

Silven Trumpeter

Volume 4 · Issue 1 · March 2006



FEATURE STORY:

PTOLUS

a silven exclusive!

See an exclusive two page spread of the highly anticipated *Ptolus*, by Monte Cook and an in-depth interview with Monte himself!

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SILVEN

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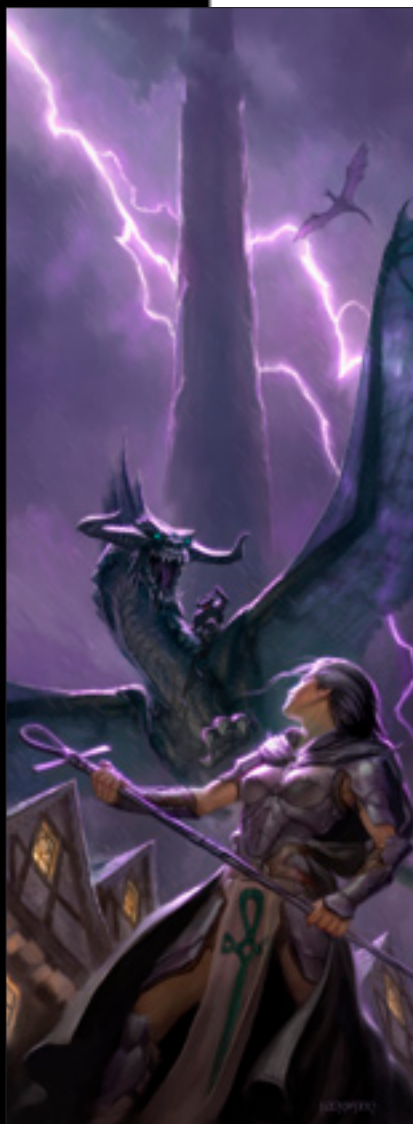
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This month's cover art is done by the masterful Todd Lockwood. The piece was originally done for Monte Cook's upcoming *Prolus* book and Mr. Cook has been kind enough to grant us permission to use it on our cover this month.

Editor's Note

March, 2006



Greetings, gamers and readers of the *Silven Trumpeter*!

I'll bet you've noticed a few changes. Like, "Where's the *Trumpeter* been for the last three months?" Or maybe "What? It's sideways on my screen!" Or how about "Wow, that cover art is amazing!" And I'm sure there have been more than one, "I have to *pay* for it now?"

Well, as you've undoubtedly noticed, the *Silven Trumpeter* has gone through some changes. What had begun as a volunteer-only project rapidly grew into something so high in quality and reputation that it was nearly impossible to get new people to commit to the time and effort necessary to maintain it, and many of the original contributors found that other companies were more than willing to repay them for their work. The end result? We felt that it was high time to repay the dedicated contributors to the *Trumpeter*, and in the process provide you - the reader - with an even higher-quality magazine.

We've introduced the new vertical-page design in the hopes that we will be able to easily transition into a true-to-form print magazine - yes, one that you can hold in your hands and carry to the game table with you, glossy paper and all. We're working closely with new artists of great talent, writers both new and experienced (and both skilled!), and some of the leaders in the RPG industry to bring you exciting new material, sneak previews of upcoming products, and great artwork - everything you've come to expect from the *Trumpeter* and more.

This quarter, we're featuring Todd Lockwood's art on the cover - the thrilling work that will grace the cover of one of the largest RPG products to ever hit the market, slated for release by Malhavoc Press in August of this year - *Ptolus: Monte Cook's City by the Spire*. We also had the opportunity to talk to Monte himself to get exclusive info about the project, so tucked into these pages are secrets that you just won't find anywhere else! In addition, we have awesome fiction, game material and advice from some of our favorite writers - plus reviews of some of the newest products on the market.

Sounds exciting, doesn't it? Well, we're excited, too! Having worked and planned this all out for almost six months, we're thrilled to see it all coming together. There's only one test left, and that's to see what you, the readers, think of the changes. Like it? Love it? Hate it? Have a great idea? Want to contribute? We have a whole forum dedicated to the *Silven Trumpeter* right here: <http://www.silven.com/community/forums.asp?case=subsections&id=21>. Drop by and send us a line - we're excited, and we want to know what you think!

Cheers!

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

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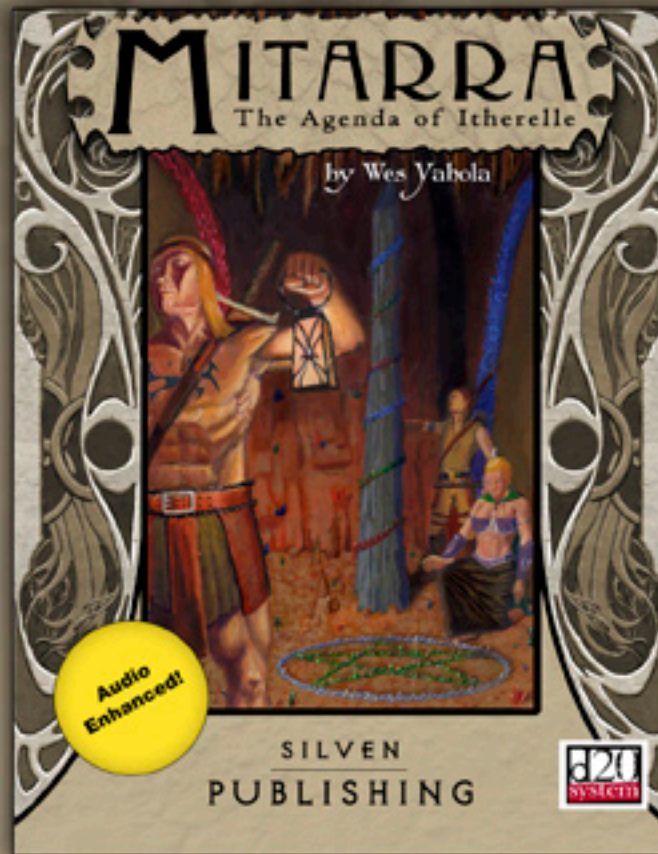
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Polyglot

Word Games Revisited

by Dana Driscoll

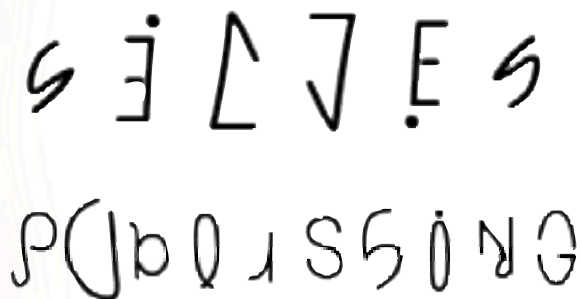
Welcome to Polyglot, your source for everything relating to language and gaming. It has been a long while since I took a break from editing to write a new article for this column, but I've decided to start it up again. Long-time *Trumpeter* readers will remember when this column covered riddles, logic puzzles, and other word games for use in gaming. This month, Polyglot takes you beyond the riddle as a standard fantasy staple and moves on to lesser-known puzzles: ambigrams, anagrams and cryptograms. This article explains what they are, how to create or find them, and how they can work in your game.

Ambigrams

Ambigrams, also known as “inversions,” are words written to look the same regardless of whether they are upside down or right-side up. (Some would argue that there is no “right way” to turn them.) While some ambigrams are very simple and easy to decipher, others are elaborate and much more complex—artistic works in and of themselves. Ambigrams are both word and visual puzzles—which sets them apart from your more standard word puzzle—and can add a bit of fun to a game.

You can find beautifully created ambigrams on the Net by doing an image search with a search engine such as Google or MSN. However, since the contents of these ambigrams are defined by their creators (meaning they may not say what you want them to), you can also use [Word.net's Ambigram Matic](#) to create your own.

I created two examples using Word.net's Ambigram Matic. Answers are at the end of the article. (Hint: the second one has two meanings.)



The neat thing about this program is that you can create phrases or ambigrams with double meanings. The drawback to all ambigrams is that the words or phrases you use must be equal in spacing or length (at least in the case of Ambigram Matic), so you'll have to get creative with some of your designs.

Because ambigrams aren't difficult to decipher (although the first one your PCs encounter may throw them for a loop) you should reserve them for minor puzzles. You could use an ambigram that is unclear as the cover to a book (the password is the word in the ambigram, spoken aloud). Another idea is to use an ambigram above a doorway; the PCs are blocked from entering until they speak the word correctly forward and backward.

Anagrams

Anagrams are another incredibly simple word puzzle. In an anagram, a single word is presented, or a word in the context of a phrase, and the person solving the puzzle must make a new word from the letters. So, an anagram for the word *lookout* is *outlook*, *evil is live*, *eleven plus two is twelve plus one* or *senator* is *treason*. While anagrams work fine in isolation, giving some more context can make them more interesting.

A great use of an anagram is when PCs are searching for a password or code word; give them an anagram as a clue. A more challenging use is to provide them a “fill in the blank” sentence with the anagram word as a clue. For example, “The **astronomers** looked up into the sky. And they saw _____.” Or “The word _____ is an anagram of **itself**.” If you don't give them the clue that the puzzle is an anagram, it could be quite challenging indeed.

Another option is to give your PCs random words that they need to rearrange to make sense. So for example, “A germ” is “gamer.” How about this one? ELEVEN RIP MRS TUT

Charles and Lawrence Kelly have developed a Web site (<http://www.manythings.org/anagrams/>) with more than 600 isolated anagrams from the English language. Another good resource is the anagram generator (<http://www.wordsmith.org/anagram/>), which generates mostly nonsense words for anagrams (and allows you to generate phrases). Another anagram generator (http://www.mi.uib.no/~ingeke/anagram/index_eng.html) creates anagrams from words or sentences.

Cryptograms

By far the most difficult of the -grams presented here are cryptograms. Cryptograms are coded messages where one or more letters or numbers are substituted for each letter. Cryptograms can range from letter-for-letter substitutions to advanced and incredibly complex alphanumeric derivations. Here is a relatively simple cryptogram:

GE IEY TDVHHI FVJO OE GE OBNQ OE IEYT RWQ?

And the code from which the cryptogram is created:
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
V C W G D K X B N Z U H S J E R P T Q O Y M F A I L

Cryptograms have been used by the military and others organizations for the better part of a century. For example, the famous German “Enigma” machine used during World War II generated and decoded cryptograms. What made it so famous was that the machine continually changed its poly-alphabetic substitutions and had to have its code cracked and re-cracked.

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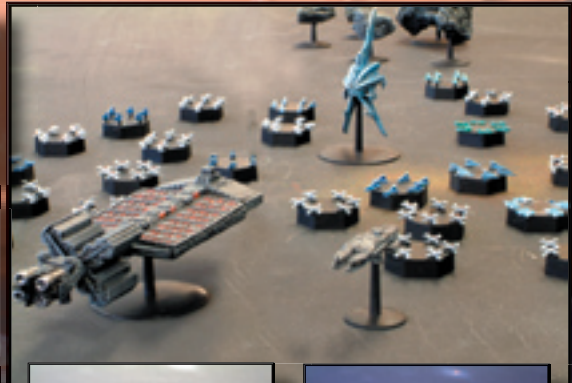
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DEATH COMES AGAIN

by Adam Janus



The warrior stood on the flowered field, the setting sun reflecting off millions of bright yellow and blue blossoms. A light breeze caused the high grass to sway rhythmically. Blowing down off the white-capped mountains in the distance, the breeze was cool and refreshing, carrying with it the smell of snow and honeysuckle, pine and heather.

But, too, there was an underlying smell, rotten, like the breath of a carrion eater. The warrior tilted his head back, breathing deep, his long red hair flowing out from under an iron, fur-lined helm.

“Yes, he is there,” the warrior said to himself, sighing. He stroked his drooping mustache before idly checking the straps on his bronze forearm bracers. Calmly the warrior surveyed the laces of his baked leather breastplate and tightened the golden, lion’s head buckle on the belt wrapped around his waist, holding up his leather backed, bronze kilt.

With a shrug of his broad, powerful shoulders, the warrior shed his woolen cloak, letting the blue and green plaid garment fall to the grass behind him. The tunic he wore under his breastplate was of the purest white linen, and the sleeves, extending down to just above his elbows, flapped in the breeze.

Neatly arranged before the warrior, in the waving grass, laid a heat-hardened wooden buckler, enameled blue, with the same golden lion’s head insignia of his belt buckle. Beneath the round shield was a scabbard of leather wrapped wood. The hilt that extended from the scabbard was simple, but finely carved, wrapped with bronze wire. Above the hilt, the cross piece was

etched with intertwining mistletoe. To balance the weight, the pommel was large, and in the shape of a golden lion’s head, where two small red jewels made the lion’s eyes glow crimson.

Bending to one knee, the warrior tightened the laces of his bull hide boots before picking up the buckler and sliding his left arm through the straps, gripping the handle riveted in the center. He then gripped the hilt of the sword, and rising, the warrior swung the scabbard from the blade, revealing five feet of shining steel.

Testing the weight of the sword, the warrior swung the weapon in great glittering arcs; it whistled lyrically, cutting the air, the setting sun reflecting along its length gave the illusion of fire following in its blurry wake.

Rapping the sword against his shield, the warrior called out to the distant forest, to the base of the snow capped mountains.

“Come! I am ready!” His strong, baritone voice ringing over the sea of grass, echoing as it broke the peaceful silence.

At first, there was no reaction; then, the breeze picked up, carrying the scent of putrefied corpses. Black storm clouds formed above the mountains and blotted out the sun, their shadows roiling across the grassy field. From the boughs of the distant forest a flock of crows took flight, and a dark mist rose from the forest floor. From the mist burst a black horse and rider.

Eyes fiery red, hooves thundering, the black horse carried its rider over the flowery fields at impossible speed, thundering

directly toward the defiant warrior with the glittering sword. Beneath the horse's hooves the earth died, the grass withered and turned sickly yellow and brown, the flowers wilted and decayed.

A fox bolted from hiding and ran, its tail between its legs and ears laid back on its head. It paused in its flight once, to look back at the charging horse. The black robed rider turned his gaze on the terrified fox, pointing a bony figure in the animal's direction, striking it dead where it stood as thunder rumbled across the land and lightening cracked from the clouds. In an instant, the animal was devoured by buzzing flies and writhing maggots.

The air grew cold as the rider galloped up to the lone warrior. Everywhere the black rider passed, fresh new spring turned to cold, bare winter.

Reins drawn tight, the black horse reared up, front hooves flailing briefly before stomping back to the earth, cantering angrily back and forth, steam issuing from its flaring nostrils. Its rider pointed a bony finger at the warrior, its skeletal hand snaking from beneath its black, decaying robes.

A wave of fatigue washed over the warrior. His shoulders slumped and his head sagged, his long red hair falling over his chest as his arms suddenly felt tired and leaden, the tip of his sword nearly touching the ground. His chest began to constrict, and it felt as if his airways were being choked off.

With Herculean effort, the warrior shook the sudden lethargy, taking in air with great gulps. He picked his head up and squared his shoulders, raising the sword before him. The warrior laughed, the sound giving him strength and rolling over the rider and his mount in waves.

"I will not go willingly!" the warrior cried defiantly, finding hope in the strength of his voice, causing the black horse to canter about nervously in tight circles.

The robed horseman drew a black sword from beneath its foul robes. The crows circled over head, cawing as they soared, and a heavy snow began to fall.

"Long have you flirted with me," the black robed figure responded in a hissing voice, circling behind the warrior. Chills ran down the warrior's spine and the hairs at the back of his neck stood as the figure stalked around him, hissing, angry.

"Running into my arms your whole miserable life! Only to evade my grasp in the end!" The figure continued its taunting, reining its foul mount before the warrior once again.

Suddenly, without warning, the horse lunged at the warrior, its iron shod hooves flashing before the warrior's face, its foul stench almost overwhelming the warrior's senses. Instinct fueling his actions, the warrior ducked below the horse's flailing hooves and stepped into the horse's charge. His silver sword flashed out from right to left, making solid contact with the animal's exposed chest, parting flesh and cutting through bone. Pushing the blade through the horse's ruined ribs, the warrior felt a spray

of blood and a whoosh of air as the sword punctured a lung. He then tried to withdraw, yanking his sword from the horse's chest and moving to his right so as not to be pinned beneath the dying animal.

An iron shod hoof glanced off the warrior's upraised shield, hard enough to shatter the wood, sending bolts of pain up the warrior's left arm. Casting off the ruined buckler, the warrior gripped his sword and turned to face the black robed figure, now standing behind the fallen horse. The animal's chest heaved, and blood pumped from its mortal wound before it shuddered spasmodically and died. A crow landed atop the carcass, it cawed once before taking to the air again; neither the crows nor the flies would feast on this foul corpse.

Gritting his teeth against the pain and numbness in his left arm, the warrior took his sword in a two-handed grip, moving in a tight circle as the black robed figure stalked around him, fainting, growling, taunting.

"I should leave you now, and not return until you beg, beg for what seems an eternity in your pitifully short life! Your body wracked with pain, twisted, deformed and diseased, covered with lesions! Drawing air into your body an agonizing task!" snarled the figure in black, its voice hissing from the inky impenetrable darkness of its deep hood.

"And even then, I will let you linger, too weak to even swat the flies from your flesh, or brush the maggots from the open, festering, puss-filled sores covering your filthy, shriveled body!"

Growling like a feral animal, the hooded figure launched a furious attack. Its black blade was a blur as it rose and fell with deadly intent, sweeping back and forth, razor tip thrusting, seeking gaps in the warrior's defense, seeking the warrior's flesh and vitals.

Sparks flew as their blades met again and again; the clash of steel rang out over the plain, each blow accented by flashing lightening and booming thunder. The warrior gave ground; backpedaling as he desperately parried and turned each attack.

Holding his sword over his head, the warrior blocked a vicious over hand blow. The combatants were locked in that position, their faces mere inches apart. The black robed figure's hood slid back, revealing a hideous death's head, a skull covered with rotting flaps of diseased skin, empty eye sockets that writhed with maggots and worms. Hot breath smelling of death and decay hissed out over black teeth, causing the warrior's guts to cramp with nausea.

"I...have...you...now!" the black robed figure growled, exerting more pressure. Flies flew from its wide mouth as it spoke, and its black blade suddenly transformed into a viper, wrapping its coils around the warrior's blade, fangs dripping acidic venom a hair's breadth from his exposed face.

The warrior once again felt his strength flagging, the pain and numbness in his left arm returning. His chest constricted and his head swam. Darkness threatened to engulf the warrior as

the black robed figure took one bony hand from the hilt of his living sword and gripped the warrior's throat.

"Give in and embrace me!" demanded the black robed figure through clenched, black teeth, increasing the pressure on the warrior's throat.

At that moment, the setting sun sank lower than the roiling storm clouds, tendrils of warm light reaching out over the plain. The warrior felt the golden glow through the black mist that had settled over him as his face was bathed in warm sunlight.

"No!" the warrior whispered defiantly, his strength returning as points of light exploded before his eyes.

"I...will not...go...willingly!" he growled through clenched teeth. The warrior released his grip on the hilt of his sword and hammered his right fist into the hideous death's head. He felt the satisfying crunch of bone as his fist made solid contact. The blackness that moments ago threatened to engulf him turned to a swimming red haze.

"NO!" he screamed again, as he rained blow after hammering blow into the grotesque head and face. The gruesome figure was driven to its knees, holding its hissing viper sword defensively before it.

Bending to retrieve his weapon, the warrior swept his sword before him, sunlight flashing from the silver blade as it cut the fanged head from the viper's body. The return stroke separated the kneeling figure's head from its black robed body.

A scream issued from the crumpled black robes at the warrior's feet, the scream of a million tortured souls as a black mist issued from the rags and shot skyward. Overhead, the storm clouds dissipated, tearing apart and scudding off, leaving dark tendrils spread over the purple sky of dusk. The crows cawed, and as one, they turned and winged their way back toward the forest from whence they came. The black mist followed, joining the retreating crows.

Falling to his knees, the warrior spread his arms, allowing the last rays of sun to warm his exhausted body. He fell to his back and stared up at a point of light in the darkening sky, a star.

Closing his eyes, the warrior had the impression of falling...up. Up and up he fell, carried toward the bright speck of light on a white mist. He opened his eyes to see a beautiful face looking down on him, smiling at him, deep brown eyes framed with flowing chestnut hair. Her head was circled with a crown of mistletoe and she was dressed in a flowing white gown. In her hand was a wooden staff with glowing green runes.

"Wake," she whispered to him softly. Closing his eyes again, he allowed the sensation of floating to wash over him, carry him.

"Wake," he heard again, not so much with his ears, but within his head.

His eyes snapped open and his mouth gasped for breath. His nose and mouth were covered with a mask from which sweet oxygen flowed.

Standing over him was a woman dressed in a long white coat, her hands crossed, one on top of the other, directly over his beating heart.

"He's back! He's alive!" she shouted. "Relax, Mr. Fitzjanus," she added, smiling and brushing his thin white hair back from his lined forehead.

He turned his head slowly to the side, taking in his surroundings. A monitor beeped steadily just to his left, its green lines spiking in time with each beep, running across the screen.

At the periphery of his blurry vision, the old man noticed a black shadow dissipate through an open door, the door to his room...his room in the cardiac unit of Rahway Hospital.

The old man closed his eyes and let his head sink back on the soft pillow as people milled around him, checking his vital signs, asking him questions and talking in urgent whispers. One thing occurred to the old man; one thing dominated his thoughts as his hands feebly checked his chest, searching for that familiar rectangular lump usually found in the pocket of his favorite blue and green flannel. Only to find his chest bare, except for sticky white electrodes that monitored his heart beat.

"Where's my cigarettes?" He whispered his thought aloud, chuckling, before succumbing to the morphine and drifting off in a drug-induced slumber.



DEATH AND THE SINGLE CHARACTER

by Pike Stephenson

The untimely death of a character during a campaign can potentially unravel a game master's meticulously crafted plot - and the player's evening enjoyment. In any combat-related roleplaying game, character death is an inevitability that we as players struggle to dodge. We develop PCs with the most effective skills, we tweak their statistics, and equip them with the latest and greatest in magic or technology, yet one fatal roll of the dice can destroy all of our work. Worse yet is the tireless lull that occurs when you are left to frantically craft a new character while the rest of the group is cheering each other on.

