

# Silven Trumpeter

Issue 22 - June 2005  
<http://www.silven.com>

The official magazine of Silven Crossroads

## COVER STORY

### The Many Faces of Gaming: Disabled Gamers

By Eytan Bernstein

page 13

**In this issue of the Trumpeter, we review...**

### GURPS Fourth Edition Basic Set: Characters

Reviewer: Joel Oberdieck

page 26



Image © Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

# Contents

## Fiction

### **The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent**

by Matthew J. Hanson  
page 3

### **The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent: Bonus Material**

By Mathew J. Hanson  
page 7

### **Moonlight Confessions**

By Chris McCoy  
page 8

### **Three Drabbles**

by Nghi Vo  
page 11

## General RPG

### **Cover Story - The Many faces of Gaming: Disabled Gamers**

By Eytan Bernstein  
page 13

### **Invasion of the Templates Invasion #5: Automaton Invasion!**

by Jerel Hass  
page 20

## Interviews

### **Interview with Richard Lee Byers**

by Chris McCoy  
page 17

## Reviews

### **Review - GURPS Fourth Edition Basic Set: Characters**

by Joel Oberdieck  
page 26

### **Other Open Gaming Licence**

page 29

### **Publishers Notes and Legal**

page 30

## Editor's Note: June 1, 2005

Hi there! Welcome to the 22nd issue of the Silven Trumpeter!

Silven Crossroads has seen some changes! One of the features of the new design provides easily-accessible forums for the Trumpeter, where readers and writers can discuss articles and fiction in an open environment. There's also a new section for Trumpeter content requests – so if there's something you want to see in the Trumpeter, start a thread there and get those ideas out in the open! You don't have to be a writer or an editor or a moderator (although they're certainly welcome, too!) – if you have a Silven handle, you can let us know what you think. If you don't have a handle, sign up today – it's free and has no strings attached.

This month's issue may look a little on the short side, but don't let that fool you! We've included running favorites like The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent, and the Invasion of the Templates, as well as fiction from Nghi Vo and Chris McCoy. We also have a thorough review of GURPS: Characters (the first in a two-part review), and an exclusive interview with Richard Lee Byers, author of the first book in R. A. Salvatore's War of the Spider Queen series, Dissolution. And, of course, we have our cover story, an insightful continuation of Eytan Bernstein's column The Many Faces of Gaming, this installment focusing on the challenges of disabled gamers.

We've also had a number of new writers joining the Silven Community in the last few weeks. Though their contributions didn't make it in time for this issue, look for some new names next month!

Trying hard to work less and play more, and reminding everyone else to do the same,

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

# The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

## Neddit, the Epic Level Commoner In Love

by Matthew J. Hanson

"You know, there's something I've always wondered," said a young woman named Bellarina. She was tall and well rounded, with hazel eyes and brown wavy hair. Starlanko the Magnificent had met her only an hour ago, but already he had learned that Bellarina worked at an import office, but aspired to run her own business. In her spare time, she practiced fencing, perfected her elven cuisine, and frequented the Five Hats' Tavern, the establishment where Starlanko and Bellarina were now conversing. "Just why do they call you Starlanko... the Magnificent?"

Starlanko liked the way Bellarina's cheeks dimpled when she smiled.

"There are some that would have you believe it is because of my magical talents," Starlanko said, "but certain people in the know realize it is for talents of another nature."

Starlanko and his associates Redreck the Fierce and Vox the Too Good For an Epithet were spending several days relaxing after having trudged through the Dark Woods looking for an ancient wizard who knew an ancient spell, but their efforts had proven fruitless.

Redreck was at the bar nursing his eighth glass of whisky, while Vox was playing darts against a number of locals. It took every fiber of Vox's being to resist her natural urges to fix the game. Funbane, Starlanko's talking sword, had been left in his room.

"If these... talents are as magnificent as they say," Bellarina smiled, "I might just have to get a sample of them myself."

"I think that can be arranged," said Starlanko. "Of course, I only give private demonstrations."

"Of course," Bellarina said. "I have a place not far from here."

As Starlanko and Bellarina walked towards the door, Starlanko caught Redreck's eye, and motioned towards Bellarina. Redreck nodded his head in understanding.

The wizard and his new friend had not gone far when Starlanko noticed a familiar face down the street. The face was covered with dirt. Above the face was a tangled mess of brown hair with bits of straw and fleece caught in it. The whole person was moving in Starlanko's direction.

"Starlanko the Magnificent!" said the mouth that belonged to the face. "I heard you were in town. I need your help."

"Is this a friend of yours?" Bellarina asked.

"A business relation mostly," Starlanko replied, "his name is Neddit, and he's assisted me in the past."

"Oh, so you're Neddit," Bellarina said to the farmer. "I was fortunate enough to get a taste of some of your sweet corn when I was dining at a friend's. It was the most succulent corn I'd ever tasted. What's your secret?"

Underneath all the grime, Neddit's cheeks flushed. "Ah, shucks. I just grow it like what my papa always told me."

"Your papa would be proud," Starlanko said.

Neddit had been a regular farmer of average skill, until he had helped a party of powerful adventurers slay a legendary dragon. Naturally, the experience of slaying the dragon vastly improved his farming skills (as well as making him tougher and more adept at combat). After becoming so powerful, Neddit had twice assisted Starlanko, once by defeating a lord who unjustly seized power, and again by rescuing Starlanko from the Bandit Emperor.

"So just what can I do to help?" Starlanko asked.

"You see," Neddit began, "ever since we first met I've heard talk about you. A lot of folks say that you're good at talking to the ladies, and recently this new lady's moved to town. Her name's Seera, and she's got her hair like if sweet taters were strung out into hair, and every time I see her my heart flops around like a chicken with no legs."

"And you would like my helping in romancing this Seera?"

"If that's not too much trouble."

"My best piece of advice," said Starlanko the Magnificent, "is to just be yourself."

"I can't do that," Neddit replied. "She's a high falutin' adventurer, and I'm just a dusty farmer. I figure if I looked like an adventurer, I might be able to talk with her. Seen as how you go on adventures yourself, I thought you might do me some good."

"I still advise against it, but if that's what you want to try, I'll help if I can."

"I sure do thank you for it," Neddit said. "I was thinking about getting a fancy sword like them there knights done use."

"Of course," said Starlanko. "We'll start with that. Tomorrow morning."

\*\*\*

"Of course, an adventurer needs a sturdy weapon," Starlanko said, as he lead Neddit into Caldorn's Magic Weapon shop. "Given your background, I'm guessing that a sickle or a scythe might be the proper choice."

"I want that one," Neddit said. He pointed at a six-foot-long greatsword mounted above the store counter.

"Ah, fine choice!" assured Caldorn, the owner of the aptly named Caldorn's Magic Weapon shop. "I bought that little beauty off a dragon slayer named Zeldon the Great, who found it in the hoard of the ancient blue wrym Kzaza-Kraruka. This may be the very sword Jaivar the Sturdy carried when he met his untimely end in Kzaza-Kraruka's jaws."

"Have you ever used a greatsword before?" Starlanko asked. Neddite looked at his feet and kicked a speck of dust. "No."

"Is there any weapon that you think you've got experience with?"

"Not really," said Neddite. "I use Bonnie Lou to do some clobbering when clobbering needs done, but I wouldn't rightfully call her a weapon." Bonnie Lou was the name of Neddite's +10 hoe of hoeing.

"Maybe a staff then?" Starlanko suggested. "Even if you have no formal training, there should be one weapon that you are able to use more proficiently than the rest. Maybe give a few a try and see how they feel."

"If we don't know what I can use rightly, it could be the greatsword."

"I doubt it," replied Starlanko. "Greatswords are martial weapons, and most people don't learn how to use martial weapons until they've mastered at least a simple weapon or two."

"But she's so pretty."

"Oh, she's a beauty," Caldron assured Neddite. "And you haven't even seen the best part." Caldron took the sword down from its mounting and gripped it firmly in both hands. "*Meiinar-az*," he said, and a sheath of electricity crackled to life around the sword.

"Oh, I do like that," Neddite said. Caldron passed the sword to Neddite, who almost dropped it. As he got used to the weight he grinned like a child with a puppy.

"You got any armor, too?" Neddite asked.

"Only the finest," Caldron responded. "You look like a man who would appreciate a fine suit of adamantite full plate.

"Don't you already have a mithral shirt?" Starlanko inquired of Neddite.

## Bonnie Lou was the name of Neddite's +10 hoe of hoeing.

"Oh sure, but that can't hardly be armor."  
"I know many adventurers who would beg to differ."

"But I can't hardly tell when I'm wearing it."

"Yes, that's the point."

"Exactly."

"Neddite," Starlanko began, "I realize you may have a picture in your head of what an adventurer looks like, clad from head to toe in armor and wielding a magic sword. Yes, some adventurers follow that pattern, but not everybody. True adventurers select the gear that works best for them, and I think what would be best for you is a mithral shirt and some kind of yet undetermined simple weapon."

"But them ain't the sort get the girls. The ones that get the girls are always the big muscled types."

Starlanko had a thing or two to say about getting the girls, but Neddite beat him to it.

"It's either that or the smart type. Like you. You can use all your fancy talking to impress them. Now, I might be foolish, but I ain't no fool. I know I'm not the blindest bat in the belfry, and I'll never be winning the girls with my smart talk. If I can't do that I figure I've got try looking like I can stop an ogre quicker than two fish blinking."

"Could you at least get mithral full plate?"

\*\*\*

Neddite clanked into the Laziaer flower garden just after noon, wearing his newly purchased mithral full plate with his +1 shocking greatsword strapped to his back. The garden featured a stunning array of plants imported from all across the continent, and it was maintained under the patronage of Lord Ermin Laziaer, the noble who protected the nearby populations.

He allowed the public to visit the garden at will.

*There - that's her.* Neddite thought at Starlanko. Before entering the garden, Starlanko had cast *what's his name's telepathic bond* on the two of them, so they could communicate without being noticed by the object of Neddite's affections.

Seera was just as lovely as Neddite had described her. Or rather, as lovely as Starlanko was sure Neddite had intended to describe her. It was easy to see why the farmer was enamored with her.

*Okay.* Starlanko thought to Neddite. *Go ahead and say something to her.*

*Like what?* Neddite thought back.

