

The Silven

Trumpeter

The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

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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

From the Editor

Welcome to the 13th edition of the *Silven Trumpeter*. That's right—this issue marks the *Trumpeter's* first year anniversary.

Before our first issue of the *Silven Trumpeter*, we had only a small ezine section at the *Silven Crossroads* site. Articles were few, but those were the beginning building blocks of what the *Silven Trumpeter* is today. A year ago, Kosala Ubayasekara, the founder of *Silven Crossroads*, asked me if I'd take on the position as editor-in-chief of a new free RPG pdf magazine. He already had decided on a name—the *Silven Trumpeter*. And so, in August of 2003, the *Silven Trumpeter* was born.

The first issue (August 2003) was a mere twenty pages of material, and the cover consisted of a photo I had taken of a campfire while on vacation at the shore. It had little artwork, but the true colors of the *Silven Trumpeter*—what we set out to do, and more importantly, what we had grown to become—were there, even in that first issue.

Our second issue (September 2003) was nearly double in size and featured more artwork, articles, maps, and reviews. Each month thereafter, the *Trumpeter* continued to grow in size while maintaining our high standards of quality and creativity. In the February 2004 issue we switched our layout to landscape format for ease of reading on the computer screen. During this time Kosala had been tweaking and improving the standard layout techniques, and the *Trumpeter* was evolving both visually and content-wise. April premiered the new "ice blue" layout theme that you can still be seen in the *Silven Trumpeter* today.

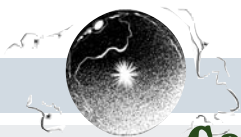
And what an issue we have! Our fitting theme for this month's issue is "past-present-future", reflective of where we have come as a magazine and the path we are taking in the future. More than that, however, this theme represents ourselves as gamers and the games we love—continually aware of our roots and history but constantly looking forward to new things—and new games!

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Crossroads E-zine



by Scott Fitz

Gaming Tips : World Building 102: Environment

Building the MoonHunter Way

Long, long ago, in a galaxy... er... city far away, I did some convention work for Tri-Tac games. Their flagship game was called Fringeworthy. It is a game of extradimensional exploration, where rag tag bands of people who possess an x factor allowing them to access gates travel to different alternative worlds. I would run game scenarios for the company. After one particular convention, I ran a scenario for my troupe at home which was popular enough to expand into a campaign. My players then proceeded to visit twelve new worlds in almost as many weeks until I reined them in. To keep this pace I needed to create a new game world every week or so. I learned a few techniques and short cuts during that time. In the years since I have worked on honing my art of game environment creation. That work has resulted in this article. So let's get to it.

Game environments are not built with a ruler and some tape; they are built with imagination and an understanding of what is needed to make the game environment. If you take the time to learn about what you will need to do before you begin the process, it will make for better results in less time and with less work.

Introduction

Your job as a game environment builder has two goals:

The first goal is to give the environment the illusion of completeness. It needs to appear to the players and any observers that the world is fleshed out and complete. The magic word is *verisimilitude*. It is the quality of appearing to be true or real or something that has the appearance of being true or real. All they need to know is that what they see (sense) in the game seems complete. The players do not need to know that on the other side of the walls, there is nothing but some two by fours holding up the mock set walls and a few stage hands drinking coffee and moving props and

scenery for other parts of the game. The illusion needs to be maintained at all costs. You, as the builder, are aware of how empty the world really is and what is missing, but the players don't need to know. The first goal requires the builder to have a basic idea about every aspect of the world, even if that idea is not fleshed out.

The second goal is to include everything the players want and the GM will need for the campaign or scenario. If you don't have what you need at the ready, the game will slow down and the verisimilitude will break. The second goal requires the builder to think about how the environment is going to be used. Once that has been established, the builder needs to make sure that the necessary elements are not only present in the environment, but fleshed out and ready to use.

The job does not change according to the size of the environment. In fact, **size does not matter**. The same process is used for creating a galaxy, a planet, a continent, a country, a city, a neighborhood, or a restaurant. It is just a matter of scale of description. When designing a galaxy, do not bother to detail a specific city, it would be like building a restaurant and detailing the salt shaker in with a full description, game mechanics, and its origin story. It is not important enough to warrant the work. When you are building big places use big strokes, focusing on big organizations and things that fill that place and are important. When you are building small places, also use big strokes about the organization, things, and such that fill that space and are important. Notice that the same advice holds for the different scales. That is because the size of the game environment does not matter, it is the same process at any scale.

The job is not overwhelming. In fact, a good builder must live by the following creed: Do just as much as you need. You are not M. A. Barker or Tolkien, nor do you have to be to run a game. This brings us to golden rules that are useful in environment building.

About the Author

A gamer since 1976, Scott has worked in and around the game industry for many years. He has spent most of his life in the grail quest of gaming: the perfect game. To that end he has honed his game craft to razor sharpness. Now he gives out game advice on a number of Internet sites.

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The Rule of Masterpiece: A masterpiece is not a masterpiece if no one ever sees it. Finish as much as you can and move on. Lavishing details will only bring heartache if nobody ever gets to appreciate them.

The Mona Lisa rule: Spend only as much time on a world, map, scenario, or NPC as the amount of play time and enjoyment will allow. Two years for six hours of play is not a good investment. Invest a few hours into the environment for a few hundred hours of gaming fun.

So to recap: You only have X amount of time, spend most of it on play rather than prep work. Just make sure what you need is done before you need it.

The Process : an Overview

0) Learn/ review the process.

- 1) Interface with the players. Also known as "know your audience".
- 2) Determine the Base bits: those important for the Genre, Setting, Scenarios Types, Story Arcs, and PLAYERS.
- 3) Brainstorm for more bits.
- 4) Build from the top down.
- 5) Build from the bottom up.
- 6) Repeat steps 3 to 5 until environment is smooth and developed.
- 7) Check Checklist.
- 8) Formal Write up.

Important definitions: Bits are ideas, pieces of detail, images, chunks of game mechanics, and brief answers to checklist areas.

Key Bits are central bits, the sparks or inspirations that define the environment's concept.

The Seven Cs

The seven Cs are the seven key points that you must keep in mind when designing an environment. They form a way of looking at things, generating specific questions in the builder's mind. Those questions will lead to better results. These ideas are key to making the process work.

Primary Cs

Consistency: Key- Consistency makes the game more real. Each environment is defined by some key ideas. Every part of the environment must be in line with the key bits- what the GM is trying to do with the environment. These ideas do not have to be totally consistent with reality (though it helps), but they have to be consistent within themselves.

Connection: Key- to every action this is a reaction or response. Nothing happens in a vacuum. All elements of an environment are interconnected. This web of interconnection helps simulate the real world... granting verisimilitude. While sometimes the connections are vague, they do exist. An idea or technology that is useful in one discipline is often usable in another. If you are building a smaller environment, make sure that there are connections to things outside it.

Chrome: Key- A touch of detail goes a long way. Little things can make an environment seem real to the players. Slang, odd names, outstanding figures, unique complications, twists of fate, and things out of place (but still consistent within the environment) and other quirks make the environment more memorable. The more things stand out, the more real they seem.

Secondary Cs

Cycle: Key- All things have a cycle of some sort. Food chains, water cycles, weather patterns, tides, moons, seasons, are all cycle examples. The physical cycles and

people's actions in relationship to them (the build up toward something, the doing, and the afterwards) are key to life. Keep in mind the ebb and flow of human history is a cycle. Those who don't learn from the past will be doomed to repeat it.

Conflict: Key- No conflict, no adventure: Without risk, danger, need, or conflict, there is no purpose to adventure. Make sure there are things for the players to be opposed by. A paradise makes a crummy place to adventure.

Control: Key- All things have limits. Games that have few limits become boring once the novelty wears off. Limits make things interesting and more challenging, as there are things that need to be overcome. Without limits on power items or power itself, the characters become draft beasts for their equipment. Control applied maintains consistency.

Continuity Key- Building is a never-ending process. During play many things will pop up about the game environment that were not fully considered during the initial construction. Keep in mind the other Cs, the key bits, and fill in the details to make the situation work. Every now and again, do a revamp of the environment, using the original bits and the new bits you have developed during play. Only a bad game environment admits no modification, so don't have a bad one.

Develop the Environment

You can NOT design an environment without knowing what kind of game you are going to run in it. If you do, you will have to rework everything and your results will be choppy. Don't do it.

Okay, tinker with it if you must, but don't set things in stone until you know what kind of campaign will be run.

Some people out there are saying, "I don't have to develop a gameworld." No matter if your campaign is based in "reality" or created from scratch, your game is set in a world of your own devising. It is based upon your personal interpretation of the world around you and how you see things.

Some people out there are saying, "That's wrong, my world

is Earth. Today." To them I say, "How many KGB agents do you know and will you be including in your game world?"

You are going to add things to the world that are as significant as a secret society or as trivial as the placement of a Starbucks. So while the world will basically be Earth today, it will not actually be the world no matter how much of a stickler for details you might be.

Some people will be saying, "But my world is Amber post the Merlin Series." They get the same treatment as the Earth folks; it is your interpretation of the place. Embrace that truth that your environment will be different from other peoples and move on.

You are making the world. Just make sure your players and you are on the same page about what is going on.

Interface with your players, your audience. It is best if you can get to know your players fairly well before you make a game environment for them. Even if you do, you will still want to run through the following steps.

Learn what they like. This sounds pretty basic, but people keep ignoring what their players want in a game. So find out by talking to them, by seeing how they play, and by asking their other GMs.

Check out what they are reading and watching. This will give you an idea about what their current tastes and interests are. If your friends are going to the John Woo marathon, and checking out old Bruce Lee Movies, it is time to run something with a martial arts orientation.

Get five bits from each of them. These bits could be genre elements, setting elements, types of characters, plot lines, enemies to fight, and so on. By taking many of these player contributed bits and using them to build the game setting, you are practically guaranteed to please your players.

These steps are mostly used when creating game environments to set campaigns in. This information will impact smaller places you create as well, so keep them in mind. If one player always wants pretty barmaids, then

make sure to create places that have pretty barmaids.

If you don't know your group fairly well, get them all together and get to know each other. Gather what information you can and proceed from there.

Determine the Basics

These are the basics for the campaign you will be running. The campaign impacts the setting greatly, so have a rough idea for the campaign when you are creating the setting. These ideas can be very rough, and will likely be revised often. You can refine your campaign another time, right now we are only interested in the things that impact the setting.

Once you have all these, or the campaign is in motion, these steps can be bypassed.

Genre: By definition, a category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content. There are many genres available to you Fantasy, Sword and Planet, Modern Horror, Pulp, Espionage, Alternate Historical, Rockets and Rayguns, Noir, others not mentioned here, and any combination of genres that seem to work. The exact divisions of genre are *messy* and subject to all sorts of opinions, so work with them as you know them. Genre will define the types of action and settings possible for you. In short, it help defines the campaign's and the settings conception. Every genre has certain tropes (important aspects) which are needed, a given tone and feel to their stories. The GM needs to make sure that these things are supported in the game environment. For example, in the Martial Arts genre you need a variety of unique styles, fleshed out schools/ dojos/ temples to learn the arts, instructor-NPCs, honor codes, a system to stress personal development, intrapersonal reasons for conflict, and a campaign reason to downplay weapons.

Background: This is the kind of setting for the campaign. This decision impacts every building decision. It also determines what things become important. If you have a

Horror campaign that is going to be set in the wild west (or something like it), you will need to add important Wild West elements like horses, sidearms, frontier elements, and natives.

Story Arcs: What is going to be the "big story" you are going to tell with the game? Is the story in your game going to be "Defeat the Empire?", "Find the True Ring", or "Thwart the Invasion of Evils?" There should be more than one, even if the campaign is only going to start with one. Once you have determine at least one Big Story you want to tell with the campaign, you know what bits will be important to your campaign and **MUST** be in the setting. For "Defeat the Empire you will of course need an Empire and Evil Emperor, several important people in the Empire and its Military (major villains to hate), Imperial troops to fight, and rebels to assist. I you don't have these, you can't run that story arc

Scenario types: Related to story arcs, are the types of adventures that you are planning on running. Are there going to be murder mysteries, military action, exploration, retrieving lost artifacts, or what? Once you have an idea of the types of adventures being run, you know what things should be and should not be in the environment. If you want to run murder mysteries, having a corp of mystics who can see the past, present, or future might not be a good idea to add to your setting.

Interface with the players again

Now it is time to let the players know what kind of campaigns you are thinking about running and get a feeling for what they think.

Campaign Trailers:

For every campaign you want to run, create a "title" and some "copy". The title is akin to a book or movie title. The copy is like a book blurb or advertising text for a movie, describing a bit about the campaign background and story it will (try to) tell. Present the trailer to the players. If there is a campaign already going, think of them as movie previews at the beginning of a game. The trailers help to build interest in the possible games. Take the time to judge

the players' responses and interest in various types of campaigns. You can then tweak the trailers to match their responses (planning appropriate changes in the campaign.) By the time the campaign is ready, the players are excited about the new campaign, just as if they were excited about a new movie.

Once the players have accepted the new campaign and setting, you can begin to build the setting.

Mini-campaign:

Another way to see if the players are interested in a particular campaign is to run a mini-campaign. It is a scaled down approach, meaning you will do everything needed for just the scenario, ignoring much of the setting. If the players like this break from their current gaming, go through and work out the entire setting and campaign and go from there.

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by Bradford Ferguson

Interview: PETER ADKINSON OF GEN CON LLC

Peter Adkison is the president of GenCon LLC and former CEO of Wizards of the Coast. GenCon LLC organizes several large GenCon gaming convention shows in the United States and in Europe. Bradford Ferguson interviewed Peter Adkison via telephone on July 21st. The interview was a telephone and it was transcribed for readability. The audio for the interview is available on the <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=listmedia>. Silven Crossroads would like to thank Peter Adkison for his time.

Did you still find time to game earlier this year? If so, what kind of games did you play?

I play frequently. When I'm on the road at conventions I play a lot of Magic because it's very easy and very fast. At home, my friends and I play a lot of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but I also like to play other games—especially new games that come out to keep abreast of what's going on. Next week, I'm playing a game of *Savage Worlds*; I haven't played that yet. Coming up next is *Hero Quest*, as I haven't played that yet either. I just ordered a bunch of miniatures for *Napoleanic* (war game) to get back into that in a little while.

Running GenCon LLC must be a massive undertaking. What do you like to do besides gaming to blow off some steam?

(Peter laughs) I like to travel. I will often take extra days to go other places in addition to business trips. Recently I went to GenCon Barcelona and then Ibiza afterwards. I like to go snow boarding and rock climbing, those are my two primary sports.

What efforts has GenCon LLC taken to resolve the registration problems of GenCon Indy 2003?

We took a giant leap forward in technology. We went from computers on networks to cash registers. It sounds a little silly, but basically that whole registration system instead of being tied to a network that can crash, it's now cash registers. The badges are all pre-printed so people can just come up, pay their money and get a badge. It will be a lot more efficient.

Is there any kind of manual system set up in case the registers don't work for some reason?

They're cash registers, so it is a manual system. They're not electronic terminals or anything like that, just old fashioned cash registers.

How many attendees did GenCon SoCal have, and did it experience any major hiccups?

4725 attendees was the headcount for SoCal; that's unique persons. The system I just described, we ran it for the first time in SoCal and had no problems.

How many attendees do you expect for GenCon Indy 2004?

Oh, probably 28 to 29 thousand unique attendees and about 90,000 turnstiles.

Why do you think that numbers will increase (from last year)?

That's based off of the leading indicators that we have. We track pre-registration sales and about a third of the people that come to the show register online before the show starts. So we know what that number is already and also all the hotels are sold out. We've already sold more hotel rooms than last year, even though the show is still five weeks away.

Is it possible that people could just be planning more in advance?

Sure, that's entirely possible. The leading indicators are up anywhere from 20 to 50 percent. I'm predicting that some of that is a shift from on-site to pre-registration, perhaps due to the line problems last year. That's why we are only forecasting a 5 to 10 percentage point increase.

Do you think that the D&D 30th Anniversary is helping attendance numbers at various conventions?

Yeah, sure, it can't hurt. Right? I think that whenever you have an event like that where a company chooses to promote in a decent way - which Wizards of the Coast has - it can be very helpful. We're very excited about it; we're doing a lot with it.

GenCon LLC just recently announced a record number of exhibitors for the upcoming Indianapolis convention. How many are registered and why do you think the increase happened?

As of July 12th, nine days ago, we were at 265 and that number will inch upward even until the show starts. We always sell booths right on site. I would estimate it at 280.

What accounts for the increase (in exhibitors)?

I think that except for the line problems last year, I think last year's show was really good. Exhibitors sold well. Your performance at any show, in terms of how many people are going to come, is in a large part determined by how good you did the previous show. Except for line problems, the last show was a pretty big hit. A fair number of attendees and exhibitors did not come last year because they did not like the idea of moving the show to Indianapolis. We had some negative press over that. Everyone who went to Indianapolis for the most part really liked Indianapolis and thought it was a good idea. I think the word has gotten out that Indianapolis was a good move but there were some people forecasting the end of GenCon because it was going to be in Indianapolis - which is certainly not what happened.

That would be one factor, and the other would be that the industry is doing well. All the product categories are strong: miniatures, trading card games, role-playing games, LARPs, and historical board gaming. It's a vibrant time in our industry, plus you have just a lot going on.

Since Origins International Game Expo takes place in Ohio, which is right next to Indiana, and within a month and a half of GenCon Indy, do you think the conventions compete for attendees?

Oh sure. There's some level of competition. We're friendly competitors, because we all know each other and get along and that sort of thing. I'm sure that there is some competition for attendee money as there is a finite supply of

money that gamers have to spend and going to conventions can be rather pricy. Both conventions seem to be doing well. Both conventions are growing. That's the flipside.

Why are the two biggest (gaming) conventions in the United States conducted during the summer? Do gamers game more during the summer?

This is due to public conflicts with people being in school. The big shows like GenCon and Origins tend to attract a lot of families. We have gamer families where mom, dad, and the kids plan their whole vacation around it. We get a lot of pressure to hold the convention during the summer time period.

Why do so many RPG companies release new products at GenCon?

If you're a publishing company...when you launch a new product, you would like there to be some hype around the launch of a new product. So companies think, "How do we get some press around our launch?" or, "How do we get some excitement around our launch?" One of the more common answers to that question is to make the launch an event and to do that at a game convention. So whether it's GenCon, people launch products Origins as well and Dragon*Con and so on. The bigger the show, the bigger the opportunity there is to make a splash with the gaming industry press, because everyone in the gaming industry press is going to be there and cover what's going on.

It becomes a common topic after the show to ask your friends, "Hey, what was new at the show? What did you see?" A lot of people come to see what's new. I mean, you can get stuff that is already out at your local hobby shop, right?

The other reason is that it is expensive for the publisher [to attend the show]. A lot of these publishers are not very big companies and it is expensive for a publisher to go and exhibit at a convention. So they will release a new product because they will get better sales on a product if people have not seen it before than they will on a product that all their fans already have, and they are able to sell the product at full retail where typically they are selling their product

to distributors at 50 to 60 percent off of retail. They are able to capture a lot more margin per unit sales if they can sell it directly to the consumer at GenCon.

Are there any non-gaming concerts or events happening at the same time as GenCon?

Do you mean affiliated with us or completely separate from GenCon?

Either affiliated or that is going on in Indianapolis.

I don't know about stuff that is not affiliated with us. There is on Thursday night every year, we have what's called our Block Party. This year it's called the "Epic Level Party in the Plaza." The Epic Level is tied to *Dungeons & Dragons* and the 30th Anniversary. Wizards of the Coast is sponsoring this party. I don't know if it is right to call it a concert since there has been a couple changes in personnel of the people who are supposed to do this party, so they are a little bit behind the eight ball in terms of exactly what is going to happen at this party. I don't know if it is going to be a band or a DJ. There is that event going on and we will have the Great Luke Ski Saturday afternoon at the costume contest. He does our halftime entertainment there. There's always other stuff going on, but those are the main things entertainment-wise going on at the convention.

Do you have any advice for first-time convention-goers?

Oh yeah. When you get there, grab a program book. I wrote a few pages; front editorial of the program book is [the] First-Timer's Guide to GenCon. The main thing is to visit the Exhibit Hall. The Exhibit Hall is fabulous. It's a great place to learn games because most manufacturers will teach their games. Get a program book early on and sit down and make yourself a schedule, get a map, bring comfortable shoes. There's a long list...

We thank Mr. Adkison for his time and hope to see him at GenCon!

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by Smokestack Jones



by Christian R. Bonawandt

14 Years

At first, Mark didn't feel the needles. Each of the nearly two hundred hair-thin conductors was pressed a few centimeters into his skin. As the machine powered up, their presence became obvious. All at once, Mark could feel the razor sharp pressure in his spine, arms, legs, hands, and feet. But it wasn't the needles themselves causing the pain--it was the beginnings of the gigawatts of power that was about to be tapped for the experiment. Their last experiment.

Terry's hands danced unsteadily across the machine's console. His small green eyes were wide with concentration. And worry. It was taking twice as long to ready and start the machine. Normally the fifteen-foot panel of buttons and gauges had been worked by both of them. But now Mark was the experiment. Alone Terry had to power-up the generators and converse with the three geo-synchronous satellites to pinpoint the ideal latitude and longitude for Mark's arrival.

With Terry busy on the controls, Mark had time to think. Too much time. He was tired of thinking and ready to do something, even if undid time itself.

Time.

There's never enough when you need it and too much when you just want it to pass. The fourteen years that Mark and Noi had been together seemed like little more than a two-hour movie. Unlike the last fourteen years. The ones without her--truly without her. Each one of those years was like eternity. He had lived them as though scarcely aware of them, and yet painfully aware of how long they were. His all-consuming thoughts then had been the machine. Which, ironically, was the same thing that had inadvertently taken her away. If he had spent more time with her instead of working on theory for this stupid, wasted machine, he might have been able to prevent her death.

Then again, maybe he could stop it now.

Terry gave a quick glance to Mark, signaling that the countdown was almost ready. The young man's eyes remained wide, but took on a new meaning. The capsule was heavily insulated and fully soundproof. It forced Mark to read his protégé's face. Instead of concentration, Terry's expression revealed trepidation, concern, and uncertainty. The young man probably wondered if he'd ever see his mentor again. Mark wondered too.

After all their experiments, Mark, Terry and their superiors had come to the conclusion that time could not be altered; that paradoxes were not even possible. That was why they were being shut down. All the probes, animals, and eventually people that had been sent back through time, he and Terry eventually discovered, were never truly *in* the past. The theory was that a window was open, allowing them view the past for a set number of minutes or hours before returning to the capsule. To the observers in the present, the "time travelers" didn't go anywhere. If the recording equipment survived the trip, the video and audio data that was instantaneously streamed back proved that nothing in the past could see or even touch the "traveler." With the exception of a few obvious static discharges and animals sniffing the general area of the "traveler's" location, there was nothing by which it could be concluded that anything sent back in time via the machine was ever in the past.

That meant nothing could be changed. So the U.S. government, in all its infinite wisdom, shut Project Wells down. Besides, not only were the "travelers," whether probe, animal or person, unable to move about in the past, but also the machine hadn't enough power to send someone back more than 20 or so years. They could be sent anywhere in world, but no more than a few decades back.

"There is no research value in such a limited range of history," one official had told Mark.

"Too much time, money and resources have been spent on this project, anyway," another said.

"You had plenty of time to perfect the machine, Dr. Hanger," argued a third.

Project Wells was to be dismantled on Monday, September 26, 2044. So Dr. Mark Hanger and his assistant, Dr. Terry Thurton, had gone in on Saturday to setup for this last unauthorized experiment on Sunday, the 25th. Mark had one last theory to test out. If it didn't work, he lost nothing. Not even the few hours he was going to spend in the past. And he couldn't try it on paper. There was no mathematical formula by which he could measure chi. He had to just go and do it. If it worked, he might be able prevent his wife's murder. If not, he would be forced to watch it happen. At least the latter might help him find out who it was that had killed her in the first place.

With two blinks, Mark signaled to Terry that he was ready. His head, arms, legs and torso were strapped in hard to the poles through which the power would travel. The needles would transfer the energy through strategic points of his body--pressure points, acupuncture points. The first of his wife's many contributions to this device's success. Mark had been oblivious to just about everything Asian until he met Noi in undergraduate school. She had been majoring Physical Education with a minor in Philosophy. Mark had double-majored in Physics and Engineering. The philosophy class he met her in was a core requirement. It had changed his life.

The jolt from the machine rocked Mark's body so hard he thought his gut would explode. Inside and out, his nerves burned like lit fuses. His mouth shook uncontrollably. It took all his strength to keep from drooling--who knows what a little bit of saliva could have done with all that electricity surging around him. Mark heard his own teeth-clenched scream as though background noise.

And then, suddenly, it stopped. The calm that followed was almost as hard on his senses as the travel. Vision came back to him. Although since his eyes had been shut, there was no telling whether that sense had been temporarily lost or not. There was no sound or feeling--the two men brave enough to go back without suits, both of them astronauts, reported the same thing. Around Mark were the familiar houses of his neighborhood. He couldn't feel the temperature, but knew from the leafless trees whose bare branches stretched out like gnarled fingers of death that it was winter. In front of him was his house. Two simple stories of white stucco. Small but well-kept. At least at this time.

Brass's midnight-blue sportscar was in the driveway next to Mark's place. Paul Brass, that disgusting son of a bitch, had thankfully moved several months after Noi's murder. It was no secret that the former Mr. Hawaii wanted Noi. She just wasn't interested, though. She encouraged Mark to stay in shape but wasn't attracted to beefcakes like Brass. For all Mark's long nights at the lab, and countless lost weekends due to travel, research and presentations, what little time he and Noi had spent together was irreplaceable. That never stopped Brass from leering and ogling, hoping the back of his mind that she'd leave Mark. When Noi died, Brass up and moved back to Hawaii. Not before trying to pin the murder on Mark, though. Luckily, Mark's alibis were irrefutable, between Terry's testimony, the lab's 24-hour security surveillance, and the electronic punch cards that logged when employees came and went.

Now for the first test. Mark and Terry had sent back some of the mice inside a clear, insulated ball. Those mice were able to move around inside the ball. That meant movement in the past was possible. The computers in the tiny land rovers reported an inability to achieve locomotion, despite working fine upon their return. None of the probes were able to move at all.

Mark thought back to what Noi had taught him about Tai Chi, Chi-Gung. It had been years since he had worked out, but he did chi-building exercises every day for his health. He couldn't see his arms or feet--same thing the astronauts reported. Eyes pointed straight ahead, Mark concentrated on his feet. He couldn't feel them, but knew they were there. A simple step. He focused on his breathing, unsure whether the air was from this time or 2044. After a few

breaths, he pushed his chi down to his legs. He imagined being in a horse stance, his arms locked about in front of him. A tingle began in his fingers and toes. Mark's mind clung fiercely to that sensation. Mark moved his leg with his mind, with his chi. Visually, he realized he had lumbered forward.

Inside, he wanted to cry! Something mystical had held the answer science lacked all along. Deep down, he had suspected this was the case. His experiments with acupuncture had been provable, though. There was no way he could have convinced anyone--even Terry--that chi was the secret to moving about in the past.

Nonetheless, he could move, he could get indoors, inside his own house. Now, if he could find a way to affect the world around him.

The next fifteen steps to his front porch were slow, laborious, and intense. He could feel his body straining. Or perhaps that was his mind. It was nearly dark out. Police had estimated Noi's time of death to have been 6 p.m. He had asked Terry to send him back a few minutes before 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 14, 2030. Like a ghost, Mark floated slowly up the stairs to the front door. Today Mark was be at work until 8. He would come home after learning that Project Wells was accepted for funding by the U.S. government. His plan was to take the next two weeks off to celebrate while paperwork was filed and technicalities worked out. Unless he changed something now, that would never happen.

When he reached the front door, Mark felt something. His fingers were tingling with a sensation akin to being asleep. He reached for the front door and almost thought he felt its cold metal texture. Instead, his hand went right through.

Angry, and growing increasingly anxious, Mark stormed through the closed door. As his head passed, he could have sworn he smelled the ten-year-old metal deadbolt. Inside, the house seemed almost unfamiliar. The soft blue carpet of the common room was smooth, freshly vacuumed. How on earth that woman could clean and still teach during the day was amazing to him. He always wondered if she had secretly hired a maid.

The plasma TV was on. A random news channel blurted something about the president's personal indiscretions. Mark could hear it. At least a little. He knew it was loud, but his ears barely picked up the newscaster's babble. The proximity to the television made his hands tingle more. For a split second, he thought he felt his knee bend as he stepped toward it.