How do we avoid this tragedy? What can we do, as players and game masters, to circumvent the disruption a character's death can cause? It's simple: preparation.

Just as any army plans for all strategic outcomes in a war, players (with the assistance of their game masters) can prepare for the possible loss of their favored character. A few simple steps can keep the game flowing and everyone involved.

There are three areas to cover in your preparation:

Creating backup characters,
Filling the down time after the character loss, and
Integrating the new character.

Backing Up

Creating backup characters is a time old practice just about every player has performed. Often we do this not specifically



in case of losing a PC, but sometimes because we want to explore different types of characters to play in the off chance of losing our current character. Some game systems have this in place, calling it Character Trees, from which you create a collection of PCs to nurture and grow all while you play a primary character.

With a Character Tree, each player creates a limited number of backup characters. They should follow the same creation process as your main character, and should be equipped with the same basic stats, skills, and possessions. They could be identical to your current PC or

as different as your desire. As your primary PC advances, there are plenty of options on how you can keep your backups near to the same level: granting them one half of the experience you collect, keep them one level lower than your primary PC, or whatever your gaming group decides is fair and equitable. What's the use of having them around if they can't slide in and stand up to the current onslaught dished out to the other PCs?

By developing such a system, it also allows you the flexibility of swapping out characters as needed. In my old gaming group, there were several of us that couldn't make the games consistently, myself included. With families and job schedules, gaming sometimes took the back seat. Nearly as disrupting as losing a character in the middle of a game, not having a player there can throw the whole game off course. With a Character Tree in place, we could guarantee to have a good balance of PCs to fill in the blanks. Sometimes we played two characters at once, giving us a chance to test out the different PCs.

An interesting and fun side aspect of this system is that you can create a shared history between your backups, and the others players' backups as well. PCs can be siblings, rivals, from similar schools and towns, or whatever works to make the game more appealing. By generating some history between the PCs, it makes the game more intimate and familiar than just dragging a cold piece of paper.

Post Mortem

Next is the dreaded lull. If you already have your backup character in place, why not dive exactly back in where you left off? Obviously, new PCs can't drop out of the sky and into the melee, there has to be a reasonable way of integrating them. So what do you do in the meantime?

After putting the finishing touches on your next character, a different way of killing time would be assisting the GM with the combat. This is something we did as well. If the battle includes an opposition force as massive as any galactic armada, the GM might have his hands full with troop placement and keeping tabs on which NPCs are damaged or fresh for battle. Helping the GM along will smooth out some lumps and give the player a chance to still participate, and maybe score a few hits against his fellow gamers. It's hard for the other players to hate the GM for nearly dropping their character when you threw the dice.

There are other duties and activities that the downed player can perform, like running to the corner for fresh soda and munchies, or waxing the GM's car. Both will score points, but that's up for you to decide.

The New You

Next comes the miraculous discovery of a new comrade. Bringing a new PC into the mix takes a little wrangling for the GM, kind of like tossing in a new character into a story. Both typically follow a predestined plot and require some massaging. But, as mentioned before, if you've already developed connective backgrounds for your backup characters, then it shouldn't take long to regroup and recruit. In fantasy settings you can't flip open a cellphone and call Rent-a-Sword, but if your next PC has been following the group, hoping to join or duel with your current character, or is in the next town over waiting for news of your adventures - the possibilities are endless.

This also offers everyone a chance to roleplay. One of the best aspects of gaming is roleplaying. Taking the time to introduce a new PC when some of the others already know her, begrudgingly or not, makes for interesting gaming. Taking that time beforehand to explore histories sets a pace that shakes up the current status quo and makes for memorable evenings.

Try these tips. Use them as building blocks to incorporate into your current gaming system and see if they can keep an unfortunate evening from dragging everyone down.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Exodus 20:3

Apparently that wasn't clear enough for some...



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REGRETLESS LOVERS

by Chris McCoy

He was forever living in the shadow of her dead lover.

Tempest sighed quietly, sinking further into the confines of his pillows. He lay next to Olivia, her rhythmic breathing signaling her descent into the realm of dreams...the same realm where her departed lover, Aramil, existed now.

Tempest glanced over at his sleeping fiancée and found that he could not blame Aramil for falling in love with her. Olivia's keen intellect and uncanny insight into the very being of a person were the characteristics that Tempest treasured most about her. As a fellow mage, Tempest was astonished by her mastery of the Art and her flawless, analytical wit. Her virtuosity was only challenged by her gentle nature and captivating elegance. Olivia's beauty was unearthly, like a creation of the moon goddess, shaped in the goddess' own likeness. Tempest once accused her of being she some sort of avatar, but this only brought on a faint blushing and a few giggles from Olivia. Her olive skin carried a hint of a haunting shade of pale moonlight upon it, even during the noon hour. Her features were supple, sultry without being overly alluring. Olivia's beauty was considered by most to be exotic, a rarity amongst the dainty wisps of women who shared her station. She held a classic brilliance from an age long since past, as one adoring scholar had spoken. That scholar had been Aramil Runecaster.

Waves of chestnut magnificence were spread across her silk pillows, left unbound by Tempest's own hands earlier that evening. To the young socialite, there was nothing more splendid than running his hands through the rich coils of his beloved's hair. Tempest had implored her to grow her hair long, down past her willow waister to the hem of her ankle-length dress. She had reluctantly agreed under a relentless barrage of promises and compliments he offered her. Tempest's fingers drifted through an unclaimed tendril of her hair, playfully looping it around his wrist. He wondered how many times Aramil had done this exact same thing to his fiancée, how many times the two had shared a private moment away from prying eyes. All Tempest could do was wonder, for he could not see what she dreamt at night, when reality became dreamscape and her journey into the sublime was not completely her own.

A melancholy sigh escaped his pressed lips and he let go of the captured strand. Olivia stirred, awakened by his mutterings and the teasing of her hair. She turned onto her side and regarded him with her emerald gaze. A slender hand rubbed sleep away from her eyes as she turned a questioning glance upon him. His own darker eyes stared back at her, something hidden within their cerulean depths, only to be quickly subsumed by the twinkle of sophisticated playfulness that usually dwelt in his gaze. An alabaster hand caressed her cheek lovingly, dispelling all questions and enticing her to move closer to his lithe form.

With a soft moan of contentment, she closed her eyes and slipped into his welcoming embrace. She rested against his warm body and drifted back to sleep as he slowly began to stroke her hair again, almost absentmindedly. Such a caress had grown to be second nature for him, one out of a long line of unconscious gentle touches.

Tempest loved Olivia without question. He had known nothing of her unspoken love with Aramil until last evening, when she had received a dream of being with the departed scholar. She had told Tempest of the vision and he had dismissed it as flightful fancy. He himself had such erotic dreams, mainly of Olivia or even her younger sister. Of course, they were just dreams. Olivia, forever a disciple of the Lady of Moonlight and Mysteries, thought the dream held a secret meaning and finally told Tempest of her secret love for Aramil. She spoke of how she had quietly fallen in love with the scholar, her instructor, and shared many passing fancies with him in her thoughts.

Olivia claimed that she never had the chance to get close to Aramil before he died reclaiming his people's lands almost five years ago. Yet he did not believe her. She spoke too fondly, too lovingly, of her former mentor for it to be just a simple infatuation. To Tempest, it seemed that the spectre of Aramil was not so easily dispelled in the heart of his beloved.

Tempest had only met the elven scholar on one occasion and had found the cloistered wizard to possess an awkward grace and unrefined charisma. Tempest could see why Olivia had been attracted to the bookish elf. Olivia had not always been so daring, so sexually innovative, or so charismatic. When he had first laid eyes upon Olivia, she had been an introspective fourth-year magess at the University of Arcane Studies, akin to Aramil in personality and intellect. He had been different then too, completely opposite to the virtues he espoused today.

He had been raised as a socialite, a courtier of women and a partaker in all the pleasures his noble station could afford him. His natural magnetism and rudimentary abilities in sorcery only augmented his already commendable training in the art of charming a woman and extorting her most precious gift: her sexuality. By the age of twenty-two, he had become a connoisseur of women, each one a casualty of his sexual conquest. Olivia was supposed to have been just one more such victim, a plaything of his loins and nothing more.

Tempest thought to make her the centerpiece of his collection, a shining example of a virtuous woman deflowered and a trophy to display to his like-minded fellows. She was the daughter of a family of rich merchants, the Bywrens, an aspiring mage, and a pillar of chastity. Surely, if he captured her heart and her virginity, he would garnish much respect amongst his peers.

A well-placed charm spell had her hanging on his every honeyed word, beholden by each unmeant promise. This continued for many days, each whispered aspiration bringing him closer to her bedside and unclaimed virginity. Olivia's will remained constantly strong for the better part of a year, driving his anticipation of bedding her to a feverish pace. When the time had finally arrived, after his false proposal to wed her, Tempest found himself unable to take what was readily given to him, freely and without impediment. Here was the woman he had been courting deceptively for almost a year, stretched out nude before him, beckoning for his loving embrace. Yet he found himself unable to bed her out of conscience and principle. Olivia, a woman of unbreakable morals and genuine compassion, had amorously captured his heart. Her purity and yearning to fulfill his every whim overwhelmed him and he fell to his knees, confessing the façades he had been living for most of his life. He told her the names of dozens of women he had seduced, leaving them robbed of their virginity and coin. He spoke of the methods he had used upon those unsuspecting women and how he and his fellows, other bored nobles with little consideration for others, considered their trickery as nothing more than a game. Tempest never shed so many tears, weeping each one for every woman he had left shattered and hollowed. He imparted everything to Olivia, purging his spirit of his fictitious reality.

When he turned his tearful eyes upon her, her face held no contempt, no open hatred for the wretch who knelt before her. Her face was gentle, compassionate, understanding. Her diminutive hands touched his tear-stained cheeks and she kissed his forehead. She whispered softly as she folded her arms about his sobbing form.

"You tell me much of what I already know. I have known of your true nature since the first day we met and I've been waiting for you to confess to me all your misdoings. Like you, I have been waiting for this day when we can put aside the facades that we both live and love as we were meant to. Without lies, without regrets. Two people in love, in love with no regrets."

They shared much that evening and Tempest knew he was truly in love with Olivia. She had learned of his dealings from his encounters with her younger cousin. Tempest had made a mistake, a fatal mistake for one of his ways, yet Olivia had taken it upon herself to try and show Tempest that a life outside of ruining others awaited him in the light of redemption. It was this type of forgiveness that drove Tempest out of his deceitful practices and into the loving arms of a woman who sought to show him a better way of life. Tempest wanted to repay her for her kindness and he sought restitution with each woman he had wronged, whether through deed or coin. He sought redemption



at the hands of his victims and solace in the forgiving embrace of his Olivia.

Yet, most of all, he found true forgiveness in the Church of Alusa, a faith that espoused the virtues of love, beauty and passion.

He recalled the ceremony with such clarity, that it almost felt as if he was living it all over again. Tempest remembered the unadorned scarlet robes he had been given to wear, the materials made of some fine silks from the Far East. He remembered the wisps of incense smoke wafting through the air on some unseen breeze. He remembered how the air smelt of cinnamon and roses and how he breathed deeply to fill his lungs with their sweetness. Tempest had knelt before the ivory altar of Alusa and could still feel the heat from the nearby braziers on his shaven face. He remembered the weight of the marble tablet in his hands and the rhythmic sound of his hammer and chisel against the smooth stone as he carved the names of those he had sinned against into its surface. He remembered the dull pain his hands had been dealt from this work, and how it had persisted for days after the purification ritual. He remembered how he regarded it as a type of cleansing pain, a pain that was to be relished in and not soon forgotten, for to do so was to forget his sins. He remembered the breaking of the stone tablet upon the altar as the ceremony had begun, the ritualistic destruction of all past sins in the eyes of the holy goddess. He remembered how the sound of the tablet shattering brought him hope for a new beginning, how it was the breaking of an old life and

the beginning of a new one. He remembered how the robed priestess, her features hidden beneath robes of red and golds, had placed a gloved hand on his forehead and whispered softly the incantation for forgiveness. The words were lost to Tempest, who had not learned the sacred language of the lovers' goddess yet, but he knew their meaning well enough. They offered the weight of his sins lifted and his conscience cleared.

Later, Tempest would learn those words and commit them to memory. It took him months to learn the language of lovers, the tongue of Amoris. Afterwards, he often found himself whispering those words whenever his mind was troubled as they continued to offer clarity.

Tempest left the church of Alusa that day with a clear mind and new purpose, all thanks to the love of one woman. His atonement proved cleansing and he soon joined the ranks of the Alusian church, a faith that espoused the virtues of love, beauty, passion, and above all else, fidelity. Since that fateful day, the day when they had become lovers without regrets, Tempest had become a selfless man of honorable intent and compassion. He owed her much. He owed her his life.

Now he found himself questioning her, wondering if she truly loved him. Was he really the selfless man he fashioned himself to be or was he merely reverting to the way he used to be, a man of petty values and shallow purpose?

"Lovers without regrets?" he asked quietly. He had not a single regret. But was Olivia as remorseless as he in their continued romance?

His mind turned to the words of purification, the words his priestess had said over him on the day of his atonement. He whispered them quietly into the night air, a softly spoken prayer for guidance.

"With a passionate heart and a cleared mind, you come before the glory of Alusa. You have walked within the shadow of your sins for too long and now seek to dispel the darkness that threatens to consume you and all that you strive to love. You have come before Alusa to confess your crimes against all that she cherishes: love, passion, devotion, and fidelity. You have denied love, yet you wish to see the beauty love holds. You have abused passion, yet you wish to bask in the pleasure passion brings. You have lost devotion, yet you wish to bind yourself with the loyalty devotion promises. You have never felt fidelity, yet you seek to experience the bond that fidelity gives. With these hopes of renewal and the embracing of Alusa's four ideals, you will cast off the shadows of your former life and walk hand in hand with the goddess.

Forever treasure love, forever embrace passion, forever espouse devotion, and forever promise fidelity. Within these words, find your salvation and new way of life. They will give you the strength and perseverance you will need when confronted with the sins of your former life. They will give you the hope of a new tomorrow. Treasure all that you profess to love, for they are the most important beings in your life. She will give you guidance in the darkest of times and will love you forever. Your sins are no

Chris McCoy is a veteran gamer of ten years and has been exposed to the beauty of fantasy since an early age. His gateway to fantasy was the Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis and he has been writing since the age of ten. Currently, the pride and joy of his writing career has been the publication of an anthology entitled *Goblin Tails*, based on one of his creations, a goblin adventurer by the name of Chuba. He also has co-designed a world setting publication that is coming out sometime in 2006 via Goodman Games. He and his wife, Chrissy, spend most of their time gaming out of their home in Englewood, Florida with their gaming group of five years known as the Knights of the Patio. He is a technical sales writer and holds a degree in history. His other hobbies include fencing, kendo, sword collecting, history, and avid reading. You may contact the author at Silverfyre@writing.com.

longer present, you have been forgiven in the eyes of Alusa and shall forever walk with her blessing if you truly cherish her ways above all others."

Such were the words of the blessing of Alusa and many troubled lovers had whispered them over the ages. For Tempest, they were more than words spoken for guidance in a lover's quarrel: they were his keys to salvation and the guiding strength to dispel the doubts of his lover's fidelity.

"Give me the guidance I so desire, Alusa, and show me that the shadows of doubt in my heart are nothing more than the illusions of a tired mind." Tempest whispered softly into the darkness, longing for some sort of sign that his doubts were misplaced.

Olivia stirred again, cuddling closer to her contemplating lover. The whispered words of "I love you... Tempest" reached his ears as she kissed his enfolded arms lovingly. She settled back into sleep, a soft smile upon her rosy tiers. He just held her for the longest time, the realization of her devotion to him coming to light.

"How foolish I must be..." he whispered softly, shaking his head in disbelief. Alusa had sent him his sign and that was all he needed to hear. While Olivia might have loved Aramil at one point in time, her heart truly belonged to him now. Aramil was nothing but a spectre of the past, a memory of a treasured infatuation that was never voiced.

Tempest closed his eyes, certain of her fidelity to their love.

--

That night Olivia dreamt of Aramil.

AXIOM

a preview excerpt from the short novel by Pike Stephenson

Carmeilliken approached the front door cautiously. Through the storefront window he detected no activity. Not a candle or lantern burned inside. The old man must have closed up for the night. He couldn't leave without warning him though, he owed him that much.

Surreptitiously, the rogue guided his hands across the door's threshold and edge, searching for potential unseen dangers. Once satisfied, he checked the knob; it was unlocked. Bracing himself, Carmeilliken cracked open the door then slipped in. The chaos that cluttered the room stole his senses. Paper and parchment, inks and templates, stitching and cloth lay strewn about the shop in heaps and trails. The sharp scent of scorched wood filled the air until the elf gagged. As dark as it was, Carmeilliken's sensitive eyes easily unscrambled the mess as he "read" the struggle. The Bookburners left their mark, and recently, yet the building remained intact. As he stalked about the shop, puzzling the reason they left without burning it to the ground, the answer rushed from the back room.

He barely had time to move as the echoes of gears and grinding metal charged in his direction. Carmeilliken tumbled to his left, rolling over a small stack of torn book covers. Tucking his left shoulder in and twisting his hips, he rotated a half turn while completing the roll. As he recovered Carmeilliken faced a monstrous machine. It stood twice as high as he, a great copper and steel figure, covered in gnashing gears and pumping rods. It reeked of pulp and hot ink as plumes of steam escaped its broad, featureless head. Its left arm, if that were an accurate description, jutted out into a broad shield covered in script that traveled across the plate in serpentine rows. He noted the changing

nature of the text, at times displaying the common tongue then switching to Draconic, Elven, other languages Carmeilliken was familiar with, and then many more that evaded his knowledge. The right arm ended in a gigantic ebony hammer that strangely resembled a printer's press.

Before becoming entranced by the machine, it charged again, swinging its great shield low and wide. Carmeilliken tumbled backwards as far as he could until he hit the back wall. The machine reared up and rumbled as it brought the great hammer to bear. The elf managed to avoid the attack but the blast of heated air that blew out from where it struck pushed him another pace or two.

"By the goddess," he said, "It's a golem."

The revelation did nothing to bolster his confidence. Carmeilliken was a skilled wizard, but in the manner of illusions. They held no sway over a creature such as this. What spells he memorized were powerful if woven properly but not against golems. Even more dreadful was trying to find a weak point on the creature. Humans, orcs, they all had their flaws that he easily exploited but a golem lacked the flesh and blood that his skillfully guided blade could render useless.

Carmeilliken searched for the swiftest route out of the shop as the golem drew back its head then howled like a giant steel door grinding against rusted hinges. Though swift and small enough to slide under its wide stance, Carmeilliken did not relish the prospect of being flattened in the process. A quick glance back over his left shoulder solidified his decision for escape. The rogue scuttled on all fours as he made haste for the back room. He no sooner reached the large archway as the creature smashed down on the floorboards behind him, spinning Carmeilliken out of control and into the Binder's front desk.

The impact stole his breath and senses. His ribs burnt as if licked by a devil's tongue. Carmeilliken groaned and rolled over onto his feet. He squatted there for what little time he had before the golem charged over to meet him. His weapons and magic were of no use and, with the pain eating up his side, he could not hope to outrun the creature. As the golem loomed overhead, raising its massive hammer fist, a sly grin cut across Carmeilliken's lips.



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NPCyclopedia Psionics

by Eytan Bernstein, Matthew J. Hanson and Sean Holland



All in all, this book is an excellent choice for a DM seeking to use psionics in their game. All of the psionic classes and races are used, along with other characters that are at least tangentially psionic in nature, the rules are finely tuned and presented very insightfully, and the new material is superb. NPCyclopedia: Psionics is a book where its presentation is eclipsed only by its usefulness.
Shane O'Connor - RPGnow

NPCyclopedia Psionics

by Eytan Bernstein, Matthew J. Hanson and Sean Holland

So you have purchased the Psionics Handbooks, and one of your players has decided to use a psionic class. You want psionics to be part of your world. The problem is that you use a lot of pre-made modules, and those don't include a lot of psionic characters.

Whatever your needs, if you use psionics and you use NPCs, this book is for you. NPCyclopedia: Psionics features eleven different psionic NPCs. Each contains a detailed background, adventure hooks, combat tactics, and statistics for every level from 1 to 20.

SILVEN
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Zarek - A Secret Society

by Landon J. Winkler

About the Author

Landon J. Winkler has been gaming for about fifteen years and GMing for almost all of that. He blames his long-time interest on secret societies entirely on the shiny letters from the cover of *GURPS Illuminati*. In his spare time, Landon is training to become a Certified Ethical Hacker, among other far less interesting things.

Origins of the Zarek

In ancient times, an empire ruled by lich-lords known as the Quilars threatened to conquer the known world. Their legions were filled with undead and terrible constructs. For years, the other nations of the world held off the Quilars with help from the clergy of the good gods.

In response to this rising resistance, the Quilars set one of their number to the task of finding and training forces to kill the priests. A few years later the Zarek were formed, an elite military order that served as shock troops and field commanders for the undead armies. Among the living, the Zarek alone were given privileged positions in the Quilars' armies, leading many to seek membership and swelling the order's ranks.

On the battlefield, the Zarek were responsible for finding and killing opposing priests before the undead legions descended onto the field.

Experienced Zarek would often lead squads of powerful undead into the fray, cutting swathes through opposing armies to reach the hated priests. On occasions when the enemy fielded few priests, the Zarek would work as squad leaders while attacking enemy mages.

The Modern Zarek

After the fall of the Quilars, the Zarek were destroyed along with their facilities and writings. A scarce handful of documents now known as the Zarek Fragments survive into the present

day. New generations of Zarek have trained themselves in the old ways, but swear fealty to their teachers and mentors rather than to the Quilars.

