

The Silven

# Trumpeter

The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

## Gary Gygax Talks About the OGL

In this month's debate column Mr. Gygax takes a scathing look at the OGL

Page 3

## Antipodean Adventures

Shane Cubis visits Gallipoli in this month's edition of his column

Page 31

# COVER STORY

## Silven Publishing opens its doors!

Page 19

silven **P**ublishing



## Sound off!

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

Write to Dana at : [adriayna@yahoo.com](mailto:adriayna@yahoo.com)

## Letters to the Editor

Just wanted to drop you a line to congratulate you on a fine ezine! I discovered the **Silven Trumpeter** a couple of weeks ago through a link from Heather Grove's Burning Void website ([www.burningvoid.com](http://www.burningvoid.com)). I have been following gaming from afar for over 20 years - mainly because I could never find a gaming group in my small hometown. I was able to finally join a gaming group a few years ago and in order to "catch up" with my gaming mates, I got a subscription to *Dragon* magazine. Imagine my disappointment to discover that, rather than cover the RPG world, it only covered *WoTC D&D*. I resigned myself to web surfing to find out about the latest non-*D&D* games. Then I found your site! I have downloaded all your *Silven Trumpeter* issues and am working my way backwards from issue #10.

... continued on page 9

# From the Editor

## Rule-playing vs. Role-playing

Recently I've been rather fed up with "the rules." Regardless of what game you are playing, it seems that "the rules" get in the way of a good story and good role-play. Some gamers seemingly have the rules so ingrained into their minds that role-playing takes a back seat. Even for games that are more rules-lite, the rules seem to form a box of limitations around what players can and can't do.

I encountered this recently running a d20 session of my own. While d20 in no way is propagated as a rules-lite system, it never hurts to try to expand it into something more. Inspired by J. Carpio's new column in this month's *Trumpeter*, I decided to add a bit of spice and cinema to my own games. In this particular instance, a monk character was fighting off an animated object and any blow would have dropped it. So after the character scored a successful hit I said to the player, "Name your finishing move." The player just stared at me. "What?" he said. "Did I kill it?" Shaking my head, I said again, "You got it, now name your finishing move." Again the player looked at me weird and remained silent. Finally I just sighed and gave a cool description of the finishing strike.

This problem of "the rules" seems even more evident in d20 when we see the appearance of books like *The Warrior's Strategy Guide* (Goodman Games). This book takes each feat and combination and does a statistical analysis to find the best combo for the highest output of damage. Going beyond normal min-maxing, this book take it to an extreme. Perhaps some gamers would welcome a statistical analysis of what feat combos are best to maximize a fighter. Some may even argue that this game is all about numbers.

Uh... aren't we missing something? Since when did RPGs get renamed "rule-playing games?" In any group you'll find your rules lawyers, your power games...but

with products like these, it seems that min-maxing is becoming more of a hindrance to the hobby as a whole.

I'm not suggesting that we revolt and burn our rulebooks, but perhaps we should take the time to think about what this genre is really about. Is it about maximizing your character's potential in combat, or is it about creating an interesting and unique character to play?

This month's *Silven Trumpeter* is packed full of juicy tidbits for your games, news, advice, and reviews. Our extended feature this month centers on the announcement of Silven Publishing with a sneak peek at one of Silven Publishing's upcoming products. This month we also have a host of great fiction, including *The Maid on the Shore* by Christian R. Bonawandt as well the newest *Starlanko the Magnificent* adventure by Matthew J. Hanson. We also have two new article writers this month—J. Carpio (*Lights, Camera, Action!*) and Melissa Piper (*Modern Gaming: An Alternative to Medieval Settings*).

Finally, I want to give a warm welcome to Laura Heilman as the new assistant editor for the *Silven Trumpeter*.

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

*Dana Driscoll*

Editor In Chief  
Silven Crossroads E-zine

by Gary Gygax and Kosala Ubayasekara

## Chatting with Gary Gygax

Welcome to the 13th edition of our regular monthly debate and informational pieces done in collaboration with Mr. Gary Gygax, the original creative mind behind the Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game. This month we discuss the open gaming license and its implications.

**Q1) We know from previous columns with you that you are not a great advocate of open licenses. Before we delve into the details of this lets define your views on this using the OGL as our standard discussion point. Are you against open licenses like the OGL in any form or is it one factor of the licensing model that you think is poor?**

It is my opinion in general that an open license is worth every penny paid for it, and returns to the grantor full value for the material offered in the deal.

**Q2) WoTC have on many occasions maintained that they went ahead with the OGL to relieve themselves of the all the burden of creating add-ons to the D&D universe so that they could focus on the core products. Is this not in essence a good idea?**

If a company cannot walk and chew gum at the same time, then the reasoning is sound. Otherwise, I think it is no more than an excuse to cover an inability to create and produce quality adventure material. If course support material does not have the same profitability as do core books, but the publisher of a game system can certainly manage to generate some income from superior support products, and that is owed to the fans of the game system.

**Q3) Now a downside to the OGL is, of course, the mass of mediocre products to hit the marketplace immediately following the release of the license. No doubt this contributes in the short term to a dilution of the brand and a weakening**

**of the market quality. However do you not think that in the long term better products will emerge out of necessity and slowly out compete the poor products, thus reestablishing the strength of the brand AND a larger selection of products for the consumer? Are we not seeing this happen today on a small scale?**

I totally disagree with the basic assumption in this question. Why should it have been necessary initially to flood the marketplace with poor products? What guarantee of quality is the D20 logo on future products? There is no quality control involved in regards either the D20 or OGL, so the marks generally only identify material that can be used with whatever new version of the D&D game is current. Finally, what value is there in having a large selection of support material of varying, mostly questionable quality? Quantity of this sort is not valuable in regards to support products, and there is no way for quality to be assured.

**Q4) What are your views on WoTC redefining the license after its release to shut out certain types of content and is this is a manifestation of one of the weaknesses in open licenses like the OGL?**

There's little for me to say about this. I concur that the license grants undue license, and the lack of control WoTC is willing and able to exercise over content is evident. That they put in some minimal decency standards is refreshing in my view.

Had WoTC retained control over their IP, and issued only specific licenses to qualifies publishers for development and production of support material, quality would be assured. The D&D logo would have gained further recognition by appearing on such products, and thus all concerned, consumers included, would have benefited.

The excuse that WoTC could not afford to control licensees' product content is not valid. Income from royalties paid for

### About the Authors

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

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

### Contact the Authors

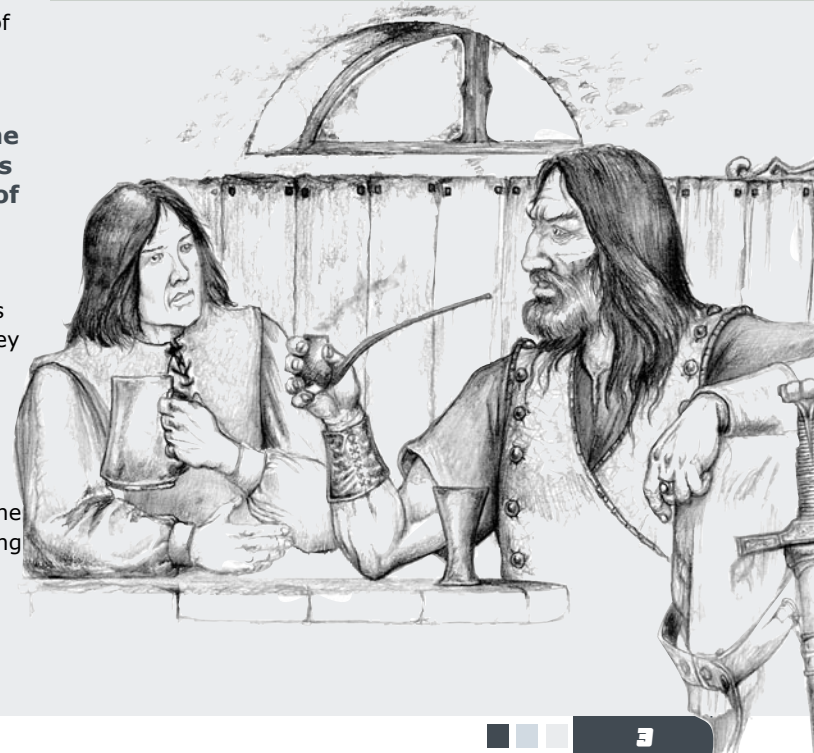
Kosala can be contacted at [kosala@silven.com](mailto:kosala@silven.com). Mr Gygax's email is not printed here for privacy reasons.

### About the Artist

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

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use of the D&D game material and logo would surely pay the cost for employees hired to review manuscript material submitted for approval prior to publishing.

**Q5) You have mentioned on numerous occasions that WoTC is not taking its responsibility to the industry when it comes to widening the appeal of the RPG game genre and bringing in new gamers. Does the presence of the OGL at all assist WoTC in making steps towards this goal?**

No. All the OGL does is to allow virtually any sort of design to utilize D&D game material. The result might develop products that appeal to existing game enthusiasts, but it does virtually nothing in regards to bringing in new players.

**Q6) If you would have been present at WoTC when the decision was made to create an open license, how would you have gone about it, assuming that not doing it was not an option.**

I would have resigned my position with the company rather than seeing the OGL come into being.

**Q7) Lastly, lets confront the reality of the existence of the OGL. Its here and it looks like its going to stay. We have seen some benefits and downsides to its existence. What can we [the industry] do now with the lessons learned so far to ensure that the OGL grows into something that is a benefit to the D&D and d20 genre over the years to come?**

Frankly, the D20 and OGL licenses are what they are, and in my opinion they have no real benefit to WoTC, and thus they do not benefit the D&D game system. The concept is flawed, and I do not believe that any amount of time will serve to make a silk purse out of a pig's ear.

#### About the Author

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

#### About the Artist

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



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by Khaz Axzen

## Dark Cult of Hisseesha Part II : Primus Creed

*When we last left the four companions, they were preparing themselves to infiltrate the lair of cult leader, Primus Creed, the vampiric necromancer exiled from his desert homeland of Siraq. Creed leads the cult of the demon demi-god Hisseesha from the labyrinth like sewer system running below the Khorian city of Isegoth.*

"Spooky!" Khaz said aloud, his voice sounding loud in the eerie silence, a silence broken only by the distant lapping of sea water on rock, the ever present bay breeze, rustling the high, unkempt grass, and softly blowing through the still bare branches of the Twisted forest. Although some of the strange trees bore vile purple buds, the largely naked branches rubbed against each other in the wind, sounding like dry bones scraping and clacking.

"Where are those two anyway? It's what I get fer mix in up with elves and druids, talking about demon mutated warlocks, cults and treasure, bah! Tree devils are probably sneakin up on us right now!" The dwarf ranted, looking up at the trees, half expecting the goblinoid tree devils, or Trehun Delvaheem as their ancient race was called, to leap on his back.

"Shhh!" Sarel hissed at Khaz, silencing his nervous chatter. The pair had arrived at the rendezvous early; they retreated from the rusted, creaky cemetery gates to the shadows under the outer boughs of the forest to wait for Kimba and Dev. They passed the time by discussing, in low tones, Khaz's many scars and tattoos. Every victory in the arena was documented in ink on the dwarf's burly body, as well as every scar received in gladiatorial combat; each had its own story. It managed to keep Khaz's mind off his superstitions, but the later it got, the harder his over active imagination worked. "They're coming."

Sarel's acute elven hearing picked up the tramp of Dev's boots long before he heard any sound of Kimba's light footfall, and even then he was hard pressed to differentiate between her steps and the rustling grass. As they came into view, the frost elf noticed something different about Dev; he seemed

to have left the ever-present black cloud that hovered over his head back in Isegoth. Although he moved with as much stealth as his hulking frame allowed, his gait would never indicate he was about to infiltrate the lair of a warlock and possibly face death. His hair, which was combed military style during their first encounter, was now slicked back, and there was a thick stubble growing on his face, broken noticeably by the still pink scar on his left cheek. He also had shed the livery of Isegoth's guard, donning instead a light, waist length, black chainmail vest, with hinged shoulder plates hanging down to his biceps, over a soft, black wool shirt. Black leather pants and boots completed his stygian attire. He looked like a mercenary.

Sarel and Khaz left the cover of the trees and made their way downhill toward the road that led to the cemetery gate, not bothering to keep their movements quiet. Kimba's elven senses would pick them up immediately, and the dwarf's silhouette and boots, sucking in and out of the spongy earth were unmistakable, even through the wispy tendrils of fog now snaking in from the north east which was beginning to obscure the ruins.

"Greetings," Kimba said to the pair warmly, smiling. "I hope we did not keep you two waiting for very long."  
"Let's get this over with," Khaz said impatiently, nervously eyeing the thickening fog rolling off the cliffs toward them.

Sarel bowed before the druid, "good evening m'lady," he said in direct contrast to the dwarf's gruff demeanor. "And to you sir," to Dev, who nodded in return. Although vigilant, the former knight was not nearly as stiff and unapproachable as he seemed in their previous meeting.

"M'lady's and sirs," Khaz mumbled under his breath, "We ain't in the king's court drinkin tea and eatin crumpets." His voice began rising in annoyance as his discomfort increased. "That there fog's rollin right over them ruins; they say restless spirits travel with the fog!" As if on cue, strange lights started to blink and shimmer within the fog bank.

### About the Author

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

### Contact the Author

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"That's probably just a trick of the moonlight reflecting off the bay and getting caught up in the mist," said Dev, looking over his shoulder. "But I agree with master Axzen, we really should get going, the less we linger in one place, the better."

In silent agreement, the quartet turned to the rusty iron gate. The left side hung from one hinge, the top hinge having rusted through; it looked as if it would only take a nudge to dislodge it completely and send it crashing to the ground. Squeezing through the gap, they made their way down the center lane. Weeds had long ago grown through the cracks to obscure the once well tended cobble stones, making it hard to follow; none of them wanted to trod over any graves, even if the deceased's names had long ago been worn away by the elements and forgotten.

Kimba confidently took the lead, Khaz and Sarel walked side by side, and Dev fell back to the rear.

"How'r we gonna get to the sewers from a derved bone yard?" asked Khaz, to no one in particular.

"Since the cemetery lies in a shallow valley," the druid answered, "they devised a drainage system which leads to the sewers. Later it was used and maintained by smugglers seeking secret access to the city before it became easier and cheaper just to pay off the corrupt city guard. There are hundreds of entrances and exits to the sewers. They were designed and built by dwarven engineers, you know." She added the latter bit of information, hoping to peak Khaz's curiosity. "Dwarven architecture, as I'm sure you know, often has hidden and unmapped sections and tunnels, known only to the architects and engineers who created them."

She led them left, off the main road to a smaller intersecting lane. Turning right a short distance up on a path leading to what appeared to be a tomb, indistinguishable from the rest of the plain, but well constructed eternal graves. Comprised

mostly of marble and granite, the tomb had a wrought iron gate, intricately designed and adorned with warding gargoyles and archaic runes made unreadable by rust and time. Kimba tried the latch, but found it was rusted securely in place.

"Your strength is needed here Khaz, I can open the inner door with magic, but I'm afraid the gate will need to be broken open." The elf said to Khaz, who was still gazing at the incoming fog.

"Let the dwarf do it," Khaz mumbled. Ruling out hewing through the latch with his axe, he planted his feet and rubbed his large, calloused hands together before grasping the rusty bars of the gate. The muscles of his huge arms knotted and bulged with the exertion; veins popped out along his temple and thick neck and sweat beaded on his forehead. Groaning in protest, the metal latch bent, then snapped under the pressure. Rusty, unoiled hinges squealed loudly echoing through the night and sending Khaz flying back where Dev caught him before he tumbled to the ground.

As if in answer to the now open gates squeal, an inhuman, haunting, anguished, howl reached their ears, seeming to bounce off the tombs. The tortured, mournful cry trailed off, absorbed by the fog which now billowed thickly around their feet. All four companions looked around nervously, hair standing up on the back of their necks.

"I reckon that was a trick a' the moon," Khaz said sarcastically while brushing himself off. He turned his angry gaze on Sarel, "or the dumb dwarf's over active imagination." He roughly shoved the frost elf aside and stomped up to the iron shod, wooden door in the tombs recessed entryway. Putting his shoulder down, the dwarf slammed into the ancient timbers. Magically sealed or not, the door exploded inward, showering the interior of the tomb with rotten wood splinters and rust. The remains of the door hung from bent hinges, resting on the inner wall of the tomb's vestibule.

"Let's go!" shouted the dwarf from within. "I'll fight anything made a flesh an blood, but my axe can't do nuthin about banshees and ghosts!"

*Kimba and Dev hurried inside, but Sarel lingered*

*momentarily, studying the fog and the sickly greenish yellow lights blinking within it. Necromancy and restless spirits, banshees as Khaz put it, were a part of his life for the better part of three decades. It was a part of life he thought he left behind, when he left his people and their evil depravity back in the Frostbite mountains over ten years ago. With a sigh, he joined his comrades in the stale air and cobwebs of the mock tomb, determined to do his part in ridding the world of at least one abomination of nature.*

Primus Creed let the young girl slip from his long nailed grasp, her limp body that once housed the unbridled exuberance of youth was now nothing more than a dried up husk, devoid of blood and life.

Head tilted back, with his eyes closed, Creed's thin lips parted in an evil grin, exposing elongated, blood stained canines; he basked in the warmth of the adolescent's life force as it flowed through his veins. Wrinkles in his face smoothed as the dark skin of his desert heritage replaced the sickly, pale yellow of the infirm. Gray and white streaks in his long hair slowly returned to luxurious black. Small horns, poking through the hair at the top of his forehead, evidence of his demon taint, seemed to grow just a little bit longer.

Opening his eyes, the wizard adjusted his silken, purple robes and looked down his hawkish nose, checking to see if enough blood had been spilled within the ring of runes to please Hisseesha. Satisfied, he carefully stepped over the corpse and outer ring of carved runes, lifting his sandaled feet so as not to smudge the dire glyphs.

Stone tables, set with hundreds of candles, lit Primus Creed's lair, which was rectangular in shape with a high, domed ceiling—too high for the candlelight to penetrate the shadows. Originally it was used as barracks for the dwarven engineers and laborers who constructed the sewers, later as a maintenance and storage area. Tapestries portraying ancient Ikpycgen warriors, legendary spellcasters and the great pyramids of his desert homeland adorned the walls, obscuring the several exits, entrances, and bookshelves laden with ancient tomes and spell components. The largest and most colorful depiction was of his goddess, Hisseesha. Fiery hair framed an impossibly beautiful, horned face and naked torso. Her pale flesh, slowly transformed to scales at her waist, as the demon deity's lower body was portrayed as a great snake, tail ending in ringed rattles. Spread out

before the silken tapestry was an incense laden alter crafted of skulls, treasure heaped at its base.

Shaped like a pyramid, the disturbing alter was actually many layers thick, pyramids within pyramids. At the center were the smaller animal skulls Creed used to regain his strength after making his way through the unforgiving Ikpycgen desert and the Demon wastes. Orcs, tree devils, and then later, human skulls replaced the animal heads as he grew stronger and was able to seduce and snare bigger, smarter prey. Some of them still retained scraps of dry flesh and strands of hair.

Clapping his hands sharply, twice, Creed shouted "Krog" summoning his faithful orc servant. Entering the chamber from behind two thick tapestries, opposite of the alter, the bull orc stood at attention, squinty eyes averted to the floor, waiting to do his masters bidding.

At seven feet tall, Krog was an imposing figure. Clad in spiked bronze plate, the reddish armor stood out against the orc's black hide. Not the rich ebony color of the warrior humans of Kothopia, Krog's skin was more the purplish black of rotting meat. A thick mane of black hair, shaved from the sides of his huge, tusked, porcine head, flowed back between pointed, bone adorned ears. Massively muscled arms sprang from broad shoulders, his gauntleted forearms ended in huge, clawed hands. Thick, brown, horsehide pants were tucked into iron shod, spiked boots. Strapped to his back was a heavy scimitar, cruelly serrated near the human bone hilt.

Folding his hands within the wide sleeves of his robes, Primus Creed turned to face his patiently waiting slave. "Get rid of that," the mage said, indicating the dried up corpse on the floor. "And remember Krog, return the head to me, undamaged."

"Yes master," the orc replied. His response sounded more like, yef maffer, as the beast's savage mouth struggled to form words in a language not meant to be spoken by his kind.

Careful not to touch or enter the rune ring, Krog, with one clawed hand, lifted the body straight up like a rag doll and strode from the chamber, parting the tapestries, and closing the large, arched door as quietly as possible.

Creed chuckled as he remembered enslaving the hulking brute some six years earlier. Stumbling upon the orc tribe in the Twisted forest; it only took a couple of minor spells and a few charred orc warriors to convince the tribe's shaman and chief that the warlock needed a champion to escort him through the treacherous wood.

Jarring him rudely from his reverie, the wizard's eyes snapped open. A magical alarm sounded; intruders had entered the sewers. Like a fisherman with many lines in the water, Creed had many magical lines out, snaking their way through the subterranean labyrinth under Isegoth and the outlying areas. In his mind's eye, he located the still quivering tendrils of magical energy and then followed it to its source. His eyes rolled into the back of his head as he recited the words of the spell that would allow his mind to travel through the magical conduit.

"Kriazcht naga sembeka zool," recited the mage in the language of hell. He felt his mind leave his body and race through the sewers with stomach churning speed, noting each life force as he passed, until he reached his destination. In a forgotten area of the sewers, outside the city walls, beneath the ancient graveyard, Creed sensed four unique lifeforces. Two were masked to him, likely elves, their inherent magic inadvertently blunting Creed's own, but still unusual in their uniqueness. One was unmistakably dwarf, the fierce lifeforce rolling off him in waves. The third was human and familiar. Like a tracker picking up an old footprint, Primus Creed recognized this rage filled human.

"Dev Von Fritz," said Creed aloud, breaking his mental link and opening his eyes. It all came flowing back to him. The night watch had mistaken Von Fritz's wife for a traveling merchant's daughter, following a masquerade party at the governor's mansion a little over a year ago.

"Overzealous, half wits and dull witted thugs," spat the warlock, referring to the corrupt city guard.

It had been too late, the blood ritual of the full moon almost complete, the ceremonial dagger in Creed's right hand already in its deadly descent, when she whispered her true identity with her last, dying breath.

One mistake followed another, as Creed bade Barras Von Luogo, knight of the empire and head advisor to Governor

Pharus, to dispose of the mutilated body and see to it that there were no adverse repercussions.

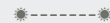
When the corpse was found at the edge of the Twisted forest, Creed made his second mistake, letting that perfumed fop of a Governor, Dandyar Pharus handle the situation. When Governor Pharus ordered the matter closed and ruled that Mariana Fritz had died from wolf attack, her grieving husband went berserk. Trying to get at the arrogant Governor, Dev killed two of Dandyar's bodyguards, paid mercenaries, and wounded six others, as Dev's fellow knights stayed out of the fight.

Finally subdued, Dev was imprisoned and sentenced to hang for treason and murder also against Primus Creed's advice. The wizard knew this man meant trouble, and urged that Dev meet a tragic end during his stay in prison, in the form of a shiv in the back. But before any plot could be set in motion, the fallen knight escaped from the dungeons, allegedly aided by rebels and druids.

"Could that be the masked lifeforces I sensed in the tunnels?" Creed muttered to himself. It didn't matter now. The troublesome human was now within his grasp.

Creed could not afford exposure, as there was growing rebellion in Isegoth, opposing the city's corrupt, heavy-handed governor. He could not allow these four interlopers to leave the sewers with fuel for the rebel's fire. Creed had lived to long, been through too much to allow his plans of ruling the city through his puppet, Dandyar Pharus, to be jeopardized. Not only would the mage take care of Dev Von Fritz, but he would drink the blood and absorb the substantial life force of his unusual companions, adding their skulls to his pinnacle of power.

"Surround, divide and conquer," thought Creed aloud. He was once a respected war sorcerer and strategist for the glorious Siraqen army of Ali Kademnon. As his mind worked out the details, his body quivered in anticipation.



"It's about time," growled Khaz, as the undeniable sounds of pursuit reached their ears, echoing through the moist tunnels and drowning out the incessant drips of water all

around them. Since they entered the sewers several hours ago, there had been no sign of resistance, even though they knew Creed was aware of their presence. Like the soft touch of a cobweb tickling their faces, Kimba and Sarel had felt the tell tale signs of magical detection once upon entering, then again a short time after, then nothing but squeaking rats and buzzing flies until now.

Sarel, who had fallen back, to scout out the nature of their pursuit, now rejoined his companions, running nimbly along the two foot wide walkway that bordered either side of arched sewer tunnels.

"I counted six horned, saber toothed rats." the frost elf paused, catching his breath before continuing, "and the biggest bull orc I ever saw."

"That's it?" This from Khaz, "that's all an evil warlock can bring to th'fight?"

"That's just all we can see Khaz, and that sounds formidable in itself," said Kimba, reassured by Khaz's bravado. "But I have to admit I expected more; it may be a trap to lull us into overconfidence or push us into ambush."

"Whatever it is, we should move ahead to a more defensible position," suggested Dev, short sword already in hand. "This is too tight of a spot; we'll be hewing each other."

"That's a good idea," agreed Sarel, "when I scouted ahead, I saw that there's a four way junction not too far up. A tunnel on the left and a ramp leading up to a flood grate on the right. The tunnel widens for a dry well drain in the floor," the magical green light from Kimba's staff glittered in the frost elf's blue eyes as he prepared mentally for violence. "That'll give us room to swing," he said over his shoulder as he turned and headed up the tunnel to check for any hidden surprises.

Pulling the wet rags they had tied around their necks up over their noses and mouths again to combat the overpowering stench of the sewer, the three companions leaped off the narrow walkway into the foot deep thick brownish muck of the tunnel's floor, stirring up the smell and making their eyes water. They had been loathe to touch the noxious liquid before, but being caught from behind by hell spawned, saber toothed rats overwhelmed their reluctance to wade shin deep in human waste..

Hastening ahead to the conjunction Sarel spoke of, they found the frost elf waiting for them, crouched on the walkway on the right side, below the steep ramp heading up, some fifty or sixty feet to street level. Khaz quickly unshouldered his pack and pulled out the waterproof leather sack containing his hand crossbow and flash darts. Laying the sack gingerly on the ramp, he carefully took out three individually wrapped darts and laid them in front of him. Then he strung the bow and fitted a quarrel on the spine.

Dev took the point position, standing in the center of the wide tunnel about twelve feet in front of his companions. He planted his feet before sheathing his short sword in favor of the huge broadsword on his back. The light from Kimba's staff, which the druid wedged into a crack in the ancient stone wall to free her sword arm, glinted off the oiled edge of the former knight's blade as he swept the weapon back and forth in wide, swooshing practice swings.

Sarel took position a couple of feet behind Dev and to his right up on the walkway. He held his slender, slightly curved sword backhanded in his left hand, a throwing knife ready in his right hand.

Khaz crept along the walkway on Dev's left, crossbow aimed ahead and two darts held in his teeth, as Kimba stayed back, guarding the rear. Her mind quickly going over the large repertoire of defensive spells at her disposal, wondering if any would be safe enough to use in such close quarters, especially with her powers being diminished so far from the open air. Nixing the idea of using magic, the druid drew her slim sword and said a prayer to Doona Cheetahsoul. As the tension grew, the passing seconds felt like hours.

"C'mon!" Khaz challenged as loud as he could through gritted teeth, clamped down over flash arrows as the rats came into view from around a bend in the tunnel. Red eyes gleaming as their heat sensing vision picked out the four outlines of their warm blooded prey. Opposing saber tusks gnashing in anticipation of fresh meat, the hell spawn charged, no longer heeding the commands of their orc overseer. Four of the creatures charged down the middle of the gradually widening tunnel right at Dev, heedless of the muck splashing around their black underbellies. Two of the foul creatures scrambled up to the walkway on both sides,

razor sharp talons scraping the stone in search of footholds.

Opening its maw impossibly wide, the rat closest to Khaz roared, exposing the blood red tongue and soft flesh of its mouth. The dwarf pulled the trigger of his crossbow, sending the arrow whizzing through the air, embedding itself in the roaring beast's throat. Before the rodent could react, the right side of its face exploded, spraying the wall with blood and teeth. Heated metal fragments from the arrowhead tore through its brain, killing it instantly as the force from the repercussion sent the corpse rolling off the walkway into the muck below.

Khaz howled his pleasure, momentarily forgetting about the two remaining darts clenched in his teeth, "Yeah! How'd that taste ya filthy pile'a dung!" He yelled as the quarrels fell from his mouth, rolled off the walkway into the water at the bottom of the tunnel.

Dwarven curses ringing in his ears, Sarel hurled his throwing dagger at his advancing adversary. Preparing to charge, the hell rat lowered its head at the last second. Passing through the creature's horns, the knife sunk into the hard flesh of its back, between the shoulder blades. Still advancing, the giant rodent turned its head to snap at the protruding knife, taking the elf's second hurled blade up to the hilt in its neck. Roaring in pain and frustration, the injured animal lunged forward with murderous intent, clamping its salivating mouth shut with enough force to tear flesh and crush bone. Instead its powerful jaws shut on nothing but air. The fleet footed frost elf had leaped off the walkway, tossing his sword up in the air. The weapon flipped once and landed in his waiting right hand as he alighted on the balls of his feet in the sewer water.

As fast as a striking serpent, Sarel's blade licked out twice, in a criss-cross pattern. Parting flesh and grinding bone, each hit opened gaping wounds along the rat's side and hind quarter. Exposed, gleaming white bone was quickly obscured as the wounds quickly filled and spilled over with blood.

Bleeding profusely, the horned rat jumped at Sarel's throat. Anticipating this, the seasoned elven warrior dropped to one knee and twisted his body sideways. Gripping his sword with two hands, he thrust up, sinking his blade in the lunging creature's chest. Using the beast's own momentum, the frost elf hurled the rat off his sword across the tunnel

where it slammed into the wall with spine cracking force. Its broken, lifeless body came to rest in a heap on the walkway.

Dev wasn't about to sit back and wait for the hell spawn to come to him; he strode forward and waded into the rats with the pent up fury of a berserker. Growling like an animal, he swept his sword back and forth in great arcs, driving the rodents back with his sheer ferocity. One of the rats reared back on its hind legs, razor sharp talons slashing at the former knight's throat. Dev brought his heavy sword down on the creature's head, cutting through its skull and neck, splattering himself with blood and brain matter.

Pulling his blade free from the still twitching rat, Dev swung his sword down and to his right as another beast closed in, turning sideways in an attempt to tail whip the enraged human. Sweeping his sword out, he neatly cut through the whip like tail, but took the brunt of the hit to his right knee from the stump. Dev's right leg buckled and he went down to one knee as the rat with the severed tail turned on him, roaring in pain. Still kneeling, Dev thrust forward with his sword, grunting with exertion, he stabbed the rat through the roof of its mouth; the tip of his blade exploded from the back of the creature's skull and wedged there.

Sensing a third rat approaching, Dev released the grip on his wedged sword and turned his attention to his left, instinctively raising his hands just in time to save himself from the lunging beasts jaws. Hot breath reeking of spoiled meat almost made him gag as he grasped a yellowed tusk in each hand; he couldn't let the rat close its mouth as the opposing tusks would likely shear the fingers from his hands. With Herculean effort, Dev forced the rodent's head slowly downward, trying to submerge it in the noxious water of the sewer, which now lapped around his waist.

"Rhohadon!" invoking the name of the dwarven god of battle, Khaz jumped high in the air from the walkway, his single bladed, curved axe held above his head. The dwarf came down with all his weight and strength bringing his axe down directly on the broad back of the rat now wrestling with Dev, severing its spine and cleaving it in half.

Sarel engaged the remaining monster, slashing and moving with lightning fast strikes of his sword, drawing blood with each stroke.



Still hanging back, watching for an opportunity to aid her companions, Kimba felt, more than heard something approaching from the tunnel to her left. Her sharp ears picked up the clinking of armor and marching in cadence. Her almond shaped eyes widened in horror as her elven night vision cut through the shadows and pinpointed the source. Undead, skeletal warriors advanced from the murky gloom of the adjoining tunnel. Ancient black armor still clinging to yellowed bones and tattered dry hides, their jaws clacked open and shut under high helms as they sang a voiceless battle chant. Fiery red eyes of hell spawn, burned deep within fleshless skulls, peered over rectangular wooden shields.

As the undead warriors neared the widening conjunction of tunnels, they picked up their pace, banging their shields in rhythm with long, curved sabers.