Mark gave the first floor a quick scan. The foyer, common room and kitchen made up almost the entire ground level. The kitchen was separated by a half-wall, and the common area and foyer were more or less the same. The back door was shut and locked. Curtains were mostly drawn. The light from outside was almost gone.

Wait. The front door was locked. But the police had said it was unlocked, that there was no sign of forced entry. Maybe Mark had already changed things. Maybe because he had moved, the would-be killer saw him and changed his mind. No. It was too soon. Likely Noi would open the door in a few minutes for something and leave it open, or the killer would catch her at that moment.

He moved to the kitchen to check the time. 5:25 according to the wall clock. 5:28 according to the microwave. 5:23 according to a watch on their tiny, pseudo-wood kitchen table.

Whose watch was that?

It had one of those thick, metro-style bands and a mess of features like the room's temperature, your body temperature, a stopwatch, and a military time option. Without thinking, Mark grabbed it. To his surprise, his hand caught it. He could feel its weight in his hand. With his thumb, he fingered a button.

The watch beeped. Startled, Mark dropped it. When it hit the floor, the digital face went blank. Somehow, though, Mark knew it wasn't the impact that broke the watch.

As he bent over to pick up the watch again, he noticed the Brass Gym jacket folded on one of the chairs. On top of the jacket were two, thin leather gloves.

The light from chandelier above the stairs turned on. Paul Brass sauntered down stairs, a piggish grin on his face. He was adjusting his workout pants over tight blue briefs.

A plain, black, long-sleeved shirt clung to his massive, nutrition-supplement-enhanced chest. It had a few damp spots on it.

Noi followed immediately behind him. She was in a thin, white silk robe. A Christmas present from two years ago. It was partly open, revealing a hint of her minute breasts and defined abdomen. Her face was apprehensive, almost guilty. Mark could feel--at least imagined--his jaw trembling. He couldn't hear what they were saying, but he didn't need to. Through Brass's Hawaiian features, partly muted by his Irish heritage and several years in the continental U.S., Mark read everything he needed to.

More than ever, now, he wanted to cry. How long had this been going on behind his back? Could it even be what it looked like? Why would Noi do this to him?

Those weren't the questions he had come to answer, though. If Brass was here now, then he was obviously her killer. Why, though? Wasn't it enough that he had been having her behind Mark's back? Still, he was going to kill her today. Soon. Mark had to find a way to stop it.

Brass put on his jacket, followed by his gloves. Mark backed up. One of the knives in the angular plastic knife holder on the kitchen counter behind him was the murder weapon. He kept himself between Brass and those knives, not even sure that he could do anything to stop the man.

Something popped. Mark felt woozy, sick. His ears were ringing. For a moment, his vision blurred.

"How'd my watch get on the floor?" Brass muttered, bending over to pick it up.

Mark heard him. Clear as day, as though he were truly hear this moment, in this time.

Noi went into the common room and turned down the TV. "You probably dropped it, you dope," she said with that slight Thai accent. Her voice had been a welcomed delicacy to his ears after days and nights with monotone government officials. Hearing it again now ignited a flame in his chest, despite his breaking heart.

Brass slipped the watch in his pocket. He turned toward the door, then did a double-take. "Hanger?"

"Mark?" Noi gasped. They were looking dead-on at him. "How long have you been here?"

His hands trembled, and some force beyond Mark's control pulled his arm back toward the knife rack.

"Mark, let me explain," Noi said, panic encroaching on her voice.

"Fuck that," Brass said, "he should have known what was goin' on. You can't neglect a person and not expect her to go looking for something better."

Noi shook her head. "It's not like he's saying, Mark."

Rage took over. He grabbed a knife from behind him and whipped it out of the rack. The entire rack spilled on the kitchen floor. Knives danced and scattered around the linoleum. When the cacophony ceased, Mark was nauseas with déjà vu. The only thing missing from this scene was the yellow crime scene tap.

"Fourteen years," Mark said. The knife shook in his hand.

"Ah, fuck you," Brass said. "You look like you aged fourteen years since yesterday."

Mark swung at him. Brass tried to catch his hand. They both missed. Or maybe they simply went through each other. Noi shouted. Mark swung again and seemed to miss by inches. Brass threw a hook. It didn't connect. It should have.

Like a bull, Mark charged Brass. His shoulder crashed into the bodybuilder's firm torso. A surge of static went through both of them. There wasn't enough force in Mark's attack to take Brass down. Brass went down nonetheless.

Mark pulled the knife back. Noi snatched his wrist. With grace and fluidity, she twisted his arm behind his back. At the exact moment his arm should have begun to hurt, she let go as though shocked.

Brass squirmed out from underneath Mark. Like a cowardly giant, he bolted for the front door. He fled down the porch steps, leaving the front door open.

Every muscle in Mark's body ached. His head throbbed. For the moment, he remained crouched on the floor like a savage, knife wavering in his slackened grip. Had he really changed the past? Did he just stop his wife's killer?

"Mark . . . ?" Noi's voice was soft and fearful, making her accent seem that much thicker.

The icy breeze from outside pinched Mark's skin. His rage turned to sorrow. "Fourteen years," he said. All this time he had spent trying to save her. She was already gone.

Did it really matter though? She was alive now. He knew the crushing pain of being without her. He could forego her indiscretion, as long as he could still have her. Couldn't he? As his gaze fell on her, his sense of smell came back to him with a seeming pop. His nostrils were assaulted by the scent of bitter aroma sweat and the tang of sex--spiced with Brass's favorite cologne.

Noi took a few steps back toward the stairs. She eyed him suspiciously, inspecting what would seem to her the sudden wash of gray in his hair, and the weighted lines in his face. "You have to understand," she began.

Mark's heart beat numbly against his ribs. He tried, deep down, to believe there was still something left in their marriage. "I spent fourteen years trying to undo this," he said, half happy, half broken.

"What?" she asked. Her arm reached out as though to comfort him.

"It's been so hard without you," he said, reached toward her as well.

Six feet of empty air separated their finger tips. Her arm retreated with a sudden jerk. It was not from a static shock. She drew her robes tightly around her, folded her arms akimbo over her breasts.

"I know," Noi said, "and you have to understand that's why . . ."

"I don't care," he said, shooting to his feet. A part of him, seeing her so frightened, had firmly decided. It didn't matter. "I don't care, as long as you're alive."

"I am," she said, the confusion tinting her words.

Mark strode toward her, his fist now clamped over the knife. "I've changed everything," he said.

"It's not like it was when we were first together," Noi said.

"Huh?"

"Mark . . . we need a divorce."

The words echoed in his head. His hope collapsed around him like shattered glass. Inside, he was hollow. He did *not* just spend the last fourteen years trying to change time so that he could hear that his marriage was over. All this time. All this work. All his pain, his toiling, his sweat and blood. The ungodly hours, the never-ending pages of formulas. God-dammit! Fourteen years!

The knife felt like steel power in his hands. As he reached for her throat, Mark realized that he hadn't stopped her killer. It hadn't been Brass, after all. His first theory had been right.

"Fourteen years!" he screamed.

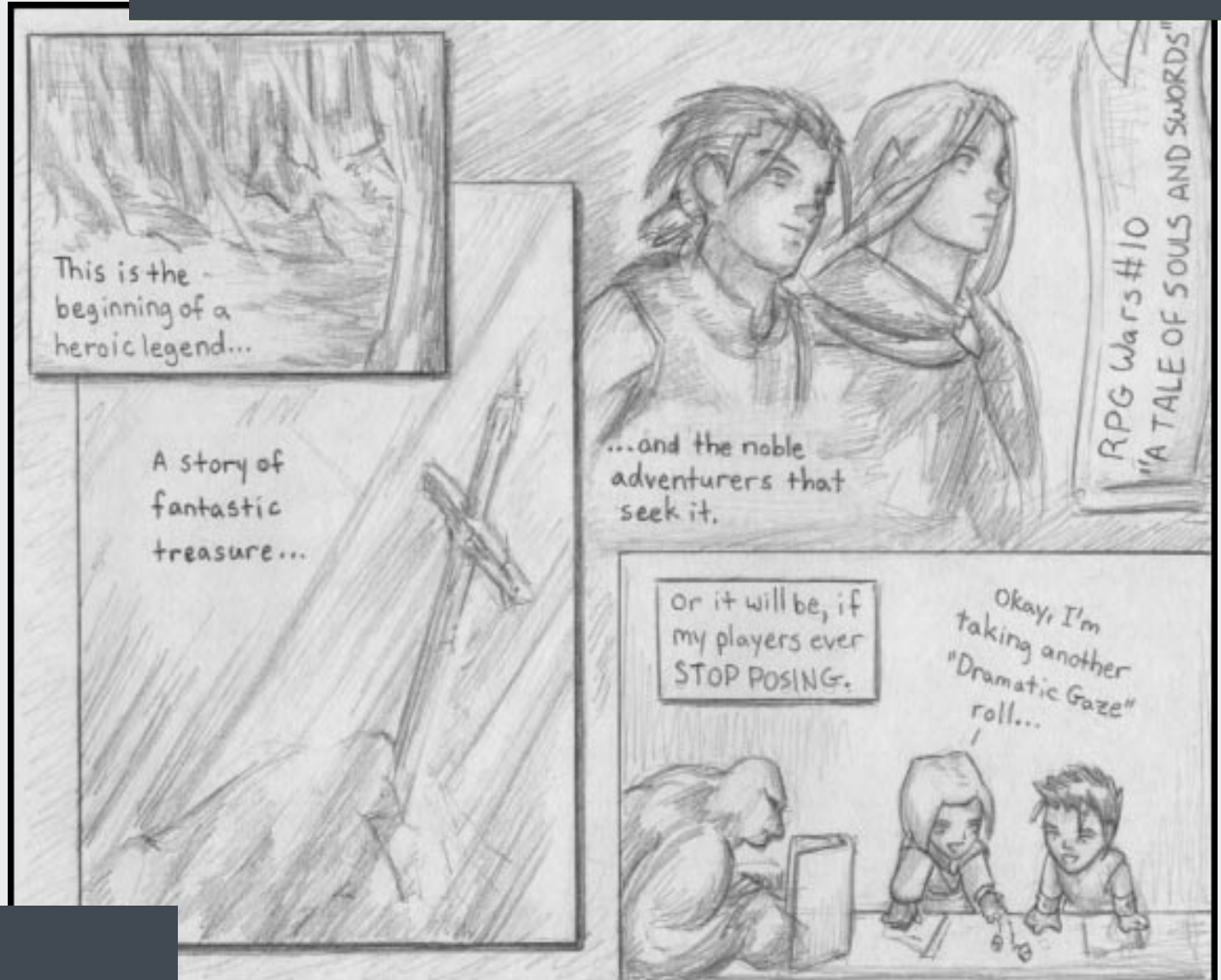
Time could not be changed.

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 **Bradford Ferguson**

Origins 2004 Wrap-up

Introduction

The Origins 2004 International Game Expo took place in Columbus, Ohio from Wednesday June 24th to Sunday June 28th. Origins began in Baltimore, Maryland in 1975. Origins was named by Interest Group Maryland (a local war gaming group) because Baltimore and Avalon Hill were the origin of war-gaming. The original Origins had 25 companies who were exhibitors while Origins 2004 had 228 companies involved. At one point, Avalon Hill and Simulations Publications, Inc. both owned Origins, but they turned it over to the Game Manufacturers Association (GAMA) in 1977. The Origins website states, "Historical miniatures and historical board wargames heavily dominated the first Origins. It wasn't long before role-playing games, fantasy and science fiction miniatures and boardgames, play-by-mail games, computer games, family games, and trading card games all shared the spotlight with the original gaming offerings." 2004 represented the ninth year that Origins has been at Columbus, OH as its inaugural year in Columbus was in 1996.

I interviewed seven people at Origins 2004 including: Charles Ryan, Brand Manager of *D&D* at Wizards of the Coast; Erik Mona, Editor-in-Chief of *Dungeon Magazine*; and Jeff Martin of Dwarven Forge and True Dungeon. These interviews can be heard and read in the D&D/d20 Section of Silven Crossroads (<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp>). On Thursday of the show, I wrote an article titled "Origins Report: Origins vs GenCon" (<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=356>) where I discussed the differences between the two largest gaming conventions in the United States.

Because Silven Crossroads is a role-playing game (RPG) community website, I covered Origins with respect to role-playing games. The biggest surprise for me was learning firsthand that role-playing games are not the focus at Origins. From all appearances, the Dealers Room was the same size of the Miniatures Room. While the Miniatures Room consisted mostly of people playing war games, RPGs consisted of less

than a third of the booths in the Dealers Room. Role-playing convention games took place all over the convention so it was hard to compare the two hobbies in terms of how many people were playing each at the convention, though some people probably played both. The biggest disappointment for me was that some publishers whose products I enjoy reading did not make the trip to Origins and instead had people sell their products for them. Malhavoc Press, RPG Objects, and The Game Mechanics did not attend.

While I did enjoy myself immensely at the convention, it was a disappointment because at GenCon RPGs seem to be more of a focus. There were a couple of interesting d20 releases at Origins, but nothing truly spectacular (though as I say this, I did not get a close look at the new *Iron Kingdoms* book). At GenCon, there are several bigger and more interesting RPG releases such as *World's Biggest Dungeon* (Alderac Entertainment Group), *d20 Future* (Wizards of the Coast), *Dave Arneson's Blackmoor* (Goodman Games), and the newly-focused *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines (Paizo Publishing).

Oh my, Starry-Eyed Surprise

Origins had a bevy of celebrities, both related directly to gaming and those who are tangentially-related to gaming. Buff Bagwell of pro-wrestling fame attended Origins to promote a Buff Bagwell card in the *Legends of Wrestling* Collectible Card Game (CCG). Buff took part in some one-on-one card-playing matches, and he also played the part of the King in games of live role-playing chess. Sean Astin participated in a Q&A session and several autograph sessions. Astin starred as Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings* and has a role in J. Michael Straczynski's *Jeremiah*, which is a post-apocalyptic series that airs on Showtime.

There were many RPG luminaries on hand for the convention and various events. Dave Arneson, the co-designer of the

About the Author

Bradford Ferguson is the Head of the Silven Crossroads D&D/d20 Section. Since the inception of Silven Crossroads, he has been writing d20 articles and reviews and speculating about the d20 industry. Bradford currently runs his own homebrew with the aid of his growing d20 library. When not gaming or ruminating about gaming, he studies for the Chartered Financial Analyst examination.

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original D&D RPG, has been enjoying some of the publicity surrounding the 30th Anniversary of *Dungeons and Dragons* and the d20 recreation of *Blackmoor*. Jonathan Tweet, co-designer of *Ars Magica* and lead designer of *3rd Edition D&D*, seemed to be enjoying the festivities as I witnessed him take part in a demo of *The Burning Wheel RPG*. Peter Adkison, of Wizards of the Coast fame and currently president of GenCon LLC, took part in a couple of Magic-related events including one where you could play him in a game of *Magic: the Gathering* and win his cards. I enjoyed meeting Michael Stackpole, RPG writer and columnist for *Comics & Games Retailer*, and Ken Hite, who writes the "Out of the Box" column for the Gaming Report (www.gamingreport.com). Influential fantasy fiction writer Margaret Weis was at the Sovereign Press booth giving autographs and meeting readers of her excellent works.

In addition, there were quite a few artists on hand including Larry Elmore and Jeff Easley. As I really enjoyed reading the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, it's always a nostalgic trip for me to see Elmore's work because of his extensive work with the various *Dragonlance* covers. Jeff Easley, illustrator of many early covers for *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*, is starting to get back in the public domain with a new website. In addition to the artists in the Dealers Room, there was an art show that was ongoing during the show where people could view original works that have been published in various works.

Ding, Ding, Ding... It's a Knockout!

Who was busy? The busiest booths at Origins were usually the ones with demonstrations of popular products, especially demonstrations that yielded product giveaways. Wizards of

the Coast had a setup where you could do a demo and roll a gigantic 20-sided die to win free product. Each WOTC demo that you did gave you a +2 bonus to the roll. WOTC had demos of everything from pen-and-paper *D&D* to *D&D Miniatures*, *Axis & Allies*, and *Risk: Godstorm*. WizKids kept themselves very busy with demos of *HeroClix* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Alderac's booth was busy with *Spycraft CCG* demos and Cyberpunk's booth was busy with *Cyberpunk CCG* demos. Not only were Living Campaigns for various d20 RPGs being played, but also *World of Darkness*, *Vampire The Requiem*, *Crimson Empire*, *Hackmaster*, a *Call of Cthulhu 24/4* marathon, *Mutants & Masterminds*, *Hero System*, *A Game of Thrones*, *Burning Wheel*, and *PAX Draconis*. The two busiest non-mainstream RPG booths were Crimson Empire and Laughing Pan Productions. Crimson Empire traveled all the way from Great Britain to promote and sell the 2nd Edition of *Crimson Empire*. Laughing Pan was selling their first RPG product that happens to be a beautiful, full-color hardback book entitled *Deliria* which has an interesting concept behind it.

The coolest booth by far was Howling Wolf Studio's booth. It had at least a half dozen panels that were sculpted in bas relief and painted. The panels were of quintessential horror archetypes such as Cthulhu and a skull. The booth reportedly took over a thousand man-hours to produce. There's no way they can put that much effort into a booth and not bring it to GenCon. If you missed seeing it at Origins, I'll put good money on Howling Wolf Studio attending GenCon.

Beyond Role-playing Games

Though Origins is smaller in attendance than GenCon Indy, there is still a wide variety of gaming and events that take place at Origins. Beyond role-playing games, there's collectible card games, clickable miniatures games, war games, board games, strategy games, live-action role-playing games (LARPs), party games, and chess. There was a giant-sized board for the *War!* board game in the Dealers Room. There was some great terrain throughout the Miniatures Room, but the most stunning of all was that of Duke Siegfried who brought a ton of *Lord of the Rings* scenarios to Origins with full mockups of Helm's Deep, Minas Tirith, the Lonely Mountain, and the Black Gate.

It seemed to me like there was more around-the-clock gaming at Origins with LARPer's playing until dawn and people watching late-night screenings of "The Gamers" and "Uber Goober." By the way "Uber Goober" (<http://www.ubergoobermovie.com>) is a some times pseudo and other times serious documentary about gamers. I watched it for a little bit and thought it was really funny. Besides the quirkiness of gaming, the movie touches upon various lifestyle things that affect many gamers such as when a gamer gets a girlfriend and cuts back on gaming.

Additionally, people always seemed to be gaming in the breezeway area which is a long hallway that serves as a connector among several locations. Demo games of various RPGs could be played in the breezeway. Maybe I left GenCon too early or was in the wrong area, but it didn't seem like people played around the clock in the Convention Center in Indianapolis. There always seemed to be at least one full gaming table at the Cthulhuthon. My sample size was far from scientific, but still I did not witness people roaming the halls late at night in Indy. It's possible there was a lot of gaming going on behind closed doors.

Gaming in the Midwest

The growth of attendees at Origins and the projected growth at GenCon could be for a couple of reasons. The central location of these conventions permits people from many different states to attend the show and to travel a shorter distance. Attendance may be growing because these conventions are staying in place and the word is spreading. It's possible that more and more people are gaming as each day passes, and it's also possible that the huge marketing and PR push from Wizards of the Coast is driving up interest in gaming for the 30th Anniversary celebration of *Dungeons & Dragons*. What if attendance falls next year after all the hullabaloo?

If you're serious about gaming or interested in learning more about gaming, I have to recommend that you attend a major gaming convention or a convention in your area. Conventions are the single-best gaming store that you could ever find as the makers and owners of the games are there for you to converse with and ask questions to. Conventions also represent the largest collections of gamers that you

Beyond attending the convention, I also interviewed John Phythyon Jr. who is the Public and Member Relations Director for GAMA (Game Manufacturers Association), which runs both the Origins convention and the GAMA Trade Show. The interview was conducted on July 14th.

"Silven Crossroads: Does Origins compete indirectly with GenCon for convention attendees?"

John Phythyon Jr.: I don't think so. Last year we conducted attendee surveys at both Origins and GenCon, and what we found was that only about 30% of respondents said they attended both shows. We did the surveys again this year and plan to do so at GenCon, so we'll have two years worth of data to track then. It'll be interesting to see how it adds up.

Moreover, the conventional wisdom is that GenCon is an RPG show, and Origins is a board and card game show. If that's true, we're attracting different audiences.

Finally, we have a comfortable relationship with GenCon. They place ads in our program books, and we do so in theirs. They have a booth at our show, and we have one at theirs. I don't think there is a rivalry per se.

Silven Crossroads: Will Origins take place in Columbus, Ohio for the foreseeable future? Why?

John Phythyon Jr.: We have contracts with Columbus through 2010. We're very pleased with the support we get from the city and from our vendors (hotels, convention center, and food service). They know us, and they know we bring them a very good, very profitable show. They're therefore willing to work with us.

Furthermore, Columbus is centrally located. It's within eight hours' driving distance for over 60% of the U.S. population. That gives us a broad population base from which to draw attendees. A significant percentage of our attendees come from Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, but we do get a lot of people from further outside that radius."

Interview cont.

can find. I must suggest that you pre-register for the convention and pre-register well in advance for events. The most popular events sell out fast. For example, at the time of this writing, True Dungeon, an extremely popular walk-through dungeon experience, is sold out for GenCon 2004. Games with the designers and writers sell out quickly. If the Midwest represents too lengthy of a trip for you, then consider I-CON (New York), Dragon*Con (Atlanta, GA), and GenCon SoCal (California). Though you just missed it, Milwaukee Gamefest is also a good, but smaller convention in the Midwest.

GenCon Indy (<http://www.gencon.com/indyhome.aspx?file=indy>)

I-CON (<http://www.iconsf.org/>)

Dragon*Con (<http://www.dragoncon.org/>)

GenCon SoCal (<http://www.gencon.com/socalhome.aspx?file=socal>)

Milwaukee Gamefest (http://www.advantageconvention.com/Gamefest_Milwaukee.htm)

What were the official attendance numbers for Origins for 2004? How does that compare to 2003?

John Phythyon Jr.: Attendance was 13,980. That's about an 11% increase from last year, which was 12,600. That's the third consecutive year Origins has posted record attendance.

Better still, we had over 50% growth on Thursday. Last year, 6000 people had checked in at registration by the close of business on Thursday. This year, that number was 9500. What this translates to is more four-day badges than in years past. At previous shows, a lot of people came just for the weekend. This year, a significantly better percentage came for all four days.

Silven Crossroads: What was the biggest surprise for you about Origins 2004?

John Phythyon Jr.: Definitely the number of people there on Wednesday and Thursday. We opened pre-registration at around two or three o'clock Wednesday afternoon, and we were busy until we shut it down at 10. A lot of people wanted to get there early so that they would be ready to go on Thursday morning. And, as I mentioned already, the numbers on Thursday were very good. We've been working for the past few years to try to convert weekenders to four-day attendees. While I'm not surprised that we were successful, I'm impressed at how successful we were.

Silven Crossroads: What were the lines like for 2004 compared to 2003 for event and pass registration? If there was a big difference, why was this?

John Phythyon Jr.: Last year, the longest wait time we had recorded was 45 minutes. This year, the longest time was 38 minutes. Average time was about 22 minutes. We also made the wait a little more pleasant by having activities going on in the line. There was a riddle contest and some other things.

One of the things we did to improve the line length was add more booths for both registration and events. We also set up the flow so that we could be flexible with the rush. If events were moving slowly, we shifted people from registration

to help out and vice versa. And we had customer service set up in between, making it easy for people who needed assistance from either line to get help faster. It worked out very well, allowing us to adapt to where the long lines were developing and deal with them appropriately.

Silven Crossroads: You seemed like a very busy person at Origins. What was your role like for GAMA with respect to Origins 2004?

John Phythyon Jr.: A lot of my work was done prior to the show. As the Public Relations guy, I was very involved in pre-show publicity to increase attendance. I coordinated a grass roots campaign at the retail store level to get customers registered. We got onto every community calendar in the Greater Columbus area. We developed and sent press kits to media outlets. Everything we could do to get people to come to the show.

On site, I used the Press Room as a base of operations so that I would be on-hand to deal with the press. But I had to be on the move a lot. I was out-solving problems that arose. I escorted news crews through the venue, showing them where they could find stories and, when necessary, giving interviews. As an executive with the company, I did a lot of floating to where I could be useful. I spent time in the Finance Room helping out there, for example. And, as the Member Relations Director, I spent a significant amount of time walking the exhibit hall floor, talking with exhibitors to see how the show was going for them and seeing if they needed any assistance. In short, I was very busy trying to be at a lot of different places at once."

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by Jeffrey E. Thetford

Exclusive Interview: R.A. SALVATORE

Bob Salvatore and I have been conversing via e-mail for a few years. Most of those e-mails consisted of me asking him lots of questions about writing and the publishing business and him giving his worldly, most appreciated answers. If you have been around *D&D* for even a weekend, you have heard of Salvatore and his writing. Of all the characters he has created, however, he is most noted for creating the legendary Drizzt Do'Urden for *Wizards of the Coast*. Shortly after GENCON 1999, Salvatore took time out of his busy writing schedule to answer via e-mail, a few questions on himself, Drizzt, and writing.

Salvatore's works include the *Dark Elf Trilogy*, *The Legacy*, *Starless Night*, *Seige of Darkness*, *Passage to Dawn*, the *Clerical Quintet*, *The Silent Blade*, *Spine of the World*, *the Thousand Orcs* and more. Salvatore has also written the *Demon Wars* for Del Rey and the *Dragon's Dagger*. Salvatore has also written a book for the Star Wars line of books, the *New Jedi Order: Vector Prime*.

Looking back over the years, what would you say has been the single greatest influence on your writing?

Tolkien, obviously. If my sister hadn't given me the *Lord of the Rings* as a Christmas present in 1977, I would probably never have fallen in love with reading, let alone writing. Tolkien's work sent me away to another world -- a better world -- than I have ever known before. It changed my life.

I am sure that everyone knows the history behind the creation of Drizzt Do'Urden. This single character has probably had the greatest influence on the *Forgotten Realms* since Ed Greenwood's Elminster character. Did you expect Drizzt to be such a landmark character and become the driving force in your writing for TSR?

I expected Drizzt to be a fun sidekick for Wulfgar, and nothing more. *The Crystal Shard* was supposed to be Wulfgar's book -- sort of a Conan in the *Forgotten Realms* story. The first

chapter I wrote had Drizzt running across the tundra when he got jumped by a yeti. On page 2, the dark elf took over the story.

I have no idea of why Drizzt has worked as well as he has, no idea of why he has touched so many lives. If I knew how to replicate that, I'd quit writing and start selling the formula to other writers!

If you could change anything about your writing over the past 10yrs—any single event or any style of writing that you wish you had /had not started—what would it be?

Vector Prime, perhaps...the attacks have hurt for months and months now. Maybe my sensibilities just aren't ready for the big time...

As is seen in your ability to weave a tale that is nearly second to none, you obviously have a deep passion and belief in what you do. Thinking back through the years, what event triggered this desire to create such vivid fiction? In other words, what created this passion that you have for writing?

I've always been a storyteller. I think everyone has this desire to be entertaining, and even more than that, I know that everyone wants to be heard. Writing gives me the opportunity to do both. As far as to why it's "vivid" as you called it, that's a description from someone with whom my style has connected; I don't think any working author is any less passionate than I.

In all of the characters ever created for the *Forgotten Realms* book line, Drizzt Do'Urden is probably the most controversial. When you hear such vitreous controversy surrounding him, what emotions does it stir in your psyche? Has this controversy ever had an effect on your portray of Drizzt in your writing?

Drizzt isn't controversial. He's internalized. The readers, for some reason, have taken him to heart, thus, everything I do with him runs the risk of crashing against someone else's opposing vision of how it should have been done. As for the controversy he's caused among gamers (everyone wants to run a drow ranger), that's a problem for the DM and not me. Whenever someone complains to me that now everyone in their gaming group wants to run a dark elf ranger with two scimitars, I just chuckle and take it as a compliment.

Let's pretend that you have never written a book for TSR or any other fiction line. With the release of *D&D 3E*, what direction would you like to see the book lines for the various worlds developed by *WotC* take?

The only line I know anything about is *Forgotten Realms*, and the only direction that's ever been right for *Forgotten Realms* is to let the authors tell their own little stories. Well, *Avatar* and *Threat from the Sea* are exceptions to that, I suppose, but as long as the tie-in to the game changes isn't overwhelming to the individual storylines, I can live with that.

From our past conversations and your Q&A at GENCON, you have said that you use your children to act out scenes when you are writing. Could you elaborate on this? Is there any specific scene that you can think of that we would recognize from your books where your children were very helpful in creating its flow or overall feeling?

