

FEATURE: Worldwide D&D Day!

*Read the onsite coverage of
a local D&D day event
by Kyle Thompson*
page 3

*Eytan Bernstein interviews
Charles Ryan*
page 7



Also...

The Battle of Dread Valley
page 9

*An Interview with a state co-creator
Malcolm Craig*
page 21

A review of Serenity Roleplaying Game
page 33

Contents Page

Fiction

The Battle of Dread Valley
by Adam Janus
page 9

Foxes and Gifts
by Nghi Vo
page 17

The Legacy of Gilgamesh - Part 2
by Anthony C. Hunter
page 25

General RPG

Worldwide D&D Game Day
by Kyle Thompson
page 3

The Silven Bestiary
by Kyle Thompson
page 4

The Once and Future Gamer
by Sean Patrick Fannon
page 15

Instinctive Wanderings
by Alisa Frisch
page 20

Exclusive Interview

Interview with Charles Ryan
by Eytan Bernstein
page 7

Interview with Malcolm Craig
by Nash J. DeVita
page 21

Reviews

Book of Templates
by Nash J. DeVita
page 30

Sweet Dreams Players Handbook
by Nash J. DeVita
page 31

Serenity Roleplaying Game
by Nash J. DeVita
page 33

d20 Postmodern: Traits & Flaws
by Nash J. DeVita
page 35

Editor's Note

Greetings, and welcome to a very special, 28th issue of the *Silven Trumpeter*!

Why is it extra-special? First of all, it's an issue in the season of holidays. We at Silven wish you all a very happy holiday of your choice, and all the best wishes for the new year. May it bring to you things as new and exciting as it will bring to us here at Silven!

"But Lyz, what new and exciting things are coming?" you may be asking. Well, read on, my friends.

The *Silven Trumpeter* that you all know and read every month will be undergoing some big changes. The first big change is that we will only be releasing the Trumpeter every quarter - in March, June, September, and December. The issues will be big - twice the size or more of what we're releasing now - and will have more articles, more fiction, and more artwork. Moreover, we're finally going to be able to provide our dedicated and talented writers and editors with a little pay for their efforts, thereby bringing you a higher level of quality in all the work that you'll see.

The flip side of the coin is that our beloved Trumpeter will no longer be available as a free download. But once you think of the articles that you love and keep coming back for - be it a hilarious fiction series, the occasional article on how to be a better game master, or a helpful column full of new material for your game - and I think you'll agree with me that a good, high-quality ezine is worth a little something.

It'll be a while before I get to address you all again, so I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who's helped to make the Trumpeter a success while we've been all-volunteer. From Silven leader Kosala Ubayasekara to my predecessor Dana Lynn Driscoll; from the skilled and resolute editors to our ever-enthusiastic writers; from those who have given us guidance and publicity to all of you, our readers - I offer wholehearted thanks. Without you, we would be - literally - nothing.

You'll see us again in March, and I hope that you'll all be with us then. In the meantime, have a great holiday and an even better start to 2006, and use some of those days off work for a good long game.

Cheers!

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

World Wide D&D Game Day

November 5, 2005

by Kyle Thompson

World Wide D&D Game Day is music to many gamers' ears (or maybe art to their eyes, depending on where they found out about it; I read it on Wizards' website!). It inspires awe in that hundreds of loyal gamers will be playing *Dungeons & Dragons* across the globe on the same day. That day is November 5th, or at least it was this year (2005). It is probably one of the few times that some of those who live in smaller towns have a decent-sized grouping of gamers near enough to join in with. It's also a chance for gamers to meet other gamers, whether in that smaller town or in New York City or London.

World Wide D&D Game Day is an event in which Wizards signs on many game stores and other similar locations around the world in order to bring their gamers, both old and new, a few hours' worth of gaming goodness. Of course, I had to investigate such a promising event, having missed it last year. So on November 5th, a Saturday, I went down to my local gaming store, called The Games People Play in Elmira, NY. There I met two other gamers (I didn't catch their names; it was highly informal) and joined in a game of D&D with them, my dad and a friend from my current group.

Wizards promised a limited edition miniature and a free campaign card for all participants in the event. To simplify the event, they even provided an adventure module to go with the *Fane of the Drow* miniature map that recently hit shelves, and provided miniatures for players and DMs to use. They even had pre-made characters ready

that were enjoyable for the players (though the initiative was calculated incorrectly for the changeling rogue).

The event was smaller (at least in my area) than I had expected. Don't get me wrong, it was a lot of fun. There were just enough participants to play a game with the four PCs that Wizards provided and a DM. I also was hoping for some other stuff like drinks or snacks. However, The Games People Play was good about getting in the holiday spirit: All d20 fantasy books were on sale for the day. Also, I expected a gathering, but it was more of a game-and-go thing in my area. I find myself believing that it must have been more gathering-like in larger areas.

The module was pretty easy to run (I was elected DM for having best knowledge of game mechanics) and I was prepped in about fifteen minutes. The adventure took three hours to complete (give or take, depending on the amount of role-playing that went on) and was mostly combat-oriented. I had a selection of four orc skeletons, a swarm of spiders, a pair of troglodytes, a half-ogre barbarian, a couple of drow arcane guards and two spiders of Lolth in my arsenal against the PCs, as well as a special edition miniature known as Lolth's Sting. To say the least, the party had a poor cleric, but it was a pretty informal game. The PCs found the rogue incapacitated (mainly a combination of poor luck and bad cleric skills) at least twice and then came my favorite part.

The last encounter involved a drow arcane guard and the Lolth's Sting I mentioned earlier. The guard was handled with little difficulty, but Lolth's Sting was a little more complicated. Her drow sleep poison took care of the wizard and the fighter. She



The special edition miniature Lolth's Sting, given to all World Wide D&D Game Day participants.

also dealt a lot of damage by dropping in and out of her ghost step ability.

In short, Wizards did an okay job with the free stuff. Everyone got one of the Lolth's Sting miniatures and the *Enemy's Bane* campaign card (from the *Mark of Heroes* set). The module wasn't very flavorful in story, but was fun to run with miniatures. The event was good and many gamers looking for a quick game and some new friends would enjoy it. I know I will go back next year. I met some funny people (whom I may never see again) and my friend, my dad and I all had a blast. Given the opportunity, we will probably return next year.

The Silven Bestiary

STEALTH SPECIALISTS

by Kyle Thompson

The Silven Bestiary is a monthly article that contains new monsters on a monthly basis. It will generally contain two to three monsters and occasionally a special bonus that includes other new material such as magic items, etc.

This month's topic is beasts that love to stay hidden and pack a punch from the darkness. Trust me; you won't want to meet these baddies in a dark alley.

Dark Robe

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 2d12 (13 hp)

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: Fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Armor Class: 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2

Attacks: Slam +2 melee (1d4+1; nonlethal)

Full Attack: Slam +2 melee (1d4+1; nonlethal)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Spontaneous spellcasting

Special Qualities: Blindsight 60 ft., vulnerability to fire

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

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 15, Con -, Int -, Wis 7, Cha 10

Skills: -



Feats: -

Environment: Mage keeps, schools or towers or any other area with a high mage population.

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: 50% standard

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 3-4 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: -

A long flowing, black cloak flutters gently in the breeze ahead. It quickly glides toward you as if the owner is purposely looking for you. As it nears, you can see that it has no owner!

About the Author:

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

Dark robes are actually mage's robes that are possessed by the spirit of their former owner. They are known to be found floating about the halls of mage schools and deserted mage towers.

Although – technically speaking – they are not malicious, they are extremely territorial and attack anything that enters their domain. They never leave their residence unless they are forcefully pulled out.

COMBAT

When in combat, dark robes tend to hone in on other spellcasters and attack them ruthlessly. They cannot control their spontaneous spellcasting, so they instead focus their only attack on one individual.

Spontaneous Spellcasting (Sp): Dark robes are noted for this ability. Once every 1d6 rounds, a dark robe releases one of the spells on Table 1, randomly determined by 1d20. The target is randomly determined by the DM. If the target for the spell is "self," then the spell affects the dark robe. If there are no targets, the magic does not discharge. The dark robe has to be able to perceive the target for this ability to take effect. Each spell is a move-equivalent action.

A dark robe has a caster level of 6th and the save DC for the spells on Table 1 are 10 + the spell's level.

Table 1

Roll (d20)	Spell
1	Acid arrow
2	Acid splash
3	Blink
4	Blur
5	Color spray
6	Darkness
7	Endure elements
8	Fireball
9	Flame arrow
10	Hypnotic pattern
11	Invisibility
12	Lightning bolt
13	Magic missile
14	Mirror image
15	Ray of enfeeblement
16	Ray of frost
17	Resist energy
18	Scare
19	Scorching ray
20	Web

Stalking

Tiny Magical Beast

Hit Dice: 3d10+6 (22 hp)

Initiative: +5 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft.

Armor Class: 17 (+5 Dex, +2 size), touch 17, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-8

Attacks: 2 Claws +0 melee (1d2-1)

Full Attack: 10 Claws +0 melee (1d2-1)

Space/Reach: 2.5 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +1

Abilities: Str 8, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 5, Wis 8, Cha 10

Skills: Hide +15

Feats: Toughness

Environment: Any urban

Organization: Group (10-20)

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: 2-10 (Tiny), 11-20 (Small)

Level Adjustment: -

Suddenly, several little pairs of red eyes pierce the darkness before you. Tiny, high-pitched screeching noises break through the quiet.

Stalklings are rarely found alone, but alone they are known for for being nuisances. A group of stalklings can be quite dangerous. Members of new adventuring parties have been slain by these tiny black creatures' claws. These creatures have black skin and the physique of tiny elven children. They have small, many-toothed mouths and red eyes.

Whole groups of stalklings have been known to hide in barrels and in the shadows of dark alleys. If exposed to the sun or any other source of light brighter than a torch, a stalkling will cower and flee.

Stalklings communicate through short piercing screeches that sound like a large bat.

COMBAT

Stalklings mob a single opponent in hope of killing it quickly. They do not flee (except from bright light) for they are stupid creatures and think of nothing but wreaking havoc everywhere.

Skills: Stalklings get a +5 bonus to Hide checks when hiding in dark areas. This is not factored into the statistics above.

Missing One

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 5d12 (37 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft.

Armor Class: 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+10

Attacks: Claw +11 (1d4+7; 19-20/2)

Full Attack: 2 claws +11 (1d4+7; 19-20/2)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Cause fear, dying scream, rend 1d6+7

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., death phrase, DR 10/bludgeoning, turn resistance +1

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +3

Abilities: Str 25, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 8, Cha 14

Skills: -

Feats: Weapon Focus (claw)^B

Environment: Any

Organization: Solitary, Horde (2-20)

Challenge Rating: 6

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: 1-4 HD (Small), 6-10 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: -

A dark figure shambles toward you. As it comes into the light, you realize that it is a young [appropriate race and gender], but there is something terribly wrong; the thing's face is pale white and it seems to be ill. The thing seems to glare at you as if looking for revenge. Whispers that seem to come from the air about you send a chill up and down your spine.*

*As chosen by the DM.

Missing ones are those who were kidnapped and murdered. They vary in size, depending on the victim's original race and age; for example a human child missing one is size small and probably has only one or two HD, but an adult missing one is medium with five or more HD depending on his

or her relative strength in life. This is at the DM's discretion.

A missing one has pale skin and is very gaunt, although the corpse in itself is in relatively good shape (besides the murder wound[s]). Its hair is generally thinning, but everything else is intact.

Missing ones are spawned out of two emotions. First, they can be spawned out of revenge, which means they can be put to rest when they are avenged, regardless of who claims the vengeance. Otherwise, they spawn from incompleteness. In this case, the missing one wants to exact its pain on everyone it meets and generally haunts the area in which it died. They have been known to be attached to lakes, forests, small towns and villages, and even city alleys.

They are horrifying to behold, not just in their physique, but in their approach. They shamble about. In some areas, groups of missing ones swarm about someone, generally terrifying unwary travelers.

COMBAT

Most missing ones cause fear to all those about them and then attempt to use their rend ability, all the while terrifying those nearby with their death phrases. Missing ones are unintelligent and only exist to cause unto others the pain caused to them, so they attack without mercy. If given the chance, a group of missing ones uses mob tactics.

Cause Fear (Sp): Once per day, as the spell. This is cast as a 2nd level sorcerer. This stacks with the effects of a missing one's death phrase, but not with other cause fear spells.

Death Phrase (Su): Whispers constantly seem to come from thin air when a missing one is present. These whispers are barely audible and tend to deal with something important to the missing one in life, or they are simply cries for help. Some examples: "Come and play with me," or "Please, help me..."

The missing one's mouth never moves. These are simply a manifestation of the strong emotions that stained the death of the missing one. However, they do have an effect on those around a missing one.

All living things within 30 feet of a missing one must succeed at a Will save (DC 10 + the missing one's HD + Charisma bonus) or take a -4 penalty to attack rolls due to the distraction of the voices, until either they leave the missing one's presence or the missing one is destroyed. If a character succeeds at the Will save, she cannot be affected by the same missing one's death phrase for 24 hours.

Dying Scream (Su): When a missing one is destroyed, the soul flies straight from the body; a twisted expression of pain upon its face. As it flies away (it does not attack), it emits a tortured scream. All creatures within thirty feet must make a Will save (DC 10 + the missing one's HD + Charisma bonus) or take 1d6 sonic damage.

Rend (Ex): If a missing one hits with both claw attacks, it latches onto the opponent, raking it with its claws. This attack automatically deals an additional 1d6+7 damage.

As this is the last free issue of the Trumpeter and the last one of 2005, I would like to thank all those who read the article. Do not worry, though: this is not the last you all will hear of the Silven Bestiary. I hope you all keep reading the Trumpeter and the other articles in it and that you help us make it a successful ezine. So once again, thanks to all of those who took the time and looked forward to coming the first of every month to read the stuff we prepared for you. I hope that the change to the quarterly ezine doesn't change a thing.

Here's to another awesome year with many new and exciting things!

-Kyle

Interview with Charles Ryan

Worldwide D&D Game Day and More

by Eytan Bernstein

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? What is your position at Wizards of the Coast and what does that entail?

Well, first and foremost, I'm a serious gamer. I started playing Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) in 1979, and have been a gamer ever since—RPGs more than anything else, although I've played my share of card games and minis games, and was an early adopter of German board games. I currently play in a Call of Cthulhu (CoC) campaign and run a post-apocalyptic d20 Modern game; most of my D&D games these days are one-offs. I DM a lot, and when I play, my character preferences tend to run toward rogues (or rogue-like characters in games without classes, like CoC).