Several groups of Zarek now exist, owing to different copies of the Zarek Fragments surfacing. Each group is careful to keep its presence a secret, in order to prevent retribution from the Quilars' old enemies. In particular, the priesthoods of the good gods suffered mightily at the hands of the Zarek and many elves still remember the slaughter of their people at the hands of the lich-lords.

Some groups of new Zarek are elite mercenary companies, prized by warlord spellcasters. Others are paid handsomely to serve in their traditional role of leading undead armies for necromancers. This new generation of Zarek is not necessarily evil and could make perfectly reasonable PCs.

Other Zarek search for clues about their past. These groups or individuals work to find items, ruins, and especially documents from the Quilars' empire. These knowledge seekers often know a few special spells that were invented specifically for the Zarek, or carry an oathblade forged for the old order. Like their mercenary brethren, these Zarek can easily be integrated into a PC group.

There are also several groups of Zarek that share a desire to return to the "old days." These groups seek to either return the Quilars to dominance or become lich-lords themselves. Zarek with this desire are often especially dangerous, forming long-scale plans and collaborating with the undead. Seeking to place the world under undead domination is not traditionally a PC-friendly goal, although a group of evil or morally ambiguous PCs could easily be united by it.

All Zarek hold a unifying respect for Quilar Avath, a Zarek who rose to the rank of lich-lord. Quilar Avath is recognized both as the greatest Zarek and as the innovator behind the oathblade. He began the tradition of inscribing oaths on his weapons, giving the blades their name. Towards the end of the Quilars' empire, Avath held sole control of the Zarek, often leading them personally in battle.



Zarek Ranks and Uniforms

Zarek and Quilar are both used as titles. For example, a Zarek with the given name of Masal would be referred to as Zarek Masal. In the same way, Quilar Avath's given name is simply Avath. Quilar can also be used as a form of address, much as lord.

The primary sign of a Zarek is the oathblade she carries, a twin-bladed weapon related to the scimitar. The traditional uniform for a Zarek includes pauldrons and a long cloak with the symbol of their Quilar embroidered onto it. Modern Zarek often wear cloaks with the crest of their mentors to honor the old tradition.

Zarek Commanders are the few with authority to command their fellows in battle and train new Zarek. In the old days, Zarek Commanders answered only to the Quilars. These Zarek Commanders wore personalized (and generally enchanted) crowns or circlets as a mark of rank. Recent leaders of larger Zarek groups keep this tradition alive.

Both in and out of battle, Zarek were expected to obey every order from their superiors. These superiors were generally limited to Zarek Commanders, the Quilars, and the direct undead vassals of the Quilars. On occasion, a Zarek would be assigned to work with the mundane army and obey the orders of that army's commander. Modern Zarek follow this requirement with a zeal that can vary widely.

Zarek in your Campaign

The ancient and secret nature of the Quilars and the Zarek make it easy to fit these groups into any existing campaign. The time span, racial makeup, and final fate of the Quilars' empire is left up to you. If you already have an empire of the ancient past ruled by lich-lords, so much the better. If not, it should be easy to find a time and place for the Quilars' empire.

Before introducing the Zarek themselves, you should mention the ancient empire of the Quilars. Even a passing mention can help cement the Zarek in your world. Some possible teasers include: the PCs find a spell designed by a Quilar, explore a ruin of a Quilar's fortress, fight creations of a Quilar, or pass over an ancient battlefield or graveyard where the forces of good were slaughtered.

After that, you can introduce the Zarek (although they will rarely call themselves by that name). Leave the Zarek's connection to the Quilar quiet at first so the PCs can discover that important secret at a later date. Different groups of Zarek may meet the PCs in different ways.

Mercenary Zarek will probably appear on the battlefield of any skirmish, either working for a necromancer or a mundane employer. Zarek seeking knowledge if their roots will probably first show up digging through ruins, as a potential ally or rival to

PCs who are also interested in things ancient and wicked. Zarek still loyal to the Quilars will be seeking out unvanquished lich-lords who are either banished or bound, instead of destroyed utterly.

Once the party has encountered the Zarek a few times and seen hints of the Quilars, you can begin providing hints of the Zarek's role in that ancient empire. An oathblade in the depths of the ruins of a Quilar-dominated city; an ancient mosaic depicting the Zarek fighting the priests of a good god; or a mention of Quilar Avath as the greatest Zarek will move the party on the right path.

Another way to handle the Zarek is having the Quilars still exist or on the rise, teaching ancient secrets to a new generation of Zarek. The Zarek Fragments may exist, but the texts will prove useful only to independent Zarek and those seeking to understand the Quilars' minions.

If even one Quilar returns to the world, the Zarek will be faced with a dilemma. Many Zarek will flock to the Quilar's banner, while others will continue to seek their own fortune. As the Quilar's Zarek become better known, however, independent Zarek will find that their oathblades and fighting techniques may mark them as agents of the lich-lord.

Knowledge and the Zarek

Presented below are some sample knowledge checks regarding the Zarek and what information different results would provide. These results assume you would not want to reveal the Zarek's connection with the Quilars on the results of a die roll.

Knowledge (local) check regarding the Zarek

DC	Information
15	The names and leaders of Zarek groups in the area.
20	The current employers and rumored missions of local Zarek groups.

Knowledge (history) check regarding the Zarek

DC	Information
15	The roles of the Zarek in recent conflicts.
20	The Zarek are an ancient order and hide from old enemies, mostly priests and elves.
30	The Zarek are said to be responsible for slaughtering huge numbers of priests during ancient wars.

Knowledge (arcana) check regarding the Zarek

DC	Information
15	The Zarek are scattered group of warrior-mages that work largely as mercenaries.
20	Powerful necromancers are extremely fond of hiring the Zarek.
25	The Zarek originate in ancient times and learn many of their secrets from documents called the Zarek Fragments.

Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (arcana) check regarding oathblades

DC	Information
10	This strange and rare weapon is known as an oathblade.
20	Few use the oathblades outside of a secretive order of warrior-mages known as the Zarek.

Knowledge (history) check regarding the Quilars

DC	Information
20	The Quilars were a group of lich-lords in ancient times that ruled a powerful empire.
25	Time frame, rough location, and fate of the Quilars' empire.
30	Rumored locations of the few remaining ruins of the Quilars' cities and towers.

The Zarek Prestige Class

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To qualify to become a Zarek, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Skills: Concentration 6 ranks, Spellcraft 4 ranks.

Feats: Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse.

Special: Trained under a Zarek for one month or read the Zarek Fragments.

Class Skills

The Zarek's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Concentration (Con), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Speak Language (None), Search (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Tumble (Dex), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

The Zarek

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Per Day				
						1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Ignore spell failure (light), oathblade training	1	-	-	-	-
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Rending dispel	2	-	-	-	-
3rd	+2	+1	+1	+3	-	2	1	-	-	-
4th	+3	+1	+1	+4	Refuse turning	3	2	-	-	-
5th	+3	+1	+1	+4	Ghostly blades (1/day)	4	2	1	-	-
6th	+4	+2	+2	+5	Disruptive attacks	4	3	2	-	-
7th	+5	+2	+2	+5	-	4	4	2	1	-
8th	+6	+2	+2	+6	Ignore spell failure (medium)	4	4	3	2	-
9th	+6	+3	+3	+6	-	4	4	4	2	1
10th	+7	+3	+3	+7	Ghostly blades (2/day)	4	4	4	3	2

Zarek Spells Known

Level	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1st	1	-	-	-	-
2nd	2	-	-	-	-
3rd	2	1	-	-	-
4th	2	2	-	-	-
5th	2	2	1	-	-
6th	3	2	2	-	-
7th	3	2	2	1	-
8th	3	3	2	2	-
9th	3	3	2	2	1
10th	4	3	3	2	2

Class Features

All the following are class features of the Zarek prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Zarek gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor (except the oathblade, see Oathblade Training below).

Spells per Day: The Zarek have a limited ability to cast arcane spells. These spells are spontaneously cast as a sorcerer, rather than prepared. Known spells are selected from the Zarek spell list (see below). Every level after 1st, the Zarek may exchange a known spell for another spell on the Zarek list of the same level. Zarek use Charisma as their primary spellcasting attribute and may only cast spells of a given level if they have Charisma of 10 + that level.

Oathblade Training (Ex): Each Zarek is trained in the use of the order's preferred weapon, the oathblade, and is considered proficient with this weapon. Any feats she has which apply to the scimitar (such as Weapon Focus or Weapon Specialization) apply equally to the oathblade.

Ignore Spell Failure (Su): A Zarek may ignore spell failure in any light armor in which she is proficient while casting Zarek

Oathblades

Oathblades are the traditional weapons of the Zarek, serving as a symbol of office. An oathblade consists of two slender, curved blades joining at a single long hilt in the shape of an 'S'. The blades face opposite directions, forcing the oathblades' users to adopt a rapid, almost dance-like fighting style.

Traditionally when the Zarek crafts or commissions her oathblade, she will carve an oath in the surface of each blade in the elegant script of the Quilars' ancient empire. Typical oaths include "This blade will taste the life's blood of the elven empire" or "This blade will restore the Quilars to their thrones."

A medium oathblade is an exotic double weapon dealing 1d6/1d6 damage with a critical threat range of 18-20. Weapon Finesse applies to the oathblade as though it were a light weapon. An oathblade weighs 8 pounds and costs 100 gold pieces. Few normal oathblades are found, however, most being masterwork or enchanted.

spells. At 8th level, this also applies to medium armor in which she is proficient.

Rendering Dispel (Su): Starting at 2nd level, the Zarek can tear at magic with her oathblade. If she successfully strikes the same individual twice in a round with her oathblade, she may use a targeted *dispel magic* on that individual as a free action at caster level 6.

Refuse Turning (Su): At 4th level, Zarek can protect nearby undead from turning attempts. Whenever an undead within 30 feet of the Zarek is targeted with a turning attempt, the Zarek can make an opposed Concentration check against the turn check. If the Zarek succeeds, the turning attempt is negated. This ability can only be used once per round.

Ghostly Blades (Su): A Zarek at 5th level can make her oathblade temporarily insubstantial as a swift action. For that round, the oathblade ignores armor as an incorporeal creature. The blade can also strike incorporeal creatures as a *ghost-touch* weapon. This ability may be used once a day. At 10th level, the Zarek may use this ability twice a day.

Disruptive Attacks (Ex): At 6th level, a Zarek has learned to make her attacks more disruptive to magical energies. Whenever her attacks prompt a Concentration check from a spellcaster, the Concentration check's DC is increased by the Zarek's class level.

Zarek Spell List

Zarek may choose spells from the following list. It is by no means exhaustive; many spells from other sources can be added to the Zarek list. In particular, consider any spell that directly improves melee ability, helps undead, or prevents spellcasting.

Entries marked with an asterisk (*) are detailed below.

1st level spells – *Blade of the Quilar**, *cause fear*, *detect undead*, *enlarge person*, *expeditious retreat*, *mage armor*, *magic weapon*, *mount*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*, *sleep*, *true strike*.

2nd level spells – *Acid arrow*, *bear's endurance*, *blur*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *command undead*, *darkness*, *darkvision*, *detect thoughts*, *false life*, *invisibility*, *levitate*, *mirror image*, *protection from arrows*, *resist energy*, *see invisibility*, *scare*, *summon swarm*, *touch of idiocy*.

3rd level spells – *Arcane sight*, *blink*, *dispel magic*, *displacement*, *fly*, *greater magic weapon*, *haste*, *heroism*, *hold person*, *invisibility sphere*, *keen edge*, *nondetection*, *protection from energy*, *phantom steed*, *rage*, *slow*, *vampiric touch*.

4th level spells – *Animate dead*, *bestow curse*, *confusion*, *crushing despair*, *dimension door*, *enervation*, *fear*, *fire shield*, *greater invisibility*, *lesser globe of invulnerability*, *locate creature*, *stoneskin*.

5th level spells – *Baleful polymorph*, *dismissal*, *feeblemind*, *overland flight*, *teleport*, *waves of fatigue*.

Blade of the Quilar

Necromancy

Level: Zarek 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 swift action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: One round

Your weapon radiates a dim purple glow, accompanied by a tangible chill. Every time you strike a living target in melee, you deal an additional 1d4 cold damage and gain hit points equal to this additional damage. You cannot exceed your maximum hit points through the use of this spell.

Secret Societies

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Fox Spirits and Hopping Corpses

by Nghi Vo

About the Author

Nghi Vo lives in a place that specifically forbids monsters within city limits after sunset, and thus is always pleasantly surprised by the lack of pitchfork-wielding mobs on her lawn. Her interests change quickly, but currently they include cigarettes, the Edwardians, circuses, *Titus Andronicus*, and tattooing. She is active in a variety of forms of playing pretend and tends to view the construct known as reality with a wary eye.

The past few years have seen an explosion in games set outside the standard fantasy genre. A significant portion of these games specifically mimic ancient Asia or throw in very Asian elements. Happily enough, this has drawn people with a variety of different expectations to the world of roleplaying. The question becomes: How do you prevent your game, set in ancient China or feudal Japan, from turning into a D&D chronicle with fu dogs instead of dragons?

The list below is in no way meant to give you a good idea of what Asian history and culture are actually like. In some ways it's specifically what history was *not*, but instead what people have dreamed of it being. The sources below, with a few exceptions, are not terribly concerned with accuracy but are all entertaining and will provide great inspiration for campaigns and one-shots.

Books

Bridge of Birds by Barry Hughart, is subtitled "A Novel of an Ancient China That Never Was." At first glance this is a light-hearted fantasy book, but like Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, the humor both conceals and throws into sharp relief a very real darkness. The heroes are Master Li Kao, an ancient and humorously cynical sage, and his assistant, the innocent Number Ten Ox. The pair clown, fight, and trick their way through the Kingdom of Chin, which is ruled by a supernatural tyrant that wouldn't be out of place in an *Exalted* campaign. This book is completely charming, and makes for a quick and easy read. You can suggest it to your players or base an entire campaign around it. The sequels, *The Story of the Stone* and *Eight Skilled Gentlemen*, don't quite match up in terms of pace and energy, but are still filled with mythical monsters and devious characters.

Suggested Worlds

Bushido - Fantasy Games Unlimited
Vampire: Kindred of the East - White Wolf
Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East - White Wolf
Big Eyes, Small Mouth - Guardians of Order
Feng Shui - Atlas Publishing
Exalted - White Wolf
Legend of the Five Rings - Alderac Entertainment Group
Usagi Yojimbo - Gold Rush Games
GURPS China - Steve Jackson Games
GURPS Japan - Steve Jackson Games
Rifts World Book 8: Japan - Palladium Books
Sengoku: Chanbara Roleplaying in Feudal Japan - Gold Rush Games

In a similar vein, Lawrence Yep's *Dragon* novels, beginning with *Dragon of the Lost Sea* and ending with *Dragon War*, also feature characters taken straight from Chinese myth and folklore. Being meant for younger readers doesn't stop them from being filled to the brim with bloody battles and extremely grim events. At one point, an entire town is drowned for vengeance and the characters suffer pain, heartbreak, and loss until the very end. This series possesses a very high fantasy feel, which could make for some interesting combinations with other, more standard fantasy settings.

Written in the 17th century, *Strange Tales From Make-Do Studio* is a collection of extremely short stories about the Chinese supernatural. The author, Pu Songling, used his demons and ghouls to subtly jab at the government of the time, but that didn't keep him from penning some wonderful stories. Unfortunately, the English edition of this collection only contains fifty-one stories out of the original five hundred, but the selections are good ones. This work features evil fox spirits, fox spirits who redeem, girls who come back from the dead for a post-mortem wedding, demons that wear the faces of wives, wolves that wear the skins of officials, and that's just a start. Many of the stories are fable-like in nature, making for very quick reading, and the woodcut illustrations only add to the appeal. If you read any one story out of this book, I would recommend "Painted Skin," a grotesque piece with some wonderfully harrowing details.

Rania Huntington's book, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative*, is more scholarly in nature, but is an invaluable resource for anyone running a game that involves kitsune, the famous Asian were-foxes. Besides retelling many stories about the impish nature of foxes themselves, she also explores the relationship between foxes and their hapless human victims. Huntington's work would be an excellent companion to any game that uses White Wolf's *Hengeyokai* supplement, which provides information on eastern shapeshifters.

It would be very difficult to have any discussion of the Asian supernatural and fantastical without at least mentioning *Journey to the West*. This classical novel, written by Wu Cheng'en, relates the adventures of an innocent monk leading a band of monsters to India in search of a religious sutra. The star of the story is

Sun Wukong, the monkey king who challenges Heaven itself. It is he who heads up the monk's rather inappropriate guard, which includes a ghoulish pig demon, and an exiled dragon. There are many different versions of this story; somewhat fitting since it started out as oral folklore, where nothing is stable or constant. In English, there is Arthur Waley's abridged *Monkey*, which condenses the hundred chapters of the journey to thirty, and Anthony C. Yu's somewhat drier but complete translation. You can find *Journey to the West* in many media, including several anime and any number of fairly recent martial arts movies.

Across the Nightingale Floor, the first book of Lian Hearn's *Tales of the Otori*, makes no claim to being historically accurate. Instead, this story of conflicting loyalties and supernatural arts concentrates on creating a world that is at once realistic and alien, seen through the eyes of the young hero, Takeo. In this world, invisibility and doppelgangers are very real weapons and the shadows seem alive with menace.

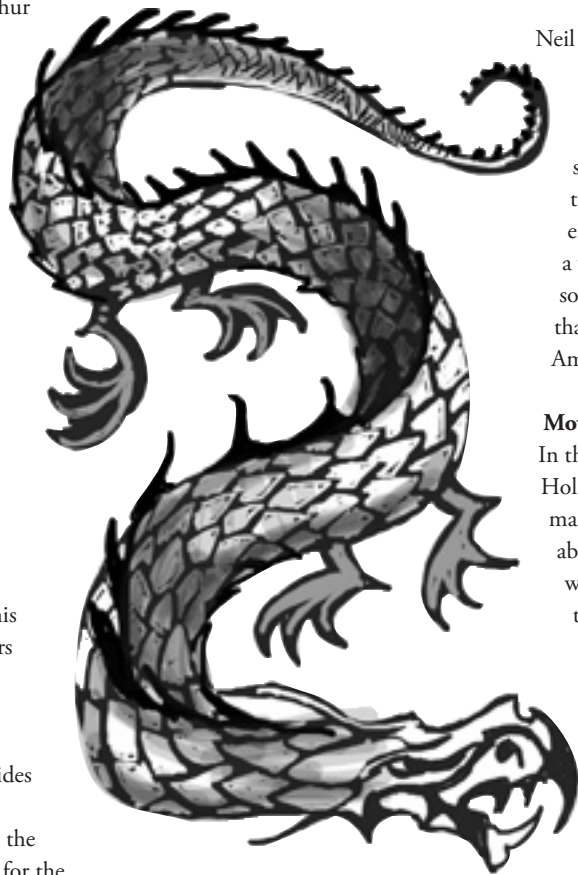
The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong provides a glimpse into the life of the crown princess of the Korean court during the late 18th century. This is not a read for the faint of heart, as it concerns the life, deeds, and particularly the unsettling death of her husband, Prince Sado. The prince was a disturbed young man with a penchant for martial arts and black magic whose crimes included attempted matricide and successful homicide.

This is a historical account, and is occasionally somewhat dry. I would recommend reading Hyegyong's fourth version of her memoir, where her husband's crimes and death are described most explicitly, though the entire book is full of good details about Korean royal life.

Similarly, Lady Murasaki Shikibu's novel *The Tale of Genji* is great for flavor and setting, even if its main focus is not the supernatural. One of the first novels recorded in the world, *The Tale of Genji* features the life and (many) loves of Prince Genji, the favored son of the Emperor. The entire novel is written in a very matter-of-fact tone, even when a woman's jealous spirit leaves her body to do harm to her rivals. Lady Murasaki's novel, especially when read in conjunction with *Across the Nightingale Floor*, makes excellent source material for the RPG *Legend of the Five Rings*, with its specifically Japanese setting.

The comic *Exiles*, written by Neil Gaiman as part of his extraordinary *Sandman* series, can be found in the tenth *Sandman* collection, *The Wake*. Delicately illustrated by Jon J. Muth, this story follows a sage who is sent to the far village of

Wei after a long and illustrious career as the emperor's advisor. It showcases the darker side of ambition and the long and drawn out fall from grace that was so possible in some of the emperors' courts. The voice of the sage is constant throughout and the art is a true pleasure.



Neil Gaiman also wrote *The Dream Hunters*, an illustrated novel about the power of dreams and the power of love set in feudal Japan. A fox spirit befriends a monk after failing to drive him from his home and ends up trying to protect him from a very dark fate. Gaiman introduces some exceptionally sinister demons that are ably illustrated by Yoshitaka Amano.

Movies

In the last five years, it seems that Hollywood has discovered the Asian martial arts drama. The funny thing about that is that it's been there the whole time, if you only knew where to look. First, and most obviously, is the movie that sparked America's interest in the martial arts genre, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Chow Yun Fat and Michelle Yeoh turn in stellar performances as supernaturally skilled fighters searching for the sword, Green Destiny. This film is great for setting ideas and details. The shooting took place in the beautiful inland province of Anhui, China and the scenery alone is worth the admission price.

As its name might suggest, *A Chinese Ghost Story* has plenty to recommend it to someone who's looking to add supernatural and horrific hooks to her game. Leslie Cheung plays a hapless tax collector who ends up falling in with zombies, tree devils, and exorcist monks while trying to figure out the puzzle of the woman who might be the love of his life. The effects leave a bit to be desired, especially after being jaded by the likes of *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, but the wire work is terrific and the story is more affecting than the stop-motion zombies might lead you to believe.

In a similar vein, *Dragon Gate Inn* mixes the dramatic with the absurd as forces converge on a small tavern on the border between two provinces. While there is much to be said about the sympathetic heroes and the menacing villains, the location of this film provides a good stop in the journey for any campaign, regardless of universe. The inn itself could easily be in Rokugan as in China. There are lots of fun details, from the armies of martial artists to the specialty meat buns that are mixed with human flesh. You can catch the 1966 version of the film, or the more recent 1992 edition, which is flashier but lacks the coherency of the original.