HAHAHA! No. I used my sons as guinea pigs by making them take a fencing class, so that I could observe and pick the instructor's brains while defining bi'nelle dasada, the elven sword dance, for *Demon Wars*. Actually, I didn't MAKE them take the class. They wanted to. I just tagged along.

I'm picturing my bloodied kids out back, beating each other senseless with bastard swords. They have done something similar with wiffle ball bats, but I didn't encourage it!

Exclusive Contest!

Are there any plans in the future of The Seven Swords developing more gaming modules?

I don't think WotC is planning to do many more modules, if any.

Since a lot of struggling would-be fantasy authors play D&D, and we know that you play regularly with your gaming group The Seven Swords and an Axe, what impact has your home campaign had on your writing?

Very little. Books and games are completely different. I have many people come up to me and say, "I'm writing a book about my D&D campaign" and I always think, "Well, if you have a big group, there will be at least a few other people interested in reading it."

My books are not based on games. There may be a name here, an incident there—nothing more than that.

If you were to go in front of a room full of aspiring authors, what would be the single most important piece of advice you would give them that you feel would help them in their chosen profession? (Besides changing professions!)

Grow a thick skin. Hold true to your vision and your own style, and hope enough people like it to keep you employed. There's really little else you can do.

To wrap up, what can we expect in the future from R.A. Salvatore? Will you continue to write fantasy and science fiction? With your introduction into the science fiction genre with Vector Prime, will we be seeing more of this style of writing or will you return to your roots in fantasy?

Star Wars is not, in my mind, science fiction, so I'll leave that genre to the giants, like Bova, Robinson, and Bear. I'm a fantasy writer and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. What to expect? Well, I'll take more chances and say things I really need to say in *DemonWars*, challenging myself in new and exciting ways. In the Dark Elf books, the challenge is to keep them fresh and keep them fun.

Silven Crossroads and ICircle Games are proud to present this exclusive contest. The contest is open to all readers of the Silven Trumpeter around the world, and to be eligible all you need to do is answer the questions below.

The answers to all the questions can be found on the ICircle Games website at <http://www.icirclegames.com/> and the violet dawn website at <http://www.violetdawn.com/> or in the freely downloadable material on the above sites.

Contest Questions

1. Which new race is described as "masters of commerce and trade"?
2. Which character wields a +5 *nysaril defending ghost touch bastard sword* known as "Wraithbane" at 20th level?
3. In *The Beast of Tull*, who is referred to as a "warrior of light brightly refracted"?
4. What magic item allows the wielder to cast the following spells: *black bolts of corruption*, *wracking taint*, and *pollute elements*?
5. Which feat was removed from *Denizens of Avadnu* when monsters lost iterative attacks in the 3.5 version of the Monster Manual?

Bonus Question

Which reviewer described *Denizens of Avadnu* with these words: "If you're a DM and your players know all the monsters and have become hard to impress, *Denizens of Avadnu* could be your solution."

VIOLET DAWN

THE TIME OF THE UNRAVELLING

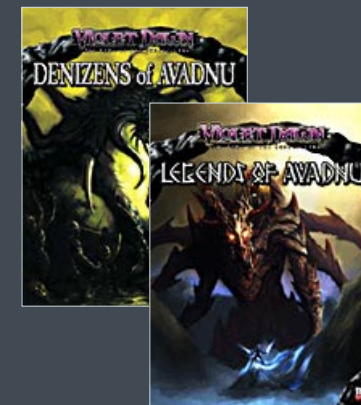
Write down your answers and your email address in an email and send it to contest@silven.com with "ICircle Games Contest" in the subject.

We will be selecting winners at random and will be giving away these prizes:

- 1) Three people will get one copy each of the *Denizens of Avadnu* Hardcover (224 pages), valued at \$39.95 each.
- 2) Five people will get one copy each of the *Legends of Avadnu* PDF (35 pages full color), valued at \$5 each

That is a total of over \$140 of prizes!

We wish our contestants the best of luck and look forward to receiving many entries to evaluate.



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VIOLET DAWN™

THE TIME OF THE UNRAVELLING

The creators of *Denizens of Avadnu* present:

THE AVADNU PRIMER

A 128-page full-color hardcover detailing the world of Avadnu for both players and DMs, *The Avadnu Primer* features the following:

- 7 original PC races and subraces
- Dozens of new weapons, armors, items and materials
- Over 75 new feats including feats for races and regions
- A new base class, the devout
- Over a dozen nations and four new planes to explore
- A wealth of adventure hooks and information to help DMs kickstart a Violet Dawn campaign
- An 18" x 24" full-color poster map



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by Bradford Ferguson and Nash J. Devita

Silven Buyer's Guide, Summer 2004

Welcome to the Silven Crossroads Summer d20 RPG Buyer's guide. This guide was constructed to assist d20 gamers with the multitude of new d20 books released in the last year. The time frame for this Buyer's Guide is from GenCon 2003 to July 2004. The guide details the top ten d20 products released in the last year based on appeal, execution, and scope. Several excellent books did not make the list because they are either too broad or too narrow in their scope. There are many books that have come out in the time frame that are good and accomplish what they set out to do, but they simply don't do it in a spectacular fashion.

Even if you don't get much gaming mileage out of a specific book listed below, odds are that you will enjoy reading it. I didn't pick any books that I think are boring to read. I didn't bias my picks toward authors that are more popular or companies that give review copies. The books below include both solid mechanics and relevant flavor text. In all the cases below, the mechanics enforce the intended flavor so that the flavor is brought out in actual play regardless of the amount of role-playing (as opposed to roll-playing) that is put into any specific game.



#10 *Book of Exalted Deeds (Wizards of the Coast)*

About: 192 pages, hard cover, full color, \$33.

D&D's *Book of Exalted Deeds* is the counterpart to the critically-acclaimed *Book of Vile Darkness*. Whereas *BoVD* discusses evil, vile acts and characters, *BoED* talks about good, peaceful acts and characters that are so good that they are exalted. Exalted characters are not mostly good like many adventurers; they are the embodiment of good and actually wage peace instead of waging war. *BoED* is best used in games where there is an epic struggle of good versus evil. For the player, there is new equipment, feats, magic spells, and prestige classes. For the DM, included are avatar-like paragons and monsters. Though this book is handy for players who like to play characters that are extreme goodie-two-shoes, I think *Book of Exalted Deeds* serves its purpose best as a tool for the dungeon master. With the aid of this book, DMs can provide a litany of moral dilemmas to the heroes. DMs can use the prestige classes for the NPCs to present a shining example of characters who sacrifice and always make the tough choices. For example, what does a character do when one course of action would betray her lawful side and the other action would betray her good side? Players love choices, but that sure is a tough decision!

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=5439&ref=sil

Other RPG Guide

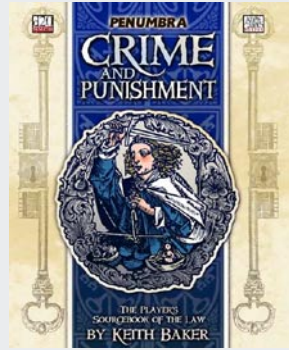


A/State Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook HC
Retail \$40.00 Sale \$31.95
http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=8756&ref=sil

The Burning Wheel RPG (2 Book Set)
Retail \$15.00 Sale \$11.95
http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=12429&ref=sil



Jovian Chronicles RPG: Handbook 2nd Ed. HC
Retail \$39.95 Sale \$31.95
http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=5333&ref=sil

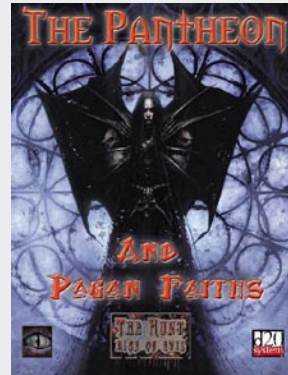


#9 *Crime & Punishment* (Atlas Games)

About: 160 pages, hard cover, black & white, \$30.

Crime & Punishment, written by Eberron creator Keith Baker, succeeds despite the aggressive pricing policy of Atlas Games and the scarce artwork. The content is top-notch and covers everything related to the law or lack of law in your campaign. Ever had a group of heroes take a walk on the wild side and find themselves on the wrong side of the law? Or, ever want to create a campaign centered around the solving of crimes and the hunting down of criminals? *Crime & Punishment* is your answer with Bounty Hunters, Investigators, and the counter-spelling Spellbanes. Baker gives several examples where you can make plausible adventuring (or crime-busting) parties based mainly on the classes and prestige classes presented in the book. What if the Big Bad Evil Guy sent a capture team after the heroes? *Crime & Punishment* also contains a good deal of discussion about different types of governments. For example, what is the system of laws used for a chaotic good-aligned society? Keith Baker divulges the pertinent answers.

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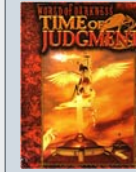


#8 *The Pantheon and Pagan Faiths* (Mystic Eye Games)

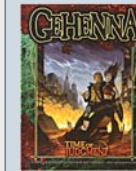
About: 208 pages, soft cover, black & white, \$27.

Of the half dozen reviewers to which Mystic Eye Games sent preview copies of this book, Silven Crossroads was the only website that actually wrote a preview of *The Pantheon and Pagan Faiths*. This book was released without much fanfare or marketing push, and it is a shame because *P&PF* is the best d20 book on religions this since the masterwork *Book of the Righteous*. Beyond the interesting pantheon and pagan gods, *P&PF* has the best shaman and witch core classes that I have seen, because the authors successfully capture the classic feel of both of these classes. The shaman calls upon animal spirits to augment her comrades, and the witch curses and hexes her opponents. There are also some deity-specific feats, spell domains, and secret domains to which only the more devout gain access. *The Pantheon and Pagan Faiths* does have back story for the faiths, but it won't bog you down with too much mythology. In several aspects, it's more functional than Aaron Loeb's masterwork. *P&PF* is a fine selection if you either don't want to use the standard D&D pantheon or like religion to play a more prominent role in your games.

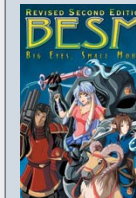
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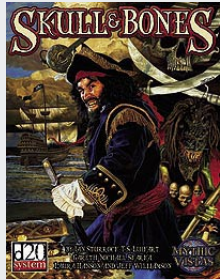
World of Darkness: Time of Judgment HC
Sale \$29.99
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Vampire: Time of Judgment - Gehenna HC
Sale \$29.99
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Big Eyes, Small Mouth RPG Revised Second Edition
Retail \$24.95 Sale \$19.95
http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=4607&ref=sil

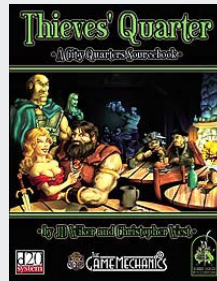


#7 Skull & Bones (Green Ronin Publishing)

About: 192 pages, soft cover, black & white, \$28.

As *Skull & Bones* is about pirates, swashbuckling action, and voodoo magic, Green Ronin Publishing carefully timed the release of *Skull & Bones* to come out after the release of last year's summer blockbuster movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The businessman in me calls it brilliant, while the moralist in me believes this to be a cheap tactic. Regardless of your viewpoint, the products that Green Ronin puts out are consistently well done. Despite the dichotomy between the small text size and the dark, 1 7/8" borders, *Skull & Bones* is fantastic. It has everything you could ever ask for with the pirate genre: fame, fortune, plenty of booty along with Voodoo magic, swashbuckling action, and naval combat. It's the setting that I most want to play a game in, but I've been a sucker for the genre ever since I played "Pirates!" on the Apple IIC.

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=2409&ref=sil



#6 Thieves' Quarter (The Game Mechanics)

About: (PDF) 78 pages, full color, \$10.

About: (print) 78 pages, soft cover, black & white, \$18.

Thieves' Quarter is the first release by The Game Mechanics for the *City Quarters* Series, and it represents one of the quarters for the city of Liberty. *Thieves' Quarter* completely describes the people and places for a thieves' quarter (or the unscrupulous side of town). Liberty is a port city with a good deal of intrigue. Adventurers would find it to be an interesting place to explore as each inhabitant has something going on whether it is a deep, dark secret or something more innocent like spying on people for the city watch. The citywide maps are fantastic, and each location comes with a multi-level map. This is a book for which the PDF really is better than the printed product. The color maps by Christopher West are stunning in the PDF, while they lack the sizzle in the book that is printed in black and white. The maps are so nice that I made a point of printing them out in color on durable paper and putting them in protective sleeves. Stop being so stingy with your printer ink, buy and download this product, and print it out!

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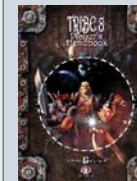


Exalted Roleplaying Game (White Wolf)

Retail \$29.95 Sale \$23.95
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Exalted RPG: Players Guide

Retail \$29.99 Sale \$23.95
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Tribe 8 RPG Players Handbook 2nd

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Orpheus RPG

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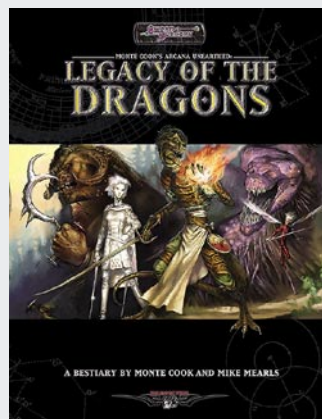


#5 *Redhurst: Academy of Magic* (Human Head Studios)

About: 160 pages, hard cover in landscape format, full color, \$30.

Like Green Ronin Publishing, Matt Forbeck is not adverse to taking advantage of marketing synergies without actually stepping on Intellectual Property. *Redhurst: Academy of Magic* is the closest you will come to a *Harry Potter* role-playing game, though the flavor ties in well with standard *D&D*. *Redhurst* fully details an academy of magic with its buildings, schools of magic, support staff, and teachers. *Redhurst* builds conflict into the school thereby presenting DMs with plenty of plot hooks for their games. Part of this conflict comes from the mysterious margin writer who points out weaknesses of the school itself and which figures at the school can be corrupted. Conflict is also written into the administrators of the school as a whole along with the dean and assistant dean of each school of magic (abjuration, conjuration, etc.). You learn about the building, teachers, first-year and advanced classes, and signature spells for each of the eight schools of magic.

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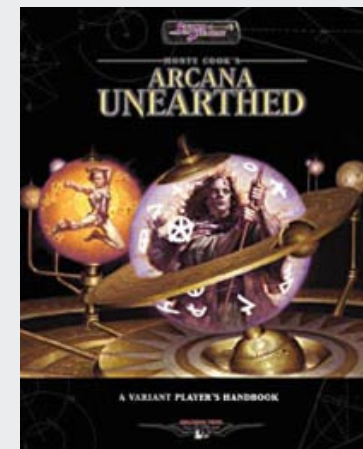


#4 *Arcana Unearthed: Legacy of the Dragons* (Malhavoc Press)

About: 160 pages, soft cover, black & white, \$24.

Beyond the obvious choice of the *D&D Monster Manual v.3.5* which excels in its versatility, *Legacy of the Dragons* is this year's best monster book for the d20 System. The monsters fit perfectly in the *Diamond Throne* setting of *Arcana Unearthed* and they work in a standard *D&D* campaign. Though *Legacy of the Dragons* has a black and white interior; the artwork by Kev Crossley and Tyler Walpole is simply superb. Few artists use wild, expressive shapes like Kev Crossley does. Beyond the pretty pictures, the monsters were some of the best that I have seen. The cool thing about many of the monsters is that they are themselves easily customizable. For example, blade trolls utilize their regenerative powers to implant assorted equipment in their body. In addition, the book hints at some of the most vicious monster combinations that I've ever seen. One of the most prolific d20 writers, Mike Mearls, recently joined Malhavoc Press on a full-time basis, and *Legacy of the Dragons* represents the first collaboration between Monte Cook and Mike Mearls. So far, so good.

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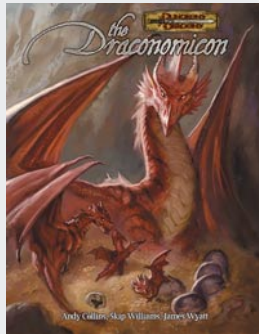


#3 *Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed* (Malhavoc Press)

About: 256 pages, hard cover, black & white interior, \$30.

Malhavoc Press and *Arcana Unearthed* were the talk of the town at GenCon last year. Not only did Malhavoc stir the anticipation for the product into a fervor, but Monte Cook also delivered the goods with excellent game design and flavorful writing. *Arcana Unearthed* is the true variant player's handbook for the year with interesting classes, familiar but different races, and a robust and versatile magic system. As a true variant player's handbook, it stands on its own without the *Players Handbook v.3.5* by Wizards of the Coast. I find that the classes and races are inherently more interesting than those of standard *D&D*. Additionally, I've played *Arcana Unearthed* side-by-side with generic *D&D* and I can say with confidence that the two are compatible. The only caveat is that characters made from *AU* should be wholly from *AU* mechanics. Another cool thing about the system is that it doesn't use alignment, a move cheered by those who don't like the annoying, cheap tactic of *detect evil*.

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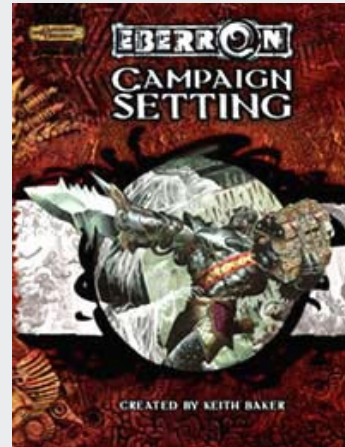


#2 Draconomicon - The Book of Dragons (Wizards of the Coast)

About: 288 pages, hard cover, full color, \$40.

When you talk about the word iconic, many D&D readers now instantly thinks of the iconic characters, but what's more iconic to D&D than dragons? All of the mechanics such as equipment, feats, prestige classes, and spells are spot-on with their creativity and relevance to the subject of dragons. Second only to *Eberron* in its visual appeal, *Draconomicon* features anatomical drawings, illustrations of the shapes of the different dragon heads as they age, and separate paintings that show how the coloration of each dragon changes as it ages. There's content for both the player and the DM, though a majority is intended for DMs. The best use for *Draconomicon* is if you, as a player, want to create characters that more effectively combat dragons, or if you, as a DM, want to create a campaign where dragons are prominent in the story. Some of the detractors of *Draconomicon* don't like the long appendix where there are 120 dragons, one for each color and each age category. Even if you removed the appendix from the book, it's still worth the price of admission. It's that good.

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=3459&ref=sil



#1 Eberron Campaign Setting (Wizards of the Coast)

About: 320 pages, hard cover, full color interior, \$40.

Simply put, *Eberron Campaign Setting* is the hottest RPG book that is currently on the market. Not only is *Eberron* one of the most visually stunning RPG books that Wizards of the Coast has ever released, but it also has excellent content and writing that enforces the pulp action feel that was the designers' goal. *Eberron* is a campaign setting that is an add-on to the core rulebook set of the PHB, DMG, and MM. What's special about *Eberron* is that it gives the feeling of high danger, lots of action, and a magic trainload of intrigue. Another way to describe *Eberron* is to imagine if the D&D setting advanced a whole new technological era, but instead of technology, the advances were driven by the application of magic. Don't worry about not having any supplemental material for *Eberron* as WOTC has a whole new adventure path, a series of novels, and supplemental setting books in the works. The first adventure for the adventure path is already out, and there is an introductory adventure in the *Eberron* hard cover itself.

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2004-07-28

RPGObjects announces upcoming ebooks

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=674>

2004-07-27

New World of Darkness Game Line All Hardcover

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=672>

2004-07-26

New Line Cinema Options White Wolf's Vampire: The Requiem for Multi-Picture Deal

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=671>

2004-07-20

Artifact Entertainment files for Chapter 11

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=666>

2004-07-20

White Wolf Delays Werewolf: The Forsaken Until February

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=665>

2004-07-19

Modern Dispatch Announced

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=664>

2004-07-13

White Wolf : Page Count Rises on World of Darkness Rulebook

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=659>

2004-07-13

Big News for Fallout fans!

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=658>

2004-07-12

d20 Modern: 12 to midnight releases new adventure

» <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=657>

by Aaron Todd

A Murder of Crows : Part 2

The Sheriff recruited several of the local tradesmen to spread the word of the meeting to the rest of the villagers. They were all to gather at the edge of town, on the green where traveling merchants peddled their wares. The village needed to discuss the events that surrounded the death of the Prefect's daughter and the danger that it might present to the town. The Sheriff took it upon himself to visit the Prefect to discuss the new information that the stranger, Tharon, had given him.

"So who is this Tharon and what can he possibly know about my daughter?" The Prefect was blunt.

The Prefect leaned back in his chair behind a massive desk, smoking his pipe. The Sheriff stood, respectful.

"He is not from around here, but he seems to know a lot already. He knew about the crow I heard last night outside my window. It got my dog in quite a stir," The Sheriff opened his case.

"Bird you say," The Prefect's shifted in his chair.

"Yes, a big bird. Sounded like a crow. I think it was a crow, at least. And Tharon knew that it was there," the Sheriff continued his case.

"Sheriff, I heard birds last night as well. Most unusual; very large, black birds. I would have thought they were crows, but they were much bigger. Did this Tharon say anything about what they mean?"

"He said that these birds are a sign that some creature called a Piasa has come to our town." The Sheriff began.

"Piasa? Don't think I've ever heard of a Piasa. What did he say it was?" The Prefect interrupted him.

"He says that this Piasa is some sort of vengeful spirit and it's angry about something. He even said that it probably has something to do with how we hunt."

"How we hunt? What could that possibly have to do with anything? People have to hunt to live. That's preposterous. Man's got to feed his family," the Prefect interrupted him again.

"Well, this Piasa that he spoke of is a spirit of the dead animals that we have hunted and it has come to hunt us. Tharon said that he has been following this for quite some time and that he has seen it kill many people. He also said that it could kill many more people in our town if we don't do something." The Sheriff prompted a response.

"This all sounds ridiculous. A man you never met before today comes into town and wants you to believe that some spirit of dead animals came to our village and killed my daughter. What sort of evidence does he have? Why should we listen to him? He speaks about birds and you immediately think that he has all the answers?" The prefect sat forward to lean on his elbows fixing the Sheriff with a steady gaze.

The Sheriff escorted the Prefect to the meeting. Tharon was waiting for them. When they arrived, half the town was already there.

About the Author

Aaron Todd is a devoted husband and Computer Operations Manager in a Philadelphia suburb. A classically trained literature buff and an award-winning poet, he has turned his attentions over the last year to his long-sought-after career as a novel writer. With his first work nearly finished, Aaron is actively seeking a publisher and agent. In his free time Aaron likes to jog, bike ride, read Star Wars novels, and enjoys a challenge at any level. With Football, Hockey, and Lacrosse as his favorite things to watch, activity is never in short supply.

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"Prefect, I think you should listen to him. At least hear what he has to say. I wouldn't want to hang an innocent man. And even if this doesn't turn out to be anything worth really hearing out, we still have Martin in custody. I know that you are already convinced that he did it, and I agree that the evidence is overwhelming, but could it hurt to listen to Tharon? He may be able to convince you that Martin is innocent and we may still find your daughter's killer."

The Prefect pondered his words for a few moments ignoring his pipe as the cinders burned out. He considered the Sheriff's arguments before answering, "Sheriff, if any other man in this town had come in here and said that to me, I would have thrown him out the front door without giving it a second thought. But during your years as sheriff you have always proven forthright with me. I think that I can listen to him.

I want Martin still held in custody. I don't want him getting away just because some perfect stranger has some crazy story for us to hear." The Prefect was clearly agitated as he waved his pipe in front of him, spilling some of the ash on his desk. "But when this is all over and Martin is still found guilty, I want him hanged immediately!"

"Understood, Prefect. And it will be done as you have decreed."

The Sheriff escorted the Prefect to the meeting. Tharon was waiting for them. When they arrived, half the town was already there. The rest of the people filtered in as the sun was setting. Everyone in the town attended; some willingly, some very grudgingly, but everyone came.

Conversations could be overheard about the birds that everyone had seen over the last few days. Individually, none of them had thought anything more of it than a migration, but here, at the gathering and the presence of a very mysterious stranger, they could do nothing but wonder what this was all about.

"Alright, everyone, now settle down," the Sheriff paused a few moments for the people gathered to quiet themselves. "By now, you've all heard that the prefect's daughter Moira was killed last night. We have someone in custody right now, and you can probably figure out who that is, but we're not sure if he is, in fact, guilty. The man you see standing here with us claims to know something about what happened last night and I'd like you all to listen to what he's got to say."

The crowd began to buzz at the presence of the stranger. Who was he? What did it mean to the rest of them?

"It may sound a little outrageous at first, but please hear him out. I think you'll find that what he says may mean something to you all," He stepped aside as Tharon approached.

"Townsppeople," Tharon started. "You all knew the Prefect's beautiful, young, daughter. Moira was a well loved and respected member of this wonderful community. But, she was taken from you by a violent, angry Spirit bent on killing humans as revenge for your hunting and your sport!"

This sent a ripple through the audience as his words reached them all. "Many of you have lost loved ones to tragedy, I'm sure. But to lose someone so young is such a loss to us all."

"This thing that has come to your town is called a Piasa. It is an animal spirit. A creature used by nature to take vengeance on man for killing the very creatures it has provided for you.

Many of you, or perhaps all of you, have noticed that over the last couple of days, there has been a sharp increase in the number of dark-colored birds around here. Some of you may have thought that they were crows or blackbirds, but they are nothing of the sort. Last night, I

can be sure that they were particularly noisy."

The crowd began hushing each other in order to hear what the stranger was saying.

"These birds follow the Piasa everywhere it goes, and on the night of a kill, they will all squawk louder and louder as death approaches, then grow silent once the victim has been sufficiently mutilated. Afterwards they return to their hiding places in the trees.

"The birds have remained in your town. That means that there will be another killing. I cannot say who or when it will be, but they are waiting for the Piasa, so it must still remain. I have seen the death this creature caused in numerous other towns. Yours is simply the next in line. Listen to me. What I say may save your lives."

An invisible wave went through the crowd as the people reacted to Tharon's words. Everyone began looking about to see if anyone they knew was missing. All the townspeople spoke at once, their concerns as grave as if they each expected to be the next victim.

"I cannot stress enough the importance of staying together in such as time as this. This creature likes to attack people when they are alone. Your town has attracted an animal spirit capable of killing without regard and it will hunt any one of you, as you have already seen," Tharon rested a hand on the shoulder of the prefect who stood on one side of him during the speech.

As Tharon continued to speak, the horror of their predicament came clearer. They had no choice but to remain here as a group. The whispers and murmurs grew louder as he spoke. Each person expressed their doubts and their fears of dying on this night if they just went home.

No one seemed to notice as large dark birds silently found purchase on the peaks and flats of houses and buildings nearby. Soon the branches of the shade oak were sagging, laden with the birds. They filled the trees that edged the green as well.

Then one of the birds cawed. Another followed the first, and another until a cacophony rose in a ring around the gathering. The birds made more noise than the crowd,

now, slowly silencing the people who stood shocked and frightened about what was going on above their heads.

Children cried as their mothers gripped them tightly. Fathers and husbands stared silently at the sky as they held their families. Their fates were no longer in their hands.

"Tharon, what is going on here?" the Sheriff demanded of the stranger. As he did so, the birds took flight over the crowd.

Tharon was uninterested in the Sheriff's challenge.

"Everyone, please remain calm. Just stay where you are," Tharon spoke for the benefit of the Sheriff and the Prefect. No one else was close enough to he heard.

A moving web of black feathers and claws streaked back and forth against the darkening sky as the shadow of something else appeared to block out the dying sun. An intricate, living, tightly woven avian net above them blanketed the assembly.

A man panicked within the dust cloud created by the beating wings. He pushed through the milling crowd. He fought for an escape. Bursting from the edge of the panicked group, he paused for just a moment, thinking he was free. That moment was all it took for the birds to swoop down and attack him. More tried with the same results. Some picked up rocks from the ground and threw them at the birds. The small projectiles merely bounced off the dark feathered shell as though they had hit a stone wall.

"Tharon, they've come! What can we do to stop this?" The prefect huddled at Tharon' side, screaming to be heard.

Tharon did not reply.

As mere seconds passed the crowd grew more difficult to see. The dust cloud had become a grainy curtain between the people and the rest of their lives.

"Sheriff, there is something you did not consider when we spoke earlier. You said that you would not hunt animals in a group; that would take the sport out of it.

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What if there was no sport involved? What if you simply wanted to slaughter them?" Tharon still stood, unwavering in his poise.

The Prefect whimpered. The Sheriff's eyes widened in horror. The town was led to massacre and the Sheriff had provided the directions.