Professionally, I became involved in the gaming industry in the early 90's when I published a roleplaying game called Millennium's End. My experience running a small game company for eight years and working at a couple mid-sized game companies led me to the R&D department at Wizards of the Coast (WotC), where I worked for four or five years. Along the way I spent five years as the Chairman of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design (the arm of the Game Manufacturer's Association that administers the Origins Awards). About two years ago, I moved over to the business side at WotC and am now the Brand Manager for RPGs. In that role, basically, I am in charge of making sure the games and brand grow and are marketed well and also to ensure the business makes a profit and that products are of high quality and produced efficiently. It's been a fun ride!



What is Worldwide D&D Game Day? Who came up with the concept? What hopes & aims do you have for the day? What kind of response have you had so far concerning this idea?

Worldwide D&D Game Day was first held last year in celebration of the game's 30th anniversary. (Frankly, I don't really recall who specifically came up with the idea, but it evolved out of a lot of thinking about how we were going to celebrate the anniversary year.) Over 25,000 players participated at about 1,000 sites—mostly game stores and book stores. The feedback we got from the players and retailers was that they'd love to have it be an annual event. For this year, hundreds

Charles Ryan is the Brand Manager for RPGs at Wizards of the Coast. He is in charge of the Worldwide D&D Game Day event sponsored by Wizards, and took a few minutes of his time for this interview on October 24, 2005. The Silver Trumpeter would like to thank Mr. Ryan for his time, especially while in the midst of both an office move and such a large project!

of hobby, game, and book stores have signed on to participate. On November 5th, each site will hold a day of celebration and game-play in honor of our favorite RPG, and all gamers are invited. We provide the participating stores with special adventures and unique giveaways, along with signage, décor, and other stuff, and the stores run with it. Players can find participating sites by visiting www.dndgameday.com. Based on last year's participation as well as great feedback from retailers, we expect an even bigger turnout this year.

What are you personally looking forward to participating in during the Game Day?

Three-Dragon Ante! It hits stores on November 4th, the day before the Game Day, and I'm looking forward to playing a lot of it at our celebration here in Seattle. In case your readers haven't heard about it, Three-Dragon Ante is the tavern game your characters might play when they're hanging out in a local watering hole between adventures. It's a card game (not collectible) that you can play as a standalone game or within a roleplaying adventure, where your character's abilities affect how you play the game and give you a unique edge. It's fast-paced and a whole lot of fun.

I've had a lot of opportunities to demo Three-Dragon Ante over the past couple of months—showing it off to distributors and retailers, coworkers, Hasbro executives, and so on, I've gotten pretty darn good at it. I'm looking forward to winning a few hands!

Is there anything that you can reveal to our readers about the direction that the D&D brand will take in the coming year?

D&D is more popular than ever. After 31 years in existence, the game still appeals to a variety of types of gamers and we will continue to release products that aim to attract both new and experienced players. So in that sense, don't expect any real changes in direction.

We launched the Basic Game last year, which is designed to appeal to players who are new to RPGs and D&D and teach them to play in about an hour. We've also been able to place the Basic Game in stores where nongamers shop, like Toys 'R' Us, which would probably never take RPG books. So we see a lot of new players coming in to the hobby, and expect it to continue to grow!

What sort of continuation will there be of the various D&D lines such as races, complete, environment, and monster (Draconomicon, Libris Mortis, etc..)?

Well, for the series you've seen before, we have Races of the Dragon slated for January. The third Fantastic Locations product releases in April, along with the Complete Psionic. And we have cool books like Tome of Magic (March) that don't fall into those series. Beyond that, well, we don't discuss upcoming releases until they've been officially announced—and we haven't yet officially announced our titles beyond April. But count on seeing continuations of those series—like the creature series—for which there's fertile ground for new material.

Recently, the rights to RAVENLOFT and GAMMA WORLD have reverted from White Wolf to Wizards. Are there any plans to put any material out for these settings?

We've had a great relationship with Arthaus on their RAVENLOFT line, and we're quite happy

with the products they've released. I can't really say more than that, because, as I just mentioned, we don't comment one way or the other on our future schedule beyond the products we've announced.

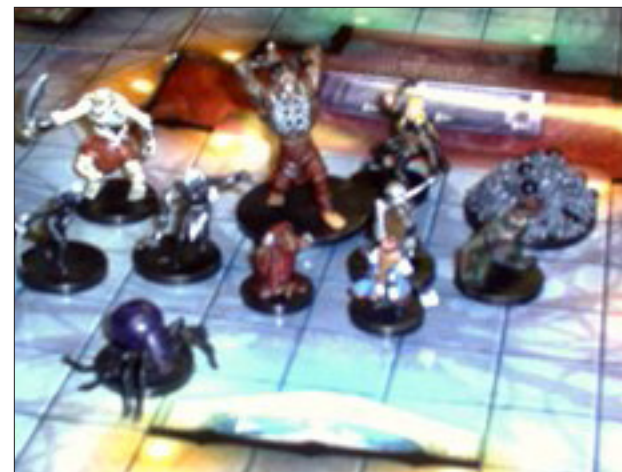
Can we expect future Wizards of the Coast related media productions such as movies or television shows?

We work with a wide variety of licensees. In general, we let them take the lead in deciding when and how to announce their projects.

How is the move to the new Wizards building going? What was the reasoning behind the move?

The move seems to be going quite well—I settle into my new digs tomorrow morning. The new building is really nice, and our offices look a lot more like what you'd imagine a high-end game company's offices might look like, and less like plain old generic office space, than our old office. Why the move? Well, I'm not a spokesperson for our Facilities department, but my understanding is that our lease was coming to an end, and, like renter in that situation, we started looking around to see if we could get a better space at a better price. Seems like we did! (Incidentally, we didn't go very far—the new office is literally a block away from our old buildings.)

Again, we'd like to thank Mr. Ryan for taking the time for this interview!



The miniatures provided to DMs for use in running the free module for World Wide D&D Game Day.

The Battle of Dread Valley

by Adam Janus

Commander Conall MacDrust dragged his knife slowly across his red stubbled pate, the dry, rasping scrape sounding loud in the pre-dawn stillness.

He ignored the caustic look shot in his direction by the praying warrior priest from the temple of Beordin. The priest's name was Alrik Kloengr, High Priest from the order of wolves of Beordin. He was kneeling, forehead close to the ground, bending his mind and will earthward, reading, feeling and interpreting the ripples and waves in the earth's living fabric.

"Witch hunters!" spat Talorg Brude, a short but very broad, muscular man who strode up on Conall's left, to join him on the earthen wall of the dun. His dark eyes, dark skin and intricate tribal tattoos bespoke his aboriginal, Gaelged Firar heritage. Tying his long black hair into the traditional topknot of his people, Talorg continued complaining. "The troops're gettin' restless Con, chasin' ghosts and rumors around the wilds."

"You saw the writ from the king, Talorg; we are to extend every courtesy to the priests of Beordin," scolded Conall, who finished shaving and stood stroking his bushy mustache, which covered his top lip. Its graying red ends framed his mouth and extended all the way down his broad chin. "And you gotta admit, it's kinda weird out here. We haven't seen a living thing for days, and damn, it's hot for late autumn!" He turned away from the kneeling priest and gazed through the pre-

dawn haze at the distant tree line in the east. He could hear the thundering of hooves in the eerie stillness, followed by two short horn blasts, signaling the return of his outriders.

Dawn was fast approaching, and thunder rumbled in the west. The distant storm clouds were ugly and had the greenish tint that usually promised hellacious weather.

Conall tightened his belt and habitually checked the straps and fasteners on his worn chain link and padded leather armor. For twenty years he had commanded the winter patrol on the southern border of Reban and the wastelands to the south. The patrols' job was to keep the roads from the silver mines and farming communities safe from outlaws and marauding bands of painted savages from the forest, providing law in a lawless land.

Like himself and Talorg, half of his hundred and fifty man company was mercenary, weapon-men from all parts of the continent, working away the winter in the patrols before being relieved by Rebanian military in early spring. They then collected their earnings and scattered. Some returned to their homes to tend farms and livestock, others stayed on with Conall, patrolling Reban's eastern border with the Khorian Empire. Most returned in late fall to re-sell their swords to the border patrol.

One month ago, Alrik Kloengr and his fifty priests of Beordin – called wolves – rode into the dun Conall commanded, with orders from the king. A silver caravan from the mines had been attacked, the lone survivor – bloody, badly burned and thoroughly mad – had ranted of demons before dying.

The border patrol and the warrior priests had found the waylaid caravan, but the silver had not

been stolen. Instead it had burned, burned so hot that rivers of crude ore ran from the ruined wagons like lava from a volcano.

Also in the ashes, they found the remains of the caravan workers and their escort. It appeared as if they had been ripped limb from limb, bones gnawed, before being consumed by the flames. Most mysterious of all, was there were no discernable tracks leading to, or from the scene.

"Why would outlaws melt the silver, and not steal it?" Conall asked Talorg, not for the first time. "And what, besides dragon fire, coulda melted all that ore?"

"Wizard's spell gone badly maybe," the Gaelged replied, spitting. "We're like as not looking at an outlaw band that's employed some half crazy mage outa Ghan, went nuts from sniffin all that sulphur from them volcanoes. For all we know, the reaver's scorched bones were among those we found. hell, it coulda even been sanctioned by Ghan!"

Conall guessed Talorg's speculation could be right. There had been border disputes between Reban and Ghan for centuries, and Ghan's volcanic western regions were infamous for spawning half mad, darkly ambitious sorcerers. And demons had not walked the earth for thousands of years, since the Great War, but even out here, in the wilds of Reban's southwestern border, rumors of strange happenings all over the continent reached the mercenary Commander's ears.

Studying the approaching outriders with his pale green eyes, Conall noticed the tension in their demeanors, and instantly got flutters in his gut. Alrik Kloengr must have noticed something also, as he joined the Commander and Talorg, anticipation etched on his lined face.

A large man dismounted and removed his helmet, revealing long white hair that still retained some of its former yellow. Hair and braided beard framed a scarred, weather-beaten face and the hard blue

eyes of a man from the north. He walked toward the trio with an obvious limp, his leather armor and leggings creaking only slightly.

"We found sumthin', Commander," the large man said, eyeing Alrik warily, not wanting to reveal his information in front of the priest until commanded to do so.

"Spit it out, Skorri," Conall said impatiently. "The priests of Beordin are here to aid us, the quicker we get this over with, the better."

Skorri noticeably relaxed; the big Northman had been torn between his loyalty to his Commander and company, and his loyalty to his god. Beordin was widely worshiped in the northern climes, but this far south, the followers of the demon hunting legend turned god were viewed as fanatics and zealots.

"Yes sir. About two leagues northeast of the road, in a shallow valley, we found a burnt out piece a ground, a big piece, a hundred paces across." Skorri swallowed, as if considering if he should continue or not. Conall thought he saw a hint of fear in the Northman's eyes.

"Burned how?" asked Alrik. "Like a forest fire or campfire that burned out of control? Or does it appear to be a controlled burn, like someone did it on purpose, and contained it?"

"I ain't never seen nuthin' like it sir," the Northman replied. "There's trees and brush on the outskirts of the area, that don't show any sign a heat, like there wasn't a raging fire two feet away from 'em! And there are dead things in the circle, a huge boar, deer, a couple a hares, and other critters. They ain't burnt, just dead, and our horses won't go near it, it's the damndest thing, Commander!"

"Thank you, Skorri. Return to the site and secure the outskirts." Conall turned to Talorg, who was making faces at the praying priests of Beordin, drawing laughter from some of the onlooking

soldiers. "Talorg, gather your trackers and accompany Skorri and the outriders to secure the area. We will join you as soon as camp is broken. I want to know everything that has approached or left the area, even if it's a single rabid raccoon."

"Yes sir!" Talorg replied, and hastened about camp, eager to break the monotony of the previous, uneventful month. Besides being Conall's second in command, the stocky aboriginal was also in charge of stealthy reconnaissance and intelligence gathering.

The trackers were comprised mostly of young, Rebanian military scouts and archers, looking to hone their skills. If any living creature left even the lightest track or slightest spore, Talorg Brude's trackers would find it.

"We should leave the horses here, Commander," advised Alrik Kloengr, keeping his voice respectfully low. "Spooked mounts could be a detriment."

The warrior priest looked Conall in the eye, and the mercenary captain noticed for the first time the Nordic resemblance he bore to Skorri, especially the piercing blue eyes. Alrik's hair was a shade darker, like those from the highlands just north of the Graode Mountain range.

"And what do you think we'll find out there?" asked Conall. "What's gonna spook experienced war horses?"

The priest's eye's narrowed fiercely and he took a step closer so as not to be overheard.

"Demons, Dun Commander MacDrust... demons. You said yourself, it seems strange out here, and you're right, there are dark forces at work. I can feel the evil portent in the air, as if the earth is tensing for something. This is the calm before the storm, Commander, and I fear it's about to hit us full force."

Something about the surety of Alrik's tone and the gleam in his narrowed eyes sent an icy chill up the hardened soldier's spine.

Skorri Grimnr's son sat atop his mount, massaging his lame knee and cursing the coming storm that promised to make the old wound swell and ache. His outriding light cavalry had secured the perimeter of the valley, they now sat at a crossroad, allowing Talorg's scouts to search for tracks, and await Commander MacDrust and further orders.

The big Northman's mind wandered as he dismounted. Skorri hated horses; he would just as soon eat one as ride one. But since his injury, sustained in battle on the western seas, his right leg could no longer stand up in sustained foot fighting.

Cast out by his seafaring people, the Dgaro-Flotnar, as a burdensome cripple, he wandered the southern kingdoms of Brynhalla and Reban. He sold his sword as a caravan escort and bodyguard, until a drunken fight in a tavern on Reban's northeastern border. He remembered little of the incident, other than waking up in a prison cell, bruised and bloody, his head pounding, again, from excess dwarven spirits.

Skorri chuckled inwardly as he recalled what a sorry sight he was, dragged in front of the fat Rebanian magistrate in shackles, dirty, bloody, naked except for boots and dirty leathern kilt. The wool that seemed packed into his brain cleared quickly though, when he found out he was being tried for murder. A young Rebanian soldier had died in the brawl, dead from a broken neck, the result of a single mighty punch from the huge Northman.

It was Commander MacDrust that saved Skorri from the gallows that day, almost two decades

ago. Putting his neck on the line, testifying that the Rebanian soldier had instigated the fight and Skorri was merely defending himself. Skorri was released into MacDrust's care, his sentence to serve in the winter patrol for a period of five years. That had been eighteen years ago.

In that time, Skorri learned how to handle a war charger, discovering that while mounted, his leg was no longer a detriment. His long reach and strong sword arm made him a natural for fighting from horseback. By the time his five year sentence was served, Skorri Grimnr's son, son of pirates and sea reavers, had become a sergeant in charge of MacDrust's light cavalry.