Tai Ji Zhang San Feng, also known as *The Tai Chi Master* and *Double Defender*, tells the story of the birth of Tai Chi. It captures a great deal of the martial arts genre following the main character from his start as a young temple acolyte through betrayal by the man he loves as a brother, to founding a martial art that finally brings him peace.

Finally, *The Bride With White Hair* is another story of star-crossed lovers, one the heir to a powerful sword school, the other an assassin and adopted daughter of a coven of monsters. Filmed in 1993, this over-the-top sword and sorcery drama exploits the implausibility of its own story. Instead of shying away from this fact, the movie celebrates it with hair that acts as a living weapon and geysers of blood. With its unlikely but wholly engaging stunts to the superhuman ability of the protagonists to absorb damage, this movie has all the ingredients of an *Exalted* campaign.

All of the sources listed above can provide a gamemaster with great jumping-off points or seeds for long-running campaigns. They're good ways to kick off an adventure or, in the event of an afternoon spent watching Hong Kong action flicks, to get your players on the same page. Try inserting some of these new flavors into your next gaming session and watch your players' eyes pop open in surprise.

In the Next Issue

Next time, we take to the mean streets of urban fantasy, presenting movies and novels that'll get you reaching for your rigger's kit and polishing up your cyberware. See you in June!



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PRESTIGIOUS PRODUCTIONS

Prestige Class Special Abilities

by Steve Russell

The soul of prestige class design is in the special abilities. Players rush to find out what unique capabilities a new prestige class offers and gamemasters scour them for talents that enhance the status of their non-player characters. Amongst class abilities rests the “coolness” factor of prestige class design. What follows is a way to help enhance this “coolness” factor without making the class so unbalanced that there is no choice but for one to ban it.

1. Prestige class abilities must match your theme

Addressing prestige class themes will be the subject of another article, but every single ability you grant should be part of that theme. If it does not shout out theme, the ability should not be part of the class. Often, you should come up with more abilities than you have prestige class levels. Prestige classes that allow for a choice of ability options within the class is one of the best, but rarely used design features. Examples: Archmage, Loremaster, and Hierophant.

I have chosen a very basic theme for the prestige class that I will present below: a low-level prestige class for a recurring character that serves as a henchman to the arch villain of my campaign.

2. Every level of a prestige class should grant an ability or an increase to an existing ability

This makes each level attractive by reducing the desire to simply “dip” into the class (taking only one or two levels to gain all the good abilities of the class). It also makes a character of different levels in this prestige class significantly distinct from each other. This can mean a great deal if the prestige class is part of an organization. Examples: Arcane Archer, Archmage, Assassin, Dragon Disciple, Duelist, Dwarven Defender, Hierophant, Horizon Walker, Loremaster, Shadow Dancer, and Thaumaturgist.

I have decided that my prestige class, minion for ill, will contain three class levels and that each of these levels will have an ability. In game, I plan to have the NPC advance a level every time the PCs do. This will help the PCs see that the world is not a static environment, giving me chances to display each new ability.

3. Prestige class abilities should be prestigious

Prestige classing is not multiclassing. The special abilities of a prestige class should not be attainable through multiclassing. Anyone can take a level in a base class, but not everyone can take a level in a prestige class. Bonus feats, or specific feats in general, are not always the best choice, as you are taking away from the core classes and robbing the prestige class of its unique nature. Feats should normally be prerequisites and not special abilities; you are creating a prestige class, not an accelerated feat chain. You also take away the “coolness” factor when you

grant something as mundane as an *existing* feat. If you are not designing for publication, granting feats that are not part of your *existing* game is a wonderful and excellent cheat if the feat fits your theme. Try to make all your abilities as unique as possible and not duplicate abilities granted by other prestige classes and/or base classes. Examples: Arcane Archer, Archmage, Dragon Disciple, Hierophant, and Loremaster.

I really want the minion for ill to have a feeling of being set against player characters by the very stars, fate, kismet, destiny, or whatever you may call it. Its abilities and presence spell nothing but misfortune for its master's foes. By manipulating chance and fate, I intend to grant him abilities that lend themselves to drama rather than combat and play off some standard villainous henchman clichés.

4. Prestige class abilities should be marginally stronger than core abilities within their own theme

At the same character level, a duelist is marginally stronger than an unarmored fighter using a one-handed weapon. You must apply the same parameters to the prestige class abilities you design. Yet, for the sake of balance, it should outshine core classes only within its theme. Take those feats that are not part of your existing game (assuming they are well balanced and match your theme) and make them slightly more powerful. Keep in mind all abilities should be appropriate for the prestige class' minimum character level. If a feat requires a base attack bonus of +8, or the minimum caster level of a spell is 7th, then the minimum prestige class character level should meet those minimum character level requirements or perhaps gain the ability a level earlier than a core character. Examples: Arcane Archer, Arcane Trickster, Archmage, Assassin, Duelist, Dwarven Defender, Eldritch Knight, Horizon Walker, Loremaster, Mystic Theurge, Shadowdancer, and Thaumaturgist.

Looking at the minion for ill, I have chosen some powerful abilities. At 1st level, an ability that at character level 3-5 gives a +2, +4, or +6 listed bonus to a single descriptor Will save. At 2nd level (at character level 4) allows for a ‘bring’em-back-alive-for-my-master death trap ability, at 3rd level (at character level 5), I have created a very limited form of rejuvenation.

5. Don't “frontload,” make them level-based

Frontloading is giving a prestige class a powerful first level ability or multiple first level abilities. Players rarely take these prestige classes for more than two levels. I am sure you can think of a prestige classes or two that someone only took one level in. If you want to give a strong low-level ability, make its power based on class level. The Assassin is the best example of this, the death attack DC increasing by one for each class level gained. The 3.5

version of the Duelist, which limits the Intelligence modifier's benefit to AC by class level, is a great example of how to revise an overly powerful first level ability. Another way is to give an ability a limit on uses per day, gaining more uses as you gain class levels. Examples: Arcane Archer, Assassin, and Duelist.

The minion for ill has only one 1st-level ability, its bonus governed by the minion's class level.

6. Place a “capstone” ability at the prestige class' last level

Whether it is a 13th, 10th, 5th, or 3rd level prestige class, the last level should have a “capstone” ability. A “capstone” is an ability that represents the penultimate of advancement in the class. It is an ability that marks out the masters of this class. The myths and legends that surround members of this class spring up from this ability and commoners think every member of this class possesses it.

Go wild with this ability. I start with this ability at the onset, working my way back down the prestige class abilities. If you're concerned about the balance of the ability, remember the minimum possible character level that this ability can be obtained. Entering a prestige class at 5th level makes its 10th level ability the equivalent of a 7th or 8th level spell. If you feel or calculate that you have gone for too much power, then institute a number of uses per day limitation. Not every class has this, but it really is something every prestige class can use. Examples: Arcane Archer, Dragon Disciple, Dwarven Defender, Loremaster, and Thaumaturgist.

I have always loved the idea of recurring characters, but in d20 that can be very hard as killing the enemy is one of the main ways to advance. For a “capstone” ability, I want my minions to return time and time again to the constant frustration of my players, who I hope will grow fond (yet frustrated) of a familiar face. It also makes for a very classic cliché.

7. Be a rules lawyer

You can design a wonderful prestige class with great flavor and flair, but if you do not define its applications you are making more work for the gamemaster. The bigger issue is that you are creating a potential conflict between players and the gamemaster, disrupting a game you were trying to augment. Write very clear explanations of what bonuses and/or advantages an ability confers and/or enhances, and when they apply. Write down the abilities in the order they appear on your table and include the level that the ability is gained in the description. Always include in the title of the ability whether it is an (Ex) extraordinary, (Su) supernatural, or (Sp) spell-like ability. Use the advancing formula for class DCs (10+ prestige class level + relevant ability modifier) and do not forget uses per day. When deciding if abilities should apply to a situation, leave that determination to the player, not to the gamemaster. If you are leaving it to the gamemaster, your ability is unbalanced and you are expecting the GM to moderate its effects for you. The gamemaster has enough work to do and does not need another thing to arbitrate.

A minion for ill must serve an evil-aligned villain, possibly as a cohort. You can choose other villains as well, but you only

gain the penalties of this class against the chosen villains. When capturing foes, they must be flat footed and unaware of your attack, or in other words, beyond surprised. I must therefore define what being unaware is. My formula is save vs. the effect, but I have to be careful to make this dramatic, not murderous, so no coup de grace. I also thought about immunities. Lastly, I want a recurring character, but a player might want to take levels in this class in an evil campaign rather than a gamemaster using it for an NPC, so effective character level (ECL) comes into play. Also, there has to be a limitation. I am not looking to make the henchman immortal. Leave that for the villain.

8. Break the rules

Not every prestige class follows all of these rules. The blackguard is still one of my favorite prestige classes and it breaks most of the rules on this list. Don't be afraid to try something different. There are so many out there nowadays, but there is still plenty of room for great prestige classes. My most recent favorites include the Luckstealer (*Races of the Wild*) and the Reliquarian (*Relics & Rituals: Excalibur*).

The minion for ill prestige class breaks a few rules: a 2nd level character can meet its requirements and it uses the very subjective definition of challenge rating.

MINION FOR ILL PRESTIGE CLASS

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

To qualify to become a minion for ill a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any evil.

Feats: Skill Focus: Profession (servant).

Skills: Hide 2 ranks, Move Silently 2 ranks, Profession (servant) 5 ranks.

Special: Serve as a henchman or cohort for an evil-aligned character who is at least two character levels higher than you.

Class Skills

The minion for ill's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), Tumble (Dex), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are features of the minion for ill prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A minion for ill gains no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

Destined to Serve (Ex): At 1st level, choose an evil-aligned villain to serve who is at least two character levels higher than you. You can choose other villains as well, but you gain the penalties of this class against all chosen villains. The minion for ill gains a +2 profane bonus per class level vs. mind-affecting

spells or effects. Against chosen villains, you lose this benefit and suffer a -2 profane penalty per class level vs. all spells and effects.

Unfortunate Ambush (Su): At 2nd level you gain the ability to twist fate and cause great misfortune to those you ambush. When an opponent is flat-footed and unaware of your attack (not just surprised but completely unaware of the attack), requiring the minion for ill to make successful Hide and Move Silently checks, and you successfully deal non-lethal damage, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + your minion for ill's class level + your Cha modifier) or be knocked unconscious for 2d6 minutes. If a foe attempts to coup de grace the victim, the victim is dealt damage, or the victim is placed in immediate mortal danger by a foe, the victim awakens and it is immediately his turn in the initiative order unless he has already acted this turn. Creatures immune to critical hits or sneak attacks are immune to this ability.

Recurring Spirit (Su): At 3rd level you gain a benefit from your dedicated service. Your chosen villain seeks to retain your service. If you are killed or destroyed you make a Profession (servant) check (DC 15 + the Challenge Rating of what destroyed or killed you). You can use this ability a number of times equal to 1 + your Charisma bonus (if any). If successful, you are raised, resurrected, reincarnated, animated, and/or otherwise returned to the chosen villain's service (your choice). If your chosen villain is dead or destroyed, you may not make this check. If your chosen villain is returned to existence, you may make this check regardless of the intervening time. Use of this ability does not require a body, but the servant may then only come back as an incorporeal undead. Regardless of how you are returned, your original estimated character level cannot be increased by this ability. (Example: Lux Mea is a 3rd level ranger, 3rd level minion of ill that is disintegrated by a 10th level wizard. She succeeds on a DC 25 Profession check, so her lich master returns her to its service as a ghost. She must sacrifice 5 character levels so that her ECL remains 6. She is now a first level ranger with the ghost template.)

Author Bio

Steven "Quillion" Russell has been a rabid gamemaster for the past 15+ years. Currently running the World's Largest Dungeon, he is the author of E.N. Guilds: League of Inspired Being, author and project manager of the Here There Be Monsters series, has written for RPGObjects, Bastion Press, Expeditious Retreat Press, the Silven Trumpeter, Silven Crossroads, Steampower Publishing, and is a staff reviewer for d20 Magazine Rack. In his spare time he enjoys wine, women, and song.

The Minion for Ill

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	Destined to Serve
2nd	+2	+2	+2	+0	Unfortunate Ambush
3rd	+3	+3	+3	+1	Recurring Spirit

THE HEART RETURNS

Part 20 in the Starlanko Series

by Matthew J Hanson

“...After the unfortunate death of her mother, Insel ascended to the throne, taking the name Lavion XII. Her first act as queen was to outlaw the raising of bovines to a height of three or more feet off the ground, thus ensuring...”

Starlanko the Magnificent’s mind once again lapsed out of focus. He did not particularly care what obscure laws the ancient queens of Camarian enacted, not as though he had anything else to talk about. And it wasn’t like he could just up and walk away.

Starlanko’s associate, Redreck the Fierce, sat across from him, barely four feet distance. The armor-plated warrior seemed calm, his mind in a state of peace. Redreck was the only other person in the room, but he was not the one speaking.

No, Starlanko the Magnificent owed his current lectures on the history of Camarian’s ruling family to Funbane, Starlanko’s talking sword. A sword who incidentally lacked any of the abilities that could be used in a fight. But he knew an awful lot about history. And nobility. And the history of nobility.

“...because the proclamation did not specifically mention sheep. The queen, however, did not see things quite that way. She—prithee forgive the interruption master, but thou art blinking again.”

Starlanko snapped back to reality. He noticed the soft white pulsation emitting from Redreck first, but looking at his own hand Starlanko saw that he too was blinking. “Ah, yes. So it seems. I was so absorbed in your story that I didn’t realize it.”

“I beg thy pardon sir, I shall try to be less interesting.”

Starlanko the Magnificent took two vials of a blue, airy liquid from the pouch on his belt, and passed one to Redreck the Fierce. They tossed back the potions, and instantly the blinking stopped.

“Sir, might I enquire why thou art cluttering thy belt with all those potions when you couldst put them in thy magic bag?” Funbane asked.

“Vox is holding onto my bag of holding while we wait

down here.”

“Miss Bibsly needed it for the mission?”

“No,” said Starlanko, “It has more to do with the fact that placing one extradimensional space within another extradimensional space tends to disturb reality as we know it and rips a hole into the astral plane.”

“I’m sorry sir, but I do not quite grasp thy meaning.”

“Bad things would happen,” Starlanko surmised. “So, were you saying something about sheep?”

“Yay, I was...” Funbane began. “Thou thinkest not she hath forgotten us? Dost thee?”

“No, Funbane, I’m sure it’s just taking a little longer than she expected.” The ‘she’ that Starlanko and Funbane referred to was Vox, a master thief and the final member in Starlanko’s motley group of adventurers. At the moment, they were waiting for Vox, and had nothing to do until she needed them.

“Thou dost not think sir that... that she...”

“No, Funbane, I do not think that Vox concocted an elaborate scheme involving a fake mission to retrieve the Elven Poet Prince’s stolen heart simply so that she could abandon us in this incommensurable hole.”

“Nay sir!” Funbane protested. “I would not dare to question good Miss Bibsly’s honor.” Starlanko and his other associates recently learned that Vox’s real name was Bibsly, and that she was the daughter of an elven aristocrat. Despite this, Starlanko doubted very much that Vox had an abundant surplus of honor. Still, he trusted her in this matter, probably because he knew that if she did not follow through on the mission the entire elven kingdom of Avalos would not rest until she was found.

“I am simply worried...” Funbane continued. “Sir, what if she canst not open the hole? What if she...”

Funbane did not need to finish. Swords do not need food, water, nor air, but Starlanko and Redreck were creatures of flesh and blood. The hole in which they waited was not really a hole as much as an extradimensional space, cut off from the rest of

reality except for a magic opening that Vox carried. And that opening was currently sealed. They had brought enough bottled air to last for days, and if he needed to Starlanko could probably arrange a more permanent way to breathe. But if worse came to worse, he didn't know how long he would want to stay locked in a hole with nothing to do except listen to the lectures of an inanimate object.

"I'm sure she's alright," said Starlanko. "Or maybe she's left us in here to die."

Just then the sky opened up. The space above was a slightly lighter shade of black, and against it appeared the silhouette of an elven woman. "I think I might need you," Vox whispered.

Starlanko sheathed his sword and climbed the ladder out of the hole. Redreck soon followed. They stood in a dark hallway. Starlanko cast a spell upon himself and Redreck that allowed them to see without light. Before him was a door of wrought iron covered with draconic runes, which promised death to "all ye who enter here." In the other direction, the hallway extended as far as the eye could see.

"What is it?" Starlanko asked.

"Statues," Vox replied and she nodded towards the door.

"Have you checked anything for traps?"

"Not inside," Vox replied. "I've no idea what causes them to animate and attack us."

"So a preemptive strike then?" Starlanko asked. "Let's have a look."

Vox swung the door open to reveal a large square room with a nearly identical iron door on the opposite side. In each corner of the room stood four identical stone statues. Each was nine feet tall and was carved to resemble a humanoid warrior in spiked armor with terrible, crushing fists.

"Golems. Luckily I have something prepared for just such an occasion." Starlanko withdrew a scroll from his case and cast it upon the statues. Had they been normal stone they would have transmuted to a pile of mud, but these were of course no normal statues.

Pinpoints of light gleamed in the statues' eyes, and with a low grinding sound they spun towards Starlanko and attempted to charge. Fortunately, Starlanko's spell had the intended effect of slowing the Golems to a crawl. Redreck, on the other hand, rushed forward to meet the golems head on, his adamantine sword blazing.

Click.

Halfway through Redreck's charge he stepped on what in hindsight was obviously a pressure plate. A burst of fire engulfed the room, and all of its inhabitants, including the four golems. Unfortunately for Starlanko and associates, the golems were

completely unscathed by the fire. Even more unfortunately, Redreck was not.

"You've got to get in there," Starlanko said.

"Are you crazy?" Vox replied.

"You've got to disarm those traps."

"Those things will pound me to goo."

Redreck slashed a huge gash in the torso of one of the golems as its mighty fist clashed against his shield. Another of the golems shifted its feet and there was another click and another explosion, this time of lightning.

"Fine," Starlanko quickly wove a pattern of magic words and gestures. He tapped Vox and she vanished. "Now they can't see you. Will you just get in there?"

"What about the explosions?"

"Can't you evade them?"

"Yeah, but can't you do something to help me out with that?"

Redreck grunted as his sword crashed through one of the statues, reducing it to rubble. At the same instant another golem struck Redreck squarely in the back. Then another click followed by a burst of cold. Redreck was not looking so hot.

"Fine!" Starlanko gasped, and he wove another spell to increase Vox's resistance. "Now just get in there!" He listened for Vox's footsteps as she moved towards the magical trap, but heard nothing. "Vox?" he inquired to no response. He waved his hands in the area that Vox had recently occupied, but touched nothing.

"Little help," Redreck gasped from the battle. Another stone warrior fell under Redreck's sword, but the flesh and blood warrior was battered and bleeding. Destroying two golems had taken more than half his energy.

Starlanko reached into his pocket and produced a crystal sphere filled with a translucent gold liquid. Starlanko threw the orb at Redreck, and when it impacted Starlanko saw some of the fighter's wounds closing. Some, but not nearly enough.

There was another clank of steel crashing against stone. It was not the thundering clank of Redreck's adamantine bastard sword bursting through stone. It was more of a clink, the sounds of a small, steel dagger tapping the stone and having no noticeable effect.

No noticeable damage to the stone, that is. It did manage to momentarily distract the golem, and allowed Redreck to land a devastating blow that splintered its torso, breaking it in two. After her attack, Vox reappeared directly behind the now recently destroyed golem. There were no more clicks.

Starlanko threw another healing sphere at the injured warrior, and the latter again recovered slightly.

Redreck had found his groove. He was battered, but his sword flew through the air and crashed into the remaining stone golem. In a matter of seconds he hacked the animated statue to tiny bits. Redreck took the opportunity to quaff a couple potions, returning him to his full strength. “Statues,” he muttered.

Vox swept the rest of the room for any traps she had missed. Then examined the second iron door in great detail. Finally satisfied that there was nothing to find, she swung the door open.

The room beyond was wide and long, beyond what any of the adventurers could see, and (as far as they could see) it was empty except for a stone podium, illuminated by a pillar of light. Upon the podium, a glass cover enclosed a beating heart. The heart of Dallius, the poet prince.

“Huzzah! Our goal is met!” exclaimed Funbane.

“Easy sword,” Vox whispered, “we’re not there yet.” She scanned the ground before her, searching for pressure plates, trip lines, mystic runes, thermal anomalies, strange odors, displaced dust particles, and any other sign that something was out of the ordinary. At last Vox satisfied her paranoia and took a step forwards. Then she repeated the process.

They inched forward, crossing nearly halfway to the podium in a mere thirty minutes.

“For crying out loud! There aren’t any traps on the floor!”

The party spun their heads towards to the source of the voice. Starlanko noticed only a faint glimmer of light reflecting off two eyeballs, and a mouth full of white teeth.

“I knew you were there,” Vox scoffed.

“You did not,” the stranger replied.

“I just didn’t want you to know that I knew,” Vox replied.

“No you didn’t. I was totally hiding in shadows,” the owner of the voice came slightly into the light. She was the most beautiful elf Starlanko had ever seen. Her eyes were stars, her lips roses, and her hair a host of other clichés.

“Hiding very poorly. I bet you can’t even hide while being observed.”

“I can too,” the beautiful elf retorted. “Watch.” She tried to return to the shadows, but even Starlanko could follow where she went.

Vox took a copper piece from her belt pouch and flung it at the elf.

New Magic Item: Cure Spheres

Cure Spheres

Cure spheres are crystal spheres filled with a potion-like liquid that heals on contact. A creature holding a *cure sphere* can automatically break the sphere and apply it to himself as a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. Alternatively, a character can throw the *cure sphere*, making a ranged touch attack. The crystal sphere has a range increment of 10 feet, and requires no proficiency to use. A successful attack indicates that the sphere heals the target. If the attack misses, the sphere shatters against another surface and is destroyed. The shattered crystal from a sphere does not provide any substantial threat. A single creature can only benefit from one healing sphere in a single round. If the target is struck with multiple spheres in a round, those beyond the first are wasted.