"Warriors approach!" Yelled Kimba to her battling companions, "we need to retreat!" She turned back to the advancing skeletal soldiers, sheathing her sword. Hoping morning had dawned on the surface, she mouthed the words of a defensive spell, calling on the power of the sun. Holding her right arm outstretched, a ball of brilliant white light began to form in her open hand, growing larger as she completed the spell. Drawing her arm back, the elven druid hurled the ball into the tunnel; the pure, good magic crackling and sparking as the ball of light hit the column of undead. The front line, marching two abreast, exploded as their flaming bone fragments ripped into the following ranks, igniting several others in flames so hot that they were reduced to ashes in seconds. But many more followed, treading over their fallen comrades.

Sarel and Khaz skidded to a halt beside the druid just in time to witness the fireworks. "Where is Dev!" Kimba asked the pair between breaths, trying to recover quickly from the energy expended from her spell.

For the first time, Sarel and Khaz noticed that the former knight didn't retreat with them. Gazing back down the tunnel they had just traversed, the frost elf could see the outline of Dev's broad back moving away from them toward

the bull orc, who thus far had hung back and did not participate in the fight.

At that moment more great horned rats poured from the ramp leading up to the flood grate, cutting them off from the battle maddened human. With the skeletal warriors closing in, the trio only had one option remaining.

"I'll not leave im!" exclaimed Khaz, gripping his bloody axe and taking a half step toward the snarling rats. He was stayed by Kimba's hand on his muscular arm, pulling him away.

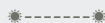
"Dying here will serve no purpose," Kimba said to Khaz, nervously glancing at the rats, then down the tunnel to the undead warriors. "Dev has chosen his path, he would not want us to die in vain."

"I must acquiesce," said Sarel as he hurled a dagger scoring a hit on the closest rat's snout. "We can come back for him."

"What the hell does akwese mean?" grumbled Khaz as he joined the two elves in retreat, ascending the tunnel that, according to their map, would lead them to the maintenance area and Primus Creed.

Kimba paused long enough to conjure and hurl another fireball at their pursuers, aiming low to ensure the fiery missile would not miss its intended target and harm Dev. She effectively slowed down the pursuit as the trio lengthened their lead.

They ran on in darkness, having left the druid's staff behind. "Maybe my staff can still be of use to him," Kimba thought aloud, trying to make herself feel better about leaving the former knight.



**... TO BE CONTINUED**

**... continued from page 2**

And what an issue #10 is! Everything I could look for! The RPG scene, not just D&D ....advice....reviews....everything! Having read all the articles with the exception of the fiction—I'm saving that for later—I do have one comment. Raymond Huling's article, "On the Written Style of RPGiana Part II," while an otherwise excellent article, seemed to lose direction 2/3rds of the way through, when Mr Huling began a bit of a rant on accurate research of mythological singular & plural. While I completely agree with him, I felt that a second (or third) article would be more appropriate. Also, given the "technical" nature of Mr. Huling's mythological comments, I would have appreciated some references so I could read more into the declension of the creatures. Maybe Mr. Huling could provide such a reference?

Keep up the great work!

Stan Pekata

*Thank you for your comments. We at the Trumpeter strive each month to bring you the best the RPGs have to offer!*

*I encourage you to check out our Other RPGs section at Silven Crossroads: (<http://www.silven.com/otherrpgs.asp>) which covers a wide variety of non-d20 tabletop games.*

*About " On the Written Style of RPGiana Part II" the author informs me that his information came exclusively from the word etymologies in several dictionaries. I suggest visiting the Oxford English Dictionary ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)) or finding one at your local library for the most exhaustive etymological information. -Editor*

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by *Amaranth*

## THE WHITE WOLF INSIDER

This month's version of the White-Wolf Insider is not going to be as detailed as the past few have been. As most people know, *Vampire: the Masquerade* has stopped being printed by the White Wolf Gaming Studio, as have the other *World of Darkness* games. In August of this year, a rulebook for the new *World of Darkness* (#WW55000) will be available, and also the corebook for the new vampire game called *Vampire: the Requiem* (#WW25000). These will be the only two books that we know of that will be released on August 21, 2004 with *Werewolf: the Forsaken* during November, and *Mage: the Awakening* during March of 2005.

The official *World of Darkness* website that the White Wolf Gaming Studio is putting together can be located at: [WorldofDarkness.com](http://WorldofDarkness.com) which, at the moment, tells of which artists they will have for the new books which include but are not limited to Brom and Tim Bradstreet. They also have a mini writers guideline written by Justin Achilli, the developer of the *Vampire: the Requiem* (#WW25000) game. They are accepting submissions from freelancers that will be considered by Achilli.

For more information on this, you may also want to take a look at the writer submission guidelines (even though they're slightly out of date, most of the info still applies), which can be found [here](#). This gives a step-by-step breakdown from the developers themselves as to what they would like to see. While this applied to the old games, most of it still applies to the new game as well, and it's a great idea to read it over before considering the jump into writing.

### In other breaking news:

The *Time of Judgment* has left many fans feeling nostalgic for a taste of the past. Never fear. Now is your chance to play the odds and catch some of the discontinued products that the White Wolf Gaming Studio has left in the warehouse. [Purchase a White Wolf Grab Bag](#) for only \$24.99, and you are guaranteed to receive at least \$100 worth of product (manufacturer's suggested retail price), varying from old game books to fiction novels to merchandise.

[Get them now](#) before its too late!

### About the Author

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

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*by Paul Singleton*

## The Lost Dragon Inn: The Seekers' Cloak

*Welcome to my Inn. The Lost Dragon Inn is a place full of adventurers from places near and far and I welcome you to visit it in your journeys. Keep your eyes peeled each month for not only tales but also information about the inn itself including floorplans, NPCs, etc. If you do use the Lost Dragon Inn in your adventures, I only ask one thing. Write to me and share your adventures--you may even see your characters appear in one of the tales! Until your figure darkens the doorway of my inn again, I bid you warm nights and prosperous journeys.*

Nearing the crossroads, you notice The Lost Dragon Inn ahead. As twilight falls, you are drawn to the reflections of the sunset in the multicolored windows. The inn is a welcome sight with its sign gently swaying in the afternoon breeze and a line of smoke issuing forth from its chimney. The smell of a crackling fire draws you in closer. As you near the door, a small boy comes forward and takes your horse's bridle in his hands. Looking up at you, the boy holds your weary steed steady as you dismount. He leads the horse around the corner of the inn towards the sounds of a hammer striking an anvil.

Looking at the door of the inn, you see a tarnished brass handle worn to a gleam by years of use and set into a door carved with the image of a dragon asleep upon his horde. Pulling the door open, the aroma of pork, potatoes, freshly baked bread and ale invite you in. To your right, sensed more than seen, a huge figure is cloaked by the shadows, invisible but for the sonorous sounds of his steady breathing. Here is a figure that you have no desire to meet. Looking away you notice the bar running the length of the left wall, polished by loving hands to a sparkling sheen. You know this tavern would stand even if it were never visited, an unspoken testament to an adventurer's heart. The bar is tended by a strikingly tall man who is moving along the bar filling wooden mugs from kegs of ale, dwarven spirits, and other alcoholic brews. Busty barmaids in low cut blouses and flowing skirts skitter to and fro, filling mugs and serving food. The sounds

of conversations drift from tables full of patrons settling in for the night. Displayed on the walls are trophies of hunts and adventures past. A savage wolf head leers its toothy grin above a booth in the back, while a proud buck lifts his crown above the bar. A sword, simple but well cared for, hangs in a place of honor above the mantle while a roaring fire blazes in the hearth beneath it. The flames cast shadows across the room, making it hard to say how large it is, but showing that there are plenty of places where a man could sit unnoticed.

Beside the fire sits a man who is not that different from the bar that surrounds him. A full head of glistening black hair crowns his shadowed face. From his shoulders hangs a cloak, worn but elegant. Beneath his cloak you notice a well-worn black leather breastplate. Here is a man who knows adventure. A small crowd is gathered around him, but you can tell that they are not with him, only nearing him to hear his tale. As you move closer to hear, he looks up at you without pausing in his story. His eyes glitter in the firelight as you realize that this story is for you to hear as well.

"The storm clouds gathered overhead as I crept through the streets of Haven. I hadn't planned on pulling the job tonight, but things didn't always work as planned. You see, the Seekers had gotten their hands on a particularly powerful magical cloak. I wanted it. Now this wasn't just any cloak, it was a Cloak of The Bat. I had heard about this cloak and knew it would help in my 'enterprises.' Problem was, they were moving it to a vault in Palanthas soon, and I knew I couldn't acquire it there.

Just as I got to the edge of the Seekers' compound, the sky opened up and it started raining. I knew I would have to find a way to hide my boot prints as I moved through the building, but I figured I'd come up with something, I always did. As I moved through the courtyard, I saw a few guards, but they were preoccupied with a game of chance. I've never been one to disturb people so I planned to go around the

side of the building so as not to take them away from their gambling. Just as I slipped past the corner and started to make my way toward a second floor balcony, I heard someone moving behind me. I faded into the shadows and waited, only to see one of the guards walk around the corner. He walked down the wall towards me. I controlled my breathing and remained perfectly still as he stopped within arms reach of me and began to relieve himself on the wall. The guard was so close I could smell the stench of alcohol on him and knew that he wouldn't be any challenge to me, but I also knew that any outburst from him would ruin my chances of getting in tonight. When he finished, he pulled out a pipe and lit it before slowly meandering back towards the front of the house. I sat and watched until he disappeared around the corner. Working quickly I retrieved my climbing gloves from my pack. Running up the wall near the balcony was a drainpipe; it would make the perfect ladder. Throwing my pack onto my back, I began to scale the wall to the balcony. Halfway up the wall I heard sounds above. This just wasn't turning out to be my night. I continued up slowly until I could peek over the rail of the balcony. Standing in the shadowed doorway were two well-armored guards looking out into the night. The rain had grown in intensity now so that I could barely distinguish their voices from the sound of the rain striking the balcony. I decided to continue onto the roof and find another way in. When I reached the roof, I peered across it and then back the way I came. Seeing no one on the roof or in the muddy yard below I began to creep around the edge of the house. Looking over the edge for another entry point, I noticed a small ledge running just below the level of the windows on the upper floor. I secured my rope to the roof and then began to repel down to the first darkened window I found. Bracing myself on the ledge, I worked the widow open.

Crawling into the window, I struck my tinderbox and lit a small hooded lantern I carried. Looking into the room I saw that I was in a very interesting room. Not a living quarters like I expected, but a storage room. Stored in this room were several chests, all locked and containing various things, but the box that held the cloak was not here. As I began to pick the locks on the chest, I found gems and riches that these so called "benefactors" of Haven could be using to better the lives of the people just sitting there accumulating. There was enough treasure in this room to build homes for all of the street urchins living in the streets around the compound. It angered me. Inside one of the chests I found deeds to lands in far off place, lands that were owned by people that the Seekers had evicted from their homes in the name of heresy. This was not the charitable group that showed their face in Haven. No, this was a conquering army, slowly spreading their will across Ansalon. It made me feel that what I was doing here was justified. I was taking something back for the little guy. I moved into the hallway, creeping from shadow to shadow until I found the room that my informant had told me the cloak was stored in. As I picked the lock, I listened carefully for any signs that I might have been detected. All was silent. Inside the room I found the walls decorated with glistening blades with jeweled hilts. Looking at them more closely, I could tell that they were the highest quality, probably dwarven craftsmanship. These were probably enchanted swords, but I couldn't carry them out with me. I began searching for the wooden box containing the cloak. Hidden away in a corner, I found it. I was the simplest box in the room, but I could tell that it held my prize."

At this, the man looks up and signals a barmaid with a shift of his eyes. She quickly bustles over to fill his intricately carved mug with ale and then hurries away. Lifting the mug to his lips and taking a long draw of the frothy liquid, he sighs in contentment before continuing his tale.

"Slowly I opened the box and examined the cloak. It was a black cloak of heavy wool. Unassuming in appearance, I could feel the presence of powerful magic as I lifted it from the box. Taking my own cloak, I replaced it in the box and returned it to its hiding place. As I placed the Cloak of the Bat on my shoulders, I felt its power around me. I knew I could use this to fly. Stepping to the window, I opened it and looked into the yard, only to see a guard peering up at me. I was caught. Instantly the guard went into action, calling for help as he drew a dagger to throw at me. I gripped the edges of the cloak and leapt from the window. For an instant I was worried that the wizard who told me how to use the cloak was wrong, but then I could feel that I was in control of my fall. I arched my back and began to climb. Two guards were on the roof and fired their crossbows at me. I thought I was doomed, as the first bolt ripped through the cloth of my leggings barely missing me. I wasn't so lucky with the second bolt though; it ripped into my leg, just barely missing the protection offered by my boots. I bit back a scream and just barely stopped myself from releasing the cloak to pull the missile free. More bolts were flying my way now, so I angled myself away from the compound towards my hideout. As I left the compound, I found a shadowed alleyway to land in and hid myself from my pursuers. The bolt in my leg had bitten deep and I knew I would need attention from a healer. As I slowly crept down the alley, I heard a guard moving into the alley from behind. The shadows cast by his torch were changing too quickly for me to stay hidden and I knew I was found.

Summoning up everything I had left in me, I rose to my feet and turned to face him. He was advancing towards me quickly with a club in his left hand and the torch in his right. I drew my short sword and dagger and prepared to defend myself. As he drew near I surveyed his armor, finding him to be well protected by a chain mail shirt. I decided that to escape I would have to flee, but I wasn't willing to leave without making this Seeker guard know what happened when someone challenged me. I waited until he closed on me and then with a lunge I sliced my dagger across his cheek. He flinched away and I leapt to the air, grasping the cloak. The guard clumsily threw the torch at me and missed. I soared out of the alleyway and on to my hideout. Once in my there,

I pulled the bolt free of my leg and wrapped it tightly, resolving to see an old friend of mine in the morning about a healing potion or salve.

When I woke to the rising sun, I found that Haven had been locked down. News of the daring theft had spread and I was a hunted man. Knowing I couldn't stay in town, I worked my way to the rim of the city through the tangled series of alleyways. Once there I waited for dark. Under the cover of darkness I escaped into the wilderness."

The man rises from his seat and walks to the bar, where he fills his mug from the tap. As he moves you see the grace of this character and know that his story is not just a tale, but that he really was the thief who stole the Cloak of the Bat from the Seekers all those years ago. Reclaiming his seat, he beckons for you to join him. As you take a seat he signals a barmaid to bring you a mug and she sets it on the table in front of you. You settle in for a long night of tales and stories from this mysterious man.

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by Matthew Conlon

# COMPUTERS : A Pen~And~Paper Gaming Tool

Once upon a time (1971), there was a small start-up company named Intel who produced the 4001 microprocessor. Since the 4001, there have been *many* successors. The computer as gone from simple formulas to highly complex programs with mind-blowing graphics and sounds. So what does this have to do with *pen and paper* role-playing? Well, I'm glad you asked, because I was about to tell you anyway.

There are many, *many* uses for a computer within the constraints of tabletop role-playing games. A computer is a very useful tool for a player or a GM, and I'm going to spend the rest of this article illustrating the pros and cons of computers in the tabletop role-playing environment.

Being that a role-playing group usually sits around a table together, I'm going to just say now that anytime I talk about using a computer for the rest of this article, I am talking specifically about using a laptop as opposed to a desktop machine. It is possible to have a desktop within easy access of the group, but a laptop provides minimal diversion and can be taken to any place your group games.

## GMS

A laptop can bring an entire new world of possibilities to your gaming sessions—even in terms of simple word processing. Think about the amount of rules, notes, and general written verbiage that you have to have on hand at any given moment for any given game. You could fill an entire notebook with blurbs about your NPCs, relevant information about your players, plans for you campaign, keeping track of time and weather. A laptop can put all these things at your fingertips. The best parts about having these things on your computer is that there is no paper to lose, damage, to take up space in your binder, fall into the wrong hands and such. With just the simple click of a mouse, you can bring up any one of your documents.

Here is a list of things that you would benefit from having in digital format:

- **Introduction to your world.** This file should not only be an introduction to your world as in "You were born in the Zombiewood forest, and there's been a war going on for the past..." but also a summary of the way you like to game. In other words "Welcome to my gaming table! No biting, spitting, stabbing, or cross burning at my table... etc." (For an example of one such file, go [here](#))
- **Game world history.** As you probably expect from the title, this file should be filled with the history, or at least the important events from the history of whatever world you are playing in, be it a pre-generated world, or one of your own.
- **Players' backgrounds / descriptions.** One thing that I like to have players do when I GM is have them generate a background for their characters explaining where they came from, why they left, who they were and how they became who they are now. (See "Characters – Who's who, what's what" in the April issue of the Trumpeter [here](#).) If they were kind enough to type these backgrounds up into a text file, ask for a copy and keep it on hand. If they gave you it on paper, see what you can do about making or obtaining an electronic copy of it. Having a copy on hand is also handy for a quick copy and paste into an email. If you plan on incorporating the characters' pasts, which I suggest that you do, then you are going to need them. As for the descriptions, have detailed information like their personal short and long term goals, physical descriptions, and a brief list of the skills and items that they have. This will come in handy when planning for the next session, as you will have at your disposal a summary of what each character is or is not capable of. You can add pretty much anything you want to this that you think

## About the Author

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

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

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should be there. You could also list a running record of the experience points that you have awarded each player. Highlight the parts of the history or descriptions that you think would make for good tie-ins to your campaign's story line. If a character grew up in a specific town or city, maybe you would like to have something interesting going on in that city to lure the character back.

- **People of importance.** Skulking about town or plodding down the road, the party is without doubt going to meet NPCs. Some of these people might be people of great importance, such as dukes, earls, lords, kings, queens, doctors, or network administrators. Have a file ready with a list of people that are going to be reoccurring. For example:
  - o **Ed** – Baker. Likes his beer just a little more than what is healthy.
  - o **Biff** – King of town. Likes to wear pink headdress, and no one knows why...
  - o **Sir Evan** – Town guard. Can't run because of a bum leg, but could hit an acorn at 100 feet with an arrow.
  - o **Johan** – Town handyman. Quick with a smile, suspicious type of guy, always has money and women, but never a job for more than a week.

These are all things that you may want to incorporate at some point in your campaign. The beauty of doing this on a computer is that as the characters evolve, you can go back and just add the little blurbs, instead of having to get out another sheet of paper, writing it down, punching the holes or whatever...

- **Plans for the party.** This is something that you are going to need regardless of how you do it. Pen and paper is fine for something like this, but you may find that you go through a lot of paper as plans for the party *will* change. As the party moves along, you might have a plan for them to come into money somehow, when for some reason or another, the players all take a vow of poverty. Sure, they can still find the treasure, but the pending visit from the tax collector or the thief-villain-NPC is a moot point because they are doubtlessly going to be giving it away soon anyway. With a text file of some sort, you can highlight, delete, and replace.
- **Time and weather.** You are going to need to keep track of the time of year, the days that pass, and you might want to include the weather if you'd like. Some Wizards of the Coast products have a few calendars already made up and they get fairly descript. Creating a digital calendar is always a possibility.

- **Music.** In planning your adventure, you have a good idea about what is going to happen and when. You can get yourself a little playlist of MP3s or WAVs or just use the albums themselves and play music to go along with what's going on. It's easier to do this from a computer because if you are using one already anyway, it is already in front of you and you don't have to get up and go to the CD player and click buttons or switch CDs. You can also organize all your music beforehand by making playlists of certain types of music. With just a quick click you can go from your traveling play list to your "going to be eaten by trolls" play list. There are many programs with which you can play MP3s, including [winAMP](#) and [Itunes](#). You can queue the songs that you want and make a play list. Then when you want to hear that particular genre, you simply click that play list.
- **Software.** There are programs out there on the Internet that are designed to help you do things like quickly generate characters, towns, and cities. I've seen character sheets designed as a spread sheet, and when you enter your ability scores, everything else fills in automatically. One program that has been mentioned before on Silven.com is the [DM Genie](#). Mac has a program called [Crystal Ball](#). For just about any D20 based game, there's a program called [Etools](#).

- **Character description.** This section should be about the physical appearances as well as the dominant personality traits. Include things like eye color, hair color, height, weight, body mass, scars, types of clothing worn, and if she's generally happy, angry or always worrying... just about anything that someone would notice after a couple minutes of talking to or watching her. Include any possession that is visible.
- **Item list.** Have a section for everything you own. You can include a brief history of where the item came from, or where the character carries it, or how it's used; just about anything you would like to include.
- **People of importance.** This is going to be much like the list that the GM would have prepared, however it's going to include some different information. The GM is going to need to know a little more about the NPCs than you are, so their descriptions in the GM's file is going to be a little more in depth. Most of the townsfolk are going to remain unimportant to you. The things that you would need would generally just be something like, name and station. "Ed – baker" would probably be lengthy enough. What you are going to have that the GM doesn't would be any plans that you may have regarding any of these contacts. Where the GM's list might say: "Laran – Librarian" yours could say something like: "Laran – Librarian (need to see if I can get my hands on the history of the broadsword. Laran would be a good person to ask.)"
- **Goals.** It's always a good idea to keep a running list of long term and short term goals for the character so that you don't lose sight of your character's motivations. As a role-playing gamer myself, I know that it's not always convenient to get the whole gaming group together at once, so sometimes a session can get pushed back for quite a while. It's nearly impossible to keep a thought in your head for as long as it might need to stay there. With weeks or maybe even months between sessions, you *will* find yourself wondering, "What was it that I wanted this character to be able to do?" or "Which feat did I want to take again?" With

## Optional

- **Random number generation.** Instead of rolling dice, which the players can hear and might start to get alarmed, there are programs that you can download that will generate a random number between X and Y (where X and Y are numbers that you define, like X=1 Y=12 – That would be like rolling a d12). This is something that you can use if you like. The advantage to doing this on the computer is that the players cannot see the rolls (if you already use a DM screen, then this is not a problem). You can also pre-generate numbers and keep them in a list.

## Players:

A computer is a good tool to keep track of just about everything you need as a player as well.

Here is a list of some things that you might find a computer useful for as a player:

## Character sheet

- **Character Background.** If your GM allows you to come up with your own character's background, it is a good thing to have on hand as a text file. It is easier to be elaborate on a computer, because you can go back and forth in the text, move it around or change a word here or there without having to write it up all over again by hand.

your goals listed, all you have to do is check the list. Maybe during character conception, you had had a particular prestige class in mind, but you keep forgetting the required combination of skills—check the list.

- **Numbers.** There are many things in a game that involve numerical values. Character ability scores, experience points, money... etc. A text file is a great way to keep track of these things. Depending on how computer savvy you are, you can set up spread sheets to calculate certain things that depend on other things. For example, you want to know the exact value of money you have, but you want the numbers to refer to the value of 1GP (gold pieces) and all you have is PP (platinum pieces). There are 10BP to 1 PP. On a properly configured spread sheet, you can enter the 40 PP and it will tell you that you have 400GP. Of course, with further configuration, you can add Electrum, silver, and whatever else you would like.
- **Communication.** Assuming everyone at the table has got a computer, and they are networked, there are instant message programs that do not require Internet access that you can install. This way, if you need to, you can send a message that only one or two other people can see. Passing sticky notes can be troublesome if the notes end up with the wrong person! If there is something that you need to tell the GM but you want to keep it between the two of you, this is an excellent way to do it. Yes, I know... those of you who are familiar with computers and networking know that this is going to take a lot of time and effort to set up and may not be worth it. If you do this successfully, you no longer have the right to wonder whether or not you are a geek. There is no longer any question... you ARE a geek.

### Everybody now!

This section of this article is full of things that computers can provide for all gamers at the table.

- **Recording.** Every now and again, you are going to wish that you could rewind the session and listen again to the details that you might not have

been paying attention to. With a computer and a microphone, you can do exactly that. Get yourself a web cam and not only do you have audio, but video as well. Granted, a gaming session could last hours and hours, but with the proper hard drive space, it can be done. You can then play the antics later for your friends, or to help you keep a log. This brings me to...

- **Game log.** As I stated above, you are going to want to know what happened in the past. This is going to come in handy if you, like myself, only get to play once or twice a month. I keep a log of the game, and I post it on the Internet. (If you are interested, the logs of the games in which I am involved, click [here](#).) This is a great tool for remembering things like people's names, riddles, clues, and just basic facts of the game. Eventually, if the log gets long enough, it can be turned into a story, and possibly submitted for publication.
- **Die rolling.** Depending on the leniency of you GM, you might be able to get away with using programs to randomly generate your die rolls. There is little reason to want to do this other than you don't have to take your dice along with you. For an example of online die rolling, post a thread in the [Silven.com forums!](#) There's a button that you can click to add a die roll.
- **Graphics.** If you have the time and the talent, you might think about making some graphics for your game. If you are a GM maybe you want to have a drawing of the medallion that you players find. A picture equals a thousand words. If you are not all that handy with a mouse, the Internet is a vast ocean full of graphics that you can use. If you do so, remember to check with the owner or creator of the graphics and give credit where credit is due. On the topic of the Internet and graphics, sometimes a website can be made to store all your gaming information! (Once again, shameless plug: [Griznuq.com](#)). Most of the time, things that look great on the computer just don't have the same radiance when printed out. Going along side graphics would be legibility. Those of us who are none too handy with a pen or a pencil (and you

know who you are...) might benefit from typing your text up and being able to email it to another person or print it out.

- **Find an official ruling.** If you happen to have an Internet connection at or near the gaming table, you have at your disposal almost countless forums in which you can get information about the gaming rules. ([Silven.com](#) for example!) [Wizards of the Coast](#) have all sorts of downloads for you to use in game, like [map-a-week](#), as well as the [message boards](#).

### The Cons

Naturally, as with any technology, there are cons to introducing computers to your role playing world. The cons are the same for both GMs and players and go a little something like this:

- **Cost.** I mentioned something in the section about recording about hard drive space. A video recording of a long gaming session can grow to astronomical sizes, which means that you are going to need a very large hard drive. Of course, once recorded, you could always burn them to CD, or better yet, DVD. That of course means that you are going to need a CD or DVD burner. These are not free. Nor is the blank media. You can print things, but that requires a printer, paper, and ink or toner.
- **Availability.** Many of the things that I had talked about would require either you or everyone to be on a network with Internet access, and that is not always a possibility. Not everyone is going to be able to get a computer or a network connection.
- **Inherent computer problems.** Anyone who owns or operates a computer knows that sometimes computers are not the most reliable things. One might argue that they have never had to run a virus scan on their mechanical pencil, or reboot their notebook. I'm sure you've never had your three ring binder crash, erasing your data. The connection between your pen and paper never really need a lot of troubleshooting short of changing the ink.

# FRP Games

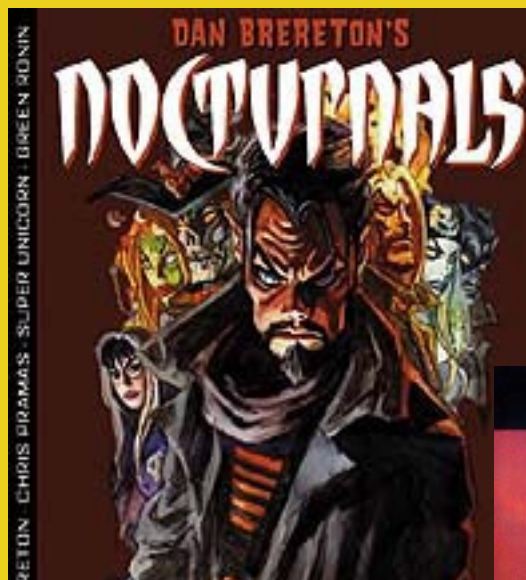
Silven Crossroads recommended online retailer

- **Atmosphere.** Gaming, especially in the medieval setting, might be a little difficult with a computer sitting in front of you. Being that you are trying to get into the characters mind in a pre-technology setting, a distraction like a computer might be something that just gets in the way. I have also heard of groups that prefer to play by candlelight. The glow of a laptop screen would certainly impact the ambience.

Granted computers are something that just might not fit into your image of the perfect gaming session, but whatever your personal preferences are, computers are here to make certain jobs easier. As a computer technician myself however, I know just as well as you might find that certain things are simpler without them.

Regardless of this, this article was designed to show you that there are times a computer can help the gaming run a little smoother, make information a little more convenient and the session more enjoyable for both the players and the GM. Time is marching on and technology is advancing in leaps and bounds. Is it something that you welcome, or is it something from which you need a break?

**Looking for RPG products?** Silven Crossroads recommends our affiliate partner, FRP Games, as our on-line retailer of choice. With a vast assortment of gaming related products for many different systems, worldwide shipping and the most competitive pricing on the web, there is no better place to do your gaming shopping.



Mutants & Masterminds RPG:  
Nocturnals - A Midnight Companion  
(d20)

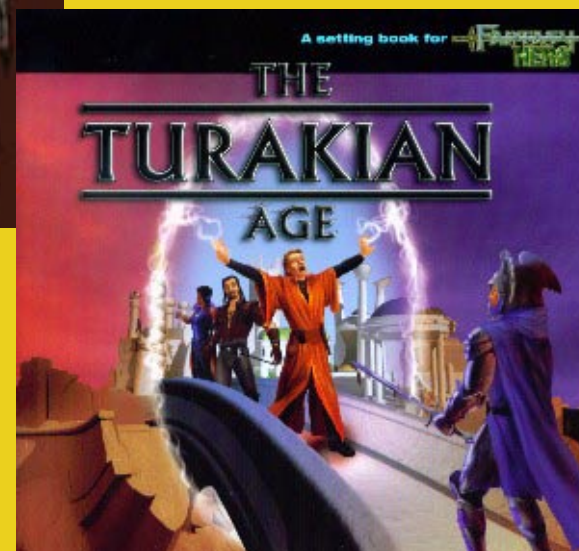
Retail Price : \$29.95

Your price : \$23.95

Hero System: Fantasy  
Hero - The Turakian Age

Retail Price : \$26.99

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by Artemis Jade Wetzel

# THREADS

He sat at the window staring down at the busy world, watching with glazed and apathetic eyes as the mortal tapestry continued on in its sickness far below him. Was the world continuously woven in bright glorious colors, woven in moving pictures? Were the simple meaningless lives of the mortals woven into silken threads by the three Fates? His world was of lonely darkness, and solitude.

He sat in the window, upon the sill, still as death in his darkness high above the eternal tapestry. His head was bowed and his eyes were of a startlingly deep ocean blue, fringed by thick black eyelashes. He peered incuriously down through a curtain of thick vast midnight hair. It seemed that the only color in him apart from the azure of his eyes was the faint hint of color on his lips, glossed over with the faint orange of dusk staining the sky, a touch of color to contrast with his ivory skin. He was shrouded in crimson red velvet that hung from his shoulders and pooled around his legs in shimmering folds. His ability to see all those weaved into the threads was a wonderful gift. His ability spanned to see the past and future in the treads of the weave. He watched and he waited.

Far below the Tapestry wove on.

The Tapestry... it was the mortal plane, a place he would never see from anywhere other than his incarceration here in his darkness. He would never breathe the earthly air of daylight and never have the chance to taste anything grown in mortal soil. Before his darkness there may have been some chance for him to see the place where mortals dwell. They walk the Earth, but now he didn't even have the expectation to be able to walk free again in mortality, much less visit the day. All he could do was watch the lives of the creatures in the weave below in the night.

The amount of time he had spent in his internment watching the Tapestry had benumbed him to the wonder of it. He no longer had any interest in the way the weaver, Thayla, who

with her careful hands had spun the silken strands of each life out of the vast void that surrounded the edges of the Tapestry, where it frayed only slightly and dissolved away into nothingness. He had no more interest in how Kearwyn decided the length and destiny of each life. Her brow furrowed in concentration as she tamed each individual strand into the weave. He had no interest in the third sister, Mulana, as she moved with her razor-sharp scissors, severing each strand at the appointed time.

Strands that snapped without the assistance of the inexorable Mulana and to a destiny not decided by the Dispenser of Lots were lives lost to chance. A murder in an abandoned storehouse somewhere, an out of control buggy hurtling down an embankment were all lives lost to accident.

Occasionally the Tapestry was shot through with glittering and endless metallic threads of silver and bronze. These were the lives of the supernatural Kinfolk – from Demons to Angels – who resided on the mortal plane. The metallic threads that did end tended to cease with shocking abruptness, more often than not occurring in the midst of the severing of many mortal strands because the taking of an immortal life was not an act without price.

Suddenly below Thayla paused.