He scratched under his braided yellow beard, gazing at the autumn trees. Naked boughs rattled and scraped together in the breeze, having already shed most of their leaves, covering the forest floor with a yellow and red carpet. In his homeland, far to the north and west, his people had already moored their dragon- and raptor-prowed ships, retiring to their longhouses. There, the Jarl and Karls alike would wait out the long winter, feasting and drinking, telling tales of their conquests around the fires, before rolling into the furs with a warm and willing serving wench.

Rarely did a day go by when Skorri did not long for the open seas and longhouses of his people, and for the nineteenth year in a row, Skorri Grimnr's son vowed this would be his last winter in the patrols. In spring, he would ride north, through Brynhalla, the Kingdom of the Riddari clans, before turning west, skirting the great Furia forest to the coast of the western sea. There he would use his earnings from the patrols and purchase a good, clinker-built craft and sail out to sea, into the setting sun.

"Sir," a young soldier's voice broke through the Northman's reverie. Skorri turned to face the soldier, who stood at attention. His name was Faverius, whose swarthy, complexion, black hair and hawk nose bespoke his obvious Khorian blood.

"Report, soldier," Skorri responded, admiring the young man's protocol, but noting the nervous tick in his cheek. "At ease, Faverius, what's goin' on?"

"A man in the road sir, within the burned area," Faverius nodded his head toward the valley. "We don't know where he came from, one moment he wasn't there, the next he was."

"Talorg and his scouts will figure out where he came from, but have the riders mount up, we'll check him out." Skorri ordered, ignoring the chill that suddenly crept up the length of his spine.

A sense of foreboding washed over Skorri as his cavalry crested the ridge and began their slow descent into the valley, toward the huge burned circle. Thunder still rumbled behind them, and the big Northman wondered why the storm traveled so slowly. He could feel the pressure in the atmosphere in his lame knee, throbbing, sometimes in time with the rolling thunder.

A hundred paces down the road which wound through the burned-out circle, knelt a figure robed and hooded in black. The figure appeared to be kneeling still, looking at the ground. Halting the cavalry, Skorri ordered the company to dismount; the horses were growing more skittish and frightened the closer they moved to the circle.

"Two of you stay with the horses," Skorri indicated two of the younger soldiers before drawing his sword, and advancing toward the kneeling figure. The rest of his soldiers fanned out behind and to the sides, in a practiced phalanx. Many wondered why the big Northman was using so much caution with just a solitary old man in ragged black robes, but their hands stayed on the hilts of their weapons as they advanced.

A wave of nausea washed over them as they entered the burned circle and the acrid scent of sulphur reached their nostrils. The figure in the road seemed oblivious to their presence, yet without looking up, the man began to rock back

and forth, and a slight change in the wind carried chanting, in a harsh, guttural language.

Skorri recalled the Commander and Talorg discussing the possibility that a mad Ghanian wizard was roaming the countryside, with a band of outlaws. Halting the advance with an upraised hand, Skorri was about to order the horn sounded, summoning Talorg and his scouts, who carried short hunting bows. But at that moment, the figure looked up, his hood falling back, revealing the hideous head beneath.

For a moment the company froze, looking into red eyes set deep in a fleshless skull. It appeared to grin at them with blackened teeth in an impossibly wide mouth.

Skorri Grimnr's son was the first to break free of the skull heads hypnotic gaze. "Sound the horn!" he bellowed. But his command was drowned out by a crack of thunder behind them, and the roar of the earth splitting before them, directly beneath the black robed figure. A foul, hot wind issued from the cracked earth, driving the command back into Skorri's open mouth.

From the crack in the earth, a huge stone rose, jutting skyward from the ground. The black robed figure remained perched atop the monolith, which seemed to glow with a dark luminescence. Pulsing red runes shone and throbbed all over the black stone. Centered on the stone was a glowing arch in the shape of a door.

"Sound the horn and hold yer line!" Skorri commanded again, standing in a crouch, holding his sword before him, fighting the rising bile in his throat from the smell of sulphur and rotten meat.

Faverius raised the hollowed aurochs horn to his lips, but the robed figure atop the stone leaped to its feat, and pointed a bony finger at the horn blower and shouted a guttural command. The aurochs horn shattered, bone shrapnel ripped through Faverius's face and neck, tearing flesh and

slicing arteries. He fell to the ground in a bloody heap.

The black robed figure spread its arms, raising its head and shouting to the sky in the same guttural language. Its body began to grow, the ragged black robes tearing, revealing glowing red armor as the figure reached twice the height of a man. A flaming red sword materialized in its skeletal hand, the same red metal as its armor.

Gripping the sword hilt with both boney hands, the figure drove the blade into the top of the stone. A great crack like thunder rolled over the terrified humans, and the glowing arch in the stone began to liquefy and run like wax, then swirl in a vicious mist.

"Shield wall!" Skorri boomed above the din of the approaching storm, and the foul wind issuing from the swirling nothingness of the unnatural archway in the stone.

"Bolverk and Por give me strength!" he prayed to himself, as the first shapes began to issue from the stone.

Conall's weapon men flanked the priests of Beordin on either side of the hard packed, dirt road. Protecting them from any earthly foes, allowing Alrik's wolves to concentrate on what they called 'disturbances of nature,' disturbances they were sure were caused by unearthly forces.

MacDrust admired the priests' discipline as the orderly column turned east, off the main road, onto a trail marked only by wagon ruts. The brush obscuring the path had been hacked away by Skorri and his outriders. On either side of the leaf-littered trail, the trees grew thicker, and overhung the trail in places, before widening a short ways up.

"Smugglers' road," commented Conall, walking in front of the column with Alrik Kloengr. "Probably branches off a hundred times, most of em leadin' nowhere."

This led credence to Talorg's theory that they were dealing with bandits, who had perhaps fallen in with a renegade battle mage, or crazed wizard. But Alrik's warning of supernatural foes nagged at the back of Conall's brain.

Thunder still rumbled in the west, moving closer, as the morning grew more humid, adding to the tension that seemed to hang all around them. As the road sloped upward, they paused briefly to study a fork in the road. Conall mopped his sweaty forehead, and was about to comment on the lack of insects which should have been plaguing them, when they all felt a hot wind crest the hill before them. It washed over them like a thick wave and carried the smell of burnt, putrefied corpses and sulphur.

"What the hell..." Conall's question was lost in the hot gust.

It was Alrik Kloengr who recognized it for what it was.

"A tear in the earth's fabric!" the priest yelled above the wind, as his Wolves of Beordin dragged heavy war swords from sheaths and spears from their backs. "It's a rift between the earth and a dark, foul plane!"

Alrik strode among his wolves, reassuring the warrior priests with his confident demeanor and shouts of encouragement. Conall's flanking soldiers waited for orders, and scouts began to filter in, Talorg among them. The Gaelged's usual devil-may-care attitude was replaced by the hardened professionalism of an experienced fighter. Before he could give any reports, the thundering of hooves reached their ears from beyond the brow of the hill.

"Must be the outriders!" commented Talorg as the horses crested the hill from the east.

The animals were riderless, large eyes wide and rolling with terror, their flanks lathered with sweat as they ran at breakneck speed out of the valley, scattering the assembled scouts and priests. Two were dragging their hapless riders behind them.

Thinking on his feet, Conall sent the mounted scouts after the loose horses to rescue the dragged riders; they then quickly reformed their lines and hastened up the hill to the rocky, tree-lined crest.

They skidded to a halt at the rim of the shallow valley and stared down at the horrific scene below them.

They saw what appeared to be a huge stone jutting from the earth like a crooked tooth. Red, archaic runes glowed over the entire surface, and a swirling black hole of nothingness heaved and pulsed in the center of the stone. Skorri and his score of outriders formed a shield wall between the road out of the valley and the stone, their hair and cloaks blowing behind them as they were buffeted by the hot, acrid wind blowing from the swirling center.

Out of the swirling doorway marched a score of creatures, each ten feet tall, with enormous, bat-like wings folded on their backs. Their heads were simian in appearance, with great, jutting tusks and goat-like horns set atop massively muscled, humanoid torsos. Their bodies were covered with a coarse, red fur, except for their faces, hands and wings, which were black. They were clad in blood red armor, and each demon held in its clawed hands a huge red sword, which seemed to pulse with the heat of hell.

Alrik could feel the earth protest each time one of their foul, taloned feet touched the ground, scorching it, and turning it black.

Atop the stone, directly above the swirling doorway, stood a skeletal creature. It, too, was clad in blood red armor and armed with a huge red sword. It issued an unholy cry while spreading its bony wings. Dried up and singed pieces of flesh flapped in the foul-smelling wind. Its skeletal head swayed back and forth, red eyes focusing on the line of humans before it.

Before Alrik could order Conall to call his men back, the demons fell on Skorri's faltering line of outriders with thousands of years of pent-up fury, sweeping their huge swords in great arcs, cutting through earthly shields and armor, flesh and bone like butter. A red mist briefly obscured the hellish scene as human souls were sent screaming to hell with each swing and chop. The demons cried out their pleasure in guttural voices that sounded like broken glass and metal shards scraping on rock, their awful chorus drowning out the anguished screams of the dying soldiers.

Alrik's wolves spread out on the rim of the valley as the storm winds from the west picked up. Greenish black clouds filled with moisture crept nearer, giving the gruesome scene in the sun splashed valley a surreal look. Surrounded by his grimfaced warrior priests, Alrik raised his ancient, rune-etched sword to the sky, calling on the earth's elements to aid him in his time of need.

He then bellowed a challenge to the demons below him. "I am Alrik Kloengr, of the wolves of Beordin, descendants of the same secret order of wolves that smote the demon lord Zaranoth, and sent his black soul back to hell!"

At the mention of its ancient nemesis, and the banished demon lord, the skeletal fiend looked up from where it was feasting on the flesh of the fallen and locked gazes with the warrior priest.

"I see you recognize the names!" Alrik continued. "Now take your abominations back to the pits of hell! Or we will send you back!"

The skeletal demon leader answered by snarling, then opened its mouth and vomited a cloud of huge, hell-spawned insects resembling gargantuan flies, with green eyes and oversized, flesh-tearing mandibles. The sound of their buzzing wings and clacking mandibles was deafening as they winged their way up the hill.

Conall and his men stood, weapons drawn, and stared in helpless amazement as the cloud of insects bore down on them.

Alrik brought his sword back, as if signaling the advancing storm to charge, and then brought his blade down in a slow chopping motion. Storm winds from the west blew stronger, as if on command, and Alrik's cloak was billowing around him wildly, whipped by the crosswinds, natural and unnatural.

The cloud of bugs riding the foul wind from the portal seemed to falter as the clean, natural storm winds pushed them back. Alrik then passed his sword before him, etching archaic symbols in the air. The magic in the air was thick, and seemed to ripple and crack as if freezing, surrounding and constricting the grotesque cloud of hell-spawned insects, taking on the color of hoarfrost. Following the direction of the priest's blade, the now silent cloud changed direction and hurtled down the hill, solidifying like a gigantic hailstone, trailing tendrils of ice as it picked up speed.

In an attempt to dodge the frozen missile, the demon leader flapped its horrid wings and took to the air. But it wasn't fast enough, and the giant ice ball slammed into one of its wings. It pulverized bone and rotten flesh, sending the demon crashing to the ground amidst a shower of steaming bone fragments.

The frozen sphere continued on its course and smashed into the swirling black nothingness in the center of the stone. There was a great tearing sound, like parchment ripping slowly, and the edges of the swirling blackness puckered and

quivered. Then the portal began to collapse, creating a vacuum that seemed to suck all the sound from the air for a split second, before spitting it back out in the form of an explosion, showering the valley with molten rock and steaming ice.

Screaming their rage and frustration, the demons charged up the hill, snarling obscenely, and unholy flames burned in their fiery red eyes.

The wolves of Beordin met the demons' advance, led by Alrik Kloengr, who sought out and engaged the demon leader in combat. Ducking under its pulsing red sword, Alrik felt the hot air of its passing as it singed his hair and set his cloak afire. Coming out of his crouch, Alrik brought his enchanted blade around, scoring a solid hit on the demon's boney hip. The keen edge hissed and rang through bone, trails of steam following in the blade's wake.

Moving to his right, Alrik neatly sidestepped the creature's angry return stroke, a downward chop that would have cut the human in half. Before the demon could recover from the missed blow, Alrik brought his sword up over his head, and brought the blade down with all his might on his opponent's neck, parting its deformed head from its obscene body.

Conall took heart from the warrior priests' bravery and led his men into the fray, falling on the creatures that were taking injuries from the priests' icy blades. The mercenary commander charged a demon that was squatting atop a dead priest, gorging on the dead human's entrails.

Conall brought his sword down on the creature's back, between its wings and right above its hindquarters. His blade bit deep, parting red fur and flesh, before grinding off the fiend's spine. The hilt of his weapon grew hot, blistering his hands as boiling ichors spewed out, burning his face and arms.

With an unearthly howl, the demon turned, slapping Conall's buckler aside, raking through his leather and chain link armor with razor sharp claws, opening up three deep wounds on his chest.

Before the demon could finish the stricken mercenary, Talorg leaped to his defense, long sword in his right hand, Khorian gladius in his left. The two blades were a blur as the Gaelged weaved in and out of the demon's defenses, striking and slashing at vitals with every stroke, until finding the abomination's black heart, sending its twisted soul screaming back to hell.

Conall's soldiers grew more confident as they realized the demons' earthly incarnations could be dealt grievous wounds with material weapons, and fell on the hellspawn in sheer overwhelming numbers.

Many valiant warriors were lost that day in the valley. The blackened, steaming battlefield was littered with smoking demon parts and dead humans. Some of the survivors had gone terribly mad from the hellish experience; most were injured, and all were shaken right down to their very souls.

In silence, the survivors – Conall, Talorg and Alrik among them – built a funeral pyre for their fallen comrades, while thunder crashed and lightning seared the skies.

It seemed as if the storm waited, out of respect, for the oil-fed flames to consume the fallen before the clouds opened up. Sheets of cool, wind-driven rain cleansed the scorched, despoiled earth, the scene of the horrific battle just hours before.

As the exhausted soldiers and priests left the valley behind, the valley that would for ever after be named Dread Valley, Conall turned to Alrik. "Is this a portent of things to come? Can we expect more? Or is it over?"

Alrik pulled the cowl on his cloak back a little, so as to look the mercenary in the eye when he spoke. "I am not a seer, Commander MacDrust, but I can tell you we are approaching the end of an age. The delicate balance between law and evil is becoming compromised. The wards between our material plane of existence, and the fiery nether plane, put in place by the arch wizards after the Demon Wars, are deteriorating. Also deteriorating are the temples of Beordin, Bolverk, Trinia, Behl, Illunar and all the gods of light, as well as their beliefs. Clandestine temples of dark gods such as Set, Sobek, Zaranoth, Hisseesha and Zareesha are growing bolder, attracting followers with the promise of quick wealth and power."