Cure spheres come in three strengths: *light* (heals 1d8+1), *moderate* (heals 2d8+3), and *serious* (heals 3d8+5).

Faint conjuration; CL 1st (*light*), 3rd (*moderate*), or 5th (*serious*); Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, and either *cure light wounds* (*light*), *cure moderate wounds* (*moderate*), or *cure serious wounds* (*serious*); Price 100 gp (*light*), 600 gp (*moderate*), 1,500 gp (*serious*).

“Ouch.”

Starlanko looked to the space where Vox had been, but his companion was gone.

“Hey,” the beautiful elf said. “Where did you go?”

A copper coin flew from out of nowhere and struck the elf on the back of the head. “Cut it out!” she demanded.

“No, you cut it out,” Vox’s voice came from the darkness.

“You cut it out!”

“You cut it out.”

“You!”

“You.”

“Make me!” Copper coin. “Ouch.”

“I hate to interrupt,” Starlanko interrupted, “but do you two know each other?”

“Oh, we go way back,” Vox said as she emerged from the shadows. “I would have introduced her, but I can’t seem to remember her name.”

“You do too!”

“Perhaps, but I want to hear you say it.”

“My name is—” the elf began. “My name is V—it’s Vo—Vo—V... My name is Leeshar.”

“Just Leeshar?” Vox inquired.

“Yes,” Leeshar grit her teeth. “Just Leeshar.”

“But it wasn’t always just Leeshar,” Vox prodded.

“No.”

“Leeshar and I went to school together,” Vox explained, “and she was always the favorite. She was the first in our class, she was pretty, she was popular, and I was... not. She was the standard that I was always held to. My professors, my peers, my mother: ‘Why can’t you be as smart as Vox Leeshar? Why can’t you be as sweet as Vox Leeshar? Why can’t you be more like Vox Leeshar?’”

“So you stole her name,” Starlanko concluded.

“I finally found something that I was better at.”

“Excuse me?” Leeshar said, “I stole the heart from the Poet Prince. Have you ever stolen anybody’s heart?”

Vox thought for a moment. Starlanko imagined her going through a checklist of everything she had stolen to see if a living heart was among them.

“No,” she finally admitted. “You win again, Leeshar. You are a better thief than I. Now that you’ve proven it, may we return the heart to its rightful owner?”

“Not so fast,” Leeshar said. She quickly placed herself between Vox and the heart. “You can have it, but I want something in exchange.”

“I’ve already admitted defeat. What more could you possibly want?”

Leeshar pasted a smile across her face. It was the smile of somebody who practiced in a mirror to insure that she got it just right. “I want my name back.”

“Over my dead body,” Vox hissed.

“That can be arranged,” Leeshar responded. She ran a finger across the glass case covering the heart. “As long as I possess this heart, the entire kingdom of Avalos is at my mercy.”

Vox sighed. “All right. You have a deal. Here.” Vox tossed the magic hole that Starlanko had so recently occupied to Leeshar. “I keep the deed in here.”

“In a piece of fabric?”

“It’s a portable hole.” Vox rolled her eyes. “You unroll it on the floor and it opens into an extradimensional space.”

Leeshar unrolled the hole on the floor. She peered down. “I don’t see anything.”

Author’s Bio

Matthew J. Hanson is an aspiring d20 designer and playwright from Minneapolis, Minnesota. His character of Starlanko the Magnificent is also featured in *50 New Ways to Blow Things Up*. In addition to his work for Silven Publishing, he has contributed to books from E.N. Publishing and Expeditious Retreat Press and published the occasional article in *Dragon Magazine*. If you would like to learn more about Matthew, please visit his website at www.matthewjhanson.com.

“Oh it’s there. Way down in the bottom in a hidden nook.”

Leeshar put one foot on the top rung of the ladder that lead into the hole. “Wait a minute. This is some kind of trick isn’t it? You’re going to wait for me to go down into the hole, then you’ll seal it up over me.”

“Leeshar, I don’t like you, but even I have my limits. I swear I will not close the hole after you go into it.”

“I see.” Leeshar took a second step down the ladder. “Wait a minute. How do I know you aren’t lying to me?”

“Oh, haven’t you heard? I’m trying to become lawful.”

“It’s true,” Starlanko added, “and she’s making good progress.”

“I see.” Leeshar took a third step down the ladder.

Vox still carried Starlanko the Magnificent’s bag of holding at her side, but now with a flick of her wrist, she loosened the bag, and flung it through the air. Time slowed as the bag traced a lazy arc through the air. It came down right in the center of the open portable hole.

There was a strange sucking sound as the two extradimensional spaces twisted each other apart and tore a hole in reality, sucking all of their contents into the astral plane. Including Leeshar.

“I only said I wouldn’t close it.”

“My spell book was in that bag,” Starlanko muttered.

“It was totally worth it,” Vox said. Deep in his heart, Starlanko knew she was right.

SILVEN PUBLISHING INTERVIEWS

MONTE COOK

Interviewed by: Kosala Ubayasekara
&
Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Silven: Hi, and thanks for taking some questions from us today. You have done a few well publicized Q&As and done public press and marketing yourself on the Ptolus product, so let's try and focus our chat today on areas you have not yet covered in depth. By now everyone should know pretty much what the product is about, so let's get started by going into WHO it's for. Who is the target group, is it for players and DMs or is it mostly targeted at DMs? Will a new entrant to the D&D game have uses for the book or is this targeted at gamers with some experience behind them? What will each of these target groups get when purchasing this product?

Monte: Well, like most setting books, it's written for DMs, but I imagine that players will buy it too to become even more familiar with the setting. However, since it's a big expensive book with plenty of sections that players *shouldn't* read, we've created a special *Player's Guide to Ptolus*. This book exists not only as the first chapter of the larger book, but as a special, separate pdf file on the CD-Rom that comes with the book so that you don't have to photocopy that chapter in order to give it to your players. If you want something more polished (not something printed out on your inkjet), however, you can get a print version of the *Player's Guide* for only about three dollars, starting in May. It'll be a 32 page book, and it's entirely aimed at players.

Ptolus is aimed at experienced players, although as I look back on it now I can see that because of the level of detail and organization, it's actually pretty friendly to the newer DM. This is because of the easy-to-use nature of the book, but also because so much has already been done for you. You can use Ptolus as a setting for your own adventures, and there's tons of material in there to help you do that. However, if you don't have the time or the experience or the inclination to do that, there's everything you need in there to run a full campaign without having to create anything on your own.

Silven: Let's face it: the book is huge. At more than 600 pages it's so large it makes large books look small. There is an insane amount of awesome artwork, amazing production values, masses of content. Here at Silven, we dig it when publishers embark on projects no other publisher has ever attempted. How much did the nature of doing it "huge" influence the decision to do this project at all? After all, you could just as easily have released this as a selection of 100 page products, or one 200

odd page product followed by lesser supplements like most other campaign settings are released. For the sake of practicality for gamers, smaller products might have made the setting more portable between gaming sessions or easier to handle as a reference.

When you were first envisioning this idea, was it always destined to be something grand in every way – and if so, what makes the Ptolus setting uniquely suited to this?

Monte: It was something we wanted to do grand in every way. We did this for a lot of reasons, but one of the main ones was simply that it hadn't really been done before—not like this, anyway. That said, I didn't just want to do huge for huge's sake. It's not hard to just fill pages with words. I wanted to create something that was deluxe in every conceivable way: in its size, its appearance, its organization, its design, its editing—everything. And so that's what we did.

Ultimately, Ptolus was a natural for this because if I was going to create a setting like this from scratch, it would have taken me twice as long, at least. Ptolus was already a living setting when we decided to do this product, and I already had an entire file cabinet full of information about it. Plus, if you're talking about a product that's deluxe in every way, how about one of material playtested by game industry professionals and veterans over many years? That's a deluxe feature in and of itself, really.

Silven: We talked about the production values, so let's get deeper into it. The layout work and the artwork are totally stunning in the previews you have released. I can't wait to get this book in my hands just to thumb through it. Tell us about the production challenges that had to be overcome to get Ptolus ready at the level of exceptional quality you have arrived at? Are we going to see more layout previews before it's released? You mentioned often using travel guides as inspiration, how has that translated into the products design specifically?

Monte: We will be doing a lot more previews, the first of which just went up as I write this. [*Publisher's Note: To see the preview Monte is talking about, [click here.](#)*] We started commissioning the art literally two years ago to make sure that we could get it all in on time simply because there's so much of it. Plus, we were sometimes asking artists and graphic designers to give us images of stuff they weren't always used to producing—street

signs, wanted posters, bottle labels, and things like that. (That all came directly from looking at travel books. The best of them give you a lot of visuals to give you a feel for the place—top to bottom—before you even get there. When writing about a place that you can *never* get to, like Ptolus, that's perhaps even more important.) The maps turned out to be an even greater challenge, however, not only because of the enormous number of them (about 50 pages, I think), but because of the level of detail we wanted. The poster map, for example, is truly a thing of beauty, and what's more, a kind of awe. There's about 9,000 individually designed buildings on it. In the end, if your character buys (or rents) a house in Ptolus, you won't have to point at a map and say "it's in this area," you'll be able to point right at it and say "this building here—that's the one." Ed Bourelle, the cartographer, really pulled out all the stops.

Basically, though, what we did was throw out all our assumptions at the beginning of what a game book should look like, and started from scratch, using other books as a models. That was probably the best thing we did.

Silven: What were the game development challenges? It's hard enough to do a 64 page book full of rules and stats and get them right in every detail, how does one do a 600+ page book and maintain the level of focus to get the game mechanics, stat blocks and rules to balance and play correctly?

Monte: Frankly, I don't even know where to begin. In fact, I'm writing monthly Design Diary columns on montecook.com cataloging all the design challenges. I will say this: a 672 page book may be the length of about ten 64 page books, but it's not at all like writing ten such books. It's much more daunting. Much harder. Because all the material has to hang together. Each bit has to be interesting on its own while still just being a part of a whole. Something I write in November has to agree with some reference I wrote in April. Of the year before. The biggest challenge is just the volume of material to stay on top of. It's probably that, more than anything, that's made me realize that it's super important to do everything I can make the book easy to use for the DM.

Silven: What are your favorite locations in Ptolus and why?

Monte: That's really hard. It almost depends on what kind of a mood I'm in. See, I was always the annoying DM growing up who would create a campaign, start the players in it, but then suddenly get it into my head to want to do something else, and scrap the campaign to start a new one. So to deal with my own foibles in this regard, I tend to create campaigns where it's easy to switch gears. So in Ptolus, you can run a solve-the-mystery adventure and follow it up immediately with a dungeon crawl, a manhunt, or whatever.

What I'm getting at is that today, I might tell you that my favorite locations in Ptolus are:

1. **Dwarvenhearth**, an ancient underground city of the dwarves, now abandoned because the dwarves no longer feel worthy of its greatness. I like Dwarvenhearth because it's sort of a big "dungeon" to explore, but also because of the pathos involved. I see dwarves as being extremely dedicated to honor and their own ideals, and to them Dwarvenhearth was like a promised land. About a thousand years ago, their actions made them (in their own eyes anyway) unworthy of the place, and so they sealed it up and left. But they left behind guardians—dwarves so committed to the ideal of keeping Dwarvenhearth safe forever that they underwent a ritual which cost them their very souls, turning them into eternal, soulless guardians. You can't reason with these guardians, but can you really bring yourself to slay them?

2. **Castle Shard**, a fortress built around a gigantic crystal of mysterious origin and power. Something (perhaps the crystal itself?) chooses figures within the city to become the lords of the castle, and they are granted great power and influence. The current lords,

Zavere and Rill, and two very interesting characters (he an ex-blackguard now fighter and she an ex-paladin now sorceress) known mostly for their bizarre parties. Castle Shard represents, in a way, the cool kids in school whose clique you really want to be a part

of—impressing the Lords of Castle Shard is a significant thing, and getting them to be your allies seems like a reward in and of itself. But since they're not actual royalty or rulers (in fact seem outside of such concerns), there's no anti-authority resentment to feel toward them. Plus, there's a lot of mystery about what's really going on with them, which is fun.

3. **Myraeth's Oddities**, a small shop in the middle of the city. A lot of players hear about Myraeth's and assume that it's important because it sells magic items (among other things). These people, however, are missing the point. See, when adventurers come back from a mission, they've invariably got a bunch of weird loot—gems, jewelry, works of art, golden idols, candlesticks, etc. Plus, some magic items that they can't use. Myraeth has carved out his niche by being willing to buy (and then re-sell) practically anything. So adventurers can come here and liquidate all of their haul at one place (and then check out to see if anyone else has brought in anything interesting that they'd want to buy). I like Myraeth's because it's the kind of place that only adventurers know about or care about, which means that when you go in, it's always full of interesting customers.

I also just like it because it's simply a logical outgrowth of having D&D-style adventurers in the world. I often liken



continued on page 36

INFO CHECKS

A Knowledge (local) or Gather Information check can reveal some facts about local guilds:

The Ironworkers' Guild is a guild in Ptolus (DC 10).

The Masons' and Ironworkers' Guilds are enemies (DC 15).

The Masons' Guild is quite corrupt (DC 20).

The Masons work for the Balacazars (DC 25).



Longfingers Guild, page 128

Rumor has it that the Masons' Guild is poised to go to war with the powerful Ironworkers' Guild (see page 183).

Balacazars, page 100

Pared Cobart is a short, ill-tempered man with brown hair and a beard.

LONGDRAUGHT BREWERY

☒ Coldheart Street (#299, I8); see map, page 180 **1** 1,000 gp

Just another in the list of places responsible for the foul odors of the Guildsman District, the Longdraught Brewery is the largest and best known brewery in Ptolus. Owned by Gavel Longdraught (male gnome expert11), the brewery employs two dozen workers.

Scenario: Having met and befriended brewery worker Torel Sellek (male human commoner2) in a tavern the night previous, the player characters come to the brewery to return a pair of gloves he left behind. When they arrive, they discover that Torel never came to work that day. Gavel tells the PCs where the man lives, and if they go to his apartment, they find his distraught wife, who says he never came home last night. A bit more investigation reveals that Torel was mugged and killed. It requires either divination magic or some serious legwork, but—if they desire—the PCs can track down the mugger and exact vengeance as they see fit. However, the thief belongs to the **Longfingers Guild**, and crossing them results in ungentle retaliation on their part.



MASONS' GUILDHALL

☒ Ring Road (#309, K9); see map, page 180 **1** 5,500 gp

This three-story building of dark red brick has sharp corners and a severe appearance. Like its rival, the Ironworkers' Guild, this guild of bricklayers and stoneworkers has a number of dwarves in its ranks. Unlike the Ironworkers', however, the Masons' Guild is a particularly corrupt group, its leadership long associated with organized crime (the **Balacazars**). This relationship often works to the guild's advantage: People fear them. "Don't cross the Masons," folks say or, more subtly, "Don't try to break a brick." Members of the Masons' Guild expect bribes and kickbacks in addition to their normal pay, making the affordable-sounding standardized prices for their work not nearly so reasonable.

The guildmaster, **Pared Cobart** (male human expert11), employs a veritable army of thugs as guards for his fortresslike guildhall and bodyguards for himself and other high-ranking

members. They also act as enforcers to intimidate those unwilling to pay the Masons' expected inducements. Pared pays a percentage of all guild jobs, as well as guild dues, to the Balacazars. While the Masons technically are a part of the criminal organization, the crime family never asks the guild for anything more than money.

THE MIDDEN HEAPS

☒ Midden Street (#310, J9); see map, page 189 **1** 1,000 gp

This is a great trash dump backed up against the southern city wall. While sewage and a lot of other waste and trash flows into the King's River and thus into the bay, a great deal gets dumped in the surprisingly large wasteyard of the Guildsman District.

Other garbage heaps are located just outside of Ptolus on both the north and south ends of the city, but these are smaller than the Midden Heaps of the Guildsman District. Those outside the city are burned in the spring and autumn, but aside from a few small fires (some inadvertent, some not), the heaps within the city walls are left to rot. Much of the refuse in the

Midden Heaps is slag and scoria from the foundries, scrap iron, and other bits of chaff and debris from the manufactories. Thus, while it's an eyesore, the place doesn't reek overmuch of organic waste. (It doesn't really stink a lot worse than the rest of the district.)

Anyone visiting the Midden Heaps comes first to a pair of small wooden buildings that house the scrap merchants. These merchants collect small fees on behalf of the city from people who bring their trash here (these independent contractors often overcharge and skim off the excess). They also sell scrap metal and other junk that someone might want, although those who wander into the heaps to look for scrap do so at their own risk. A broken item costs about one quarter its normal price. Scrap of other kinds normally runs about 5 cp per pound. Choice bits found by the scrap merchants are kept in the small shed east of the office.

The chief scrap merchant is Delloch Boundstone (male dwarf expert7). There's always at least one other agent with him, usually a human commoner—they come and go frequently (no one stays at the job long). Delloch also, of

course, has a guard dog: a hulking rottweiler with a vicious demeanor (use a dire wolf's stats).

The majority of the Midden Heaps is just what it sounds like: great mounds of scrap, trash, and waste. Many of the heaps rise twenty or even thirty feet, which makes wandering among them something of a labyrinthine experience. A rusted winch-driven crane sits behind one of the buildings. Once used to raise massive hunks of rubbish to the tops of the heaps, it long ago fell into disuse.

It comes as no surprise to anyone in Ptolus that such creatures as ratmen, goblins, and even otyughs make their homes among the refuse in the Midden Heaps. They dig their own hidey-holes and tunnels through the piles of waste and usually can get around the place without coming to the surface. Beneath at least one of the oldest, most massive heaps is a hidden entrance down into some underground warrens that eventually join up with the [sewer system](#). Near the center of the Midden Heaps lies a pool of oily waste water, scourgings, and runoff. It is full of horribly poisonous contaminants in which dwell a few dangerous oozes.

The humanoids and even the otyughs are smart enough to leave the scrap merchants alone, but they don't hesitate to attack anyone else that comes into the wasteyard. And, of course, the oozes in the midden heaps don't discriminate at all.

Scenario: Someone is using trash from the Midden Heaps to create strange constructs called scrap golems (treat them as flesh golems with an additional +4 bonus to natural armor, a +2 modifier to CR, and the ability to repair themselves 1 hp for every pound of loose, solid, nonliving matter that is added to their damaged form as a full-round action). These things wander out of the wasteyard and menace passers-by, but then fall apart after a short while.

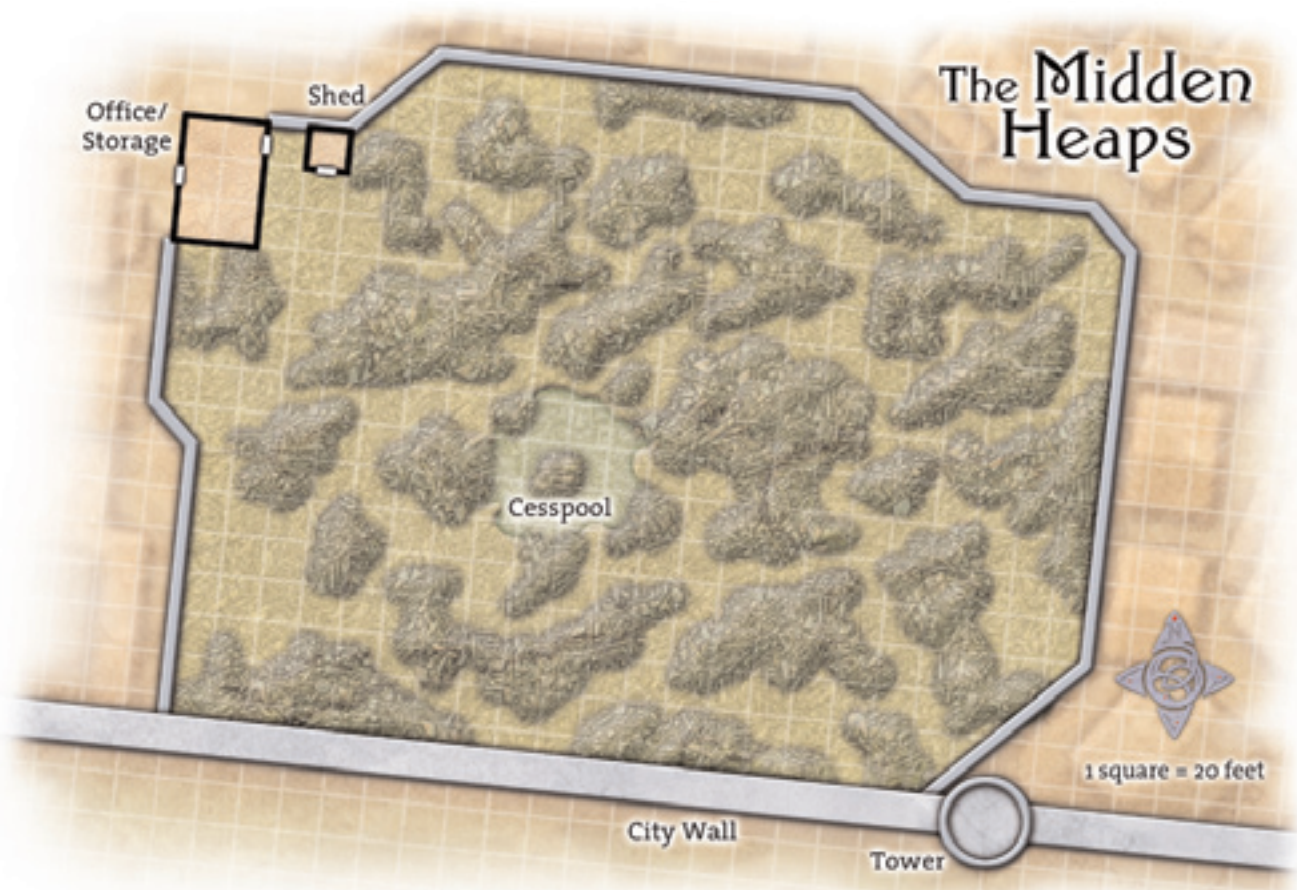
Their creator is a ratman mutant born with the ability to create these scrap golems once per day, but they last for only about thirty minutes. The city is offering a 2,000 gp reward to anyone who will put a stop to the golem attacks, but Ularis Gadare ([Kevris Killraven's lieutenant](#) in the Guildsman District) is quietly promising 5,000 gp to anyone who can bring him the creator of the golems alive.