The Prefect pulled away from Tharon who stared coldly down at the cowering man who only moments before was in command of the entire town. The village was Tharon's now and the Prefect knew it.

Tharon's words still hung in the air as he raised his arms above his head. His long dark coat formed into wings that lifted him off the ground. His body dissolved into the dusty air, then emerged as a massive bird. With a raucous cry he disappeared into the murder that would soon engulf them all.

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by Nash J. Devita

RPG Systems: d20 vs. the World

This is not to debate d20 vs. the rest of the gaming world, but, in fact, an exploration of the utilization of the d20 system vs. the multitude of other gaming systems out there. Even though I run the Other RPGs section here at Silven Crossroads, I am not taking sides. I am simply presenting the various arguments for each side, the logic behind those arguments, and hoping to spark some debate and informed comments regarding readers' takes on this topic.

I have heard many different gamers discuss the matter of usage of only the d20 system rather than using any other gaming system out there. I have also heard conversations from people who dislike the d20 system to such a degree that they refuse to use it in any form, *d20 Modern*, *Star Wars*, or *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition* or 3.5 edition.

Please note that neither I, nor any of the staff here at Silven Crossroads, necessarily subscribe to any of these lines of thought. The arguments listed are simply those that are common between gamers in person or on message boards.

d20 Only

d20 versatility

The d20 system is a versatile system. Thanks to books such as *d20 Modern* and the up coming *d20 Future* in addition to the primary d20 line *Dungeons & Dragons*, Wizards of the Coast has put together a system that is so versatile that it allows a great number of genres to be played with just one basic rule set. Yes, there are some necessary tweaks to change genres, but these are far fewer than the items that stay the same.

For example, if I want to run a horror game using *d20 Modern*, I am good to go. If suddenly I decide that I no longer wish to run horror but run pulp in its place I can still use the same books and rules. There is nothing new to buy and learn. If I suddenly wish to run a super hero type game, I could manage running a game in that genre by only purchasing one additional book and making a couple of minor modifications to the rules such as new feats.

OGL - Publishing

The Open Gaming License has allowed a countless number of publishers to produce products that utilize this system. While some of the titles that exist today are not worth the paper they are printed upon, many more are of extremely high quality. So many of these products would have never been in existence if it was not for the OGL. Heck, even TSR / Wizards of the Coast's biggest competitor, White Wolf Publishing, has embraced the OGL and has produced some of the better d20 titles that are on the market today.

This kind of support to publishing has allowed the *Ravenloft* setting continue to live. In many people's opinion, there is no better company to handle a setting such as *Ravenloft* than *Sword and Sorcery Studios*. *Sword and Sorcery Studios* is an imprint of *White Wolf Publishing*, a company who published the second best-selling role-playing game to date--*Vampire: The Masquerade*.

On the opposite side of that coin, it has been said that lack of support from outside companies destroyed some larger publishers such as TSR and FASA. This was not the only reason behind their collapse, but this was a contributing factor.

As much as the OGL allows horrible products to enter the market, it allows a higher quality of product over all to survive. That which is poor in quality will not be purchased while that which is higher in quality will be. Eventually, this creates a 'survival of the fittest' type of evolution in the role playing industry.

OGL - Open Content

By having so much open content, a great amount of pre-existing data can be used in creation of a new title. The classic *Dungeons & Dragons* game can take a multitude of new directions - fantasy adventure, horror, steam punk, etc.

It can really be summed up by a number of old adages:

- 1) That which is old can be new again.
- 2) Why reinvent the wheel if it is not necessary?
- 3) If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
- 4) Reduce, reuse, recycle.

Need I continue?

OGL - System Reference Documents

The invention of the *System Reference Document* has allowed a great number of gamers to play with out having to purchase hundreds of dollars in books. I shelled out \$60 on my *Dungeons & Dragons 3.0* books. It was not necessary for me to by the 3.5 version books for another \$90 thanks to the *D&D SRD*. People in my group are able to play BESM d20 thanks to the *SRD* that exists for that as well. They borrow my copy for some of the details, but they are able to use the *SRD* for all of the major work on characters or stories.

This simple fact allows a far greater number of individuals the ability to embrace the hobby that is role-playing. Such being the case, more individuals are likely to purchase RP books, even if only occasionally. This helps strengthen the RPG industry, community, and the economy all around.

Anything Other Than d20

Versatility

The d20 system is mostly focused around combat. There are so many other systems out there that allow more of a social or political story to be told. The Story Teller System (or the new Story Telling System) focuses much more on personal interaction but still allows a much deeper story to be told more easily. The *Tri-Stat* system from *Guardians of Order* allows an over the top, anime-esque style of combat that the d20 system could never hope to achieve - the d20 system is too straight forward to hope to achieve such a feel.

A more versatile feel has been attempted with the d20 system with games like *The End* from Tyranny Games. This begins to grasp a less combat oriented feel but it is still very combat focused and does not work perfectly for more social issues and interaction. That is left to the gamer because it is not inherent in the system.

Realism

Even though *d20 Modern* is far more realistic feeling than *Dungeons & Dragons*, it can not come even close to the level of realism the *Silhouette* system manages with modern and futuristic technology and action. The *Silhouette* system is not solely focused around action but it manages to grasp the realistic feel. That particular system also manages a pretty good amount of versatility while tackling the realism, as can be seen by the number of games that the *Silhouette* system supports - *Tribe 8*, *Heavy Gear*, *Jovian Chronicles*, etc.

Role Playing

The d20 system relies too heavily on dice rolls, not actual role-playing. This has been summed up by a great number of people saying it is "roll-playing", not "role-playing." The Story Teller system encourages games of social interaction while the *d20 system* encourages combat interaction over anything else. It should not take a great group of players to make the system work in all means necessary like the *d20 system* does. The system should encourage all types of encounters and interactions and solutions to them.

Flooded Market

By limiting the publishers who can publish titles for a particular system, integrity is not going to be compromised. By having so many different publishers distributing so many poor titles, the market has become flooded and buyers can not trust that a title is of an acceptable quality, in writing or content, thanks to the name or system.

Books such as *The Book of Erotic Fantasy* are of an unacceptable quality, focusing more on smut than on the hobby if role playing. It is books like this that made Wizards of the Coast release a press release regarding that title and others and their new need to approve all titles that are to

hold the d20 logo. If they limited the publishers who could use their system to begin with, Wizards would not have had to release any statement regarding any product and their views on it. In the days of TSR, this was never necessary.

Adult products are fine within reason. Products such as those put out by *Black Dog Publishing* (from White Wolf Publishing) and the *Book of Vile Darkness* are fine but there are products that have crossed that line that should have never had the opportunity to do so. They are labeled as adult but are still within the bounds of the hobby.

There are also far too many books that are poorly written, edited, envisioned, executed, etc. Yes, some books are bound to slip through the cracks within any publishing company but no system has as much 'garbage' as the d20 system. There should not be so many supplements that so many GM's disallow because they are so broken. Sadly, within the d20 system, there are so many titles that are 'broken' that a buyer can far too easily purchase a title that has no hope of being used without a number of major changes through house rules.

Again, these arguments are not necessarily my own or those of any Silven Crossroads employee. I know that not everyone will agree with all of the 'arguments' and will have arguments against them. Others will agree whole heartedly and will have further logic to back them up. Input is welcome. Flames are not. I hope to see civil debate. I do not want to see any arguments form.

Those listed are far from the only arguments that can be made - on both sides. As was stated above, input is welcome. Actually, it is more than welcome, it is encouraged.

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job -

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

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Dice:

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

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job

- **Miniatures:** Small figures covered in paint representing a character is the one lasting legacy role-playing games have from their war game ancestors. The use of individualized figures can add a great deal to play, especially if the GM is willing to use a large hex/square map. While miniatures can be expensive, especially for GMs who have to field monsters and enemies, they add a great deal to the game.

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by Matthew J. Hanson

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

A Midsummer's Day Carol

Stave 1: Amendale's Ghost

Amendale the Astounding was dead to begin with. He was really, really, *really* dead. I am just trying to make this clear, because if you think that he's alive it will not make any sense when his ghost comes back. You would just say, "Oh look, it's Amendale the Astounding. Why is he so transparent?" but since he is dead, instead you will say, "Hey, it's Amendale the Astounding, isn't he supposed to be dead?"

The answer is yes. Yes, he is dead. Dead as a coffin nail.

Starlanko knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Starlanko the Magnificent had condemned Amendale the Astounding to death.

Oh, but he was a silver tongued rascal, Starlanko the Magnificent! A fast talker, smoother operator, hustler, hawker, and huckster. Starlanko was the sort of man that could sell a *freeze water* spell to an Eskimo. (That is, of course, if Eskimos existed in Starlanko's world, or if he did in theirs).

Starlanko had neither office nor home that he called his own, but instead roamed the land in search of profit, bedding in whatever common house happened to be cheap and convenient.

At a table in the corner, Starlanko could sit and watch the goings on in the bar room. His associate, Redreck the fierce—a well-muscled man, good with a sword—was away for a few days. From Starlanko's belt hung Funbane, the talking sword that Starlanko never swung.

A woman Starlanko recognized entered the room. He watched her scan the room, until her eyes landed upon the Wizard. "Starlanko! Merry Midsummer's! I heard you were in town. Why didn't you come by?" "Merry Midsummer's to you, Sarret!" Starlanko stood and embraced the woman. It was not the sort of gesture normally displayed between

strangers. "I planned to stop by in a day or two. How are Mom and Dad?"

"A day or two? Brother, tomorrow's Midsummer's. You should eat Midsummer's Day feast with us."

"Sarret, if I could I would, but I am afraid I have already accepted an invitation to another event."

"Mom and Dad are well, but they miss you. They haven't seen you in seven years."

"Nonsense, I came for the wedding didn't I," Starlanko said.

"Yes."

"And when little Arrabelle was born."

Sarret folded her arms. "Twice in seven years, and both times you're here for a few hours, then gone."

"I lead a busy life these days."

Sarret paused before she asked the next question. "Starlanko, is it because of Amendale?"

Maybe Starlanko had not heard her. "I understand you're expecting another," he said.

"Yes..." It took Sarret by surprise. She'd barely learned that she was pregnant herself. It would not show for months. "I'm sure it would do Mother and Father's hearts good if you disappointed you previous engagement."

"The party is being thrown by the Wizard's guild of Camiran. Wizards are coming from all over the kingdom. It's a networking opportunity I can't pass up."

"A fine way to spend Midsummer's day," Sarret

About the Author

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

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huffed. "In a stuffy old room, with stuff old wizards, when you could be enjoying a feast and games with your family."

"I beg thy pardon," interjected Funbane, "but I feel it proper to mention that the Midsummer's Day was established to bring honor to Leolus the Sun Lord. Perhaps thou might spend the day in most pious prayer. Thy soul would reap the rewards."

"I'm sorry Sarret," Starlanko said, "but the reason I didn't stop by earlier, is because I knew you would try to make me come to the feast. I thought it would be easier if I waited until it was too late."

"Easier yes, but also ruder. Isn't there something I can do to change your mind?"

"I doubt there's anything you would actually be able to accomplish. If you were able to make the Wizards' Guild of Camiran accept invitations to the family feast, that would probably alter my decision. In the meantime please stay and have a drink with me, I would welcome the company. If you have other business you must attend to, I understand."

"I can stay for a drink or two, but I still have a great deal to purchase in preparation for tomorrow's feast."

So they drank a couple glasses of cheap wine, talked about the times, and Sarret left.

The same door that let Sarret out, at the same time let two gentlemen in. One was tall and lithe, while the other was short and stocky. Both were well dressed.

The gentlemen approached Starlanko's table, and informed him of their worthy cause. They were soliciting donations to help the poor and downtrodden of the city, and wondered whether Starlanko would like to make a donation.

"I certainly would," Starlanko said.

That was excellent. How much should they put him down for?

"The depends. What are the different levels?"

The tall gentleman informed Starlanko that there were no particular levels. He could give whatever sum he pleased.

"But where are the cut offs in your newsletter? You know, 'The following gave between this many and this many gold pieces.'"

The gentlemen did not have a newsletter.

"You really should. It keeps your patrons informed, and gives them some recognition. And give titles to the various donation levels. This so much gold makes you a knight, more to be a baron, more still to be a duke. People love that sort of things, especially titleless merchants, who really should be a high priority demographic

They were not quite sure what a demographic was.

"What about tote bags? Do you give away tote bags?"

No.

"Good sirs, I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you're marketing department is in some serious need of improvement."

The short man said they did not have a marketing department.

"I figured as much."

It was not about marketing, it was about helping the poor.

"I beg your pardon sir," said Starlanko, "but everything is about marketing. You're new to this, I can tell. It's a common mistake when you start to think, 'We can't spend money on advertising; it would only take money away from the poor.' Let me assure you that money spent on a little public relations is an investment that will pay for itself ten times over. Tell you what: I normally work in the commercial sector, but I like your cause, and you seem like honest gentlemen. For a nominal fee I would be willing to do some consulting."

The gentlemen did not think that would be necessary.

"No? Well then would twenty gold pieces be an adequate donation?"

Yes, that would be adequate indeed.

"Hmm... is that so. I'd better make it forty gold pieces." He reached to the coin purse that hung from his belt. "Oh dear, I only have the twenty on me."

That was all right, the short gentlemen informed him. Twenty gold pieces was still a fine donation.

"No. Take this just as a preliminary donation. I should be able to find the additional twenty by the day after tomorrow. Why don't you stop by the tavern again in two days. Around the same time?"

"Once more I beseech thy pardon, master." The short gentleman jumped at the unexpected voice that came from Starlanko's scabbard. "Dost thou not have more gold in thy *bag of holding*?"

"Oh, of course, thank you, Funbane." Inside Starlanko was not thanking Funbane. "I just bought the bag yesterday," he explained. "It's a Midsummer's gift to myself."

The gentlemen understood. They thanked him kindly and circled the room hunting for more victims.

Starlanko supped in the common room. After his meal he waited for another hour or so in hopes of hearing a particularly juicy rumor. When none presented itself, and the room was dying down, Starlanko retired.

The inn where Starlanko was staying for the night was of the higher class than what he usually frequented (though he found himself frequenting the sort more and more frequently.) Among the many decorations in the inn were different animals, one sculpted into each of the door locks. Starlanko's lock was meant to look like a lion, but on that Midsummer's eve night, when he placed the key into the lion's jaws a most peculiar thing happened.

Starlanko the Magnificent saw in the door, not the face of a lion, but the face of his dead business partner Amendale the Astounding. Starlanko stared at the face, blinked twice, and then the lion was a lion once more. Starlanko cast *detect magic* on the lock, but it radiated nothing.

Starlanko tried the spell again inside the room, but the only magic auras in the room were caused by the magic items Starlanko had brought. Not satisfied, he searched the room by hand very carefully, taking twenty times as long as he normally would. Starlanko still found nothing of consequence. Finally, just in case, Starlanko cast a spell of *alarm* and of *what's-his-name's faithful watchdog*. These he hoped we be enough to dissuade any intruders.

Starlanko could not sleep. It was unusual for Starlanko. The bed was perfectly soft, the room was dark, there were no loud noises coming from below. There was just a sense of something not being right that gnawed at the back of his mind. Soon he heard a sound coming from beyond his room; the clank of chains being dragged up the stairs. Starlanko's staff had been leaning against the bed. Now Starlanko grasped it and took it beneath the covers with him. He watched the door through squinted eyes.

Through that door a face appeared, soon followed by a body, soon followed by a long length of chains. The chains were new, but the body and face Starlanko recognized. It was Amendale the Amazing, now dead for some seven years.

The specter opened its mouth and spoke in a voice that seemed to echo through a massive cavern. "RISE, STARLANKO THE MAGNIFICENT, I BEAR YOU TIDINGS."

Starlanko rose, and because it was his habit, he cast a spell to detect magic.

"I AM NO ILLUSION, STARLANKO, AND I ASSURE YOU I CANNOT BE DISPELLED."

Starlanko walked around the ghost, checking for any sign of a light being thrown on him. He rapped on the door to make sure it was solid, and then opened it to check the other side for clues.

"IN LIFE I WAS YOUR PARTNER, AMENDALE THE ASTOUNDING."

Starlanko poked the apparition with his staff. It passed right through.

"Would you stop that!?" The ghost's voice took on a much more human tone.

"I'm sorry, but thought this was some sort of trick."

"Well it's not."

"It's not an unreasonable conclusion, you know. If I wanted something from Starlanko the Magnificent, and I knew about our history, I would probably try a trick like this."

"Listen, Starlanko. It's me: Amendale. Ask me something only I would know."

"Fine, fine. I believe you," Starlanko conceded.

"Come on, go ahead and ask."

"Okay, who was the girl I had a crush on when I was twelve?"

"Umm... that was Mindora... or Cindora. Something ending with an -indora."

"Candessa."

"Yes, Candessa. That was going to be my next guess."

"Amendale, shouldn't your soul be transmigrated to another plane of existence?"

"Yes, that's where it spends most of it's time, but they've let me out for a little bit so I could warn you."

"Warn me about what?"

"CHANGE YOUR WAYS, OR YOUR SOUL WILL BE FORFEIT."

"I think my soul will do just fine, thank you. You are hardly one to advise soul cleansing."

"I WEAR THE CHAINS THAT I FORGED IN LIFE."

"Really, I didn't know you were such a blacksmith."

"It's a metaphor," the sprit said.

"Really?"

"You're mocking me."

"No!"

"You are. I can tell. You always thought I was dumber than you."

"I wasn't dumb enough to get myself killed."

"I was only doing what you taught me."

"I never told you to become a murderer."

"You taught me to do anything to get the edge, to get the best magic, the most coin."

"I told you to protect your long term interests. It doesn't matter if you have five coins today if you're going to loose ten tomorrow."

"You know what? If I wanted to be verbally abused I wouldn't have left that squalid little abyss I call home these days."

"Don't feel like you have to stay on my account."

"Don't worry. I'll be gone as soon as I deliver the other part of the message."

"Go ahead and deliver it then."

"YOU WILL BE VISITED BY THREE SPIRITS. THE FIRST WILL ARRIVE TONIGHT AT THE STRIKE OF ONE. THE SECOND WILL APPEAR AT THAT SAME HOUR TOMORROW NIGHT. THE THIRD SPIRIT WILL COME THE NIGHT AFTER,

WHEN THE LAST BELL OF MIDNIGHT CEASES TO SOUND."

"Anything else?"

"No, not really."

"Weren't you going to be going then?"

"Yeah, I'm on my way."

"Well?"

"Don't you want to ask about the spirits or something?"

"I suppose I should?"

"THEY ARE THREE SPIRITS, EACH BEARING A LESSON TO HELP YOU CHANGE YOUR WAYS."

"That's nice."

"I WEAR THE CHAINS THAT I FORGED IN LIFE."

"Yes, you said that already."

"Oh, right. I'll be going then." The spirit turned and walked for the door.

Starlanko stopped him. "Amendale, for what it's worth, I'm sorry. And for a while there—I mean, like when you cast your first cantrip—I was really proud of you."

"Thank you, brother."

Starlanko watched the ghost of his former business partner and brother leave. It walked through the door from whence it came. Starlanko lay down upon his bed, and fell fast asleep.

Stave 2: The First of the Three Spirits

Starlanko the Magnificent awoke as the bell in the nearby clock tower tolled the hour: twelve strokes in all. Starlanko thought first that he had slept through the entire day, and into the next night, but he remembered the words of his dead brother: that the first of the spirits shall visit him that night when the bell tolls one. If the ghost was to be

trusted—and Starlanko was by no means convinced that it was—then Starlanko had only slept two hours.

Starlanko knew that three hours was not a lot of rest to face a spirit on, but it was better than two. Additionally if the spirit's arrival turned out to be a false promise, Starlanko did not want to waste an hour of sleep over it. The choice then seemed clear.

Starlanko was soon again fast asleep, though not for long.

"Starlanko!" A low voice roused the wizard from his newfound slumber. It seemed to come from far away, which cause Starlanko a slight surprise when he opened his eyes, and found a childlike man standing at the foot of his bed. Starlanko would have judged him a typical halfling had the man's head not shone brilliantly.

"And you I suppose are the first of the three spirits?"

"Indeed. I am the Ghost of Midsummer's Past."

"Long past?"

"Your past."

"You would be, wouldn't you? And you've come to teach me a lesson is it?"

The Spirit nodded.

"About how long do you think this lesson will last?"

"To Spirits, time is not an issue."

"All right then, Spirit. Let's have the lesson."

The Ghost of Midsummer's Past took Starlanko's hand, and lead him to the window. Starlanko began to mutter words in an ancient tongue.

"What are you doing?" The spirit asked.

"I'm casting a *fly* spell upon myself," Starlanko said. "We are going out the window, yes? I'd rather not fall."

"Such magics are unnecessary. Bear but a touch of my hand there," the Spirit laid its hand upon Starlanko's heart, "and you shall be upheld."

Then they stepped through the window, and floated above the city. As Starlanko watched, the city around him shrank, but not because they flew higher. Buildings unbuilt themselves, trees grew younger, and the few people on the street became fewer. They passed over many rooftops until they found one Starlanko new most well, and alighted at the door.

"Do you know this place?" the Spirit asked.

"How could I not," Starlanko said. "It is my old family home." A thought occurred to Starlanko. "If I may ask Sprit, what should we do to avoid altering the space-time continuum?"

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," the Spirit explained. "They have no consciousness of us." It passed through the wall into the Starlanko's old house. Starlanko quickly followed.

"How young I once was," Starlanko laughed, immediately recognizing his former self: the precocious child of four, sitting at the floor before his uncle.

"And you remember this night?" the Spirit asked.

"This is the night when it all began."

They turned to watch the young boy and the old man.

"See this coin?"

The child nodded.

"Watch it very closely. Now I close my hand tightly around it. Keep your eye on the coin now! I say the magic words, 'Abra Cadabra,' and behold!" With great flair the old man's fingers burst open, to reveal an open palm. The child stared with astonishment.

"But wait, there's more," said Starlanko of the present.

"But wait, there's more," the shadow of his uncle echoed.

"What's this behind your ear?" Starlanko and the shadow said in unison.

The old man reached behind the child's ear and plucked out a silver coin, identical to the first. "Here, I think this belongs to you," he said, and flicked the coin to his nephew.

"Do it again."

"Perhaps another time."

"Can you teach me how?"

"Maybe next year."

"I held him to it, you know," Starlanko mused half to the Spirit, half to himself. "The truth is I was disappointed when I learned it wasn't really magic, but I didn't want Uncle to know, so I learned his lessons faithfully."

The room swirled. The occupants now sat around a long table and were about to eat a splendid feast. At the head a man was standing, about to give a toast. Starlanko found his younger self among the multitude, a boy of ten sitting between a girl of thirteen and a boy of eight.

Starlanko recognized this scene as well, and he knew the toast his father was about to make.

"Family, friends, I am truly glad that you can all be with us this day of celebration. And today is truly a day of celebration indeed, for we have just learned today, that our eldest son," The man rested his hand upon the shoulder of his wife seated next to him, "our son eldest son has been accepted into the Wizard Academy of Dalphithius, the most prestigious academy on the Northern Continent, and I dare say the greatest academy in all this world." The small crowd broke into applause. The young version of Starlanko buried his head in one hand, but could not help but smile.

"Why didn't you tell me?" whispered the younger boy next to him.

"Starlanko, son, I just want to say how proud I am

of you. Now I managed to take a dying woolen business and turn it around."

"Yeah, turned it around into the biggest cloth merchant of all time!" shouted one of the invited guests.

"Please, Elric, if I may. I'll admit I've been fortunate enough to make some profit in this world, but I would be kidding myself if I thought that made me something special. There are a thousand merchants out there just like me, but you, son, you're going to be a wizard. That's something special. A merchant has the chance to be good, but a wizard has the opportunity to be magnificent."

The audience burst again into applause. And over the roar Starlanko could not hear what the target of this praise said to his brother, but the wizard remembered the words: "Don't worry, Amendale. In just two more years he'll be saying that about you." The words rang in the ears of Starlanko's memory. They reverberated down to his mouth, through his throat, and came to rest as a stone in his stomach.

The room swirled again. On the surface much remained the same. There was still a throng of people seated at the table. A few faces had changed, one feaster replaced with another. They had aged slightly, just two years.

On the surface things remained the same, but the air was different. Heavier. People spoke not in the loud boisterous toasts of old, but in hushed whispers between neighbors. Despite himself Starlanko could only hear the conversation of the two brothers.

"Don't worry about it, Amendale. Mom and Dad will find a good wizard to apprentice you too. Dalphithius isn't as great as everybody says."

"It's good enough for you."

"I'll let you in on a secret, but you can't tell mom or dad."

"Okay. What is it?"

The older of the two children quickly swept his head back and forth to make sure nobody was listening.

"The only reason I really like Dalphithius is Candessa."

"What's Candessa?"

"Who's Candessa?"

"Okay, *who's* Candessa?"

"She's another student at Dalphithius."

"A girl? Is she your *girl friend*?"

"No."

"You're in *love* with her aren't you?"

"Shut up." The young Starlanko kicked his brother beneath the Table.

"Starlanko and Candessa sitting in a tree—"

"You know I was going to help you?"

"With what?"

"With magic dummy. Until Mom and Dad find you a master to work under, I thought I'd show you the stuff I learned at Dalphithius during my breaks. And I can find you texts to study. I've been reading about a lot that they don't teach us in class."

"Like what?"

"Like... okay, they're teaching us Draconic, but so far they've just taught us boring stuff, so I looked a bunch up myself. Like *grufblar*."

"What's *grufblar* mean?"

"I can't tell, but you *grufblar* all the time."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"Come on, tell me what it means."

"I won't tell you," the older child said. "But I'll let

you barrow by Draconic Dictionary if you want."

The young Amendale smiled.

The old Starlanko felt his heart yearning for simpler times.

The room swirled again. For the first time Starlanko found that he and the Spirit were not at his old home. They were in the entryway of a small shop. The tables were covered with potions, the shelves with magic texts, while dried lizards and other strange substances hung from the ceiling. Outside the window a sign swayed in the wind. The sign read, "Starlanko the Magnificent & Amendale the Astounding's Magical Emporium." Below the lettering was painted a wizard in classic robes holding a magic wand, turning a frog back into a man (or a man into a frog. Starlanko had enjoyed the ambiguity when the sign was commissioned).

In the room, rummaging through papers at the desk, sat a younger version of Starlanko, but older than the others they had seen. He was now some twenty years of age.

"Spirit, this is not a shadow of the past I wish to relive."

"What you wish is of no consequence," the Ghost of Midsummer's Past replied.

In a few short minutes a second man slid through the door. His brow was covered in sweat. He was trying to hold back his panting.

"Amendale, what's going on?"

"Starlanko, you need to help me."

"The city guard was here asking for you."

"What did you tell them?"

"That I didn't know where you were."

"Was that all? Did you tell them anything else?"

"No."

"What were you doing last night?" Amendale asked. He kept checking over his shoulder.

"I was working."

"Here?"

"Yes, here. What's this about?"

"Starlanko, this is very important. If anybody asks were I was last night, you have to tell them I was with you."

"Amendale, people are talking about you."

"Please, Starlanko, can you do this for me?"

"Amendale, they're saying you killed someone."

"I need you to do this for me, as your partner, as your brother," Amendale implored. "I need you to tell them that I was with you last night."

"Amendale. You need to tell me. Did you kill anybody?"

Amendale swallowed hard. "I didn't want to. I just went there to get a look at the spell. That summoning spell he's using to steal our business. I just wanted to see how it worked, but he had some sort of alarm. It all happened so quickly. Just a shocking grasp. I only wanted to scare him a little, but he just crumpled. Please Starlanko, I need your help."

"Didn't I tell you I had a plan?"

"Yes, but... damn it, for once I wanted to be the one who solved the problem."

The young Starlanko sighed. "Don't worry, Amendale. It will be all right. We'll figure out something. You'll be alright." The brothers embraced.

The room swirled once more, and Starlanko was once again back in the inn, and the Ghost of Midsummer's Past was nowhere to be seen. Starlanko could hear the clock tower outside striking twelve. The world outside his window was still dark. He had spent a whole day in the company of the company of the spirit, and yet felt not the least bit tired. Quite the contrary, he was so awake now, that hope of

getting any sleep before the next spirit was beyond him.

So Starlanko took a book from his possessions and read it by magic illumination as the bells chimed off the quarter hour, half hour, three quarters, and finally the hour itself. One o'clock, the hour when the second spirit would arrive.

Stave 3: The Second of the Three Spirits

No sooner had the bell's last resonance died, than nothing happened. The room was dark. Starlanko the Magnificent looked around the room for any apparition that could be considered a spirit, and finding none, he thought it would be best to try to sleep.