The warrior priest sighed deeply and stopped momentarily to help Conall readjust the bandages wrapped around his bloody chest. "Strange things are occurring all over the world, Commander, and all of us will have a role to play in the upcoming struggle."

Alrik pulled his cowl back down over his face as the rain picked up in intensity, and hastened forward to assist more of the injured.

None looked behind them into the valley, as swirling winds created a great funnel cloud, touching down at the spot where the demons had breached earth's material plane. The tornado's tip danced and spun on the ground, seeming to erase any signs of the demons' passing.

As it reached the smoking funeral pyre, the twister raised and hovered above the site. Many gray, ghostly forms issued from the ashes, rising into the spinning cloud. A great black mist in the shape of a clawed hand reached up and grasped at the ghostly forms in vain.

The tornado then took on the shape of a giant war hammer and smote the evil hand, dissipating it.

The gods took the souls of their brave children back from the pits of hell.

The Once And Future Gamer

My cracked crystal ball

by Sean Patrick Fannon

"And now, the end is near..." – Frank Sinatra, *My Way*

The Internet is crackling with electrons frying by the millions as RPG fans rush to post the latest news and rumors about companies staggering and falling all over the place. Some serious players in what we typically call the "Second Tier" seem to be in restructuring mode. Smaller companies are just disappearing or growing increasingly silent as their web sites cease to be updated and their forums shut down.

This means people are being laid off and are now posting resumes and requests for work wherever they can be seen. Naturally, this just fuels the sky-is-falling machinery, taking speculations about who is going out next and making them *the* hot topic on the various forums (outpacing even the latest "No, *your* favorite game system sucks, not mine!" threads).

Whereas this has always been a fairly constant source of static/traffic in the RPG and hobby game industries, there has been a noticeable increase in the magnitude. There's little doubt that RPG sales are in a slump. Retailers are feeling it in big ways; many of them moving rapidly to diversify their stock in order to staunch their revenue bleeds.

You *know* things are bad when a retailer looks at comic books and goes "Hey, that looks like a stable source of income..."

Freelancers are focusing more and more on their day jobs, some even giving up completely on working with games anymore. Publishers are giving up their offices and moving their inventory into their garages (thus forcing their spouses to park the mini-vans on the street, hacking them off royally) while managing their product lines from the PC in the spare bedroom.

There is definitely a shift happening in the RPG industry. I am fairly convinced that this shift is permanent, and that we will be seeing a very different-looking business in the years to come.

"Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right. Here I am, stuck in the middle with you."
– Gerry Rafferty, *Stuck In the Middle With You*

Don't get me wrong. I am far from predicting the "end" of anything, unless it's Business as Usual. The times, they are a-changin', though. This very e-zine is a prime example. This is my last freebie column; from this point out, we publish quarterly and I get to make a little scratch for my efforts.

Why?

Because the business model for online publications is evolving to the point that the Silvern folks now feel they can realistically make some money doing what they really want to do, which is to provide high-quality content to their increasing fan base.

With the near-death of the paper-based gaming magazine (I don't even want to think about how far circulation has fallen for the venerable *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines), the vacuum has been filled to bursting with Internet-based content.

Granted, most of it is free.

Most of it is crap, too.

The "Can't Stop the Signal" revolution has finally eased up a bit, thankfully. No one is saying there should be no free content, but it's nice to see that the end users are finally warming up to the idea that *quality* content is worth paying a few bucks for. To that end, many publishers are offering their content in ways that can be accessed directly – all instant-gratification like – on the Web.

The day Prometheus brought forth Adobe from Olympus, many game publishers and writers were saved. Too bad about that liver, though...

Companies do not *have* to go out of business to respond to having no money left. So long as there are some folks willing to devote their time to the cause (and take their payment on the back end as a royalty), the show will go on. Decipher's recent release of *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Trek* RPG material as PDF products is a firm testament to that.

Many companies, as a matter of fact, are based primarily, or even solely, on the model of publishing their materials as PDFs. The recent decision by the Powers That Be at RPGNow.com to split their sites between their "Top 100" and the rest of the companies that use their services is a clear indication that there are a *lot* of players in that field.

One of the key issues right now is that most of the established fan base for RPGs still want actual books. They don't enjoy burning tons of printer ink and reams of paper to print out huge PDF products, and they really don't enjoy spending even more money going to a print shop or office

supply store and having it done. By the time they are done, they've often spent more money on a three-ring binder version of a game than they might have spent on an actual printed and hardbound book.

Granted, many obviously go this route anyway. Alternately, they only print out the pages they need, often putting the books on a laptop they can reference during game play. Technology really has changed the face of the gaming table. Most of those who accept the reality of PDFs do so with the understanding that the material they want is only going to reach them that way.

Sadly, this means PDFs have little chance of opening new markets or reaching new fans.

"Turn the clock to zero, boss. The river's wide, we'll swim across – we're starting up a brand new day." – Sting, *Brand New Day*

Print-on-Demand (POD) has actually been around for quite a while, at least a decade or more. However, it is only in recent years that the machines one needs to effectively utilize POD have become affordable enough that some publishers can handle it directly, while others can make use of a few cost-friendly services out there. As the POD part of our changing market evolves to a level that makes it completely "no-brainer" for all concerned, I predict a real renaissance for the RPG industry.

In fact, I predict a huge change in the business model for *all* industries that have a need or demand for printed product. It's already happening, mind you, but there's a threshold that's just about to be crossed, where traditional print houses are going to have to adapt totally or just die.

Reducing and even in some cases effectively removing the up-front barriers to publishing a roleplaying game book will enable very talented teams to put out high quality product. Consumers will literally vote with their dollars with no diffusion

of the results through the various traditional chains.

Of course, this also means that a lot of crap will become easier to bring to market as well. In addition, the FLGS (Friendly Local Gaming Store) will be dramatically injured, forced to diversify into product lines that cannot be recreated easily in the electronic media. Alternately, the brick-and-mortar shops will have to find a way to break in for a piece of the action.

This won't be as hard as some might think, mind you. Ironically, those retailers who seek out direct relationships with the various POD operations that are carrying the game lines they are interested in will be able to effectively recreate the three-tier process they are used to. The POD shop will essentially replace the distributor in the chain, really.

There are some other innovations that I predict will change what your average RPG publishing house looks like. Diversifying the media presentations of a property is one idea – not just an RPG, but a web comic, flash movie, and who-knows-what-else lies in the future. Garage-level MMOGs (Mass Multiplayer Online Games) are becoming increasingly easier to pull off, such that a publishing house with a couple of coders can put together an online game based on the same property as their base RPG property in a lot shorter time and more cost-effective manner.

You, gentle reader, are in for a change. You can embrace it by accepting the new media and new formats that your game product is appearing in, or you can wail, gnash your teeth, and rend your clothes.

Welcome the change and support the games, friend. We've got enough drama as it is...

Sean Patrick Fannon is the author of *The Fantasy Roleplaying Gamer's Bible*, and has worked on numerous gaming projects over the last two decades. His magnum opus, *Shaintar: Immortal Legends*, is now entering the marketplace, and he's very excited to be writing for a quality publication like the *Silven Trumpeter*. It certainly beats clawing his eardrums out with a shrimpfork... Email Sean at SeanPatFan@gmail.com.

FOXES AND GIFTS

by Nghi Vo

They would have called him a grave robber, but Fei knew that he was guilty of a much worse crime. If they knew, the villagers would hang him, burn him, and then scatter the ashes.

But that, he thought, as another shovelful of dirt flew out of the grave, is only if they know.

When the moon was beginning to set, the shovel thudded into the lid of the coffin and his breath came even harder, tears threatening the edge of his vision. He raised the shovel again, and with painful deliberation smashed through the rotting wood. An unwholesome spray of dust and mold puffed up, then settled, and Fei reached into the coffin.

"Good evening, Chu Hua," he said, pulling a moldering skull out of the grave.

He sat down suddenly, stunned with the pain of what he held in his hands. The jawbone still rested in the mess of hair and silk, but the smooth curve of the skull was otherwise intact. He ran his fingers over the fissures and into the sockets where his wife's eyes had once rested.

Fei felt something bubble up inside him, laughter or tears or some combination of the two and he bit his lips until it went away. He couldn't afford to be weak or mad. That could always come later.

He climbed out of her grave, the skull tucked into the crook of his arm, and then he looked at the sad pile of dirt by the gaping hole. Fei paused and then

walked away. They could think what they liked, he decided. He wasn't coming back.

This was a lawless time in the Middle Kingdom, and brigands and thieves of all kinds thrived by the ill-kept government roads. Women traveled in disguise as monks and hard men traveled as blushing maidens inside rosewood palanquins.

Because of the corrupt soul of the land, the demon races also flourished, and none did so well as the fox clan that lived near Shenyang. There were seven foxes that lived there, from grizzled patriarch to toddling kit, and sometimes they wore human faces and lived in a palatial home, and sometimes they burrowed in the cool dirt at the foot of the ancient trees. They were happy either way, for it is the luck of foxes to be happy in times of unrest.

The eldest fox, Xi-wang, wore his human face that day, and he was just getting ready to dine on a platter of fish heads when his eldest son coughed respectfully from the door.

"Father," said the younger fox, resplendent in the robes of an imperial scholar, "There is a... human and a skull here to see you."

Xi-wang's immaculately groomed eyebrows almost met his hair, but he only put aside his meal and folded his hands.

"By all means, show them in," he said. "I would like to see such a pair."

Fei looked like a beggar come to the feast, in his bare feet and thin peasant robes, but Xi-wang greeted him with dignity. Something about the incongruity of the wild-looking man in a chair crafted for an empress pleased him and he smiled.

"My name is Shou Xi-wang," he said courteously. "You and your skull are welcome in my household and by my children, sir."

Fei blinked at the blunt mention of his wife's skull, but he tried to return Xi-wang's politeness.

"I am Lee Fei, of a village of no great importance, and... the welcome of your house is what my wife sorely needs."

Xi-wang's mouth turned down in displeasure, and he tapped two long claw-like forefingers together.

"Surely that can wait until after we have dined?" he said, and Fei hung his head like a chastised child.

The fox rang a bell, and almost immediately a young maid with a mousy face appeared.

"A plate, for our guests," he said imperiously, and if she thought it was strange that her employer was dining with a beggar and a skull she gave no sign.

She returned, unnaturally quickly, with a plate of steaming duck and a bowl of rice. Fei picked up the solid jade chopsticks with wonder, and Xi-wang smiled tolerantly.

"Eat," he said, "and then we shall discuss your esteemed wife."

Fei was only going to eat enough to be polite, but then he found himself nearly gobbling down the savory pieces of meat. Before long, the plate was empty, and Fei guiltily wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"Please, my wife..." he said falteringly, but Xi-wang cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"Come walk with me," he said, "for I am an old man and need a strong arm near to support me should I stumble. I will show you my home, and you shall meet those of my family who are present."

The fox was anything but frail, Fei noted, and the hand that he lay on Fei's arm had a grip as strong as iron. Fei let Xi-wang guide him down the hall and out onto the porch, where the setting sun painted everything in oranges and golds.

A beautiful woman strummed her lute as they passed by, and the look she gave Fei was loaded with promises, but when they passed by she went back to her music as though she were quite alone.

"My middle daughter," said Xi-wang, quietly. "A good girl, though far too headstrong."

They walked into the garden where a gaunt old vixen slumbered by the pond. She raised her muzzle as Xi-wang passed a fond hand over her graying ears, and gazed inquisitively at Fei, who still carried his skull, but Xi-wang resumed their walk.

"She was the beauty of Shenyang when I met her," Xi-wang confided, "and though she grows old and prefers our first form, she is still the darling of my heart, and the keeper of my home."

On the north side of the house, shaded by old willow trees, a sly-looking young man with a robber's moustache hailed them.

"Grandfather, come pass a few moments with your beloved grandson!"

Xi-wang tried unsuccessfully to hide a smile and spoke as harshly as he could to the young man.

"Why, now, you great lazy lump! Your

examinations are in less than two months time and you waste your time tossing dice?"

"Ah, but Grandfather, how can I waste time if there's no one to waste it with?" He looked at Fei boldly and said, "Come on, sir, a quick game of dice with me, and I'll return to my studies without a whimper."

Fei looked at Xi-wang's face, but it was stone, so he shrugged uncomfortably.

"I haven't anything to wager..." he said hesitatingly, but the young man only smiled.

"The clothes you have versus everything in my purse, what do you say?"

"Faugh, do not be an idiot," growled Xi-wang, this time with a touch of real temper, "This man is our guest, you rude wart." A glimmer came into the old fox's eyes then and he looked astonishingly like his grandson for a moment.

"Play with him, Fei," he said, "and if you lose your clothes, why, I'm sure Jin will be pleased to provide you with the finest clothes from his closet to see you home."

Jin cringed. "Of course, Grandfather," he said meekly, but he tossed the dice masterfully enough.

Fei tossed them in his turn and a few moments later found himself in possession of a heavy purse of gold.

"Just as well," said Jin cheerfully, "I love my clothes more than my gold!"

As he sauntered away, Xi-wang groaned.

"Forgive my grandson," he said, "He is bright, but a wastrel."

Fei was going to say something but the elder fox sat down on the porch and gazed up at the darkening sky.

"You are mourning your wife," said Xi-wang softly.

Fei could only nod.

"And what do you think we could do for her, hm? Do you think we are Perfected, that we can bring the dead back to these shores?" He glanced at Fei rather fiercely, and the human found his tongue.

"No, sir," he said, "I know that no creature under Heaven can do that."

"Then what brings you here? Our hospitality is good, but most cannot bear the fleas!" Xi-wang threw back his head and barked a laugh at his own joke, very fox-like indeed.

"I..." Fei swallowed and tried again. "I want to make a gift to your household." He held out the skull as if it was his most precious thing.

"Ah." The single word spoke volumes and Xi-wang took the skull into his hands, considering.

"She was very beautiful, your wife," he said slowly. "And what do you expect us to do with this skull of a beautiful woman?"

Fei looked somewhat desperately at the fox. He had turned vagabond and grave robber on this slight chance, and now Xi-wang looked at him as though it might have all been for nothing.

"I... I have heard that... foxes uses skulls to change form. That they steal the faces of the dead and wear them..."

Xi-wang laughed again and this time he regarded Fei with a friendly eye.

"This is true," he said kindly, "though I will not be so crass as to ask you where you got such information." There was a delicate pause that let Fei understand that the fox knew that one acquired such information only by traffic with lesser, unsavory characters.

"You understand, however, that this is not your wife reborn? That no matter how much the woman you see might laugh and walk like a real woman, she only a fox with a beautiful face?"

Fei nodded with difficulty.