MAP
PAGE
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As a rite of passage, the Knights of the Chord used to make new initiates spend the night in the Midden Heaps. After a string of deaths, they ceased this practice.

The sewers, page 439

Killraven's lieutenants, page 122



continued from page 33

Ptolus to being like a gold rush town, but instead of prospectors striking it rich, it's adventurers. And, like a gold rush town, Ptolus caters to the needs of the people with the money.

But tomorrow I might say Jabel Shammar (the fortress at the top of the Spire), the ethereal islands called the Seven Jewels of Parnaith, the shady pub called the Onyx Spider, or the lost city of dreams, Dreta Phantas.

Silven: What is your favorite feature of the *Ptolus* product? What's the aspect that you look at as a gamer and wish was available in every gaming product you use?

Monte: Well, I'm tempted to say the pains taken to break new ground regarding the organization of the book, but really, it's more than that. It's the fact that the book anticipates what a DM is going to need and provides it. Easy-to-use organization is a part of that (color coding, footnote-like text references, multiple indexes, etc.), but there's more. This isn't just an urban campaign setting, it's also an urban campaign guidebook. This product doesn't just provide locations, NPCs, and scenarios, it also explains how the DM can make such things on his own, appropriate to the setting.

From years of running an urban campaign, I know, for example, that the DM doesn't just need pre-made locations, he needs the ability to make up a new location on the spot—and fast. Ptolus helps with that. It provides encounters (either keyed to specific locations or to specific districts) that provide not just challenges, but convey flavor, verisimilitude, and the idea that it is a living, vibrant city full of people. In every way I could, I tried to make Ptolus not just a book, but a DM's assistant.

Silven: One of the main attraction points about Ptolus to me is the fact that this is a setting that served as the earliest 3rd edition campaign that was played by some of the top names in the d20 industry. Are there any sidebars or extra information in the book about game session moments that occurred while the group was in different locations in Ptolus?

Monte: Absolutely. There's a series of sidebars called "From My Campaign to Yours" that relate how the original PCs dealt with a particular challenge or NPC, or a funny story that happened in the campaign related to the material at hand. Those were fun to write. In fact I wish there'd been room for even more.

Silven: What kind of impact do you think Ptolus is going to have on the RPG industry? Do you think it will open the way for other huge, elaborate projects, or do you think it will remain a one-of-a-kind product? And what kind of an impact do you foresee from it being one of the most expensive products ever released?

Monte: Well, here's where I might get a little arrogant, so I'll apologize for that right now. I hope Ptolus will make the gaming world stand up and take notice. I think that, for the first time, gamers out there are going to look at a single product and realize that it really is worth \$119.99. I think that retailers

are likely to drastically under-order this product because, while it is expensive, it's not a niche book. This is the kind of thing that when a gamer takes a look at it in the store, it's going to be something he just has to have. Seriously, it's that cool. And I'm not tooting my own horn here, I'm talking about the whole package as you flip through it—the art, the maps, the layout, the handouts, the detail and organization, not to mention the physical quality of the book itself. Everyone who worked on this product really gave it everything they've got.

You know, someone recently asked me how much "playing-time" Ptolus contained. I estimated that—if you're a DM who doesn't really want to make up your own adventures, NPCs, or material and you stick with only what's in the package—it's enough to keep a group that plays once a week busy for about two years with a whole variety of adventures, involving intrigue, dungeons, politics, and more. It's not just one long dungeon crawl, it's a whole campaign. And of course, if you're the kind of DM who is willing to create some of your own adventures and whatnot, well, I've ran campaigns set there for about eight years or so, and there's still plenty more to do. That's what I mean about one product being actually worth such a large price.

Now, does that mean that we'll start to see big deluxe products popping up all over? I doubt it. At least not to the degree of Ptolus. It's just too monumental an undertaking. One of Ptolus' strengths is that it's the product of a singular vision. Despite its size, there's one author and one editor. It's the product of years of playtesting and careful refinements. I'm not sure another Ptolus coming along would necessarily be a good idea (I won't be doing another one, that's for sure). I do think you'll see aspects of Ptolus influencing the organization of sourcebooks from here on out, though.

Silven: According to your website, *The Night of Dissolution* adventure will be included with *Ptolus* if we preorder. Approximately how much of the city of Ptolus would characters encounter during that adventure, assuming they don't stray *too* far off the adventure's path? And once they've completed the adventure, how invested in this particular city will characters be? Will they be deeply enough involved in it to continue their adventuring days there, or will they be wont to go on and save the next big city from the end of the world?

Monte: The adventure *The Night of Dissolution* takes PCs from 4th to about 9th level. It's not meant to be a grand tour of Ptolus, but you do get some nice above-ground intrigue, investigation and mystery mixed with some dungeon delving (assaulting an underground cult stronghold actually). Oh, and a haunted house thrown in for good measure (haunted brothel, actually). So what it does is cover the gamut (or a good portion of the gamut) of the kinds of adventures you can have in a Ptolus campaign.

And of course, coupled with the adventure material in the book itself, it can be a part of a level 1-20 campaign that does take you to every corner of Ptolus, as well as deep below it and high above.

Silven: While we're talking about *The Night of Dissolution*, we're wondering a little bit about its intent. Was it designed solely as

an introduction to Ptolus for new players and GMs, or is it an adventure that would still be fun after having played a two-year campaign in Ptolus – that is to say, once we know most of the secrets?

Monte: Actually, it's not an introduction to Ptolus, really. Don't forget that Ptolus isn't just a sourcebook, it's also full of adventures. For example, there is an introductory Ptolus adventure in the book that takes PCs to about 4th level. As I said, *The Night of Dissolution* starts at about 4th level, so it's meant to pick up where that adventure left off. It could easily be used then or, as you say, two years from then. It has some potential earth-shaking (or in Ptolus' case, city-shaking) events, so the DM should use it when he or she wants to incorporate those things.

Silven: The holy symbol of the Church of Lothian, the ankh crucifix, appears in the very logo of Ptolus. This implies that this particular religion is absolutely integral to the setting and the city itself. How true is this? Or is the inclusion of that particular symbol in the logo simply a bit of flavor?

Monte: Well, it's both, really. The Church of Lothian is the "official" religion of the Empire of which Ptolus is a part. It's a very Roman Catholic-like church and it's as monotheistic a religion as one could probably realistically expect in a d20 setting that clings hard to the core rules. A little over half of the city's population are Lothianites. But then, in addition to the worship of Lothian, Ptolus has hundreds of other religions—the rest of the city's worshippers revere a whole plethora of different gods. The cool thing about this is that it means that if the DM (or the players, or both) want to have a more real world Medieval Europe flavor to the game, the game can focus on Lothian—a large, basically monotheistic-style church with real political power and influence. Or, if they want a more traditional core rules experience, which usually involves a whole bunch of different gods, they can have that too.



Monte Cook has worked professionally in the game industry since 1988 for such companies as Iron Crown Enterprises, TSR Inc., and Wizards of the Coast. He is a codesigner of Dungeons & Dragons® 3rd edition and author of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He also designed the HeroClix system of superhero combat for WizKids Games and has published two novels, in addition to his work with Malhavoc Press. Under his Malhavoc Press imprint he has published the popular *Books of Eldritch Might*, *Arcana Evolved*, and the forthcoming *Ptolus: City by the Spire*.

The Silven Bestiary

Hearts of Ice

by Kyle Thompson

Frost Lion

Large Magical Beast (Cold)

Hit Dice: 10d10+50 (105 hp)

Initiative: +7

Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares)

Armor Class: 20 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +8 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 17

Base Attack/Grapple: +10/+18

Attack: Bite +13 melee (1d8+4)

Full Attack: Bite +13 melee (1d8+4) and 2 claws +8 melee (1d6+2)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Breath weapon, frightful presence, rend 2d6+6

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, low-light vision, vulnerability to fire

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +10, Will +2

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 17, Con 20, Int 8, Wis 9, Cha 12

Skills: Hide +11*, Listen +7, Move Silently +11, Spot +3, Search +2

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Run

Environment: Cold plains

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 7

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 11-15 HD (Large); 16-30 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: -

A huge lion with fur the color of snow stares at you, uttering a low, guttural growl. Its size alone is awe-inspiring, but its majesty and color are just as beautiful. With impossible grace and power, it suddenly rushes at you.

Frost lions are slightly larger than their grassland cousins. Instead of yellow-brown hues for their coats, frost lions sport whites and very light blues. Their manes are darker than the rest of their coats.

Born hunters, frost lions almost invariably attack anything that moves, for this is the only way they can survive in their harsh environment. They are much more intelligent than a normal lion, allowing them a much better chance of finding food where food is often scarce.

Another difference between frost lions and their grassland kin is that a frost lion is often found alone in the wild. The average frost lion lives forty-five years, provided it finds enough food. Frost lions understand Common, but only very simple terms and phrases. They are also able to speak in guttural tones.

This month's bestiary contains monsters for you to drop onto the tundra. You want a lion that is good at blending in with the snow? Check out the frost lion. What about an undead that is unique to the tundra? Look at the frozen heart. Neanderthals unique to the frozen wastelands of your campaign? See the icemongers.



However, most who attempt to talk to a frost lion don't get much more than a word out.

COMBAT

Frost lions follow their prey to an opportune area, where they hide within a snow bank and wait for their prey to come to them. They then use their teeth and claws to kill their terrified prey. If the prey proves exceptionally difficult to kill, a frost lion uses its breath weapon, though it prefers to not have to chew through thick layers of ice to get to its food.

Breath Weapon (Su): 30 foot line, once every 1d6 rounds, damage 6d6 cold, Reflex DC 20 half. The save DC is Constitution based.

Frightful Presence (Ex): A frost lion causes fear in the hearts of those simply in its presence. Any creature within 30 feet with fewer HD than the frost lion must make a successful Will save (DC 16) or become shaken for 5d6 rounds. A successful Will save makes the creature immune to that frost lion's frightful presence for 24 hours.

Rend (Ex): A frost lion that hits with both claws begins ripping and tearing its opponent. This attack automatically deals an additional 2d6+6 points of damage.

Skills: Frost lions have a +5 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks, and a +2 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. *A frost lion's natural coloration improves its Hide bonus to +16 in snowy or icy environments.

Frozen Heart

Medium Undead (Cold)

Hit Dice: 2d12 (13 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)

Armor Class: 15 (-1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 16

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+3

Attacks: Slam +3 melee (1d4+2 plus 1d6 cold)

Full Attack: Slam +3 melee (1d4+2 plus 1d6 cold)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Icy gaze, icy touch

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., frozen aura, immunity to cold, low-light vision, single actions only, vulnerability to fire

Saves: Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +2

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 9, Con -, Int -, Wis 9, Cha 2

Skills: —

Feats: —

Environment: Any cold

Organization: Solitary, pair, or group (3-15)

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: 3-6 HD (Medium)

Level Adjustment: -

A zombie-like creature stumbles through the snow. The remainder of its skin is blue and encased with a thin layer of ice. The creature's movements are shaky, and as it nears, the air seems to grow colder.

A frozen heart is an undead created when a hiker or climber dies after being lost in a blizzard or caught in an avalanche. The undead look like zombies, except their skin is tinged blue from the extreme cold they suffered when they died. The cold that spawns frozen hearts preserves their bodies better than most normal zombies', and the ice encasing a frozen heart's body provides some protection by deflecting weapons aimed at the zombie.

A frozen heart constantly moans in agony. It cannot speak but understands the languages it knew in life.

COMBAT

Having no intelligence, a frozen heart is very upfront in combat. Frozen hearts attack whatever they see, because they believe that if enough lives are taken by them, the life they lost will return to them. This is the only thought and instinct that governs their existence.

Icy Gaze (Su): 1d6 cold, 30 feet, Fortitude DC 10 negates. The save DC is Charisma-based. A frozen heart has a gaze that is as cold as the death that brought about its existence.

Icy Touch (Su): A frozen heart is extremely cold. Its slam attack deals an additional 1d6 points of cold damage.

Frozen Aura (Su): A frozen heart is eternally marked by cold, causing the temperature in a 30 foot radius to feel noticeably colder (by about 9°F). This cold is not harmful, but it makes other creatures aware of the frozen heart's chilling presence.

Single Actions Only (Ex): Frozen hearts have poor reflexes and can perform only a single move action or attack action each round. A frozen heart can move up to its speed and attack in the same round, but only if it charges.

Icemonger

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Cold)

Hit Dice: 5d8+5 (27 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Armor Class: 14 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather), touch 11, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+8

Attacks: Claw +9 melee (1d6+3 plus 1d4 cold) or longsword +8 melee (1d8+4/19-20)

Full Attack: 2 claws +9 melee (1d6+3 plus 1d4 cold) or longsword +8 melee (1d8+4/19-20)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Frozen claws

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, vulnerability to fire

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +3

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 9

Skills: Hide +9, Listen +8, Move Silently +9, Spot +8, Survival +1

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Focus (claw)

Environment: Cold plains

Organization: Solitary, pair, group (3-15), or tribe (1 3rd-level commander plus 1-30 icemongers)

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually chaotic neutral

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

A humanoid creature stalks through the snow, wielding a longsword in its long claws. The creature is extremely hairy and has a wide forehead and burly arms. What skin is exposed is a hardened tan color tinged with blue.

An icemonger is slightly taller than a human, averaging six and a half feet tall. Icemongers are covered in thick, dark hair that keeps them warm in their cold environment. They have the same facial features as humans, but their forehead extends slightly further and their ears are slightly smaller, an adaptation that keeps their ears from being damaged by the cold.

Icemongers speak whatever language is common in their area, so that they can communicate with any traders they happen upon. Icemongers are experts at getting rare furs from the animals of the tundra, and this is often the reason traders and adventurers seek them out.

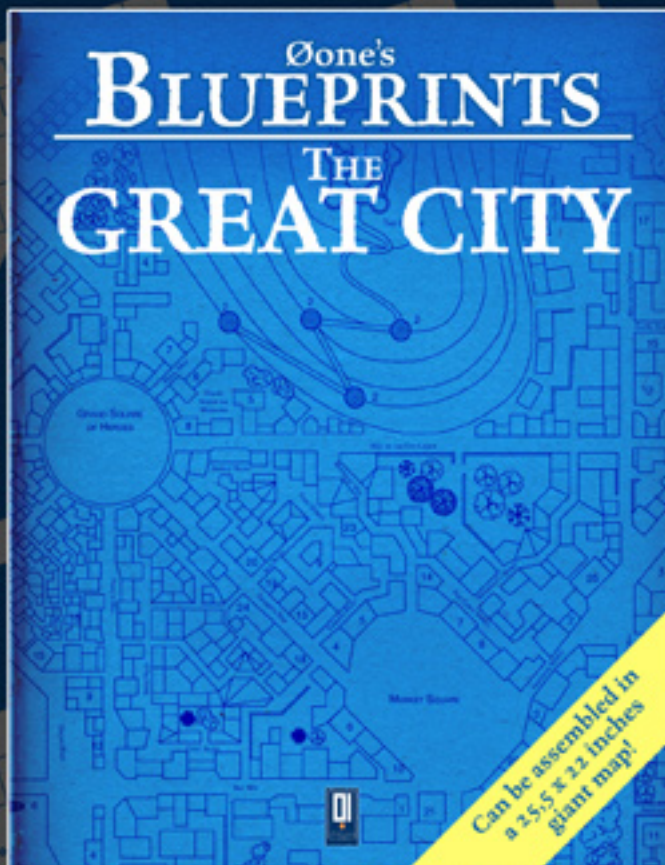
COMBAT

An icemonger fights using a combination of his long, claw-like fingernails and his favored weapon, the longsword. Most of the time, an icemonger avoids a fight if possible. He will not, however, risk personal injury or any harm to his tribe. The tribe is of paramount importance to an icemonger, and any threats against it always end in a fight.

Frozen Claws (Su): An icemonger's claws bear some ancient magic of the tundra, causing them to be extremely cold and allowing an icemonger's claw attacks to deal an additional 1d4 points of cold damage.

Skills: An icemonger has a +6 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Move Silently, and Spot checks.

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CYBER-DAEMON

by Jerel Hass, based on an original idea by Daryl Blasi

HISTORY

Cyber-daemons are possibly the youngest Xenofom placed within the hallowed pages of the Annals of Xenology. While first encountered in the early 1990s, it is believed that the creation or birth of the cyber-daemons traces back less than five years before that. When first observed during what seemed to be a routine cult investigation, a CXS agent encountered what he thought was a previously unclassified Bering demon. Unfortunately, for the agent, that assumption led to his death. Thankfully, however, the agent did manage to keep studious notes. From these notes and the agency's later encounters with the cyber-daemons, the agency has been better able to classify and understand this new and deadly threat.

Created by humanity's almost religious obsession with technology and the internet, cyber-daemons are born from computer code infused with negative human emotions. Since their creation, these awakened programs have sought and created their own haven, known as Cyber-Hell or Hell's Network, based on the home of their religious-based reflections. Ever growing in numbers, the cyber-daemons have since split their home into a number of nodes, with each node representing the negative emotion its daemon inhabitants most closely reflect. Cyber-daemons are ruthless and fearless, continuously feeding humanity their evil by polluting the internet with their filth and attempting to lead humans as far into degradation as possible.

What makes the cyber-daemons so deadly is that they are capable of directly interfacing with nearly any internet-capable device in the world using the Cyber-Plane.

ECOLOGY

The Cyber-Plane

The transitive Cyber-Plane is a supernatural manifestation of the immense and almost cognate data that exists between computer networks and the internet. Existing as only a shadow of all the digitized data existing on Earth, the Cyber-Plane started its existence with no form or function. With the creation of the first Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Cyber-Plane experienced dramatic changes. "As a human soul must come from somewhere and, when it dies, have a place to go to, so must a silicon soul" was the decree

sent forth from the universe. Therefore, the Cyber-Plane took on a second role: it would house the souls that would become AI and those that had stopped being AI. From this decree, the role of the Cyber-Plane was set and so was its place in the universal cosmology. A second skin formed around the Material Plane, existing closer than, but far less accessible than, the Astral.

Within this new plane were great synaptic storms; brutal electrical tempests which ravaged the plane. These storms were the result of the primal intelligence being developed within the plane itself. As the synaptic lightning flashed, it struck floating bits of data. These pieces of data were gifted with intelligence, eventually creating the different inhabitants of the Cyber-Plane. From pure pieces of outdated or unused data were formed the keepers of the realm.

These data elementals, though useless to the Material Plane, have become the grunts of the Cyber-Plane, building and maintaining with a newfound sense of belonging. Highly developed code, such as rejected or failed AI, were also gifted with sentience, with many of these early beings forming their own Networks off of the Cyber-Plane. Finally, the last pieces of data to be touched were the tainted ones. Data existing because of the sins of humanity, these pieces became the cyber-daemons and their minions. The most powerful of the tainted, like the other AI before them, left the central Cyber-Plane, forging new Networks of their own.

Unlike most planes, nothing physically exists within the Cyber-Plane. Like a GUI interprets code into a graphic form, so must visitors find a way to interpret the Cyber-Plane if they wish to interact with it. This can be done through physical means, such as by using the appropriate software and hardware, or magically through spells capable of such things. In a Progress Level (PL) 5 campaign, the technology for interacting with the Cyber-Plane is just beginning to develop. By PL 6, technology exists to shadow the existence of the Cyber-Plane, which makes the connection to it much more accessible. Finally, by PL 8, the entire structure of the Cyber-Plane changes as its planar boundaries become semi-permeable, allowing items and information to bleed between the Cyber-Plane and Material Planes with great ease.

Cyber-Plane Traits

The Cyber-Plane has the following traits.

- Ever Expanding: As more data enters the plane, its size increases to adapt to the influx of information. On the outskirts of the plane, one can see large nets of crisscrossing electricity that make up the plane's borders. Beyond that barrier is a direct link to the Astral Plane.

- Subjective Directional Gravity: Each inhabitant must make a conscious decision as to which direction pulls, simulating earth's gravitational pull.
- Timeless: The flow of data moves at near light speed, making whatever happens on the Cyber-Plane nearly instantaneous.
- Highly Morphic: A semi-godlike AI exists within the Plane, directing the data elementals and constantly altering the plane to fit the new data. However, it is also possible to directly interact with just a portion of the plane and separate it from the main body, creating what is known as a Network. Within these Networks, the most powerful being sets the rules. If more than one powerful being exists, then a Network may split, forming separate nodes governed by each being.
- Electrically Charged: All spells or psionics with an electricity descriptor are considered maximized without penalty.
- Lawfully Coded: Data either exists or it does not. No data exists without a purpose. Everything existing within the bounds of the Cyber-Plane must exist within a predefined set of rules, just like the code the plane is constructed from. All neutral creatures (except lawful neutral ones) suffer a -2 penalty on all Charisma-based checks, while chaotic creatures suffer a -4 penalty on all Charisma-based checks.

Hell's Network

Hell's Network is a cluster of demi-planes, each primarily linked to two others as well as to Plane 404. All of these planes border the transitive Cyber-Plane, but do not directly touch it, meaning that all traffic from them must pass through the abyss of Plane 404 to reach the Cyber-Plane.

Each of the eight individual demi-planes of Cyber-Hell are also called nodes. Of Cyber-Hell's eight nodes, only Plane 404 is not ruled by a malignant and powerful cyber-daemon who has shaped the node to its own personality. The remaining seven nodes are currently known as Avarice, Envy, Gluttony, Lust, Pride, Sloth, and Wrath. These will be the subject of a future article.

Shared Traits

All the nodes share the following traits unless superseded by information specified in their individual descriptions.