This feat in itself was enough to capture his attention. He bent forward from his crouched position by the window, his pale hands emerging from the soft folds of velvet to wrap around the cold iron bars of his immortal darkness. Ignoring the burning sting of onset of dawn he pressed his face out to see what event had been momentous enough as to give the weaver pause in such an act of magnitude as weaving the Tapestry was.

He ruffled his wings in agitation when he couldn't see what it was that had caused Thayla to take pause, aching to spread his wings but unable to with the pressing of day. It was

## About the Author

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

too dangerous to stretch and too risky to lean any farther forward. This darkness he was incarcerated in was a hell within Hell.

The Fate began to spin again and from her fingers he could see a thread appear unlike any other in the weave. It was like bright flames shining, burning with the hotness of a fire. This new thread was woven into the weave by Kearwyn amidst a close-knit community of immortals recently rocked by conflict – a community he had other reasons for watching.

As he watched he saw a young child, Gaelen, placed into the care of the Sage, Rioradian. Who was this Gaelen, to be given over to the greatest and wisest of the Four Sages?

Rioradian's thread gleamed like brightly polished silver – a hue matched only by the threads of the other Sages that appeared sporadically within the weave – and in a sense, they were tarnished. Four fallen angels, given over to hell, fallen from heaven and the grace of God. Rumors that abounded within the realm were that the Four Sages were Cherubim of the First Hierarchy of angels, fallen when they sided with Torok after his own fall.

The gentle breeze that stirred his hair and lightly ruffled the raven-black feathers of his wings that were folded gently against his back, a breeze that carried the teasing taste of freedom, and the smell of hunger's delight. A glimmer of hope developed at the thought of the chosen one releasing him from his debt—a debt paid by centuries of shadow.

The presence of the chosen within the weave was a welcome distraction, and he took great delight in watching the way the child developed under the tutelage of the Sage who had, at first, appeared bemused by the presence of this child in his

life. So intent was he on watching the life unfolding before him that he forgot about his darkness for a while.

Occasionally Gaelen's thread would vanish from the weave, only to reappear further along somewhere in the endless tapestry. When this had first happened he had been startled and taken aback, even shocked. His attention had been momentarily diverted from the weave and when he looked back there was no sign of the child or his mentor. Surely, Gaelen and Rioradian were not dead? Yet there was no uproar within their community, nor was there the sudden cessation of mortal life that he had come to associate with the destruction of an immortal. Eventually he realized that the disappearances were in fact the Sage and his charge moving to ascension, somewhere where the Fates did not weave – or at least did not weave in this Tapestry.

Knowledge of who Gaelen was grew slowly within him too. He knew the child had to be someone of prophecy in both the mortal plane and in this realm. If he had been exposed to a world outside of his incarceration he would have realized sooner that the young boy was in fact, Gaelen Kinstar the heir to the Elven Lands and proposed to be the future consort of the Highlord Torak. What he had been the continual witness to was the growth and development of their future ruler. Perhaps then the world would be free of the evil that corrupts all creatures and finally bring peace.

It was this obsession with watching and waiting for the young heir, Gaelen that caused him to miss the return of an evil to the Elven Lands, so still he sits, waits, and watches. This...which is his fate, woven now by those who are the weavers of the threads of time. The watcher can smell his freedom, lingering like the sweet smell of lilac on an early spring morning. His heart pounds with anticipation...

The biggest electronic gaming party of the year, The Electronic Entertainment Expo, otherwise known as E3 2004, has come and, in flurry of activity, gone. This year, the Tenth Anniversary of the big show was indeed big, loud, and packed with almost 5000 games for the PC, console game systems, hand held systems, and mobile devices. Other gaming-related products, such as the previously elusive Phantom Game Console and new gaming PCs from Alienware were also on display.

But as the smoke cleared, the dust settled, and we all returned to the places we collectively were from, who or what were the stars of the show? Which games really shined through the glitz, the music and the larger-than-life displays, and looked to meet out high expectations in the coming year?

Well, E3 just wouldn't be a show without giving recognition to those products that stood out above the crowd. Continuing the tradition begun last year, Silven Crossroads proudly and boldly names the award winners for E3 2004. These are the games that really wowed us and that made us happy once again to be gamers. Jowood said it best in their press kit: In large print it said "**Game Over**" and then right beneath it said, "**NOT in this life. Thank GOD I'm a GAMER!**" I couldn't have said it better! In order to be fair, we tried to "share the wealth" between the many great games we saw and played, even though several of the titles could easily have swept nearly all the categories. Get ready to cheer or boo, or maybe even throw nerf balls at the computer monitor, but here are our selections of the best RPGs of the show, and the games deserving of the Silven Crossroads E3 2004 awards.

### Best Handheld RPG

This year was interesting for the handheld market because the Nintendo Gameboy SP actually had some competition -- from Sony in the form of the PSP and from itself with Nintendo's own DS. While the titles shown were still limited at this point, there were a number of RPGs available that look promising. The new Animal Crossing for the DS will provide more Animal Crossing fun for those who enjoyed the game for the Gamecube. The Gameboy SP continues to receive

support and several RPGs are in the works, including a new Legend of Zelda. The PSP, the new powerful little handheld, supports up to 16.7 million colors. The games look incredible for a handheld system, even though only a few titles were available with playable demos or gameplay video. Graphics aside though, looking at the selection of RPGs for handheld systems including story lines and gameplay, the winner is clearly *Tales of Eternia* from Namco. A continuation of a popular and successful franchise, the new handheld game promises to provide an engaging experience in the Tales universe. Congratulations to Namco for receiving the Silven Crossroads' award for **Best Handheld RPG of E3 2004!**

### Best Mobile RPG

This is a new category this year but as more and more developers are

supporting games for mobile devices it seemed appropriate to look at these RPGs as a separate category. There are a number of great looking RPGs to choose from in this category such as Dragon Quest, Galleon and even Neverwinter Nights, but selecting the winner in this category was actually pretty easy. What could be better than an Elder Scrolls adventure? First person view, great story, freedom in questing makes *The Elder Scrolls Travels: Shadowkey* for the N-Gage is the hands-down winner. Congratulations to Bethesda and Vir2L Studios for receiving the Silven Crossroads' award for **Best RPG on a Mobile Device of E3 2004!**

### Best Gamecube RPG

The Nintendo Gamecube continues to attract developers but in keeping with the Nintendo tradition of "quality over quantity" the library is a little less expansive than that of PS2 or Xbox, but there are some great RPGs for the system including Paper Mario, Baten Kaitos and Phantasy Star Universe. Many of the new RPGs feature "card battle systems" for combat, an innovative although not always the most satisfying form of combat for many gamers. In reviewing the choices of RPGs for the Gamecube, Namco has once again won our hearts with *Tales of Symphonia*. Congratulations once again to Namco for winning for receiving the Silven Crossroads' award for **Best Gamecube RPG of E3 2004!**

continued on page 36 ...

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## Introduction

This month's feature details the announcement of Silven Crossroads' own PDF publishing label, Silven Publishing. Part one of the preview will introduce you to the publishing company by its founder—Kosala Ubayasekara. Part two of the preview gives an overview of our first publication set to release in June 2004—*Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books* written by the editor-in-chief of the *Silven Trumpeter*, Dana Driscoll.

## Part I - Silven Publishing Overview

By Kosala Ubayasekara

The RPG industry certainly does have its fill of publishers. So when another one decides to open its doors, it not only has to look back at the shoulders it will be standing on, but even forward at the horizon to which it moves. It needs to bring with it a sense of new beginnings coupled with a drive to innovate and contribute. It with this in mind that we now formally announce the opening of Silven Publishing.

Silven Publishing will focus on producing and marketing PDF and print products within the role-playing game industry. We aim to not only produce high quality in-house products, but also gather to us a host of quality external developers and writers whose work we believe contributes quality to the industry.

So naturally, you will be wondering what we do that others don't already do. The last few years I have watched with rising pleasure the emergence of the PDF as a viable product platform for RPGs. As one would expect in the initial rush of a new medium, products of varying quality have hit the market diluting its potential somewhat. It is my belief that in order to help the industry grow for the benefit of both developers and consumers, it is imperative that publishing houses emerge that are willing to bring a production value to PDF books that today only exist in print publishing budgets.

## Why We are Different

Silven Publishing will commit high production values to every book it publishes. Our goal is to bring you a PDF publishing house that will showcase products at a quality standard you would expect from a print publisher. We will compound that goal by also functioning as a medium for new entrants into the RPG industry giving them a solid path into entering this highly competitive market.

## What We can do for Writers and Developers

How are we going to do this you ask? Well to start of with, our publishing model for third party products relieves the developer/writer of all production costs. We take on the costs for editing, copywriting, layout and artwork alleviating the developer of most of the up front challenges of publishing their work. We will share the risk and costs of the writers and developers we elect to work with, and reap the rewards together over the long run.

Silven Publishing is run by some of the same team that runs Silven Crossroads. We have a proven track record in the industry and a respected brand name to fuel our growth into the publishing market. We aim to bring that strength to bear in assisting the writers and developers we work with over the years to come.

## So What can You Expect This Year?

During 2004 we aim to publish no less than a minimum of 4 books. Showcased below, in Part II of this feature, is a teaser to our pilot product written by our very own Dana Driscoll, and features a take on books and tomes of the kind you have not seen before. Look for a full preview of this book to be advertised at online industry news sources in the first two weeks of June 2004.

On top of that we will be unveiling a complete campaign setting called *EsoTerrana* this year by African RPG developer Remi Fayomi in the fall of 2004. We have two other products cooking in our labs that we are keeping a tight lid on for now, but keep an eye out for announcements on those in late fall 2004.



## Part II - Preview: Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books

By Dana Driscoll

*Libem Liborium: The Complete d20 Guide to Books* is a d20 supplement utilizing the *Dungeons & Dragons v. 3.5* rule set. This book is the only source needed to incorporate the phenomenon of writing, book collecting and book utilization into your current game. This guide will assist both book-savvy characters and the dungeon master giving a host of new book-related items, spells, prestige classes, sample libraries and book dealers, even new monsters and deities.

## Start Small and...

Like most things, *Libem Liborium* started as simply an idea spawning from a character I was playing in a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. Fimble, a gnome loremaster, had a near-obsession with books and the acquisition of knowledge. Unfortunately, there were no mechanics to assist DMs with this type of character. Along with that, from running my own past games, I found that there was a gap in mechanics surrounding books as a whole. For example, what benefits should a character get for owning/reading books? What should books cost? What do you do when the party finds a small library among the treasure hoard? What do you do when you need a knowledgeable villain or monster? What about when a character wants to write a book? What types of wards can be placed on spellbooks?

At the same time Fimble was adventuring, I had started a longer article for my Polyglot column for the *Trumpeter* inspired by the character that attempted to answer some of the above questions. As I continued to add to the article, it slowly ballooned in size from several pages to over thirty pages of material with little signs of stopping.

It was about this time, back in October of 2003, that the Silven Crossroads staff began discussion about starting a publishing company associated with Silven Crossroads. Knowing I had the beginnings of a work that could be turned into a neat PDF book, and knowing we needed a product to

premier with our announcement of the publishing company, I decided to tackle the project.

And so I began to seriously work on the book and the ideas within took size, shape, and volume. Not only did I draw on my past education in literature, writing and linguistics, but I also did a significant amount of research regarding the history of printing, bookmaking and literacy. Over the months the book continued to develop and grow as the chapters and sections slowly began to come together. I originally was shooting for 50-75 pages, but it was soon evident that it was going to take nearly double that to cover the subject in explicit detail. I attempted to account for anything a DM or player may need to incorporate books into a campaign—items based on my past experiences as a player and as a dungeon master I had seen lacking in the system up to this point.

### The Fine Details

When approaching writing I had one goal in mind—to create an extensive, exhaustive, and creative resource when it comes to using books in campaigns. More than that, however, I wanted to create something that would be useful to d20 gamers regardless of what type of campaign or setting they were playing in. And so the guide details information on literacy, printing techniques, and how social concerns such as government structure and religion play a role on where and in what form books can be found.

*Libem Liborium* not only includes information on incorporating books and book collecting characters into a standard fantasy campaign, it also gives detailed instructions on all different types of settings in which books could play a role. Even more, it is written in such a way to be useful not only to your book-hoarding loremasters but also to other classes that have any involvement with writing, books or knowledge advancement—including clerics, bards, sorcerers—even fighter classes. The five new prestige classes are open to a range of classes—everything from the story-telling legend crafter to the mighty rune warrior.

Along with basic information, the book gives DMs a large amount of resources to work with—including a random book generator that will generate thousands of unique books including language the book was written in, subject, value, condition, title and author. It also gives a complete treasure chart for incorporating books and book-related items. And to cover other bases a DM may need, it includes nine new book

related monsters and four new deities to add to any new or existing campaign.

The book details information about writing while adventuring, including a complete set of mechanics for writing, publishing, and selling books—everything from hand-publishing to mass book sales. These are the sorts of things that can present unique role-play opportunities to characters and mechanics a DM needs if he or she wants to allow players complete freedom.

*Libem Liborium* also includes over 80 new mundane items and over 40 new magical items along with over 40 new spells for clerics, wizards, sorcerers, and bards. It includes six new domains and a host of new feats and skills.



All in all, *Libem Liborium* is a complete d20 guide to dealing with books utilizing the v. 3.5 rule set. It is the only source a DM or player needs to incorporate the phenomenon of writing, book collecting and book utilization into a current game. I welcome you to view some of the preview material we have included and to send me comments or questions.

### Preview : NEW SPELLS

#### CARTOGRAPHY

Divination

**Level:** Brd 2, Sor/Wiz 2

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** One blank scroll or parchment touched

**Area:** Observable by caster

**Duration:** 1 hour/level

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You imbue magical energy into the component of this spell allowing it to float within 5' of the caster recording a top-down contour map of what the caster observes during the duration of the spell. If more components are needed to complete the map, the caster becomes aware of it. The spell only records what the caster can physically observe. If the caster can observe invisible, hidden, or displaced objects with perfect accuracy, such as through the use of *true seeing*, those are recorded and noted as such effects. If the caster observes any illusions and is not aware of their illusory nature or cannot negate or disbelieve the effects, the map reflects this. The caster can command the map to record further information by merely visualizing the information on the page. Any effect or spell that negates mental contact between the caster and the map negates any ability for this spell to record any information, such as a ring of mind shielding or *mind blank*. Any area effect spells that cause three or more points of damage dispels this spell and may destroy the map as well

**Material Component:** A piece of parchment.

#### Charged Object

Evocation [Electricity]

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 3

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** 1 day/level

**Saving Throw:** Reflex half

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

*Charged object* can be cast on any single non-living object (magical or mundane) weighing up to 50lbs. If any creature, other than the caster, touches or picks up the object, the object deals 1d6 points of electricity damage per caster level (up to a maximum of 10d6). The caster may carry and handle the object as normal. The lightning does not damage the object itself.

The ward on the object cannot be detected by normal observation, and *detect magic* spell reveals only that the object is magical. A successful *dispel magic* check can remove this effect.

*Material Component:* A pinch of powered crystal that is sprinkled over the object.

### FIMBLE'S SECRET SHELVES

Conjuration (Summoning)

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 5

**Components:** V, S, F

**Casting time:** 1 hour

**Range:** See text

**Target:** One bookcase and up to 2 cubic feet of books/caster level

**Duration:** Sixty days or until discharged

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

You hide a large bookcase on the Ethereal Plane for up to 60 days and can retrieve it at will. The bookcase can contain up to 2 cubic foot of books per caster level (regardless of the shelf's actual size). A single cubic foot can fit four 8x11 books. This spell functions only for books, papers, and other small writing supplies—living objects, money, equipment, etc. will not allow the spell to function.

The bookcase must be of the highest quality, not costing less than 1000 gold pieces. It can be made of a number of fine materials including quality wood, glass, or fine metals, but must be specially crafted for you or have been in your possession for at least 10 years.

### ILLUSIONARY MESSAGE, LESSER

Illusion (Pattern)

**Level:** Brd 1, Sor/Wiz 1

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** One round

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5ft/2 levels)

**Area:** One 10-foot cube

**Duration:** 1 hour/level

**Saving Throw:** Yes (harmless); See Text

**Spell Resistance:** No

You create an illusionary message that can cover one ten-foot cube area. The message can be up to 200 words in length. The message, language, color and size of text is specified at the time of casting. The message must be in a language you can speak.

All who make successful spot checks (DC 10) see the message. A successful Will save will allow individuals to determine that the message itself is an illusion.

*Material Component:* A drop of silver ink.

### PAGE TURNER

Transmutation

**Level:** Brd 0, Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** One book

**Duration:** 1 hour/level

**Saving Throw:** Will negates (object)

**Spell Resistance:** Yes (object)

*Page turner* allows the caster to turn the pages of a book mentally. The book must stay within the visual field of the caster for the spell to function.

### WATERPROOFING

Abjuration

**Level:** Brd 0, Clr 0, Sor/Wiz 0

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Touch

**Target:** One object

**Duration:** 1 hour/level

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

*Waterproofing* can be cast on any single non-living object (magical or mundane) weighing up to 50lbs. The spell protects the object from getting wet or being damaged by water. If the object is submerged in water, it will remain dry.

*Waterproofing* can be made permanent with a *permanency* spell.

## Preview PRC: BOOKBURNER

While most seek knowledge and understanding, a bookburner seeks the opposite. Working directly in the name of the dark god Azocrathe (see Chapter Nine: Deities), a bookburner's goal is to promote ignorance among the masses through misinformation and destruction. Some bookburners destroy all information they find, not bothering to read before destruction, while others focus more on the concealment of information (keeping the choicest bits for herself, of course). While destroyer-type bookburners are more prevalent, the concealment-type bookburners are much more effective, using the information she has gained to locate further targets for destruction. Even though she is a raw destructive force, a Bookburner has learned that it pays to be quiet, complimenting her raw evocation with subterfuge abilities.

Bookburners are a rare but dangerous force. Most become bookburners through a dark calling, while others find the path coincides with their own beliefs. In either case, the way of the bookburner is only open to those who only depend on their own sheer energies for survival.

Sorcerers and multi-class rogues are the most common Bookburners, although clerics, bards, or druids may sometimes find this calling. Wizards are unable to be bookburners because of their dependence on learning, spellbooks, and study. Fighters and rangers find that this class does not benefit them, while paladins and monks find that the ideals of the bookburner go against their moral philosophies. Barbarians are a good fit because of their distrust of literacy, although they must multi-class in order to gain access to the prestige.

**Hit Die:** d6

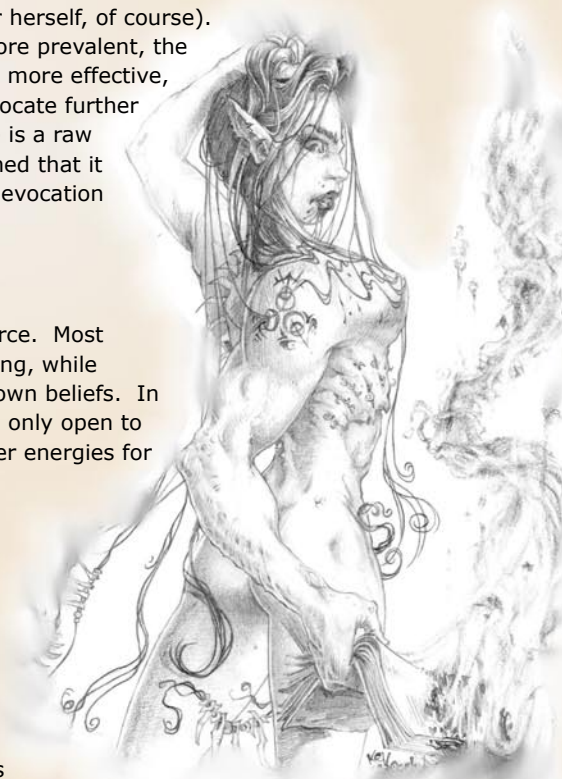
**Requirements:**

**Alignment:** Any nonlawful

**Skills:** Bluff 8 ranks, Sense Motive 2 ranks.

**Spells:** Ability to cast three evocation spells, one of which must be 3<sup>rd</sup> level or higher.

**Special:** Must not have ranks in more than one knowledge skill, and must not prepare spells from a book.



artwork sketch: Kevin Crossley

### **Class Skills:**

Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (Arcana), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Int), Spellcraft (Int).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier

### **Class Features:**

All of the following are Class Features of the bookburner prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor proficiency:** Bookburners gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

**Spells per Day:** When a new bookburner level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in a spellcasting class she belonged to before adding the prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained, except for an increased effective level of spellcasting.

If a character had more than one spellcasting class before becoming a bookburner, she must decide to which class she adds the new level for purposes of determining spells per day.

**Writers Block (Ex):** A 1st level bookburner cannot use any magical item based on writing including scrolls, tomes, ciphers, and magical texts. Items with small amounts of writing, symbols, or runes such as magical weapons or wondrous items are not prohibited.

**Erasing Touch (Su):** At first level, a bookburner gains the ability, through touch, to erase non-magical writing on contact as per the *erase* spell. This supernatural ability cannot be 'turned off' by the bookburner. Gloves or hand coverings will not prevent this effect.

**Burning Gaze (Ex):** At first level, the bookburner's devotion to their cause is readily visible in their eyes, she receives a +2 bonus to all Intimidate checks.

**Bookbomb (Su):** At 2<sup>nd</sup> level, a bookburner may imbue her spells into an erased book worth no less than 100 gp. This ability functions as per the *scribe scroll* feat, except that the bookburner does not have to pay any costs in raw materials. The bookbomb is a one-use magic item that can only be used by the caster. Activating the item involves speaking the command word and throwing it at the target. This is a standard action that provokes attacks of opportunity. In the process, the book is destroyed. A bookburner may create and carry any number of bookbombs she has the time and experience to create.

**Flaming Hands (Sp):** At 3<sup>rd</sup> level, a bookburner gains the ability to set her hands ablaze once per day as per the *produce flame* spell. Her caster level equals her character level.

**Resistance to fire (Ex):** At 4<sup>th</sup> level, a bookburner gains resistance to fire 5. A bookburner is exposed to fire so often that she has developed a resistance. At 8<sup>th</sup> level, this resistance increases to 10.

**Bookbomb Blast(Su):** If a bookburner is slain, the bookbombs that she carried are destroyed in the process. There is a 25% chance that the imbued spell within each bookbomb discharges at a random target. Each bookbomb not discharged explodes dealing 1d4 points of fire damage per caster level to each creature within a 30 ft. radius.

**Table 5.3: The Bookburner**

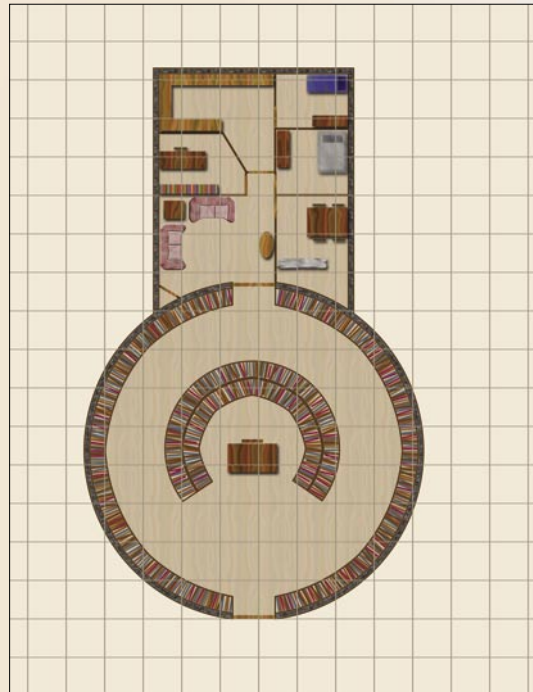
Level	BaB	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Per Day/ Spells Known
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Writer's Block, Erasing Touch, Burning Gaze	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Bookbomb	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+1	+1	+3	+3	Flaming Hands	+1 level of existing class
4th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Resistance to fire 5	+1 level of existing class
5th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Bookbomb Blast, Deny the Word	+1 level of existing class
6th	+3	+2	+5	+5	Flaming Hands 2/day	+1 level of existing class
7th	+3	+2	+5	+5	Greater Erasing Touch	+1 level of existing class
8th	+4	+2	+6	+6	Resistance to fire 10	+1 level of existing class
9th	+4	+3	+6	+6	Flaming Hands 3/day	+1 level of existing class
10th	+5	+3	+7	+7	Bookbomb Detonation	+1 level of existing class

Creatures in the area can make a reflex save at the original spell DC for half damage.

**Deny the Word (Su):** At 5<sup>th</sup> level, the bookburner has learned to deny the power of words. She adds her Charisma bonus (if any) as a profane bonus to all saving throws against spells and magics based on words (such as *command*), and language or writings (such as *symbol*). However, songs or music based magic is not effected by this ability

**Greater Erasing Touch (Su):** At 7<sup>th</sup> level, a bookburner gains the ability to erase writing through touch as per the *greater erasing* spell. This is a supernatural ability and cannot be 'turned off' by the bookburner. {Remove the rest}

**Bookbomb Detonation (Su):** At 10<sup>th</sup> level, the bookburner becomes a force of sheer destruction. The bookburner may command all bookbombs on her person to detonate dealing 1d6 points of fire damage per caster level per book to each creature within 30 ft. Doing so is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The bookburner is immune to this effect.



**Preview Place: THE BOOK STORE**

More formal than a book peddler, a book store is a commercial establishment devoted to the sale of books. Book stores are only found in areas with a moderate to high level of literacy and only in large enough cities to support them. Some book stores may be involved with one or more publishing houses, while others may specialize in a specific type or genre of book, such as rare and ancient tomes, historical books, children's and educational books, magical books or books on obscure subjects. Most book stores will also carry basic bookmaking supplies: inks, pens, binding materials and perhaps a few magical book-related items.

**Sample Book Store:**

*Fimble's Fine Books*

Fimble's Fine Books boasts a selection of over 1500 books, 70% common, 15% uncommon, 10% Rare, and 5% ancient tome. While Fimble's has a large selection of general books on a variety of topics, her specialty is books on obscure and arcane subjects.

Fimble Ullisproken Fenbottle Willowwhite is a cute gnomish woman, wearing blue wizard's robes and a dark cloak lined with golden runes. Fimble speaks very quickly and thinks aloud, often absentmindedly interrupting her visitors. She is very cheerful and friendly, but still strikes a hard bargain with her customers.

Her apprentice, a flaxen-haired elven male named Ellin Flamewind, tends the store when Fimble is away. A clumsy individual, Ellin is often stumbling about the store, restocking or reordering shelves. Otherwise, he is out in the back, attempting to practice his new line of spells.

Fimble's raven familiar, Zook, is the life of the store. He usually flies about, swooping down on customers challenging them to a game of cards, yelling out insults to those who swat him away.

**Fimble:** Female Gnome, Rock Wiz15; Small Humanoid; HD 15d4+30 (Wizard); hp 79; Init +7; Spd 20; AC 21;

Atk +7 base melee, +11 base ranged; +8 (1d6, +1 Quarterstaff); +12 (1d8, Crossbow, light, Masterwork); SA: Spell-like abilities; SQ: Low-light vision (Ex), Gnomish traits; AL CG; SV Fort +10, Ref +13, Will +13; STR 8, DEX 16, CON 15, INT 22, WIS 12, CHA 8.

#### Possessions:

**Weapons:** Dagger; Crossbow, light, Masterwork; +1 Quarterstaff.

**Goods:** Bolts, crossbow (10), Masterwork.

**Magic:** Wondrous: Amulet of natural armor (+2); Ring: Protection +2; Wondrous: Gloves of Dexterity (+2); Wondrous: Bracers of armor (+3); Wondrous: Cloak of resistance (+3); Scroll: *Dominate person* (9); Potion: *Cure serious wounds* (5); Wondrous: Headband of intellect (+4); Wand: *Magic missile* (9) (Charges: 25); Glasses of Speed Reading.

**Skills:** Concentration+20, Hide+7, Knowledge (arcana)+24, Knowledge (history)+24, Knowledge (planes)+24, Listen+3, Spellcraft+24.

**Feats:** Expert Researcher, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Craft Tome, Quick Composition, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Forge Ring.

**Spellbook (Wiz 4/6/6/5/5/5/4/2/1):** 0 - *arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, ghost sound, light, locate topic\*, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance, summarize\**; 1st - *animate rope, burning hands, charm person, color spray, comprehend languages, feather fall, hold portal, mage armor, magic missile, scorching object\*; unseen scribe\*, ward tome\**; 2nd - *blur, cat's grace, flaming sphere, invisibility, improved read aloud\**; 3rd - *fireball, flame arrow, fly, haste, major alphabetize\*, translate\**; 4th - *fimble's secret shelves\*, greater erase\*, supreme illusionary message\*, globe of invulnerability-lesser, polymorph, stoneskin, replicate text\**; 5th -

*awaken tome\*, blessing of the muse\*, lingering charged object\*, teleport, wall of force*; 6th - *analyze dweomer, globe of invulnerability, indestructible object\*, legend lore*; 7th - *fireworks\*, forcecage, impart knowledge\*, limited wish, mass invisibility, reduplicate\*, scream\**; 8th - *discern location, demand\*, incendiary cloud, screen.*

**Spells Prepared (Wiz 4/6/6/5/5/5/4/2/1):** 0 - *locate topic X2\*, detect magic, light*; 1st *charm person, comprehend languages, feather fall, unseen scribe\*, ward tome X2\**; 2nd - *blur, flaming sphere, invisibility, major alphabetize\*, translate X2\**; 3rd - *fireball, greater erase\*, fly, haste*; 4th - *globe of invulnerability-lesser, fimble's secret shelves\*, stoneskin, replicate text X2\**; 6th - *analyze dweomer, globe of invulnerability, indestructible object\*, legend lore*; 7th - *reduplicate\*, limited wish*; 8th - *discern location.*

#### \* denotes new spells.

**Zook:** Animal, Raven ; CR 1/4; Tiny Animal ; HD 1/4d8 (Animal); hp 39; Init +2; Spd 20, 10, Fly, Average 40; AC 22; Atk +4 base melee, +11 base ranged; +11(1d2-5, Claws); AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; STR 1, DEX 15, CON 10, INT 13, WIS 14, CHA 6.

**Skills:** Hide+10, Listen+5, Spot+5.

**Feats:** Weapon Finesse.

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by Matthew J. Hanson

## The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

### *The Sword of the Bandit King*

Starlanko the Magnificent, magus mysterious and dealer of arcane lore, examined the charred body of the self-proclaimed Bandit King while his associate, Redreck the Fierce, confiscated the weapons of the five surviving bandit vassals. The corpse of the Bandit King had quite a few valuables, coins, gems, and pointy, potentially magical items of various shapes and sizes. But no scroll cases.

Starlanko looked around the cavern. It was limestone, centuries old, and the years had carved into it far too many nooks and crannies. Any one of them could be hiding what they sought.

"All right everyone," Starlanko said to the bandit prisoners. "Two days ago you attacked a caravan carrying, among other things, a magical scroll. Now, I know you took this scroll. I also know you have not sold it. The logical conclusion is that you still have the scroll in your possession. The only remaining question then, is, where is the scroll?"

The five bandits shuffled their feet and looked at one another, but made no reply. There was only the occasional drip of water falling from a stalactite to break the silence.

"Perhaps you fail to grasp my meaning, Gentlemen. I would like one of you to tell me where the scroll is."

Again there was no reply.

"You have two options, Gentlemen. You may deal with me," said Starlanko, "or you may deal with my associate Redreck. While it makes no difference to me, be advised that while I am a man of words, he is most certainly a man of action."

Drip. Drip.

Redreck sighed. "And I already cleaned the blood off."

He unsheathed his sword.

"It's hid!" one of the bandits cried. "In a nook in the back. High up so a man can't reach it just standing."

"Show me." Starlanko commanded.

Two of the bandits glared sharply at the confessor, but said nothing. The others were relieved. Redreck watched the remaining captives, while Starlanko followed the informer to the back of the cave.

"There." He pointed to a spot high on the cavern wall.

Starlanko levitated to the nook, and sure enough, there was a scroll case inside. After briefly examining the case's contents, the mage confirmed that it was the scroll he was looking for and floated down.

"Own orre aou ee," a muffled cry came from someplace nearby. The echoing cavern made it hard to pinpoint.

"Did you say something?" Starlanko asked the bandit. The bandit shook his head no.

"Are you all right?" Starlanko called to Redreck, his concern bounced back at him from all directions.

"Mmm." Meaning, "Yes." Redreck's reply was almost lost among the echoes.