"It's enough to know that her face is under moonlight and that her hands might play in water again."

Xi-wang patted Fei's arm and there was compassion in the old fox's eyes.

"My youngest granddaughter will be a beauty, thanks to you," he said.

At dawn, Fei awoke in a mud hole not far from Shenyang, coughing and sneezing until he sat up. He looked like he had spent the night in an earthen hole; the beautiful house was no where to be seen.

He got up on shaky legs and then bent nearly double as his stomach cramped. He bent over and vomited up a trio of small fish heads in various stages of decay, and when he got a good look at them, he felt like vomiting again.

Fei had started down the road when he felt a weight in his pocket. It was still a silk purse, but it was filled with small pebbles. Fei grimaced. This was probably better than winning Jin's robes and ending up naked on the public road.

He was sick and destitute on the road to Shenyang, but he smiled at the rising sun, suddenly feeling better than he had in ages.

Some day soon, his pretty wife would walk under the sky again, and though it would not be for him, she would smile.

Instinctive Wanderings

PUTTING YOUR PEN (OR PEAR) TO PAPER

by Alisa Frisch

Greetings, *Silven Trumpeter* readers! I begin my first formal Instinctive Wanderings column with a question. Have you ever come across an opponent in a game that was constantly on your back? The opponent I'm thinking of may not be the stereotypical "munchkin" collectible card game player, nor is it the game master's monster designed to crush your character in one strike. Rather, it's a real life opponent for all of us, and especially for aspiring writers. It is the beast known as "procrastination."

Some of you may have read my introductory column back in the *Silven Trumpeter's* September 2005 issue. Not long after I turned it in to the editors, the infamous deadlines of "real life" started putting the stranglehold on me. One event came up after another, and I found myself missing a deadline. This is a major issue for any new writer, as it makes a first impression quickly, usually a negative one.

So you can see that I've already felt the "bite" of the procrastination beast, and I knew it was time to look back into my old notebooks full of college classroom tips and relearn the advice my teachers gave me on writing well and on a deadline. Then this past July, luck was on my side. I met several gaming writers during the Origins International Games Expo in Columbus, Ohio. Among them were Justin Achilli and John Chambers, authors whose works are a part of the White Wolf Game Studio line.

The White Wolf staff held a "Writing Tips and Tricks" seminar at the convention which offered realistic insights for anyone wanting to try their hand at writing for the gaming industry. They

also used advice from other members of the White Wolf line who could not be present at the seminar, namely Bill Bridges, who has over 40 writing and developmental credits with White Wolf.

At the time of the Origins convention, Justin Achilli had completed over 60 books with White Wolf, including development for *Vampire: the Masquerade* and *Kindred of the East*. He submitted his resignation this past September, but his work and experiences with White Wolf lead to some strong advice for those ready to put ink on paper.

Justin emphasized that the two areas of focus that White Wolf looks for in writers are talent and timing. It's important for you to have great ideas and write well, making good use of game mechanics. Also, timing is crucial. When you find a medium to contribute to, be persistent. Research the area of interest and any submission guidelines it may offer to new writers. You can also use the internet to investigate what a publisher is or is not interested in publishing.

Justin also emphasized communication. Keep your editor informed of your projects and ideas, but refrain from going overboard. I, myself, cannot emphasize this enough, as it can make or break a writing opportunity for you.

Finally, Justin suggested using an "idea file" so you can always have fresh ideas on hand, and don't forget to proofread your work and write every day. Also, remember to write for yourself and not just for a job.

John Chambers, developer of the *Exalted* game line, was also on hand for the seminar. John

recommends that you be strongly familiar with the game that you want to write for. He says that even though writing "over the top" may work for a fantasy game like *Exalted*, it will need to be scaled back if you want to write for the darker and more somber *World of Darkness*.

John also stated a simple fact we can all relate to from back in our school days: follow instructions. If your editor tells you to change something, change it. Don't try to sneak in that one "brilliant idea," for if it needs to be corrected again by the editor, you won't see it in print and you may not even be hired again!

He reminds writers to think of the property they write for as a "lens." You can use that lens to filter pieces of culture or news, thus coming up with new story ideas or articles to submit to your editors. These ideas may soon help you create articles needed to add to your writing portfolio, and also to your trustworthiness as a writer.

Finally, the White Wolf writers emphasized an essential word to remember in the writing field: deadlines. Always be on time with your work, no matter how simple or complex your article may be. This is the first point listed on the "Writing Tips and Tricks" guidelines that the White Wolf staff handed out at their seminar. According to Bill Bridges, who developed *Mage: the Awakening*, if you can't write to a deadline, don't try your hand at professional game writing. This also goes for any other kind of writing that involves a deadline.

In conclusion, I learned a lot from the White Wolf staff, and their richly-detailed sourcebooks are proof of the hard work required when writing for the gaming industry. From my personal experience, it takes an inner talent and a drive to be a writer. You need to know your strengths, read a lot (even including material that you won't be writing about), and find a writing tool sharp enough to strike down the "procrastination" beast once and for all. Good luck.

With canines and claw marks, Alisa

Interview with Malcolm Craig

Part 2

by Nash J. DeVita

SILVEN TRUMPETER EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Malcolm Craig, author of *a|state* and president of Contested Grounds Studios, was kind enough to sit down with me and answer a few more questions. While the tape from that sit-down was garbage thanks to all of the background noise, he was thankfully willing to answer them again via e-mail.

How did you originally get into RPG gaming?

It was all down to my mate Scott. I played a lot of Warhammer Fantasy Battle (back in the old 1st/2nd edition days, which was a fair while ago!) and he asked if I'd be interested in this 'role-playing' thing. Why not? So I turn up at his parents house on a Friday night and there's about two billion people there. Well, maybe it was 9 or 10. Anyway, they're running this game called "Call of Cthulhu." Righty ho, says I, what do I do? Well, here's your character; he's a private detective. Great!

Well, the game lasted about 30 minutes before the GM gave up due to the party going off in about 3 different directions at once. And almost everyone went home. I initially thought that this was what it was all about. How wrong was I? Then, on the same night, we started playing *Twilight: 2000* (this was when it was first edition with the...well, the less said about that the better). So, I guess it says a lot that my formative role-playing experiences were *Call of Cthulhu* and *Twilight: 2000*.

Other than your own, what is your favorite RPG game currently?

Hmmm, that's a particularly tough one. My current favourite (and this is going to sound like a cop out), would have to be chosen from three games: *Dust Devils* by Matt Snyder (<http://www.chimera.info>), *Dogs In the Vineyard* by D. Vincent Baker

(<http://www.septemberquestion.org/lumpley/dogs.html>) and *Best Friends* by Gregor Hutton (you can download his stuff for free from <http://www.gregorhutton.com/roleplaying/index.html>). They are all fantastic games that have taught me a lot about game design. They are also, in quite different ways, wonderful games to run and play.

Do you regularly play with a group?

I don't play in a regular group, no. However, I do go along to the Edinburgh University games society on a Sunday and run the occasional one off game. But, as one of life's perennial GMs, I never seem to actually play in anything.

What is your favorite RPG product of all time? Why?

Easy. *Traveller: 2300/2300AD*. It was the first game that ever really grabbed me. I love the setting and all the stuff that comes with it. I've always loved SF games and although *Traveller* was the first game I actually ran, it didn't get hold of me in the same way as 2300AD.

The universe of 2300AD was fantastically conceived and brilliantly executed, the sheer variety of things you could (to me, as a young gamer) was just staggering. OK, so today it may look slightly (slightly?) hackneyed and outdated (computers that have a whole 20MB of memory, folks!), but I still read the game and supplements from time to time, just to remind myself how an expansive and detailed game world can be created.

I also have to give an honourable mention to *Blue Planet*. Again, a 'hard SF' game and another brilliant example of world creation. Like 2300AD,

P R E V I E W



ghostfighter

contested
ground studios

P R E V I E W

the detail and scope are tremendous and *Blue Planet* helped me run one of the three best long-term games that I've ever done (the others were a 2 year 2300AD game, unsurprisingly, and a modern era supernatural investigation game that went under the title 'The Kult of CORPStulhu'. That last one was set in Paris in 1997 and took stuff from *Kult*, *Call of Cthulhu* and used Greg Porter's brilliant *CORPS* system).

As you stated in our e-mail interview, a|state is your first published game. How did you get involved within the RPG publishing industry?

Well, therein lies a story. Myself and Paul had been working on our free, website-based version of a|state for a while and one evening, whilst reading some particularly positive feedback, Paul turned to me and spake thusly:

Paul: "You know, we could publish this!"

Me: "Yeah! That's a great idea! How hard can that be?"

And thus a ravening monster was created.

In reality, it was a lot harder than we thought, but with a bit of perseverance and a whole load of dedicated, unpaid, excellent people around us, we published a|state.

It was very much a leap in the dark and not something I'd advise anyone else to get into without a lot of thought and a lot of advice (see below for some of that advice). There are a lot of things that, if I had my time over again, I would do differently. On the whole, though, it's been a great experience. That moment when the first box of printed copies arrives and you rip it open to see the finished product is absolutely fantastic. In addition, we've met some great people and made lots of friends through this endeavour, which is worth it in itself.

Do you have any advice for individuals working to break into the RPG industry?

One thing that is vital is that if you're looking to try and get work from a games company, proofread your proposals and emails. Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation are vital if you want to create a good first impression. Even in your introductory email, make sure it's well written and not full of errors; this way there's a better chance of some actually going on to read your proposal or submission.

Going further: First off, don't give up. Secondly, find out what you are good at. Thirdly (and perhaps most important of all), have a great group of people around you to support you and comment on your work. If you're approaching established companies, be prepared for a lot of rejections. It's a fact of life that there are far more people out there who want to write for the games industry than there are any opportunities for them to actually get work published. A popular avenue these days is self-publishing through PDF. This offers a very cost-effective, low-risk way of getting started. And, with the plethora of print on demand facilities available these days, you can even get short print runs of your book done at a cost which isn't too prohibitive.

Take the advice of people who have been through the games industry mill, especially those who have set up their own companies. We were lucky when we started out that the esteemed James Wallis (formerly of Hogshead Publishing) gave us vast amount of useful advice, even on the most basic of matters such as how to get ISBN codes and so forth. You'll get a lot of different opinions, some good, and some bad. Regardless of this, take them all on board and think really hard about what you want to do.

Think about your product (and I use the word product advisedly. If you're serious about publishing something, don't just think of it as a project or something to do in your spare time, think of it as a product) and where it will sit in the marketplace. How similar is it to other products? Who will like it? What are the strong points? What are the bad points? If you can nail down exactly what you want it to be and what you want to do with it, then that's all to the good.

Finally, my earlier comment about having good people around you is, I think, a vital one. I'm very lucky that CGS is a collective of intelligent, hardworking people. It's something I'm very grateful for. Everyone pulls their weight and brings different skills into the company. The original

CGS crew was myself, Paul Bourne (a close friend and wonderfully talented artist and graphic designer) and John Wilson (another close friend, web maestro and talented tea drinker). That was the core of the group, but it's now grown and become something much more. We now have Iain McAllister (who did editorial work on a|state and is now writing *Mob Justice*), Cat Tobin (who keeps our money matters well in hand and offers very levelheaded advice about where we're going as a company and what we should be concentrating on right now!), Gregor Hutton (editorial master, writer, illustrator and editor of our eZine *The Circular*) and Greg Saunders (shadowy chemical genius and ace writer).

Where do you see your company in one year? In five years?

In one year we will have a lot more games available! Yeah, I realise this all sounds like vapourware as we've been talking about other games for quite a while now, but the ball really is rolling now. At the moment, we're a company that produces a game, rather than being a games company. In a year from now, I'm confident we'll have at least another 3 or 4 games available. The big one is *Mob Justice*, a noir-esque gangster RPG set in an America where prohibition never ended. It's written by friend and CGS team member Iain McAllister and it's a really great game. Then there are the things I'm working on: *Everlasting Empire*, *Cold City* and *Criminal Comedy Capers*. I'll talk more about these in the question below!

We'll also be producing lots more stuff for a|state, which will continue to be our flagship line. We were hit rather badly by the collapse of Osseum Entertainment, who handled our worldwide fulfillment. This set us back quite a lot, but we really are back on our feet now and surging forward. A lot of this is thanks to the good people at Indie Press Revolution (<http://www.indiepressrevolution.com>) and Key 20 Games (<http://www.key20.com>), who now handle our distribution and sales. I can't give them enough praise, as they really are top blokes.

Five years' time? That's a bit more vague. I'd like to have done a second edition of *a|state* by then, as there a lot of ideas and concepts that I feel would make *a|state2* an outstanding product. Over the past year, I've really been inspired by a lot of games and people, something which has really changed my view on how to design a game. I'd like to give *a|state2* a lot more focus and a lot more direction on what it is the characters do. One of the things I've heard a lot from people is that they love the setting for *a|state*, but sometimes feel it's so expansive and detailed, they're not entirely sure what it is a character group would do. This is something I'm keen to address, as well as bring the concepts of hope and despair (which to me are key to the entire game) more into the centre of the playing experience.

There are five people I'd really like to single out as having influenced my current thoughts on game design. Gregor Hutton (who writes and edits for CGS, as well as designing his own wonderful games such as *Best Friends* and *3:16*) really has been a big influence on me in terms of his ability to get to the core of game concepts and really come up with games that work and provide maximum enjoyment for players and GM. Matt Snyder also changed the way I look at games through the marvelous *Dust Devils*, which I bought immediately after Matt ran me through a demo at Gen Con this year. The way the game works and allows the players to drive the story was a revelation to me. My Antipodean friend Morgan Davie really sent me off in new directions with his considered thoughts on *a|state* and how the game works. His ideas were fresh and new and really did inspire me to go off in different directions and take another look at something I thought I knew everything about.

Then there's the redoubtable Allan Dotson (writer of *Sweet Dreams* and *The Big Night*). I met Allan at Gen Con this year and his enthusiasm and excitement about games and games design really was infectious. I really wish I'd seen him run *The Big Night* for a bunch of young kids at Gen Con, as it sounded like a wonderful role-playing experience

and really gets to the heart of what gaming is all about. Allan is a great guy and everyone should check out his stuff.

Last, but by no means least, there's Mr. Iain McAllister, writer of *Mob Justice* and stalwart member of the CGS crew. Like Allan, his enthusiasm and energy at Gen Con was wonderful to behold, as he himself took great heart from his meetings with other games designers such as Luke Crane. Ever since then, he's been unstoppable. He seems always to have a pad and pencil ready to come up with a new game idea!

Can you tell us about any new projects on the horizon?

I surely can!

At the moment I'm working (at various speeds) on three new games projects. And I'll give a brief rundown of each of them below!