The only problem was with the light that came under the bottom of the door, and through the small cracks as well. It was not a bright light at first, but kept getting brighter, and brighter still, until at last it seemed as though the sun itself was roaming the inn's hallway.

Starlanko rose to investigate the situation. No sooner had he placed his hand upon the knob, than a voice boomed from the other side, "Enter and know me better, man!"

Starlanko passed through the door. It was the hall of the inn, that was most certain, but it had undergone a strange transformation. The walls were lined with honeysuckle, and there was a table running down the center heaped with every food the tongue could know of.

At the opposite end stood a great man, so tall he needed to duck his head to fit entirely into the corridor. Were Starlanko not expecting a spirit, he would have thought this man had giant blood. He was clothed in deep green robes made from the finest silk, and about his head he wore a crown of flowers. "You, I presume are the second of the three spirits."

"Indeed. I am the Ghost of Midsummer's Present."

"And you have come for the betterment of my soul."

"Indeed."

"Well then Spirit, let's waste no time."

"Touch my robe," the Spirit commanded. Starlanko did so, and the spirit led him out of the inn, and through the early morning streets. As the morning turned into day, men, woman, and children filled the streets on some last minute errand: to buy a goose, or ham. They whizzed by with a supernatural speed. It was as though, in an effort to get to its true purpose, the day itself had cast haste upon all its occupants.

After the shops closed the people continued to flow, going now to the homes of their friends and relatives. So many were on the street, that one might think all the houses were emptied, yet there was always somebody home to greet the visitors when they arrived.

This Spirit soon led Starlanko to the old familial home, and then inside. A great deal had changed from his memories and the events of Midsummer's Past. Starlanko's father and mother were both there, as was his sister Sarret. But his parents' hair was going gray, and Sarret was no longer a child, but had a child of her own.

The room had been redecorated, and what remained from parties long passed had aged many years. There were even more faces that Starlanko did not recognize. Many he could not have recognized, because —like Sarret's daughter Arrabelle— they would not have been born when Starlanko last attended a Midsummer's Day feast.

But then there were many things that had not changed. There were still the raucous games, made even more raucous still by Arrabelle and the other children. When it came the girl's turn to act in charades, she could scarcely contain her laughter, so amusing was the idea of acting an elephant.

Arrebelle's father Pater—Sarret's husband and Starlanko the Magnificent's brother-in-law—had an amusing game of his own.

"Guess who I am," he said. "Ah, Merry Midsummer's to you all. Pater, you look good, did you loose some weight? Of course I have a few minutes to stop and chat, but not long! I have to go meet some eccentric old

men with a propensity towards turning things into dung beetles.” Most of the adults at the party laughed.

“Right,” Starlanko said. “I probably deserved that.”

“Why you’re my dear brother, Starlanko the Magnificent,” Sarret replied, not as amused as the others. The crowd gave an afterchuckle.

“Who’s Stolinko, Mommy?” Arrabelle asked.

“Starlanko. He’s Mommy’s brother, dear. Your uncle.”

“Where is he?”

“Oh,” Sarret said, “he travels a lot. He’s very busy. He’s a wizard. He does magic.”

“I like magic!” Arrabelle said.

“Yes, dear, I know you do.”

The most familiar element of all was the great feast. Turkey, goose, and lamb were all served, along with stuffings, puddings, mountains of potatoes, and valleys of fresh fruit.

“This is all very good, Spirit,” Starlanko said, “but I’m not sure what I’m supposed to take away from it.”

“No?”

“Perhaps you want to show me the joys of what I’d be missing, but I believe there is more than one way to have fun.”

“Really? Let us take a look then, at the Wizards’ Guild of Camiran.”

The spirit led to a tower at the heart of town. The highest level of the tower was a single large room occupied by a multitude of robed men and woman. Mostly men. While woman had been given the same legal rights as men decades before Starlanko was born, the de facto world was slower to change. And an old boys-club like the Wizard’s Guild of Camiran was among the slowest changers of all.

The gathering was a far cry from the party Starlanko had just left. A buffet table along one wall was the only source of sustenance, mainly in the form of cheeses and crackers. While the hors d’oeuvres were complimentary, the wine cost extra.

The people gathered in small cliques. They spoke in hushed tones and eyed the other clusters suspiciously.

“Okay Spirit, it’s not the most lively scene,” Starlanko admitted, “but I’m sure it has its redeeming qualities.”

Starlanko thought he saw one of those redeeming qualities across the room. A young woman, about Starlanko’s own age, peeled away from one group, and headed for another. Starlanko drew nearer. She looked familiar, like somebody Starlanko had known at the academy.

“Hello, my name’s Candessa Voliar. I’m afraid I rather new, and I don’t really know anybody. Would you mind introducing yourselves?”

“My name is Serdric,” a gray wizard with a long beard droned. “This is Pitharc, Werlis, and Nathiarc.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Candessa said. She touched her forehead as a sign of respect. A gesture the others did not reciprocate. “Would you mind telling me a little something about what you do?”

“We’re wizards,” Serdric replied.

“Yes, I gathered that. I was wondering if maybe you could tell me something a little more specific. Is there any area of magic you concentrate on? Do you maintain a business or the like?”

Serdric appeared to be the spokesman for the group. “We deal with highly advanced topics. I doubt you would understand them. Merry Midsummer’s.”

“You never know. Maybe you could give it a try?”

“I think, perhaps not. Merry Midsummer’s.”

“Oh. I see.” Candessa left them to their own

devices. She did not mind paying extra for the wine.

“All right, spirit. I think I’ve seen enough.”

The spirit nodded his head, and led Starlanko again into the streets. They stopped at many more houses, from nobles, to paupers, merchants, miners and sailors, and all were celebrating Midsummer’s as merrily as the last.

Starlanko and the Spirit left the city and traveled through the countryside to watch the revels of farmers and shepherders. On they traveled still from town to town. They came to a great hall, which was giving a mighty festival. Many actors, jugglers, and musicians filed on and off the stage. One in particular caught Starlanko’s ear: a tenor who played the lyre while he sang an enchanting ballad of a maiden fair. The wizard had heard this singer before.

Starlanko surveyed the audience, and saw his long time associate, Redreck the Fierce sitting alone at a table in the back, sipping from a tall glass of mead. Redreck had not said where he was going on this holiday. Obviously he had come here, to hear this man sing.

Starlanko could not tarry long. The spirit had him venture farther, leaving even the kingdom of Camiran behind him. It was a long night if only a night is was. Starlanko expected that the Spirit had the power to alter time as well as space, making a single night seem to stretch on ad infinitum. By the time they had returned to Starlanko’s inn room, the Spirit had undergone a change.

“Spirit, your hair and beard are gray. Is your life upon this world limited to just this night?”

“Indeed it is.”

“Then I thank you for sharing your life with me. I am honored, considering there must be other, greater, things that your life could have been spent on.”

“You are a strange man, Starlanko the Magnificent,” the Spirit said. “You are a riddle to even a spirit.”

The clock tower nearby began tolling once more, signaling that another day had been lost with the spirit.

"Remember, what you have seen on this night, Starlanko, and learn well from it."

The bell's twelfth, and final toll chimed, and the Ghost of Midsummer's Present disappeared.

There was now only the Ghost of Midsummer's Yet to Come.

Stave 4: The Ghost of Midsummer's Yet to Come

Across the room, Starlanko the Magnificent beheld the phantom, draped in a black robe and hood. Its entire body was hidden except for a single withered hand, pointed at Starlanko's heart. The spirit glided across the ground, like a bank of fog rolling across a graveyard.

"You, I presume, are the Spirit of Midsummer's Yet to Come?"

The Spirit answered not, but instead pointed his hand toward the door of Starlanko's room.

"And you have come to show me shadows of things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us."

The hood of the phantom's cloak lowered as though the Spirit were nodding.

"Very well then, lead the way."

The spirit glided away as smoothly as it had approached. Starlanko followed. He was not sure how got to the middle of the street, it seemed as though Starlanko had always been standing in the heart of the city.

The Spirit approached a group of businessmen, and pointed to them with his bony finger. Starlanko listened.

"I don't know how it happened," said a man with a large jaw. "All I know is that he's dead."

"You know *when* he died?" asked a woman with dark curls.

"Last night, I reckon. Though it wouldn't surprise me if he'd been lying on the floor for days, given the

amount of visitors he gets."

"You think there'll be anybody at the funeral?" ask a third speaker, a tall man who looked as comfortable with his tallness as a teenager at the height of his growth spurt.

"Oh, I'm sure there will be *somebody* there," answered the first man. "The Wizards Guild will have to send somebody by, won't they?"

"Do you think there'll be lunch?" the tall man asked.

"Not a proper lunch," the large jawed man said. "Probably just cheese and crackers."

"And they'll charge extra for wine," said the curly headed woman. The others laughed. The group broke up and each continued his or her own chores.

Starlanko saw the Spirit pointing now to two men Starlanko recognized. Both were of the Wizards' Guild of Camiran.

"Good morning," said the first tapping his forehead. The second man repeated the salutation.

"The old crank has finally shuffled off," said the first man again.

"So it would seem. The codger sure took his time."

"All things come to those who wait they say. You hear the news from up north?"

"About the elves?"

"Yes, that."

"Heard it yesterday. Good day to you."

"Good day."

The two wizards separated, and each went his own way.

Two conversation now, the Spirit had pointed out, and both dealt with the death of an unlikable personality.

Starlanko recalled the words of the Ghost of Midsummer's Past.

Your past.

"Spirit," Starlanko said. "I have not yet seen the shadow of myself in this future. Please, I would like to know what has become of me."

The Specter made no response, save to point once more with its ghoulish hand. Starlanko had no choice but to follow. The spirit lead him to a place that sank Starlanko's heart, even though it was not unexpected.

The Spirit and the wizard passed through rows of gravestones, coming finally to one, at which the Spirit stopped and pointed.

Starlanko reminded himself, that a sure thing was best. He crouched to read the stone, knowing and dreading what it would read.

Serdric the Wise

No, on second thought, that had not been what Starlanko had been expecting.

"Spirit, what is the meaning of this?" he asked.

The Ghost of Midsummer's Yet to Come pointed his finger at Starlanko and then again at the head stone.

"No, that's not me. Unless I change my name in the future, which would not be inconceivable. Still I don't think I would call myself anything 'the Wise.' It has no flair. Sounds more like something a priest would be called."

The Spirit pointed again to the gravestone and again to Starlanko.

"No." Starlanko spoke slowly and loudly as though the Spirit were hard of hearing. "Starlanko the Magnificent," he pointed at himself. "Serdric the Wise," he pointed at the grave. "Not the same," he waved his hands back and forth and shook his head.

The spirit reached into its robes and withdrew a roll of parchment. Upon it was written: *Serdric the Wise.*

"No, here." Starlanko took a business card from his belt pouch. "Look, 'Starlanko the Magnificent.'"

The Spirit's cowl shifted, from the parchment to the card, from the card to the gravestone, from the gravestone to Starlanko, then back to the parchment again. The spirit put the parchment back into the folds of his robe, then turned and shook his withered fist at an unseen presence in the sky.

"Well, now what?"

The Spirit held up its index finger. It needed a minute.

The Spirit produced another piece of parchment from its robes, and a quill this time. It began furiously scribbling. Starlanko edged around, hoping to peer over the Ghost's shoulder, but before he got the chance, the spirit whipped its hood around, clutched the scroll to his chest, and glared (if a figure with no discernable eyes can be said to glare) at Starlanko.

"Okay, if it's that important to you," Starlanko said and shuffled off (but not in the figurative sense).

The Spirit finished its scribbery, and put the new parchment away. The sun emerged in the sky above them, and the fog melted away. People thronged all around Starlanko, some were aged faces of those he recognized, but many more were unknown to him. A large portrait of himself stood not far off, and below it was a grave freshly dug.

There was food provided: meats, breads, fruits, salads, more: a banquet that rivaled the King's own. And the wine was free. This was the sort of death Starlanko had always envisioned for himself. This was the death of a salesman.

There was a raised platform not far from Starlanko's portrait. Soon a knight in shining armor, a paladin who bore the crest of the Silver Guard stood on the dais. Starlanko did not recognize him.

"Your attention please," the paladin said. Then brandished his sword.

"Friends, Camiranians, countrymen," the sword spoke. Starlanko recognized it. "Lend me your ears. I come to bury Starlanko, not to praise him." Starlanko doubted Funbane had picked up a sense of humor in the intervening years, so he assumed that the sword's use of irony was unintentional. Praising Starlanko is exactly what Funbane proceeded to do, a long dry soliloquy about the great man who had struggled to liberate Funbane from the evil hoard of the Bandit King. Starlanko was a fierce champion of everything that is good and holy in the world. "Now cracks a noble heart," the sword Funbane concluded. "Good night sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." The paladin wiped a tear from his eye and resheathed the sword.

There were other speakers at the funeral, many that Starlanko did not know; many spoke of great things Starlanko of the present had not yet accomplished. Some spoke more favorably than others, but none waxed quite as poetically as Funbane had.

One speaker caught Starlanko's attention the minute she stepped onto the platform. She looked the spitting image of Starlanko's sister Sarret. Starlanko imagined the new speaker must look the spitting image of her mother.

"Hello. Like the rest of you I knew Starlanko the Magnificent. I did not know him well. Though he was my uncle, I only saw him every few years. Once, when I was younger I thought my uncle didn't like me. I asked my mother why. She said that was not true; I just reminded Starlanko of his brother. But I do not want to speak today of his absence as an uncle. I wanted to speak of the presence he had in all our lives.

"Some say Starlanko was the most famous wizard of our age, others delegate him only to the third most well known, but nearly all can agree that he was the most fun. While other wizards were locked in epic battles between good and evil, between those who would rule the world, and those who would liberate it, Starlanko concerned himself with the people. Not just with the royalty and arch magi, but with the cowherd and planter as well.

"Starlanko the Magnificent was many things during his lifetime: salesman and statesman; lover and fighter; but

I think the best legacy for Starlanko is that of the teacher. Before my uncle, wizardry was the providence of the wealthy and their children, or perhaps the rare lucky student that was taken under the wing of a generous master. Starlanko changed that, with his self-help books, and his free academy, Starlanko brought wizardry to everyone. He gave the world magic."

"Spirit," Starlanko said, "Are these shadows what *will* be, or what *may* be? If things are changed with knowledge gained on this night, can I alter the flow of this stream?"

The spirit said nothing, only pointed.

"Okay, we've got to work out a system. Point means 'yes;' no point means 'no.' Can I alter these shadows?"

The spirit continued to point.

"Very good then. Spirit, I am ready to return to my own world."

Stave Five: The End of it

Starlanko awoke to find himself in his own bed. (As much as a bed in an inn could be considered his own bed that is). He looked around. Everything had been as it had been before the arrival of Amendale's Ghost. Starlanko opened the window. There was a boy outside.

"Hello," Starlanko cried. "What day is it today?"

The boy stared at him quizzically.

"I am asking seriously."

"Why sir, it's Midsummer's day."

"Thank you kindly," Starlanko said and tossed the boy a few coins. Then he spoke to himself, "They've done it all in one night then. Well, I best make sure I am prepared for this evening."

Starlanko the Magnificent Arrived at the Wizard Guild of Camiran's gathering fashionably late. He tipped his hat to many wizards as he circled the room, exchanging

a quick word and handing out his card when he could. He remained constantly in motion until he came to the wine table.

"Excuse me Miss, I hope you don't mind some company," Starlanko said.

"No, not at all," the woman said.

"I beg your pardon if I sound forward, but I can't help remarking on the uncanny resemblance you bear to a girl I had a crush on when I was a boy."

The woman smiled, "Where did you go to school?"

"The Academy at Dalphithius," Starlanko replied. "And you?"

"The same."

"Candessa?"

"Starlanko?"

"What a small world we live in."

"I didn't expect to see you here," Candessa said.

"I almost didn't come," Starlanko said. "These functions are always so stuffy and snobby."

"This is the first I've attended," Candessa said. "It's not quite what I expected."

"I've got an idea. I know a party that should be much more fun than this. Why don't you and I quit this scene, and try someplace else." Starlanko offered her his arm.

Candessa took it. "I think that is a magnificent idea."

On his way to the party, Starlanko paused briefly to cast a quick spell, one that would deliver a message several

miles away. The message was simply this: "Try flowers. Musicians like that sort of thing."

Hours later, Starlanko and Candessa had danced, they had sung, they had feasted, and now the party was fading. Many of the guests had left. Candessa was half asleep on a couch. Starlanko the Magnificent sat before his young niece Arrabelle.

"See this coin?"

The child nodded.

"Watch it very closely. Now I close my hand tightly around it. Keep your eye on the coin now. I say the magic words, 'Abra Cadabra,' and behold!" With great flair Starlanko's fingers burst open, to reveal an open palm. Arrabelle stared with astonishment.

"But wait, there's more," said Starlanko. "What's this behind your ear?" He reached behind the Arrabelle's ear and plucked out a silver coin, identical to the first. "Here, I think this belongs to you," he said, and flicked the coin to his niece.

"Do it again!"

"Perhaps another time."

"Can you teach me how?"

"Maybe next year."

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Super Sheet: Keep your character sheet in a clear plastic sheet protector. Insert a thin cardboard sheet (a board backer) there as well. This set up protects your character sheet from wear and tear, gives you an easy to hold sheet, and gives you a storage place for all things related to your character (cue cards, notes, equipment lists). The extra things are slipped in behind the cardboard backer. You can even face an important sheet against the backside of the cardboard for ease of use. If you need to change something pull the sheet out. If you need to mark damage, use a water based marker on the plastic or a sticky note. The character sheet will remain pristine for quite a while when using a super sheet.

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - Duplicate Effort: A player should have three character sheets; a master sheet that has all the current permanent information, a copy of that sheet for the GM, and a sheet that they are currently using to play the character with. The master sheet should have a date on the top saying when it was last updated. Every copy should have a date saying when it was made and when the last time it was updated.

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - A Thank You: Take some time to tell your GM you appreciate what he is doing, especially after a great session. Being a GM is a fairly thankless task. A little "thank you" or an occasional goodie will help the GM to bring enthusiasm and effort to the campaign.

Moonhunter Says: Tools for the Job - A Sense of Humor for the GM: Gaming is a social activity where you interact with people for long periods of time. As such, sometimes having a sense of humor about things can help reduce tension. Some people forget to pack these, I don't know why. Bring a spare.

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by “Dregg” Carpio

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: The Pulp Era

Once upon a time, five cents was all it took for moviegoers to be transported far away from their troubles. America had just come out of the Great Depression and little did America know that they would soon be going to war overseas to fight Hitler and his storm-trooping Nazi party. At this time, the cinema was America’s only true escape. By today’s standards it does not sound like much, but this was the golden age of movie going. Each week you could watch your favorite hero get him or herself out of endless dangers again and again. Audiences watched Buster Crabbe as Flash Gordon fall into Ming’s death traps, and we would be convinced that our hero was dead, but the very next week we would see that Flash had somehow saved himself from almost certain doom. Hollywood referred to Flash Gordon and others weekly short action films seen in local movie houses as “chapter plays,” the more commonly known “serial,” or the cliffhanger (as they were called due to the over-used theme of a hero trapped upon a high cliff and about to fall to his/her doom.). In its true form, this was one of the 1st of the “cinematic” film genres. Each one of a series of non-stop action-packed episodes, and each one brought the thrills and chills of the pulp novels to the big screen.

The chapter play was released in 1912, having its origins in the time of the silent films (*Circa 1912-1925*) with the well known genre staple *The Perils of Pauline (1914)*. It starred the beautiful Pearl White (also known in Hollywood as the “Queen of the Serials”). A second staple of the period was the Edison Company’s (yes that Thomas Edison) *What Happened to Mary?* with the lovely Mary Fuller. Although these films were more like modern sitcoms, the latter was actually tied in to a running newspaper story. The serial became a Hollywood tradition with several movie houses pumping out episode after episode, but as we reached the 1950’s America started to lose interest in the serial as television became more and more common. In 1955, Republic Pictures brought us *King of the Carnival*, the last of the great serials, and with that a great genre died.

In the serials, heroes became major players in the plan of diabolical evil, with only their revolver and fedora hat to make it through. They faced the unexpected, looked death straight in the eye, and smiled. In Pulp genre gaming you take on the role of hero in this sometimes deadly but always exciting world. Genre roles of the pulps ranged in flavor and style: avenger, relic hunter, scientist, flying ace, even mystics, the possibilities were limitless although narrow in scope. This was an innocent time in America’s history, and your characters are part of it, changing and molding history as it happens. In the genre you can discover lost civilizations, travel the unexplored reaches of outer space, destroy the plots of an evil mastermind, or fight Nazis in two-fisted battles overseas. The action never stops! This is just a taste of what awaits you in the daring world of the serials. Whether you’re a gritty gumshoe detective or a mask wearing vigilante, your wits, skill, and pistol are going to be your best friends and fast. When you’re engaged in a heated fist fight on the back of an out-of-control truck traveling at 80 miles an hour on a cliff side road, you have no time for fear, because death is most likely around the bend.

Bridging the “Big Screen” to the GM’s Screen

Ok, so now that you are thinking “thanks for the history lesson” and “what does this have to do with gaming?” As a matter of fact, it has a great deal to do with gaming. Suspension of disbelief is a powerful tool and in the hands of the right players and GMs. One can take a few notes on a piece of paper and make their game as real as our world. The other connection is to the genre itself. What was projected on to the screen and written in dime novels almost 70 years ago has been a major influence on how writers and directors make films. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that George Lucas wrote *Star Wars* based on his love for the serials of the early part of the 20th century? As we go forward in this article I will try and bring your world to black and white and explain to you some simple Pulp elements (some you might use today in your own games) that can entrance

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). 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.

your players as the “Pulp Serials” did to those in the movie houses years ago.

Creating Adventures in the Pulp Era

The terminology used in the genre comes from the use of low quality paper “pulp” that was used to publish schlock magazines in the period. This publishing method allowed for a larger quantity of print runs and more of a selection. Pulp was not about the quality of paper the stories were printed on though; it was an art form that sprung from a medium that allowed more authors to get their work out. Pulp was also feeling and atmosphere that these great authors produced. One of the first uses of the pulp paper printing scheme was the “dime novel” and it’s English counterpart the “penny dreadful.” Both were cheap stories or melodramas printed in mass quantity and sold to the masses. The dime novel tradition went from about 1850 till about the 1940’s, and many publishers including Howard and Lovecraft got their start in these books. With this in mind, any possible storyline could be made to reflect the genre.

The world of the pulps, a place where may visions of an uncertain future come to life, and the oppression of a period in time is turned to fantasy to forget ones troubles. The pulps were black and white, good vs. evil, a place where giant robot men bumped heads the worlds greatest heroes, a place where women wore skimpy outfits and cried for help from the great arms of their captors. With that said, how does one take from the vast pool of stories and ideas and make a place for their players to find the intrigue and adventure they desire? What is left that can be considered original? How do you as a GM create something that your players won’t say “hey I seen that in a movie!” or “gee, I guess someone read Ray Bradbury!”

The first part is the pulp feel. Most players and GM's are in the delusion that putting on a trench coat and blasting gangsters with twin revolvers make it pulpy; of course this is not pulp, this is what it would be "hack and slay" in any other genre. Now take the same trench-coated figure, place him at a old dock at midnight where the only sound is the tide beating against the decaying dock. Now replace the generic gangster with "Johnny the Watch," a wise guy who can make people do things against their will whenever he opened his "magic pocket watch." With this visual, lets toss in the PC's sister being held against her will aboard one of the many old ships docked here. Now that's pulp! It's not how the characters are equipped or what they wear, it's the feel and the story that make the genre; it's how the elements form around them, the way the chapter of the story is presented, and finally the image that you plant in the player's mind.

A good pulp story just does not have to be about dark shadowy avengers. Look to the works of Lester Dent (aka Kenneth Roberson), Ray Bradbury, Edgar Rice Burrows, Sax Rohmer, HG Wells (yes he was pulp), and many others for further inspiration. Now, lets go to our Pulp cookbook and see how you as the game master can take a simple story element, add a bit of spice, and turn your catch-the-bad-guy story to something outlandish and worthy of a dime novel.

Good Vs. Evil

The heroes and villains—how could we have a pulp story without them? Tried and true or hearts as black as pitch—these are the genre's heart and soul. In any good pulp story, you would not find Jimmy "the newspaper boy" saving the day, which would be too mundane, or even heart warming. The newspaper boy might be a story element, but in most cases the author would not write him in as a major character. He might greet the hero, but he won't be the one knocking down doors with twin 45's. I guess the point I am trying to make is to think big, to look at the world around you and romanticize it. Good and evil should be bigger than life, just like your heroes and villains.

When creating the ultimate hero, the ultimate champion of good, the first thing to forget is being humble. Most of your standard fictional pulp characters were ex-military personnel (actually WWI makes for a great character origin). Motivations can include trench shock, avenging a

fallen friend (do it for Johnny!), cryptic visions that came to the PC's in combat, etc. If the soldier route is not your style, go with the millionaire playboy, the actor, the newspaper owner, the man from beyond, or even a sports star works. The same can go for villains. For example, a kind farmer's boy gets hit with disfiguring mustard gas, and suddenly you have an angry and scared soul who sold the farm to start his campaign against mankind. As with heroes, villains have many origins as well, rich, poor, and ancestors of great asian warlords, etc.

The six steps of pulp genre story generation:

1. Antagonists:

The antagonist is the meat and potatoes of any pulp story, whether it be archrivals, good vs. evil, chef against chef or more. What is important is to be sure that the rivalry reflects in the story. We see this in many classic pulp stories (Flash vs.. Ming, or Smith vs. Fu Manchu). The clash of these titans may not happen in every story, but the threats they cause to each other are the making of a good story and inspiration for future story lines.

2. The Race Against Time (or The Great Escape):

Now I'm not saying that the race against time is the overall most important element, but when looking at most stories in the pulp genre, it was surely a staple element. The stories race with plots of bombs about to detonate a rare vaccine that would save the dying Eskimos who were infected by a virus that was created in a mastermind's lab. In other stories we see the high priest of the snake god trying to covert the good-natured people of the lost city. A time limit for the PCs in any pulp scenario gives great flavor to the story. Plus what GM does not get off his sick and twisted jollies when he sees the PCs running around like madmen trying to solve a problem in time to save the day.

3. The Enigma:

"Whose blood rests in the chalice of the red queen?" Imagine those words being boomed out of a large golden idol in some crumbling temple in Tibet. The enigma, the puzzle, and the riddle can be a great spice

element to the pulp story. It could come in the form of a letter from an old friend (who died or disappeared), a warning from the infamous scientist who crawls in with a dagger in his back, or an ancient puzzle piece the PCs get mailed to them. These scenarios start the great enigma of your story, and it can make a good story great as the pieces of the puzzle are being pulled away slowly to find our players miles deep in another situation.

4. The Cliffhanger!

What would your story be without the infamous deathtrap, burning building, the innocent tied and unconscious going to the sawmill, or other devious demises all to leave the players guessing until their next turn or the next session? The cliffhanger sometimes need not be plotted out by the antagonist; the heroes can get in enough trouble on their own accord... a faulty gadget, a failed driving check in a car chase, or just the overconfident nature of a pulp hero in general will get one caught between a rock and a hard place. When using the cliffhanger device, don't try and use the same trap or device over and over again as it kills the fear factor for the PC. Otherwise suddenly the car hanging over the 1000 ft. drop will become a "eh, this always happens" thought in the player's mind.

5. The Great Chase!

With the same feel of the "race against time," the great chase is the all out, breath taking, breakneck speed chase through a usually heavy populated area. This can include the car chase, the horse chase (great in western stories), handcart vs. train, vehicle vs. human, or race on foot. The race is a great way to get the juices flowing. As the GM it is your job of course to throw every obstacle you can in their way as the chase ensues. Cars, people, pets, boxes, old nuns, cows, trains, horses... whatever suits your mood at the moment.

6. The Climatic Ending!

Ok, now that our heroes have been beaten to a pulp (no pun intended) and thwarted at every turn, it's time to give them their 10 minutes of fame and let the good

guys win. In the “climatic ending” we should find our heroes have gone through the last five steps and are tired, bleeding, and about to cry. It is at this time the villain gives away his evil plot, gives away his diabolical secrets, and challenges the PCs to the final duel. Trappings for this are endless, secret labs, zeppelins, cliffs, giant machines of mass destruction, basically wherever the villain looks good at whatever evil he is unleashing. This locale is important and you want to choose something a little exotic if possible, Climatic endings at the local diner or supermarket can be a little boring, but putting the ending at an abandoned amusement park is adding the spice to make the story hot! The ending should be a long one, you might even want to dedicate a whole evening’s session to it. Don’t make it too easy or methodical, let the players come close to death or the edge of sanity (oops wrong game) when disposing of a foe that has thwarted them for several chapters, and keep in mind good villains never die and their bodies are never found so they can come back for revenge in future sessions.