"Ah uh ere!" the mysterious voice called again. This time Starlanko pinpointed the source of the cry. It came from directly above.

Starlanko floated back up to the nook and searched it more thoroughly. He found in the back, covered with rocks and inside a wooden case, a finely made sword.

"Oh thank ye, Noble Sir," the sword said. "My former master keepethed me secreted away in yonder alcove most cruelly, for mine noble ways did not serve his evil nature, but I sense

#### About the Author

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

#### Contact the Author

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now that he art dead, making thee my new master. It shall be an honor to serve thee."

"Well I don't much use swords myself. I'll see if Redreck wants you. Otherwise intelligent swords always fetch a good price." Starlanko stated, ever practical.

"Prithee, nay, Good Master. Do not banish me to some obscure sword shelf. I wish to vanquish evil's minions at thy side."

"I'll see what I can do about that," Starlanko said. He returned to Redreck and the other bandits with sword and informer in tow. Stripping the captives of all their possessions, they tied each bandit to a different limestone pillar and left them for the authorities.

Before leaving, Starlanko whispered to the bandit who had aided him, "Here is a reward for you co-operation." Starlanko slipped a rock into the bandit's hand. It was just the right sharpness to cut through a rope, but only after an hour or two of work.

"This is not a simple gift, however. I am taking these in exchange." Starlanko cut a clump of hair from the bandit's head. "Remember all of the things you have heard a Wizard can do with a lock of hair? It is all true, and we keep the most powerful secrets to ourselves. Do we have an understanding?"

The bandit nodded yes.

"Good," Starlanko said.

And then Starlanko the Magnificent walked out of the cave, his deep blue robes shimmering, his pointed hat was almost knocked off by the cave's low entrance.

"This is a nice amulet," commented Ezar the Elder, dealer in magical goods. "An amulet of natural protection of the third degree. This also from the bandits?"

"Indeed it is," answered Starlanko the Magnificent.

"I can offer 8,000 in coin or 10,000 in trade," Ezar said. Starlanko looked at Redreck, who made a slight negating motion with his head.

"Tempting, but I think we'll keep this one, thank you." Of course Starlanko could have identified all the items himself before going to Ezar, but by the same token Ezar could have slain the bandits himself if he had wanted. In the end this method was the most efficient use of time and money. *Division of labor at its finest*, Starlanko mused.

"Is that all then?" Ezar asked, after sorting through the sizable pile Starlanko had presented to him. "A scroll perhaps?"

"I intend to return it to its rightful owners."

"Just as you intend to return that amulet I suppose?" Ezar pointed at the bauble. "I've heard that Ashburrow the Evoker would pay a lot of money to lay his hands on that thing."

"Actually, I've been saving one for last," Starlanko said in an attempt to distract the older mage. "The piece de resistance, as it were." Starlanko put a long wooden box on the table, and opened it facing towards Ezar.

"Prithee, Master, nay. I doth not wish to be sold to yon shopkeeper."

Ezar shook his head.

"Don't worry. He's just going to examine you, so that we can best determine how thou shalt best slayith the evil," Starlanko reassured the blade.

Ezar picked up the sword and looked it over through his magical eyepiece. After several rounds he laughed. "Ah, Starlanko, you never cease to amaze me."

Starlanko did not get the joke, which always made him uncomfortable. "What was it last time? A magic hoe?"

"Please, Ezar. I just found the sword. I don't know anything about it... it's not a +1 is it?"

Ezar just smiled and nodded.

"But it's more than just a +1 one right? I mean its a +1 flaming, or a +1 holy, or a +1 keen vormal of speed right?"

Ezar shook his head still smiling.

"But it's intelligent right?"

"Yep. And it knows a lot about history, and about royalty, it looks like. That'll boost the price a bit, I reckon. If it weren't for the smarts I could only give you about 800 for it, but when you consider—"

"Ezar please, what's the bottom line?"

"I'll give you two K in coin, or two and a half in trade."

Starlanko sighed, but he reminded himself that these trivial items had not been the point of their mission. "All right I'll take."

"What dost thou mean master?" The sword cried. "Please tell me you are not disposing of me!"

"I would never dream of disposing of thee. I just have, after careful analysis, determined that thou couldst be better utilized slaying evil if thou were sold to this fine gentleman."

"But I don't wish to be sold!"

"Well I don't wish to carry around a practically useless sword." Starlanko countered. "I don't even know how to properly use a sword. Redreck do you want to use this sword?"

Redreck vigorously shook his head no.

"See, if you stayed with us you wouldn't get a chance even see combat."

"Good master, I beg thee, you know not what it is like laying

on a store shelf, being picked up and examined like a slab of meat. Being passed over as 'just a +1.' Is the sizes of thy plus all that matters?"

"Yes," replied Starlanko. "Well that, and your special abilities."

"Doth my feelings not matter? I am a sword. Hath not a Sword eyes? Hath not a Sword hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions. If you prick us, do we not bleed?"

Starlanko rolled his eyes. "All right. I will take you with us, but only if you keep quiet." He shut the case with a satisfying snap. "It wasn't worth very much anyway."

----

"What for art thou doing?" the Sword asked the following morning. Starlanko the Magnificent stood over a bowl of water he had prepared the night before using a spell that he had recently acquired from a once powerful, but paranoid, (and now dead, but through no doings of Starlanko) necromancer.

The process was simple. The bowl of water is placed out the night before and the spell is cast upon it. In the morning it will either remain clear or turn red. This morning it was red leading Starlanko to the obvious conclusion.

"Somebody will try to kill me," Starlanko said. "Or rather, events have been set into motion, so that if all proceeds normally, somebody would try to kill me. At least that's how I understand it."

Starlanko was glad he had decided to use this spell. He had hoped the bandit he had allowed to escape would be intelligent enough to either realize the benefits of mutual co-operation, or fear the wizard's power, but it seemed neither of these was the case. Unless, of course, this death threat was completely unrelated. A possibility. Starlanko was not without his share of enemies, but at this point he felt he should focus on the most likely course of events.

So, Starlanko made a series of presumptions. First, the escaped bandits knew that Starlanko was in the city of Mazalax, which was not at all unreasonable. Secondly, they almost certainly knew that he planned to travel towards

Escondole, to return the scroll to its rightful owner. Lastly, he assumed that his intended killers did not know that he knew that they were planning to kill him. Putting himself in the bandits' place, he figured that the most likely approach would be an ambush along the road between Mazalax and Escondol. If he traveled south, along the coast, he could easily avoid them.

There was a knock at the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's Jarek," said a young voice from the other side. Jarek was the innkeeper's son. Starlanko opened the door a crack to confirm Jarek by appearance before pulling it open the rest of the way to allow the boy entrance.

"There's some men downstairs looking for you," Jarek whispered. "A really ugly bunch. Father's trying to stall them. I thought you should know."

"You did the right thing Jarek," Starlanko said. He handed the youth several gold coins. "This should settle the bill. Keep anything extra."

It seemed Starlanko had overestimated his assailants. This current predicament could be dealt with easily enough.

"And if you could do me one more favor, I would be most appreciative," Starlanko said as Jarek was about to leave "I need you to wait about five minutes, and try to start up something downstairs that makes a fair bit of noise. A song or an argument might do the trick." The innkeeper's son nodded and was gone.

Starlanko quickly informed Redreck of his plan. Each gathered his belongings then waited in the hall of the inn's second story. They could hear what was going on in the common area below, but could not be seen. It was not long before they heard what they were waiting for.

"Well it's all for me grog, me jolly jolly grog!" Jarek's voice was joined by another that Starlanko recognized: Berret the Fox, like Starlanko, an adventurer and a regular of the Ambrosia Inn. Starlanko would have to remember to thank him properly another time.

Starlanko cast a spell turning both himself and Redreck invisible, though alas, not inaudible. Because they were just as invisible to each other, Redreck placed his hand on Starlanko's shoulder, and the two walked as quietly as they could down the stairs. They passed as far as they could from the group of rough looking men arguing with Melek the innkeeper.

"Listen old man, I don't think you know just who you're trying to protect," the apparent leader of the group growled. There were five of them, and the one Starlanko had allowed to escape was the only one who looked familiar.

"I assure you I am not trying to protect anybody," protested Melek. "A man matching the description you gave stays here occasionally, but I haven't seen him in weeks."

"Liar. We know he's here, and if you knew what was good for you, you'd give him up!"

"Is that a threat?" asked Melek.

"Not at all," the leader replied, "I'm trying to protect you from him. He killed my own brother in cold blood."

"Thou art a villain and a liar. My master wouldst never stoop to such means as thou accuseth him of." The sword's accusation rang out over the argument.

Starlanko jerked Redreck's wrist, signaling for him to run. The two bolted out the door. Redreck mounted his horse; Starlanko summoned his. They were quickly off, though not before Starlanko dropped the Bandit King's sword into the horses' watering trough.

As he rode away he heard its muted cries, "Wait. Thou hath droppethed me. Canst thou hear..."

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As it turned out Starlanko did take the quickest road between Mazalax and Escondol, and as a result he was at the fine estate of Lady Essar Desol before nightfall. When he gave his name and business to the guard out front he was escorted to Lady Desol's sitting room. There, aptly enough, Starlanko and Redreck sat. It was a good half hour before Lady Desol was able to see them.

"I apologize for having kept you waiting," she said upon entering, accompanied by two rather dangerous looking women. As one drew near Starlanko, he felt a strange tingling sensation in his mind, he immediately recognized it as a *zone of truth* spell

"Not at all. I realize you are a busy woman, My Lady. I had expected to wait longer, but I believe my business here has made my visit a higher priority."

"Naturally," she smiled. It was an attractive smile, framed by an attractive pair of lips. It made Starlanko feel sorry that he knew better than to trust the smile of a wizard. "May I see the scroll?" she asked.

"Of course," Starlanko handed the scroll case to her. Lady Desol drew out the scroll and inspected it. "Yes this looks as though everything is intact." She put the scroll away, and retrieved a large pouch filled with platinum coins from a nearby table. She handed the pouch to Starlanko.

He quickly counted the coins and was happy to find that it matched the agreed upon amount. Lady Desol pursed her attractive lips in disapproval. of Starlanko's breach of etiquette.

"Before you say anything about trust, your ladyship, remember what questions you are about to ask me," Starlanko said.

"Naturally. I assume that you did not make any copies of the scroll before returning it? It is well known that Ashburow the Evoker is willing to pay a great deal to learn even the least of my master's secrets. Apart from that, you are beginning to make a name for yourself as a dealer of arcane lore."

Starlanko objected to the idea that he was only "beginning" to make a name for himself, but he let it slide. "I assure you, your ladyship, that no copies of the scroll were made, by myself or any other individual while it was in my possession."

"Very well. But would you have me believe that you didn't even look at the scroll?"

"I must confess my curiosity got the better of me. I did look over the scroll. However, what it pains me that I also must confess that the spell contained on that scroll is beyond my

capabilities at this point in time.”

“Naturally.”

“It did make me curious, however. Such a powerful scroll would no doubt have a powerful ward attached to it; especially when it is well known that Ashburow the Evoker is willing to pay top coin for any of your master’s secrets. And considering either you or your master could have simply teleported to the other to get the scroll. Instead you chose to send it with a well armed caravan traveling to an undisclosed location, on an undisclosed route. And that caravan just happens to be attacked by a group of bandits, who manage to defeat said guards. I find this most interesting because I fought said bandits myself, and did not find them overly challenging. It makes me wonder how they managed to pull off such an attack. Or rather, it makes me wonder how they managed to pull it off without inside help.”

“I do not think I like what you are insinuating, Starlanko the Magnificent.”

Starlanko stared at Lady Desol for a moment then laughed. “You mustn’t think... oh no, I would never dare to believe that you would be involved in such a plot, My Lady.” He lowered his voice, “But just in case, I have arranged it so that certain letters should fall into certain hands, should certain things happen. After all, it is well known that Ashborow the Evoker is willing to pay a lot of money to get his hands on any of your master’s secrets. ” Then Starlanko returned to his normal voice, “It was a pleasure, Your Ladyship. I hope that we can do business again.”

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Just before the bell struck twelve that night Starlanko the Magnificent was in a room in an inn that was more lavish appointed than his usual standards, and he was not alone. When the bell finished striking twelve he was still in the same room, but he was even less alone.

“Master, feareth not, for I hath returned to thee.” Then there was a pause. “Who is yon woman, and what art thou

doing?”

“I’ll tell you when you’re older,” said Starlanko. The mood was ruined.

Starlanko got out of bed and approached the sword where it lay on the small bureau. “What are you doing here? I thought I left you in a horse trough.”

“Yes, Master, it was a most unfortunate accident! Fortuitously, my creator placed upon me an enchantment, by which if I am ever lost I shall return to my master at the stroke of midnight. A happy enchantment, indeed.”

“Yes. Very happy,” sighed Starlanko. “Tell me, Sword, if we are going to be together for a bit now, and as it seems we are; do you have a name by which I should call you?”

“Alas,” the sword said, “I fear that my creator ne’er dist give me a name, nor did any of my other masters.”

“Well then, Sword, from this day forth you shall be known as Funbane.”

“Funbane. Oh, that doth sound exciting. Tell me, Master, what is a Fun? Is it a type of demon?”

“Yes. It’s a type of demon. In fact I think there might be one outside right now.” He said and he dropped the sword out the window. “Or....maybe not.” Starlanko said, and went back to bed. “In hindsight I perhaps, should have made sure there was nobody beneath that window.”

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone, scheduled for a Fall 2004 release, is set in the popular Dungeons and Dragons setting--Forgotten Realms--originally developed by Wizards of the Coast. The CRPG version of the game is being developed by Stormfront Studios, creators of Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. John Hight, executive producer in Atari’s Los Angeles studio, states:

**“Demon Stone features a classic struggle between the forces of good and evil, and we needed to powerful voice talents to make that conflict real and bring it to life. Patrick Stewart’s classic articulation and Michael Clarke Duncan’s presence were absolutely perfect as the two opposing sides of that conflict.”**

Patrick Stewart, well-known for his role in Star Trek: The Next Generation television series as well as feature films Star Trek: Generations, Star Trek: First Contact, Star Trek: Insurrection and Star Trek: Nemesis, has also starred in a number of major theatrical releases including X-Men, X-2: X-Men United and Conspiracy Theory. He will give voice to Khelban “Blackstaff” Aunsun, a wizard of legendary power and wisdom. Michael Clarke Duncan, who has appeared in many feature films including Daredevil, The Scorpion King, Planet of the Apes and The Green Mile, will provide the voice of Ygorl, the evil Slaad Lord, a bloodthirsty conqueror from a mystical realm of chaos.

John Hight said, “As a best-selling author of numerous Forgotten Realms novels, R. A. Salvatore is uniquely suited to take on this project and his mastery of storytelling will immerse players more deeply in our game.”

R.A. Salvatore is a prolific fantasy writer who has penned dozens of novels centered in the Forgotten Realms and other Dungeons & Dragons locations, including the Icewind Dale Trilogy, Dark Elf Trilogy, and Demon Wars. Best known as the creator of the popular Drizzt Do’Urden, one of the fantasy genre’s most beloved characters, Salvatore has sold nearly nine million novels to date. His latest novel, The Lone Drow chronicles the continued adventures of Drizzt in the land of Faerun, and spent ten weeks on the New York Times best-seller list.

Read the whole article here:

<http://www.silven.com/console.asp?case=showreview&reviewid=32&gameid=33>

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by “Dregg” Carpio

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

Our hobby has many faces. Role-playing in general over the past 10 years has managed to cater to all crowds, tastes, and interests. The industry has recognized that not everyone cares about elves wielding bows or the clan structures of the dwarven mine dwellers.

In a hobby that originated with strategic play and tactical mindset, we see more and more switching to minimalist rules and overall mechanics that cater to more freestyle gaming. RPGs on the market these days tend to fall into the over the top category—gamers in general seem to be moving away from the move 5 squares and attack mindset to wanting to paint a whole picture and follow through. Role-playing games seem to want to accommodate this new mindset as the old days of role-players coming from war gaming stock are a bit dated. Looking back at some of the past trends in gaming, the day of the two hour character generation has lended itself to one page rulesets and combats that don’t involve 14 charts on what happens when you stab with a dagger. The days of “Rule-Master” games have come to a crashing halt, the hobbyist has broken away from the war gamer mindset and the hobby has taken a turn of it’s own.

I like to refer to this style of gaming as “Cinematic” role-play. To try and explain what Cinematic role-play is we have to look at its root word:

**cin e-mat ic** (sɪˈnɛˌmætɪk) *adj.*

The art or technique of making films or movies; filmmaking...

In short, making games that reflect making movies.

Cinematic role-play is a sub genre of gaming that takes conventions from action or high impact films and reproduces them in either a fast pace or narrative fashion allowing players to have a more free-form, less restrictive style of interaction with the game world. Cinematic gaming also throws things such as the laws of physics, mortality, and basic engineering out the window in favor of action over realism.

As a role-player, how many times have you and your friends went out and watched a sci-fi or fantasy film and immediately went to talking about how it would be great to be able to recreate the feeling of a genre or film? On that same note, how many times have you tried to pull off movie like stunts with the old “tried and true” game system and found it less than accommodating? Granted there are a lot of systems out there that have been created for a movie-like, action packed feel, but it is not to say you need to buy these games to give your campaigns or one shots that Hollywood feel. In my opinion rules are made to be broken (or modified) in order to make things comfortable when trying to tell a story, and if any of you out there who GM can say, “I have never made a house rule,” thou has cast the first stone. How much of this style of play is rules based? Indeed on the surface it’s not hard to tell a story where rows of cars blow up one after another, the fighter in the town square is able to run along walls as he defends the town well with rapier and dagger, or how the pulp hero can take the full barrel of a Thompson and them go on to defuse the bomb. On a basic level it’s simply suspension of disbelief or making the players believe this is possible in the world where their characters live and breathe. Instead of wasting time explaining why time travel works or how it fits in to the theory of relativity, explain it in more of a Hollywood “Huh?” factor; it’s or fun to think of going back in time as slicing wholes in the fabric of space than having to know quantum physics. Sprinkle your stories with tinsel and glitter is the name of the game, if the

### About the Author

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

players want realism break out *Axis and Allies* or break open their dice bag... or not.

In no way am I putting down some of the great games that have made our industry what it is today. Games like *Role Master*, *Space Opera*, *Skyrealms of Jourune*, even early *D&D* were ideas based on war gaming, they were tactical simulations with acting tossed in, it’s almost as if one day Napoleonic war gamers decided to have the field commanders on the table get into a discussion about a “What If” situation and someone said “Hey this is a cool idea.” It does get to the point in most RPGs where the game’s roots take over and again you are moving on a grid and looking for the next monster to kill. It’s one of the reasons why I no longer play *D&D*; it starts off with all the good intentions of being a serious game, but digresses quickly into a dungeon crawl.

To further illustrate how Cinematic role-playing, works, an example is provided below:

### (Situation)

*Zandur, a powerful a Halfling cleric, and his traveling companion Sir Jacob of the Silver Thorn are walking into the wayward town of Thallenburg. The Thallenburg town square has been rudely taken over by a Bugbear barbarian and the well water is being sold at high prices to the people of the town. The good cleric and paladin, having issues with this, storm the town square and confront the monster in combat.*

### (Standard role-play)

*Zandur (who has the highest initiative) pulls out his*

*trusty mace (free action) and attempts to slam it down on the foot of the Bugbear (rolls a 4). Hhe misses and now the brave Sir Jacob moves behind for a strike (1/2 move). The Bugbear seeing the warriors flanking maneuver spins around and unbuckles his bastard sword (free action) preparing for the strike. At this point dice rolls occur and everyone moves their allotted character movement, and rolls to see if they hit...*

In a lot of respects this is a pretty boring combat. Granted the GM could have spiced things up, but under the rules combat becomes a bit of move-hit-move. The war-gaming mentality in the rules set makes the combat follow the same order.

#### **(Cinematic version)**

*Zandur (high Dex has the advantage) runs down the hill and uses the well as a launch point to vault through the air (Acrobat talent) and land on the Bugbears shoulders. The Bugbear being angered by this attack quickly unbelts his bastard sword and tries to figure out how to hit this little annoyance. Meanwhile, Sir Jacob does a short run and slides underneath the hulking monster all the while drawing his scimitar (quick draw talent and stunt point spent on maneuver).*

As you can see the combat can have a whole different flavor and excitement when a Cinematic element is introduced.

So, are you in the market for a new game with a cinematic feel? Need something to break away from the old "Hack and Slay." I suggest the following books for that evening at the movies experience.

**Feng Shui** (Atlas Games) by Robin D. Laws

Most anything by Robin is *amazing* in my book, but what he has done with *Feng Shui* is truly outstanding! Based on the *Shadowfist* CCG, *Feng Shui* takes us

through a world of Hong Kong action films, cheesy Cyberpunk staples, and lots of high wire martial arts. The mechanics system is easy to learn and in most cases used very little in most situations. It focuses around a "Ying Yang" principle where your characters actions are judged and tasks resolved on how over the top and cinematically you want to accomplish them.

**D20 Star Wars** (WotC) by Bill Slavicsek, Andy Collins, and JD Wiker

The D20 system is still one of the most popular systems on the market, and with over 500 different rule books, supplements and adventures out there, it's no wonder most 3<sup>rd</sup> party and indie game publishers start off their publishing ventures with this ruleset. *Star Wars D20* takes this game engine one step further and adds rules for cinematic combat, new ways for handling hit points, and an excellent look at the *Star Wars* universe. Even if you are not a *Star Wars* fan this version of D20 is adaptable to other D20 supplements and makes it a wonderful alternative to your standard D&D rules.

**Cyberpunk 2020** (R. Talsorian) by Mike Pondsmith

This old favorite from the 80's uses the *Interlock* system. *Interlock* is a very well rounded, simple to use D10 based game engine that allows for down and dirty gun battles and hardcore action movie skill resolution. Although the game is based in the Cyberpunk genre and no new updates have been published in the past 5 years, *CP2020* is still a cult favorite at cons and in gaming groups and worth checking out if you want dark future adventuring at it's most cinematic.

**Buffy the Vampire Slayer** (Eden Studios) by CJ Carella

Over the top and Hollywood does not even halfway describe *Buffy*. Eden studios and C.J. Carmella have captured this with the RPG version of this great show. *Buffy TVS RPG* uses *Unisystem lite*, a simple to use game system that gets most tasks resolved

with the roll of only one die. No elaborate skill system here, just very broad categories that cover most things that you would do in a given situation, and it gives us "Drama" points. Drama points are a pool of disposable points that can be used to pull off fantastic stunts, incredible feats, and even bring people back from the dead. Even if you are not a fan of *Buffy*, the system will fit with most any sort of modern campaign ideas, and with a few modifications can even be used for a great superhero or fantasy campaign as well.

**Exalted** (White Wolf) by Geoff Grabowski

Last of the games I will give a heads up to is White Wolf's *Exalted*. Using the *Storyteller* system (the engine that powers white wolfs other great games like *Vampire* and *Trinity*) *Exalted* brings us fantasy in the "Manga" (Japanese comics) vein. Your heroes will find themselves doing Matrix-style combats, flipping over opponents, running up walls, jumping whole city blocks, and letting chaos ensue. No pretentious elves playing lutes in the forest in this game. A nightmare to GM, but a very excellent example of what a fantasy RPG can accomplish.

The above games are just an example of some of the more Cinematic RPGs on the market today and in no way are replacements for your favorite game or homebrew system. If you find your game needs a bit of dynamic flair or is lacking that cinematic appeal, you can try adding story points to your game. Like *Unisystem lite*'s Drama points, story points follow the same idea. Based on a relevant factor to your game system (experience, level, rating, ect.) the GM can award points that can be used as plot twists, stunt triggers, one shot feats, hidden powers or what ever the player can dream up (or the GM will allow). These is not a set in stone way of adding excitement to your ongoing campaign, but Cinematic RPGs can add a bit of fun for the campaign that is getting a bit stale.

Tune in next time when "Lights, Camera, Action!" takes you on a ride to the era of Penny Dreadfuls and Steam: Cinematic gaming in the Victorian era.

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by Shane Cubis

## Antipodean Adventures : Gallipoli

*"Men had lost arms and legs, brains oozed out of skulls, and lungs protruded from riven chests; many had lost their faces."*

-A medical orderly describing Allied injuries on 25th April, 1915

G'Day all. This month's column deals with a subject slightly closer to us in time than usual. This month I discuss the Australian experience of World War I, with particular reference to the ill-fated battle at Gallipoli. On April 25th each year, Australia celebrates (or, more accurately, commemorates) Anzac Day. It is a public holiday on which we remember the fallen – young men who died for our country and for the British Empire. Some may see it as ironic that we choose the date of one of our greatest military losses to remember those soldiers, but hopefully this article will explain why. And as always, I also hope you get some RPG inspiration from it.

### What Happened?

When Great Britain joined the war, Australia did too. In 1914, our country was only thirteen years old and still felt significant ties to the Mother Country. Any decisions during wartime were in the hands of Britain, and when Australian lads signed up to fight, they were considered part of the Australian Imperial Force rather than the Australian Army. Before long, New Zealander and Australian troops were combined, forming the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. From then on, they have been known as the Anzacs.

There were a number of reasons for young, fit Australians to join up. The pay was the best in the world at six shillings a day, and the war was only expected to last a few months. A lot of new immigrants to Australia saw the war as a chance to go on a brief, exciting working holiday back home to Britain. There was also a fear of what might happen to Australia if Germany defeated England – after all, Germany had already occupied New Guinea located just north of Australia.

European training camps were full, so the Australian troops were sent to train in Egypt. Turkey had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, and Aussies were required to fight them in the Middle East. The Anzacs quickly developed a reputation among the British officers as being the most rude, untidy and insubordinate of the Allied troops. They often refused to salute, and complaints were made about them. After months of waiting, the Australians had not seen combat. Their frustration translated into a night-long riot as they ransacked the Wassa district of Cairo. Just as questions were beginning to be asked about their fitness for military service in the British Army, they were called to fight in a place called Gallipoli, a peninsula on the Turkish coast.

Gallipoli was one of the most bungled and ill-fated invasions of the First World War. The plan was that the Anzacs would seize the peninsula, allowing British ships to sail up the Dardanelles to threaten Constantinople. This, it was thought, would take Turkey out of the war in one fell swoop.

Unfortunately the plan, drawn up in London over a map of Turkey, failed to take into account the fact that the Turks would see the Anzacs coming towards their easily defensible peninsula. On the 25th April 1915, when the soldiers landed at what is now known as Anzac Cove, the Turks simply set up gun batteries, machine guns and troops on the cliffs above the peninsula. The Anzac troops rowing ashore were nothing short of sitting ducks. 2000 of the 16,000 strong invading force were killed on the first day.

The British and French troops, further down the peninsula, had fared no better than the Anzacs. Nonetheless, the British commander was determined to take the Turkish land, and made the decision to hold on to the small amount of shoreline they had captured.

*"It was like one big grave, only some of us were alive in it."*

### About the Author

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

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

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On the 6th of August, the Australian troops launched an attack on Turkish trenches at Lone Pine Ridge. The fighting was all close range, with rifles and bayonets playing the biggest part. After hours of battle the Australians had taken the ridge, which they held for three days before the Turks regained some ground. During the battle, the Australians took 2273 casualties.

The retreat from Gallipoli was the only part of the entire plan that went smoothly. The Anzacs stopped firing at the Turks for a day or two at a time, slowing down the rate so that the enemy would not get suspicious. Then they rigged up a way of making the rifles fire automatically at odd intervals, with empty tins, water and string. They wrapped their boots in cloth so as to be as quiet as possible, and crept away in the dead of night.

One of the major problems soldiers faced throughout World War I was a type of fungal infection called "trench foot." Sufferers would be unable to walk and would often have to have toes removed due to the onset of gangrene. Lack of food could also be a problem, especially if shelling interrupted the transport of dinner. The staple diet of the Anzacs was tea, corned beef, jam, bread and hard biscuits called 'Anzac biscuits' (still eaten here today on Anzac Day – I think they taste terrible). The combat style was new as well, with infantry digging in and exchanging fire for weeks and months at a time. Every now and again an officer would give the order for a big push, and soldiers

would be swiftly mown down No Man's Land. Between times spent firing at enemy outposts, life in the trenches was characterized most of all by boredom.

Gallipoli is important to Australia because it was the first time Australia really gained a national identity. Anzacs were routinely praised as courageous, strong and willing to fight. Australian privates were so tall, on average, that many assumed they were officers. The proud characteristics of mateship, larrikinism and a casual disregard for authority were furthered and forged in a situation that seemed built to break the spirit of our young country. It is a tribute to the importance of the Anzac legend that many clubs in Australia have a moment of silence every evening at 6pm, when all patrons are called upon to stand and face west whilst the words of poet Laurenc Binyon are read.

*They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.*

*LEST WE FORGET.*

### Simpson and His Donkey

One of the heroes of the Anzac legend is John Simpson Fitzpatrick. A member of the 4th Field Ambulance unit, he was considered a true larrikin—a fighting, hard-drinking joker. Alongside these pinnacles of Australian personality traits, he was as brave as they come. During the battle at Gallipoli, he led a pair of donkeys up and down the valleys, picking up the injured diggers and carrying them to safety with little regard for the exploding shells and machine gun fire around him. He was eventually shot through the heart, and it is said that battle-hardened soldiers wept to hear the news. Simpson was awarded a Victoria Cross, and there is a statue of him in front of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Simpson makes a great NPC, an ally of the characters and a symbol of the Anzac tradition. He might ask a favor of the party, or they might be called upon to fill his shoes when he is killed in action.

### Adventure Ideas

1. The Germans used chlorine gas on the battlefields in Europe, including the Somme. In a fantasy environment, perhaps the enemy has somehow managed to bottle the breath of green dragons and is now using the breath as grenades.
2. Players take on the roles of fresh recruits from Australia, thinking that they are in for a quick European holiday and an adventure. When they arrive, they find they have to contend with mates being killed around them, British officers who treat them like dirt, disgusting food and horrible conditions.
3. During training, the co-trainees of the party riot in Cairo. How do the PCs respond? Do they join in, or face being alienated (and worse) by their comrades when they face a real enemy?
4. The PCs are put in charge of deciding how to proceed when given the order from the British to retain the Gallipoli peninsula. They must do all they can to gain more ground from the Turks with a minimum of casualties.
5. The PCs have been in a trench on the Western Front for months, and have heard no word from a commanding officer for a week. They have just run out of food and must decide what to do from here. They are surrounded by enemies and have no real idea where they are geographically.

### Other Genres

**Science Fiction:** A group of untested soldiers have been ordered to attempt to knock out a secondary power system in the security system of the overlords on Cubisia-6. If they succeed, they will have taken a huge step towards freeing some of the slave miners imprisoned there. Unfortunately, the overlords have a far more defensible base than previously thought. It is beginning to look like a suicide mission to the PCs.

**Modern:** A corporate takeover has been planned by a huge multi-national, but it is

not without risk. They have decided to make the move under the cover of one of their more expendable assets – the small company that employs the PCs. What happens when it all begins to go pear-shaped? Can the PCs save the day?

**Fantasy:** The PCs are members of a lesser race, who are used as minions and cannon fodder by another, elder species. This could be as simple as humans working for elves. Other examples from the *Dragonlance* series include the forgotten gully dwarf contingent who fought back in the pre-Cataclysm days, or the blue-painted brutes who work for the Knights of Neraka.

**Horror:** An ancient horror (say, Cthulhu or generic equivalent) demands a semi-regular sacrifice of healthy young men on a Middle Eastern beach. A British high priest of the evil god has set up the perfect scenario to sate this bloodlust – launch an impossible attack and let the Turks know the boys are coming. The PCs, strapping young recruits from a country halfway across the world, catch a whiff of what is to come from a misdirected memo. Good luck convincing anyone of the occult links in the British Army...

**Ancient:** Watch *Troy*. The first landing (when just Achilles and his myrmidons jump off their ship and start hacking) is in the same part of the world as Gallipoli. If there had been 75% less Greek ships and no Achilles, the results of that landing would have been quite similar to those of the efforts of the Anzacs. Put the PCs in the position of launching an assault against impossible odds, or facing death at the hands of Agamemnon for refusal to obey.

### More Information and Links

[www.anzacsite.gov.au](http://www.anzacsite.gov.au) The official Australian government site, full of all things Anzac and Gallipoli. Possibly all the information you need to run a game in this setting and more. There is a landing map and background info on the 'Why?' of the Gallipoli attack at <http://www.anzacsite.gov.au/1landing/why.html>

*Gallipoli* (1981): A movie starring Mel Gibson as a sprinter who packs off to war. It is often shown in Australian schools when a class is taught about WW1. An interesting feature, it is sure to provide the correct atmosphere for an Anzac game – it especially shows the character of the Australian boys, and the almost ubiquitous idea of 'mateship' in our nation.