Cold City

It's a game of Cold War monster hunters set in Berlin in 1950. Modern history is what my academic background is in and I wrote my honours dissertation on the Cold War, so it's a subject very close to my heart. *Cold City* is pretty simple in concept: you are members of a multi-national (American, British, French and Soviet) agency that hunts down various nasties brought into the world by twisted Nazi technology during the war. However, there's also a lot of focus on inter-party trust and the way people see each other in terms of national stereotypes. Just about finished that one and I'm hoping we'll have it out by March of next year.

Criminal Comedy Capers

This is about as far from *Cold City* as you can get. *Criminal Comedy Capers* is the game of bungling burglars, corrupt cops and thick thieves. It's an extremely light-hearted, knockabout farce style of

P R E V I E W



The Lowfinders Guide to **MIRE END**

P R E V I E W

game, sort of Quentin Tarantino meets the British 'Carry On' films! I'm extremely pleased that Gregor Hutton has allowed me to use the basic system for his *Best Friends* game as the core of the mechanics as, to be quite honest, my original idea sucked! I think it'll work extremely well.

Everlasting Empire

Men with big moustaches and pipes in space! Again, this is quite different form the previous two in terms of feel. Its set in a future where the British Empire never broke up and has now expanded to the stars. This was due to the fortuitous crashing of a spaceship into the Home Counties in 1895. Over the years, British scientists reverse engineered some of the technology and super-charged the Empire! The characters are members of the various shadowy secret services that operate through the Empire, trying to root out

those who would cause the Empire to fall. However, it's not quite as black and white as all that, as the characters are exposed to the seedy, not-so-shiny underbelly of the Empire, which cause them (perhaps) to question their positions and stance.

Mob Justice

This is going to be another big one for CGS. Written by Iain McAllister, it's all about mobsters and gang lords in an America where prohibition never ended. It's currently at the second stage of playtesting and promises to be a really excellent game. Iain has put an immense amount of time and effort into the game and that's sure to pay off. Having read the draft text of *Mob Justice*, I'm very excited about it and really looking forward to seeing it in print. Watch out for it appearing sometime during 2006.

Oh, and I recently entered the 24 Hour RPG competition with a game called *Defenders of the Union*. If you're interested, you can download it for free from: http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/Defenders_of_the_Union.php It's very much a stripped-down first draft alpha version, as 24-Hour RPG competition entries are meant to be.

How do you tackle a new writing project?

Several pints of coffee, a pack of Marlboro and lots of profanity.

I'd like to thank Mr. Malcolm Craig for his time and patience once again. You have quickly become one of my favorite RPG authors and all around favorite RPG people! Thanks for all of your hard work, wonderful writing, time, and patience.

THE LEGACY OF GILGAMESH - PART 2

by Anthony C. Hunter

"Great. How did the killer get your name, much less your email address?" Corrine was sitting at my desk, reading the hardcopy of the email I had received.

I looked up in surprise. "Uhm, I hadn't thought about that. I mean, you can easily get my email address from the library website and from some of the papers I've had published. But how would he know I'm involved in the case?"

"Well, I hate to point this out to you, Robin, but that means the original killer must be in town and has seen us, if that's who actually sent this." Corrine held the page out to me and pointed. "And what is this gibberish here in the middle?"

I pointed to the book sitting beside her on my desk and answered, "That gibberish is Sumerian cuneiform. And it says, 'I found that which Gilgamesh sought.' Gilgamesh was a Sumerian hero who supposedly lived nearly five thousand years ago. In one portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh, it tells of his traveling the world, seeking the secret of eternal life. In the end, of course, he died. But this tells me that the person who sent this is aware of both the proper use of cuneiform and of what the ritual is that was performed. The Sumerian font is easily obtained, but to make something other than gibberish takes talent."

I paused and looked at Corrine, noticing the circles under her eyes. She was not getting much sleep. She leaned back in my office chair and looked at me carefully, "It could possibly be from the second

killer, but look at the subject line. The Imposter, that implies that this is the true performer of the ritual, and that the other is a, for lack of a better term, a Johnny come lately." She read through the email again and then shook the paper at me again.

"This email states that he has no need to perform the ritual for another decade. This man believes that the ritual works?"

Getting up from the desk, I walked over and closed the office door and turned to face Special Agent Young. Looking her directly in the eye, I answered her, "Corrine, we've been through quite a bit together, and you have seen some very strange things. Things that you have had to either leave out of your reports or gloss over to keep from being laughed out of the bureau, or worse, locked up as a nutcase. So you know I wouldn't feed you a line of bull on something important, right?"

She looked at me and slowly nodded. Continuing, I said, "It is entirely possible, if this person has researched the ritual and followed it properly, it might have actually worked, to some degree. Or it is possible that the individual has deluded himself into thinking it worked."

Suddenly Corrine stood up and began pacing around my office. She stopped in front of me and snarled, "Thank you so much, Robin, you just made my freakin' day. So we may have an immortal or semi-immortal serial killer wandering around, and he's upset that someone else is trying to steal his thunder?"

Anthony Hunter is an aspiring writer who began playing roleplaying games during his hitch in the U.S. Navy in the early 1980's.

Having played quite a few different systems, he has no particular favorite, feeling that the players and the GM are what make the real difference. He is currently working on bringing a fantasy world he has designed to a point where it is suitable for print.

He has three grown children, two of whom occasionally game, two dogs and two cats - one of which likes to try and steal dice.

The author would like to thank Coley Brookshire for the inspiration for this story.

I shook my head and explained to her, "Not exactly, Corrine. This person obviously thinks his ritual worked to the point that he won't have to perform it again for a decade." I gave her a second for the implications to sink in and asked, "What did the autopsies and the analysis of the residue in the bathroom show?"

Corrine stopped pacing and perched on the edge of the desk before answering, "The victims of the local killing all had indications of having been drugged before they were killed. And the mixture in the bathtub, although having some resemblance to the residue from Kenosha and Flagstaff, was not exactly the same. Also, go back and look at the photos from Flagstaff and Kenosha. There was nowhere near the chaotic blood splatter that marked the local killing. The person who did the second one is a copycat, and an amateurish and vicious one at that. You did say that the person who did this one didn't appear to be as familiar with the rituals."

I nodded, "I was really hoping you would tell me that I was wrong. So what we have is someone who has watched the killer and apparently seen

the results of his ritual, and is trying to mimic it. I have to agree with the real killer in that the 'imposter' will strike again soon, especially if he didn't see any immediate results from his ritual. He'll probably do one more here within the next couple of weeks before he moves on to another location, unless he is a complete imbecile, in which case he may do several more in this area, thereby assuring that you will catch him."

Looking carefully at me, Corrine gave a slight smile and said, "I appreciate your confidence in me. The real killer probably realizes that if the 'imposter' continues, it will draw unwanted attention to his own activities. He probably hopes that if we catch this guy, he'll have a chance to slip away."

As Corrine stood up again, I reminded her, "I'll be here at the library until Thursday, then Friday I'm supervising the movers when they come to the house, and my flight is leaving O'Hare at 11pm on Saturday. If you need me after that, you have my personal email address and my mobile number. I may not be able to come view a scene, but you know I'll help as best I can."

The Watcher saw the FBI agent leave the library. Special Agent Corrine Young, thirty-two years old, divorced, no children, no boyfriend, sister married to a local homicide detective. A very attractive woman, although somewhat harried-looking at the moment; yes, she would do nicely. The bookworm was just someone the feeps called in for things like they do on television, it seemed. Apparently an expert in old books, at least according to the library's web site.

The Watcher waited until she crossed the street and headed down the block. It was only a couple of blocks from the Library to the FBI offices. He started his car and drove up State Street, heading for the FBI offices.

Picking up the ringing phone instead of the coffee I had just poured, I was rather surprised to hear Corrine's voice on the other end.

"Robin, I just had an interesting visitor. I got back to the office and there was this pencil-neck fellow in a cheap suit waiting in reception. My secretary gave me his card, Bruce Harrimon, from Flagstaff, Arizona."

She paused and I could hear her taking a sip of something, probably more coffee. "I called the chief of police in Flagstaff, he and Harrimon apparently have a mutual dislike of one another, but get this, Harrimon's last case down there was following Mrs. Richards for her suspicious husband."

She paused and I asked, "Richards? As in - "

Before I could finish the sentence, she exclaimed, "Yes, Richards! The same one who was killed. This Harrimon has contacted Mr. Richards from time to time, claiming that he is closing in on Mrs. Richards' killer. The chief thinks he's probably running a scam." She paused again, and I waited, certain that she wasn't finished.

After a moment, she continued, without the triumphant sound in her voice. "I may have been a little hard on the grubby little peeper. He came in and started telling me that he was making a courtesy call to let us know he was in town on a case, and I pointed out to him that if he had any information, we would appreciate his sharing it, but that his Arizona license didn't give him any special privileges here. He got mad and stalked out of my office, but not before he told me what he had seen."

I eagerly prompted her, "What had he seen, Corrine? Did he witness the killers?"

"Yes, Robin, the man specifically said he could tell me about an Arab gentleman who used the

Richards and Quintell women to make himself look younger. I have asked Roger to have the patrol officers keep an eye open for this Harrimon, and to tell him I'd like to see him if they spot him. This could be the break we have been looking for."

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone line, then with a slight hesitation, Corrine spoke again, "Listen, I was wondering if you would like to have dinner tomorrow night, since you're going to be leaving town. My treat, a 'thank you' for all the help you've given me over the past several years here."

I told her that sounded like a good idea and she quickly responded, "Great, meet me at Charlie Trotter's in Lincoln Park at six-thirty. We can try some of that famous antelope strudel and get sloppy drunk and tell each other how much we are going to miss working on weird murders."

I chuckled and told her, "As much as I like Charlie's, it usually takes a month or more to get a reservation."

I could picture her smiling on the other end of the phone as she replied, "Well, it just so happens that the Director was supposed to take his wife there tomorrow, but he had to fly to D.C. today for a meeting, so he asked if I wanted to use the reservation. So, do you think you can tear yourself away from moving long enough to let a friend buy you a special farewell dinner?"

"Absolutely. I'll meet you there tomorrow, I look forward to a break from packing and this case." I hung up the phone and pondered the information Corrine had given me regarding the private investigator from Arizona.

Dinner was excellent, and I had called ahead and made arrangements with the owner to put the majority of the bill on my credit card so Corrine wouldn't go into shock at the prices. I was glad I

had done so after she finished off the major part of the three bottles of wine. Gods know she needed this chance to relax a bit with the case weighing on her mind. We laughed and joked all the way back to her house, and she realized as she got out of the cab, that she had drank at least two of those bottles of wine.

She pointed an accusing finger at me and slightly slurred, "You let me get drunk, Robin."

Asking the cabbie to wait, I put her arm over my shoulder and helped her up the stairs to her brownstone. I hugged her slightly and told her, "Of course I did, Corrine. You know I don't drink very much, and you needed a night to blow off steam. Call in sick tomorrow and nurse the headache you are probably going to have, and then come see me at the house. I'll be with the movers all day, remember."

Pointing at her purse, I said, "Now, give me your keys." Opening her apartment door, I asked if she was able to get in and get to bed.

She looked closely at me for a moment and then nodded a slow, deliberate nod. "Probably, or I may just sleep in the foyer." Giggling, she kissed me on the cheek and took her keys back. "Shee you shometime tomorrow, Rob, Rob, Robin. G'nite."

Corrine entered her brownstone and I heard locks turning. Satisfied that Corrine was at least inside and safe, I headed down the steps. I got into the cab and gave my address.

He looked at me in the rearview mirror and commented, "Figured you would be staying with your girlfriend, buddy, she sure looked like she wanted you to."

Smiling at the cabbie, I told him, "We just work together, friend, and we were having a bit of a bender since I'm moving out of town this weekend."

I thought with a smile about the past seven years of working with Corrine as I paused and repeated softly, "Just a friend."

As the cab turned the corner near my house, there was a flash of light from the corner, and suddenly, a man in a suit was running towards the cab, waving his hands at us and gesturing. I told the cabbie to stop, that there might have been an accident. The man ran up, pulled open the door on my side of the cab and began speaking rapidly. It took a moment for his words to sink into my slightly wine-soaked brain.

I answered the man and told the cabbie, "Quick, back to my friend's house, she's in trouble." The cabbie spun the cab into a u-turn and headed back the way they came, telling his dispatcher to call 911 at the same time.

The cabbie said, "Good thing you understand Arabic or whatever that feller was gibbering on in. I know a bit of Spanish and a little Italian, but that's about the size of it. Dispatcher's calling the cops, and we'll be there in just a minute, buddy, traffic is light this time of night."

Pulling out my cell phone, I dialed Detective Barnes' private number that Corrine had given me and apprised him of the situation. Barnes said he'd meet us there and he'd call and let the uniforms know the situation. As I hung up, I muttered a few words in Gaelic and felt the effects of the alcohol leave my system. As the cab squealed around the corner to the street where Corrine lived, I realized we had arrived before the police.

Tapping the driver on the shoulder, I asked him, "Do you have a gun, or mace or anything?"

The cabbie gave me a funny look and pulled a baseball bat from beneath his seat. "Sorry, friend, but that would be illegal. I do have my Louisville Slugger here though, and you're welcome to use it. Want me to come in with you?"

Shaking my head, I tossed a hundred over the seat and took the bat. As I opened the door, I told him, "Wait for the cops and let them know I went in to see if I could help her. I hope that the person who stopped us was playing a bad joke and that she'll be upset that I'm back."

Racing up the steps, I pulled the loose brick from the wall where Corrine kept her spare key. After quietly unlocking the door, the first thing I saw was the broken coffee mug on the floor, and the stun gun on the foyer table. Then I smelled the incense and heard the chanting.

Pushing the door open wider, I stepped into the foyer and saw Corrine, lying naked in the center of a mystic circle, with some skinny white man stalking around the outside of the circle, a knife in his hand, chanting in very badly accented and mostly mispronounced Sumerian. The man matched the description of the Arizona P.I. that had called on Corrine. As I hefted the ball bat in my hands, I could hear the distant approach of sirens and realized that they would arrive too late if I didn't intervene.

Chanting softly in Gaelic, I began to move up behind the naked man. As I chanted, the baseball bat began to glow with a slight green glow. Quietly approaching the man, I loudly said, "You mispronounced that last part, you'll need to start over." As the man turned around and started to swing the knife, I swung the baseball bat and caught the man in the ribs, knocking him to the other side of the circle.

As he struggled slowly to regain his balance, he faced me and turned the knife over in what the movies called a "knife fighter's stance." He rubbed his ribs with his free hand and sneered, "Well, well, well. I figured you for a bit of a pansy, librarian. You really think you can stop me from gaining more power than the little Arab?"