Introducing your Players to Pulp!

The hardest thing to do is make your regular players participate in a world that already exists. For example, hardcore fantasy RPG’ers will never want to give up their world of magic and elves for one with zeppelins and rocket packs, and if you were ever bold enough to tell them that what they are playing now is no different then what you would like them to try, they would probably stake you to the tavern wall and look at you like you had seven heads.

For some, you need to introduce the ideas slowly; if you are the GM of these finicky players you need to introduce these ideas to them in your current campaign. Point out that Gultuir the Lichlord is no different than the yellow menace of Fu Manchu. The unfortunate thing is most players will not switch genres easily, and for some it’s a useless battle. Other genres of the Pulp Era might also be appealing. Try running a 4-color golden age supers campaign or a group of cyber soldiers for hire. True this article deals with the time period of the early 1900’s but the genre fills a lot more gaps. Once your players see that the pulps is not just playing “Flash Gordon” they will see the light, and you just might have the next Doc Savage on your hands.

Pulp Games on the Shelves

The market has been thriving for pulp related RPG’s (and even some board games) over the past couple of years. As where before one would have to alter a generic game or hunt down some out of print copy of something very short lived, today all the average gamer has to do is look on the shelf of his FLGS (favorite local gaming store). Below are some titles that have been floating around in the gaming community as of late, ready to transport the imagination to the world of “yesteryear.”

1. *GURPS: Cliffhangers*: Steve Jackson Games

What’s not to say about *GURPS*? Any genre you can imagine has a sourcebook in this system that has been a staple in the industry for almost as long as *D&D*. In its second edition, *GURPS Cliffhangers* has several different types of useful material in one. Not only does it give some great rules editions for playing the genre in the *GURPS* system, but it also gives enough resource material to write a college level essay on the time period. Even if you never use the *GURPS* system for your pulp adventures, this book has a world of information that is useful for any two-fisted campaign. My only problem with *GURPS* is the rules are not truly tailored for cinematic gaming, but any GM worth her salt can write a great set of house rules to solve that issue.

2. *Savage Worlds: Pinnacle*

Savage Worlds is one of the coolest generic systems to come around in the past two years. I know everyone has a favorite (*GURPS*, *Fuzion*, *Basic System*, *OGL*), but Pinnacle did an excellent job on creating a system that lends its self towards the pulp genre. Right from the beginning when you pick up the book the cover gives you a feeling of a pulp magazine, the letter styling and even the cover art give you the urge to start humming the “Indiana Jones” theme. The system is a very basic Stat Vs. Skill scheme, but like the system it was based on (*Deadlands*) it uses simple playing cards to help resolve combat. Not a very meaty book for its price, but for all the fan support you can find on the Pinnacle site and in the fan community its not a bad buy.

3. *Adventure!*: White Wolf Studios

Another system that has always had a flair for the cinematic has been White Wolf’s “Storyteller” system. 1st introduced in their *World of Darkness* line of RPG’s the storyteller system soon found its way into other lines. *Adventure!* Is the 3rd in a series of games based on a similar theme. In telling a story from beginning to end *Adventure!* starts the tale of the Aeon society in the 1920’s and goes on to modern times in *Aberrant*, and finally ending in the future with “Trinity.” As with any storyteller game the system takes minutes to learn and can be easy to resolve conflict and issues with one roll. The down side to storyteller is that being a pool based system (pool being that you roll X amount of dice and add up successes) you need at least around 20 d10s in order to make a roll, and having to sit around counting 10’s and 1’s on every roll can be a bit tedious. For those who wish to play in a prepackaged Pulp world that has a lot of great material it is worth picking up. At the time of this article being written *Adventure!* was just reprinted as a d20 game.

4. *Pulp Zombies*: Eden Studios

When I first saw the title of this book, I wondered how zombies could be pulp, but after reading through the material I soon seen another sub-genre flash before my eyes. Not actually the best genre book produced by Eden Studios (who brings us the *Buffy* and *Army of Darkness* RPGs), it still has it’s moments and is worth the cost if you play any of the “Unisystem” games produced by the company. It has stats for weapons and vehicles of the pulp era, great ideas of how to design adventures, and the coolest part—a write up for Zombie Nazi’s. I personally have used the book to run Pulp genre games with the *Buffy* RPG and it translates over quite well.

5. *Forbidden Kingdoms*: Otherworld Creations

Again we see the OGL (d20) used for the genre. *Forbidden Kingdoms* was one of the 1st of the pulp d20 games on the market, and I remember tripping over my feet to run out and buy a copy of this book. I am very torn when describing the game for a couple of reasons that I will try and explain. Since it was released shortly

after the *D&D* 3rd edition, we see *Forbidden Kingdoms* sticking directly to the d20 system. For a genre game they did not go very far to alter the rules to make it a more cinematic game. It did include some new feats and a couple on new combat options, but all and all it remains a very vanilla translation of the d20 system by WotC. On the other hand they have examples of various "pulp" worlds you can have your adventures in and in this regard the game is brilliant. Otherworld Creations has some of the best writers under their banner and the material they are capable of producing is fantastic. A couple of the worlds we see from this book is a Victorian "Ghost-Busters" setting and the one I found the most creative is a Pulp supers setting that deals with Tesla. My suggestion is that if you pick up the game, run it with *BESM* d20 or *Mutants and Masterminds* to give it that cinematic flavor.

6. Two Fisted Tales: Politically Incorrect Games/ Matthew Stevens

Being a long time member of the "pulp Games" e-group, I have watch this game evolve from its humble free RPG status to a well-received game in the pulp community. Although I have never read through this game, I mention it out of the respect of Matt Stevens who has put a lot of heart and soul into this product. I promise to buy a copy Matt, honest. The game, according to reviews and those who I know who have played it, is a full emersion into the genre with loose enough structure to do pulp gaming in any time period or setting. The system itself is flexible enough to either play with dice, cards, a combo of the two. In fact, I have even heard of some diceless variations. My only fear with this game is that I might love it so muc; I will stop working on my own material and just play *Two Fisted Tales* for all my pulp needs.

7. Dime Heroes: Deep 7

Another one of the pulp games I would like to give a heads up to is *Dime Heroes* by Deep 7. *Dime Heroes* is one of their one-page RPG's, which in fact are just one

page. All the rules and stats you will ever need to know are written right on the character's sheet. Since Deep 7 has written a good number of these one page RPGs there is a good number of resource materials out there to add to the game. Besides the simple mechanics, it gives rules for death traps, a brief nod at the genre and a "serial" style adventure to run your players through. *Dime Heroes* is a great game to introduce your players to the genre. A \$4.95 investment is all it takes to see if your group is ready for the thrills and spills of the pulps.

8. Pulp Era/Basic Pulp: Chapter 13 Press

One of the reasons I can speak so in depth about this genre is because besides being a fan, I have also done some pulp RPG design myself. My first attempt was *Pulp Era*, a movie serial game based on my own campaign of 10 years. Memento Mori Theatrix first released the game in 1998, but due to some conflicts between designers, I requested it be taken off the web. It was a simple percentile based game that gave players a great feel of the pulps by using an almost minimalist system. I still have the PDF laying around and mayhap I might put it up for nostalgia some day. Currently I have another free pulp RPG on the web called *Basic Pulp*. *Basic Pulp* is based off of Dilly Green Bean Games' *Basic System* and both are available free for the download. *Basic Pulp* was almost done as a challenge of "I can make your game even more simple". The game uses an almost OGL model of game play and all tasks are resolved with a simple D20. I am currently revising the game with new rules and a modern pulp setting. Check it out at www.chapter13press.com. Hey it's free.

To Be Continued...

As you can see the pulps can be a fun and exciting place you as a GM to bring your players. Everything from cliffhangers to serial-based adventuring can leave your players just gnawing on their fingernail until the next session. Even if you do not set your games in the theme or spirit of the 1930's pulps, the feeling of high flying adventure can be a incredible ingredient in the hash that is cinematic gaming. Until next time when we address generic and multi-genre RPGs, may all your gaming be action packed!



by Shane Cubis

Antipodean Adventures : *Gold Rush!*

The night too quickly passes

And we are growing old,

So let us fill our glasses

And toast the Days of Gold;

When finds of wondrous treasure

Set all the South ablaze,

And you and I were faithful mates

All through the roaring days.

-Henry Lawson

G'Day all. In the course of a nation's history, many events take place that help to shape the eventual character and path of its people and its culture. In some cases, these events are slow-burning with effects revealed only in retrospect. In other cases, a single, instant occurrence changes the path of history. In Australia, 1851, something happened that fit both these categories. Edward Hargraves, an Australian not long returned from the rush in California, discovered gold near Bathurst. He named the site Ophir, and within four months it was home to over a thousand fortune seekers.

What Happened?

Australia at that time was a penal settlement of low esteem, viewed as little more than a dumping ground for British criminals. Native-born Australians strove to be as good as the British and to be known as a colony was something of which to be ashamed.

When gold was found, reactions were mixed. Some proclaimed it a calamity worse than an earthquake, while most were excited at the news. Jobs and old lives were abandoned as thousands flocked to the goldfields in search of fortune. Plus there came the treasure-seekers from abroad.

In 1852, one year after the first discovery of gold, over 300,000 immigrants flocked to Australia. To give some indication of how this affected the economy, the population of the country was 430,000 in 1851. By 1871, the number of people residing in Australia was 1.7 million. Railway lines and telegraph systems were first introduced during this period, and the gold bullion being shipped to England sparked the economy of the gold towns as well as interest in local investment. A byproduct of this was the abandonment of the transportation of convicts from Britain. Given the circumstances, it was agreed that sending criminals to a land of opportunity and growth was not much of a punishment.

The rise in population led inevitably to overcrowding. Small houses consisting of two rooms would hold fourteen people, and many lived under canvas or in earth-floored shanties. Once people began to make money from gold an extensive building program alleviated this problem. Overall, the gold rush had a huge impact on the development of Australia.

After the chaos of the initial rush, the government was quick to take steps to make money from the discovery of gold. A license system was introduced under which every prospector - whether they found anything or not - had to pay for the privilege of digging on Crown land. The troopers who were sent to conduct random license checks on the fields were often brutal thugs, and there was a great deal of resentment between troopers and the prospectors. This series of events led to the building of the Eureka Stockade (see *Silven Trumpeter* Volume 2). Further, only landowners could vote, so even though some successful diggers were becoming rich, they still felt a lack of political power. Land prices were soaring, and many felt they were getting a raw deal from the government.

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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"Small in stature, with small eyes and long plaits of hair, made even longer by a piece of string with a tassel tied at the end of it. They are very funny to watch when they walk overland, for they usually travel in large groups of a hundred or so, one behind the other in a long line like wild geese. They don't walk normally but take short steps and appear to be running very slowly. Each one carries a long pole over his shoulder with baskets of victuals hanging at both ends."

-Seweryn Korzelinski, Polish prospector

When Australia became federated in 1901, the first act of parliament was the White Australia Policy. Basically, this said that immigration should be restricted to Anglo-Saxons whenever possible, lest it become overrun by Asians (and other supposedly inferior races). The roots of this policy come from the massive influx of Chinese immigrants during the gold rush. There was a lot of anti-Chinese feeling from the other diggers, because the Chinese worked harder and gleaned gold from sites abandoned by other prospectors. They were often accused of spreading diseases, having rampant opium addiction, and taking Australian gold back to their own country rather than investing it in Australia. In 1861, Chinese immigrants made up 3.3% of the population. Most came out on contracts from businessmen in their home country, whom they had to repay before they earned anything from their toil. It was a time of grinding poverty in China, and its not surprising that they worked hard for their families back home!

This racism came to a head in 1861, at a place called Lambing Flat. On June 30th, a mob of 3000 white diggers attacked a Chinese camp of 1500 people with staves and pick handles. They set upon their hapless victims, burning down tents and cutting off their pigtails. The troopers were slow to respond, and the ringleaders were eventually found not guilty to the dismay and anger of the Chinese.

Life on the Goldfields

"I feel like a king, only happier!"

Perhaps the most interesting ramification of the gold rush was its effect on the British class system in Australia. The somewhat random nature of a find meant that a common laborer could make his fortune with a lucky strike, while the son of a lord digging the claim next to his found nothing. There was a strong egalitarian streak among the men of the goldfields, and this carried over into the Australian national character – a myth that spread to the soldiers in Gallipoli (themselves referred to as 'diggers') and even today. Hard work and physical strength were favored over learning and refinement. Diggers proudly wore beards, sturdy clothing, and a layer of mud – a testament to their toil. Those who were once servants could return to town with a pocket full of money, sneering at their former masters. A noted clergyman said of this reversal: "All is confusion, selfishness, license, and subversion of all respect for worth, talent, and education. In fact, we have here the French Revolution without the guillotine."

Many of the fortunate diggers blew their wad on women and booze, but they had a great time doing so. For most, they earned just enough to survive, especially with the heavily inflated prices charged by goldfield merchants. In fact, during this time you were more likely earn a decent living working as a carpenter or a mason than as a prospector.

Food consisted mostly of damper (bread made from flour and water, and baked in the ashes of a campfire), whatever meat could be scrounged, and a couple of cups of tea. A feast might include a broth, potatoes and cabbage. Certainly there was nothing to delight the taste buds. Diggers lived in tents,

among an often desolate land covered with the holes dug by themselves and their comrades. The night air would be filled with the sounds of conversation or arguments, music from flutes and fiddles, and pistols being fired into the air.

Equipment

The Australian Gold Rush was a time of innovation, not just in economic or social terms, but also in the equipment people dreamed up to help them find that elusive metal. The original and most common method of unearthing gold was to dig with a shovel. This was reasonably easy in the early days, given the weather, terrain, and presence of gold in shallow earth. This was referred to as 'fossicking', picking through chunks of rock looking for a glint. Once these finds had been picked clean, the prospectors had to employ a touch more ingenuity. Panning for gold, a process that involved kneeling by a river with a metal pan, scooping up mud from the bottom and swooshing it around in the hopes of finding a tell-tale glint was a cheap and popular method. Other methods of prospecting were cradling, puddling and nuggeting.

Campaign and Adventure Ideas

The players take on the roles of "new chums", immigrants who have recently arrived in Australia to seek their fortune. They will soon discover that life on the goldfields is not as easy or as idyllic as they were led to believe in newspaper reports and made-up 'diggings diaries.' Depending on their country of origin, they will encounter racism, derision and resentment from entrenched diggers.

Specific Ideas:

The PCs have discovered a new vein of gold and have to keep it quiet. Less reputable diggers are more than happy to off the party and take the earnings. Government representatives may attempt to take over the vein if it is a particularly rich one.

The government wants to raise license fees. The PCs may fight this, or have to think up some way to raise the extra cash to afford the fee. Alternatively, the PCs may be politicians and administrators, who have to maintain a public image of popularity and order, balanced with the trials and tribulations of running a colonial settlement.

The party members are troopers, charged with maintaining order and universally despised. They may turn to the path of corruption or feel it their duty to clean up the profession. They must contend with non-license holders, digger disputes, and the ever-present danger of bushrangers.

The group may have begun as honest diggers but have now been forced into a life of crime. They have formed a bushranger gang, and are determined to make their fortune any way they can. Refer to the "Antipodean Adventures: Bushrangers" article in *Silven Trumpeter* Volume 3 for details of a bushranger campaign.

Other Genres

Pulp: Lots of chase scenes through claims, mysterious Chinese adversaries with opium and occult connections ("This is the antidote...to the poison you just drank!"), shoot-outs and near escapes from capture. The PCs have to thwart the plot of a fanatically religious, Puritan scientist who plans to use a transmogrification device to reverse alchemize all gold in Australia into lead.

Science Fiction: A scouting party finds traces of a precious mineral on a backwater planet named Cubisia-6. There is an influx of fortune seekers from various other worlds, a large majority of whom are taken prisoner by the heretofore unseen native species—six-armed brutes with no concept of mercy.

Fantasy: A quiet human border town is overrun with dwarves when gold is discovered there. The PCs, who are the leading citizens and guards of the town, have to contend with an out-of-control population increase, strain on resources, racism against the dwarves, and spiraling price rises.

Horror: Someone or something is killing prospectors, and the troopers do not seem to care. It falls to the PCs to solve the mystery before a lynch mob takes it out on an insular group of Chinese diggers, who have been accused of consorting with the Devil.

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by Nash J. Devita

D6 Space Rulebook

"D6 Space Rulebook"

Authors: Eric Gibson
 Publisher: West End Games
 Review Date: July 16th, 2004



Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. Previous to reviewing this title, I had only a very brief exposure to any titles from West End Games via the Star Wars RPG while I was in college.

West End Games took a devastating blow when they lost the rights to the Star Wars license. They have finally returned with their D6 system and a number of genre books based upon said system. D6 Space, in my opinion, is a great way to re-launch the company being as that, previously, their biggest game was also set in space. I find this to be somewhat akin to the phoenix, rising from the ashes, refreshed and to retake its old position and job.

D6 Space is a 144 page hard back. The interior art was done by a host of artists including, but not limited to, Leanne Buckley, Christopher Martinez, Shawn Richter, Lee Smith, and

Tyson Wintibaugh. The cover art was provided by Chris Dien. I really do not understand why none of his work made it into the interior of this book. The cover is quite nice.

From the Back Cover

"My Dearest Heart,

I'm sorry I haven't written you sooner. I've had my pick of bounty jobs this season, and I've only now had some spare time as I make my way to a new system.

To let you know the type of events that I've been up against, at our first interstellar switch point, pirates attacked us. Though a metaphysicist might have foreseen the danger, we didn't have one on board. Fortunately, a well placed shot from our cybernetically enhanced weapons officer efficiently finished the would-be thieves.

We only needed a few minor repairs to get us on our way. We made it to our destination without further incident, and a cyber-psy is bringing in the ship now. You and I will have to arrange to meet as soon as I've found out more about my next assignment – I could be heading to a meagcorp- controlled planet to a frontier world. I'll let you know.

Yours with love...

P.S. Though you can't join me on my bounty hunting, I'm sending along a game that could help you get an idea of what I do. This book combines the best of 15 years of D6 system design, tailored to the science fictions genre. It covers all of the basics for using the D6 System with your favorite settings.

>Three different character creation methods – customizing pre-constructed templates, using defined dice distribution limits, and distributing a pool of points – allow each player to spend a much or as little time making a character while being compatible with the method others players choose.

Review snapshot

Archetype: Core Book

Body: 9 (Game Mechanics): Could use some fine tuning.

Mind: 10 (Organization): Order is quite nice - makes sense.

Spirit: 8 (Look & Feel): The art, in general, has too much contrast between blacks and whites.

Attack: 7 (Value of Content): \$30 for just under 150 pages. Not great but not horrible.

Defense: 9 (Originality of Content): It is genre specific, as is intended.

Health: 9 (Physical Quality): Hardback with 'ok' binding.

Magic: 10 (Options & Adaptability): Being genre specific, options abound.

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.

>Over 80 character options (Disadvantages, Advantages, and Special Abilities), each with numerous variations – as well as a sampling of generic alien packages – allow players to further customize their characters.

>You have the option of relying on a Body Points or Wounds damage system, both equally interchangeable with a single combat system.

>You get quick rules for cybernetics, ship travel, ship design, and metaphysics (a form of psionic reality manipulation).

>Dozens of generic equipment and character examples offer starting points for adding your own science fiction tech, aliens, and denizens to your adventures.

>You get to decide the level of complexity, with the essential rules separated from the optional rules.

The accessible format includes an introduction to using the

book and the system, a solo adventure to test out the rules, and prefaces to each chapter that can help you locate the information you need."

Presentation

The cover is mostly awash with various shades of dark blues and purples. The primary feature on the cover is a female who has a number of cables strung from her back, arm, and head (a la The Matrix). She has long, flowing blond hair and is dressed in an orange / red body suit. She seems to be using metaphysics to guide a craft onto a landing dock. This could very well be the ship and port of call that are described on the back cover.

Content

Characters in the D6 system consist of six (or seven with some characters) primary attributes - Agility, Strength, Knowledge, Mechanical, Perception, Technical, and (for some) Metaphysics (this is a special psionic attribute). Each attribute is rated in dice from 1d6 up. Each attribute has a number of skills related to it which also have dice ratings. The rating of the skill or attribute is how many dice one rolls to determine success or failure.

In addition to the score in dice, one special die is rolled. This is the Wild Die. The Wild Die determines critical success or failure - a roll of 6 on the Wild Die is a critical success, a roll of 1 on the Wild Die is a critical failure. This means that 1/3 of the time; the rolled result will be a critical one.

Characters consist of far more than attributes and skills, however. Characters can also a number of Disadvantages. Taking disadvantages give the character points to use toward Advantages, more Skills Dice, or more Attribute Dice. Many of the disadvantages are pretty typical for role playing games - such as Age, Enemy, and Reduced Attribute - while others are relatively unique - such as Debt, Burn- Out, and Cultural Unfamiliarity. All of the disadvantages can be taken in varying degrees. Weak disadvantages give only one (1) extra point while strong ones can give upwards of four (4) points. Examples at each possible rank are provided.

Advantages work in a very similar manner. Actually, they are so similar that some advantages have exact opposite disadvantages - Wealth vs. Poverty, for example. Advantages

also range from rank 1 to rank 4. Again, examples of each possible rank are provided.

Special Abilities are somewhat like Advantages. They are abilities that give the character a direct and constant benefit where as [most] advantages give only occasional benefits. Unlike advantages, special abilities do not have varying ranks. Each costs a specific amount. Even with out varying ranks, Special Abilities are vast and varied. The easiest comparison I can give is to feats and racial attributes. Special attributes are fairly similar to both of those ability types in the d20 system. Like feats, special abilities include things like Ambidextrous and Fast Reactions. Those like racial attributes include Infravision and Water Breathing. Just about everything in between is included as varying special abilities.

When a roll is needed, the number of attribute or skill ranks is used to determine the number of D6 rolled. The ranks + 1 (wild die) dice are rolled. The total is then compared to a chosen difficulty or opposed roll. As stated previously, if a one (1) is rolled on the wild die, this result is a critical failure, however, if a six (6) is rolled on the wild die, the result is a critical success.

I, personally, do not care for this system for determining critical failure or success. A critical success or failure occurs far too often with this system for my liking. A staggering result, whichever end of the spectrum it falls on; do no occur that often in reality. If the Wild Die was to be rolled again and on a 1 to 3, the result was 'normal' and on a 4 to 6, the result was a critical one. This reduces the chance of critical success or failure to a more reasonable level.

So far this sounds like just about any other role playing game. What makes this one special and deserving of the title, Space? Metaphysics, Equipment, space travel, and aliens all make this title more than every other role playing game / book.

Metaphysics is psionic- like special ability that some creatures can manipulate. These abilities are limited in number but are quite powerful (and their price reflects this!). Metaphysics can be used to heal or to harm, to move or to communicate.

There is a lot of great equipment given in this book. There

are a number of weapons listed. This makes me happy since most of the other specifics are only listed as a short list of examples. The weapons list, on the other hand, is a fabulous list that really does not require personal expansion. There is far more than weapons here, mind you. Also given are details on robots, armor, ships, tools, and other general futuristic, sci-fi gear.

The list and execution of aliens is quite nice. There are feline, canine, plant, insect, and other aliens given. These races are presented as templates that can be dropped on top of just about any character (so long as that character has a few points left from creation). Aliens follow all of the same rules as human characters. They are simply 'packages' of advantages and disadvantages, for the most part. This makes their inclusion a snap. This makes creating new alien species even easier!

Conclusion

This title manages to accomplish most of what it sets out to do. One can role play in just about any futuristic setting with D6 Space. It pretty well covers the genre. Being a broad genre book, much of the information presented is broad. Of course, this book is also designed to let players / GMs create their own specifics to use within the system. Many of the items here are presented as examples, not hard set lists.

There are a couple of glaring typos. This is easily solved in with a second printing. No publisher is free from this issue; however, those found here can get in the way of reading / understanding the rules, on occasion.

If a second printing does ever come, I would like to see more examples of items, races, advantages, disadvantages, etc. so the less rules design inclined players are not hampered by the few 'choices' that are presented here.

The system is not bad, all in all. It could use some fine tuning but, overall, it is pretty well executed. I am not fond of how often critical successes and failures occur within this system but that is minor compared to the quality of the system overall. Again, with some fine tuning, the D6 System will not be one to be reckoned with.

Through the Lens of History Using History for Better Gaming

by Sean Holland

About the Author

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

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Vision 10: "Message for you, Sir!" - Part II

Mail and Messengers from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern World

Literacy supports mail systems and by the Middle Ages in Europe, literacy had again become widespread enough to make communication by letter feasible. With letters came people to carry them, this in turn led to organizations and systems to carry letters and packages. Over time, these systems evolved into our modern postal systems and package delivery companies.

This month the lens looks at messengers and mail from the Middle Ages to the early Modern World.

Part I - The History

The expansion of the church, universities and trade networks throughout Europe meant that by the eleventh century correspondence began flowing along these mercantile and ecclesiastical routes. The Church needed to communicate with its widely dispersed monasteries, nunneries and churches to dispense and receive information, both political and religious, throughout the Christian world.

One such system was that of the Teutonic Knights, who had a mail system that linked Marianberg (in Germany), Vienna, Venice and Rome. Each stronghold of the Teutonic Order had a postmaster (called a *Wything*) who oversaw mail passing through his area, checking each piece in and out, and directed mounted couriers (called *Jonges*). A messenger would carry the mail through one stage and then turn it over to the next messenger and return to his home stronghold. The *Jonges* carried the mail in linen bags, waxed to be waterproof, and only official mail was carried.

Merchants needed messengers for the more worldly matter of making money. By the thirteenth century mounted "Clerks of the fairs" carried commercial correspondence between Flanders and Champagne in France. The city of Venice developed an impressive postal system. As an important commercial city rapid exchange of information was of great importance to the Venetians. The *Compagnia dei Corrieri Veneti* (the Company of Venetian Couriers) founded in 1305 maintained a virtual monopoly on foreign mail as well as a majority of the mail delivered overland in the Venetian Republic's territories. Standardized rates and an efficient network throughout Italy made the *Compagnia* highly successful. An interesting feature of the *Compagnia's* network was that the couriers' tired horses would be left at post stations and could be hired by someone who was returning along the same route.

The courier services of Venice, established by the Tasso and Della Torre families, slowly expanded into international services, and the families were united by marriage. The couriers carried a strip of badger skin as a symbol of their authority ("*Tasso*" means badger). In 1450 they were knighted by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III and the families Germanized their name to Thurn and Taxis. In 1500, Franz von Taxis was appointed Captain and Master of the Posts and he negotiated the establishment of posts between the Holy Roman Empire and the kings of France and Spain in exchange for an annual stipend. When the Empire fell behind in paying the stipend, von Taxis opened the entire service to the public. By the mid-16th century, the Thurn and Taxis Post operated all over Western Europe. By the 17th century, the Thurn and Taxis system had 20,000 employees, but revolution, war and political change slowly encroached on the Thurn and Taxis Post until, finally, they sold the last of their operations to the Prussian State in 1867.

Europe had the advantage of being relatively densely populated with an existing transportation network. The North American colonies, on the other hand, were isolated from

each other and distant from England. In the early years of the colonies, official news and letters were carried aboard warships of the Royal Navy. Private letters were transported from coffee house to coffee house. A ship's captain would hang a bag in a coffee house, letters and payment would be placed in it and on the sailing date, the bag would be taken aboard (letters could also be given directly to the ship's captain for delivery). The captain would drop off the letters in another coffee house following his arrival on the other side of the Atlantic where people would have to come and collect them.

The coffee house system had obvious problems and attempts to standardize it (by the Act of Queen Anne in 1710) by forcing captains to deliver the mail to official post offices were widely avoided. (Captains frequently "forgot" to stop by the post offices). Colonists looked on the post offices as another form of tax (which they were to some extent).

Inland routes were established in North America, essentially on a colony by colony basis, which were overseen by appointed postmasters. Benjamin Franklin was one of these serving from 1753 until 1774 when he was dismissed by the British government. Franklin reformed the postal system as best he was able, instituting such innovations as night post-riders between Boston and New York and reducing the time for letters to be exchanged between these cities from two weeks to four days. The inland postal system only functioned effectively in the fairly densely populated North; attempts to establish regular service in the Southern colonies was hampered by lack of population and climate.

After the Revolutionary War, the Federal Government established a Post Office which was initially headed by Benjamin Franklin. This era saw, Royally sanctioned and supported messenger services in Europe slowly move away from delivering royal messages only, to carrying private mail and then to becoming postal systems in the way we think of the post office today. By the late 19th century, most European states had created national postal services following the British model of universal service at a single price indicated by stamps.