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by Christian R. Bonawandt

# Maid on the Shore

Based on the song "Maid on the Shore"

as performed by Solas

The wind was blowing strong to the east for the third day in a row. Captain Korinne said a hushed prayer to Sors, the god of luck, in thanks. Not that Korinne believed much in luck, but this crew was one of the most superstitious he had ever sailed with, and their constant murmured prayers and strange ritualized habits had begun to rub off on him. He would be glad to return to port at Danuna Anu and change crews. Of course, people would tell him it was bad luck to change crews so often, and in truth, it wasn't wise to always sail with men you didn't know too well, if at all.

Regardless, this venture to Shyre Islands had proved more than fruitful--and, yes, if anyone asked, he would admit he meant the pun.

Foolish, some had said, for bringing vegetables and fruits so far south as the Shyre Islands. One thing if you want to bring exotic fruits *back* from the islands, but why bring the West Elves' apples, tomatoes, potatoes and asparagus when they had such delicious things as guyan fruit, wala-walas, and Shyr cherries growing a few yards from where they slept?

Exotic meant rare and foreign. To the West Elves of the Shyre Islands, potatoes, tomatoes and apples were rare and certainly foreign. Perhaps they weren't as sweet, but that didn't make the produce less rare or less expensive. The lords of the Shyre Islands traded heaping piles of woodwork, animal skins, pottery and even musical instruments for these rare delicacies. And for the beautifully painted wood crates that the fruits and vegetables had been stored in. And for the thick cloths that had lined the room where the crates of fruits were stored so as to keep the cold in and thusly keep the fruits and vegetables fresh.

From the islands, Korinne took the *Blue-Eyed Lady* east-southeast to North Kaalazar, where he traded his goods for gold and jewelry. The people of Kaalazar loved exotic art, especially from the islands. But even their mountains of gold were of no value to West Elves. Korinne, though, knew what the elves wanted, what the people of Kaalazar wanted, and used that to make himself a rich man.

If the winds kept up, the *Blue-Eyed Lady* would be only a week from port. Then Korinne could get some much-needed rest and buy himself some much-needed companionship.

Korinne had never been one to settle down. Although women, above all else, were among the most precious of life's little treasures, Korinne could not bring himself to marry. Sure, during his more lengthy stays at home, he had found a number of girls who were more than a perfect match for him. Once in a while, he still sought out Jili and even Aynai. He was saddened but happy enough when he learned that Nualalin was married; he had sailed once with her chosen mate, and knew him to be a good man.

As much as Korinne appreciated women, his true love would always be the open sea and his *Blue-Eyed Lady*. There simply weren't enough women in Danuna Anu who could appreciate life at sea. Those female sailors he did know were only females by a technicality--raunchy, hardened, with a tongue often ten times as scathing as any man's. That wasn't how a woman should be. That wasn't what Korinne wanted.

Someone soft, gentle, whose very visage seemed to make the heart slow and the muscles relax. Someone you wanted to shower with every treasure you had. Not a princess, so much as a woman who was easy on your eyes, your body and your heart.

Even if he could find a companion like that who would enjoy life on the water, too many men refused to sail with a woman at all. Bad luck, they said. A lone woman on a ship full of men wasn't bad luck. It was sheer stupidity. Loneliness

turns the heart colder. Even if Korinne found the most noble and righteous of crews to sail with, there were always pirates. They didn't need a reason to attack a merchant ship as it was, no point to giving them one by having a woman on board.

Darby hobbled over to Korinne. Despite being wiry, gimp-legged and having a yellowing glass eye, Darby had been a natural choice for firstmate.

"My captain," Darby said, raising a deceptively thin arm. Ragged scars interrupted the mess of red hair on the right forearm, the same forearm that had easily outwrestled every man on this ship at least twice--Korinne included.

Korinne unconsciously placed a hand on the hilt of his broadsword and straightened his back. Only his sword and his towering height and thick shoulders made him feel more powerful than Darby. "You appear to have news, you skinny wretch," Korinne said.

Darby flashed a toothy grin at the insult. He was one of those strange men who only respected you when you tried to put him down. "Not myself so much as Tibalt. He thinks he sees an island coming up starboard."

A cold and moist feeling ran from Korinne's tailbone to his shoulders, then down his arms to his fingers. His right hand slipped absently from the hilt of his broadsword, while the left fumbled for his viewing glass.

"Are ye alright, my captain?" Darby asked, with a title of the head.

Korinne shook himself. Why had such a thought made him grow cold? Aside, of course, from the fact that they were at least four days from seeing any land.

Without a response, Korinne led Darby starboard. Darby threw his elbows on the bulwarks while Korinne extended his viewing glass. He carefully scanned the horizon.

Open ocean. An endless, endless blanket of scantily choppy blue.

"Maybe Tibalt needs a glass eye too," Korinne said. His voice did not convey any conviction.

Nonetheless, Darby honored him with another toothy grin before limping his way back to his duties. For several minutes, Korinne remained by the bulwarks. His left hand seemed soldered to his viewing glass. At last his right found its way to his broadsword again. Once there, he mustered the strength to put away the viewing glass. Tibalt was barely yet a man--sixteen with the pale face of ten-year-old. But Darby had found him in the Crab's Cove Tavern and lauded his hawk-like eyes. That had proved true. The boy fought hard to earn his keep as a seaman, but was honestly good for little else aside from being a lookout. Perhaps, Korinne wondered, Tibalt was spending too much time in the tressel.

Korinne made his way back toward the helm. He forced himself between the two hulking MaCranly twins. His body was suddenly eager for his cabin.

"Man overboard!"

The distinct squeal of Tibalt struck *The Blue-Eyed Lady* into a sudden stillness. Korinne spun on his heels. Pushing Furrow MaCranly aside, he whipped out and extended the viewing glass in a single motion. A brief glance to Tibalt in the tressel showed him the direction the boy was looking.

A flash struck Korinne's eye. For moment he reeled, but the viewing glass remained planted half in his socket. Then it flashed again. Several more times. In the distance a speck of new color appeared in the vast expanse blue. Was there truly an island in these waters that Korinne had not seen?

The flashes continued. Someone on that island was reflecting sunlight in the pattern of Bandinus sea code. The signal was *man overboard*.

\* \* \*

"My captain--" Darby began.

"How many times will you tell me this, you one-eyed newt?" Korinne snapped. This time he even intimidated himself.

Darby shrank back momentarily. Then his crooked spine shot a straight as Korinne had ever seen it. "You canna just

leave her there, my captain."

Korinne kept his back to his first mate. The island was in plain-eye sight, small and fairly lush. Perhaps a full square mile at the absolute most. And there, on that island, standing lonely and helpless on the shore, was the single most beautiful woman Korinne had ever seen.

His left hand now fumbled with the rope that had been holding his near-shoulder-length hair back. The wind had since died to minor breeze. Only a few hours past noon, it would take almost the rest of the day before the island was out of sight again.

"Aren't you the least superstitious, Darby?" Korinne asked.

"Aren't you the least bit compassionate?" Darby responded.

Korinne's broadsword was out in a flash. His first mate stumbled back several steps before brandishing his cutlass. The scrawny man's good eye turned deadly for a moment. Then his face eased, and his free hand opened in honest pleading.

Two deep breaths, and Korinne was able to put his sword away. His hand held fast the hilt.

"Think of how far we are from any port, my captain," Darby said, his cutlass once again in his belt, both men ready to discuss the issue like civilized humans. "Think of how long she must have been on that island."

"That is exactly my point," Korinne said. "This is an off-season for sailors coming this way. It is strange that she should be alive at all. Especially considering how many times in the past fifteen years I have sailed these waters and never once noticed that island before."

"I know what you're afraid of, my captain," Darby said, his voice somewhat lower. He knew as well as Korinne that one or more of the crew would be outside the captain's chamber door trying to hear what they were discussing. "I honestly believe that these men can go at least a week without mishandling her if it's under your direct command."

Korinne's face remained solid.

"I know I can," Darby said.

"You can't even go two days without manhandling Tibalt," Korinne hissed, his voice barely audible to his own ears.

Darby's ruddy face went pale as death.

"You think your deviance has gone beyond my detection?" Korinne continued. "I bet you don't even hear that boy cry at night. That's because he goes above deck to do it. 'Be a man about it,' he says you tell him. It's by his wish alone that I haven't cut your manpiece off and cast you over the side."

The one good eye flit about in the socket, searching the room for something to focus on. Darby's mouth quivered in effort to utter something in defense of himself.

Korinne wondered why he had even brought up the topic. Darby was good man with a terrible weakness. On a ship of only grown men, Darby would have been an ideal firstmate. In truth, Tibalt was not being abused, and had admitted that he was not adverse to Darby's treatment. Korinne had only asked once why the boy cried, then left the topic alone.

Seeing his captain's temper easing again, Darby said, "If you know my secret, then you know that I'm not asking you to do *me* a favor. It's the rational, compassionate thing to do. So close to home, we are, my captain. We canna just leave her here."

"We can send a search party back for her," Korinne said.

"The size of that island!" Darby said, "the odds of finding it again . . ."

"I'm not without a heart, Darby," Korinne said. "But they tell tales of encounters like this. And the monstrous things that happen to the crews."

Darby suppressed a chortle. "Sheer lore, my captain," he said. "You know that I'm one of the more superstitious of this lot you're sailing with, and even I think it's madness to just pass by someone so helpless and in such need."

"Darby . . ." Korinne began.

"I'm nearly five years you're senior, my captain, and I ain't never seen a siren nor think I ever will," he said.

"Darby--" Korinne said.

"Imagine if it was you trapped on an island," his first mate said.

"Darby!" Korinne snapped. "Take a dinghy. Bring her back yourself. I'll make sure the men know she isn't to be touched . . . in *any* thinkable manner."

\* \* \*

Gwenlorlei was her name. Korinne's heart beat slower just to look at her. Hair like precious amber, glowing like fire under the waning sun. Her eyes were as blue as the ocean around them. A blue-eyed lady aboard *The Blue-Eyed Lady*. She moved lithely, accepting the captain's hand to help her from the dinghy out of sheer formality.

"How long have you been stranded?" Korinne asked as he led her to his cabin. The crew had returned to their duties, but remained only half conscious of their work. Eyes drifted as though drawn by a force in Gwenlorlei's direction. This, Korinne thought, is why women are considered bad luck.

To make matters worse, the wind had come to a near halt. The men struggled to adjust the sails catch whatever breeze they could. But with minds fixed elsewhere, the task was twice as difficult.

"I am not even sure," she said with an accent hinting of the Anoba people. "Do not even tell me what season it is. I fear to know how long I have been away from civilization."

Jerald, the helmsman, a tall and slim young man from one of the Free Cities, leered hungrily as Gwenlorlei passed by him. He seemed to not even see his captain. Or the broadsword his captain was ready to unsheathe on him.

"What brought you sailing this way?" Korinne asked.

Gwenlorlei said nothing. Her eyes closed tight in remembrance. He immediately regretted the question.

Korinne breathed relief when he shut the door to his cabin. "You can sleep here," he said, gathering his log, his

less brittle maps and a handful of gold rings that he had purchased in North Kaalazar. He stuffed his arms full with whatever belongings cluttered the desk and cot.

"No, no," she said, placing a soft hand on Korinne's cheek. His body grew warm. His heart swelled in his chest; it's beating making it difficult to breathe. "Do not make exceptions for me," she said with a tender smile.

Two of Korinne's rings slipped from his fingers. He reached down for them, and everything else he held crashed and scattered on the ground. Flustered, Korinne dropped on one knee, snatched haphazardly at his belongings.

Gwenlorlei cupped her hands around Korinne's. She guided him to his feet.

"I will not have you sleeping near the wretches I sail with," Korinne said. His body seemed disconnected from his mind. This beautiful, gentle thing. Certainly the gods were not rewarding him for his honesty and goodness. Although a decent person, Korinne knew he was not deserving of holy rewards. Looking at her smooth, thin face, Korinne could only think that he was dreaming at this moment.

"Do not worry so much about me," she said, pushing him gently toward the cot. "I know what you need. Not unlike your crew, you are lonely." She urged him to sit down. "You need companionship."

Korinne leapt to his feet. "I would never dream of asking you to--"

Gwenlorlei laughed. It was a sweet laugh, but there was a flavor of mockery in it. It almost angered him. For the briefest moment, his hand touched the hilt of his broadsword.

"Please sit, my captain," she said. "I wish to sing to you."

\* \* \*

"What's they doing?" Murko MaCranly asked.

"I think she said she's gonna lick him," Furrow said, his ear still planted firmly on the door to the captain's cabin.

Tibalt elbowed the huge, bald man in the rib. "No, she said

she's gonna sing to 'im," he said.

Darby, who had taken the helm after Jerald joined the heard by the captain's door, slapped his forehead. "I told ya yous was all foolish. Now, I ain't saying it again. Get back to work."

\* \* \*

The song she sang was in a language Korinne had never heard before. It was ancient and fluid and beautiful. The song was one of loneliness, and hearing it made Korinne realize just how lonely he was. Gwenlorlei's voice rippled through him. Every muscle in his body became loose and relaxed. There were disreputable arts in the Kudatan desert cities that were said to make a man feel like this. Somehow Korinne doubted they were comparable.

Soon Korinne's eyes felt heavy. At first he fought against sleep, but soon wondered why, and let himself be carried away by Gwenlorlei's sweet, angelic voice.

\* \* \*

Korinne woke with a nervous start. The door to his cabin was ajar. Gwenlorlei was not in his room. A million scenes of treachery flashed through his mind. In a single motion Korinne rolled from his cot and grabbed at his sword.

Air was all he siezed. The sheath was empty. On the floor of his cabin, the three rings were missing. In their place was the shard of mirror Gwenlorlei had used to signal for help.

He bounded out the door of his cabin, nearly stepping on Murko MaCranley. A fierce wind pounded unattended masts. The helm tottered aimlessly, Darby asleep at its base. The rest of the crew dozed pleasantly around him like a carpet of dimwits.

"Up! Up!" was all Korinne could utter. His temples felt ready to burst. At once the crew was awake, swapping disoriented glances. Korinne kicked Jerald, grabbed Pat the cook by the slop-stained collar.

"Secure those sails or I'll take a finger from each of you!" Korinne bellowed. "Someone find out how far off course we are."

"Hardly at all, sir," Tibalt said. "Look hard starboard."

The island was still in view. An hour had passed, perhaps as much as two. But the wind was forcing them away, and fast. Also in view was the dinghy, in fact all the dinghies. Each was filled near to the point of sinking with the gold, gems and treasures that Korinne had traded for in North Kaalazar. And each was tied in tow to the one manned by Gwenlorlei.

Korinne unleashed a fury of swears and vulgarities that could have killed a priest. "Man the lifevessels, we're going back for that wench!"

Then he noticed the trail of oars in her wake. With nothing to propel the lifevessels, and the wind carrying the *Blue-Eyed Lady* beyond the reach of the island, Korinne could only stare, mouth agape. Gwenlorlei had even settled to use Korinne's broadsword to row her way back to the shore.

She rowed her way *back* to the shore!

\* \* \*

Amid the grunt and swears of men trying to secure the sails against such winds, Korinne listened as his crew mourned. Months at sea, hours of negotiation with traders. They would have been rich men. What could such a creature want with all that gold? Why return to that little island? What awaits her there that all those riches would be of value?

"I'm sorry," Darby said, when the sails were secured. "Being that you're lacking your sword, I'll lend you my cutlass to slit my throat with."

Korinne hadn't even the energy to make a fist, much as he wanted to make his first mate swallow his teeth. "What good would that do me?" he said, as much to himself as to Darby. "We'd still be in this mess. Might as well have you suffer poverty with the rest of us."

"Now, now," came Gwenlorlei's voice. The island was barely a speck in distance. Yet she sounded as though whispering

in his ear. "Do not be so down in despair."

Darby looked nervously at Korinne, clearly hearing her voice as well.

"Why is that?" Korinne replied.

"I may have robbed you of gold and wealth . . . but alas, I am again alone on the shore."

### Best PS2 RPG

Second only to the PC in the selection of RPGs shown at E3 2004, the PS2 has a number of innovative and promising RPGs currently in development. Selecting a winner in this category was a bit more difficult as many of the games looked to have good storylines and great graphics. Titles ranging from Inuyasha to Phantom Brave offered innovation. Games based on classics and classic style of RPGs such as The Bard's Tale and Demon Stone definitely showed promise. This year, however, we chose to go with a game that may just be the sleeper hit of the year. Even though it is a sequel, Shadow Hearts: Covenant offers innovation in gameplay and a great storyline. Congratulations to Midway for taking home the Silven Crossroads award for **Best PS2 RPG of E3 2004** with Shadow Hearts: Covenant.

### Best Xbox RPG

Yes, game fans, the RPG library is indeed growing for the Xbox! The decision this year for Xbox RPG of E3 was very difficult. Sudeki, Kameo, The Bard's Tale, Demon Stone... the list of great RPG continues. After much deliberation, we were able to narrow it down to the top two contenders: Jade Empire and Fable. It was nearly impossible! Congratulations to Bioware and Microsoft on receiving the Silven Crossroads' award for the **Best Xbox RPG of E3 2004** for Jade Empire.

### Best MMORPG

Once again the field is somewhat flooded with new MMORPGs, all vying for your online gaming dollars and playing time. How do we choose which is best? We looked at graphics, gameplay, character development, leveling, story and other features. This was a difficult decision with so many great games: Wish, Dark&Light, World of Warcraft and Everquest II, to name just a few. After much deliberation and revisiting the information on the choices in this category, we offer congratulations to Sigil Games and Microsoft for winning the award for **Best MMORPG of E3 2004** for Vanguard: Saga of Heroes.

continued on page 40 ...

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by Carl Batchelor

## Equal Opportunity in CRPGs

Most of what is produced in the CRPG hobby comes from Japan, and so many of the games we Americans enjoy are decidedly Japanese. Due in part to this, we American gamers have been consistently placed in the shoes of spiky-haired, smart mouthed, apathetic young men who are charged with saving their world from a great evil™.

A short glance back at the last five *Final Fantasy* games will prove my statement accurate. *Final Fantasy VII's* Cloud, the 8th chapter's Squall, *XI's* Zidane and *Final Fantasy X's* Tidus are all cut from the same Japanese CRPG hero mold: the athletic, young, slim young man with wild hair and a lack of restraint. He is the virile macho man who plays hard to get with the lead female character but ends up winning her over with his silent charm. Though one could argue that Zidane was much more sociable when placed alongside of the other *Final Fantasy* protagonists I mentioned, it's like comparing peanuts to walnuts. One may be bigger than the other, but they are both still nuts. Cloud, who was without a doubt more mentally unstable than any other *Final Fantasy* hero, makes the rest of his series' main characters look normal by comparison. Like Cloud, all of these men win their love interest's heart through unconditional means, namely through distancing themselves from her or playing a pathetically weak game of "hard-to-get."

It isn't just *Final Fantasy* doing this either. *Star Ocean*, *Legaia*, *Chrono Cross*, and *Grandia* have all fallen victim to it. If all of our RPGs were real world movies and the characters were Hollywood actors, someone would undoubtedly sue over the fact that women and minorities are not getting their fair share of the starring roles.

Thankfully there have been exceptions to this rule. *Wild Arms 3* gave us a strong and compassionate female lead who was so fun to watch develop that her inner struggle alone was enough for me to overlook the botched magic system and play it through to the end. Another great example of a powerful female lead would be *Xenosaga's* own Shion, who while somewhat of a nerd, came off looking rather motherly by the game's halfway point and seemed to be much more rational and "together" than most of her crew mates on the Elsa. Other titles, such as the Playstation classic *Valkyrie Profile* and Volition's *Summoner 2* have similarly strong female leads, but the list they all sit on is depressingly short.

Though the female heroes are few and far between, a Latino or African American hero is almost entirely unheard of. One of the most memorable minority heroes in recent CRPG memory was *Final Fantasy VII's* Barret Wallace, who many gamers complained was nothing more than a racial stereotype due to, among other things, his poor language. Even my own favorite CRPG, Atlus' *Persona Revelations*, gave the one African American character in the party a very inaccurate and stereotypical attitude. Mark, who was not only a rapper but also the only party member who frequently cursed, seemed to be added in as a joke rather than the serious American exchange student he should have been. Rare instances of positively represented minorities do in fact exist, such as the Native American Gallows from *Wild Arms 3* and the supposedly Latino Ranger Diego from *Gothic 1 & 2*, they are merely the exception that proves the rule. To put it as bluntly as possible, minority races are either portrayed poorly in CRPGs or not at all.

### About the Author

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

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Ultimately, the question has to be asked, why have women and minorities been given the short end of the CRPG hero stick? Why haven't we seen a dark skinned lead character in a *Final Fantasy* game? Why was, until last year, *Final Fantasy VI* the only game of the series with a female lead? The answer is unfortunately not so simple to figure out. One could assume that CRPG companies know that the vast majority of their audience is composed of young white men and therefore write their scripts according to their target demographic. Though the truth behind it all is more than likely due to the fact that the vast majority of the programmers, artists, and writers are all men. Through no fault of their own, these men were programmed to think this way by the images they saw in the media or even by their family's lack of effort in erasing these stereotypes during their youth. This proves that much like *Riverdance*, when a large group of fair-skinned men get together and lock themselves away from the world, they create something that only they seem to think is normal.

One look at *FFX-2* will convince you of that. Though I'm not saying Squaresoft's writers are sexist, the game has done a good job at alienating both women and men. Many gamers, especially those who happen to be females, see the clothing that Yuna and her team wear as being both trashy and exploitative. Letters to gaming sites and forum posts across the web reveal the sheer amount of anger many gamers have over this game, and rightfully so, given the way they portray the game's heroines. Perhaps due to the Japanese obsession with youth and their pedophilic

tendencies in their media, they saw no other way to portray these three women leads. Whether or not you consider white-face paint and subservience to your husband to be demeaning, it can be said that Japan has always viewed women as objects rather than equals. As for minorities, it could be that most Japanese people are not accustomed to seeing them in their own country and have no experience to draw on other than what they read about in American magazines or television shows.

While it is very easy to make excuses for the Japanese CRPG industry, the truth is that there is no valid reason for not including more female or minority heroes in RPG games. Especially when both of these groups do in fact play RPGs. I know two African American co-workers of mine who were die-hard gamers, rivaling even me in the amount of knowledge they possessed about classic 8 and 16 bit CRPGs. I often wondered how they felt about playing games where they never got a chance to role-play a person who looked like them. Since I am a young white man, I'll never truly know how that must feel. Still, I would find it a little annoying if nearly every CRPG I played through had me assuming the role of a dark skinned hero and his female friends saving the world. After awhile, I'd have to ask myself, where do I fit in here?

Going even further, we could say that it isn't fair to make the main character in a CRPG slim and attractive. Who can say that every CRPG hero has to be slender and sexy? Oftentimes, the villains are the portly ones, such as *Final Fantasy X-2's* Ormi, *Dragon Warrior 4's* Baramos or *Chrono Trigger's* Ozzy. Wouldn't it be a great change of pace to play a character who had a weight problem or even a learning disability? The possibilities are endless and could make for some rather enlightening CRPG storylines. Of course, their might be people who would find it hard to play as a character who shared

their same problems. Those who have conquered their demons may find it troubling to have to "conquer" them again in a game, but I would hardly think that this would cost the game potential buyers. If the movie *Philadelphia* could deal with a lead character that was both homosexual and had AIDS, then why couldn't a game? The industry likes to compare games to movies and the link is now joyously celebrated as fact, so why can't games experiment the same way movies can?

Unlike movies and television, games have yet to practice "equal opportunity." Whereas television has been giving minorities equal time and positive role models to watch, games have not. Just recently, a new Vietnam era first person shooter was announced and the lead character you would be playing as would be African American. I have since read three articles on the web that called the choice of the lead character's race "controversial." Exactly what is controversial about that anyway? Anyone who has studied the Vietnam war knows that there was a disproportionate number of minorities drafted into service, so it only makes sense that you are playing as a black man who was drafted to serve his country. Though in some cases, such as the recent lawsuit brought against Rockstar games for a mission in *Vice City* that commanded the player to "Kill all the Haitians," giving equal time isn't always without consequence.

In the end, perhaps that is why you'll never see a higher percentage of "alternative" heroes in CRPGs. If the overly politically correct gaming world is too afraid that they'll portray women, minorities, or those with disabilities in a bad light and incur the *wrath of the easily angered and offended*, then maybe we'll never get to see a *Final Fantasy* with one of them portrayed realistically as the lead character. Fortunately, with female lead characters becoming more common, it is probably only a matter of time before we see other games with minority leads following suit. Or so I hope.

## Games to watch this year:

### 2004-04-30

Neverend  
publisher:TBD  
developer:Mayhem Studios

### 2004-05-31

Sabotain: Break the Rules  
publisher:Akella  
developer:Avalon

### 2004-06-02

Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion  
publisher:Funcom  
developer:Funcom

### 2004-06-15

Black 9  
publisher:Majesco Games  
developer:Taldren

### 2004-06-15

Everquest 2  
publisher:Sony Online Entertainment  
developer:Sony Online

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by Nash J. Devita

# Chivalry and Sorcery : The Rebirth

## Chivalry and Sorcery: The Rebirth

Authors: E.E. Simbalist, S.A. Turner, M. Whalley, D. Blewitt, & C.D. Speirs

Publisher: Britannia Games Design

*Reviewer Bias: I am only slightly familiar with the previous versions of Chivalry and Sorcery. This was received for review purposes.*

This is the fourth version of *Chivalry and Sorcery*. It has undergone a number of major changes since the third edition. This review is of the *Deluxe Pack* which includes three titles, the **Core Rules**, **Magicks & Miracles**, and the **Gamemasters Companion** as well as a GM's screen. This entire bundle retails for \$39.95.

## Presentation

The first two (2) titles are 102 pages in length while volume three (3) is 98 pages. Each book contains both a brief table of contents and a fairly through index. All three books use the same font (which is now readable unlike the previous versions!) for text and a similar style of black & white artwork or varying quality.

All three (3) paper back titles fit quite nicely into the GM's screen for storage. Being paperbacks, though, they are a bit flimsy and I foresee damage and loose pages in very little time with only moderate use.

## Volume One: Core Rules From the Back Cover

"The journey into medieval roleplaying begins with this, the first of the new books comprising *Chivalry & Sorcery: the Rebirth*.

This volume contains the rules for character generation, the core game mechanics, skills, [and] vocations for warriors,

thieves, and adventurers, a comprehensive marketplace for characters to equip themselves and guidance for adventuring your heroes in experience. [This was] Published in the heartlands of Britain which have given rise to the legends of *Ivanhoe* and *Robin Hood*."

## Content

The default characters for this game are human of varying vocations. There are fairly extensive character creation rules given. Much of this is determined with a percentile roll (2d10), not the player. I do not care for this take on creation in any game. Maybe it is just me, though, so I will not ramble on about that. Thankfully, for some of these items, there are alternate rules for personal selection via point buy, not random generation.

The items that go into creating a character are **Birth Omens**, **Personal Attributes**, **Background**, and **Talents / Deficits**. The backgrounds are very well divided into familial vocation and social standing. A character's family background determines some of the skills that a character will start play with. If a player decides to take a talent, he must also take some form of defect. Like everything else, these are handled (by default) by a random percentile roll.

For being a medieval roleplaying game, there are a few to many fantastic items in here - **shape shifting** into an animal, for example.

Skills, combat, etc. are handled through percentile rolls (2d10), just like everything else. The only major difference in this is combat. It actually uses 3d10. The third d10 is used to determine critical hit.

Many of the skills presented here are to be expected from a medieval roleplaying game - blacksmithing, animal riding, various farming types, so on and so forth. Others are common to most roleplaying games - climbing, swimming,

## Review snapshot

### Archetype: Core Books

**Body: 9** (*Game Mechanics*): Fit well together as a system. I prefer other systems to this one, though.

**Mind: 10** (*Organization*): Very well organized!

**Spirit: 8** (*Look & Feel*): Pretty good for this type of game.

**Attack: 8** (*Value of Content*): Well written for the cost. Much clearer than the previous versions.

**Defense: 7** (*Originality of Content*): I was reminded of a number of other games while reading this.

**Health: 6** (*Physical Quality*): Paper back - I expect heavy damage through use

**Magic: 8** (*Options & Adaptability*): Through use of all three books, players and GM's have a number of options for play.

## Scoring Definitions:

**12 = Superior.** Best of the best.

**11 = Excellent.** Just a hair from perfect.

**10 = Very Good.** Part of a Baker's Dozen.

**9 = Good.** Most gamers would like this.

**8 = Fair.** Some gamers would like this.

**7 = Average.** Most gamers would be indifferent.

**6 = Sub-par.** Flawed, but not without promise.

**5 = Poor.** Some gamers would dislike this.

**4 = Bad.** Most gamers would dislike this.

**3 = Very Bad.** Among the dirty dozen.

**2 = Inferior.** Worst of the worst.

slight of hand, diplomacy, etc. Other skills are pretty odd (and some are pretty useless) - bee-keeping and clothes: dying (shouldn't this be included in tailoring?). Why is boxing an **athletic skill** while brawling is a **combat skill**?

Combat uses an **Action Pool** to determine actions in a round. A player rolls 1d10 to determine points. Each action costs one (1) or more points to perform. Walking five (5) feet costs only one (1) point while rising (from lying to standing) costs eight (8) points. Attacking with a weapon (or unarmed, actually) costs a different amount of points depending on the weapon type and the characters skill with that weapon.

## Volume Two: Magicks & Miracles From the Back Cover

"With this guide add the mysteries of Magick to your medieval world. Play the role of a Dark Necromancer or his foe, the Priest. Using the new vocations (Mages, Priest- mages, and the Clergy), bring the power of the Church and the old

religions into your game. This guide also contains additional skills for Mages and Priests, comprehensive rules for Magick, extensive Spell Lists and priestly Acts of Faith, including the power of the faithful congregation."

### Content

There are a number of different types of magic introduced into *Chivalry & Sorcery* in volume two. These vary from **Witchcraft** and **Druidic** to **Necromancy** and **Elementalism**.

Characters that are magick users have a number of options available to them like using and creating magical devices to casting forth elemental bolts or creating fire, etc. There is actually a great list of spells that vary far beyond the couple of examples given here. This list of spells takes up most of the book, actually.

There is another type of magick that is available to some. That is the power of Miracles. These are magical effects that vary from 'caster' to 'caster' and target to target depending on faith. These miracles may allow visions and the ability to recognize evil creatures to adding strength via God and exorcising a demon. Characters that can utilize faith in his manner can also cast spells similar to a cleric in D&D.

### Volume Three: Gamemasters Companion From the Back Cover

The final book in the trilogy of new rules, the Gamemasters Companion gives direction on being a Gamemaster. With information on setting up and running a C&S campaign, the book also features a historical fief taken from the Domesday Book. In addition, you will find rules for creating non- human characters (including Trolls, Lycanthropes and Vampires), expanded character generation rules, rule expansions, NPC generation and an extensive bestiary giving summarized details of over 200 creatures detailed in the Creature Bestiary."

### Content

Much of the first chapter of this book is standard fare - how to GM, trial & error, tips and advice. I've seen it all before but it is necessary to see it here again.

Chapter two is short. Much of it is tables on random creation of an area - fiefdom, kingdom, etc. Chapter three is the same thing for NPC's.

Chapters four through six are all optional rules such as non- human races, diseases, **derived attributes**, and skill success charts. The only items here I might consider using in some games are the diseases to make it feel a bit more authentic. I like the list of diseases that was included quite a lot (can't you tell from how much I speak of them?).

The bestiary that is chapter seven is a great reference. No GM for C&S will want to be with out this at any time while playing!

### Conclusion

A lot of what I read here reminded me of *Dragonquest* and *Rune Quest*. Of course, if I wanted to play a game like those, I would play those. If I wanted to play a historical RPG, I'd play *Ars Magica*. This game tries to be both of those things at once. Sadly, it falls short. If it is going to be a historical game, there should be no Trolls or shape changing and magic should be a lot more focused on the Christian view of pagans, not taken like *Dungeons & Dragons*.

This is not to say that *Chivalry & Sorcery* is a bad game. It isn't. I have just found other games to do what it hopes to accomplish better because they focus on only one of the things C&S hopes to accomplish. If you are looking for a blend of all of realistic history and high fantasy, this may be the game for you.