*Start with something basic. She's admiring the flowers. You could use that as a jumping-off point. Try to work in a compliment if you can.*

*Maybe I should tell her she's got eyes that chatter like ripe gourds.*

*Umm... maybe you should just compare her to a flower.* Starlanko replied.

"Hi," Neddite said to Seera. "Nice flowers, ain't they?"

"Quite well tended, yes," Seera replied.

"You know, you're sort of like a flower."

Seera stood up and looked at Neddite. As she did Starlanko caught a glimpse of a holy symbol of Garandin, the earth mother. That might prove a useful topic of conversation.

"What do you mean?" Seera asked. "Are you implying that I'm fragile and need to be tended to?"

"No," stammered. "I just meant you were pretty is all."

"Oh, of course that's what you meant," Seera sighed.

*Now what?* Nedit thought.

*She's wearing a holy symbol to Garandin. Mention that. Is she a cleric? An adventurer? So are you. You have so much in common.*

"I saw you was wearing a token of Garandin there. You a cleric?"

"Yeah, do you have something against clerics?"

"No. I like clerics. Most of all the adventuring sort. You do much adventuring?"

"I suppose you could say that," Seera replied.

"You know, I'm an adventurer too? Look, see I just got this new sword down in the market earlier today?"

"A greatsword. How classic."

"A +1 shocking greatsword."

"I'm shocked."

"No, it's not meant for shocking like that. It means it gets all lightning like, so I can slay up bad guys more."

"Oh, a shocking greatsword."

*I think she was joking with you.* Starlanko thought.

"Were you joking with me just now?" Nedit asked.

"Yes."

"Oh. We've got a lot in common."

"I'm sorry?"

"We're adventurers and all."

"Oh. What did you say your name was?"

"Oh," Nedit thought for a second.

*She just wants to know your name.* Starlanko directed at him.

*But most folks around these parts know me for Nedit the farmer. I want her to think I'm really something fierce.*

*Give her an adventuring name then, like Nedit the Dragon Slayer. But less cliché.*

"My chums all call me Blood Axe," Nedit said. "It's my adventuring name."

"They call you Blood Axe?"

"Yeah."

"But you use a sword."

"Yeah."

"And it's not very bloody."

*Maybe you used to use an axe,* suggested Starlanko. *Maybe it's a figure of speech.*

"It's a figure of speech. Like chicken jumping. You don't really jump on a chicken."

"I see."

"So," Nedit asked, "you got any adventure plans coming up?"

"To tell the truth," replied Seera, "I'm starting to tire of the adventuring life. I thought I might settle down someplace and start a little temple."

"You ain't looking to do much more adventuring?"

"No. Is there something you wanted, Blood Axe?"

*Just a thought,* Starlanko offered, *now might be a good time to tell the truth.*

"I should be telling you the truth," Nedit said. "I'm not really no fancy adventurer. I'm just a simple farmer. But when I saw you, I thought, well that girl there, her eyes chatter like ripe gourds. But I'm just a simple farmer. I didn't think you'd like to talk to just old me."

"Just a farmer? If there were no farmers, how would the rest of us eat? A farmer is one of the greatest professions there is, highly honored by Mother Garandin. Your name is really not Blood Axe, then, I hope?"

"No. It's just Nedit."

"Nedit? Not the Nedit? The farmer who grows watermelons as big as houses?"

"They were never as big as no house. About like a shed must have been the biggest one. A small shed."

"Your reputation is the reason I thought of settling in Kafforth. Your farming has been attracting a lot of attention."

"Oh, it's nothing. I just let the crops grow the way they wanted to be growing."

"Is it true that you found a flock of dire sheep?"

"I don't know about a flock. Just a few head is all."

"I thought they'd been hunted to extinction by the northern mountain trolls."

"Nah, sheep are sturdy beasts."

Starlanko listened to the two chatter. He looked at their body signs. Open, smiling, leaning slightly towards each other. He strolled away. His work here was through.

### About the Author

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

### Contact the Author:

[matthew@matthewjhanson.com](mailto:matthew@matthewjhanson.com)

~FIN~

# RACES OF TWILIGHT

## The Green

by Michael Thompson



silven  ublishing

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

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

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

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

# The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

## Bonus Material

By Matthew J. Hanson

### Nedit

**Human Commoner 30** CR 29; Medium humanoid; HD 30d4+60, hp 135; Init +1; Spd 30; AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +15; Grapple +; Atk +17 melee (1d6+2, +10 hoe of hoeing); Full Atk +17/+12 melee (1d6+2, +10 hoe of hoeing); AL NG; SV Fort +12, Ref +11, Will +12; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 10  
*Skills:* Handle Animals +17, Profession (farmer) +58, Ride +18

*Feats:* Epic Skill Focus (Profession [farmer]), Mounted Combat, Open Minded (6) Spirited Charge, Skill Focus (Profession [farmer]), Trample, Improvised Weapon proficiency (hoe)

*Languages:* Common

*Possessions:* Mithral shirt, +10 hoe of hoeing

### Open Minded [GENERAL]

You are naturally able to reroute your memory, mind, and skill expertise.

**Benefit:** You immediately gain an extra 5 skill points. You spend these skill points as normal. If you spend them on a cross-class skills they count as ½ ranks. You cannot exceed the normal maximum ranks for your level in any skill.

**Special:** You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time, you immediately gain another 5 skill points.

## New Items

### +10 Hoe of Hoeing

This hoe adds a +10 competence bonus to Profession (farmer) checks. It can be wielded as an improvised weapon. As such, treat it as a +1 quarterstaff, except that the wielder suffers the normal -4 penalty for using an improvised weapon.

## New Feats

### Improvised Weapon Proficiency [GENERAL]

Choose any item that could be used as an improvised weapon, such as a chair, frying pan or garden hoe. You understand how to use that item in combat.

**Prerequisite:** Base attack bonus +1

**Benefit:** You make attack rolls with the improvised weapon normally.

**Normal:** A character who uses an improvised weapon takes a -4 penalty on attack rolls.

**Special:** You can gain Improvised Weapon Proficiency multiple times. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of improvised weapon. A fighter may select this feat as one of his bonus feats.

FROM THE DESK OF ARAMIL RUNECASTER, CLERIC AND MAGE IN THE SERVICE OF MARTHOS, THE ONE TRUE HAND OF THE GODS:

DEAREST READER,

IT BRINGS ME GREAT JOY AND HAPPINESS THAT YOU HAVE TAKEN AN INTEREST IN THIS HUMBLE SCRIBE'S WRITINGS. THIS STORY, WHICH I HAVE PREPARED, IS A JOURNEY INTO THE SUBLIME AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IMAGINATION.

IT IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT WAS BROUGHT TO LIFE FROM THE DREAMS OF THIS SIMPLE WRITER. THE ACCOUNTS PRESENTED IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE TRUE AND WITHOUT FAULT IN THEIR FACTUAL NATURE. I EXPERIENCED THEM FIRSTHAND NOT MORE THAN A TENDAY AGO IN THE HALLOWED WALLS OF THE SYLISSAN LIBRARY, THE SAME WALLS IN WHICH THIS TALE WAS WRITTEN.

IF MY CREDITABILITY IS IN DOUBT, I REFER YOU TO JORD GALEON SILVERFYRE AND ASSISTANT DEAN DAISY POWDERPOP OF THE CHURCH AND UNIVERSITY OF SYLISS AND THE CITY OF CARTHAS. BOTH CAN VOUCH FOR MY CREDITABILITY AND MY ABILITY TO REVEAL ONLY THE TRUTHS IN MY WRITINGS. NO FALSEHOODS SHALL EVER FLOW FROM MY QUILL. LET MARTHOS STRIKE MY VISION FROM ME SO THAT I MAY NO LONGER SEE OR SCRIBE THE WRITTEN WORD IF I EVER BREAK THIS OATH OF TRUTHFULNESS. WITH SUCH WORDS SAID, I WISH YOU A PLEASANT JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF MY IMAGINATION AND RECANTING OF THE EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE NOT MORE THAN TEN NIGHTS AGO. MY HOPE LIES IN YOUR PLEASURE OF THIS.

WITH THE BLESSINGS OF MARTHOS AND THE GODS,

ARAMIL RUNECASTER  
SCRIBE AND MAGE IN THE SERVICE OF KNOWLEDGE

# MOONLIGHT CONFESSIONS

BY CHRIS MCCOY

The last tendrils of sunlight were beginning to fade as I began my nightly work at the Library of Syliss. As a junior priest and scribe in the Order of Marthos, it was my duty to search over every piece of written work I could find in search of lost lore, to uncover as much the past as I can.

I shall not bore you with the details of such philosophy but I will merely state that it is very important for Marthos priests to search out and decipher the meaning of written knowledge. It is our fruit and wine. We are driven by a need to learn and preserve all that we observe in the form of the written word. A library is always home to at least one or two Marthosians.

The night was beginning much like any other night for me. I was planning on studying some ancient Thircian scrolls that Darren, a spellthief in the service of the Church of Syliss, had recently liberated from the tomb of some forgotten archmage.

These scrolls contained scraps of Thircian culture and were a window of insight into the lives of these long-forgotten people. Even in mundane texts such as this, knowledge of everyday life is sometimes the most important knowledge of all.

The scrolls were fragile, as frail as morning dew upon uncut blades of grass yet just as beautiful. My mind was clearly going to be occupied with the knowledge I was bound to absorb from these masterfully written accounts on the Thirce. The ancient words seem to flow together into a visual poem of everyday events.

I could practically hear the sounds of the blacksmith crafting his goods, the melodic voice of the flower girl peddling her wares, the scratching of quills upon parchment from the scribes recording the insightful words of the preaching cleric of Aalr, and the slow rising chants of magic being practiced. My mind's eye was filled with the vision of a levitating city soaring in the clouds, above the lands that would one day be known as the Frontier.

The city, although nameless, was built on an inverted mountaintop and brought forth into the air as if held by the hand of Syliss herself. The people lived their lives surrounded by mystical splendor and enriching knowledge.

What an awe-inspiring place Thirce must have been! But through the folly of one man and a dark tryst, it was all destroyed, forever lost.

My heart weeps for the lost of Thirce, but I am happy that at least some records of it are left for future generations to dream and think of the wonders of such a place.

When I read or engage in studious activities, I enjoy using the small sitting area that is set aside in the west wing of the expansive library. It sits nestled in a quaint corner of the library and is constructed entirely out of white marble. Finely crafted elven chairs and couches litter the room, providing comfort and relaxation to the visitors and scribes of the library.