Watching him as he stepped towards me, moving slowly as he was careful not to step on Corrine

or the candles he had placed around the circle, I answered him, "Harrimon, you aren't doing the spell properly. You won't accomplish anything with the way you have prepared this." Perhaps if I could keep him talking, the police could get here and stop him. As he approached, he suddenly lunged at me with the knife and I felt a blossom of pain as he sliced through my clothing and into my arm.

Harrimon sneered, "What makes you think that I'm not doing the spell right?" He seemed to be looking for another opening to use the knife he held.

I shifted my feet, and carefully stepped back over Corrine's outstretched arm as I answered him. "Because I understand both Sumerian and how magic works. You aren't doing it proper. . . hey!" I broke off as he stabbed forward with the knife, opening up a slight cut on the back of my right hand.

As I stepped back and struggled to maintain my grip on the bat, I noticed a slight movement from the entryway and asked the man, "So, you're the private investigator from Arizona, right? The one that botched up the ritual last weekend on Kent Street?" I stepped to the right, standing with my feet on either side of Corrine's head as the man maneuvered around to face me.

Glaring at me, the man boasted, "I didn't botch that ritual, bookworm. I felt the power, not as much as I witnessed in Flagstaff and Kenosha, but I just chose the wrong sacrifices. You say you know magic, but I saw the real thing. Those two lesbians and the kid didn't have the kind of power that this chick here does." He pointed his chin towards Corrine, "She'll give me what I need." He paused and gave me a malicious smile. I felt my left arm turning numb and released the two handed grip on the bat, resting the tip on the floor as I lowered my right arm a bit.

The man smiled a feral smile and he said, "I

didn't figure you for much of a fighter. Goodbye, bookworm."

He lunged forward with the knife as I quickly raised the bat, striking him squarely between the legs. As a sound like thunder erupted in the room, I jumped and stumbled backwards, glancing at my bat in surprise as blood began to run from Harrimon's nose and mouth.

He staggered briefly and looked at me with bewilderment, "But I was supposed to live forever . . ." he managed to whisper as he collapsed to the floor.

Standing in the entrance to the living room, Detective Barnes holstered his service revolver and strode forward. I was already taking off my overcoat and covering Corrine with it. Barnes looked at the baseball bat and down at Harrimon.

Shaking his head, Barnes said, "Must have been the candles, your bat looked kind of green when I first walked in." He knelt beside Corrine and checked her pulse, and then pulled a radio from beneath his coat and called the EMT's and his men into the brownstone.

Saturday evening, I stopped by Corrine's on the way to the airport. Barnes opened the door when I rang the bell and told me, "I dropped by to tell Corrine about the wrap up on the case. Come on in." I sat my small suitcase down in the foyer and went over to sit beside Corrine on the sofa so Barnes could continue with his news.

After filling us in on the details, Barnes finished his coffee and told us, "Internal Affairs ruled it a clean shooting. The testimony of the cab driver and Mr. Carson here definitely helped."

Winking at me he looked at Corrine and said, "And of course that the Chicago PD not only stopped a serial killer, but saved an FBI agent to boot."

Barnes laughed as Corrine made a rude gesture. Placing his coffee cup on the table, he continued, "Unfortunately, the EMT's were unable to stabilize Mr. Harrimon before he passed away, so we'll never know just how many people he killed."

Looking over at me, Barnes asked, "Your plane leaves tonight?"

I nodded and told him, "At eleven, so I guess I better head that way."

Corrine stood up and put her arms around my waist. She kissed me squarely on the mouth and told me, "See you soon, bookworm."

Looking over at Barnes, she explained, "I'm applying for a transfer to the Chattanooga field office."

Barnes kissed Corrine on top of the head and told her, "I'll see that Mr. Carson gets safely on his plane. See you tomorrow, Corri. Let's head to O'Hare, Mr. Carson, and have a little talk on the way."

I groaned as Corrine and Roger both laughed. I picked up my suitcase from the foyer and followed Detective Barnes down to the waiting car.

Standing on the corner of the street, with a small dog on a leash, the Sumerian saw Mr. Carson and the Detective leave the brownstone. Smiling, he tugged lightly on the leash, "Come along, Gilgamesh, perhaps it is time we visited Europe for a decade or so."

Reviews, Reviewsreviews!

How we rate

Scoring definitions for d20 products:

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

Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:

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

Book of Templates

The *Book of Templates* is another d20 title that contains exactly what the title says it does: templates for monsters for *Dungeons & Dragons*.

page 30

Sweet Dreams Players' Handbook

Sweet Dreams Players' Handbook is a 222-page paperback that contains all of the basic rules and background information necessary to play the game. There are two other books available to help fill out the rules.

page 31

Serenity Roleplaying Game

Serenity is an adaptation of the movie of the same name and the series upon which the movie is based, Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, into RPG format.

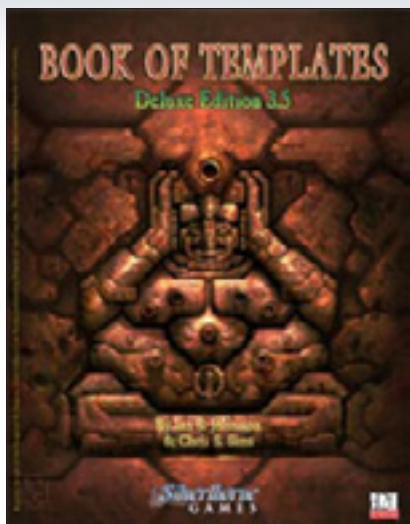
page 33

d20 Postmodern: Traits & Flaws

d20 Postmodern: Traits & Flaws contains exactly what the title says it does – traits and flaws for characters in d20 Modern. It is a seventeen-page PDF that is very printer-friendly.

page 35

read on...



Book of Templates

Author: Ian S. Johnston, Chris S. Sims, Devon Apple, Erica Balsley, Robert Blezard, Gregory W. Ragland, & Sean K. Reynolds

Publisher: Silverthorne Games & Goodman Games

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: November 8th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was given to me for review purposes and eventual play use.

The *Book of Templates* is another d20 title that contains exactly what the title says it does: templates for monsters for *Dungeons & Dragons*. It is a 191-page hardback that contains just about all of the information needed to utilize templates, save the full list of creatures from the *Monster Manual*. The *Book of Templates* retails for \$34.99.

From the Back Cover

Build a better monster!

Using the templates and new rules in this tome, the monster collections you already possess can be revitalized with new wonder and possibility.

Creatures encountered and defeated dozens of times before will take on new dimensions through alterations ranging from simple to complex. You will find within more than 70 new templates and over 30 variants, creating more than 100 new ways to make any monster innovative and inimitable!

Presentation

The cover features a realistic-looking menagerie of monstrous skins that look as if they were sewn together to make the cover. This makes an interesting blend of colors from brown leathers to red dragon wings and even a book spine made of a spine. The cover work was done by Lean and Laszlo Jakusovszky.

When compared to the sheer number of templates contained within, there are relatively few images. This makes for a smaller page count though, so in my book, it is welcome. The images that are present are all black & white and were provided by Cara Mitten and Jeremy Mohler.

The Rules

There are a lot of factors that go into using a template with a creature. One cannot just slap a new name on there and call it done. Thankfully, this book contains all of the rules that are necessary to utilize the templates within (as well as any other templates in other products you may encounter). One does not need to flip through multiple books just to use the options given here.

There are numerous charts for new attribute calculation and even some for calculating things like Challenge Rating and Level Adjustment. I do not agree with all of the charts in all cases. Of course, that is why this is a guide and not rules that are set in stone.

The Templates Themselves

Templates are broken down into categories – twelve of them, to be exact. They are categorized by creature type: Aberrations, Animals (and Magical Beasts), Augmenting, Constructs, Diminishing, Dragons, Elementals, Meta-templates, Oozes, Outsiders, Plants, and Undead. For ease of use, the creature types are in alphabetical order.

Most template types are fairly self-explanatory. One is not, however – Augmenting. Augmenting templates are those that "*augment the monsters to which they are applied, giving a specific suite of abilities...*" Some expand upon spell-like abilities while others enhance combat prowess. Others still apply bonuses to skills. My favorites are those that help them multiply – Hypermitotic and Legion. The former allows the creature to multiply when struck (akin to the brooms from Disney's *Fantasia*) while the latter creates spawn via its own fruition. Still other augmenting templates give multiple heads, the need to feed off of the dead or consume metal. These seem to be the most varied templates in the entire book.

Within each of the categories, the templates are also in alphabetical order. This level of organization *really* helps when looking for a specific template or even a specific type of template!

Some of the templates do seem to be over-powered (for most campaigns) when the abilities are compared to the challenge rating. For example, the Relentless template has a DR $1 + \frac{1}{3}$ of its hit dice, and this DR can only be breached by epic weapons. Thankfully, there is an alternate Relentless provided for those times when the GM does not want a nigh-unstoppable killing machine. Additionally, the vast majority of the templates are good to go.

All in all, there are roughly 70 new templates. Each category has its own variants that add to that number.

Appendix

There are rules within here that go beyond templates. There are a couple of new skills that relate to templates as well as a handful of new feats. The new feats can really help mix things up when used in conjunction with the templates.

There are even some new spells included here – 56 spells that are either new or altered, as well as some spells that are reprinted here for ease of use. After looking over the spells, it seems that they are all well in balance with existing spells from the D&D *Player's Handbook*.

Conclusion

While templates may complicate matters more than some GMs would like, they make things a lot more interesting by making them far less predictable. For the cost, it is an excellent investment that I can wholeheartedly recommend to just about any GM out there.

Class: Creature Supplement.

Str 12 (Physical): The bonding on my copy is a bit weak. This may not be the case in all print runs.

Dex 18 (Organization): Can't ask for better. Period.

Con 14 (Value of the Content): A lot of new possible monsters for your dollar.

Int 16 (Quality of Content): A lot of great ideas that are well thought-out and well written.

Wis 16 (Options & Adaptability): It's nothing but new options for monsters.

Cha 14 (Look & Feel): Not a ton of pictures but they get the point across. Just few enough pics so as to not inflate the page count.



Sweet Dreams Players' Book

Author: Allan Dotson with David Richards & Aaron Coquet

Publisher: May Contain Monkeys

URL: <http://SweetDreams.acwpd.com/>

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: November 8th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. I played in a demo of Sweet Dreams while at Gen Con Indy 2005. After playing in this demo, I felt this game needed a review so I promptly asked Allan Dotson, who was running the demo, to send me a copy for that purpose.

Sweet Dreams Players' Book is a 222-page paperback that contains all of the basic rules and background information necessary to play the game. There are two other books available to help fill out the rules.

From the Back Cover

Sweet Dreams is the storytelling game of Romance, Espionage, and the Supernatural in High School. Teenagers in *Sweet Dreams* are deep in a

world of supernatural conspiracy, where Popularity is everything. They cheat, steal, spy, blackmail, and bully. They go undercover in rival cliques, lead secret lives, and betray their friends. Sometimes, they even kill each other. But that's only the beginning.

Someone in your High School could be dabbling in Black Magic. Someone could be a Psychic, gifted with bizarre superhuman powers. Someone could be possessed, or they could be a legendary horror from beyond the grave, a supernatural monster thirsting for blood and human souls. That someone could be you.

As one of the Chosen, use your skills, abilities, and super powers to get a cute boyfriend, ace your midterms, stay alive, and keep your parents in the dark. The Chosen may hate each other or date each other, but they all have to go to class together the next day.

In *Sweet Dreams*, your Dreams are windows to another reality that offers seductive magical power, but is full of danger *because your dreams can kill you*. The school is a battleground of teen-angst bullshit, underhanded politics and the supernatural and no one will believe you.

Presentation

All of the interior illustrations are black & white. Most feature teenagers of various forms and in various states – human, monstrous, jock, preppy, happy, and brooding.

All of the illustrations, cover and interior, were provided by Allan Dotson, Anat Rabkin, Kelly Aaons, and Diane Will.

Setting

I'm sure a good number of the readers remember high school either because they are in it or because they have gone through it. If you don't remember high school even though you have gone through it,

go back and watch *The Breakfast Club* and other John Hughes films. If you have not gone through high school think about the things that you have heard, especially all of the drama and angst. Then go watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (TV show, not the movie, although that can be a good laugh, too) and all of the John Hughes films you can get your hands on (because they are just that good). That just about sums up a good portion of the setting.

Sweet Dreams takes high school and all of the perceived drama and adds mystical/supernatural aspects and makes it the truth. All of the stupid things that we felt were so important *are* important – popularity, family wealth, jocks v. nerds, crush of the week, etc. It goes far beyond that, however. These mystical aspects drag the characters into conspiracy after conspiracy that no adult would ever believe (even though they, themselves, went through it a generation before).

Not all of the action is within the physical bounds of high school. Characters also can enter the state of Dreams where magical powers are at their fullest. There are some individuals so based in this realm that they can never actually leave (this can be a blessing and a curse).

Characters

Any game based in high school that is worth its salt is filled with teenagers. That is exactly the case here. The player characters (and a great number of NPCs) are all teenagers will have all of the issues that normal teens have and then some. They have the things they love and the things they hate, popularity is an issue, their circle of friends is important, their lives are filled with angst and other issues that no other human could possibly understand. Of course, in this case, there are some issues that no one else could actually understand. Your friends are just as likely to be fairies as they are humans, mutants with crazy powers, or even werewolves.

System

Sweet Dreams uses a 3d6 dice system that takes the character's skill scores and adds them to the dice roll total. Skills are divided into **sets**. These sets represent related skills. Being closely related, they generally have the same score.

The skills range from things that any high school student should have, such as **Academics**, **Gossip**, and **Flirt**, to those that only people involved with the supernatural would really have, like **Espionage** and **Mysticism**, and of course, combat skills.

A character is far more than her skills, however. Everyone has a number of **Subplots** in various degrees. These range from the crushes that most teens have to the need to drink blood (usually only for vampires), or even the fact that you don't believe in the supernatural. Personally, those are my favorite aspects of the characters – not the strong scores, not the magical abilities – the difficulties, especially the realistic ones.

Every character also has **Talents** (or **Powers** or **Features**). These are not normal talents – a knack with mechanics or the ability to play musical instruments. These are not all supernatural, either. A werewolf would have multiple forms and certain benefits that go hand in hand with each. A fairy might be able to work with spells. Other 'normal' people might be strong of faith or be a light sleeper.

Conclusion

Being a game of high school and the fact that most of us have either been through it or at least have exposure to it, we can easily get into character. When playing the demo, the fact that I was able to play that character so well along with a group that was able to do it just as well made the game what it was. The magical aspects were fun, but they would not have been as enjoyable in another setting.

The depth of interaction and emotion (properly blown out of proportion for a high school student) make this game excellent. It clearly draws a lot of inspiration from the 80's brat pack films, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and other teen angst films and shows that it works. I don't know anyone that does not have some experience with at least one or two of those kinds of influences.