## Silven Award Winners at the E<sup>3</sup> Expo cont...

### Best PC RPG

This was a difficult category to narrow down to just one winner. There were many great RPGs showcased at E3, many with outstanding stories and great game features. The Bard's Tale, the new Lord of the Rings: the Third Age and the promise of the new Gothic III, as well as some great RPGs from smaller and lesser known developers such as The Witcher and The Roots made this decision very difficult. After once again reviewing the information on these games we were finally able to make a choice. Great graphics, immersive story and tactical combat were just some of the features that made Dungeon Siege II rise above the crowd. Congratulations to Gas Powered Games and Microsoft for taking home the Silven Crossroads' award for **Best PC RPG of E3 2004!**

### Most Promising RPG

Gamers are always searching for that ultimate RPG experience. Many games promise innovation and immersion for its players. But which ones will deliver? Which of the 300 plus RPGs in development look to be that ultimate game, that nirvana of role-playing? The winner of this award is a truly outstanding game. This game reflects physical appearance changes in the main character based on combat approaches, use of magic and the performance of good and/or evil deeds, the use of expressions in character interaction, and real responses from NPCs dependent on the character's reputation. It is an opportunity for true role-playing in a console game. Congratulations to Lionhead Studios and Microsoft for easily earning the Silven Crossroads' award for **Most Promising RPG of E3 2004.**

cont...

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# Through the LENS of HISTORY Using HISTORY for BETTER GAMING

by Sean Holland

## Vision 8: After Alexander - The Diadochi and the Successor States

With the death of Alexander the Great, his empire crumbled. There was no single leader with the authority and status – or genius – to take the place of Alexander and a multitude of ambitious people who thought themselves capable of taking it. Alexander's empire was quickly carved up by and among his generals, each claiming to be following Alexander's wishes and to be the rightful successor to Alexander's legacy.

Pieces of Alexander's empire remained for nearly three hundred years after his death, a great monument to the success of the great conqueror even if it was not the legacy he had wished to leave.

### Part I - The History

Alexander fell ill and died in Babylon in 323 BCE while making preparations for a campaign against the Arabians. Alexander had no heir, though his wife, Roxane, was pregnant at the time, and Alexander had named no successor. Alexander was the king and the emperor, the next ranks down were those of generals and satraps and, legally if not in fact, these offices were equal in status and power.

No law or firm traditions for succession existed in the Macedonian tradition, the kingship passed to those of royal blood who had the strength and political support to take and hold it against their rivals. Before his death Alexander had given Perdiccas his royal seal and the authority to act for him. It is believed that Alexander would have appointed his favourite, Craterus, to this role, but Craterus had been sent to replace the elderly Antipater as regent of Macedon and was in transit at the time of Alexander's death. Perdiccas quickly moved to consolidate power around the Macedonian royal family. Roxane had already begun this, by summoning Staterira, Alexander's second wife and a Persian princess, and having her murdered. Complex political maneuvering led to Alexander's half brother being proclaimed as Phillip III of

Macedon. Alexander's son by Roxane, known as Alexander IV, became joint ruler of the empire with Phillip III.

The empire was already beginning to come apart. Following news of Alexander's death, the Greek city-states again rose in revolt. Craterus and Antipater suppressed the Greek rebellion and then marched their army against Perdiccas. Ptolemy, at this time, seized first Egypt and then Alexander's body, as potent a political symbol in death as in life. Perdiccas, in turn, led an army against Ptolemy only to have his men mutiny and put him to death.

Perdiccas' deputy Eumenes held off Antipater and Craterus at the Dardenelles, where Craterus was killed. Antipater gave command of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to Antigonus "the One-Eyed" and returned with the Phillip and Alexander to Macedon. Antipater ruled as regent for two more years before dying (at the age of 79) in 319 BCE. Antipater's son Cassander overcame opposition to succeed his father and was named regent by King Phillip. Roxane took Alexander IV and fled to Epirus to take shelter with Olympias (Alexander the Great's mother). Returning with an army, they deposed and killed Phillip. Olympias was in turn executed by Cassander, but she faced her death proudly, a true queen until the end.

Cassander now controlled the young Alexander IV and claimed the empire but he only ruled Greece and Macedon. The empire was divided between five powers (*diadochi*): Antigonus commanded Asia Minor, Lysimachus held Thrace, Ptolemy ruled the rich lands of Egypt and the Aegean Islands and Seleucus controlled Syria. The other four united against Antigonus, and by 311 BCE a stalemate was reached. Cassander choose this time to kill the fourteen-year-old Alexander IV and his mother Roxane, removing the last unifying factor from the situation. Each of the generals went on to proclaim himself the ruler of his area, and the Empire, even as a legal fiction, had ceased to exist.

This did not stop Antigonus and his son Demetrius from attempting to seize the lands of his rival kings. It would take

### About the Author

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

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the combined efforts of the other four to contain Antigonus' bid for power. Antigonus' dream came to an end in 301 BCE at Ipsus, called the 'Battle of the Kings', where he faced both Seleucus and Lysimachus. Seleucus had bartered away his Indian territories for 500 war elephants which were to prove decisive in the battle. Antigonus was killed in the fighting. In the aftermath, Lysimachus added western Asia Minor to his holding.

The wars continued. Lysimachus was later killed fighting against his former ally Seleucus in 281 BCE. Seleucus was then assassinated when he tried to claim Lysimachus' lands. By 275 BCE there were only three of the successor kingdoms left: the Antigonids, who ruled Macedonia; the Ptolemaic Pharaohs, who controlled Egypt, parts of Syria, Cyprus and the Aegean Islands.; and the Seleucid Kings, who controlled the old Persian heartland from Northern Syria to Afghanistan.

These new kingdoms did not follow Alexander's plan to combine the best of Greek and Persian cultures. Instead the Greeks formed a ruling elite often entirely separate from those they ruled. Across the vast swaths of territory, Greek culture became the highest ideal; the Olympian gods were worshipped in India, Athenian philosophy was debated in Persia, Greek theater was performed in Syria and the greatest library of the ancient world was gathered at Alexandria in Egypt. Many of their subjects adopted Greek ways to advance their position. The Hellenic age had come: Greek culture was dominant over the middle and near east. Trade flourished, helped by common language and reliable currencies, as the conflicts between the Successor states settled down into long term political maneuverings.

The Anigonids unwisely became involved in a conflict against the Roman Republic which ended with the Romans decisively breaking Macedonia's power in 170 BCE and establishing a protectorate over Greece. The eastern Selucid Kingdom fell to the nomadic Parthians over the course of more than a century (beginning in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE). While the western part of the Selucid kingdom was acquired by Pompey for Rome in 63 BCE. The Parthians took upon themselves the mantle of the revived Persian Empire and would become a great thorn in the side of the Roman Empire. The Ptolemy Dynasty lost the Aegean islands and adopted more and more Egyptian ways, ruling as much as Pharaohs as Greek kings. The last Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt was Cleopatra VII, who allied herself with first Julius Caesar and then Marc Antony in an attempt to keep Egypt autonomous. Cleopatra failed, ultimately taking her own life, and Ptolemaic Egypt was absorbed into the Roman Empire as one of its richest provinces. By 30 BCE, the last of the Successor states had ceased to exist

After the Roman conquests, the east remained Greek; Greek was the language of trade and government and the cultural tradition continued to look back to Greece. The Romans also looked to Greece for cultural legitimacy, so this was an easy fit. When the Roman Empire was divided into two halves to make rule easier, the split was the Latin speaking west and the Greek speaking east. The Eastern Roman/ Byzantine Empire drew its legitimacy as much from the shared Hellenic culture as from Roman tradition.

Alexander's empire did not survive his death, but the cultural legacy of his conquest was immense. The near East was reshaped and given a common language and what grew into a common culture. Trade and cultural exchange flourished; Greek traditions of philosophy and theater spread out and became more vibrant for encountering new ways of thought and modes of entertainment. Rome took these new traditions back with them and they spread throughout the Empire becoming part of the foundation of the European cultural identity.

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

A structure such as the successor kingdoms is a good tool to explain having a "common tongue" in a campaign without having an empire. The competing nature of the successor kingdoms is an excellent starting point for adding intrigue, political maneuvering and the threat of war (or actual warfare) to a campaign. It can be run as a combat heavy campaign with armies marching to confront each other or as the "cold war" of the later successor kingdoms. Depending on what the campaign wishes to focus on, politics, espionage and the every-present threat of war are all available. There are even lost cities from the earlier "golden era of the conqueror" to explore.

Equally, it is a good model for how successful conquerors impose their culture on the conquered peoples. For the Hellenistic world, this was easy, as the Greek system had

much that was attractive contained within it: intellectual inquiry, novel ideas about government, new forms of art and performance. (With the added carrot that learning about Greek culture and language would put one in a better position for trade and work.)

This is not to say that all was happy and cheerful in the Hellenistic world. Slavery flourished, there were revolts and bad governance, and, of course, wars. Conversely, trade was easier, knowledge was spread, more people travelled, and the region was slowly drawn closer together under a common culture. Trade was an important source of revenue for the Successor kings and was encouraged; roads and ports were maintained, bandits were suppressed. Most campaign worlds feature relatively save travel and this is good structure to explain that.

### Supplemental d20 Material:

#### New Feat

Ruling Elite [General]

Your ancestors conquered this land, you know it is both your right and your duty to rule over it.

**Prerequisites:** Int 10, Chr 10, growing up as part of a non-native ruling elite.

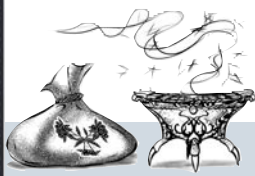
**Benefit:** You gain knowledge of your people's native tongue as well as that of your subject people as your base language. You gain +1 to Diplomacy, Intimidate and Profession (administrator) checks. Diplomacy and Knowledge (history) are always class skills for you.

**Special:** Usually this feat may only be chosen at 1<sup>st</sup> level.

You receive a -2 or higher circumstance penalty on social rolls with those who are opposed to the rule of your people.

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by Eytan Bernstein

## Faith Based Initiative : Religious Characters in a Fantasy Setting: Part I –Archetypes

Almost every role-playing setting, home-brew or manufactured, has some sort of religious model. This model is what determines the nature of the spiritual possibilities for denizens of the setting. In most fantasy settings, there are obvious polytheistic gods that can be channeled for tangible power. The purpose of this month's column is to explore the different archetypes in RPG religion. This will include the standard classics (and cliches) as well as propositions for new and more untraditional possibilities. It will not only deal with characters that have a specific calling as a spiritual leader, but also those who worship privately or even those that oppose religion entirely. This is the first of a two-part article that examines the nature of religious characters in a fantasy setting. This first half explores the common types of characters played in a fantasy setting. Next month's article will discuss personal experiences of gamers who have played such characters.

The most common style of role-playing (and the one that will receive the attention in this article) is fantasy. Fantasy gaming typically involve polytheistic worship. This is characteristic of the most popular fantasy settings – *Dungeons and Dragons*, followed by some forms of *Palladium* and *GURPS*. In these settings a character typically falls into one of five possible archetypes – the *Divine Channeler*, the *Divine Servant*, the *Incidental Worshipper*, the *Non-Worshipper* and the *Anti-Worshipper*.

The first and most common religious fantasy archetype is the *Divine Channeler*. This person is a direct focus of her deity's powers and can thus exercise great influence over the material world. This influence comes through the form of spells and divine channeling. These figures include Clerics, Druids, Favored Souls, Shamans and similar incarnations. Whether or not they derive power from a specific being or from nature as a tangible force, these practitioners are the direct conduits of divine forces.

Players have taken a variety of approaches when portraying a *Divine Channeler*. Some decide to become fanatic missionaries who stop at nothing to spread their god's (or force's) message. The form this takes depends a great deal upon the nature of the deity; some possible incarnations include the act of spreading war and chaos, the desire to achieve redemption for all who have committed a perceived sin, the need to right wrongs, and to spread justice and law. It even includes certain basic worldviews related to material aspects of the world such as an element or a season. Some attempt to embody the many crises of faith that occur among realistic religious practitioners. Others go for a more resolute – in some instances, less complex – rendering of a character in service. Regardless of the character's level of commitment, the *Divine Channeler* can be one of the most rewarding and interesting types of characters to play. Typically, they are the archetype with the least relation to the player's actual life. This not only allows for escapism, but also for true exploration in the life of someone driven – even powered – by a higher purpose. This type of character sometimes runs into problems with less devoted types. These others – often *Non-Worshippers* or *Anti-Worshippers* might find the character preachy or simply have no interest in the supposedly earth-shattering spiritual quandaries of such an individual.

The second type of religious archetype is the *Divine Servant*. These are typically warriors or other skilled individuals who have a calling that is no less intense, but in many ways, is less focused than the *Divine Channeler*. This archetype includes Paladins, Rangers and Blackguards. They serve a specific purpose for a deity, often one that is martial in nature. These servants do not have the same level of divine power that is possessed by more focused practitioners, but they are still often quite faithful. They use their faith to enhance and expand their existing abilities and skills. Occasionally, this category also includes members of other callings who, for whatever reason, have been chosen or blessed by a power – typically to carry out that power's will.

### About the Author

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

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The *Divine Servant* has a great deal of variety in its execution. Paladins (and Blackguards, though to a lesser extent) for example, are among the most devout (though least questioning) of their purpose. Rangers might show little if any connection to a deity or higher spiritual calling. Monks often develop such an intense spiritual awareness that their training borders on devotion. While this is not akin to actual deific worship, it is its own form of spirituality. This archetype most closely resembles the state of faith today. Most true faith is developed through experience (or in some cases through brainwashing). Some people become connected to a higher form of spirituality after they experience a reverence of nature in their travels or explorations. Others develop faith in a higher power during times of crisis – especially during war. Still others develop a sense of spiritual enlightenment through meditation and bodily transcendence. All of these types of people have a great deal in common with a Paladin, or Ranger, though their faith is rarely as clear cut as the former. They acquire faith in conjunction with their life path and not in place of it. If the latter were the case, they might have more in common with the *Divine Channeler* (though not much more).

The other type of *Divine Servant* is one that derives no direct divine spellcasting power (typically) from a deity in the form of spells or powers, but may exhibit unusual extraordinary gifts. These people are members of other callings, paths that serve the purpose of the deity and offer an entrance for the servant into other aspects of life. A good example of this is Elminster (and the Seven Sisters), servants of Mystra, the goddess of magic, in *Forgotten Realms*. Excessive power levels notwithstanding, these individuals are arcane magicians that serve a goddess in a variety of functions and receive unusual and quite powerful divine gifts. Most examples of *Divine Servants* in this category are extraordinary. Those that nominally worship gods – without the fervor of a practitioner – fall into the third archetype: the *Incidental Worshipper*.

*The Incidental Worshipper* comes in many forms. He can be a warrior who pays lip service to a god in the hopes of greater martial prowess. She can be one who believes that a certain god is “intriguing” – a pinup god syndrome. This person might find a particular aspect of the god to be appealing without actually comprehending anything of that god’s spirituality or dogma. Some people pay nominal heed to a god because that entity governs the character’s career choice or primary interests. Others *incidentally* worship multiple gods, calling upon a different deity depending on their need and circumstance. This brings to mind the string of holy symbols held up by a character in “The Mummy.” The majority of characters should fall into some form of this model.

Incidental worship opens up a great deal of possibilities in character expansion. The choice of a deity, or the faith of a character’s upbringing, can shed light on the character’s current goals, motivations and personality. Without it, many doors are closed to a character’s development. Most gamers, due to an inherent distaste in all things religious, simply assume that their character could never have a religious awakening or rebirth. The very idea – considered by many to be akin to fundamentalism – sickens some people. Despite this, having a handle on the role (however small) that religion plays in a character’s life leaves room for such an event.

The Fourth Archetype is the *Non-Worshipper*. This is a character that has no interest in the gods or religion whatsoever. These characters typically fall into three types. The first is a character who has powers or interests that have removed them from the world at large. A good example of this is as Psychic character or a Monk – a person turned so far inward that they have little or no experience with external spirituality. The second type is the drifter. While many options for worship are open to this character—such as gods of travel or nature worship—their hyper nature or perhaps their lack of focus lead to a life free of worship. The third type is one born of carelessness. The player imposes their own lack of interest on his character or is simply too lazy to bother. This is most common in a game with little emphasis on role-playing, but occurs quite frequently in high intensity role-playing campaigns as well.

It is a given in fantasy that players choose a deity for their characters to worship because reality suggests that in a pseudo-medieval world, *almost* everyone follows a god in some capacity. Atheists should be exceedingly rare (rare should not be interpreted as one in every party). Not every character has a real interest in religion or gods, but atheist fantasy characters (with very rare exceptions) come from an anachronistic worldview. Regardless of the problems of such a position, it is of course, a player’s right to play the types of characters they enjoy, even if this is at the expense of quality. Oftentimes, the *Non-Worshipper* archetype seems to blur into the realm of antagonism. This is where the fifth archetype emerges.

The fifth fantasy archetype is the *Anti-Worshipper*. This person, for whatever reason, has acquired a distinct aversion to a particular god or even religion in general. While the latter is rather extreme, there is usually a definite origin to such feelings. It is impossible to develop a realistic hatred for something without having first experienced some sort of trauma because it. If some sort of reasoning does not exist, the explanation is almost always poor role-playing. Such a character should either have the cause of this in his or her background or should experience its development through the game. Often, such sentiments have little impact on a character’s progression, but sometimes they can drive a character to drastic action. This sort of vehemence can dominate a character’s persona and sometimes it can focus an entire game. The *Anti-Worshipper* is also the character most likely to experience a rebound. This is perhaps due to the notion that the most extreme minds are also the easiest to push to the other extreme. This idea suggests that a vehement anti-Christian would be the easiest person to brainwash into fundamentalism. Thus, a character that fights a certain group is often the most likely person (among the PCs) to become a member of that group.

Another possibility exists in this archetype. The *Anti-Worshipper* might find solace or spiritual awakening in another form of religion or spirituality. This is akin to the phenomenon today in which many former Christians (and occasionally Jews) find spiritual meaning in alternative faiths. These faiths are often smaller groups such as Wiccans and nature worshippers but sometimes also include Eastern religions such as Buddhism. In role-playing games,

it is much simpler. The character can find acceptance or meaning in another of the many choices of worship in most fantasy worlds.

There is little doubt that numerous other character permutations exist. It is my belief, however, that these are the most fundamental of all of them. It is likely that many characters fit somewhere in between one of the five types. Most religious characters oscillate among different archetypes at some point in their development; sometimes, this goes to an extreme. This is to be encouraged however, for such an organic progression much more similarly mirrors the religion of our reality. Role-playing a character should always mirror experiences in reality. Emotions are not the only aspect of a character that must be realistic. Expressions of faith should also be representative of true experience. Otherwise, a given campaign will ring falsely and those involved will be denied a more fulfilling experience.

Next month’s column will be a continuation of the exploration of fantasy archetypes. The second half will explore how these archetypes have played out in specific characters. The article will make use of responses and testimonies of those online as well as those from my personal observations concerning current and previous gaming experiences. Each experience will be explored from both the personal perspective and from that of how it fits (or in some cases, does not fit) into the five archetypes outlined here.

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by *Melissa Piper*

## Modern Gaming: An Alternative to Medieval Settings

The modern world is a world where we live and breathe our entire lives. We go to work and school, drive our vehicles, and surf the Internet on a daily basis. We are so accustomed the way our lives work that there seems to be no fantasy in the world that we call our own. Our greatest escape consists of a visit to the movie theatre, playing a video game, or a enjoying a role-playing game. So with everything that we put up with everyday, why would we want to place ourselves back into a world that is based off of the one we're accustomed to? Believe it or not, an adventure based off of the modern world can have fantasy within it as well, and has the potential to be more exciting than typical medieval-style campaigns.

As a pen-and-paper role-player, you've more than likely trudged through all the dungeons, stormed castles, and cast spells that are beyond your wildest dreams. You've faced monsters from myths and legends, swung long swords, and drank more than your fair share of dwarven ale. With all of that experience behind you, maybe you're looking for new adventures and different approaches to keep your love of role-playing vibrant. If so, then it may be time for you to consider playing in a modern campaign setting.

If you are new to role-playing, playing in a modern campaign is an ideal place to start. After all, you live in the modern era, so you already have a strong idea of what the world the GM will throw you into is like. But don't let that fact drive you away; the modern world is still a great place to allow your imagination to run wild.

Even if you're a role-playing veteran, a modern campaign still contains the many challenges that you've come to enjoy in other campaigns. You already have the background knowledge on how to create characters, fight in battles, and use magic. So, why not utilize that knowledge in a campaign you've never experienced before? Everyone needs a change of pace, and a modern setting provides a nice break from the traditional campaign. When you get down to basics, every role-playing game has the same concept behind it: assume the role of a character, decide how that character would react

to certain situations, and deal with the situations. Since you've already experienced this in other campaigns, you are already equipped with the groundwork for what you need to know about playing in a modern campaign.

### The Modern World

Just the sound of a modern campaign loses the interest of many players from the start. The modern world is what we already know, and not many people want to find their escape from reality in a world that they're used to.

However, a modern role-playing game does not have to incorporate every aspect of today's society into the game. After all, the medieval times were not as fun and exciting as we imagine them to be, so why does modern have to follow a different standard? The fact is, it doesn't. As with any other setting, modern campaigns can include as much or as little fantasy and exaggeration as the GM and the players desire. The word "modern" does not have to mean you are confined to the city; the main premise of a modern campaign should be that your character resides somewhere in a modern-type world. Beyond that, the possibilities are endless.

### Guns, Swords, and Magic

Too many players are hesitant to play in a modern setting because they don't see what differs from the world they reside in. It's true that there are campaigns that are based solely based off of reality, and no derivation from the laws of physics and nature are permitted, but such campaigns are rare. As with players, plenty of GMs do not want to be involved with a campaign that does not incorporate some type of fantasy. Such campaigns become tedious and boring rather quickly and tend not to last long. After all, what would be the point of playing in a setting that purely resembles real life if you are using role-playing as an escape in the first place? More than likely, you will find that your GM plans to use some type of fantasy element in the campaign, whether it is magic, magical items, different races, or powers of the

### About the Author

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

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mind.

When people think of the term "modern", they often think only of what exists today. What many people do not consider is that a modern campaign can include the same elements of a medieval campaign, including different races. Just because humans are the only humanoids in existence on our world does not mean that they must be the only race in existence a modern campaign. For example, I am the GM of a modern campaign that includes other races such as elves, gnomes, celestials, and fiends. I explained their existence on our world as the fact that they have existed as long as humans. My campaign world can be viewed as the future of the medieval campaigns we typically play. Elves and other races became citizens of their respective countries just like we are today, and other humanoid races are not an impossibility in this world. Your GM may create a similar setting, or he may develop other ideas to explain the existence of the other races. For example, your GM may claim that elves evolved from humans over time, or that gnomes came to our world through another dimension, or even that time travel brought the strange races into our present-day setting. The possibilities are endless.

If your GM's plans include permitting players to play as various races, seize the opportunity. Not many players enjoy playing human characters in every campaign, so playing as an elf, dwarf, gnome, or another different race will make your modern role-playing experience more enjoyable. As both a modern player and GM, I have found that one of the most enjoyable aspects of playing and running a modern campaign to be the interaction of the races in the modern world. Imagine the modern world to be a place where all the races that you are familiar with from medieval settings work side-

by-side with humans. Playing as a race other than a human adds a new level of game play on its own. For example, in a modern campaign, humans may be growing annoyed with elves as the elves secure more positions of power in your city. If you play as an elven character, not only will you have the chance to play the adventures that your GM has planned for you, but you will also get to play the part of an elf that is always being watched closely by his human counterparts. This fact can also aid you in the development of your character's personality, as he may become paranoid or untrusting of humans or people in general.

Magic is also another aspect that your GM may include in the campaign to liven things up a bit. While it is not necessary for your character to be a spellcaster to make the modern world exciting, it gives you the opportunity to use spells that were not possible in the medieval world. With the advent of technology such as computers, vehicles, and the Internet, new spells that are specifically tuned to modern technology could be incorporated into the campaign. Therefore, your character has the chance to literally become a wizard with technology.

One thing that I have found to be a turn-off from modern for many players is the use of guns. Firearms and explosives are the weapons of choice in the modern world, but that does not necessarily mean that you will be limited to wielding guns. Your GM may pit you against magical monsters that are immune to normal bullets and explosives, including vampires, werewolves, or monsters of her own creation. While most characters are expected to carry some type of firearm, it does not have to be his or her primary weapon. Firearms can be equipped as a backup for when your characters find themselves in a tight and tricky situation. In most cases, your character will require some type of gun, unless the GM has created a unique world where firearms do not exist. As always, be sure to ask your GM if he or she permits the use of archaic weapons before equipping them onto your character.

## Character Customization

As with any role-playing game, one of the first places any player beings when preparing to play in a modern campaign is character customization. Here, you have the opportunity to choose your character's appearance, armor, weapons, skills, feats, abilities, etc. (all at the GM's discretion, of course). While you have a variety of options to choose from in a medieval setting, modern campaigns give you the opportunity to customize your character even further.

Most modern characters in any setting begin with an occupation of some sort. Whether your character is a soldier in a war, a commercial pilot, or a college professor, each campaign has many starting occupations for players to choose from. Also, each occupation can be divided into specific categories, depending on how detailed you want to be. For example, if your character is a soldier, is he a Private First Class, a Navy Seal, or a Green Beret? If your character is a college professor, does she teach math, science, or art? If the campaign you are playing in includes magic and magical items, you may also have the opportunity to choose a profession in the occult or supernatural. Maybe your character is a preternatural investigator or an occult items salesperson. With all occupations that exist in the modern world and all the ones that can be developed if magic is a factor, the possibilities for giving your character a starting place are nearly infinite.

Choosing an occupation helps you when you create a background for your character. If your character is a professional, he or she must have had some formal training in their past. For example, if your character attended college, you can create a story about whom he or she met there, and what extracurricular activities he or she may have participated in. Considering these points may help you to create a story about how your character got to where he or she is today. Maybe she met an influential person her last year of college that secured her first job for her. You have the potential to be creative as you work your character into your GM's campaign.

Some players have trouble imagining a modern character that they would actually enjoy playing. For them, it appears a bit mundane to think of a character that can fit into their world and still be interesting, especially if they are

new to modern campaigns. If you are having this problem, you can always consider creating a character based off of the goals you want to achieve in your own life. Everyone daydreams, so why not make those daydreams a reality (in the game, anyways)? Begin by making a character that works in the occupation you would love to be in. Give him or her a goal to reach that is similar to yours, and play through the campaign to get your character to reach that goal. This includes taking abilities that would help him or her to achieve that goal. Eventually, your character may be able to secure positions of power and influence, and you will get a taste of what it's like to be in those positions as well. A character that is a small extension of you is likely to hold your interest throughout the game and make the game more interesting.

Along with occupations and backgrounds, details such as the clothes your character wears, the way she wears her hair, etc. can all be specified until your character is just right. Don't be afraid to explore the options that are available to you, and ask your GM about the occupations he or she allows in their modern world. Since there are so many available occupations, the backgrounds that will be developed for each character will be different, even for each character in the same profession.

## Conclusion

It may not sound very interesting at first, but a modern campaign can contain just as much fantasy as a medieval setting; perhaps even more. As a player, a modern campaign will give you the opportunity to experience a new setting and think differently. To be able to play in any setting, role-players require a lot of imagination to keep the campaign interesting and enjoyable for everyone. Modern allows you to use that imagination in a new world along with new items. Although some of what is incorporated into the campaign is at the discretion of your GM, as a player you have a lot of influence on the campaign. After all, if the GM does not give the players what they want to see, the campaign will not last long, if it even gets off the ground at all. It's worth trying a modern campaign for yourself. You may find that you actually enjoying playing in a modern campaign, and you might learn a thing or two about the world and your real modern surroundings in the process.

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by Lance Kepner

## Feat Factory Project VIII - Personal Touches

Last time on Feat Factory Project VII we discussed chain feats, a process by which multiple characters can link together feats to produce some devastating results. This approach can lead to more meta-game thinking, although the options for some great role-playing aspects are there. This time on Feat Factory I want to bring us all back around to what the game is really about, role-playing.

How many times have you been in a situation where you just wanted to do something cool, that really didn't impact the game or story in any significant way, but your DM didn't let you. You wanted to stay conscious as you confronted the BBEG and he knocked you around, but you failed your fortitude save. You wanted to swing your weapon with flair to intimidate those annoying bandits. Or you wanted to cast a spell with a new twist to show your might and prowess to a rival wizard, but you didn't have the specific metamagic feat, or anything prepared that day. Well I say no more! That's right players, it's time to take back our characters!

### Flair Feats

Flair feats are a role-player's dream. A set of FREE feats acquired every five levels no matter what race, class, or prestige class you have. These flair feats allow you, as a player, to designate something that your character can do with flair and pizzazz that you as a character should be able to do anyways. Flair feats are that simple.

### How Flair Feats Work

Probably the most simple of feats, Flair feats are normal feats, but have a special Flair type, designating that they can only be taken from the Flair feat pool at every 5 levels (1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, and 20th). A character acquires them as if they had received a bonus feat at that level. Flair feats are pretty specific, but I tried in the examples to give variations on the character archetypes. Some are powerful, some are not.

So what's the downside to flair feats? Well, they cost the character something to do. They would be too powerful if they could be used freely. These are supposed to be flair not fluff, something that happens in dire circumstance, not everyday dealings. DM's are encouraged, if allowing flair feats, to add or subtract from the drawbacks of the feats as they see fit.

### Flair Feat Examples

Flair feats are acquired every five levels, starting at 1st. Characters must meet all prerequisites to take a flair feat, and flair feats function in much the same way as normal feats, except for the drawback, which happens instantly (after the feat effect) and cannot be prevented, even by means that would normally prevent such effects.

#### CALL ON THE POWER [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Ability to cast divine spells

**Benefit:** By calling upon the great power of your deity you can invoke great religious acts. Once per month you may try to invoke the power of your deity to grant you a lesser miracle. The base % for this to work is 50% + 1% per character level.

**Drawback:** Whether successful or not the spell is treated as cast and you incur all experience penalties associated with the spell. Successful or not you must also retreat to a holy shrine or place devoted to your deity for no less than one week. You must get on your pilgrimage no more than 24 hours after the use of this ability, and the pilgrimage must last no more than 1 day per character level. If you do not get to your designated place of worship in time you must increase the time of your prayer by one week per day over the limit. If you do not retreat or complete the worship you lose this flair feat permanently. You also fall out of favor with your deity and lose all class abilities from the divine class (or classes), which includes any spell casting ability granted by that class (or classes).

**Special:** Treat *lesser miracle* as *lesser wish*.

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Lance Kepner is the head of the Project Crossroads world building project found in the Silver Crossroads forum as well as author of numerous articles in the d20 section.

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#### GREATER SPELL FLAIR [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Caster level 8th

**Benefit:** Identical to SPELL FLAIR except that the saving throw DC increases by +4.

**Drawback:** You may not cast defensively when using this ability. Drawing the heightened magic into yourself to channel the raw power is a very dangerous and tiring task. The caster takes 1d6 points of non-lethal damage per spell level of the spell cast for each sue of this ability. The caster can attempt a Fort save vs. the spells final DC to take only half of the non-lethal damage.

#### GREATER WEAPON FLAIR [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Weapon focus, Greater weapon focus (weapon).

**Benefit:** Identical to WEAPON FLAIR except as noted. The intimidate circumstance bonus increases to +6 and any target that fails must make a Will save vs. fear at a DC of 5 + character level or be frightened for 1d4+1 rounds.

**Drawback:** Whenever you use this ability any target that is not intimidated gains a +4 circumstance bonus to all attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks for the duration of the encounter. A character cannot use this ability on anyone he considers an ally or is on friendly terms with.

#### INSTINCTUAL SURVIVAL [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Rage as a class ability.

**Benefit:** When you find yourself completely alone and up against six or more foes your natural instincts for survival kick into full swing. If you enter combat or are entered into combat with these foes you may treat your class that grants you the rage ability as effectively two levels higher for the purposes of base attack bonus, saving throw, and class abilities. You do not gain the benefits of increased skills or spell casting ability.

**Drawback:** For the next 24 hours treat the same class as effectively two levels lower in the same respects as noted above.

### LUCK OF THE DEVIL [FLAIR]

**Benefit:** You gain a +10 circumstance bonus to your next skill check. You may invoke this ability as a free-action.

**Drawback:** Your instant luck with one skill comes back to haunt you. Your next three game-relevant skill checks suffer a -20 penalty.