The room is enclosed by bay windows that overlook the edge of the Sylissan University and the city of Carthas beyond. A full glimpse of the heavens and Apharella herself can be seen from this sitting area, providing what some would call a romantic aspect for this otherwise mundane house of knowledge and learning.

I carefully placed the ancient scrolls down on the edge of my favorite couch and settled in for a long read. These writings were simply too fantastic to put aside. Deciphering ancient Thircian is no easy experience, but it is well worth the effort to extract the knowledge hidden within the runes of that long-forgotten language.

My thoughts were focused purely upon the hidden meaning of the runes, and my surroundings seemed to melt away into obscurity. Some might say I lose touch with reality when I study such engrossing material. That was quite the case that evening. I was taken far away from my simple life as a scribe and was placed into the magically enriched world of the Thircian. My journey was a short lived one, though, as another was about to begin...

A soft touch upon my shoulder awoke me from my thoughts and returned me to the realms of reality and the mundane. I was startled and the scroll I was reading fell from my lap and landed upon the hardwood floor. I jumped from the couch and quickly reclaimed it, lest some damage befall it.

The scroll was, after all, thousands of years old and very fragile! To have some disaster befall it simply because of my own lack of perception of my surroundings would indeed lead to some form of disciplinary action against my otherwise flawless record!



“Her moon-kissed skin was adorned with silver moonstone jewelry, and a mithril symbol of Apharella rested between her ample breasts. ”

It was at this time that my eyes adjusted to the silvery light that now filled the room, streaming down from the heavens above. Apharella’s silvery rays played upon the books and furniture of the sitting room, illuminating everything in an aura of silver and white. Everything, including the lithe form of a cloaked woman who now perched where I had been just a moment ago.

Her royal blue cloak was pulled low around her face, hiding it from the silvery radiance that now illuminated the rest of her full, supple body. Her smooth alabaster legs were dangling from the edge of the couch, clad only in a pair of thin dancing slippers.

Her moon-kissed skin was adorned with silver moonstone jewelry, and a mithril symbol of Apharella rested between her ample breasts. She stretched a bit and I could see that her form was barely covered, save for a thin shift that was quite translucent in the moonlight. Needless to say, it left little to the imagination.

I remained in a sitting position upon the hardwood floor, the ancient Thircian scroll clutched protectively to my chest. My eyes glanced over her flawless body, drinking in the details as if they were some form of long lost knowledge. I quickly recovered my composure and stood abruptly, almost losing my balance in the process.

My ink-stained hands quickly moved to smooth my librarian robes, and I adjusted my cap so that it no longer hung dangling from one pointed ear. I cleared my throat, as I had not spoken in at least a few hours, and turned my full attention to the mysterious woman who thought she could get away with disturbing my studies without proper intent!

“Miss! Please state your business and the reason you have intruded upon this house of knowledge when you know very well that it is closed to the general public at this time!” I said clearly, with as much authority as I could muster.

Melodic laughter flowed from unseen lips as the cloaked woman stepped from the lounging couch and onto the hardwood floor. She was on even height with me, and I came to the conclusion that she was definitely not elven. Elven women tend to be smaller than most and this woman was rather tall. I myself stand two hand spans above the five-foot mark and am considered quite tall for my kind, the twilight elves.



I stood awaiting an answer as she suddenly approached me, hands outstretched. I felt something come over me at that moment: what, I cannot begin to describe accurately.

I felt as though I was held helpless, yet falling at the same time. This wraith-like beauty that was now ad-

## About the Author

Chris McCoy is a veteran gamer of ten years and has been exposed to the beauty of fantasy since an early age. His gateway to fantasy was the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, and he has been writing since the age of ten.

Currently, the pride and joy of his writing career has been the publication of an anthology entitled *Goblin Tails*, based on one of his creations, a goblin adventurer by the name of Chuba. He and his wife, Chrissy, spend most of their time gaming out of their home in Port Charlotte, Florida with their gaming group of four years (known as the Knights of the Patio).

He is a computer programmer and holds a degree in History. His other hobbies include fencing, kendo, sword collecting, history, and avid reading.

### Contact the Author:

[Silverfyre@writing.com](mailto:Silverfyre@writing.com)

vancing upon me held me helpless before her. I do not know whether it was some sort of spell or merely that her cowl had fallen from her face and I finally grasped a look at the beauty before me. Ebony tresses flowed unerringly down pale shoulders and reached down to the middle of her back.

Pale, sky blue eyes, filled with emotion and passion, glazed into my own and stirred something within my soul that I had never experienced. Lust? Compassion for the flesh? Love at first sight? I could not label such an emotion, nor can I ever.

Her cheeks were dimpled as she smiled invitingly and stepped closer to me, her small hands touching my face gently. Her tiny fingertips plucked the scholar’s cap from my head and tossed it daintily onto a nearby chair. Her eyes traveled down my robed form and her hands soon followed.

Her fingers expertly undid the clasp of my cloak and a swirl of black and green cloth signaled its removal. The buttons upon my outer robe were halfway undone before

I regained my usual sense of clear thought and

grasped her small hands within my own as a way of preventing her from continuing with this very unusual situation.

"Uhm...err...Miss..? What is it you think you are doing?" I stammered as I locked my gaze with hers. I saw only laughter and passion in her deep orbs and before I knew what was happening her beautiful lips were upon my own.

Time seemed to slow down for me and the world faded away, much like it had before. Ancient Thirce was not my destination, though, and I was going to a place which no book or scroll can accurately portray or describe.

"My name is Odette. I am a servant of Apharella, she who is surrounded by mysteries and dreams, she who offers fulfillment of unspoken desires and hidden dreams. I am her incarnate and the body which she shall use to bring your hidden desires to life and give your dreams form. Love me as you would your dreams, treasure me as you would your desires, cherish me as you would your heart. Close your eyes and experience what it means to give your dreams and desires flesh..."

The silvery moonlight danced upon our intertwined forms as the rhythmic movement of our lovemaking reverberated from our hearts. Compassion sprang forth from our souls as we shared kisses upon crimson tiers under the light of Apharella, she who blessed such a union of the mysterious and mundane.

The sounds of our joined breathing became the song of our conjoined spirits, giving wings to bond desires that now sought to escape into the air. A dream within a dream, we lay together, not speaking a word or even daring to open our eyes for fear of losing ourselves to the mundane once again.

I never wanted to leave this world within a dream, for it was the only time I have ever experienced such compassion from another. The only place where I could become the master of my own desires and destiny. The only world I could ever find the one named Odette.

Logic, something I had long valued, faded away and was replaced by emotion. My dreams were the only thing that mattered to Odette, the only thing of value in a world that deemed dreams to be the utmost form of beauty. I lost myself in her eyes and to that dream within a dream. I lost myself to Apharella that night, who came to me in the form of a beautiful woman named Odette. I soon

drifted further in the realm of dreams, thinking of how perfect this world was and how I never wished to leave.

How perfect that ending would have been...

The morning sun soon broke through the hazy windows of the Library of Syliss, bringing forth warmth and chasing the darkness out of every corner. I awoke slowly, my naked form lying atop a pile of my own robes. Perspiration covered my body and my hair was matted to the left side of my face.

I smoothed my hair away from my face and looked about in a daze. I was back in the Library of Syliss, albeit without my clothes, and alone. The mysterious woman of Apharella was gone, no clear sign of her existence or passing. I was alone once again, left with the memories of Dreams given true form and desires unbridled.

A loud banging from down the hall signified the beginning of yet another day as Assistant Dean Powderpop pounded on the main doors, demanding to be let in. Sighing contently, yet with a hint of disappointment hidden in my heart, I hastily dressed in rumpled robes and paused for only a moment to reclaim my discarded cap and place the Thircian scrolls back upon their proper scroll shelf.

I hurried to the end of the hallway and open the doors, squinting at the sudden appearance of the sunlight that shone directly in from the east. The small gnomish woman, adorned in the robes of a professor and carrying a timid flat smile upon her plain features, regarded me with an inquisitive stare in her brown eyes.

"Mr. Runecaster, are you ill?" she asked quietly, ushering herself into the library.

"Uhm, no Professor. I was, uhm, merely organizing the scrolls in the back room and it was quite physically taxing..." I stuttered and fell into step behind the hurrying gnome.

"Well...your shift is over, so please feel free to wash up and do whatever it is you need to do." she said and I quickly nodded my thanks and headed to the small room, near the west wing, that I called home.

Thoughts of Odette swam in my mind and I wondered if I would ever see her again. "Who knows?" I thought. Was she perhaps just a figment of my own imagination, or had Apharella truly graced me with a dream given flesh? I wondered if I'd ever know.

Classes were about to begin and I had much to accomplish today. A visiting Valthian mage was giving a lecture on magic theology that I did not want to miss...I could only hope my mind did not wander too far, back to the night before and the woman I had shared so much with...

MY DEAREST READER, I HOPE THAT THIS STORY HAS GIVEN YOU SOME INTEREST IN THE WORKINGS OF THE UNKNOWN AND PARTICULARLY DREAMS THEMSELVES. I TRULY WONDER IF I WAS INDEED VISITED BY A SERVANT OF APHARELIA AND IF SHE WILL EVER VISIT ME AGAIN. I AM UNCERTAIN AS TO WHO ODETTE REALLY IS OR EVEN WHAT SHE IS.

AFTER SPEAKING WITH THE LOCAL PRIEST OF APHARELIA, BALTHASAR BLOODSTONE, I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT I MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED MERELY A DREAM THAT WAS GIVEN POWER BY APHARELIA.

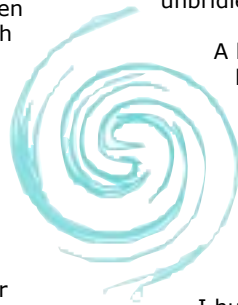
I TRULY BELIEVE THAT THE MOON MAIDEN MADE HERSELF MANIFEST TO ME THAT EVENING FOR REASONS THAT ARE BEYOND MY COMPREHENSION. I DO NOT QUESTION IT, THOUGH, FOR IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE I SHALL ALWAYS TREASURE AND VALUE.

I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT YOU, DEAR READER, HAVE GAINED SOME SMALL AMOUNT OF INSIGHT AND PLEASURE FROM READING MY ACCOUNT OF THIS ENIGMATIC EXPERIENCE.