It may not be the kind of game that everyone can play for extended campaigns. For others, it could go a long way. At the very least, it can make for an excellent short term campaign. It is a good game, just not everyone's cup of tea.

Archetype: Core Book

Body 10 (*Game Mechanics*): Nice new system.

Mind 10 (*Organization*): Mostly spot-on order.

Spirit 8 (*Look & Feel*): Some art is great while other pieces seem sub-par.

Attack 10 (*Value of Content*): Great cost for the product – only \$25.

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): Good blend of sources to make this product.

Health 7 (*Physical Quality*): It's a awfully big paperback. Be careful.

Magic 10 (*Options & Adaptability*): It is just as diverse a high school was.



Serenity Role Playing Game

Author: Jamie Chambers

Based on an original screenplay by: Joss Whedon

Publisher: Margaret Weis Productions, Ltd.

URL: <http://www.serenityrpg.com/>

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: October 29th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes. I am a fan of the movie that the game is based on as well as the series that the movie is based on, Firefly. When I saw this title at Gen Con Indy 2005 and spoke with Jamie Chambers, I knew I had to review it – so here it is.

Serenity is an adaptation of the movie of the same name and the series upon which the movie is based, Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, into RPG format. This tends to be a difficult task as there are so many facets that need to be handled carefully to keep the feel of the property. Thankfully, Jamie Chambers did a masterful job in his adaptation of *Serenity* into a role playing game.

Serenity Role Playing Game is a 223-page hardback that offers complete rules and

background information for this unique setting. This is a full-color title that features a great number of fitting quotes and still images from the film.

From the Back Cover

Here's how it is.

The Earth got used up. We found a new solar system and used terraforming technology to create hundreds of new Earths. The central planets formed the Alliance and decided that all worlds should be under their rule. There was some disagreement on that point...

After the War for Unification, many Independents – those who fought and lost – drifted to the edges of the system, far from Alliance control. Out on the Rim, people struggle to get by with the most basic technologies. Out here, a ship will bring you work. A gun will help you keep it.

A captain's goal is simple: Find a crew. Find a job. Keep flyin'.

The *Serenity Role Playing Game* lets you re-create the action of the 'Verse, the unique and exciting science-fiction setting created by writer/director Joss Whedon. Everything you need to get started is in this book. Add dice, friends, and your imagination. Fly a ship out into the Black, take jobs as they come, and make sure you get paid.

- A self-contained role playing game. All the rules are provided for both players and Game Masters!
- Full character creation rules, plus fifteen sample characters, including the crew of *Serenity*.
- Complete details on spaceships, guns, and technology.
- Emphasis on story, action, and character development with easy-to-learn rules.
- Game details, descriptions of the characters, and settings from the film!

Presentation

The cover illustration contains two major points of detail. The first, of course, is the title. It is presented just as it is on the ship of the same name, 'Serenity.' It uses the same font and the same two-circle emblem behind the name. Inside of the innermost circle are characters for the word 'Serenity' in Chinese. Below that is a firefly class space transport ship, the same type of ship as *Serenity*.

The background also has a great number of nice details – other ships that are all kind of blurry, the wake from the engine burn, tons and tons of stars, etc. I will leave it with the fact that the colors are stunning.

The cover was done by 11th Hour (Susan Renee Tomb).

As is stated above the images within the title are, for the most part, stills from the film. There are some illustrations contained with as well – of characters, weapons/equipment, and ship layout. These illustrations were provided by Lindsay Archer, Dan Bryce, and Ryan Wolfe. I love the ship layout images, as they are spot-on to the layout used in the show & film.

Setting

This is what really makes *Serenity* stand out from other science-fiction games and even science-fiction films. Joss Whedon captured something that is a blend of the familiar and made it truly unique. There is great technology, as with just about any sci-fi setting. *Serenity*, however, blends this with a heavy 'western' feel. Also used are elements of American and Chinese culture. All of these elements are reflected in many planets' (or moons', space stations', etc.) look and feel and even in the language. Earth-That-Was had two major powers (read: survivors), the Americans and the Chinese. That is the predominant reason for the mixture of those

two cultures. Other cultures did survive, just not in as great of numbers.

The central planets have made their own culture and own technology and thrive because of it. Things are bright and shiny and, supposedly, better. The people that are on the Rim planets, though, are left to their own devices. They use whatever they have and make do without the things they do not. Horses are more common than skiffs and wheeled vehicles. The use of ballistic firearms far outweighs the use of lasers and the like.

Characters

The characters in *Serenity* make the game what it is. The stories are about them and their interaction with the 'Verse. There is a awful lot going on, but we only really care about what is going on with them. They are important and detailed, yet very playable.

Characters are created from a pool of points. The pool size is determined by the 'type' of game, set by the GM. These points are used to purchase levels in **Attributes** (Agility, Strength, Vitality, Alertness, Intelligence, and Willpower) as well as purchase **Assets**. **Complications**, the other side of Assets, give points. Characters go far beyond numbers, mind you.

There is only one race in the 'Verse, humans. There are tons of different humans in the time beyond Earth-that-Was just as there are tons of different types now (Earth-that-Is?).

Traits – Assets and Complications – are those aspects of an individual that cannot be represented by numbers as easily as Attributes can (though most do have a numeric effect on the character). One could be **Born Behind the Wheel** and have a natural affinity for driving/piloting (such as Wash, the pilot of *Serenity*) just as easily as that same character could suffer from **Combat Paralysis** and freeze up whenever bullets start flying (for

example, *Serenity's* engineer Kaylee). Every character has some quirks, positive and negative. That being the case, every character is required to take at least one Asset and one Complication.

Everyone is good at some things and not so hot at others. Character's **Skills** are purchased with a separate pool of points. There are two different types of skills – **General** and **Specialized**. Once a character has enough ranks in a general skill, she can begin working on specializations. General skills range from Artistry and Discipline to Mechanical Engineering and Guns, while specialized skills encompass just about any sub-type of skill. A character with the general skill Guns can specialize in pistols, energy weapons, assault rifles, etc. A character with Pilot could specialize in navigation, astrophysics, or any type of craft.

Ships & Guns & Stuff

Characters need stuff and services (yes, even "services"). Just about any type of **Equipment** that was used or mentioned in the film or series is represented here. If it is not there, find the real equivalent and make it (the nice thing about the level of technology in the game being so close to our own is that these things are possible to figure out easily).

Serenity would not be *Serenity* without the ships. Hell, the game is named after the ship! The series, *Firefly*, was named after the class of the ship that *Serenity* is. All of the details for making an in-game craft are included as are a few samples that are able to, more or less, be used right out of the book. Sadly, the ship creation system seems to have been changed from the time the examples were written and the time the book went to press. None of the examples follow the rules, as presented, perfectly. Thankfully, it is not difficult to see where the changes were made and adjust accordingly. I would really like to see correct examples at some time – be it on the web or in a supplement dedicated to craft.

System

The system, in taking a very critical look at it, is somewhat (though only slightly so) akin to the Storyteller System from White Wolf Publishing. Points are used to buy ranks in Attributes and to purchase Traits. A separate pool is used to purchase ranks in Skills. This is where the similarity ends. The ranks are not each a die. The higher the rank, the higher the die type that is used. For example, the lowest possible rank is a d2. The next highest is a d4, d6, etc. through d12. After d12, a die is added to that – so after d12 is d12+d2.

When rolling, generally speaking, the Attribute dice and the Skill dice are rolled and the total number from all of the dice is compared against a difficulty. Modifiers can change the difficulty or the dice that are rolled, depending on the situation.

Players are given **Plot Points** throughout the game. These can be used during the game to modify rolls, alter the story, or be saved as experience. When used as experience, they can be spent to improve Attributes, Skills, buy new Assets or even buy off Complications.

Other

I think one of my favorite sections of the entire book is actually the appendix. A great list of slang is given, in both English and in Chinese. The use of these terms makes a decent game of *Serenity* into a great one because it helps capture so much of the flavor and make it feel just like the show or film.

Conclusion

It only recently dawned on me that the system was somewhat like any other out there. That is how fresh the system is. It also works well for this game. I would like to see what else can be done with this system. I really like the Plot Point system – one pool that is used for so much and is not

broken in any way (or so it seems to me).

I admit it - I am a fan boy of *Firefly* and *Serenity*. I became interested in the book long before I saw the show or the movie came out, though. I did my best to not let my love of the license distort my view of the title. Personally, I think I did a fine job of keeping the fan and the reviewer separate. Of course, as much as I love the man now, this is the first license of Joss Whedon's that I have really liked. None of the others ever grabbed me before.

It is a bit pricey, but it is well worth it. If you enjoy sci-fi games and are not familiar with the license, do yourself a favor and check out the film, the series, and most importantly (as far as this review is concerned), this book. It is an original setting, a great system, and an all-around well-written title.

Archetype: Core Book

Body 10 (*Game Mechanics*): Nice new system.

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

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

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

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): Stunning take on the licensed setting.

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

Magic 10 (*Options & Adaptability*): It is a huge 'Verse with many possibilities.



d20 Postmodern: Traits & Flaws

Author: Michael Todd

Publisher: Big Finger Games [<http://home.att.net/~michael.todd/>]

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: October 29th, 2005

Reviewer Bias: This title was sent to me for review purposes. I had no idea this product even existed until I was asked to review it. After reading it, I am somewhat surprised that there is nothing official along these lines.

d20 Postmodern: Traits & Flaws contains exactly what the title says it does – traits and flaws for characters in *d20 Modern*. It is a seventeen-page PDF that is very printer-friendly. It is mostly grayscale and there are very few images. The few images that do exist here are also in grayscale – shadowy silhouettes of people (three in total). The only color in here is in the logos for the company and the d20 system, actually. It retails for a mere \$2.75 at www.RPGnow.com.

On d20 Postmodern

I include the following to show what the goal of this project was from the beginning – to provide a cinematic feel to *d20 Modern*. It is taken from the back page of this product but applies to the entire d20 Postmodern line.

d20 Postmodern is Big Finger Games' catch-all title for their line of Modern d20 add-ons and enhancements; but more than that, it is a state of mind.

Postmodern art and entertainment allow that creative imitation of sources is just as artistically valid as faithfully recreating an actual subject or posits that perhaps, give our skewed view of the actual object, imitating the unreal rather than the real is a more successful undertaking.

Therefore, in many cases, postmodern art is based as much on other art as it is on reality, and the rigid 'rules' of the real world take a backseat to the demands of creation. We laugh at old movies where the good guys never run out of bullets, but since these movies exist, in John Woo movies we accept that Chow Yun Fat only runs out of bullets when it is dramatically important to do so. After all, the movie isn't about counting bullets; it's about Chow Yun Fat being cool.

Roleplaying games can take a lesson from that.

With d20 Postmodern, Big Finger Games' stated goal is to provide a mix of authentic cinematic action, colorful and robust character options, precise and flavorful rules, and inspiring and sophisticated storytelling for your Modern campaign.

From the Publisher

This pdf presents a rich and detailed system of character-defining traits, flaws and disadvantages for your Modern d20 game.

D20 Postmodern Traits and Flaws offers a complete system of self-balancing character traits. These traits are designed to flesh out aspects of your character, such as personality, background, or even physique. Traits can serve as an interesting starting point for roleplaying, reminding players of their character's most prominent strengths and weaknesses. Suggestions for roleplaying opportunities are given throughout. Character traits include *coldly logical*, *strange luck*, *preternaturally sensitive* and many more...

Flaws exist as a sort of anti-feat. Whereas a feat enables a character to be better than normal at performing a task (or even to do something that normal characters can't), a flaw restricts a character's capabilities or imposes a penalty of some sort. Character flaws include *criminal record*, *manchurian candidate*, *tracking implant* and many more...

As a bonus, d20 Postmodern Traits and Flaws includes a system of character disadvantages. These disadvantages are designed to inject dramatic situations into a character's day-to-day life. These disadvantages may stem from the character's background or some persistent element of the character's personality or daily experiences. Character disadvantages include *amnesia*, *personal code*, *guilt* and many more...

d20 Postmodern Traits and Flaws includes:

- Five categories of traits and flaws; mundane, conspiracy, occult, psionic and supernatural.
- Forty character traits.
- Twenty-six flaws.
- Fifteen disadvantages.

Traits

Traits here are various facets of a character – be they his/her personality, background, or even physical prowess (of various states). No matter how negative a trait may sound, there is a benefit. No matter how positive a trait may seem, there is a drawback. Each and every trait has them, a positive and a negative. A character who is **Hard of Hearing** obviously can not hear as well as a normal person but that character has learned to focus his/her vision to give a benefit with that sense.

These traits are broken down into a number of different categories: **Mundane**, **Conspiracy**, **Occult**, **Psionic**, & **Supernatural**. Mundane traits include things such as **Skinny**, **Hard of Hearing**, and **Nightsighted**. Conspiracy includes items like **Networked**. The other categories follow suit.

Flaws

Flaws are not the exact opposite of traits. In fact, flaws are strictly negative. What they give in return, though, are bonus feats. Flaws are broken down into the same categories as traits. Some flaws are pretty harsh (such as **Possessed**) while others are livable (like **Vulnerable**).

Disadvantages

The title does take a step beyond what is included in its name. Also included here are disadvantages. These are negative facets of the character without a direct benefit. The upside is that these can give a bonus to experience if used in the game. Things such as **Amnesia** and **Enemy** are included here. Each disadvantage has multiple levels of threat. The higher the rating, the worse the effect and the greater the experience bonus.

Conclusion

Though there are only three new types of options for characters given here, each has a ton of potential. I can't wait to use them in a *d20 Modern* game of my own.

These attributes are so well thought-out and so well written that, after reading this PDF, I am shocked that Wizards of the Coast did not include these types of options in the core book.

Class: Setting & Fan Guide

Str N/A (Physical): PDF.

Dex 14 (Organization): Clean organization.

Con 18 (Value of the Content): Sweet deal!

Int 16 (Quality of Content): Very clearly written.

Wis 16 (Options & Adaptability): Nice, new options for *d20 Modern* characters.

Cha 10 (Look & Feel): Not a lot going on but it does the job – well.

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 as well as contributed by independent authors.

For more information, please contact the editor at ElizabethRALiddell@yahoo.com

Publisher

Silven Crossroads. attn: Kosala Ubayasekara
kosala@silven.com
Ekensbergsvägen 17, 1tr. 11769 Stockholm.
Sweden.

Editor in Chief

Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Assistant Editors

Laura Heilman and Paul Tevis

Layout and Design

Kosala Ubayasekara

Next issue: March 20, 2006

From 2006 the Silven Trumpeter will be a commercial, quarterly magazine. We are looking forward to giving you an even higher quality magazine with more content and exclusive insights into industry companies and products.