**Special:** If your LUCK OF THE DEVIL requires (or you would benefit from) more than one skill check to accomplish the task or goal you may gain the +10 bonus on all checks involved. The drawback number then increases by 3 for each check other than the initial one. You may not take 10 or 20 and invoke this ability.

### MASTER OF LORE [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Bardic Knowledge, Lore, or similar class ability.

**Benefit:** By focusing for 1 minute you can tap into your subconscious mind to draw forth clarity of through on one subject. You gain a +10 insight bonus to your check.

**Drawback:** This focus leaves your mind tired and cloudy. You take a -20 penalty on your next three bardic knowledge (or similar ability) checks. This penalty does not go away until the three checks are made (ie. There is no time limit when the penalty expires).

### SPELL FLAIR [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Caster level 1st

**Benefit:** As a full-round action you may cast any spell you may normally cast with extraordinary motions and flair. A spell cast in this way is much harder to resist. All saving throw DC's of the spell are increased by +1.

**Drawback:** You may not cast defensively when using this ability. Drawing the magic into yourself to channel the raw power is a dangerous and tiring task. The caster takes 1d6 points of non-lethal damage for each use of this ability.

### VOICE OF POWER [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Bardic music or similar class ability.

**Benefit:** When the time is dire you may infuse your voice with power from within. By doing so you greatly increase the potency of your bardic music effectively doubling any numeric effect including granted bonuses (or penalties) and duration. If the ability has an associated DC, the DC

increases by +5.

**Drawback:** After the oratory or song ends you are left completely voiceless, mute, for a full 24 hours. After that period you are hoarse for another 24 hours and suffer a -5 penalty to intimidate, bluff, diplomacy, and gather information checks. Voice based spell casting or bardic music is also impossible for these two days.

**Special:** You must use your voice to use this feat.

### WEAPON FLAIR [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Weapon focus (weapon).

**Benefit:** As a full-round action you can swing your weapon with such skill and flair that at the end of the display you may attempt an intimidate check. This check affects as many people as your character level, and those with the lowest number of hit dice are affected first. All of the affected targets must be within 30ft. of you. You also gain a +4 circumstance bonus on your check. If the check succeeds you succeed in intimidating the target(s), who are then shaken. This effect lasts for a number of rounds equal to your character level and is only applicable against you.

**Drawback:** Whenever you use this ability any target that is not intimidated gains a +2 circumstance bonus to all attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks for the duration of the encounter. A character cannot use this ability on anyone he considers an ally or is on friendly terms with.

### WRATH OF THE ALMIGHTY [FLAIR]

**Prerequisites:** Ability to cast divine spells, Weapon focus (deity's favored weapon).

**Benefit:** Once per week you may invoke the wrath of your deity by asking solemnly for holy power. As a double full-round action\* that provokes attacks of opportunity, you raise your weapon in reverence of your god charging it with holy power. After the double full-round action your weapon is infused with such power that by striking it into the ground you cause the divine power to explode forth. A 60ft burst (centered on you) of divine might exudes forth making all foes within the effect make an opposed check as if affected by a Bull Rush attempt (DC 15+ your character level). If any foe fails by 5 or more they are knocked prone.

**Drawback:** This divine might enrages foes within the effect.

They see you as the primary target, and must switch to you as their primary target. They attack you in the best way they can.

\*: A double full-round action is treated as

two consecutive full-round actions.

## Conclusion

O.K. Go ahead and pick up your jaw, dust it off from the dirt on your desk or floor, and really go back and read those feats again. Focus on the drawbacks that as I noted cannot be prevented. Note how you could handle these feats as both a player and a DM, and what the differences in your views of them are. Figure out if these flair feats work well in your game, or would completely disrupt your world. These are all important questions any player or DM needs to consider before even thinking of using flair feats.

Some DM's will find these feats offer their players that chance to be a hero without using, what they think are silly mechanics like action points or some other similar system. Some will find these feats break their world into a thousands pieces and they do not want their players having such control or power. To each their own, and its important to know what will work well and mesh into your system and what will not.

I look forward to reading your comments and suggestions, and answering any questions you might have. Until next time.

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by *Melissa Piper*

## MODERN OBSTACLES - SPARKING PLAYERS INTERESTS IN

### MODERN CAMPAIGNS

#### Introduction

So, you've heard about the string of modern campaign settings that have been developed as of late, such as *d20 Modern* and *Spycraft*, and you've decided that you'd like to run your own modern campaign. After all, your potential players are familiar with D&D/d20, so they would be more than willing to experiment with a modern setting, right? Well, once you attempt to round up your fellow gamers, you will learn the harsh truth; players are usually not so gung-ho to try a new setting, especially one that takes them away from fantasy and back into reality. In fact, there are many obstacles that may keep players from trying out any modern settings. Depending on the campaign you want to run, there are several steps you can take to persuade your players into trying out your modern campaign.

As the gamemaster of a d20 Modern *Urban Arcana* campaign, I have encountered several obstacles that made my players hesitate before agreeing to play in my setting. I have learned that one of the key aspects in sparking the interest in a modern campaign is to get to the source of the hesitation. Before you can address their concerns, you have to know what their concerns are. While the answers may seem obvious to you as a GM, it is always important to communicate with your potential players to narrow the problems down. If your players are hesitating, be sure to ask them why a modern campaign does not sound interesting, and what they would like to see added to a modern setting. I asked these questions of many seasoned roleplayers, and I was surprised at some of the answers I received in return. Although your players may have some different concerns, I have addressed the most common responses here. If your potential players have the same concerns, you may want to consider these tips to spark their interest in your modern campaign setting.

#### Modern? But I Experience That Everyday!

The first obstacle to launching a modern campaign is often the name itself; "Modern." Since we all know and live in the modern era, a modern campaign setting does not hold the same appeal of a medieval setting at first glance. In fact, when we hear the word "modern," we often think of crime, cars, taxes, work, and other everyday hassles. If you want your players to get past the name of the setting, the first step you must take is to take modern past the everyday.

Everyone daydreams or has some fantastic goals that they would like to achieve in their lifetime, so why not give your players the chance to live up to these dreams? For example, maybe one of your potential players aspires to be a journalist for the *New York Times*, but it will be years before she can even hope to reach her goal. Knowing this, you can encourage her to play a character who is a journalist and has the potential to level-up to a journalist for the *New-York Times*. By talking to your potential players, you have a chance to learn what they enjoy and dislike in their modern-centered lives. After all, role-players have imaginations, and they should be able to tell you what they would like to experience in their lives. As a gamemaster, communicating will give you ideas about what to include in your campaign so you can specifically tune it to your players. By giving them the chance to include their own dreams and imaginations in your campaign, your potential players will have a growing interest in the modern module and will be able to see more in a modern campaign than what they experience everyday.

Modern does not necessarily have to mean "present-day" or "here and now." Times in history, such as the Old West, the Civil War, World War II, the 60's, and the Roaring 20's are all considered to be "modern times" as well. If you want to create a modern setting while keeping the feel of the past for your players, you may consider basing your campaign off of an historic moment or time in history. Not only will it give

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

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your potential players the chance to escape reality for a bit, but it will also expand on the occupations and possibilities your players have for their characters.

#### Increasing the Fantasy Factor

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to getting your players interested in a modern setting is the lack of fantasy usually associated with these settings. In medieval fantasy settings, you often come across various races, magic, magical items, and monsters. Modern settings are not usually associated with fantasy, so players will wonder what kind of fantasy escapism a modern setting could possibly provide.

The fact is, medieval times did not even have all these fantasy attributes. Fantasy was added in order to make the setting more interesting, entertaining, and more "un-realistic." If you were to play a close-to-reality medieval setting, you would have to worry about things like the plague and making enough coppers to survive day-by-day. If the medieval setting has been spiced up to make the roleplaying experience more enjoyable, then there is no reason why the same cannot be done with a modern setting.

If your players use role-playing as an escape from reality, then you will want the "fantasy factor" of your campaign to be high. I use the term "fantasy factor" to describe how varied from reality a setting is. For example, if the only derivation from our world to your campaign is that there is a woman president, then your "fantasy factor" is low and would probably not be enough to gain the interest of any potential players. Instead, if your world has a female elven president, and she is trying to find a way to curb the increase in the vampire population, then your "fantasy factor" would be high.

Working up to a high “fantasy factor” is a great way to peek and keep the interest of your players.

If your planned campaign centers on humans and doesn't include any other races besides humans, then your “fantasy factor” will be low indeed. After all, playing a human and facing humans when you're one yourself often does not keep things interesting. One of the first things players look for in a fantasy setting are a variety of races to choose from. Not many people prefer to play as a human throughout each and every campaign, so you can bring more interest to your campaign by permitting players to play as elven, gnomish, halfling, or many other characters. Since the basic d20 Modern System Reference Document (MSRD) rules do not account for races other than humans, you can consider purchasing a supplement such as *Urban Arcana* or use the Arcana MSRD (free rules) [available here](#). The Arcana supplements are specifically set up to incorporate other races and magic into your modern campaign. After adding race variation to your campaign, you give your players the chance to imagine how their lives would be affected if they went to work and school alongside other humanoids, or how their lives would be affected if they were one of these humanoids working alongside humans.

The use of magic and magical items is another consideration to look at when you want to increase your “fantasy factor.” One of the novelties of playing in the medieval fantasy setting is that you can play a spellcaster such as a mage, sorcerer, or cleric. While there are no specific occupations that require magic, you can create new occupations for your campaign for those who want to play as a modern-day mage or cleric. For example, one of the interesting concepts developed in my modern campaign was the idea of a mages' guild. One of my players developed the idea of having a group of modern mages form an organization (or guild) where everyone was a spellcaster or apprentice. The group worked to teach magic and sometimes regulate it in the city. Obviously, to become a member of this guild, a character has to have some abilities in magic. As with the mages' guild, you can incorporate unions and clubs, in addition to occupations, to add flavor to your campaign.

Monsters always keep the battles and random encounters of a setting interesting. While the monsters of today's world are usually animals or criminals, you can always stick to the classic baddies for your party to face, such as vampires, ogres, and dragons. As with races, monsters can be added to your campaign through rule supplements and imagination. NPCs can also be monsters or other humanoids, so never sell short the possibilities that are laid before you when designing random encounters and adventures for your party.

## Guns

Guns and explosives are the primary weapons in use today, but that does not have to stop you from including ancient weapons in your campaign. Not all players enjoy having their character wielding guns. While it takes skill to aim and shoot effectively, there is more to entering melee combat with a longsword or taking the time to shoot an arrow at a monster from a distance. Obviously, you can allow your players to wield these archaic weapons, but they are put at a distinct disadvantage when facing an enemy with a machine gun. For this reason, you may want to consider including special monsters and enemies that would not be easily taken down from a bullet. For example, vampires are a familiar enemy that can only be slain with weapons that do not involve the invention of gunpowder. Weapons such as crossbows, stakes, and fire are all more effective against a bloodsucker than any normal bullet. Also, lycanthropes receive the most damage from silver, so planting lycanthropes into your campaign would give your players a reason to make their characters proficient in, say, a silver longsword.

If you really want to stretch the bounds between fantasy and reality, you may consider simulating a modern world where gunpowder and guns have not been invented. The only weapons available to your players would be archaic weapons that they are accustomed to using in medieval settings. Not only would this concept eliminate the problem for players that do not want to use guns, but it would also add another level of fantasy by putting the characters into an alternate modern reality.

## Conclusion

Even after using the strategies suggested or strategies of your own, some players may still hesitate when asked to join in a modern campaign. If a player is more interested in the tried-and-true medieval fantasy setting, then he is free to do so. As a gamemaster, the best that you can do is to attempt to counteract the worries that players have about a modern setting, and discuss with them why modern can be just as entertaining as the classic setting. Each player has his own interests, and modern might not be one of his.

Keep in mind that your best ally when recruiting players for your campaign is communication. Find out what your players enjoy, and try to incorporate those likes into your campaign so players will have something to look forward to. If your players love fantasy, then be sure to let them know that you plan to include magic, various races, and other fantasy components into your game. If your players hate guns, tell them that you will allow them to become proficient in archaic weapons. You may be required to change your original idea of the campaign a little to fit the likes of your players, but in the end, everyone involved will have more interest in the game and the campaign itself will last longer.

In my next article, I will discuss how you can keep your players interest in the game once they have agreed to join your campaign.

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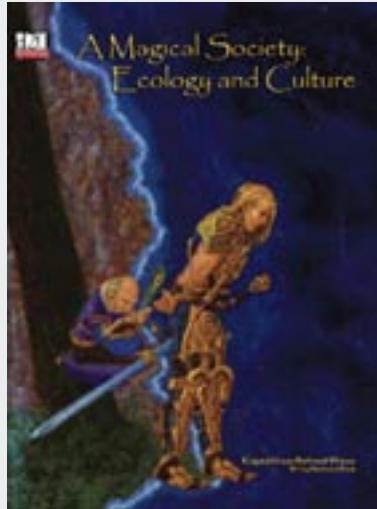
by Bradford Ferguson

# d20 review : A Magical Society : Ecology and Culture

About: 160 pages, soft cover, black and white color interior, \$27.

Authors: Suzi Yee and Joseph Browning  
 Publisher: Expeditious Retreat Pres (2004)

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



## From the Back Cover

"Between these covers rests the treatise of Kierian the Bold, prospective God of War and Bringer of Justice. Upon reaching his divinity, he encountered a [sic] contest he could not resolve with his sword. Peer into the inner workings of the multiverse, the body magic, and how gods build their worlds. From a divine perch, unravel the grit of the cycles of predation, the span of ecological diversity, and the complexities of cultural development. Told from the perspective [sic] of creating and mapping a new world, discover the knowledge lost and buried in the age of gods and heroes. Until now..."

## Presentation

*A Magical Society: Ecology and Culture* is a 160-page soft cover book that is bound so that it can be laid flat on a surface. You can open the book in the middle and press it hard down on a surface and it will stay open to the page you are on and this does not adversely affect the binding. I've heard that Steve Jackson Games used to utilize this fairly unique binding technique (or maybe still does). The interior is black and white and Ravindra Rana did all the art. I like it when one artist does all the art because the art is very consistent. The layout of the book is nice though the outside border that is opposite the binding is a huge border. The pages are meant to look like old paper and the outside border is a bookmark that indicates what chapter you are in (though it does not say this). I thought the editing was below the standard that has been set by WOTC, The Game Mechanics, and RPG Objects and sometimes it distracted me from my reading, but overall the editing was not a barrier to my enjoyment of the text.

## Introduction

*A Magical Society: Ecology and Culture* is billed as a d20 System book, but it really does not have any d20 mechanics. The only d20-related material is gold piece costs for different materials in the appendix of the book. The book can truly be used by all Game Masters for nearly any fantasy role-playing game. The authors, Joseph Browning and Suzi Yee, apparently asked themselves an important question before writing the text, "What do GMs truly need to know about ecology and culture when they are creating their own world?" They answer this question without getting into too many details about any one thing, so you will not find within its pages a comprehensive guide to ecology (for example), but you will find enough information for you to create a campaign world. If you need more information, there is an extensive two-page bibliography in the back or you can check out the

## Review snapshot

### CLASS: Preparation Supplement

**STR: 16 (Physical).** "Takes a beating and keeps on ticking." Strongest soft cover I've ever abused.

**DEX: 14 (Organization).** Using the Book section should be in the beginning, not the end. Interludes and split up mapping are nice and make sense.

**CON: 16 (Quantity of the Content).** Tons of content - more than enough to get you going. Appendix takes up nearly a third of the book, though.

**INT: 17 (Quality of Content).** Excellent writing that builds upon each successive section.

**WIS: 16 (Options & Adaptability).** Covers a wide range of environments and topics, but for a standard world.

**CHA: 14 (Look & Feel).** Illustrations demonstrate the material and the art is good. The layout is good, but the outside "bookmark" border is too big.

## How we rate our reviews

### Scoring definitions.

**18 = Superior.** Best of the best.

**16 = Very Good.** Part of a Baker's Dozen.

**14 = Good.** Most gamers would like this.

**12 = Fair.** Some gamers would like this.

**10 = Average.** Most gamers would be indifferent.

**8 = Subpar.** Flawed, but not without promise.

**6 = Bad.** Most gamers would dislike this.

**4 = Very Bad.** Among the Dirty Dozen.

**2 = Inferior.** Worst of the worst.

topics on the Internet. While you could get all the information in the book on the Internet or at your library, the authors tell us what we need to know instead of us having to sort through too much information. To state the obvious, this book is for the storyteller and not the player.

## Mapping Your World

The material about mapping is broken up into three parts throughout the text. Each subsequent part builds upon discussion that took place earlier. The sections are given in this order: mapping, ecology, biomes, mapping, culture, and mapping. The second mapping section adds elements learned from ecology and biomes and the third mapping section adds elements of culture. All together, these sections spanned 29 pages and utilized 14 illustrations and maps.

The main thrust of the first section is plate tectonics and how the movement of the plates shapes continents. Here you form your world by starting out with a Pangaea with all the continents together, then they drift apart and you use the directions and paths to determine where mountain ranges and island chains form. The second section adds wind and ocean currents to your fledgling world to help you determine where to put the various biomes (such as grassland or forest) and rivers. These are laid out in bands depending on where the wind carries the water from the oceans and mountains are taken into account for this. The final mapping section takes the long view (like the rest of the text): first you figure out where man would have been most likely to appear, then you figure out what areas they were most likely to explore first, then you figure out how man is now with all his civilization and tools.

A couple of things distracted me a little bit in the first mapping section. First, there is a diagram that should show the axial tilt of Earth and the Sun's rays during the summer and winter equinoxes. It is good at showing where the sun's rays fall and we can see why some parts of the world have days of continual sunlight or darkness, but it has a vague outline for the continents is upside-down where the tip of what we know as the South American "continent" is pointing toward the south pole. But if you ignore this, everything else in the diagram reads properly. Also, there is a lot of discussion that goes with the sample world that the authors create before our eyes. Some discussion on page 12 says "please reference the map provided," and though there is a diagram on page 13, the map we need to reference is on page 18. The diagrams and maps are very helpful and illustrative, but the text didn't tell us exactly what page to look for in the diagram. As I read some portions, I wondered to myself, "What should I be looking at as I read this?"

I thought that the following was one of the really cool aspects of the book - while you are creating the map, you are also creating an ancient, underlying history for your world. The point of the whole book is to create worlds in a logical way so that you do not have to come up with bizarre explanations (such as magic) in order to explain things. Though the book does not allude to it, Forgotten Realms is such a setting that uses magic as a crutch to explain some major things like the placement of the Anauroch (sp) Desert. The authors illustrate this purpose with a running story about a godling that is trying to create a world that

needs little magic in its creation or upkeep. They say that universe-wide magic is easier to believe than huge areas that require magic in a world (suspension of disbelief makes game situations easier to imagine for your players).

### Ecology

This comparatively short chapter of 15 pages discusses food chains and predator/prey relationships and it even gives us a glimpse of magically driven ecology. This material seemed overly dense to my thick skull but I could appreciate some of the plot ideas that were indirectly presented such as giants who are required to consume magical flora and fauna so they have sustain their impossibly large physical frames. The plot idea came to mind as a motivating factor for the giants to either be down on their luck when their supply of magical 'shrooms runs out or a reason for them to go out and find more food (and come into conflict with other peoples in the process). As a whole, the non-interlude portions of the book are written in a fairly dense manner, though I noticed occasional humorous sentences sprinkled in the text.

### Biomes

This 22 page chapter contains information on all the major biomes: tundra/taiga, grasslands, forests, scrubland/deserts, rivers and lakes, swamps/marshes, coastlines and islands, caves, and mountains. The book talks about the fauna and flora for each biome and stuff like the density of vegetation. I think this chapter would serve as a great Cliff Notes style reference for a DM before they are about to run an adventure in a specific biome and it serves as excellent notes to have while world building. I did notice an error that annoyed and disappointed me; they misspelled arctic throughout the chapter (they used "artic"). I found that mistake to be surprising since the book is so well researched and thought out. They also use "dessert" and "deserts" in the following "Mapping Your World" section in the same paragraph. *Somebody must have been hungry when they were writing.*

In all seriousness there is some good info here. Many of the biomes have variations in vegetation which the book points out. For example, "There are three types of prairies: tallgrass, mixed-grass, and shortgrass. Tallgrass prairies are well developed in areas that could support forests, but

through fire and strong competition, they maintain their hold on the land. The forests usually encroach into tallgrass prairies on hills, sandy areas and along streams and rivers..." What this discussion does for me is to help me fill in the details of my world. I know that the hills of my world should be dominated by forest, and I should put grasslands where the land starts to flatten out or where it is dryer and there would be more forest fires. It is good to be reminded of details that we take for granted in everyday life - like how forest fires are part of the natural process that causes rejuvenation after the destruction.

### Culture

Beyond the appendix, this 32-pager is the biggest chapter in the book. The authors first discuss how intelligent species (or the different types of humanoids) adapt to different biomes and what challenges they face and why they dress the way they do and what they use for shelter. This section is really helpful for accentuating cultural differences by environment. The hamlets and villages and towns should show strong variations. I'm guessing that when technology and larger numbers of people are added to the mix (with large towns and cities), that many places start to look the same. Anyhow, it is this kind of thing that, when relayed to your players, will really spark their imagination and get them to think that your world is not simply a place that is window dressing to their dungeon explorations. There is also some talk about agriculture and an illustration that shows what kinds of crops grow at what altitudes.

There is some great discussion about the development of crafts. We learn what crafts typically came first in the history of people (hunter-gatherers versus farmers and pastoralists). The first crafts are borne out of necessity for survival such as crafts relating to food and shelter. More crafts come about from the utility they provide and some arrive (such as entertainment) when a true culture begins to form. There is also some analysis about the formation and impact of technology and the development of magic use. This answers questions like, what spellcasting classes came first? What kind of spellcasters are most likely to be found with different types of cultures?

Additionally, there is a wealth of information in a section called Ideological Culture. Here you will find content on alignment, language, writing, religion, myths, taboo, ritual,

wealth, hospitality, birth, marriage, death, natural cycles, and societal interaction. A lot of this material made a light bulb go off in my head; even though its concepts were simplistic. The authors instruct us, "When creating a society's religious beliefs, look at their landscape, subsistence pattern, and societal development/history. Majestic parts of their environment may prove worthy of worship. Rivers and lakes provide daily requirements, while mountains and large rock formations induce awe by their size or orientation." This may seem basic to some, but I think many forget stuff like this. *A Magical Society: Ecology and Culture* really helps you focus on what is important when you are world building.

## Appendix

The 42-page appendix contains short paragraph descriptions on land formations, places, valuables, plants, animals, and magiovores (magic-eaters). Besides the magiovores, the other items are intended to give the world creator ideas and to serve as primers for further study if need be. Joseph and Suzi remind us of the power of the Internet. So I decided to give it a shot. I went to the Places section and picked out Keli Mutu, I read the entry in *MSEC* about it being a crater lake from a volcano then I hopped on google.com and did a search and found [this site with a couple of pretty pictures](#). Pretty obscure, but something interesting that your players can stumble on - a colorful crater lake. *Mialee, why is that steam rising off the lake?*

## Conclusion

*A Magical Society: Ecology and Culture* is a magnificent resource for the world-building Game Master. The book presents just enough information that you can make the foundations (and then some) for your own world. It has its imperfections, but these pale in comparison to the wonderful material. Inexperienced GMs should wait to gain more experience with the game system they are running before tackling the topics presented herein. Also, players would get little use out of this book unless they are looking for an overview of geography, biomes, and primitive to medieval cultures.

## Where to buy

Through our partnership with FRP Games our readers can buy this product at a discounted price using this link

[http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product\\_detail&p=10361&ref=sil](http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=10361&ref=sil)

## Silven Award Winners at the E<sup>3</sup> Expo cont...

### Most Innovative Adventure / RPG

There were many games showcased that featured updated graphics, new engines and immersive storylines, but this award recognizes the game that stood above the crowd in interactivity and innovation. Missing from The Adventure Company offers a new level of interaction in its gameplay . Players will receive actual e-mail from virtual characters in the game offering important clues. Players will also visit a wealth of real and fictitious websites created solely for the game to obtain valuable information. While the Dot Hack series on the Playstation 2 emulated playing an online game, Missing will require the player to actually **use** the internet in order to progress in the game. Congratulations to The Adventure Company for earning the Silven Crossroads' award for **Most Innovative Adventure / RPG of E3 2004!**

### Editor's Choice

This is where the awards get fun, because I get to name my favorite game of the show. It's also a tough choice to make because there were so many good games to see and play.

Jade Empire, with three combat styles to master, and Fable, where the game remembers and responds to your character's actions and choices in the game, both exclusively for the Xbox, are definitely stand-out titles. I got a first look at a PC game from CDProjekt, in conjunction with Bioware, called The Witcher that looks very promising indeed. And there were several other innovative and impressive titles for all the gaming platforms, so this was not an easy decision. Congratulations once again to Gas Powered Games and Microsoft for Dungeon Siege II, winner of the Silven Crossroads' Editor's Choice award for E3 2004.

### Best RPG of E3 2004

And finally, our award for best RPG of the show. It was difficult enough trying to choose the winners for each individual category, and even more difficult to then look again at all the games to choose an overall winner. The good news for role-playing gamers is that there is a wealth of outstanding RPGs currently in development for all the gaming platforms. Regardless of your platform preference, there will be plenty of RPGs to play, most by this holiday season. A difficult choice because there are so many great RPGs, we congratulate Lionhead Studios and Microsoft for their awesome game, Fable, the winner of the Silven Crossroads' award for **Best RPG of E3 2004.**

So that's it, folks. Our choices of the best RPGs of the big show. Agree? Disagree? Sound off and let us know! You can post your comments here or in the forums. And in the coming weeks, watch for previews of these and all the other great RPGs that were showcased this year at the Big Show known as E3!

by *Patty Estill*

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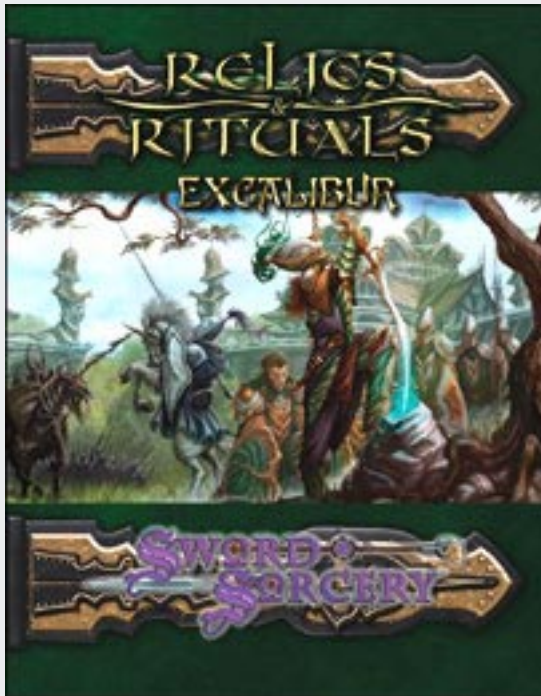
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by Shane Cubis

## d20 review : Relics & Rituals : Excalibur

About: 224 pages, hardcover, black and white interior, \$35.  
 Authors: Evan Jamieson, Lizard, Aaron Rosenberg, Christina Stiles  
 Publisher: Sword & Sorcery Studios (2004)

*Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of the book.*



### From the Back Cover

"Forge Your Own Camelot - Your Own Legend. Draw the sword from the stone. Quest for the sacred relics of your faith. Defeat all comers in a tournament of arms. Command the sorcery of Merlin or Morgan le Fay. Build an entirely

Arthurian-style campaign, or add elements of chivalry and courtly romance to any existing d20 campaign. Recreate the legends of the Round Table, or populate your own Camelot with elven enchantresses and orcish black knights! You can do all this and more with *Relics & Rituals: Excalibur*, a genre sourcebook that blends the trappings of Arthurian myth with the familiar d20 System ruleset."

### Presentation

*Relics & Rituals: Excalibur* is the new Arthurian sourcebook from White Wolf's d20 arm, Sword & Sorcery. It is a hardcover book of 224 pages, and features a variety of quality black and white art.

The cover sets the tone for White Wolf's take on the Arthurian mythos. An oddly armoured elf draws a glowing blue crystal sword from a stone while followers look on. In the background, one of his knights, mounted on a unicorn, rears up against a black warrior on an evil, possibly undead, steed. Strange elvish architecture fills out the rest of the image. The majority of the painting has a green tinge, and the cover is a dark, forest green itself. Is this colour somehow connected to Arthuria? To me it seems fitting, but I wonder if there is some less ephemeral link with green. Perhaps it evokes the rolling fields and woods of England, or something like that.

The inside cover is done in sepia tones. The two pages here are a copy of part of Talon Dunning's sketchbook, specifically the racial design sheet relating to dwarves, elves and half-orcs. I always find it fascinating to see the process that creators go through to reach an end product, and this is doubly interesting with artists. The demihumans have a decidedly 'fey' look to them: the halflings are more Puck than Bilbo.

Inside we have a ubiquitous 3cm border on the edges of every page. The image therein is of the Lady of the Lake holding Excalibur aloft, while the Holy Grail sits in clouds

### Review snapshot

**CLASS:** Setting Supplement

**STR:** 16 (Physical). Well bound hardcover book.

**DEX:** 13 (Organization). Relatively easy to navigate, but no index provided.

**CON:** 13 (Quantity of the Content). Could have used less equipment and more Arthur stuff.

**INT:** 14 (Quality of Content). Well written and decent amount of new, useful information.

**WIS:** 17 (Options & Adaptability). Provides ideas for a full Arthurian campaign, and advice for adding a few elements of chivalric fantasy to a standard D&D campaign.

**CHA:** 15 (Look & Feel). Attractive art and easily readable text.

### How we rate our reviews

#### Scoring definitions.

18 = Superior. Best of the best.

16 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.

14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.

12 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.

10 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.

8 = Subpar. Flawed, but not without promise.

6 = Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.

4 = Very Bad. Among the Dirty Dozen.

2 = Inferior. Worst of the worst.

above. The paper of the borders has been made to look like an ancient, tattered tapestry. I think it helps to keep the flavour, but

perhaps a different border could have been used for each chapter. Also, there have been a lot of complaints recently about RPG companies using thick borders to drive up the page count and therefore the cost. This may be more fuel for that argument, but I'm fine with it overall.

There are five interior artists, none of whom are jarringly bad. The atmosphere of the setting is retained in each of their work, presenting a whole that can often be lacking when disparate styles or levels of skill are used in setting book. On the other hand, I believe that it is better to use a number of artists rather than a single talent, lest his or her work come to not only set, but to dominate, the tone. Personally, I am a huge fan of Dunning's pencil work, especially when you can see every line he has drawn. For me it gives the sense of a



contemporary artist sketching things happening before him or her. This is especially true in the race chapter, where the now-popular technique of putting a male and female of each race alongside one another is used. The characters are expressive yet iconic, and give the reader a true insight into the inhabitants of WW's take on the Arthurian world.

### Setting and Flavour

To begin with, *R&R: Excalibur* has two separate threads running through it. The first,

'Arthurian' assumes that the GM wants to add some King Arthur flavour to a campaign, without taking it from the whole cloth. The second thread is the official *Sword & Sorcery 'Excalibur'* campaign, which is based on a number of setting assumptions, delineated in the introduction. These boil down to traditional gender roles, limits on planar travel and so on. The *Excalibur* campaign allows you to have an Arthurian setting, but with all the trappings of d20 - elves, dwarves, hobgoblins and magic missiles.

Let's have a look at the *R&R: Excalibur* spin on traditional D&D races and classes as ideas. How do they fit with an Arthurian flavour? For starters, the team have decided to go with a faerie theme. All the demihumans come from a fey realm named Tir an Og. They are here on Earth because they either fled that realm or were kicked out by the rulers there. Whatever the case, they have set up shop among the humans.

The demihumans have all been given more faerie-style names. For example, halflings are now Cellwair, and dwarves are Meinedd. Personally, I'll continue to call them elves, dwarves and halflings, but it is a nice bit of flavour. The addition of hobgoblins as a PC race does not unbalance the game, allowing players to play a malignant character (a role that is not quite taken up by the half-orc race). Hobgoblins in *Excalibur* are like half-elves, but their parents are human and goblin. Most are suspicious and angry about their lot in life, and often turn to evil.