PERHAPS ODETTE OR SOMEONE LIKE HER WILL VISIT YOUR DREAMS AND MAKE THEM REAL. I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT IT DOES HAPPEN TO YOU. TRUST ME, IT IS SOMETHING YOU WILL NEVER FORGET.

WITH MUCH THANKS AND THE BLESSINGS OF MARTHOS,

ARAMIL RUNECASTER  
A SCRIBE WHO HAS FELT THE TOUCH OF DREAMS  
COME TRUE





# THREE DRABBLES

BY NGHI VO

A drabble is a story written in exactly one hundred words. Some time back in October, in the midst of post-graduation unemployment, I decided that I wanted to write one hundred drabbles.

From October until February, I more or less successfully cranked out a drabble a night. Some of them I can't stand to look at now, and some of them I'm still rather proud of, but the fact remains that they exist, all 10,000 words of them.

St. George, before he slew Knock Hill's wyrm and gained a fiefdom for the crucified god, was a fisherman from

Hegglesbruck. By all rights, he should have stayed there in that dank village until the day he died.

One day, though, he caught a smelt that was as long as his arm, and then there was no living with him. He had a talent for it, the fishermen would say, and wonder what he was going to bring home next.

In some circles, it is common knowledge that when St. George came to Knock Hill, he was looking for bait.

~

When I was first turned, I was deeply afraid of killing humans. I skulked about the countryside, bleeding the cows, dreadfully ashamed of my hunger.

Then I started missing the cities. I missed wearing pretty clothes, and dancing; I missed the museums and the crush of the streets. I returned to my beloved Chicago, but still I kept a pair of huge wolfhounds, so strong that my meals could not weaken them.

One day, I looked around, and finally saw no humans around me. They were only cattle, and, with a sigh of relief, I gave away my beloved dogs.

~

I was never a princess.

You were the one who made me this way.

Who else could put me in glass slippers, or make me grow my hair until it tumbled down the stairs?

Who else could tear me from my farm, and my friends, and my family, who wept to see me go?

You rescued me when I needed no rescue and made me into a victim for your glory.

Foolish girl, I gave up my bread to dine on pastry crumbs, and I left my real life to find a fairy tale that you had created for me.

~

# Libem Liboriam

## The Complete d20 Guide to Books

by Dana Lynn Driscoll

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

What others are saying...

[Crothian of ENworld.org](#)

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

» 4 out of 5

[Bill Perman of GamingReport.com](#)

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

» 3.5 out of 5



# The Many Faces of Gaming: Disabled Gamers

by Eytan Bernstein

This column has previously covered the current issues facing both gay and female gamers. The latest entry in this series focuses on disabled gamers.

For the purposes of this article, a 'disabled gamer' will be defined as any gamer with a physical condition that makes his or her gaming experience more challenging. This includes gamers with reduced mobility (such as those confined to wheelchairs), gamers with sensory impairment (blindness, deafness, or speech impairments), and those with neurological conditions (such as Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinsons).

These gamers are all unique individuals with little more in common with each other than they have with non-disabled gamers. The only things they share are the challenges they face in their gaming experiences.

This article will shed light on this community, looking at some specific disabilities that make gaming a challenge. This entry will also discuss some of the advancements that have been made to make playing more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

In today's gaming world, it is often taken for granted that people can walk, see, drive, hear, and speak without any difficulty. These are challenges that aren't faced by most people and are rarely even questioned. For a disabled gamer, these are the greatest challenges.

With minds as astute as (or often more keen than) their unimpaired counterparts, disabled people are frequently frustrated by the difficulty they face navigating the everyday events taken for granted by most people.

Like in all other activities, disabled gamers are no different from other gamers. They are as avid participants in gaming as anyone else, but they must often seek special provisions to make the most of their gaming experiences.

## **Visual Impairments**

Visually impaired gamers face multiple obstacles. The first, and most obvious, is that most gaming products are visual in nature. RPG books are written in ink, video games must be seen, and card games must be read. Blind gamers also face the problem of mobility.

Many unimpaired gamers complain that it is hard for them to find time to play during the week or to get transportation to their games. For a blind gamer, these concerns are compounded. Despite

these difficulties, visually impaired gamers manage to take full advantage of the gaming world.

Software packages exist that make gaming much easier for these gamers: there are programs that allow them to hover over a text so that the computer reads it aloud.

Some game manufacturers, such as Lone Wolf, are creating games that incorporate special sound effects that tell visually impaired gamers information such as direction or health levels. These programs can be unwieldy and awkward however, and many gamers will be discouraged from playing due to these reasons.

Blind role-players can now purchase Braille copies of major RPG titles, though the majority are still unavailable. There is still a long way to go to make the gaming world a truly welcoming place for visually impaired gamers.

On a social level, blind gamers may experience some difficulties, but there are many things that can be done to incorporate them into a gaming group. Because much of gaming is imagination, there is little standing in the way of a blind gamer who wants to participate in an RPG session.

A gaming experience may provide such gamers with an empowering experience, allowing them, like most other gamers, to do things that would be

very challenging, if not impossible, in reality. There are audible dice that will read numbers aloud, but if this is a hassle (in the case of a GM, for example), there are also Braille dice.

With a small amount of consideration and aid, a blind gamer can do almost anything that an unimpaired gamer can.

### **Hearing Impairments**

Hearing impaired gamers face a completely different series of challenges. Mobility, reading, and visual cues are not problematic for a deaf gamer, but communication and interaction can be very difficult.

Most gamers take for granted that they can describe their characters, indicate their actions and desires, and participate in a gaming experience.

For a hearing impaired gamer, these things are very challenging. In many ways, it may be more difficult to incorporate a deaf gamer into a gaming group than a blind one because most members will not be familiar with sign language.

Unlike family members of deaf gamers, gaming associates are much less likely to go the distance to learn another language. Fortunately, there are hearing impaired gaming groups as well as those that are deaf-friendly.

Whereas RPGs may be more accessible to a blind gamer than a deaf one, video games are just the opposite.

✧  
**Most gamers take for granted that they can describe their characters, indicate their actions and desires, and participate in a gaming experience.**

**For a hearing impaired gamer, these things are very challenging.**  
✧

While a lack of sound can make a game more challenging, it is definitely possible to play many games without any audio.

It is easier for game designers to program in extra visual information than it is to create entirely new audio components. In addition, hardware developers are developing many different kinds of vibrating or tactile controllers that enhance the gaming experience.

Unfortunately, this doesn't cover some of the biggest challenges facing deaf gamers. The most popular games today are fast-paced and are often voiced by celebrities, as opposed to earlier games, which were mostly text-based.

As audio technology becomes more advanced, games rely more upon it. This makes video games increasingly more challenging for the hearing impaired.

### **Speech Impairments**

Speech-impaired gamers face similar problems to deaf gamers, with a few differences. Mute gamers can hear, but they cannot speak. Therefore, they face very few problems in terms of video gameplay, but with RPGs, things can be quite challenging.

Since they can hear, they can use writing for some aspects of gaming, but this can slow a roleplaying game down considerably.

Sign language can be used in some cases, but as with deaf gamers, most unimpaired gamers don't know it, or won't want to learn. It can be very frustrating to both the disabled gamer and his associates when gameplay becomes difficult because of such a problem.

### **Impaired Mobility**

Gamers with impaired mobility, due to neurological disorders, serious injuries, or other disabilities, face a number of obstacles. The gaming world is no more or less designed for people in wheel-chairs than any other area of society. Games conducted at a university or in an apartment building might be accessible to a wheelchair-bound gamer, but they might not be.

A mobility-impaired gamer's success and enjoyment depend a great deal on tolerance and understanding from their gaming associates. The greatest challenge to such a gamer is feeling that people stare at them or that they are somehow different or less capable. In reality, they are no less capable than any "normal" gamer.

### **Neurological Problems**

Mobility is not the only concern for a gamer with neurological problems. Their problems can often prevent them from keeping a standard schedule. While most of these gamers lead productive and full lives, sometimes their conditions can make them unable to play.

They may require lengthy hospital stays, or sometimes they may just not feel up to playing. The most important thing for a gaming group with disabled members (and not just those with neurological disorders) is to have reasonable expectations and flexibility. The average gamer might miss games because of irresponsibility or forgetfulness. This is rarely the case with a disabled gamer.

When they don't show up, it is almost always for a legitimate health reason.

Because of their challenges, these gamers are often very dedicated, their absence, when it occurs, is almost always justified.

### **Improving Future Accessibility**

Video game designers are beginning to take note of the needs of disabled gamers, building hardware and software designed for them (or friendly to them), but this is a slow change.

Online groups and special interest groups are increasing awareness of the needs and desires of special-needs gamers, but these developments are still in their infancy.

It is the hope of many of these gamers that companies will try to be more inclusive, creating products that are accessible to all.

One of the purposes of writing an article like this is to increase awareness of special needs gamers so that the effort to increase inclusiveness will see some results.

Numerous gaming communities exist on the web for disabled gamers and those who wish to be more supportive of them.

For massive multiplayer online RPG players with disabilities, there is [www.ablegamers.com](http://www.ablegamers.com).

For the needs of blind gamers, a Yahoo! group exists: <http://gamesource.groups.yahoo.com/group/blindgamers/>.

For deaf video gamers, there is an online community at <http://www.deafgamers.com/>.

The goal of <http://www.totalgames.net/pma/19712> is "going in search of enlightenment [to] explore the overlooked world of accessible gaming."

Numerous other online and print resources are out there for gamers with disabilities.

### **Integrating Disabled Gamers into Your Game**

Like all minority groups, disabled gamers can bring a unique and refreshing new perspective to gaming. Their experiences are simply different than other gamers and offer new possibilities in a gaming environment.

They may choose to play characters without disabilities in order to experience what that is like. They may also decide to play characters with disabilities, offering a unique and more accurate perspective on what it is like to play a blind, deaf, or wheelchair-bound character.

Every gamer brings in his own unique experience, whether playing a video game or an RPG. Unusual individuals can bring a truly refreshing aspect to a game if given a chance. The key to playing with these gamers is a combination of tolerance and willingness to allow for independence.

These gamers may need help with some basic tasks, but they are extremely capable individuals and want to do as much on their own as possible. With a little tolerance and understanding, there is little these gamers cannot do.

