiery image of a bull-headed humanoid. There are bits and pieces of a number of individuals in the foreground who seem to be worshipping this image.

Each page, sans the chapter opening image pages, has along its top border an image of individuals, and the outside edge has the same oriental-like characters that have become familiar thanks to past books and especially the hardback titles. (If I remember correctly, this alphabet can be found in the *Exalted Player's Guide*.)

Content

Being as that this title contains information on a fairly limited region, the book has only a limited scope of use. This can really only be fully used if

the characters are traveling through the Southern nation of Harborhead. This title is very closely related to *Blood and Salt*, which details the southwestern island nations.

This book is divided into a meager three chapters. Each chapter is somewhat loosely bound but still contains related information. This does make each chapter somewhat broad, though.

The Land of Harborhead, the first chapter, contains details on the lands themselves as well as the people who live there.

Even though they are all besieged by the people of the Realm, the Five Peoples of the area wage war with each other as well. While very few differences are seen among these peoples from outsiders (such as individuals from the Realms), they all see the differences among themselves.

Each of the groups is a large collection of tribes who seem to draw much influence from Ancient Egyptians and the Aztecs as far as society, outer appearance, construction style, etc., with some influence from Asian culture and a hint of European culture, as well. The Brakhani are a fierce people, since they hold bravery in high regard. The weak are culled from the ranks when they come of age. The Izhalvi contain the most people but the tribes are somewhat scattered to the winds. They are philosophers and hold the elderly in high regard. The Krantiri are fishermen who hold cleverness in highest order. The Shayanti hold the most political power and wealth. They are also the primary connection to the Realm. Finally, the Totikari are a migratory people and have learned to help one another and anyone else who might be in need of assistance.

The battles among these peoples becomes understandable when the fact that there is only a limited amount of space for all of these people and that this space is divided into four regions. 4 regions + 5 groups wanting a region = trouble.

The general view of society also makes this difficult. There are two castes of people here: warriors and slaves. No one wants to be a slave (would you?) so everyone strives to be a warrior. Only war becomes possible with a society consisting solely of warriors.

This chapter also contains a number of major individuals' backgrounds and Adventure Seeds. The adventure seeds make the book much more useful, as they offer in black and white terms how to use the book as a major asset and not just a brief travel guide.

The next chapter, The Imperial Garrison, describes the Realm in regards to its involvement with the region. The main city here, Harborhead, is discussed as it is the primary seat of power in the region for the Realm. Harborhead contains the Imperial Garrison (a big shock, since it's the name of the chapter, isn't it) and it contains an Imperial palace. This is the satrap's palace. The satrap is the Realm's primary representative in the region. A good number of other Dragon-Blooded Exalts also live within the Garrison. Multiple houses of Terrestrials reside here. The 47th Legion is stationed in the Garrison, too. As one can see, the Realm has attempted to keep as much of its local power in one place as possible.

This chapter also contains a few Adventure Seeds.

The final chapter, Gods, Monsters, and Manses, contains information on, well, the Gods, the monsters, and their Manses. Ahlat, 'the God of War and Cattle' (can you guess what shape his head is?) is a powerful individual who has powerful friends and enemies. He has had a sordid past (and present).

As interesting as the discussion of the gods goes (and it is interesting. I'm not being sarcastic), the discussion on a new type of Fair Folk is even better. The Lion Folk don't have a ton of information but I can't wait to use them as adversaries in an adventure.

So, we've had gods and monsters. What about Manses? They round out this chapter along with their sisters, Demenses. There are nine Manses and Demenses that are fully detailed and described.

The appendix contains data on a few different fiery beasties that seem like they'll be a lot of fun to play with. I'm not going to spoil any of the fun about these guys for anyone by giving away the details.

Conclusion

House of the Bull God has a lot of information for a somewhat limited area. This makes any adventure in that area quite detailed and complete. If outside of that limited area, though, the book is just about useless. I feel the book has very little use for most groups, at least on a heavy use scale. It will only see a couple of sessions in most games or even a few sessions in a game that has a 'lay over' in the region. Of course, it will see constant reference if the game takes place in that area. In that regard, this title is either nigh useless or completely invaluable.

Archetype: Setting Book

Body 9 (*Game Mechanics*): Some new info.

Mind 7 (*Organization*): Only three chapters.

Spirit 10 (*Look & Feel*): The feel of the book is great for the setting.

Attack 9 (*Value of Content*): \$22 for 120+ pages but has limited use even with the story seeds.

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): Unique within setting.

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

Magic 7 (*Options & Adaptability*): This is a fairly limited setting and therefore a somewhat limited use title.

RACES OF TWILIGHT

The Green

by Michael Thompson



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Deep in the forests of the the world, the legendary tree men stir as their world is threatened by the humanoid races. Their numbers dwindle as the centuries pass, but their will to survive is strong. Can they protect themselves and the natural world from fire, magic, and steel, or will they and their lore pass into the twilight?

Races of Twilight: The Green is the first in a series of d20 racial toolkits. Not simply a collection of elf and dwarf variants, the Races of Twilight series provides detailed information on unique and original player races that can be incorporated into any fantasy campaign. While intended for the experienced gamer who enjoys deep characterization and role-playing over one-dimensional heroics and “roll-playing,” **Races of Twilight: The Green** can be used by anyone who likes unusual characters.

Each of the races presented are in some way approaching the final phase of their cultural, political, or physiological development and are slowly fading from the world. Some have fallen into decadence and apathy; others have lost their dominance and position in a world of multiracial empires; still others have been crushed by disease, overpopulation, or magical travails. Whether each races dies and is forgotten or overcomes its difficulties and thrives is in the hands of players and DMs.

While each book provides numerous details on a new race, plenty of room is left for DMs to develop a unique background and role for that race in his campaign world.

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Next month, look for Part II of Joel Oberdieck's review of *GURPS 4th Edition*, a look at the *Campaigns* core book. Add to your games with creatures, characters, locales and more from the Silven Bestiary and the Invasion of the Templates. Starlanko is "Going Home" in his next installment, and you'll see new short fiction from Khaz Axson and Kosala Ubayasekara. That's not all, but we'd spoil the surprise for you if we told you everything we have planned! Make sure to check out the August issue of the Silven Trumpeter for all the fun!