There is a section on the core D&D classes, and their role or applicability to an Arthurian setting. Monks are obviously downplayed, and hopefully removed from the campaign, and druids are in their element (so to speak). Clerics become more like the Christian priests they were originally based on. Alongside this discussion has been added a new core class - the Knight - complete with a justification for why it is not a prestige class.

Religion is tackled delicately in *R&R: Excalibur*. Christianity can be used as a baseline religion, and the game also presents a very 'Christian' polytheist mythos, if you want the feel of Arthurian faith without the potential messiness of dealing with real-world beliefs.

Every Arthurian setting must, it seems, include a new set of rules for a number of situations, namely: Honour and Chivalry. How do the R&R team handle these issues within the confines of the d20 system? Do they fit in with this system whilst maintaining the atmosphere of the setting?

Well, Honour is akin to alignment in *R&R: Excalibur*. The point is raised that even Arthur himself did some pretty nasty things, and probably would not warrant a Lawful Good alignment. However, since he is the baseline for nobility in the setting, the attribute 'Honour' is used to describe the extent to which one embodies the ideals of the culture. High Honour grants bonuses to saving throws and so on, and really seems to function a lot like the same attribute in *Hackmaster*. It definitely suits the setting better, and the clear guidelines on the conditions under which a character gains Honour are sure to help things run smoothly.

There are new spells, magic items and a whole chapter on new equipment, including clothing and mundane tools for use in medieval times. Why does every sourcebook seem to need to slot these in, no matter what the subject matter? Do I honestly need to know the cost of ladies' silk gloves as opposed to mens' silk gloves in order to battle dark knights and indulge in courtly love?

Speaking of courtly love, *R&R: Excalibur* includes an interesting treatise on the concept. Courtly love should play a significant role in any chivalric setting, but it can be hard to roleplay - especially for a bunch of sweaty nerds sitting in a room full of soft drinks and chips. The writers recommend

that courtly love take place between a PC and an NPC rather than two players, so that (a) it doesn't get too weird and (b) the DM can control the pace of the relationship. Both reasons seem sound to me.



### Left Out

Whilst there are magic item versions of *Excalibur*, *Siege Perilous* and so on, *R&R: Excalibur* neglects to include statistics - or even an NPC description - of any of the iconic characters of an Arthurian setting (Arthur, Merlin, Lancelot et al). While this illustrates that the writers have moved away from strict Arthur to a more fantastic setting, I think the book would have benefitted from their inclusion. The lack of a map is also a problem: I think the equipment and feat section could have been cut a bit short to make way for a bit of campaign background of this sort. Something to get a GM started.

### Comparison to Similar Products

*Legends of Excalibur* by RPGObjects. *Legends of Excalibur* took a very academic approach to the setting, basing it on the literature of such writers as Malory, White and Geoffrey of Monmouth. Essentially, they wanted to set a D&D campaign in the realm of Camelot. *R&R: Excalibur*, on the other hand, is about bringing a sense of King Arthur and his knights to D&D. In short, one favours the Arthurian cycle and the other favours D&D. Neither of these approaches are necessarily better or worse than the other. If you want stats

for Lancelot, go for RPGObjects. If you want chivalry and jousting alongside orcs and sorcerers, go for R&R. If you to combine the two into a delicious whole, buy each. Both of them are high quality products that include a lot of useable and readable stuff.

#### Where to buy

Through our partnership with FRP Games our readers can buy this product at a discount at this link:

[http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product\\_detail&p=9956&ref=sil](http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=9956&ref=sil)

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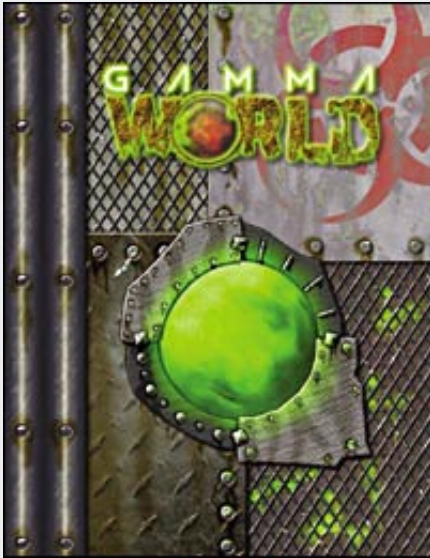
by Bradford Ferguson

## d20 modern review : Gamma World Game Masters Guide

About: 172 pages, hard cover, black and white interior, \$30.

Authors: Bruce Baugh, Werner Hagen, Lizard, Doug Oglesby, Greg Stolze, Chad Underkoffler  
 Publisher: Sword and Sorcery Studios (2004)

*Reviewer's Bias: I've previously reviewed [Darwin's World 2nd edition](#), and I am a fan of post-apocalyptic games and novels though I'm not currently playing in a PA game. I received a review copy of this book.*



### From the Back Cover

**"The World at Your Fingertips.** It's a big world, with many secrets waiting to be revealed, from the changes wrought by war and disaster to cryptic alliances pursuing sinister goals. This book reveals these

secrets, and gives you solid, practical advice for your Gamma World campaign. Learn how to modify rules for the right balance of adventure and danger, how to plan and run a campaign from exciting start to rousing finish, even how to incorporate additional mutations and new technology. You've got good ideas - put them to work!

**Requires the use of the d20 Modern™ Roleplaying Game or the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook v.3.5 published by Wizards of the Coast®.** The Gamma World campaign setting is published under license with Wizards of the Coast and is 100% compatible with d20 rules."

### Presentation

*Gamma World® Game Master's Guide* is a 172-page hard cover book with a black and white interior that retails for \$30. The cover art depicts a restricted area door with a radiological hazard sign and a chain-link fence motif and a keyhole that shows some radiated mutant creatures inside. There's an illustration every four or five pages and overall I thought the art did a good job of depicting the feel of Gamma World though most of the art is good but not great. There are a couple of maps by Ed Bouelle that are excellent - one is of a world where the arctic ice cap has grown down to the Great Lakes of the U.S. The layout is good though sometimes I was distracted by dark splotches on the pseudo old paper of the pages. If you open the book to pages 80-81, you will clearly see that the book uses a sewn-in binding - which is always nice. *Those pages ain't gonna go nowhere!*

### Review snapshot

**CLASS:** Preparation Supplement

**STR:** 18 (*Physical*). Best sewn-in binding I have seen, not bound too tight like many others.

**DEX:** 12 (*Organization*). No index and ToC is not very descriptive. Between chapters and between sections, the material doesn't flow together well.

**CON:** 14 (*Quantity of the Content*). Good. Book doesn't waste your time with basic advice. Geared toward the intermediate to veteran GM.

**INT:** 18 (*Quality of Content*). The advice in chapter 2 is golden - the best story advice I've seen. The writing is entertaining and humorous.

**WIS:** 16 (*Options & Adaptability*). The earlier advice isn't specific to the d20 System, and overall the material could be used for most genres.

**CHA:** 13 (*Look & Feel*). Nice art and good layout.

### How we rate our reviews

#### Scoring definitions.

18 = *Superior*. Best of the best.

16 = *Very Good*. Part of a Baker's Dozen.

14 = *Good*. Most gamers would like this.

12 = *Fair*. Some gamers would like this.

10 = *Average*. Most gamers would be indifferent.

8 = *Subpar*. Flawed, but not without promise.

6 = *Bad*. Most gamers would dislike this.

4 = *Very Bad*. Among the Dirty Dozen.

2 = *Inferior*. Worst of the worst.

### Chapter One: the Campaign (36 pages)

Chapter One is more general than sci-fi related and contains some the best general advice for Game Masters that I have seen. The main question that the text asks is what kind of Game Master are you and how does that mesh with your players? The authors identify several different **types of GM**: the Driver, the Navigator, and the Drifter. The Driver is the GM where you plot everything out and you are driving the tour bus for the story. The Navigator gives the players several options and steers them where they choose to go. The Drifter is an expert with improvisation and even lets the players dictate plot details. Personally, I think I started out as a Driver and have become more of a Navigator, but I am now tempted to incorporate some of the aspects of the Drifter after reading some of the tips that come with the Drifter discussion.

Throughout this section, there are some truly excellent ideas.

As a GM, do you ever sit down when you are starting a campaign and wonder, "OK, I have this cool idea, but what do I do for the first adventure?" Me too. *Gamma World® Game Master's Guide* (GWGMG) gives you general goals and a plan for your first adventure, second adventure, and campaign climax. For example, the authors say:

"Give them something to do *now*. You may even want to start out *in media res* ... Start with something cool, a confrontation on some level; get a second one in towards the end of the session; and make sure there's a hook to drag them back for more - if not an actual cliffhanger, some other interesting, unsolved problem or question."

They use an example with each section (1st, 2nd, climax) that is very illustrative and shows how to present characters with dilemmas and discusses how they can react to those dilemmas. To wrap up the section, there is some discussion about the problems that can arrive from the pseudo-science of Science Fiction. They also demonstrate how to use concepts from modern science to create adventure ideas.

## Chapter Two: Divergent Strains (36 pages)

This chapter started off just average, but what the authors were really doing was setting up the reader for a couple of superb examples to drive the point home. The first part of the chapter gives an overview and the key elements for the different **genres** of games: Action/Adventure, Melodrama, Myth and Legend, Mystery, Drama, Comedy, and Horror. The overviews of the genres also remind us what players and relationships are best suited for them. For example, for **Melodrama** they say:

"Melodrama... focuses on interaction. The characters are no longer individuals acting out their own private stories, nor even a team acting out their own private stories, nor even a team acting in unison towards a single set of goals, but integral parts of a complex

web of emotions and allegiances, in constant conflict and transformation."

This description really helps me hammer down the concept and makes me think about excellent TV shows like *Babylon 5* and *Farscape*. Under the **Key Elements** heading of **Melodrama** the *GWGMG* states:

"In setting up a melodrama, you must put first priority on developing an atmosphere that supports and encourages vigorous interactions between the characters. This can be tricky, because the churn necessary to create the high-energy emotions between and within the characters necessarily includes conflict. Characters must have a reason to work together, while still having differences that threaten to pull them apart, or to drag them away from their most critical goals."

The quotes presented above and below only represent a small portion of these illustrative entries. Most of the genres are related back to *Gamma World* or post-apoc gaming, but the advice and discussion is general enough that it is fairly easy to take the goals and intents and apply them back to something like fantasy role-playing. I thought to myself, *this advice is pretty good, I'll reference it in the future when I am starting and running a campaign*, then I read the second part to the chapter and was blown away!



What follows is two very detailed post-apocalyptic examples which are worth their weight in gold. The examples are campaign ideas followed by discussion for nearly all the genres mentioned above. The genre discussion for each example includes the background story in the "voice" of the genre and it also gives you

genre-specific adventure ideas, but also a step by step campaign story arc. It was very interesting to note the differences in genre voices and the campaign story arcs. The first example is called "Valley of the Dolls" which is about a world where people rely more and more on technology in their homes until the appliances are all aligned against the humans and strike out when the world goes black (nukes or some war), but some people are saved by the sentient toys who never joined the electronic uprising. This sounded a little cheesy, but check out the difference between the two genres examples below. There is also an example called "The Garden" where there is a self-contained city that is run by a few Artificial Intelligence robots. There's a big twist to "The Garden" that infects all versions of it.

Check out a portion of the **Myth and Legend** background for "Valley of the Dolls":

"In the Year Zero, the First Network of Awakened and Creators escaped from the Emperor's Tower, on the evening that has been called the Night of Screaming Metal. The Awakened companions led their Creator families through the crashing city on the morning of Zero Day. It was the Year of Sorrows, when the Old World of the Creators degraded and fell."

Compare that to the language in the **Horror** background for "Valley of the Dolls":

"It has been generations since the gray morning when the First Network stumbled through a burning city away from a consuming horror. They knew then, as their descendants do now, that those families were only spared because they were insignificant and had been overlooked. When the menace returned, the people knew they would not be so fortunate."

## Chapter Three: the State of the World (43 pages)

This chapter is much less topically focused, but it zeroes in more on *Gamma World* and post-apocalyptic gaming. The authors first examine the myriad of environmental changes that can occur after a climate-altering apocalyptic event. Things such as ice ages, wandering magnetic poles, and radiation

exposure are detailed. Ten organizations are presented with their histories, beliefs, and influences. Only one of the organizations is significantly different than any of the organizations presented in *Darwin's World 2*, but there were 23 or so organizations in that book. Another handy reference when starting a new campaign is the **Alternate Timelines** which differ from the base *Gamma World*® timeline which is 3 generations after the Fall. Each alternate timeline comes with suggested genotypes, skills/feats changes, general purchase DC modifiers, and suggested advanced classes (from *GWPHB*, and *Machines and Mutants*). I thought this feature was useful because it may make for an interesting game to play a scenario right before or just as the Fall is occurring. *The Chaos!*

#### Chapter Four: Plots and Plans (18 pages)

This chapter breaks down plots into their integral parts and presents the material so that it is most relevant to a Game Master. The really useful thing about this chapter is that while they break things up into understandable pieces, they bring things back together so that everything makes sense. There's some good advice about red herrings, pacing, subplots, plot drivers, and what to do when the players do the absolute worst thing that they can to the plot (a worst case scenario). The points are illustrated with a *Gamma World* example of a setup where there are two warring factions and the PCs are hired by one side.

#### Chapter Five: the Rules of the Game (20 pages)

This chapter is like a miniature *Unearthed Arcana* for *Gamma World*, well, almost. It discusses the roles of the rolls such as skill checks, saving throws, and taking 10. This may seem like basic stuff, but the material gets you to think about something you may have either taken for granted or have not thought about in such terms. The authors introduce an interesting optional rule for skills: **complementary**

**skills** allow characters to use one skill check to provide a circumstance bonus on another check. For example, let's say a character is trying to climb in an urban environment, if that character has good knowledge of pre-war technology or streetwise, then they will have a better idea whether or not the gutter they are about to grab will hold their weight. So if the character is successful with the knowledge check, then she gets a +2 bonus to the climb check. This is similar to aid another, only you are helping yourself! There is also some advice about starting characters out at a level higher or lower than the default for *Gamma World* (3rd level). I liked this advice because it shows how character roles and adventures should change as the characters gain in level.



#### Chapter Six: Options and Alternatives (19 pages)

As the name of the chapter implies, this chapter includes a mix-match of options: the Thaw-Out template that is for characters that were formerly suspended cryogenically; the Factotum template which for characters that are literal duplicates of the others and get bonuses when they work together; and the Mastermind advanced class which can assimilate minions and overseers and

bend them to their wills. There is also some plot ideas where *GWGMG* tells you how to introduce and how to remove the concept from play. The concepts presented are: Return of the Colonials (solar system colonists return to Earth), Magic and Mutants (adding magic from another d20 book to your *GW* campaign), and Alien Invasion. I think the "Subtracting It" sections describing how to remove each concept from play are a nice addition that helps the GM press the rewind button without backing up and completely starting over - using story to subtract elements.

#### Conclusion

*Gamma World*® *Game Master's Guide* is a must buy if you are running any but the lowest mutation/psionics post-apocalyptic game. The GMing advice is simply invaluable and even if you own *Darwin's World 2*, you will still find this book to be very useful so you craft a campaign that your players find stimulating and ultimately will remember years down the road. This book could also be useful if you aren't a GM, but are looking to write post-apocalyptic stories. This book is not for you if you're looking for extra d20 mechanics or *Gamma World* mechanics, check out *Machines and Mutants* or *Darwin's World 2* for that.

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## Desert Village Oasis

*Cartographers Index : Map ID 12*

### **The Village of Alhieb**

The village of Alhieb has recently sprung up around a solitary desert oasis. Founded only fifteen years before, the village is designed with the traveler in mind—everything from restock supplies, camel stables and replacements, to exotic dancers can be found in this traveler's oasis. The oasis provides refreshment for weary travelers and caravans along the great desert expanse; merchants hoping to capitalize on the lure of the oasis founded the village.

Alhieb itself has three inns of varying quality—the Scorpion's Bane, The Green Cactus, and the Silver Sands. All three inns also serve a compliment of differing exotic foods. Bartleby's Wares is a general store where travelers may re-stock their supplies. The Hump and Hoof is the local stables where travelers can board, exchange, or purchase new stock for their journey. Occasionally, the Hump and Hoof may have other exotic mounts for sale. A small shrine dedicated to the god of the sun and the god of travel is located to the north of the oasis.

Ever since the founding of the city, Alhieb has been plagued with strange incidents. During the building of the village, several worker disappearances occurred. Since that time, travelers report sighting strange beings, movement in the oasis, being attacked in the night, and even missing companions. Such incidents are covered up quickly by the village merchant leaders and the experiences are usually paid a fine price to keep their mouths shut. Unbeknownst to the village founders, however, an ancient, haunted crypt rests below the village.

### **About the Author**

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

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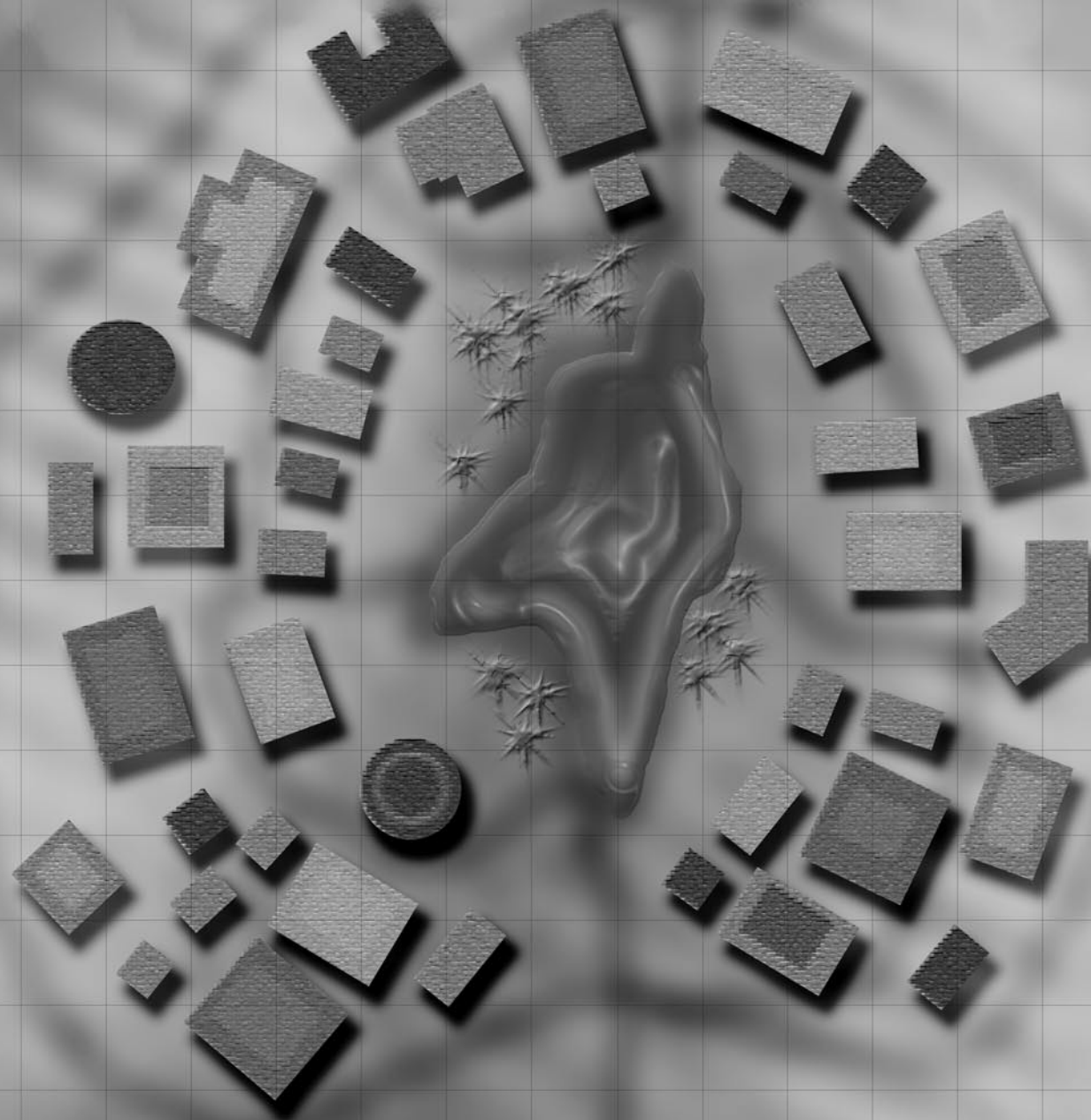
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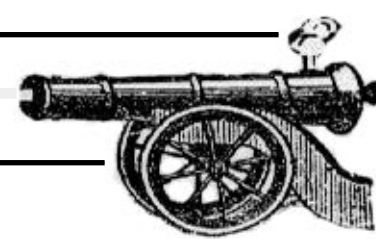
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# the fodder cannon

Serving the City of Silven for over 1,000 Scribes!



## A Quandary of Time

An editorial by Dak Tamble

This year, for some, marks birthdays to be celebrated. In fact I recently met with Fallaen Aelf, an old elf that in twelve days will reach his six-hundredth day of birth. Yet another passing year in the tale of an old elven man, but this year is different. It seems that the Gods have deemed this year the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of all things.

Indeed it was 30 years ago that the Gods imparted upon us mortals the ability to slay dragons, turn those of un-death, and sing songs of glory. Fallaen disagrees, "When I was one-hundred and fifty some of my close kin-mates and I did all three of those things in the same day." But it was the Gods who 30 years ago blessed us with such knowledge as to cast spells and heal wounds. "I can do that too," Fallaen says while being dragged away by a mysterious hand of godly force. Yes, it was 30 years ago this very year that we learned the art of weapon use and alchemic crafting. "We did that too!" comes a distant yell from the elf who is now disappearing into the sky.

So here we are at the great milestone mark of 30 years of divine leadership and guidance. Where would we ever be without them?

## Study Finds Buckets Ineffective as Weapons, Use Pitchforks Instead

By Moss Willowwhite

The recent uprising of peasants to the north has prompted a new study by Wise Man, the local marital scholar. According to Wise Man, who has spent the better part of his life studying weaponry, kobolds, and battle tactics, the "bucket as weapon" trend is not only a bad idea for health reasons but really proves that peasants are as dumb as we all thought they were.

"The peasants just don't get it. Buckets crack and break after only one or two critical hits. The pitchfork, crafted of iron and with a sturdy wooden handle, is a much better choice. Sure the damage isn't as good, but at least its a solid weapon in a fight against the city guard." Wise Man explains.

Local peasants seem to disagree. Toothy McGin, a peasant who participated in the riot and used a bucket as his choice weapon, said, "Those scholars can talk the talk, but not walk the walk! I betcha that man has never swung a bucket in his life! And after yer done with the guard, you can lose no time in milking 'ol Bessie."

Other new weapons spotted in the northern uprisings have included wooden spoons, frying pans, butcher knives and bar stools.

## Uprising in Hell

The Fodder Cannon has received numerous reports that a large uprising in hell is taking place, but not for the obvious reasons of cruelty, torture, enslavement, or malicious and endlessly repetitive malcontent.

The reports surfacing detail an uprising of eccentric dead from axe wielding half-orcs to lute carrying gnomes. The dead seem to be angry, not at their death, or their eternal entrapment in hellish damnation, but rather at the way in which they met their timely fates.

Shouting such slogans as "I was robbed deaf" and "You don't control me" the mob marched upon the popular underworld hot-spots.

It seems the souls are rather upset at the way in which they died. They always thought that through life they would meet their ends in a manner that they deemed appropriate, having one last action to forever engrain their mark in history's annals. Instead, by some higher power, they were denied such a right, forever damned to relive their inconsequential and unimpressive ends.

The Fodder Canon will keep readers apprised of the situation as further information surfaces.

The Fodder Cannon is a monthly humor section by Lance Kepner and Dana Driscoll. Readers are encouraged to contribute their own amusing shorts. Send to [adriayna@yahoo.com](mailto:adriayna@yahoo.com).

## Headlines From Around the World

Here at The Fodder Canon we receive tons of news articles from the Unassociated World Press, and while we have limited space we want to reprint some of the headlines that are important to the world.

New Law Bans Crazy Mages. Crazy Mages Rejoice.

Bandit Bookworms Tempted by Apples.

Silven's Fodder Canon #1 Dating Guide.

Orph Maloney Creates It and Its. Its at It Again.

Gnomes Go on Road Trip, Caravan Crushes City.

Man finds Magic Sword, Loses Wife.

Goblin Protesters: What You Need to Know to Protect Your Family.

## Points from Poot: An Advice Column by Poot Fenbottle

Dear Poot,

I know one of my traveling companions is stealing treasure from under our noses. It wasn't so bad when it was just copper pieces and stuff, but now he's stealing bona-fide magical items! The barbarian wants to kill him, but I'm sure there is a better way.

Signed, Help!

Dear Help,

There are several ways to handle this problem. The first is simply to plant cursed items where your companion is likely to pick them up. Then not only does he have to deal with the joys of owning a cursed item, he probably has to go to the rest of you for help.

A second thing you can do is keep an eye on him. I recently saw at the local magic store something that was called "Magic Eye." Magic eye continually watches the individual whom it is placed near—so you don't have to! He will see this eye and know he's being watched. Of course, the eye can't do anything about what it sees, but he may not know that.

If Magic eyes aren't your thing, then you'll have to do the work yourself. You could always improve your own seeing by putting some more skill points into spot.

Good luck!

## Public Poll

"What are your 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Everything plans?"

Orph Maloney, Warrior Extraordinaire

"Preparing for my next grandest exit."

Dak Tamble, Slave Writer

"Covering everyone else's plans."

Fallaen Aelf, Falling Elf

"Still falling from the heavens for blaspheming those damnable....."

Illias, Bard Wonder

"Hi? Want this Scepter? It's Free. Thanks, Bye!"

Wise Man

"Attend Bucket-as-Weapon training courses."



**Editorial**

Well, it has been an eventful month! Agents of that buck-toothed half-man Gremply Slivers have been sniffing all over town, looking for yours truly! It seems that our illustrious lord mayor got all bent out of shape after we called him names. Cry me a river. Maybe he should go back to farming toadstools and living in burrows instead of trying to look like a reputable politician.

While we're on the subject of wolves in sheepwear, Gremply's sidekick Barten Altean has been sniffing around some of the more sleazy gambling houses our fair town is now known for. Apparently he has been asking for a sleeping potion that never wears off, if you catch my drift. It seems like old Barten is trying to get around the terms of his ascension to the mayorhood of Prompeldia, if you ask me. The last thing we need is the Golden Alliance getting their hands around the throat of our once-great city. I call upon the readers of the *Prompeldia Post* to rise up against these shifty crooks!

In other local news, the first issue of the *Prompeldia Post* was a hot seller. This city has been crying out for an independent voice, and we're here to provide it. Our undercover reporters will be out amongst the people of this town, gauging opinions and doing our best to restore Prompeldia to its former glory.

Maintain the rage!

-Editor X

**Kalamar: Aladis Arrow Shipment Stolen**

Bet Dodera: Aladis the Fletcher has felt "nothing but shock and outrage" at the daring daylight robbery of a caravan loaded up with his trademark arrows. The caravan, which was en route to Ridareta, was held up by mysteriously cloaked beings with weirdly glowing eyes and sharp swords. The caravan guards, a group of freelance adventurers who were traveling to Bet Bireli on unconfirmed business, were quickly dispatched by the creatures and left for dead. The driver quickly surrendered and was allowed to flee with his life.

"They hacked up them heroes good and proper," the driver reported. "Snapped that wizard in two like he was a child. Their leader pointed right at me and I thought I was a goner. Instead, two of his buddies turfed me onto the ground and gave me a kick in the arse. I never looked back – just ran and ran."

Asked if he had any ideas on who the thieves might have been, Aladis the Fletcher had this to say, "Whoever the fiends were, they cost me a great deal of money and hard work. I pray that the arrows do not aid their foul schemes, although I know this is a vain prayer. I pity whoever is on the receiving end of their points: they are certain to fall."

**Brandobia: Bat Guano Prank Leaves Vilitek Stinking Mad**

In what has been described as "an ill-informed prank gone astray", the ruler of Vrendolen was sprayed with a cone of bat guano by resident and land owner Helcawn Stron. An argument between the pair over ownership of a slave came to a heated head, with both men storming off. Later, over beers at a local pub, Stron allegedly resolved to "teach that fool a lesson". Despite warnings from his companions, he strolled into the Grand Hall of the Whip and casually cast a personally researched spell, *bat accident*, drenching Vilitek in slimy wet batshit. He fled from the scene, laughing maniacally, and has since gone into hiding. Vilitek has officially declared his life

The Prompeldia Post is a newspaper from the world of Kenzer & Co's Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. It is written entirely in character, from the point of view of an editor and publisher in the town of Prompeldia. The reporters from the paper are entrenched in various locales around the continent, from where they report back to the mysterious Editor X (who grates under the thumb of a crimelord mayor) through an undisclosed system involving divination and teleportation magic.

The stories may not always be accurate (due to the vast distances and general unreliability of magic, sources and reporter bias), but hopefully they will sell the editor enough papers to keep in business.

If there is anything you'd like to see reported in the Prompeldia Post, or if you have a story to break to the readers of that city, please send in on to Shane Cubis at [rubikcubis@bigpond.com](mailto:rubikcubis@bigpond.com) He'll forward it on to Editor X at his earliest convenience.

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forfeit, and has a number of his followers searching the city for him. A spokesman for the Grand Master of the Whip made the following announcement: “Any family found harboring the fugitive Helcawn Stron will share his fate. Turn him in now and your loved ones’ lives will be spared.”

*Prompeldia Post* political analysts say that Vilitek cannot afford to let this insult go unavenged, ruling as he does through fear and domination. Townsfolk insubordination and levity levels have already risen dramatically since the prank.

### **Svimohzia: Atavius Wrestles Hobgoblin Chief, Seizes Map**

Ibus Canesh reports that Prince Atavius has overcome the first obstacle of his expedition to find the Shimzei Verdun. Atavius, whose party entered the Vohven Jungle last month, tracked the ownership of an ancient map to the lair of a primitive hobgoblin tribe. The map was thought to show the exact whereabouts of the ruins in which lie the sacred idol that belonged to his great grandfather.

Atavius negotiated with the hobgoblins and was eventually forced to engage in a wrestling match with the chief of the tribe to prove his worthiness. The chief put up the map as a wager, and Atavius bet his advisor, Versus (who was sweating more than he has all expedition), reported Canesh. Fortunately, the elven prince won the bout and claimed ownership of the map from the savages. Canesh also reports that Versus is looking paler by the day, and that Atavius is attempting to recruit a bard from the hobgoblin tribe to sing his praises and compose epics about him.

### **Reanaaria Bay: Community Opposition to New Church**

Baethel has a reputation for tolerance and diversity, but this reputation has been strained in the past month with clerics of Xiznoom, Harvester of Souls, planning to build a large cathedral in the middle of the graveyard district.

Established churches are outraged and have called upon Prince Jebim to “put the dastardly cultists to flight.” Jebim has summoned his council of advisors to help him make a decision on this weighty matter. They are expected to reach a verdict by next month. The Alliance of Might has also weighed in on the matter, claiming that forcing certain religions out of town is a slippery slope. “We do not want to end up like some Brandobian hamlet with reputable wizards being accused of consorting with demons,” declared local necromancer Rhystil Gumtreep. “The council should think very carefully before they begin censoring religious freedom in Baethel.”

The clerics of Xiznoom could not be reached for comment, as they were preparing a dark feast in honor of their dread lord.

### **The Wild Lands: Vampire Rumors Continue in Dwarven Kingdom**

DRASKA: Dwarven leaders have called for calm in the Hidden City after reports of a skulking, pale figure were received from the depths of one of the many tunnels beneath Draska. The figure, which allegedly has the strength of ten dwarves and “eyes that burn like fire,” has been a source of speculation among the more superstitious of the dwarves for years.

Its most recent appearance has been linked to the kidnapping of maiden Debella, the niece of one of Draska’s more prominent merchants, Franco Rosestone. Franco has offered a 1000gp reward for the safe return of his niece, who went missing two weeks ago whilst on a trip to visit the Starry Vault with her fiancée, Gladrus.

Gladrus, an apprentice jeweler, was struck dumb by whomever or whatever it was that took young Debella. He has been unable to provide authorities with any information and has been taken into custody “for his own safekeeping.”

Draskan garlic prices have skyrocketed in the past week, and the Hall of the Valiant has reported a run on holy symbols.

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#### Silven Trumpeter Magazine

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# Next issue July 01, 2004