Disabled gamers can both experience and create challenges when involved in gaming.

Most gaming hobbies just aren't designed with the difficulties of these individuals in mind.

Sensory-impaired gamers aren't a large constituency, thus most video games, RPGs, and card games aren't designed for them. Most gamers have little trouble moving about, so they often play in difficult-to-reach basements or cramped, walk-up apartments.

Due to these challenges, disabled gamers are often some of the most passionate and enthusiastic participants. It should be apparent to other gamers that when they see actively participating gamers with disabilities, these gamers are truly devoted. For such gamers to overcome so many challenges really speaks of a desire to have fun.

If a clear level of communication exists between disabled and non-disabled gamers, there is nothing outside the realm of accomplishment.

by Eytan  
Bernstein

CURSES!

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

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

**Curses!** features the following:

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



# An Interview with Richard Lee Byers

As conducted by Chris McCoy

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

I've always loved fiction and conceived the notion of writing it when I was still quite young. I guess I realized I had a pretty good imagination and some verbal ability, and that those would stand me in good stead.

The kind of writing I do the most of – action-adventure fantasy with elements of horror and mystery – derives from the kind of fiction I loved when I was a kid, and that I still love, when it's done well. Some of the writers who influenced me are Howard, Leiber, Zelazny, Anderson, de Camp, Moorcock, Wagner, Burroughs, Vance, Block, Chandler, and Lovecraft.

## **When did you decide to become a writer?**

Well, like I said, I always meant to do it, but I got sidetracked. I thought that for reasons of financial security it would be smart to have a real job and write on the side. So I went into the mental health field with the intention of writing in my free time. But it turned out that working in a psychiatric clinic was draining enough that I didn't feel like writing when I was away from work.

Years passed, and I got burned out on the mental health field. Then my mom passed away and left me some money. I realized that if I used it to live on, I could afford to quit my job and try writing, so I did.

## **How did you first get published?**

I was first published in a small-press horror magazine. The pay was minimal, but it got me started.

## **What other occupations have you had throughout life?**

Except for after-school part-time jobs and the like, the mental health field and writing are pretty much it.

## **You are the author of numerous fantasy novels and short stories. Which of your characters is your favorite and why?**

That's tough to say. I guess that at the moment, it's Taegan Nightwind in my dragon trilogy. I like witty, resourceful, unflappable characters, and he is one. But that will change. My favorite is always a character in my current project, or the project I just finished.

## **You are also the writer of *The Black Bouquet*, the second novel in *Wizards of the Coast's "The Rogues" series*. Can you tell us a bit about this novel and your experience writing it?**

Since the series was, after all, "The Rogues," I decided to write a book that would be both a sword-and-sorcery story and a caper novel, with all the elements you find in the works of Richard Stark and similar authors. It was a ball to write, and I think it came out well.

Richard Lee Byers (<http://stonehill.org/rlb>) is a renowned fantasy writer and the author of over fifteen novels and numerous short stories.

His *Forgotten Realms* novels are by far his most famous, amongst them being his "The Year of Rogue Dragons" trilogy, the *Black Bouquet*, and book one of R.A. Salvatore's "War of the Spider Queen" series, *Dissolution*.

He is a lover of fencing and holds a Master's degree in Psychology. I recently had the chance to interview Richard via email and he was kind enough to answer my questions.

Now, enjoy a look into the mind of Richard Lee Byers, fantasy writer, fencer, and gamer!

**You are currently writing a trilogy for the Forgotten Realms called the "Year of Rogue Dragons". Can you tell us a bit about this series and perhaps even give us a tidbit or two into the third and final novel, The Ruin?**

"Rogue Dragons" is one of the notorious "Realms-shaking Events" or RSE's, a story that holds a knife to the throat of all the Forgotten Realms and will make lasting changes to the setting.

It's also a story intended to showcase all the various sorts of dragons extant in the Realms. The core idea is that all the dragons in the world are running amok at once, and the heroes have to deal with the problem.

I don't want to say much about Book Three, for fear of spoiling it. I will say that all the questions I raised in the first two volumes are answered, and that I tried hard to deliver a climax that tops even the biggest, wildest, loudest moments in Books One and Two.

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

**This series was written with other Forgotten Realms authors, who include Paul Kemp, Thomas M. Reid, Richard Baker, Lisa Smedman, Phillip Athans, and of course, R.A. Salvatore.**

**Now that all the novels have been released, please tell us what the experience was like.**

Dissolution was a tricky book to do, for various reasons. I had to satisfy two editors, Phil Athans and Bob Salvatore, and I felt a lot of pressure to give the series a rousing start. Because if I screwed up the beginning, I was screwing it up for the five authors who would follow me.

I was also aware that the dark elves are fan favorites, and that their fans would be sorely disappointed if I didn't portray them properly.

But Bob and Phil were tremendously gracious and helpful, as were Thomas Reid and Rich Baker (at that point, the writers for Books Four, Five, and Six hadn't been chosen yet), and writing the book actually wound up being a lot of fun.

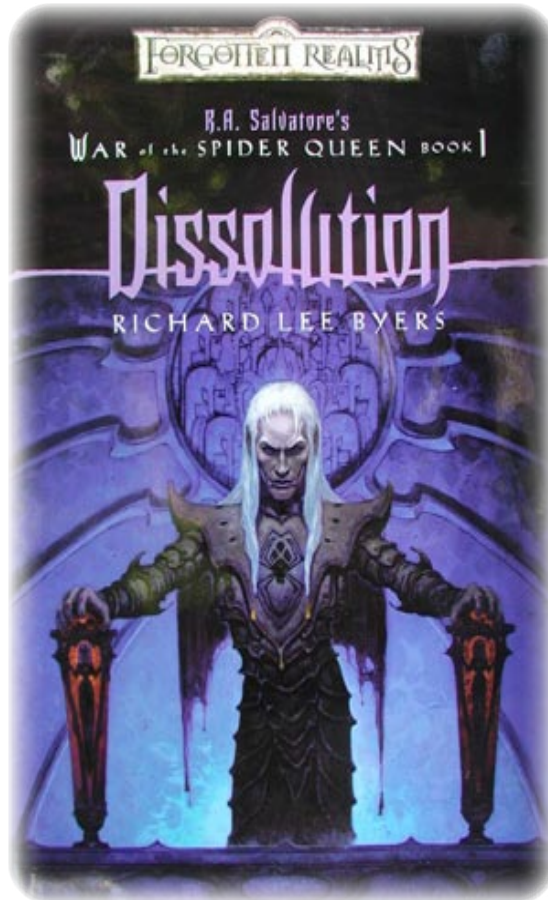
**What is your favorite novel of all time? Who is your favorite Forgotten Realms author and what is your favorite novel?**

Favorite novel of all time: The answer would vary according to my mood. Today I'll say The Swords of Lankhmar, by Fritz Leiber.

Favorite Realms novel and novelist? I'll take the Fifth. Don't want to pick and choose among my friends and colleagues.

**You have also written for White Wolf (www.white-wolf.com). What can you tell us about your experience writing for them?**

I always had a lot of fun writing for White Wolf.



I liked the World of Darkness and the Scarred Lands. They were interesting worlds to play around in, and my editor, Philippe Boule, is a great guy and very good at his craft.

**Besides fantasy, have you ever written in any other genres?**

Horror.

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

Tough to say. I think a writer may be too close to his work to make that kind of objective critical judgment.

I suspect the books in the dragon trilogy may be about as good as anything I've done, but then, as I mentioned, I have a tendency to be most enthusiastic about whatever it is I'm currently doing, or have just finished recently.

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

My novel Queen of the Depths comes out in September. It's part of "The Priests," a Forgotten Realms series focusing on religious elements of the setting, but also ties into "Year of Rogue Dragons."

The Ruin, the final book in the dragon trilogy proper, comes out in May 2006. I have some idea what's coming after that, but I don't think I'm supposed to talk about it yet.

**Are there any other upcoming releases by other authors that you are interested in?**

I wish George R. R. Martin would get the next book in his jumbo fantasy epic finished. Beyond that, I'm always eager to read whatever Bernard Cornwell, Richard Stark, and Joe Lansdale publish.

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

If research is required, I do it. Other than that, no special preparations.

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

Schedule time for writing, and stick to your schedule.

Finish the stories you start.

Submit the stories until you run out of markets or somebody buys them.

Definitely do not pin all your hopes on one market (like the Forgotten Realms.) Pursue a variety of opportunities. Maximize your chances.

Read some of the many how-to-write-and-get-published books that are out there. Ultimately, you can only get good through practice, but even so, the how-to books can give you insight and help you avoid basic blunders. They can help your writing reach a professional level sooner than it would otherwise.

If you're interested in those how-to-write-and-get-published books, or you're looking for more advice for aspiring writers, be sure to check out our upcoming writers resource section on Silven Crossroads later this month.

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

I've drifted into being solely a shared-world kind of writer. If I had it to do over again, I would still do all the franchise work, but would also work harder to keep writing and selling non-franchise work.

**I hear that you are quite the accomplished fencer and swordsman. How did you get into fencing, and did this play a factor in writing combat in your stories?**

A dear friend gave me a gift [certificate] for fencing lessons about ten years ago, and I've been doing it ever since.

It has helped me write better combat scenes, I think. The more you know about any subject, the better off you are when you portray it in your fiction. I took some karate training when I was quite a bit younger, and that's been helpful, too.

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

I've played D&D, Champions, GURPS, and Call of Cthulhu. Unfortunately, no amusing gaming anecdotes are leaping to mind.

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

Poker, shooting pool, going to the movies.

**What are some of your goals in life?**

To write more books and have them sell more copies.

To improve my skills as a fencer and poker player.

~FIN~



We would like to thank Richard Lee Byers on the behalf of the Silven Trumpeter for taking the time for this interview!



# INVASION OF THE TEMPLATES!

By Jerel Hass

## CASE FILE #10: HAIRY DWARFS

Based on the Hairy Dwarf by Jim Clunie

"It felt like I hit a rock. My gun broke". – Lorenzo Flores, Venezuela

The so-called Hairy Dwarfs are biological constructs, designed for work purposes by an extra-Terran grouping of advanced beings. The Hairy Dwarfs were built for cost-efficient labor as the beings became more involved in space exploration.

As these beings became more intellectual and less physical, the Hairy Dwarf quickly took over up to ninety percent of the beings' physical work.