- Finite Size: The nodes can grow, however, as the daemons within become more powerful and take more souls. The sizes of each individual node vary.
- Ruler Adapted: The node adapts and takes on the personality of the strongest daemon within its borders. These changes are slow, methodical, and not under the ruler's direct control.
- Sentient: Every node that links off the Cyber-Plane takes on a simple form of sentience, based on the Cyber-Plane's own AI. This AI is rarely capable of making its own decisions, but instead feeds of the

personality of the strongest being within its borders.

- Electrically and Negatively Charged: All spells or psionics with the negative or electricity descriptor are considered empowered without penalty.
- Evil-Aligned: Neutral creatures suffer a -2 penalty on all Charisma-based checks, while good creatures suffer a -4 penalty on all Charisma-based checks.
- Normal Magic.

Welcome to the end of the 'net: Plane 404

Plane 404 is where all deleted data goes, from things as trivial as math assignments to government secrets banished to oblivion in an attempted cover up. This data enters the plane as free-floating physical bits, given imagery based on its interpreted meaning. A math assignment may enter as an incredible mass of equations, while a computer artist's rendering of an empty field may appear just as created. At times, data may even be given sentience, although this is rare and usually only occurs when an AI is deleted. A wide range of living and non-living sentient beings inhabit Plane 404, including magical hackers, wandering AI, and the minions of the cyber-daemons.

Like a giant floating trash collector, Plane 404 is a mangle of haphazard surfaces, seemingly thrown about its infinite space at random. These surfaces, however, function as dividers which create an illusion of layers, but act more like natural borders.

Plane 404 Traits

Plane 404 has the following traits:

- Surface-based Gravity: Plane 404 does not have centralized gravity; instead, any surface may be traversed as if that surface had its own gravity. It is possible to jump from surface to surface, falling under the influence of the destination surface's gravity. This can be done by making a successful Jump check (DC equal to half the distance in feet) to break away from one's current surface gravity and connect to another. A failed check results in the jumper being unable to break the current surface's innate gravity. A check failed by more than 5 means the jumper has broken free of his original gravity, but has missed the surface he was aiming for. A jumper that misses his target will simply float through the plane in a straight line, without gaining momentum, until close enough to attach to another surface.
- Normal Time: Time within Plane 404 passes at the same rate as time on the Material Plane.
- Infinite Size: Plane 404 is endless.
- Static: Although new surfaces may be added to the node by transporting them in or constructing them; nothing seems capable of actually manipulating the node itself.
- No Energy or Elemental Traits: Unlike the rest of Hell's Network and the Cyber-Plane, Plane 404 does not have any energy or elemental tendencies.
- No Alignment.
- Dead Magic: For reasons baffling even the most studious scholars, Plane 404 is in a constant antimagic and antipsionic field.

404 Links

With nearly enough links to be a transitive plane, Plane 404 connects to every network of demi-planes connected to the

Cyber-Plane. Within Hell's Network, Plane 404 is the bridging plane necessary to reach the Cyber-Plane and, from there, the Material Plane.

PHYSIOLOGY

A cyber-daemon is not simply able to transverse the barrier between the Cyber Plane and the Material Plane. This is because they are creatures of pure code, with no physical structure outside of the innate magic and science of the Cyber Plane. For a cyber-daemon to cross over, it must first create a physical vessel to contain its code. This vessel is a pure metaphysical construct built out of the souls it collects. Once constructed, this vessel can be manipulated and molded to the desires of the cyber-daemon, giving them a physical form within the Material Plane. Once inside the vessel, a cyber-daemon can cross freely into the Material Plane at will using its *plane shift* ability. If the cyber-daemon is destroyed while in its vessel, its code returns to Cyber-Hell and the vessel is destroyed, freeing the component souls. The vessel of a cyber-daemon must be crafted of thirteen souls, representative of thirteen missing chromosomes. These souls are collected through a cyber-daemon's unique ritual. A cyber-daemon may not be summoned physically into the Material Plane without an appropriate vessel of thirteen souls. Its consciousness, however, may be summoned using an appropriately sanctified electronic media. Sanctification of the media requires both a Knowledge (arcane or arcane lore) and a Computer Use skill check (the DC for both checks is equal to 10 + the HD of the cyber-daemon). The combination of these two skills creates a location both suitably magical and technological for the consciousness of the cyber-daemon to reside in.

Cyber-daemons are considered both Constructs and Outsiders and receive a combination of the bonuses and penalties associated with those types. The features, traits, common abilities, and vulnerabilities of this amalgamated creature type are given below.

Features: Cyber-daemons have the following features.

- Hit die: d10.
- Base attack bonus equal to total Hit Dice (as fighter).
- Good Fortitude, Reflex, and Will saves.
- Skill points equal to (8 + Int modifier, minimum 1) per Hit Dice, with quadruple skill points for the first Hit Die.

Traits: Cyber-daemons possess the following traits (unless otherwise noted in a creature's entry).

- No Constitution score.
- Darkvision out to 60 feet.
- Immunity to all mind-affecting effects.
- Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromancy effects.

- Cannot heal damage on their own, but can be healed by exposure to electricity. A cyber-daemon heals 1 hp for every 5 points of electrical damage dealt to it, with excess hit points being added as temporary hit points.
- Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain.
- Immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects, or is harmless).
- Spells such as *raise dead*, *reincarnate*, and *resurrection* do not work on dead cyber-daemons, but they can be recreated.
- Bonus hit points, as per constructs.
- Proficient with all simple and martial weapons and any weapons mentioned in its entry.
- Cyber-daemons do not eat or drink.
- Immunity to cold.

Special Attacks: All cyber-daemons possess the following special attack forms (unless otherwise noted in a creature's entry).

- **Electric Bolt (Su):** A cyber-daemon can use this attack at the cost of 5 hp damage to itself, and as long as it is within 50 feet of an electrical source. Electric bolts cause 1d8 points of electrical damage per Hit Die of the cyber-daemon in a 40 foot line, with a Reflex save for half damage. The save DC is Charisma-based.
- **Rituals (Sp):** Each cyber-daemon has its own unique ritual, based on its dominant sin, which allows it to collect the thirteen necessary souls for its vessel.
- **Summon Internet Shadow (Sp):** Once per three days, as long as the cyber-daemon is within 50 feet of anything with Internet access, it can summon a number of Internet Shadows equal to 1/3 of its Hit Dice to aid it.

Special Qualities: All cyber-daemons possess the following special quality.

- **Wireless Connection (Ex):** A cyber-daemon can communicate with any wireless capable device up to 50 feet away per Hit Die. With a successful Computer Use check, the cyber-daemon can hack the wireless device. The wireless connection also allows the cyber-daemon to communicate with another cyber-daemon telepathically, either to its maximum range or by bouncing its transmission through other wireless devices (which may be intercepted or blocked).

Vulnerabilities: Cyber-daemons possess the following vulnerabilities (unless otherwise noted in a creature's entry).

- **Hacking Vulnerability:** Due to the cyber-daemon's construct-based nature, it is possible to hack a cyber-daemon's code. With a wireless connection and an opposed Computer Use check, it is possible to either disrupt or injure a cyber-daemon as a full-round action. Disrupting a cyber-daemon: for every 5 points by which the hacker beats the cyber-daemon at the opposed check, the cyber-daemon suffers a -2 penalty to all attack rolls, saving throws, and ability and skill checks for the next 1d4 rounds. Injuring a cyber-daemon: for every 5 points by which the hacker beats the cyber-daemon during the opposed check, the cyber-daemon takes 1d6 points of damage.
- **Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Vulnerability:** An EMP affects a cyber-daemon as if it was a robot, causing 5d6 points of damage and requiring a Will save (DC 15) to avoid being stunned for 1d4 rounds.

SEDUCTRIX

Medium Construct/Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Cyber-Daemon)

Hit Dice: 6d10+20 (53 hp)

Initiative: +5 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 50 ft. (average)

Armor Class/Defense: 21 (+5 Dex, +6 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 16

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+6

Attack: Claw +6 melee (1d6 plus 1d4 electricity)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +6 melee (1d6 plus 1d4 electricity); or 9mm SITES M9 handgun +11 ranged (2d6)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Electric bolt, seduction ritual, spell-like abilities, summon internet shadow

Special Qualities: Cyber-daemon (construct and outsider) traits, darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, wireless connection

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +8

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 20, Con -, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 22

Skills: Bluff +23, Computer Use +13, Diplomacy +21, Disguise +14, Escape Artist +10, Hide +17, Intimidate +11, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Search +9, Spot +9

Feats: Endurance, Persuasive, Skill Focus (Bluff)

Climate/Terrain: Cyber-Hell, specifically the plane of Lust

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 8

Alignment/Allegiance: Cyber-Hell, Evil

Advancement: By character class

"The wrongfulness of lust is reducible to this: that venereal satisfaction is sought for either outside wedlock or, at any rate, in a manner which is contrary to the laws that govern marital intercourse." -Galatians, v. 19

Spawned by the vast pornography that pollutes every nook and cranny of the web, the seductrix are a creation of perversion and lust.

COMBAT

Electric Bolt (Su): 40-foot line, damage 6d8 electricity, Reflex DC 19 half. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Seduction Ritual (Sp): A seductrix is able to perform a special ritual that changes the target into a fanatical slave. This ritual can take many forms, but always involves manipulating the lustful desires of the victim. The most direct method is actual sexual activity with the victim. After a series of successful trysts, the victim eventually becomes a willing slave to the Seductrix. Another way the seductrix can perform this ritual is by setting up a pornographic site on the internet that actually acts as conduit for her power. As the internet user involves themselves in the pornographic media, his will is weakened by the seductrix's power, eventually succumbing to her domination.

In game terms, the ritual requires a series of saving throws, with each failure bringing the victim

closer to slavery. Each hour the victim spends being seduced, he must make a Will save (DC 15+1 per previously failed save). If the first saving throw is successful, the victim can walk away unaffected by the ritual. However, after the first failure, the victim becomes addicted, requiring a Fortitude save (DC 17) to resist taking 1 point of Wisdom damage every day he is away from the seductrix or her website. This occurs for 5 days plus 1 for every previous failure. If the victim fails five non-consecutive saving throws, he becomes a fanatic, controlled as if by a *geas/quest* cast by a level 20 wizard.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): The seductrix may employ the following spell-like abilities at will: *alter self*, *charm monster/person* (DC 18), *detect thoughts* (DC 15), *plane shift* (Cyber-Hell and Material Plane only), and *suggestion*.

Description

A seductrix in its natural form appears to be a slim, well-muscled, androgynous human with soft hypnotic features of both genders. The seductrix is not very tall, standing a mere 60 to 66 inches and weighing only 110 to 135 pounds. Its hair is usually long and unnatural in color, traditionally shades of metallic grey that reflects a rainbow of light, as if it were polished silver. Its skin is dark; a sharp contrast to the white zeros and ones that race across its body, like snow caught in a whirlwind. Five long, razor-sharp talons that jut out of each hand break the otherwise harmless appearance of the seductrix.

Encounter

A seductrix's primary method of corruption is the use of pornography on the internet. It typically starts by sending an instant message (IM) to a potential target. This IM will have one of the seductrix' websites listed and mention how the seductrix just wants to be friends. If the target takes the bait, the seductrix will continue its relationship with the target by sending more sites, each progressively more perverse. As the seductrix feels the soul of the target becoming its own, it will begin to talk of meeting. It is during these meetings that the seductrix crosses over into the Material Plane to collect the soul.

Normally the seductrix is a blatant coward, corrupting whomever it can from across the net and choosing to cross over only when it knows it owns the victim's soul. When pressed, a seductrix may stay and fight if it means losing a large crop of souls or a particularly favored minion.

Adventure Hook

The peace of an affluent, suburban community is shattered with the horrific death of a visiting religious leader. To the shock of the community, three bright high school boys are revealed as the murderers. With no apparent motive, the boys killed and then mutilated the man by cutting strange markings into his torso. Fingers are immediately pointed in all directions trying to place the blame. The common bond of the boys is their obsession with computers and violent video games. During the investigation, the police find a large quantity of downloaded pornography on the student's computers. Unknown to the public, a seductrix had contacted each of the boys on a chat site and established a digital relationship centered on sex. Eventually, she magically seduced each one in turn with her websites and

then ordered them to murder the minister as part of a satanic ritual. The minister was, in fact, a member of a religious order of demon hunters who had foiled earlier plans of the seductrix. His ritualized death weakened the barriers between dimensions and allowed the seductrix to pass into this world.

The seductrix has taken on a mortal identity as the beautiful new computer teacher at the local high school (the old teacher mysteriously left one day, tendering his resignation through e-mail). Now the seductrix has a large number of potential slaves to do her bidding as she sets her sights on seducing the owner of a successful software company conveniently located in the town.

Bluudjagm

Large Construct/Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil, Cyber-Daemon)

Hit Dice: 8d10+30 (74 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Armor Class/Defense: 16 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+18

Attack: Grafted chain saw +14 melee (3d6+6 plus 1d4 electricity); or sawed-off shotgun +9 ranged (2d8)

Full Attack: Grafted chain saw +14 melee (3d6+6 plus 1d4 electricity) and sawed-off shotgun +9 ranged (2d8)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Electric bolt, hate aura, rage, spell-like abilities, summon internet shadow, the awakening of blood ritual

Special Qualities: Cyber-daemon (construct and outsider) traits, damage reduction 5/good, darkvision 60 ft., hunger for hatred, low-light vision, wireless connection

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +8

Abilities: Str 22, Dex 13, Con -, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 18

Skills: Bluff +16, Climb +16, Computer Use +12, Demolitions +11, Intimidate +17, Jump +16, Listen +15, Sense Motive +12, Spot +12

Feats: Power Attack, Cleave, Endurance^B, Diehard

Climate/Terrain: Cyber-Hell, specifically the plane of Wrath

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 10

Alignment/Allegiance: Always evil, Cyber-Hell

Advancement: By character class

"Do not let the sun go down on your anger." -Ephesians 4:26.

Bluudjagm are cyber-daemons created from the hate and violence of racism that has infested society and the internet. The Bluudjagm are rage-filled creatures whose very presence causes others to become agitated and hostile.

COMBAT

Electric Bolt (Su): 40-foot line, damage 8d8 electricity, Reflex DC 18 half. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Hate Aura (Su): All creatures must make a Will save (DC 21) each round they are within 20 feet of the bluudjagm, with failure indicating they must spend their action attacking the focus of the bluudjagm's hatred. The bluudjagm may change the target of its hate focus as a free action. Damage caused by those under the effect of the hate aura heals the bluudjagm, as per the hunger for hatred ability. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Rage (Ex): This ability functions exactly like a barbarian's rage ability.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): The bluudjagm may employ the following spell-like abilities at will: *alter self*, *detect thoughts* (DC 15), *plane shift* (Cyber-Hell and Material Plane only), and *suggestion*.

The Awakening of Blood Ritual (Sp): Bluudjagm often use the internet to interact with mortals who have leanings toward racist or antisocial behavior, infecting them with the bluudjagm's hate. The bluudjagm can project their hate aura through the internet in a special ritual that will leave the victim seething with anger quenchable only by violence and murder. This hate ritual, called the Awakening of Blood, requires the victim to make a Will save (DC 15 + 1 per previously failed save) every hour the intended victim is online interacting with the bluudjagm's website, which is typically dedicated to hate rhetoric towards a specific group of people. This complex Will save does not have to be made every hour, as the cyber-daemon may even break off the ritual and return another day to complete it.

For example, an internet user may visit the hate site only one hour each day, eventually succumbing to the bluudjagm's rage. If the bluudjagm's victim accumulates five failures, she immediately becomes combative (default Attitude: Hostile) towards a particular group of people, and will seek out violent confrontations with anyone of that group. If the ritual is successful, this effect lasts for a week. A side effect of this hate ritual is the weakening of barriers between planes. If the bluudjagm inspires his pawns to kill thirteen people, the daemon will be able to cross over into normal reality.

Hunger For Hatred (Su): Bluudjagm feed on the hatred and violence they inspire and can actually be physically hurt if they are unable to influence others to violence. For each day a bluudjagm is unable to force someone to inflict 5 hp of damage on another person, the bluudjagm must make a Will save (DC 18) or take 1d8 hp of damage. A bluudjagm may only heal this damage by getting someone to commit acts of violence against another. Any damage dealt by those under the bluudjagm's influence heals the bluudjagm by the

same number of hit points. Damage inflicted upon the Blutdjagm through other means may be healed in this manner as well.

Description

Blutdjagm appear as humans with grotesquely large muscles and rage-twisted faces, with lips permanently curled back to show large yellow teeth. Blutdjagm can change their skin color at will to appear more like that of the individuals they are trying to inspire to violence. A Blutdjagm's body is covered with tattoos of infernal runes, diabolical scenes of cruelty, and other hideous markings.

Most Blutdjagms have numerous body piercings, ranging from simple nose rings to hellishly designed equipment that would kill a normal human. Blutdjagm always have a large weapon melded with one of their arms, replacing the forearm and hand. This weapon can be detached by the Blutdjagm and replaced by another, depending on their mood or need.

Encounter

The Blutdjagm reacts to most situations with aggression and cruel violence. It favors any sort of weapon that causes extreme pain or heavy damage, such as flame-throwers, heavy machine guns, and sabot cannons, depending on the Progress Level of the campaign. Such a weapon is attached to the Blutdjagm's arm and can be reloaded as normal. Blutdjagm are not subtle in their tactics and prefer a fist to the face over complex schemes.

If a Blutdjagm is successful in crossing over from Cyber-Hell to normal reality it will attempt to forcibly take over leadership of a militant organization dedicated to racism or prejudice and inspire them to ever increasing acts of violence, until the group inevitably self-destructs. The Blutdjagm then moves on to another group, where the cycle begins again.

Adventure Hook

A small city experiences a series of brutal attacks on immigrants, most of which die from their wounds. The victims of these attacks all have racist slurs spray-painted on their bodies, while the few who survive recall their attacker muttering about the "Angel of Purity." The police eventually catch the killer, who turns out to be a librarian described as polite and soft-spoken by his co-workers and acquaintances. As the city celebrates the capture of the killer, a new series of attacks begin. This time, the victims are people in an affluent neighborhood. Determined to cross over to Earth's dimension, a Blutdjagm had contacted the librarian on a racist chat site with the intention of corrupting him with the hate ritual. The librarian, however, was not a true racist, but merely researching hate groups for an article he had hoped to write for a local magazine. After the librarian's apprehension, the

Blutdjagm began controlling a new pawn: a college student who has taken an interest in radical social movements. The Blutdjagm hopes the student will complete the thirteen murders it needs.

Internet Shadow

Medium Construct (Incorporeal)

Hit Dice: 3d10+20 (36 hp)

Initiative: +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: Fly 40 ft. (8 squares)

Armor Class/Defense: 14 (+1 Dex, +3 deflection), touch 14, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-

Attack: Incorporeal touch +3 melee (1d6 electricity)

Full Attack: Incorporeal touch +3 melee (1d6 electricity)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Energy damage (electrical), static shock, electric shield

Special Qualities: Blindsight 30 ft., construct traits, immune to electrical damage, incorporeal traits

Saves: Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str -, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 16

Skills: Hide +4, Listen +5, Search +2, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative

Climate/Terrain: Cyber-Plane, The Internet

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 4

Alignment/Allegiance: Always lawful neutral

Advancement: N/A

Poor souls lost to the degeneration and degradation of cyberspace find themselves amongst the hundreds of other cyber-damned, forced into servitude by the cyber-daemons. Internet shadows appear ethereal and wraith-like, with an occasional ripple of static discharge disrupting their incorporeal form.

Combat

Static Shock (Su): At a cost of 5 hp, the internet shadow forces all creatures within 30 feet to make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or become dazed for one round. This attack also acts as an EMP pulse, potentially shorting out all unprotected electronics within range. This attack does not affect creatures without a central nervous system or devices that are not electronic-based. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Electric Shield (Su): This shield causes 2 hp of electrical damage to any creatures within 5 feet.

BEHIND THE SCENES

PART II: ALTERNATIVES TO EXPERIENCE AWARDS

by Robert M. Adams

Welcome back! If you remember last time, Jangle the Thief had just successfully robbed Mr. Fatpants and escaped into Victimtown to pawn said belongings. This was all covered in my previous article regarding bluebooking. If you missed it, go back and read it! It contains some great stuff about how to handle behind-the-scenes interaction and down-time during the course of a campaign - but enough of my shameless plugs. Now then - in this article I am going to cover the holiest of holies, the prize all gamers covet, that which makes us roll dice and according to many, is even better than gold and plunder: experience.

What exactly is experience? Is it a bonus awarded for killing as many monsters as you can? A kind of morbid tally of death in which a character gaining a level is really just another way of saying "Yeah, I killed that too." Is experience simply a matter of Challenge Rating vs. "how much experience can I gain today?" Is it something that every character just gains as they go? "Oh you know, the older you get the more experienced you are!" Mr. Miyagi caught it with a chopstick. Are we doomed to relive the ghost of hack-n-slayers past? If so, then increasing the death count by any means necessary is truly the only way in which a character can level.

On the other hand, it could be something more. Can experience really be that magnum omega catalyst between what is good about roleplaying and what is not? If experience awards are abused and poorly managed, I think the answer is yes. Therefore, what can we DMs do to prevent our finely crafted campaigns from becoming 'I-need-experience, monster-slay-fest, com'ere-ya-bastard' nightmares? Should we allow this to turn our campaigns into hack sessions? I am glad you asked!

Imagine: the game is just about to begin and you hand out everyone's bluebooks. The players all look at you and smile as each person takes one. Jangle's player opens his bluebook and eagerly flips through, reading the description of his sneaky character's successful robbery of Mr. Fatpants. As he comes to the end-list of booty, he smiles and even chuckles to himself as he thinks up the next lucrative business deal and purchases Jangle can make with his ill-gotten loot. He mentally barrages you with questions regarding magical items and fine weaponry, selecting a list of the rarer ones to barter for later. Satisfied, he puts down the bluebook and looks up to you expectantly. You are the DM, what do you do? What does this person want? Is it a Mountain Dew? No, he has that already, and it better not be the last one! Does he need to borrow your dice again? Nope, he remembered his dice bag. Good. He will need them today for sure! Is there pizza sauce on your new *Order of the Stick* shirt? Nope. Then it hits you: you didn't write down the experience in their bluebooks!