A study of messengers and couriers would not be complete without a mention of that most American of courier services: the Pony Express. Created to link the west coast of the United States with the east, the Pony Express (officially the Central Overland, California and Pike's Peak Express Company) ran mail from St. Joseph, Missouri (where the rail line from the east coast ended) to Sacramento and San Francisco, a route of 1,950 miles (3,138 kilometers.) Riders covered this distance in ten and a half days, except in winter when the time it took to cover the route increased to fifteen days or more. The riders of the Pony Express carried messages (usually written on tissue paper to save weight) in a specialized pouch called a *mochilla*, which could be quickly moved from one saddle to another, vital as only two minutes were allotted for changing horses at each stage of the route.

Founded in 1860, the Pony Express only remained in existence for eighteen months before technology, in the form of the telegraph, supplanted it. During that time the riders dealt with weather, a "revolt" by Native Americans (which was more of a panic caused by settler overreaction) and other problems to deliver mail across eight states and almost every sort of terrain. But, in the end, the horse could not deliver messages faster than telegraph and the Pony Express faded into the mythology of the American West.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Messengers follow similar themes as were explored in last month's Lens, the importance of delivering certain messages, money to be made as a courier and so on as already discussed. As a society moves closer to a modern conception of the post office another option emerges beyond stealing a single, valuable letter to stealing entire bags full of mail and pilfering them all for cash (and information).

As mail systems become larger and more complex, the government becomes more inclined to step in and administer them. This gives opportunities for character to assist in the running of postal systems. Perhaps a character is assigned to become the new postmaster of a distant part of her homeland and has to deal with uncooperative locals, missing mail and a distant bureaucracy that expects things to be done in a certain way with no knowledge of what conditions out in the field actually are. Or character could be sent to investigate why mail is vanishing along the coast road or why postal receipts are too low in Kingston Port.

Supplemental d20 Material:

New Feats

Order Messenger [General]

You serve your Order as a messenger and you will not be turned from your task.

Prerequisites: Wis 10, Knowledge (local) 1 rank, Ride 2 ranks, membership in a knightly or religious Order.

Benefit: You receive a +2 bonus on your Knowledge (local) and Ride checks. You gain a +2 bonus on Fortitude saves made to avoid nonlethal damage from hot or cold environments and a +1 bonus to Will saves. Also, you may sleep in the saddle without becoming fatigued.

Special: Combined with the Endurance feat, you gain a +5 bonus to avoid nonlethal damage from hot or cold environments.

Postmaster [General]

You are a postmaster, a position of responsibility, skilled in handling both mail and people.

Prerequisites: Int 10, Wis 10, literate, Diplomacy 2 ranks *or* Knowledge (local) 1 rank.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on Knowledge (local) checks. In your home locale you gain a +2 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy, Gather Information and on Profession (postmaster) checks.

Special: If you spend too long away from your posting, you are likely to lose your position. An unemployed Postmaster loses his circumstance bonuses until he is rehired or finds a new position.

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by Melissa Piper

Modern Gaming: Modern Settings from the Past

Slide the curtains away from the nearest window and take a look outside. What do you see? Chances are, you'll notice a few roads, some vehicles rolling down those roads, your neighbors' houses, or maybe skyscrapers and bustling streets. When a game master mentions that he or she is looking to start a modern campaign, players usually envision a scene in the real world when they try to picture how a modern setting would appear. The term "modern" often has a negative connotation that leaves players with a "been there, done that" attitude, and little is left to the imagination. But take a second look because "modern" means more than what lies outside of your window.

Before I take on the task of explaining what time period a modern campaign can encompass, I would like to take a moment to explain what actually makes up the basis of a modern campaign. Obviously, a modern campaign is a role-playing game that takes place sometime in the present. Often times, game masters will incorporate modern-day features such as technology, automobiles, and guns to give the setting a present-day feeling. The technology utilized today can be used to uncover clues and research information like never before, and these elements have the same effect on a modern campaign. Players have the chance to explore these new features within the context of the game, as well as get the chance to add new quirks and faults to their characters' personalities. Also, in an effort to add the fantasy element to their campaigns, game masters will sometimes add fictional enemies or player races, such as goblins, elves, and kobolds to the mix. Basically, when you throw all of these elements into the role-playing blender, the result will be a high-fantasy, cinematic action/adventure game that takes place in your very own hometown.

As I started to write this article, I toiled over what would be the best approach to defining the term "modern." Instead of resorting to lengthy examples and explanations, I opted to go straight to the book of definitions and pulled out my handy *Webster's Dictionary*. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the word "modern" pertains to "present or recent times." Okay,

so we know that "present" implies "here and now," but we are still left with the question of what time the word "recent" encompasses. If we use the term "recent" in context of the Earth's history, considering that the Earth has been in existence for billions of years, "recent" can encompass a large period of time indeed. Therefore, I do not think it would be too lax to consider anywhere from 350 years ago to the present as a part of the modern era.

If this general definition answers the question of what time span can be considered modern for you, then you need look no further than a timeline of history to get a feel for what occurred during the past 350 years. However, if you are a more detail-oriented person that prefers a clear starting point to modern history, then this definition is probably not solid enough for your purposes. If this is the case, defining "modern" becomes more of a challenge.

There is no real agreement by historians as to when modern history began. The decision on where to mark the beginning of modern history is truly a matter of perspective, especially in the role-playing community. When considering the possibilities for modern settings, one must think about what makes a setting "modern." The popular consensus seems to be that the modern era began in the United States and Great Britain with the Industrial Revolution during the 1700's and early 1800's. This is justified with good reason, since this was the time when Western nations changed from agricultural societies to industrialized societies. Or, perhaps you see the shift to the modern era with a shift in weaponry with the change from swords to guns. If so, you may believe that modern history began with the invention of gunpowder in the 8th century or with the use of the first gun by the Muslims. If you are a real techno-geek, you may not believe that any time could be called "modern" until the creation of the first electronic digital computer during World War II. Whatever the case, decide on what components are essential for a modernized world then take a trek through history to learn when these components were invented or first introduced onto the open market.

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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With that said, there are a vast array of settings from the past that are still labeled as modern. Although you can probably imagine more "past modern" settings that you know what to do with, here are a few possibilities you can experiment with, along with plot hooks to capture your players' interests from the first session.

1. The Wild, Wild West – The Old West is a great setting to use if you want to stretch your players' imaginations back to the past, while keeping parts of the present intact. In this setting, your players can take on the roles of anything from cowboys and cowgirls to the town blacksmith. With the law of the time consisting mainly of the sheriff and his deputy, there will always be a major NPC or two that your players can report to.

One plot hook worth taking a look at in a Western campaign consists of the murder of the sheriff's deputy. Without his deputy, the sheriff is greatly outnumbered by the band of rustlers and thieves that are rumored to be approaching the town. Out of desperation, the sheriff has decreed that all cowhands, gunslingers, etc. who believe that they can handle a gun should fight on the side of the law for their town. Your players, who take on the parts of the local cowhands and gunslingers, are then grouped together to form a band of fighters that work with the sheriff to stop the invading rustlers and outlaws. In the meantime, your players could also work on the investigation of the murdered deputy.

2. The Roaring 20's – The 1920's are well known for flappers, mobsters, and prohibition. All of this adds up to a great campaign setting with many possibilities. In this setting, players could have the option to play on the side of the mobsters and "make them an offer they can't refuse,"

or align with the law and investigate a string of murders believe to be related to the mob. Whatever side your players unite with, you, as the game-master, control the opposite side.

If you have your players take on the role of the mobsters, their main obstacle could be the investigators and the newly-created FBI. One possible plot hook if your players are taking on the role of the mobsters is that they could be in charge of smuggling alcohol to local patrons in search of the banned beverages. Your players would have to face a string of investigators as they inspected the premises for the illegal substance. The challenge would be to outwit the investigators, or to take care of them by "other means" without drawing too much attention to the group.

The other option when running a Roaring 20's campaign is to allow your players to take on the roles of the investigators and inspectors. Their job, then, would be to bring a stop to the mob's smuggling activities. For an interesting campaign with a large group, you can divide your group into two parts; the law and the mob. With this approach, players are constantly trying to outwit each other, adding a new challenge to the game.

3. World War II – One of the best-known wars in history, World War II, lays the groundwork for a strategic historic campaign. In a World War II setting, players can side with either the allies or the axis. Each session can then be played in various countries, since the war took place throughout the world. As with the Roaring 20's setting, you take on the role opposite of that acted-out by your players.

Players in this setting effectively get a chance to re-write history. If the players take on the role of the axis powers, then the goal of the game is to outwit the allied commanders and see how things may have gone if the axis won the war. However, if your players side with the allies, the goal of the game is to secure the war for the allies once again.

This general plot can be used with any war throughout history. As with the Roaring 20's campaign, if you have a

large enough group, your group can be divided into two sides, and the players must battle each other throughout the game.

4. Independence Day – One thing that most countries have in common throughout their histories is a struggle for independence. Countries on every continent of the world (except Antarctica) have been under the rule of another country at some point, and they eventually come to the point where they want nothing more than to run their own country. Sadly, many of these struggles for independence come through war and other means of violence.

An example of a common struggle for independence took place in Africa directly after World War II. Algeria, a country that was a colony of France at the time, demanded independence from the allied country. Africans held strikes, boycotts, and rallies in order to make the French see their way. At some points, colonists even resorted to riots and terrorism in an effort to scare the French out of their territory. In 1954, colonists revolted against French settlers in that country. The revolt lasted either years, but Algeria finally won their independence.

A role-playing scenario can be developed from this battle for Algerian independence. For example, players can take on the role of the colonists who have had enough of French rule. If you are running a large group, then the players can be divided into smaller groups. One player from each sub-group can be designated as the group's leader. The leader will be the one who decides what action the colonists will take to oppose French rule. For example, one leader may elect to stage a protest where a prominent French politician is staying, where as another leader may choose to a more violent approach by holding some French settlers hostage until their demands are met. The job of the game-master, then, is to control the French and judge their reactions to the players' actions. The scenario can work the same way with a smaller group, except that the party forms one group with one designated leader.

5. Peaceful Independence – Since I previously mentioned that most struggles for independence are won through strife and violence, I feel that it is important to mention a possible setting where independence was won through peace. After World War II, when several regions were fighting with Western nations in order to win independence, a nationalist named Mohandas Gandhi was also fighting for independence from Britain for India. Unlike other leaders, Gandhi did not resort to violence in order to win freedom for this country. He put himself through a personal hunger strike, refusing to eat until Britain released its hold on India. Gandhi eventually won his battle, and India became an independent nation under its own rule.

Running a modern, post-WWII India setting would be a unique experience for both players and game-masters. In this setting, players would assume the rule of Gandhi's supporters. This means that they could not resort to violence as a means to an end. Instead, players would have to rely on their wisdom and intelligence in order to develop peaceful plans for protest. The game-master's role would be to control the side of the British (and even Gandhi, himself) until the players developed a way to make the British agree to their terms. This type of campaign would be difficult to run, but it gives the game-master more room to emphasize the use of the imagination instead of allowing players to simply resort to violence.

Whatever type of modern session you choose to run, do not allow yourself to be limited by the word "modern." Just because something is called "modern" does not mean that it must occur here and now. After all, everything today has its roots in the past. And it may just be that the best modern setting for you may be found somewhere in the past.

by Matt Haught

d20 Review: Creatures of Rokugan

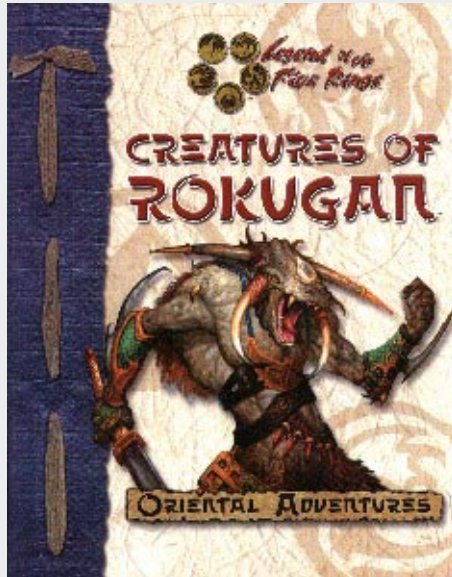
"Creatures of Rokugan"

About: 112 pages, soft cover, black and white, \$25.

Authors: Shawn Carman, Rich Wulf, Seth Mason, Travis

Heermann, Aaron Medwin, Eric Steiger and Eric Brann

Publisher: Alderac Entertainment Group



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

From the Back Cover

The depths of the Shinomen Forest seethe with countless strange beasts. The Sea of the Sun Goddess boils with serpents, ningyo and drowned ghosts. The spirits of animals and tricksters freely roam the roads of the Great Clans, bringing mischief in their wake. The Shadowlands squat beyond the Carpenter Wall, a home to strange abominations of every variety.

Introduction

Creatures of Rokugan is a creature supplement for AEG's Legend of the Five Rings setting, which is the default setting for Wizards of the Coast's Oriental Adventures d20 game.

Presentation

Creatures of Rokugan is a 110-page softcover with glued binding and black and white illustrations throughout. The cover material seems to be made of especially heavy stock, and projects a feeling of durability. The art seems to be pencil-shaded black and white drawings, most of fairly good quality.

The Meat and Potatoes

When I picked up Creatures of Rokugan, I was surprised by its heavy softcover construction. It reminded me of the old Complete Classes Handbook series from 2nd Edition D&D. Both the cover and the interior are printed on heavier-than-average stock, lending the book a feeling of durability that is rarely encountered in softcover products. It feels like this is a book that could endure being tossed roughly into a backpack and toted to conventions without suffering much in the way of damage.

The first thing that struck me about the content of Creatures of Rokugan was its specialized, setting-specific vocabulary. I am fairly well versed in basic Asian weaponry terms, but the

Review snapshot

CLASS: Monster Supplement

STR: 13 (Physical). Exceptionally sturdy, glued softcover binding and heavy stock pages.

DEX: 14 (Organization). Tables, index and listing of monsters by CR combine to make finding the perfect monster relatively easy.

CON: 14 (Quantity of the Content). 112 pages of densely packed content.

INT: 14 (Quality of Content). Interesting monsters with a wide variety of CRs.

WIS: 14 (Options & Adaptability). Excellent appendices. NPC generator is well done.

CHA: 13 (Look & Feel). Beautiful cover, but interior illustrations range from mediocre to excellent.

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.*

various spirit realms baffled me. Fortunately, a reference is provided in the extremely helpful appendices. In fact, it is the presence of these appendices that I feel sets Creatures of Rokugan apart from the common monster book.

Creatures of Rokugan is at its heart a monster book, and it provides a wide range of adversaries. While the majority of entries are CR 10 or lower, there are a few high-level baddies to challenge the great Samurai of the realm, including the First Oni, who weighs in at a hefty CR 25.

Low-level parties might encounter a nikumizu, a small crustacean-like parasite that hides in crevasses and rotting trees in the Shadowlands. While the nikumizu are slow, fragile, and seemingly harmless, they are in fact quite deadly to characters who are unfortunate enough to encounter them, as their primary attack method is burrowing into flesh and eating their way towards the heart. PCs will have to either cut them out (taking damage while doing so) or use healing

magic to remove them before they reach vital organs.

Mid-level parties will have their hands full dealing with a shadow beast, a corrupted minion of the Lying Darkness. While not as physically tough as most other CR 7 monsters, the shadow beast's energy-draining breath weapon, damage reduction and stealth more than make up for it. Interestingly enough, shadow beasts are geared towards combating the Shadowlands, and are especially effective against creatures or spirits from that realm.

High-level parties venturing into the seas around Rokugan may be attacked by an orochi, a great sea serpent that guards the ningyo and attacks ships that carry any who may have offended the underwater people. Massive, brutally strong and vicious, the orochi knows nothing of subtlety and will simply attempt to sink a ship carrying the PCs. Can they defeat such a monster, or will they be drowned in its gullet?

For the truly powerful parties, there are numerous types of Shadowlands creatures that band together in disciplined armies. But more terrible than legions of plague-bearing undead bushi are their generals: the Ashura. These moth-winged samurai are so evil that the land itself repels them, leaving them floating in the air a few inches from the ground. With their tainted weapons, numerous spell-like abilities, regeneration, terrifying presence and brutal resilience, these generals of the armies that might have been, are truly a challenge for even the most experienced party.

In addition, the book seems to make great use of available space. Instead of repeating the standard Oni abilities and qualities in each entry, it prints them once in the Introduction along with other traits common to some monsters, and only mentions deviations from these standards in the individual monster entries. This keeps the book uncluttered with repetition, unlike some others that I have seen.

Appendix One begins with ECL values for the various alternate races presented in the book, and continues with racial- or template-based prestige classes before ending

with detailed rules for Taint-induced Shadowlands powers.

Appendix Two provides short descriptions of the ten Spirit Realms, which I found very helpful in understanding the vocabulary used throughout the book. This section also details the properties of crystal and jade items, including weapons. Since many of the monsters in *Creatures of Rokugan* are vulnerable to jade or crystal, such rules are very important. They are also extremely simple and well balanced. This section ends with what amounts to a random NPC generator, full of tables for creating NPCs of any class and level. The entries provide detailed feat and skill progressions, making generation quick and easy. Of course, GMs may wish to alter the feats or skills for specific or recurring NPCs, but the tables provide an easy way to generate that party of Crab samurai who will be hunting the PCs.

Appendix Three is a short section of GM advice on using monsters to spice up a campaign or adventure, followed by a list of all creatures in the book, arranged by challenge level. All in all, these appendices go a long way towards helping a GM, be he novice or experienced, to craft and understand the world of Rokugan for the benefit of his players.

I like to include a counterpoint to all my reviews, a sort of devil's advocate to show the other side of the story. I've spent considerable time trying to find a flaw in *Creatures of Rokugan*, and at first I was going to comment on the constant referrals to events, characters and places about which I knew absolutely nothing. However, that's not truly fair, as I'm sure all of these things were discussed in the Rokugan setting book, and thus my ignorance of the plot is not something that can be laid at the feet of this product.

The only other gripe I have is that the book itself is in black and white, and the illustrations range from the excellent to the mediocre. On page 11, for example, there are two illustrations. The first, *Doro no Oni*, is excellent. It depicts a samurai in mid-swing, trying to fend off the advances of the ooze-like Oni. The second, a *Chizaro no Oni*, looks like something that Todd McFarlane conceived and drew in all its cartoonish glory. For whatever reason, it just seemed off to me. I found one minor typo in my perusal, but I think that can be forgiven.

Conclusion

Creatures of Rokugan should prove very useful to GMs running Asian campaigns in general, and Rokugan campaigns in specific. The NPC generator and excellent documentation make this a versatile tool for such users. For a softback, it's built like a tank. If you're a GM, and you have any desire to run an Asian-flavored campaign or just want to add some Oriental monsters to your game, then *Creatures of Rokugan* is perfect for you.

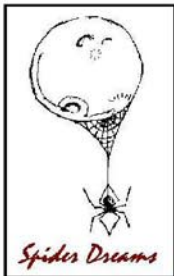
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Ignotus

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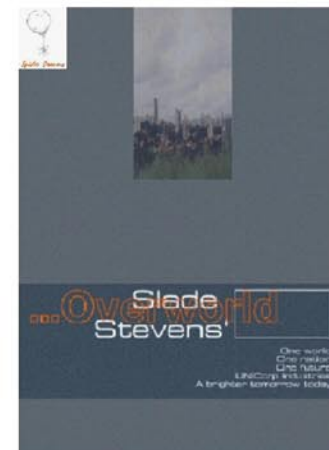


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Slade Stevens' ...Overworld

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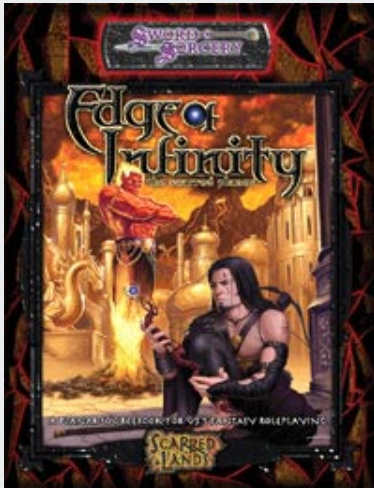
d20 Review : Edge of Infinity - The Scarred Planes

"Edge of Infinity : The Scarred Planes"

About: 144 pages, soft cover, black & white interior, \$24.

Authors: Werner Hager, James Maliszewski, John Snead, Ian Watson, and Patrick Younts

Publisher: Sword and Sorcery Studios



Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product. This review contains some spoilers for players who are playing in a Scarred Lands campaign.

From the Back Cover

"At the Edge of Infinity, where dwell the gods... Even the vast Scarred Lands are tiny compared to the scope of the Great Beyond. From the horrendous wastes of the Apocalypse Abyss to the beatific glories of the Adamantine Heavens, these planar realms are places of mystery and wonder - not in the least because of the role they played in the gods' empowerment and the titans' downfall. Edge of Infinity: The Scarred Planes is a sourcebook detailing the dimensional planes which enfold and enwrap the Scarred Lands, from the homes of the gods to the stellar planes to the planes of the elements.

Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, published by Wizards of the Coast®. This product utilizes updated material from the v.3.5 revision."

Introduction

Edge of Infinity is essentially a manual of the planes for the Scarred Lands™ campaign setting. Scarred Lands is a high fantasy setting and was the first d20 fantasy setting. The unique thing about Scarred Lands is that two hundred years ago, it was like any fantasy land, but then the gods and titans fought and left indelible marks on the land of Scarn and now all the races are in a fight for survival. Edge of Infinity presents a brief cosmology for Scarred Lands and then jumps right into the descriptions of the various planes. Edge of Infinity covers all types of planes: from the Void and its opposite, to the four elemental planes, to the nebulous Ethereal, Astral, Shadow, and Dream planes. That's just getting started. Also included are the Divine Planes, the Zodiacal Planes, planar lore, prestige classes, and monsters. The eight Divine Planes are the resting places of the gods of Scarred Lands, and the sixteen Zodiacal Planes are the planes for the constellations in the sky of Scarred Lands - an interesting concept. With each plane's write-up, you get an introduction, history, planar traits (stuff that affects physics, magic, or creatures of certain alignments), locales (specific

Review snapshot

CLASS: Setting Supplement

STR: 13 (Physical). "Perfect bound" binding held up well to my abuse, but still is a soft cover.

DEX: 8 (Organization). The book progresses in a logical manner, but there's no index and the ToC is not detailed and misses a chapter.

CON: 12 (Quantity of the Content). For a book of the planes, it seems a little light at 144 pages. More monsters, more maps, and some statistics for mortal entities would have been nice. Still, there are plenty of planes to keep you busy.

INT: 14 (Quality of Content). The planes chapters are excellent, but the book loses steam in the appendix which gets shoddy at times.

WIS: 12 (Options & Adaptability). Fairly adaptable. Since the gods make their homes in the planes of Scarred Lands, you may need to edit them out for your campaign if it isn't Scarred Lands.

CHA: 14 (Look & Feel). Very good art and layout, but the book is black-and-white.

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.

places or areas), and entities (specific beings, whether mortal or immortal).

Presentation

Edge of Infinity is a 144-page sourcebook on the planes for the d20 System. It is a soft cover book with a black-and-white interior and most of the planes get an illustration that shows a particular aspect, entity, or locale for the plane. Every prestige class and monster has an accompanying illustration. The cover art by Scott Johnson is fantastic and the interior

artwork by Tim Truman, Eric Lofgren, and Jeremy McHugh stood out to me for different reasons. Tim Truman's style is realistic looking, but done with ink; Eric Lofgren's style is stark and brooding as many of his illustrations of the planes have a scary and eerie feel to them (this is a good thing); Jeremy McHugh's style is soft, looks like it was done with pastels, and has great shading. The left and right borders on the pages look like cracked glass or crystals and are 1-1/8 inches wide. Most planes are infinite so there are only a couple of maps in the book. One of the maps shows the relationship between many of the planes; the other map depicts an interesting locale of the Vault of Earth (the plane of the earth element). One feature of the presentation that I shouldn't neglect to mention is the watermarks for the Divine and Zodiacal Planes. The watermarks are faint and are the deity's or constellation's symbol - a nice touch. Overall, the artwork and layout are very good, but it loses a couple of points by virtue of being black-and-white.

Fundamental Planes

Before this chapter is a brief cosmology of the Scarred Lands. The cool thing about the cosmology is that it presents five different cosmological theories which are all by different sources (organizations with different views).

Chapter Two details the Fundamental Planes: the Eternal Void (negative energy), the Highest Brilliance (positive energy), the Deepest Sky (air element), the Vault of Earth (earth element), the Great Inferno (fire element), and the Endless Deep (water element). As a whole, the chapter was an excellent start to

the book as these planes are imaginative, if not odd, and provide some interesting twists and turns. Magic is greatly affected on each of the planes as magic that is linked with the nature of the plane is affected by metamagic feats and magic that is the opposite of the plane is impeded (does not work). One of the plot hooks that I really like is that if you

destroy negative energy undead in the Eternal Void, then you utterly destroy its counterpart on Scarn (the world of the Scarred Lands). There are a good number of plot hooks throughout Edge of Infinity. I think that the planes for the four major elements have some nice, creative twists. For example, the Vault of Earth has tunnels that open and reseal themselves - definitely a peril to travelers who choose to use them!

There was one dichotomy that I didn't quite understand. The Plane of the Highest Brilliance destroys visitors that are unprotected from positive energy because the healing energy fills the creature to the point that it explodes, but then those parts of the exploded creature then transform and take on a life of their own. For example, Krusk travels to the Highest Brilliance without protecting himself (hey, he ain't the brightest of the bunch) and explodes into myriad pieces; his eyeball later sprouts little legs and walks off. It is infinite life... Though this is quite strange, I didn't understand why the Eternal Void did not have some feature that was similar but aligned to negative energy. Also, I could wrap my little skull around the interesting concept of the Void, but there are creatures in the Highest Brilliance that are masses of limbs. Though the limbs are not tentacles, I thought this was simply bizarre in a Cthulhu-esque type

way. The insanity!



Occult Planes

The Ethereal Plane, the Astral Plane, the Plane of Shadow, and the Plane of Dreams are detailed here. There are a couple of really cool things about the Ethereal Plane that got my attention. First, there is a great plot hook where if there are traumatic hauntings or phenomena on Scarn, then those can be fixed by expunging the Ethereal Wrack from within the Ethereal Plane. If you combine this with the hook from the Void then you could make a story arc for a high-level campaign where the heroes venture into these dark planes and risk their perils to make Scarn a better place to live. How noble of them! Another thing that I liked about the Ethereal Plane is one of its locales - the Web - which is tended to by swarms and swarms of phase spiders. The spiders claim that the Web is to trap the predators of the plane and prevent them from causing havoc on Scarn, but I don't believe them. Spiders are sneaky like that.

While all of these planes are described as well as possible, they are nebulous and hard to get a great handle on. This aspect does not lend itself well to the exacting nature of d20 rules and how technical d20 players and DMs can be. I can envision a group of adventurers traveling to these planes and arguments starting at the table, or the players getting annoyed when the DM has trouble explaining the environment that her players find themselves in and how to describe what is happening. The human mind cannot grasp the infinite or the boundless. Some of the situations that you can possibly put your players in are patently unfair as they could mean a Total Party Kill if the group runs out of magic at their destination. Take the Fields of Somnolence in the Plane of Dreams, for instance. The Fields "appear to be a vast field filled with colorful flowers, bushes and trees of every size and color." If I was a character and tired of being paranoid, I would hunker down for a picnic before continuing on with my planar travels. If the whole group sits down for a picnic, they may not get back out for a long time, if ever.

Divine Planes

This chapter explains the eight Divine Planes: the Mithril Heaven (god: Corean, LG), the Golden Paradise (Madriel, NG), the Eternal Glade (Tanil, CG), the Timeless Vault (Hedrada, LN), the Howling Limbo (Enkili, CN), the Iron Hells (Chardun, LE), the Black Lands (Belsameth, NE), and the Pestilential Abyss (Vangal, CE). While the Divine Planes

are infinite like the Occult Planes, the locales are more defined and consequently give DMs more to chew on and use in their games. Another cool thing about the entries for each plane is that there is a "Fate of the Departed" entry which describes the afterlife for the worshippers of the deities that are tied to each plane. For worshippers of evil deities, this typically means that they start out higher on the hellish food chain in their afterlife if they gave "glory" to their god/goddess during their lives. If they failed in life, then they start at the bottom of the bottom - a chilling prospect.