With the advent of the Hairy Dwarf's neural interface, the beings began to use the Dwarfs to almost entirely replace their own physical bodies while they continued to explore their mental pursuits. The cultural name for the ruling entities presents great problems in translation in relation to human cultural history.



## INVASION #5: AUTOMATON INVASION!

### HAIRY DWARF

Medium Construct  
Hit Dice: 10d10+15 (65 hp)  
Initiative: +0  
Speed: 30ft.  
Armor Class: 18 (+8 Natural), touch 10, flat-footed 18  
Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+18  
Attack: Slam +11 melee (2d4+3)  
Full Attack: 2 slams +11 melee (2d4+3) or render mount +9 fire (2d6)  
Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.  
Special Qualities: Sticky hands, DR 10/-, skill upgrade, construct traits  
Saves: Fort --, Ref +2, Will +4  
Abilities: Str 17, Dex 11, Con --, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 5  
Skills: See Below  
Feats: Improved Grapple, Weapon Focus (Unarmed)  
Organization: Solitary or 2-3 with Tribune  
CR: 6  
Alliance: Tribune  
Advancement: 11-16 HD (Medium) or 16-36 HD (Large)

The best accepted name for these rulers is Tribunes.

#### Combat

Sticky hands (Ex): A Hairy Dwarf has tiny spikes that protrude out of its hands and feet. These tiny spikes allow the Hairy Dwarf to climb surfaces of a hardness of no greater than 8 at its normal movement rate, but it may not climb any overhang. These spikes also give the Hairy Dwarf a +4 bonus to grapple and a +4 against attempts to disarm it.

#### Skill Upgrade

Hairy Dwarfs are preprogrammed with skills the Tribunes believe are necessary for the task at hand. These skills are always at max rank. In addition, if telepathically linked, the Tribune can download any needed skills to the Hairy Dwarfs at the rate of one rank per round.

## Description

Hairy Dwarfs are humanoids of about three feet in height, but very thick in the body. These creatures are generally covered in thick, long hair ranging from black to red-blond in color, with a curious stalk- or straw-like appearance. However, when severely malnourished, they rapidly shed this hair.

Their bare skin is a pale, chalky green, and in very decrepit units, begins to flake off as a yellowish-green dust. They wear silvery or black jumpsuits, sometimes including a mask with breathing tubes to contain the dust from badly maintained Dwarfs. This is a completely cosmetic feature, as the Tribunes simply do not want their old, yet well-trained Dwarfs getting dust all over everything.

A Dwarf's face is made up of two large green eyes of slanted oval shape, no visible nose, oddly wrinkled or folded skin, and a wide trapdoor-like opening without teeth. These creatures have no need to eat, but when armed for conflict, a laser-targeted render weapon can be mounted inside this "mouth" cavity. The eyes have two concentric iris rings of glassy triangular blades around an uncovered pinhole pupil.

The arms and legs are long and thin, ending in broad-palmed, stubby-fingered hands and disk-shaped feet. In some cases, Hairy Dwarfs have been observed in a knuckle-walking gait, or even walking on their hands, apparently for increased speed. Both hands and feet can extrude multiple small spikes that dig into timber, stone or cement surfaces, allowing a Dwarf to walk up vertical walls (though not overhangs).

## "Bluntly, Hairy Dwarfs abandoned on their own tend to seek advice from large, shaggy dogs."

These are also used to improve the creature's grip on captives. Escaped would-be abductees often have scratched skin or torn clothing.

A Hairy Dwarf's body and limbs have a rock-hard consistency, easily noticed when a human is grasped by the creature or attempts a hand-to-hand attack on it. The creature's structure is actually composed of microscopic silicate layers acting as a substrate for protein- and TPA-based organic material.

This structure is as hard and tough as reinforced concrete, except at the joints, which are a complex combination of solid members and flexible bundles of silicate fibers, with little organic material. Hairy Dwarfs are also extremely heavy (45 lbs per point of Constitution).

## Encounter

These creatures travel in vehicles of cylindrical or elliptical shape and quite small size. A captured specimen contains only hutches for four Hairy Dwarf workers and a large, hollow frame surrounded by non-functional machinery. The craft's performance is believed to be quite limited, and it is certainly not capable of interplanetary flight.

The hollow square device is believed to be a spatial transporter that conveys abductees to a much larger examination chamber elsewhere.

Hairy Dwarfs can be programmed to accomplish an assigned task, or they can be controlled remotely by a Tribune. Their basic programming, which dominates their behavior unless overridden by specific controls, involves the capture and examination of living creatures.

Those with more advanced programs are capable of telepathic contact, cunning tactics and complex technical manipulation. For example, two Hairy Dwarfs were reported to have carried out a medical diagnosis and successful surgical procedure on a human subject suffering from cancer.

As well as guiding the Dwarf for physical work and speech, a skilled Tribune can project his native psionic powers through a remote-controlled Hairy Dwarf. When something goes wrong, the Dwarfs have some limited fuzzy-logic ability that allows them to escape from the immediate threat and seek further instructions from their Tribunes.

Unfortunately, the Dwarfs are often confused by the slight resemblance between Tribunes (a long-haired, carnivorous, quadruped species) and certain terrestrial fauna. Bluntly, Hairy Dwarfs abandoned on their own tend to seek advice from large, shaggy dogs.

Likewise, a human confronted by a Tribune may make a Spot check (DC 22) to notice the being's alien body structure, opposable foreleg digits, and head formation. When surveying

1. **Terioc Pseudonucleic Acid:** Believed to be an alien version of DNA, characterized as abnormally malleable.



terrestrial life, the Tribunes themselves show a strong bias towards their own body form, often ignoring humans in favor of studying quadruped mammals, such as dogs, cats and cattle.

### **Habitat/Society**

Hairy Dwarfs are built to serve the Tribunes. When encountered, they may be engaged on autonomous missions, or may be under the direct control of a Tribune (giving the Hairy Dwarf much greater adaptability, personality, and psionic powers).

It appears that programming and maintenance of Hairy Dwarfs is a task too complex for most, or even all, of the Tribunes assigned to Earth. Some researchers surmise that such mechanics' jobs are seen as demeaning and of little importance, or that the Tribunes found here are in fact cut off from high-tech supplies. Hairy Dwarfs here are typically poorly programmed for their tasks, badly maintained, or both.

Hairy Dwarfs have been known to offer devices to humans in return for assistance in their activities, which would also suggest a low priority given to physical technology by their instructors. There have been reports of armed conflict between Hairy Dwarfs and other alien beings, probably of the Pascagoula type, with the active involvement of at least one human.

### **Adventure Hook: Thief in the Night**

The Heroes are dispatched to Vienna, Austria, where the Hofbräuhaus (the repository of the Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperors' treasures) has been burgled. The only thing stolen was an antique spearhead, possibly Roman, believed to be the Spear of Longinus, sometimes called the Spear of Destiny.

The heroes are too late to intercept the thieves, who have already left the country for a secret laboratory in Iceland. Vienna is swarming with agents of the Order of St. Gregory, Knights of Malta, ODeSSA, and virtually every other Illuminated group, all of them out for blood. The heroes must stay alive and trace the path of the thieves.

The Spear has been taken by a secret research group associated with the Raelian Movement, a French religious organization based on revelations provided by short, hairy alien beings. The Raelians make no secret of their intention to use cloning technology to bring about the literal return of Jesus Christ, working from DNA remnants on various Christian relics. Nobody suspects just how far their techniques have advanced, or how close the Raelians are to raising a new prophet under the control of the Galactic Federation, if they can only find the right source material.

In Iceland, the heroes must journey through the spectacular and deadly landscape to an isolated research compound, avoiding or battling strike teams from other Illuminati. They must penetrate the lab, avoid the horrific results of earlier, failed cloning experiments, and defeat the Raelians' drive for world domination.

# CASE FILE # 11:

## TERRA-COTTA WARRIOR

Based on the Terra-Cotta Warrior by David Tormsen

In ancient China, it was customary to sacrifice a king's servants when the king died so that they could continue to serve him in the afterlife. When the first Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang, died in 210 B.C., however, this practice was no longer popular. Rather than slaughtering an entire army, the Emperor was buried with a symbolic force of thousands of life-sized, detailed warriors formed from Terra-Cotta.

In order to make sure these warriors did indeed serve the Emperor in death, the Imperial alchemists tried to devise a spell that would imbue the Terra-Cotta warriors with life. Over the course of seven decades, the technique was perfected, so that when the Han Emperor Jing Di died, he and countless Emperors before him had been buried with a multitude of Terra-Cotta warriors, some of whom had been infused with life.

The spell that created these living Terra-Cotta warriors is very similar to the spell used by Alonso del Adriacchi to create living gargoyles in Europe. It is very likely that the spell for gargoyle creation is a descendant of the spell of Terra-Cotta warrior creation. It has been theorized that perhaps the spell was brought to Europe from China by an explorer like Marco Polo; or perhaps it traveled via an occult trading network similar to the Silk Road.

Given the rumors of "living statues" appearing in India and the Middle East in the right time frame, perhaps the latter is true.

Then again, it is possible that Adriacchi discovered the technique independently, similar to how Roger Bacon discovered gunpowder centuries after it had developed in China.

### Description

Terra-Cotta warriors are just that: extremely detailed warriors made of Terra-Cotta. Each individual warrior is distinctive, and this is true for the inanimate as well as the animate varieties.

They are of above-average height, and well-built. They were painted in rich colors at one point, but time has worn most of that away, leaving only clay behind. They are typically outfitted with leather armor (remarkably well-preserved) and carry real weapons: mostly swords, crossbows and spears.

### Encounter

Terra-Cotta warriors are fighters, so they are formidable foes. They do not actively seek combat, but when forced into it will attack with calm and discipline. They use only the weapons that they are used to, mainly melee weapons and crossbows.

## Terra-Cotta Warrior

Medium Construct

Hit Dice: 6d10+15 (45 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 20ft.