For me, there were some of the best histories and backgrounds to the planes here in this chapter (translation: darned good mythology). For example, Tanil's Eternal Glade used to be in an eternal spring, a bright and cheery place that was constantly growing. However, Tanil had a daughter Idra who disagreed with an act of vengeance that Tanil took and Idra left the Eternal Glade. Tanil became sad and melancholy by the departure of her daughter and the Eternal Glade now has a certain coldness to it along with the perpetual rains and fogs of autumn. Tanil has become withdrawn and doesn't see visitors as much now. I like the concept of the land reflecting the emotions of a goddess, I guess this is because this is how many real-world religions started - people thinking that their god was angry with them whenever something went wrong. But I digress... The locales of these planes are much more tangible and would thereby be easier for a DM to include in a game.

Zodiacal Planes

A grand total of sixteen planes linked to the major constellations of Sharn are detailed in this chapter. All the Zodiacal Planes are finite in size. Though there is some good adventure or quest potential with the planes in previous chapters, each of the Zodiacal Planes has a quest associated with it. Most people tie the Zodiacs to astrology and the telling of the future or to divine things. Each Zodiac in the Scarred Lands has a specialized focus of knowledge and divination. If the heroes either ask the right way or fulfill a quest to be able to ask a question, then they can have a question answered. For example, Vespis is a huge

bat that "possesses vast amounts of knowledge about darkness and events that happen there." Vespis can provide knowledge about events that have happened or will happen in complete darkness and "provide detailed maps of any natural cavern in existence." These divinations have limits, as the beings either answer one question for each time period or during certain time periods or the quest to get the ability to petition the being can be demanding or only happen during that zodiacal period.

Appendices: Lore, PrCs, Monsters

The mechanics of Edge of Infinity are largely confined to the three appendices. The first appendix gives feats, magic items, artifacts, and one spell; the second appendix presents five prestige classes; the third appendix provides four monster entries and two creature templates. I felt like the book lost some steam here as the appendices seem like a mish-mash of d20 Mechanics instead of something more cohesive.

Most of the feats seemed to have ties to the planes or the zodiacal beings, but they didn't really impress me. Two of the magic items that got my attention were the Amulet of Star Blessing Zodiac and the Zodiac Talisman. The cool thing about these items is that they have different powers depending on the month of the year or which zodiac sign to which the item is linked. Their relationship to the planes seems slightly tangential.

Of the five prestige classes in Edge of Infinity, I only found the occultist to be relevant to the material. Occultists are interested in studying and traveling the Occult Planes (Ethereal, Astral, Shadow, & Dreams). They gain different abilities to help with divination and magical means of travel. The Iron Lord is a general of Chardun (LE deity) and has similarities to the Blackguard PrC. The Keeper of Great Laws embodies Hedrada (LN deity) and is all about the letter of the law and fighting chaos; it is a good PrC but doesn't seem to fit. The Mithril Disciple is a holy warrior of Corean (LG deity). The Moonlight Lord pushes the agenda of Belsameth (NE deity) and becomes like a werewolf without actually becoming one. All these prestige classes are very well done and fit in the Scarred Lands setting, but only one fits with the topic of the planes.

I thought the monsters were very mediocre. Two of them are simply humanoid in nature and based around a standard ability. The Night People have blindsight and darkvision, and the Air Walkers can fly. They have nice pictures for the monsters, but the mechanics or feel of the monsters did nothing for me.

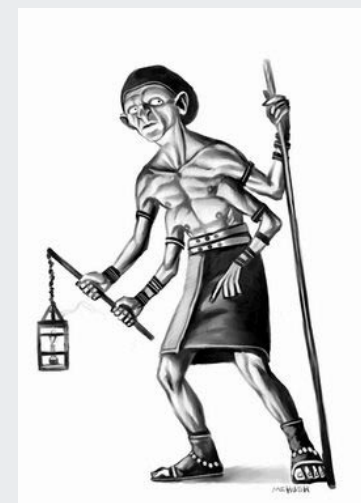
Conclusion

Despite the lackluster appendices, I whole-heartedly recommend this book for fans of the Scarred Lands setting. I do not have the Planar Handbook (Wizards of the Coast) so I cannot make comparisons between the books. I do think that the writing for the Divine Planes and Zodiacal Planes is excellent. The Divine Planes are a bulls eye on the flavor of the deities of Scarred Lands and the Zodiacal Planes are interesting and provide many plot hooks. The Fundamental and Occult Planes are definitely adaptable to most any fantasy campaign. Incorporating the Divine Planes and the Zodiacal Planes to a non-Scarred Lands game may take a little effort.

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by Melissa Piper

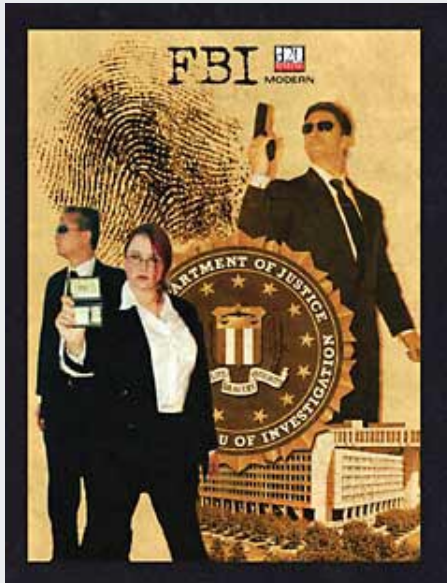
d20 Modern Review : FBI

"FBI: d20"

About: 112 pages, soft cover, black & white interior, \$20.

Author: Tom Ricks

Publisher: Holistic Design Inc. (2004)



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

From the Back Cover

"This book gives players the chance to work with the FBI or some of the world's other famous police forces. Detectives, forensic scientists, profilers and more all have a role in battling crime - or in trying to clean up the FBI itself!

Real-Life Roleplaying FBI comes with everything players and gamemasters need to recreate the greatest triumphs of the FBI and battle the most dangerous criminals in the world. It includes: A look at the storied history of the FBI, including some of its darker times; Information on running mysteries and police adventures; New advanced classes, including the profiler, special agents, and more; New feats and uses for skills; A wide variety of non-lethal weapons, used by police for both capturing criminals and crowd control; A complete sample setting focused on New Orleans; Two adventures, ready to play, that thrust the characters into conflict with deadly criminals; A strategic campaign that pits characters against a team of criminal masterminds; and A variety of alternative law enforcement campaigns.

Requires the use of a Roleplaying Game Core Book published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc."

Presentation

FBI: d20 is a perfect-bound, soft cover, 112-page d20 Modern campaign supplement. Although it is softbound, the cover is constructed of a strong, glossy material. The cover is in full color, but the internal pages are completely black-and-white. However, the black-and-white scheme fits well with the mood associated with the FBI. The only artwork throughout the product lies in the equipment section; all other visual aids consist of black-and-white photographs. The book is printed on thick paper, giving the entire book a durable feel.

Review snapshot

CLASS: Campaign Supplement

STR: 13 (Physical). Durable for a soft-cover product.

DEX: 14 (Organization). Easy-to-find player's and game-master's sections, data organized into tables where appropriate.

CON: 10 (Quantity of the Content). Some material is repeated.

INT: 14 (Quality of Content). Most basics of the FBI are covered, but some sections could be more detailed.

WIS: 16 (Options & Adaptability). Author presents much of the material as concepts, permitting more adaptability in game play.

CHA: 14 (Look & Feel). Black-and-white interior, but actually fits with the mood and feel of the book.

How we rate our reviews

Scoring definitions.

18 = *Superior. Best of the best.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 = *Inferior. Worst of the worst.*

Introduction

When you hear the letters "FBI," the first thing you probably think of is the image of FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents as they are portrayed in the movies; the secrecy conveyed, the expensive clothes they wear, and the glamour that seems to follow them wherever they go. Holistic Design's newest product, FBI: d20, sets out to dispel those falsehoods and gives the reader a glimpse at what makes the real FBI tick.

FBI: d20 is the fourth addition to Holistic Design's Real-Life Roleplaying? product line. Unlike the three previous RLR products, however, FBI: d20 focuses on an organization rather than a setting. As with every organization, one of the FBI's most important features is its employees. Throughout the book, you are introduced to some of those employees (all fictional), along with some of the equipment they use

to combat crime and the methods and techniques that are most effective in accomplishing their missions.

Although it is not specifically labeled, it is easy to discern the player material and game master material though the course of the book. The first four chapters focus on supplying background information on the FBI, as well as presenting new advanced classes and equipment for players. The remaining chapters, chapters 5-9, center on material for the GM. Here, an example campaign setting is introduced, with plot hooks and story scenarios comprising the rest of the book.

The First Four Chapters (For Players)

The first four chapters in FBI: d20 are usable by both game masters and players, but the information here is geared toward the players. Chapter 1 is a history lesson on the FBI. When reading this chapter, you will become acquainted with the roots of the FBI, its triumphs, and its tragedies. It also gives an overview of the purpose of the FBI and what their goals were and are in each decade, beginning with the 1920's. The chapter concludes with a significant mention of terrorism, Al Queda, and the Patriot Act. You can tell that the designers of this product put in significant research time when developing an overview for this world-renown organization.

The second chapter gets to the heart of the d20 material. Chapter 2's purpose is to present four new advanced classes that are specific to the FBI module. The first class, the FBI Special Agent, is the agent that you often see on television and in the movies. He is the agent that works out in the field and conducts the arrests and searches. The second advanced class is the Profiler. The profiler's job is to effectively think like a criminal and determine what his next move may be. Profilers must rely on their wits in order to get the job done. Next, the Forensic Scientist advanced class is presented. Normally, advanced classes reach up to 10th level, but the information given for this advanced class only extends to the 5th level. I found no explanation for this fact, and believed the reason was because the author suggests that this class be used as an NPC class. However, the final advanced class, the Survivalist, is a pure NPC-only class, but its stats reach to the standard 10th level. The survivalist is an NPC who has learned to escape the eye of law enforcement and lives to commit yet more crimes.

Overall, these advanced classes should play out well in the heat of a campaign, but they are unique to an FBI-oriented campaign. For instance, it is unlikely that you will find a need for a Special Agent if the FBI is not a major component in your campaign. These classes are specific, and are not well-rounded like those you will find in other d20 modern supplements. Also, the Forensic Scientist needs more development behind it before it can be used to its fullest.

Chapter 3, entitled "Skills, Feats, Flaws, and Equipment," covers exactly those four elements. One of the most interesting aspects about FBI: d20 is that few d20 statistics are actually given in the book, and this is most obvious in the Skills section of the chapter. Instead of listing new skills and their statistical makeup, skills in FBI: d20 are presented as concepts which can be created from the skills that already exist in the core d20 rules. For example, one of the skills an FBI agent requires is the ability to obtain a warrant. Instead of presenting a new "Obtain Warrant" skill, the book's author suggests deriving this skill from a Diplomacy check. Normally, the DC for the skill would be 10, but the game master (referred to as the "referee") may set the DC higher in order to obtain a search warrant (which are often more difficult to obtain than an arrest warrant).

As with skills, feats are not presented in list-fashion. Instead, they are called "flaws" or "negative feats." Flaws are serious physical ailments, psychological ailments, or addictions that greatly affect the well-being of the character. For instance, one of the example flaws in the book is "One Hand." With this flaw, the character takes twice as long to accomplish tasks that most people have no trouble with. The term "negative feat" draws from the fact that, in effect, the flawed character is left with one less feat than other players because of his condition. The author suggests awarding players who willingly take a flaw with an extra feat in order to balance game play. I was not a big fan of the "negative feat" concept, because some of the suggested flaws seem a bit far-fetched at times. I got the impression that the author tried to promote the idea of pressuring almost all of the players to take a flaw. If this were to happen, your FBI force would have so many flaws that they would never be able to keep up with the daily pressures of the job.

The final section of Chapter 3 deals with weapons, which are primarily non-lethal weapons. Lethal weapons are not discussed in FBI: d20, since they are covered in d20

Modern. The weapons presented here are stun guns, tasers, and pepper-spray launchers, all of which are weapons used by police forces to break up unruly crowds or to control riots. Statistics for all of the aforementioned weapons are listed in a table at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4 is another chapter that discusses how the FBI works and how the organization itself is organized. This is a good chapter for players to read so that they get an idea of how their characters fit into the FBI's structure. Some of the skills that were discussed in Chapter 2 are elaborated on, and some of the information from Chapter 1 is repeated. However, some of the unanswered questions from the previous chapters are answered here, as this is a more detailed explanation of the inner-workings of the FBI and its processes.

The Remaining Five Chapters (For Game-Masters)

The remainder of the book is for the GM's eyes only. This is because the final five chapters present an example campaign setting and plot hooks, about which players should have no knowledge. Chapter 5 begins the GM's section with a history of New Orleans, the author's choice for all plots and stories in the book. The businesses listed here are all real, but the FBI agents and criminals are fictional. The main purpose of this chapter is to give you a quick tour of New Orleans, and to meet the characters that are discussed during the campaign.

Chapters 6 and 7 are walk-through modules, with dialogue that the Game Master can read during the session and possible paths that she can take in response to the players' actions. At first, I expected these modules to be your typical, run-of-the-mill cop stories. In a way, that's what they are, but they are presented in a way that keeps things interesting. I found myself reading through the two modules for entertainment purposes instead of just for review purposes. The author does a great job of setting the scene and establishing the NPCs your players will meet.

The final two chapters, chapters 8 and 9, provide types of campaigns that Game Masters can use, as opposed to the walk-through campaigns presented in the previous two chapters. Chapter 8 presents strategic campaign ideas. The background and characters are given for each strategic

campaign, but it is up to the GM to fill in the blanks, such as character dialogue. This is a good chapter for those that need a quick campaign idea but like to develop the characters and plot themselves. Chapter 9, like Chapter 8, supplies quick campaign ideas, but it takes several new approaches. One of the mini campaigns, entitled "The H-Files" (a deliberate take-off on the X-Files), centers around J. Edgar Hoover's foolhardy son who is sent to chase after Big Foot, aliens, and even Santa Claus. Finally, some quick tidbits are suggested for other possible FBI campaign genres, such as horror settings and superhero settings.

Conclusion

While the majority of the book held its ground, one of the things that annoyed me was the constant slips in editing. For instance, there were several occasions when I noticed the editors failed to notice the missing space between words. This may be a direct result of the block format that is used to contain the words inside their columns, but it detracts from the professionalism of the product.

FBI: d20 is more like a book of facts and concepts than an actual d20 supplement. While few actual d20 statistics are presented throughout the book, it does give suggestions on how to develop new skills and feats from what already exists in the core d20 Modern rules. Because of this, FBI: d20 encourages GMs to create what works best in their own campaigns instead of relying on a book to provide the solutions for them. This may seem to take away from the purpose of the book, but it actually detracts little from the product. While this lack of statistics may turn off some GMs, FBI: d20 makes up for the lack of stats by supplying solid, usable concepts and background information.

If you are looking for a book that ties together all of the important information on the United States' prime crime-stopping unit, then you will certainly want to check out this book. All of the background information that you need for an FBI campaign is compiled neatly in FBI: d20. However, if you are looking for a product that is heavy on stats and supplies you with new skills and feats, this is probably not the book for you. Concepts make up the core of this book,

giving the GM freedom to modify and create items, skills, and feats as he or she sees fit.

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Greetings Fellow Freedom Lovers!

Welcome to the third edition of the *Prompeldia Post*, the only public voice of dissent in this troubled city of ours. We see that a competing newspaper has sprung up within Prompeldia's walls. Well, let me just say that the popinjays over at the *Prompeldia Herald* will never match up to our crack team of continental reporters! The Post will never be a kowtowing apologist for the current mayoral administration, and will certainly never have the unjustified ruler of this once-fair town, Gremply Slivers, as a guest editor!

On a sadder note, a member of our crack team, Hoddy Trufish, was brutally murdered by agents of the Golden Alliance. It appears that they took umbrage at my calling them a bunch of 'shifty crooks.' We at the Prompeldia Post refuse to back down from this simple statement of fact and offer our condolences to Hoddy's family. He truly died for a cause he believed in and doing what he loved.

I call upon the people of Prompeldia to boycott the Herald and to take action against the half-man, half-mayor. Spread chaos throughout the city – because the only way to restore order and justice is to burn down the corruption of Slivers and his cronies and start afresh.

Here are the headlines from around the world.

-Editor X

Kalamar: Dungeon Claims Three Adventuring Parties

TAGALETA: A new dungeon discovered on the eastern edge of the Duchy of O'Par has so far claimed the lives of three stout groups, reported the Tagaletan Adventurers' Guild. "Yep, she's a fierce one," said Franco the Brave, a retired ranger. "Full of traps and beasties. I wouldn't be heading down those winding stairs without an artifact or two by my side."

The dungeon, which was revealed to the light of day in the aftermath of a magical duel in the area, is believed to be the final resting place of some unknown monarch. The lone survivor of what has been dubbed 'The Soul Destroyer,' gnome scout Gizbie describes the dungeon as "an infinity of death with brief, random pauses for abject terror." He has not decided whether he will tackle the Soul Destroyer again, stating "There's gotta be some awesome gems down there. No-one puts that much effort into a trap to guard some dead king's corpse."

The Warriors of Doom, Heralds of the Passionate One, and Sifaka's Sojourners will be sorely missed.

Brandobia: Market Plans Marred By Martial Rumours

MENDARN: The bi-monthly 'Gems for Textiles' market has been rife with rumors of trouble this season, causing organizers to have significant second thoughts. From bandit raids to the threat of racial violence, it seems everyone wants a piece of the action.

Stakey Wizzletoes, a representative of the Dopromond gnomish gem sellers, has assured all involved that the market will go ahead as planned. "We are aware of the potential for attacks from Eldoran racial separatists, but the gnomish

The Prompeldia Post is a newspaper from the world of Kenzer & Co's Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. It is written entirely in character, from the point of view of an editor and publisher in the town of Prompeldia. The reporters from the paper are entrenched in various locales around the continent, from where they report back to the mysterious Editor X (who grates under the thumb of a crimelord mayor) through an undisclosed system involving divination and teleportation magic.

The stories may not always be accurate (due to the vast distances and general unreliability of magic, sources and reporter bias), but hopefully they will sell the editor enough papers to keep in business.

If there is anything you'd like to see reported in the Prompeldia Post, or if you have a story to break to the readers of that city, please send in on to Shane Cubis at rubikcubis@bigpond.com He'll forward it on to Editor X at his earliest convenience.

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race will never be bowed. I have personally overseen the institution of measures to deal with any oversized menace who thinks they can destroy the proud 'Gems for Textiles' tradition that dates back to our fathers' fathers."

The Mendarn merchants are "keen to attend," but have yet to make a final decision on whether to risk losing their well-crafted textiles to thieves and cut-throats. Agawa Crownsetter has bought gems at the market for years but fears that visiting marauders could keep him away. "It isn't so much that I fear for my riches," he said, "but I could not stand to take a loss this quarter. I'm already behind in my tiara-crafting, and the Life's Fire knows that Princess Otiosa cannot wait another month. If something were to go wrong at the market I'd lose gold and my head!"

Most agree that the best solution would be to hire more guards. Itinerant adventurers are fairly common in the region and tend to serve as a ward against trouble. Gnome and human talks will take place later this week to determine the status of this and future markets.

Svimohzia: Adventuring Prince Dispatches **"Reptile Men"**

Atavius has completed another leg of his journey to find the Shimzei Verdun, an idol belonging to his regal grandfather. Embedded *Post* reporter Ibus Canesh has survived with his life after being taken prisoner by a horde of ravaging "reptile men." Here is Canesh's special report.

"We had made camp under some low-hanging vines with our backs to a large rock where it looked like we were well protected from any attack. I was bedding down when suddenly a hessian bag was put over my head, and I was dragged off to gods know where. Next thing I knew, Atavius was standing over me with the bleeding head of some lizard man in his hand. He was covered in gore. His advisor, Versus, had fainted behind him."

Canesh is believed to be suffering the effects of some tropical disease but reports that Atavius picked up a decent amount of treasure from the reptile man raid. After beheading their primitive chief, he found a secret room full of gold and magical items, including a flaming sword and some potions to aid him in his quest.

Reanaaria: Prince Calls On Xiznoom Priests: **"Put Down the Dead!"**

In the aftermath of a bizarre dedication ceremony, formerly dead citizens of Baethel are once again walking the streets and attempting to go about their lifetime duties. Clerics of Xiznoom are believed to have raised the bodies of Baethel's deceased as part of the ritual construction of their new cathedral. It is unclear whether the raising was deliberate or an unforeseen byproduct of the unholy rites.

The dead have thus far caused no intentional harm to the living, seemingly happy to continue the tasks they took on in life. "The bread is a bit dirtier than usual, but it has the same old delicious Drebar taste," says Baethel resident 'Old Man' Hank, referring to the corpse of the late baker's efforts in the kitchen.

Prince Jebim has called upon the church of Xiznoom to return the dead to their graves. He is reportedly under great pressure from established churches to outlaw the worship of Xiznoom in Baethel entirely, a move that would cause huge rifts in the community. Local necromancer Rhystil Gumtreep is negotiating with the clerics on behalf of the Alliance of Might. The outcome of these talks is yet to be seen.

The Wild Lands: Tharggy's Tomb – Empty?

Outrage erupted from the royal palace this month as the final resting place of human hero Tharggy was revealed to be empty. Queen Defyn has demanded the head of anyone suspected of involvement in the crime, calling it "the worst desecration since Kalamar took my husband from me." A full investigation of the five guards on duty the day of the kidnapping is set to take place next month. None of the coins in the tomb were touched, although it was otherwise empty of Tharggy's trappings (including a sword and set of plate mail, both rumored to be heavily enchanted).

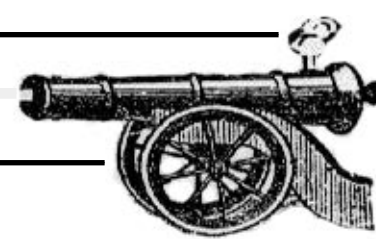
In the streets of Bynarr, a darker rumor has taken hold. According to potato farmer Grung, "No one done took Tharggy from his tomb. Tharggy done got up and walked, cuz he was sick of women running his realm." This view has clearly begun to gather credence among the townsfolk, who have taken to wearing any number of holy symbols lest they see the dead hero stride down their roads.

Even the nobles of the realm are looking a little piqued, as they are well-known omen watchers. The disappearance of their national hero cannot be seen as a good sign in any sense, and neighboring realms are aware of this. *Post* spies report that a few relatives of the queen have already taken subtle steps to disassociate themselves from Her Majesty.



the fodder cannon

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Elves Protest Wizards of the Coast

By Dak Tamble

A congregation of elves from around the city of Silven are marching to the coastline to confront the Wizards that reside there on issues of naming. The great Wizards have proclaimed the world in which we all live, breathe, and work be called Dungeons and Dragons. The elves are up in arms about this naming and have been for millennia. Their spokesperson, an elvish woman by the name of Braeli leads the band of lanky nigh-immortals on their cross-country trek. "I've been an elf for ever. I am one of the immortal elves. I don't even have a class level. When I adventured it was enough just BEING an elf. I see these youngin's and they can't do half the crap I could when I was their age. Sure there are dungeons all over the place... hell we built half of them, and sure there are dragons... but there are more elves! Elves make this world function, and we've been around since the beginning too. It's high time we get our just due from these overlord Wizards of the Coast. I mean, for an immortal race we have more breeds than rats. Doesn't that stand for something?"

Proposed changes are Dungeons and Elves, Elves and Dungeons, and the most popular choice Elves and Even More Elves.

Bathrooms, Do They Really Exist?

By Moss Willowwhite

Last week, visiting Professor Taedrin from the Isle of Afar came to inspect the city of Silven and was aghast to discover a most appalling and disturbing fact—the city was lacking restroom facilities. According to Taedrin, not only does the city lack bathrooms, but apparently citizens of the city have never had to go to the bathroom in their lives. He says, "Its just uncivilized. Don't you people ever need to take a crap?" Taedrin maintains that the lack of bathrooms and bodily excretion not only contribute to poor posture and lack of sleep but also can be the source of increased violence and bloodshed. He says, "Without bathrooms, people become eternally constipated, forcing them to become increasingly violent and attack things. The lust to adventure, the search for wealth and power—all these stem from the lack of proper bathroom habits!"

Residents have their own take on the subject. Barton Beersblood, local drunk, states, "Bathrooms? What's this new-fangled idea? What the hell ya supposed to do with them!" Local adventurer Oniko Caynmeyer states, "I don't know what all this talk about excretion is about. Nobody ever needed to crap before Taedrin came along." Orph Maloney, wizard extraordinaire has even made his own astute observations, "I've been in many a tower, dungeon, and castle. And through all of my many adventurers, a bathroom has yet to be discovered."

The mayor has declined to comment, but one of our Fodder Canon sources at City Hall confirms that the mayor has commissioned the Inventors Conglomerate chapter to begin development of a gate to the elemental plane of poo.

Local Assassin Outraged Over Loss of Work

By Poot Fenbottle

Famed assassin Ikeelit Fermunie is suing the city of Silven over lack of lost pay. Last month, Fermunie was commissioned to assassinate an undisclosed storeowner in the boatyards for renigging on a loan. But all did not go as planned at the scene. The day before Fermunie's job was commissioned, the Mayor ordered a doubling of all city patrols to handle the increased threat from Orph Maloney and the Wizards of the Coast as well as the constant protests of the now increased number of goblin supporters and protesters taking the streets.

According to Fermunie, the increased guards have made it near-impossible to complete his work with discretion and stealth. He says, "The guards are everywhere. It makes times hard for guys like me." He not only believes that the mayor's increased security has put him out of business, but also that a large portion of underground activity and trade has ceased since the start of the tightened security. Fermunie states, "I tell you, the mayor's trying to starve the lot of us. I'm the victim here! And I intend on making him pay—er suing him for lost wages. Yeah, that's right."

Not everyone is upset over the increase in city security. Newly hired city guardsman Rufis Righto says, "Its great for guys like me. Last month I was a penniless, out-of-luck commoner. I had nothing but a scythe to my name. Now look at me! I'm a proud

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.

member of the city guard.”

The mayor has refused to comment on the situation.

When Fermunie was asked if he had any final comments, he responded, "Its a living man, so don't knock it."

Material Component Laborers Strike

By Dak Tamble

In a series of labor strikes plaguing the city of Silven, the Material Component Labor Union (MCLU) has emerged from the far (and near) reaches of the world to set up picket lines outside many of the city's magic markets. Spokeman for the MCLU, Esh U. Mahteraels says, "Why must me fellow peasants dig sand, color it, put it in pouches, and not get paid a dime for it! I have never seen a business so reliant on product and yet that product is free! No wizard I know of has ever paid for any material component under a certain limit. Sure they pay for the big ones, but we don't handle those. We harvest the sand, and the eyes of newts, and wooden arrows, and bull's-eyes, and small mechanical clocks. These things take time, effort, and labor to produce, so why don't we get paid? And as far as this special art of not using material components under a certain cost, we take that as a personal affront to our very nature!"

Picket signs on the line read, "Eschew This!" "Down with Orph!" and "Open the Goblin Caves!"

Points from Poot: An Advice Column by Poot Fenbottle

Dear Poot,

A while back I sent you a letter about my rank companion. Your advice was most appreciated, but soon after since he was killed by a Troll, the problem no longer was a problem. Our party has since found a new companion—and this one with even a worse problem! Our new companion believes that all goblins are going to roast him for dinner. Now, let me put this problem in perspective. Gruk, as we call him, is an awfully big, burly, man. He could STEP on the goblins that protest on the streets if he wanted to. He could swing that massive club and squish two or three of them with one blow. But yet, he believes the goblins are out to get him. It wouldn't be an issue, but everywhere we go these goblins seem to have swarmed the cities with their protests. We can't walk the streets without Gruk spotting at least one goblin and completely freaking out. What do you suggest?

--Desperate

Dear Desperate,

Fear is a tough cookie to tackle, but I may have a solution for you that will help all of us. Talking to Gruk about why he thinks the goblins are going to roast him may provide some insight into his thought processes, but certainly not accomplish anything of value. Instead, what I suggest is to somehow brainwash him into believing that the goblins aren't going to kill him, but that he is going to kill the goblins. That way, your big friend can not only tackle his fears, but rid the city of Silven of an ever-increasing menace.

Public Poll:

Who will you vote for in the upcoming mayor elections?

"Whoever stands for cheaper ale."

Dak Tamble, Bard Wonder

"There is an election?"

Doofus Dave, Gnome candidate for mayor

"I vote on you!"

Naomi, love-sick orc maiden

"I don't go for this newfangled voting nonsense."

Poot Fenbottle, Wizened Sage

"As long as whoever wins is on my side - who cares?"

Damian Dark, secret Rogue Guild Chairman

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