Armor Class: 19 (+1 Dex, +8 Natural), touch 11, flat-footed 18

Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+8

Attack: Slam +8 melee (1d8+6) or katana +9 melee (1d10+6)

Full Attack: Slam +8 melee (1d8+6), katana +9 melee (1d10+6), heavy crossbow (1d10)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

Special Qualities: Construct traits, immunity to magic, low-light vision, fragile

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

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con --, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 3

Skills: Spot +8, Intimidate +8, Search +7

Feats: Weapon Focus (Katana), Power Attack, Improved Sunder

CR: 4

Alliance: Guarded Emperor or Chosen Faction

Advancement: 7-10 (Medium), 11-14 (Large), or by Class

### Combat

Immunity to Magic: A Terra-Cotta warrior is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

**Move Earth:** Drives the warrior back 60 feet and deals 3d6 points of damage to it.

**Disintegrate:** Paralyzes the warrior for 1d6 rounds and deals 2d10 points of damage.

**Shatter:** Causes the Terra-Cotta warrior to lose its next action, lowers its Armor Class by 4 points, and does 4d8 points of damage.

**Fire damage:** Any magical effect against the Terra-Cotta warrior that deals fire damage instead heals 1 point of damage for every 3 points of damage that it would cause against a normal creature.

**Fragile:** Bludgeoning damage dealt to the Terra-Cotta warrior deals an additional 1d6 points of damage.

Despite being made of Terra-Cotta and thus being remarkably fragile, Terra-Cotta warriors will shrink from no battle.

### Habitat/Society

In the 1970s, Chinese peasants uncovered a pit filled with Terra-Cotta warriors. At the same time, Chinese officials discovered another pit filled with about a dozen living Terra-Cotta warriors eager to give their allegiance to the Communists.

Scattered around the pit were the shattered remains of other Terra-Cotta warriors. While those still intact claimed that the shattered remains came from non-living Terra-Cotta warriors, it is more likely that, over the centuries, some of the Terra-Cotta warriors lost their loyalty. There was some sort of altercation, and the loyal Terra-Cotta warriors were slaughtered.

Today, most Terra-Cotta warriors still remain at their posts, guarding the long-dead Emperors of the Qin and Han dynasties. There are, however, Terra-Cotta warriors who have abandoned their posts and have taken up new causes. At certain Communist party gatherings, or the boardroom meetings of Hong Kong business giants, there can be found a Terra-Cotta warrior, standing in a corner unnoticed, always watching, always on guard.

Similarly, the occasional living Terra-Cotta warriors can be found in museums in Europe and North America, and are hot property on the New York and Paris art circles.

Why certain Terra-Cotta warriors abandon their posts is unknown. On the rare occasion when two or more Terra-Cotta warriors encounter one another, they rarely acknowledge one another unless the two are on opposing missions.

In this case, they do have a tendency to target other Terra-Cotta warriors first. If a warrior still loyal to his emperor encounters another who is disloyal, the encounter normally sends the loyal warrior into a killing rage, attacking the disloyal until one or the other is destroyed.

### Adventure Hook

The Chinese government secretly contacts the Heroes. It seems that a living Terra-Cotta warrior that had been working as a Communist Party guard in Beijing has defected.

The Terra-Cotta warrior has stolen certain information about China's psychic genetic research project, and is preparing to sell the information to the highest bidder at an auction in the Metropolitan Club in New York.

Many highbrow members of the Bilderbergers, Freemasons, Knights of Malta and other secret societies will be there. The heroes are to make sure the information does not get into the wrong hands, and capture the Terra-Cotta warrior in the process.

## Elite Terra-Cotta Warrior

Medium Construct, Fighter 6

Hit Dice: 6d10+6d10+15 (75 hp)

Initiative: +5

Speed: 20ft.

Armor Class: 25 (+1 Dex, +8 Natural, +4 Stone Chain Mail, +2 Medium Stone Shield), touch 11, flat-footed 24  
Base Attack/Grapple: +10/+14

Attack: Slam +14 melee (1d8+6) or katana +15/+10  
melee (1d10+8)

Full Attack: Slam +14 melee (1d8+6), katana +15/+10  
melee (1d10+6 (17-20 x2)), or heavy crossbow (1d10)  
Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

Special Qualities: Construct traits, immunity to magic,  
low-light vision, fragile

Saves: Fort --, Ref +3, Will +4

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con --, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 5

**Skills:** Spot +10, Intimidate +10, Search +9, Balance  
+8

**Feats:** Weapon Focus (Katana), Power Attack, Improved  
Sunder, Improved Shield Bash, Rapid Reload, Improved  
Initiative, Improved Critical (Katana)

CR: 10

Alliance: Guarded Emperor or Chosen Faction

Advancement: By class

### Combat

**Immunity to Magic:** A Terra-Cotta warrior is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

**Move Earth:** Drives the warrior back 60 feet and deals 3d6 points of damage to it.

**Disintegrate:** Paralyzes the warrior for 1d6 rounds and deals 2d10 points of damage.

**Shatter:** Causes the Terra-Cotta warrior to lose its next action, lowers its Armor Class by 4 points, and does 4d8 points of damage.

**Fire damage:** Any magical effect against the Terra-Cotta warrior that deals fire damage instead heals 1 point of damage for every 3 points of damage that it would cause against a normal creature.

**Fragile:** Bludgeoning damage dealt to the Terra-Cotta warrior deals an additional 1d6 points of damage.



# Reviews, Reviews Reviews!

This month we take a look at...

## **GURPS Fourth Edition Basic Set: Characters**

GURPS is the most flexible roleplaying system ever created. With just this book, you can adventure in any world you can imagine. Use all types of weapons from clubs to lasers...magic and martial arts...psionics and superpowers.

### How we rate

#### **Scoring definitions for d20 products:**

- 18 = Superior. Best of the best.
- 16 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.
- 14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.
- 12 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.
- 10 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.
- 8 = 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.

#### **Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:**

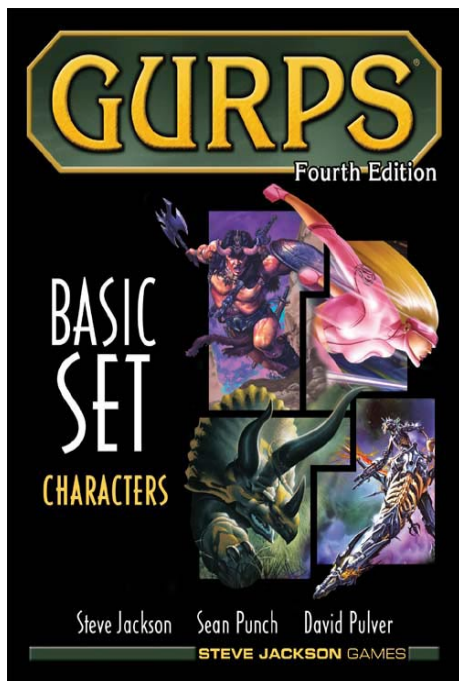
- 12 = Superior. Best of the best.
- 11 = Excellent. Just a hair from perfect.
- 10 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.
- 9 = Good. Most gamers would like this.
- 8 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.
- 7 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.
- 6 = Sub-par. Flawed, but not without promise.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

read on...



# GURPS Fourth Edition Basic Set: Characters

Authors: Steve Jackson, Sean Punch, and David Pulver  
Publisher: Steve Jackson Games <http://www.sjgames.com>  
Reviewed By: Joel Oberdieck  
Review Date: March 25, 2005



*Reviewer Bias: I have long been a fan of GURPS Third Edition, but have never played GURPS Fourth Edition nor had a chance to see it in action. This is the first roleplaying book that I have reviewed.*

*Characters* is the first half of the two-volume Basic Set for GURPS Fourth Edition, focused entirely on character creation options with a brief summary of the combat system in an appendix. The book is hard-cover, 336 pages long including appendices and index, and illustrated with color throughout. The cover art was done by John Zeleznik, while interior illustrations were done by a variety of artists – Abrab Ajmal, Alex Fernandez, Ted Galaday, Eric Lofgren, John Moriarty, Torstein Nordstrand, Glen Osterberger, V. Shane, Bob Stevlic, Eric Wilkerson, and Jim Zubkavich.

## From the Back Cover

“Anything You Want.

GURPS is the most flexible roleplaying system ever created. With just this book, you can adventure in any world you can imagine. Use all types of weapons from clubs to lasers...magic and martial arts...psionics and superpowers.

Create exactly the character you want to play...your favorite fictional hero, or your own invention. Choose from over 400 advantages and disadvantages, over 350 skills, spells and techniques. Customize your character with individual perks and quirks, and you're ready to go.

No more switching game systems when you change campaigns! GURPS gives you one set of clear, comprehensive rules to cover any background. This new Fourth Edition is based on 16 years of gamer feedback from the Third Edition, and is faster and easier to play than ever before.

GURPS makes the Game Master's job easy and fun. All rules are carefully organized, indexed, and cross-referenced. Charts and tables are clear and legible. And to help you introduce new players to the system, there's a "Quick Start" section which covers the basics in a few pages... and the introductory version of the rules, GURPS Lite, is available free online!

This is Book 1 of the two-volume Basic Set. Only this book is necessary to play. Game Masters, and players wanting more detail, will find Book 2 valuable.”

## Presentation

The cover of *Characters* shows four color images fitted together in a manner reminiscent of puzzle pieces, each showing a different character. One character is a typical Conan-esque barbarian equipped with battle axe and shield. The second is some sort of super-heroine dressed in pink spandex, either flying or moving at super speed. Below her, there is an image of a skeletal undead wearing armor and equipped with various firearms. A triceratops in its natural environment completes the collection. All four images occupy the right half of the black cover, with text and logo in white and yellow.

The internal art is all in color and varies in size from very small to half a page, with most artwork relevant to a topic discussed in the nearby text. The text of the book is formatted in three columns, with additional materials placed in offset text boxes. Each chapter is color-coded with tabs on the top and bottom of the page to allow easy location. All in all, the presentation makes the text easier to navigate, which is vital in a book of this density.

## Content

GURPS *Characters* is a large book, and contains a great deal of information even for a book of its size, which can make it seem overwhelming at first glance. Even more intimidating, this book is almost entirely devoted to the process of character creation and equipment, topics which normally would receive, at most, only half the space they are given here. To understand why the book is so large, it is important to look at two key aspects of GURPS history.

First, the Fourth Edition is not just a revision of the Third Edition. Rather, Fourth Edition is an effort to collect the works of over a decade of earlier GURPS into a single, more coherent volume. *Characters* is, in fact, a collection of all of the advantages, disadvantages, and skills created for GURPS Third Edition over the course of that decade, rewritten and reorganized to be more consistent with the new edition. Even that doesn't give the full picture, for many new advantages and skills were also added, filling niches that had previously been left empty.

This niche-filling is the other important factor which must be considered in judging the density of *Characters*. The stated goal of *Characters* is to be the complete character-building reference for the entire GURPS system. It has been stated that no new skills are expected to be added to the system after *Characters*, and only a handful of new advantages (mostly related to super powers) are expected to be appear in future volumes.

Given that, it is unsurprising that *Characters* is so large and so dense. Nonetheless, it can still prove intimidating to a first-time player, causing a sort of information overload in the character creation process.

Despite these warnings, *GURPS Characters* is presented clearly and is fairly easy to navigate. Each chapter is devoted to a single topic of character creation, making it easy to look up a particular topic. The well-written index and tables of advantages, disadvantages and skills in the back also aid this process greatly.

The first chapter, "Creating a Character," summarizes the whole process of mechanical character generation, including a definition of the concept of point-based character creation, advantages and disadvantages, and a brief summary of how one gains and spends character points in play. Following these definitions is a summary of how to generate a character concept. This section is not as developed as it is in many RPGs (there are, for example, no "Twenty Questions" to help you define your character), but given the generic nature of the system, this is forgivable. I hope, however, that more detailed character concept aids will be provided in future world books. After those introductory sections, the chapter dives into the mechanics of character creation, covering attributes (both basic and secondary), body type, age, appearance, social background, wealth, reputation, and native technology level.

With these basics completed and a firm character concept established, we now enter chapters Two and Three, "Advantages" and "Disadvantages." Having that "firm character concept established" is important, because these are the two chapters where players are most likely to run into information overload.

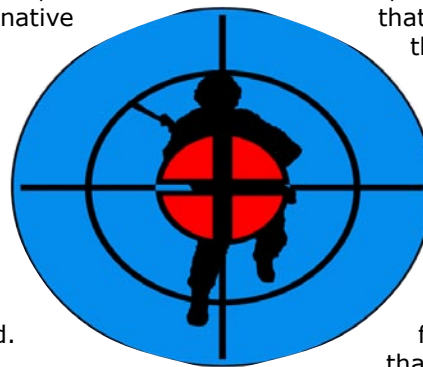
The advantages, for example, cover sixty-six pages, and include everything from standards like Ambidexterity, High Pain Threshold, and Luck, to bizarre racial/super advantages such as the abilities to walk through walls, fly, shoot laser

beams, or regenerate injuries at a rate that would take an average man from dying to full health in under a minute.

The disadvantage section, while smaller, is no less overwhelming. Combined with the Enhancements and Limitations presented in chapter Three (which alter the way advantages and disadvantages work in exchange for percentile modifications to their costs), virtually any ability or restriction desired can be simulated. With so many options, a player entering these chapters without a firm concept can easily become lost to option overload. GMs are also advised to take note of the new Mundane, Exotic and Supernatural categorizations for advantages and disadvantages; these provide quick ways to limit player's options based on what type of campaign you wish to run.

Chapter Four: Skills introduces the skill resolution mechanisms in GURPS as well as explains how one buys skills. Following this introduction, the chapter goes into the large list of skills present in the system. Each skill lists its governing attribute, difficulty, and defaults (what you roll if you don't know the skill). Following this is a description of the skill and, a new addition to this version of GURPS, a complete list of modifiers that can apply to a roll for that skill. All in all, this chapter is very well laid out and highly useful for both players and GMs. Unfortunately, skills are listed alphabetically rather than grouped by functionality, which can lead to players forgetting some skills that would fit their character concept.

Chapters Five ("Magic") and Six ("Psionics") provide very brief introductions to how these two classes of supernatural abilities are



handled in GURPS. Magic is handled as a set of specially learned skills (one for each spell) which cost Fatigue to use. Chapter Five includes the introductory spells for various schools of magic. There is enough here to build a beginning spellcaster, but more advanced characters would benefit greatly from *GURPS Magic*. Psionics, on the other hand, is handled as a set of specially modified advantages. Since psionics are really just minor modifications of existing advantages, this chapter is very short. Further information on psionics will be included in the forthcoming *GURPS Powers*.

Chapter Seven introduces the concept of Templates, which are in effect pre-made packages of advantages, disadvantages and skills designed to fit a particular theme. Templates are generally made by the GM to help customize the world. For example, the GM might make an Elf Racial Template and, by so doing, define what Elves are like in his world. In order to be an Elf, a player would have to purchase the Elf Racial Template. Unlike some systems, templates in GURPS provide no cost breaks; it costs exactly the same to buy the Elf Template as it would cost to apply all of the components of the template individually. This chapter does not discuss how to design templates (that is covered in *GURPS: Campaigns*), but does provide a few samples.

Chapter Eight covers various types of equipment. The chapter mostly consists of tables of ancient, medieval, modern and futuristic weapons and armor, but also

includes two pages of generic, miscellaneous equipment. This chapter is the last step of character creation, and despite the description of various rules concepts related to equipment (such as damage types and descriptions of the various statistics for ranged weapons) this is a fairly standard equipment chapter.

The final chapter of the book, "Character Development," covers how one advances a character during play. There are fairly detailed rules about how one purchases advantages or buys off disadvantages, and also rules about gaining skill points through study or work (i.e., "off screen" character advancement). This chapter also covers the interesting topic of how to deal with your character being drastically altered: for example, having your brain transplanted into a robot body, something which I have not seen covered in many roleplaying games.

### Conclusions

*GURPS Characters* is a well-written, well-developed character creation book. There are, however, several concerns that potential buyers must watch out for.

First, *GURPS Characters* is half of the Basic Set, not the full set. While a player can get along with just *Characters*, a GM will require its companion book, *Campaigns*. In fact, since *Campaigns* contains all of the details of how the system works, including the full combat system, many players will want to pick this up as well. The two put together have a cost of roughly \$65, which is a bit of a bite for entering the system (compare this to *Dungeons & Dragons*, where a player can pay only \$35 for all the details he needs to play the game).

Second, *Characters* is loaded down with options. While many players (myself included) consider this a perk rather than a drawback, it can be quite overwhelming. Successfully navigating *Characters* requires a well-defined character concept from an early stage. This, in turn, biases the system toward more experienced roleplayers. To counter this issue, I would suggest that GMs introducing players to GURPS do so through *GURPS Lite*, which is available free online. That will give players a

chance to get their feet wet with the system before tackling all the options in *Characters*. Finally, it should be noted that early printings of *Characters* had serious binding issues. These caused pages of the book to fall out, especially pages in the middle of the book, as they became detached from the spine.

If you happen to get a copy of *Characters* with this issue, you can have it replaced for free by contacting Warehouse 23 ([orders@warehouse23.com](mailto:orders@warehouse23.com)).

Steve Jackson Games is very accommodating on this issue (I myself had to get a replacement copy due to this problem). Later printings of *Characters* do not have these binding issues.

Archetype: Core Book (1 of 2)

Body 7 (Game Mechanics): Rules are scattered throughout the document, with an appendix at the end summarizing combat. For the heart of the mechanics, you need Campaigns.

Mind 10 (Organization): Divided into chapters by topic, although the alphabetical lists of traits make locating traits difficult if you don't know the exact name.

Spirit 9 (Look and Feel): Art is generally unobtrusive, but is average quality.

Attack 10 (Value of Content): Character creation options for any genre in one book.

Defense 10 (Originality of Content): Many new ideas, and just about anything is possible if you know how to make it.

Health 8 (Physical Quality): Early printings tended to have pages falling out due to bad binding. Later printings have corrected this issue.

Magic 11 (Options and Adaptability): The boast of universality may be a stretch, but not by much.

## OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

**1. Definitions:** (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

**2. The License:** This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

**3. Offer and Acceptance:** By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

**4. Grant and Consideration:** In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

**5. Representation of Authority to Contribute:** If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

**6. Notice of License Copyright:** You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

**7. Use of Product Identity:** You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

**8. Identification:** If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

**9. Updating the License:** Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

**10 Copy of this License:** You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

**11. Use of Contributor Credits:** You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

**12 Inability to Comply:** If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

**13 Termination:** This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

**14 Reformation:** If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

## 15 COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Silven Crossroads, Silven Publishing and the corresponding logos are trademarks ©2002-2005 Kosala Ubayasekara. All Rights Reserved.

Printing out the entire e-zine can be very demanding on your printer and use a lot of ink. If you are careful about the amount of ink you use in printing then we advise you not to print the entire e-zine.

Its recommended that you print the maps on glossy paper if you can. Glossy paper is available from most stationery or office supply stores and is more expensive than regular printing paper, but the quality difference in the print is worth it.

#### **Silven Crossroads Legal Notice**

##### **Trademarks and Copyright**

Silven Crossroads and the Silven Crossroads logo are trademarks ©2003 Kosala Ubayasekara. All Rights Reserved. All text and artwork are copyright their respective authors and creators as noted in the text, images, or to the right of this page.

##### **Distribution**

This document may be distributed in its entirety on any website for non-commercial purposes. In the event of this occurring, the owner of the website must refer to our free syndication guidelines at: <http://www.silven.com/syndication.asp>

##### **Usage of this document**

No changes of any kind are to be made in this document including, but not limited to, editing or changing the text or images, saving and distributing parts of this document without the whole, and copying and pasting portions or excerpts of any content found herein on any site or document.

##### **Printing**

You may print out pages and content in this document for your own personal, non-commercial use only.

#### **Silven Trumpeter Magazine**

The Silven Trumpeter is a monthly publication produced by the Silven Crossroads community (<http://www.silven.com>). Articles and fiction appearing in the Silven Trumpeter are drawn from the various content areas of the Silven Crossroads site. Because of this, if you are interested in having a piece of writing published in the Silven Trumpeter, it must first be submitted for inclusion in a specific content area on the site.

For more information, please contact the editor at [ElizabethRALiddell@yahoo.com](mailto:ElizabethRALiddell@yahoo.com)

##### **Publisher**

Silven Crossroads. attn: Kosala Ubayasekara  
[kosala@silven.com](mailto:kosala@silven.com)  
Ekensbergsvägen 17, 1tr. 11769 Stockholm. Sweden.

##### **Editor in Chief**

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

##### **Assistant Editors**

Laura Heilman, Jeffery Womack and Paul Tevis

##### **Layout and Design**

David M. Jarvis

# **Next Issue: July 1, 2005**