Robert Adams is a freelance content game designer, play tester, and roleplaying consultant with over fifteen years invested in roleplaying, LARP, and table-top miniature battles. His past contributions have included: *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Shaintar: Immortal Legends*, *SPY RPG*, and *Legends of a Kindling Moon*. He currently resides in Jacksonville, Florida with his wife and daughter, where he runs several on-going in person and online campaigns, including "Alliance of the Dark Seven" and "Streets of Silver and Blood" <http://www.heldensage.com>

For shame, how could you have been so foolish? Do you not understand that as a DM it is your sworn duty to catalogue every event? You are supposed to recall everything. Even if you do not remember everything, trust that your players remember everything they *ever* did and will call you on it if they feel cheated. Wouldn't you? Fear not, my friend. There is still hope in the gossamer signs of impending darkening friendships and broken level advancements. As a DM, you have many options available to you- from those listed in the DMG, to alternate sources and those you grasp from your imagination- but more later on how to use that.

Alternate Experience Awards

Trust me when I say that as a DM you have the right to award experience in any way you choose. Oh sure, you will have some players quoting Challenge Ratings and monster levels, and justifiably so - it's what they know. Don't let that stop you from assigning other types of experience awards. Unbelievably, we roleplayers are still out there and we deserve experience awards for our contributions, just the same as the hack-and-slash crowd. A bit of friendly advice for new DMs - if you do not award roleplayers for actually roleplaying, they will walk out of your game and never return. It is nothing personal - well, actually it is, because it is like doing something for nothing. In the mind of a roleplayer, it is the penultimate gaming experience to sit and chat with the prince of a town while engaging in intricate plots, perhaps without even rolling a single die. You have to give the roleplayer something- I am talking about the alternate experience award.

What is an alternate experience award? It is basically an experience award given in addition to or instead of experience gained from defeating a monster. Obviously, your players should still be awarded for the monster-defeat as it represents knowledge gained as the characters learn new fighting techniques, vulnerabilities to various critters and more about the world around them. I would not dream of taking that away; but what about adventures with a great deal of roleplaying or

When it is all said and done and the villain has been defeated, the princess saved and the treasure looted, keep one very important fact in mind as your friends are putting away their dice for the evening – this is just a game. Right now you are thinking, “What did he say...it’s just a game? Blasphemy! Burn him! He must be a witch!” In all seriousness, this is a game and no matter at which level your character progresses, getting there is the biggest part of the fun, so award creativity, talent, and ambition with experience rather than just on a case-by-case, by the book, challenge rating-based, monster hack fest.

perhaps no monster slaying at all? There are all sorts of choices for alternative experience awards, from quick down and dirty, to band-aids or a more permanent Ten Commandments-style, “This is how it will be” awards system.

For now, let us look at a down and dirty, on the fly, pay-as-you-go system, which I will call the ‘immediate’ award. The immediate award goes something like this: Billy looks at you and says, “Jangle looks up to the constable and in his best and most sincere voice says ‘No sir, I did not see anyone coming out of Mr. Fatpants’ house last night. I was here with my friends in the tavern all night.” Not only is this good roleplaying, it also helps move Jangle’s alibi along nicely. You would then of course respond as the constable, giving any more consideration for his suspicions of Jangle and then have him let Jangle return to his friends. If you were to award Billy experience for Jangle using the immediate award you would simply say something like “Billy, great job! I am going to award Jangle fifty experience for that conversation.” Then watch Billy’s face light up when you recognize his actions. Be warned, though, that this is not always the best option as it can backfire when players expect everything they do to gain immediate gratification via experience awards.

A second, less volatile way of awarding experience is end-of-session. Using the above example in this instance, you would simply say, “Billy, you did a great job today, go ahead and mark down fifty more experience on your character sheet for excellent roleplaying.” This allows you the flexibility of granting immediate awards without the headache of having to list every specific event. In this type of system you could even have a preset experience scale, say, from ten to fifty points which you could award for roleplaying. Your players would already know about your experience point system and should not be surprised when at the end of the session, roleplaying awards are given. All players who roleplayed would gain experience in this manner, but those who really stood out receive more than those who did not. To me that is just fair. Keep in mind that the ten to fifty scale is completely arbitrary and one that I am using for simplicity of explanation rather than a hard-and-fast set rule.

A third option is to list every type of roleplaying award possible on a board or separate printout for all the players. Pretend that our imaginary printout says a player gains experience by roleplaying on a ten to fifty scale and based upon the result of any associated dice rolls. Using this option, Billy would already know he was going to receive decent experience for roleplaying but not necessarily what he would receive for his associated dice

roll, which in this case, would be Diplomacy. I call this the Ten Commandments style of awarding experience, because everyone already knows all the rules – even if they do not like them.

roll, which in this case, would be Diplomacy. I call this the Ten Commandments style of awarding experience, because everyone already knows all the rules – even if they do not like them.

A fourth option for awarding experience is secret ballot. To do this, have everyone vote by secret ballot who they think the top three contributors of the session were. To do this you simply have everyone write down three names, numbered one to three, and then place them in a hat, a Crown Royal bag, dice bag, whatever you wish. Once they have put the names in the hat you then pull out all the secret ballots and count the results. You can award the following points: one hundred to first, fifty to second, and twenty-five points to third place. If you still feel that someone contributed more than they were given credit by the other players you can then give them an end-of-session award. However, be careful if you use this option, because players gaming together tend to be a secular lot and may vote for the person they feel needs the most experience. If they do that, let them. They will suffer the consequences either way and besides, it really is their choice. Of course, you can also contribute to the secret ballot if you want by adding your own votes to the mix before tallying. Again, understand that these point spreads are only suggestions not rules.

Other Rewards

Lastly, and this is my personal favorite, be creative with awards. Foremost, you do not have to give out only experience. There are many other goodies that a DM can award a player for good behavior, participation, and heroic deeds other than the everyday humdrum experience point. Some of these include hero points, bonus rolls, prestige class advancement and other in-game related awards, such as allowing the fighter to purchase and/or find that magical sword she has been asking you about for weeks.

Hero Points

Hero points are what I used to use as a bonus award whenever my players go that extra mile in the game. So what are hero points? Hero points are whatever you as the DM wish them to be, though you should establish exactly what hero points can do before you begin awarding them to your players. The hero points I award in my games are on a scale using red, white, and blue poker chips. Previously, I had pieces of paper with an amount written down and my signature, kind of like an IOU, but this all changed when I started gaming with Sean Fannon’s crew and was introduced to using poker chips.

The scale of the chips is very simple; white is the base hero point and allows a player to re-roll a missed attack, save, skill, or ability check. These hero points are awarded for exceptional role-playing, in-character commentary, and good bluebooking. The blue hero point is the 'second level' chip and it allows a player to force the DM to re-roll an attack, save, skill, or ability check (this has to be done before the DM rolls the damage or declares any result other than pass/fail). These hero points are awarded as the DM feels appropriate whenever a player completes a truly heroic deed. A blue chip can be given back to the DM for three white chips, which makes the blue chip all that more cool of an award.

The last and most potent of hero point awards is the red chip. This is the grand-daddy don of hero points; with it a player can re-roll all damage dice in a single attack, force the DM to re-roll all damage dice in a single attack, automatically hit with one attack, succeed the base DC of a skill attempt, pass a saving throw, and pass any ability check needed. In addition, a red hero point can be exchanged for three blue chips or six white chips, or any combination therein. Basically, a red hero point is worth three times as much as a white chip and twice as much as a blue chip.

There is one more award, a special hero point award that I have called the Legendary Hero Point. This award is a multi-colored poker chip. Yes, they make them, and in my games they are the equivalent of a very limited wish. When holding one of these chips, a player can pretty much ask for anything of the DM within reason and so long as it is not campaign breaking and fits the overall mood of the game. Thusly, a fifth level paladin asking for a holy-avenger probably should not receive it, but he could get a nice sword +1 sword with a +1 bonus.

As an aside, give hero points to your villains, too! Not your minions, but to the overall bad guys and their henchmen. I found that giving each henchman one white chip and the villain three white and a blue really spices things up. Of course, the hero point system is completely subjective, so feel free to change it as fits your campaign.

When considering what your hero points can do, always think about each player having about five chips at any given time. Also, you need to consider whether or not the hero points can be kept for just one game, a period of games, per level, from story arc to story arc, or throughout the entire campaign. I have discovered that players tend to stockpile their resources unless dramatically challenged. If you allow them to keep the hero points from every game, the result can be an overabundance. Generally, I like to allow the player to hold onto their hero points on a nightly basis. At the start of each game, all players receive three white chips and one blue chip plus other awards throughout the course of the game. All hero points are handed back to me at the end of the session, which encourages players to use them and makes the game much more interesting.

Bonus Rolls

Another type of award system is the bonus roll system. This pretty much is as simple as it sounds, you allow the player to roll twice for his attack, skill, save, what-have-you and keep the

highest result. You would award bonus rolls perhaps using poker chips; handing them out to the players as they are awarded and collecting them from the players as they are spent. The caveat to this rule is that the player must announce their intention to use the bonus roll before actually rolling the dice. I generally like this rule and have included it in my games with hero points. It seems to work well with the hero point system, but I found that this option offers less choice for the player when used as the primary alternate awards system.

In-Game Awards

Lastly, I will touch on your ability as a DM to control and manage whether or not a player can access a particular prestige classes and exotic equipment. If you want to award your player with something more tangible and long term than the hero point or bonus roll, then you should consider this option. To illustrate my point, visualize Jangle again and imagine that his player, Billy, really wants to become a Tomb Raider. It is possible that he is just that darn good, but it is more likely that the Tomb Raiders have some kind of guild or organization in which membership is required to learn the secrets taught. Using this option, you could say that Jangle runs into a Tomb Raider guild member unbeknownst to him and is tested for possible membership. Imagine Billy's surprise when Jangle receives a letter at his address asking him to meet in some dark alley in town and to bring his thieves' tools along. Now picture Billy's surprise when he discovers that Mr. Fatpants is a major financial contributor to the guild!

Whichever system of player rewards you choose, do some research first and explain to your players that the new system is on a trial basis while you examine how it will work within your campaign. Remember to list every possible award in advance so that your players do not feel you are adding things at the last minute. In general, be creative with your awards and honest with your players. They will thank you, and you will be on the road to becoming a better DM.

Reviews

Where we tell you what to buy and what to run from....

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Dragonlance: Holy Orders of the Stars
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Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer
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Tribe 8 Second Edition Player's Handbook
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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.*

World of Warcraft: More Magic and Mayhem

Authors: Bob Baxter, Joseph Carriker, Bob Fitch, Bruce Graw, Mur Lafferty, & Andrew Rowe

Publisher: Sword & Sorcery Studios

URL: <http://www.warcrafttrpg.com/> & <http://www.swordsorcery.com/>

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: March 1, 2006

Reviewer Bias: I had never read any of the Warcraft RPG books but did purchase the World of Warcraft RPG core book when it came out and loved every page of it. I am an ex-World of Warcraft (online computer game) player, so there is some tie to the line.

More Magic and Mayhem is the first supplement for the *World of Warcraft RPG*. This 200 page hard back book contains art from Jeff Laubenstein, Jason Chan, Harold Oesterle, Darren Calvert, & James Stowe.

From the Back Cover

Magic Twists as Gears Turn

Arcanists and healers weave spells that scour the battlefield. Tinkers craft rifles, bombs, and clockwork poultry to decimate their enemies.

New Magic and Technology

More Magic and Mayhem brims with magic and technology steeped in the **Warcraft** setting. Heroes hardwire new weapons, research arcane secrets, and call forth mighty creatures to smash their foes. Based on the best-selling **World of Warcraft** computer game, *More Magic and Mayhem* contains a wealth of new spells, feats, classes, magic items, and technology.

- * New and updated core classes, including the Inscribe, Runemaster, Witch Doctor.
- * New and updated prestige classes, including the Argent Dawn Crusader, Enchanter, Geomancer, and Steam Warrior.
- * Create alchemical brews, enhance your weapons and armor with special enchantments, and harness runic powers.
- * New feats focused on magic and technology in the **Warcraft** world.
- * New spells, abilities, magic items, and technological devices that enhance, mangle, and squawk.
- * Extensive rules for battling in mighty steam armor!

Material is adapted from Blizzard Entertainment's best-selling **Warcraft** computer game franchise, with over 19 million copies sold.

More Magic and Mayhem is the first sourcebook for the new *World of Warcraft RPG*.

Presentation

The cover features three individuals ensconced in combat. The primary character is a hulking ork covered in glowing runes. Were I living in this realm, based on his looks, he is an individual I would not want to cross. He is about to pound on a night elf woman (it appears to be the same night elf often used in *World of Warcraft* images). The pink-skinned night elf is wielding a glowing stone and a similarly glowing sword. To the



ork's side is a red haired (and bearded, of course) dwarf who is wielding a pole arm. This weapon is crackling with electricity and looks to be technical in nature, not magical. This well detailed image is from Jason Chan (who also has illustrations in the interior of the title). All of the interior art work is black and white and in the same style as the illustrations that appear in the core book. The core book's illustrations are in full color while, sadly, this title is in black & white. This fact throws off the consistency a little. The largest images, through most of the book, are about a third of a page. There are a few images, such as character class illustrations, that are a half page. The image placement, as far as position and content relevance, are excellent. I am a little disappointed in the lack of art contained within. The illustrations seem sparse in some areas. Also, there are no full page images, and there are no chapter dividing pages.

Content

More Magic and Mayhem offers a bevy of new options for a *World of Warcraft RPG* game. Thankfully, the new entries are not just thrown into the game but are translated from or inspired by the Warcraft series of computer games. All of the additions really capture the feel of the series and help enhance the RPG. It is only 200 pages but it is chock full of great options!

Classes

Three new core classes and four new prestige classes are presented for use. All of these new classes, base and prestige, are well-balanced with those presented in the core book. Two of the new base classes work with a new rule set, **runes**. The other also works with a new rule set, **brews**. The new rule sets are discussed below.

The **Inscribe** is a member of the Arcanist path. Inscribers work with a form of arcane magic that does not risk arcane corruption. They do this through a spell casting process called

rune-casting. The inscriber can cast from his own list of spells as well as from a select list of arcane spells that can be transcribed into runes. Beyond the spell list, however, inscribers are very much like other arcane spell casters.

The healer path is also expanded upon here with the **Witch Doctor**. Witch doctors are highly skilled alchemists. Their alchemy is fairly unique to them, however, in the fact that they 'awaken the spirits of the ingredients' that are used in their concoctions. This spiritual awakening is done through a set of techniques known as Mojo. Along with their other special abilities, witch doctors work with the same spell list as shamans.

The **Runemaster**, like the inscriber, uses runes for power. Unlike the inscriber, though, a runemaster focuses his runes upon himself. He is tattooed (or marked on some other fashion) with a number of runic patterns and can use these to enhance his own abilities. The number of runes a runemaster knows and how many can be used in a day are determined much like spells for a sorcerer in *Dungeons & Dragons*.

The **Argent Dawn Templar** prestige class offers a new set of options for those who oppose the Burning Legion. This prestige class offers a great number of new abilities to characters who qualify for the class, but at a cost. Class features from previous classes must be sacrificed to acquire the new abilities.

Enchanters take creation of magical items to a new level. These characters destroy existing magical items in order to create new ones. This may seem like a great cost but the enchanter does not need to spend as much (if any) experience when making the new items. The time it takes for these items to be imbued with magical properties is also much greater than that which is required in the creation of a wholly new magical item.

There are some who study the lines of power that spread throughout the world. There are even some who have learned to harness their power directly. **Ley Walkers** have learned to draw upon the magical properties of the world to enhance spells and other magical properties. Some have even learned how to travel along them (cast *teleport* or *dimension door* spontaneously). There are also those individuals who do not seek attunement with the magic of the world but with technology, particularly technology that can greatly assist in their survival in combat. **Steam Warriors** build and customize their own machines of death and destruction. They wade into battle in massive steam-powered steel suits and test their mettle (and metal). Of course, to go along with these new classes, there are a number of new feats. Many of them tie directly to one of the new classes, base or prestige. There are a number of feats that can be taken by individuals outside of the classes described within this book, but they are still, at least loosely, tied to them.

New Rules

Alchemy is introduced as a kind of potion making for those who can not necessarily make potions (though it is not closed to those who can). With alchemical concoctions, one can make healing items (akin to cure potions), augmenting items (like a *potion of bears strength*), liquids that are applied to items (like poisons), and those that completely transform other objects.

There is a list about six pages long of nothing but alchemical concoctions. If we have an enchanter, we must have rule for **enchancements**. Enchanting allows an enchanter to take a pool of points from a magical item that she has broken and spend those points in the place of experience points. Unlike magical items, however, only one enchantment can be placed on a single item. Enchantments can be placed on other magical items. A list of enchantments a little over four pages long is included.

Rune-casting takes the patterns that are formed by lines of power that are found in nature and uses them to cast non-corrupting arcane spells. There are multiple kinds of runes. They are broken into grouping called patterns. These patterns are similar to domains for divine casters. They are groupings of runes that build upon each other. There are eleven patterns in all and about fourteen pages worth of single runes.

New Toys: Magic & Technology

The new rule sets are not the only ones that get new spells. In fact, there are twenty-three pages worth of new spells for all classes! Magic goes far beyond what is cast. As with most good supplements, there are new magical items. There are new specific items & attributes in spades in this title! There are five specific armors/shields and twenty new magical attributes for defensive items, twenty-five new named magical weapons and fifty-four new magical attributes for weapons! Each and every one of the new specific magical armors, shields, and weapons is brimming with personality. They add so much depth to the game. Beyond the items for combat, there are new potions/oils, rings, rods/staves/wands, scrolls, and wondrous items. Just like with the weapons, a good number of the new wondrous items have a lot of personality. Take Beer Goggles for example: now there is no wonder why, in a drunken stupor, we may have gone home with someone quite questionable. They were able to disguise themselves.

Conclusion

At \$30, *More Magic and Mayhem* is a little pricey, since it weighs in at only 200 pages and is black & white. Don't let the price scare you away from the book. I cannot think of a single *World of Warcraft RPG* game that this title will not enhance greatly! If you are a GM or player of this game and you have not done so already, do yourself a favor and get your hands on a copy of this book. I really do not think you'll regret it!

Class: Rules Supplement

Str 16 (*Physical*): Strong binding, durable cover (even the image resists scratches).

Dex 14 (*Organization*): I had to do a little page flipping but not much. I don't like the lack of chapter dividing pages.

Con 16 (*Value of the Content*): It may seem a little thin for \$30 but there is a ton of useful material in here.

Int 16 (*Quality of Content*): All of the new rules seem to fit very well with the reviously published *World of Warcraft* material.

Wis 17 (*Options & Adaptability*): All of the new material (especially base classes) opens a great deal of new options for any *World of Warcraft RPG* game.

Cha 16 (*Look & Feel*): The illustrations that are contained with are quite nice (and fitting to the feel of the game) but they are a bit too sparse.

DRAGONLANCE: Holy Orders of the Stars

Authors: Sean Eveiette, Chris Pierson, Cam Banks, Trampas Whiteman

Publisher: Sovereign Press

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

Reviewed by: Adam Stuart

Review date: February 12, 2006

Reviewer Bias: I must admit to never having read anything with any sort of connection to the DRAGONLANCE campaign setting. This title was given to me by Mr. Devita for review purposes.

This book is a supplement for the d20 DRAGONLANCE setting. It comes complete with 158 pages of material ensconced in a hard-bound cover. Cover art has been provided by Matt Stawicki, while interior art has been provided by Drew Baker, Chris Dien, Larry Elmore, Jason Engle, Alan Gutierrez, Stacy Hausl, Tomasz Jedruszek, Shelly Loke, Jennifer Meyer, Douglas Malachi Penney, and Beth Trott.

From the Back Cover

Written in the Stars...

The mortal races of Krynn can see the presence of the gods by simply turning their gaze to the night sky. There the constellations of the gods of good, evil, and balance wheel about in silent struggle to influence their children who live and die on the world below. The gods have blessed the world with miracles of healing and salvation but so also have they inflicted war and terrible cataclysms. Clerics, holy warriors and people of strong belief serve the gods, working to bring about the aims and ends givento them through prayer and meditation. They wield the divine powers of true healing and magic, and most will live and die for their cause. Powerful champions wield holy artifacts, some created by the gods themselves.

Holy Orders of the Stars is a resource for games set in the world of DRAGONLANCE. Contained within these pages are resources for players, including information on the gods and the races of Krynn, new prestige classes, spells, and magical items. Detailed descriptions of the churches of all of Krynn's gods are present, including the "lost" gods, Paladine and Takhisis. Dungeon Masters will discover resources on the gods and their aims, including their various aspects-ideal for incorporating divine forces into an ongoing campaign. All information within this volume is fully compatible with the revised edition of the d20 system game.

Presentation

The cover of *Holy Orders of the Stars* depicts a vivid action scene consisting of a surrounded cleric on a hilltop fending off an undead army with his trusty mace. The cover passed the "smack it with something big and heavy" test with flying colors.

Interior illustrations are very well done in typical fantasy style. While the images are very well placed within individual pages, there simply aren't enough of them, or at least they aren't evenly spaced enough to seem that way, and for many sections you will find yourself looking at a big ol' pile of text for page after page

Content

The only overarching problem while going over this book was my own unfamiliarity with the DRAGONLANCE setting. Please note that if you don't want to spend most of your experiences with this book scratching your head and flipping through the book as you try to piece together the meta-plot, then prior knowledge of the DRAGONLANCE universe is highly recommended. That said, once you start to get the gist of what the devil's going on, the book is quite informative. The opening section on roleplaying tips for your character is in particular very well done. Becoming a man or woman of the cloth is not for everyone, and this section guides you step-by-step of what caused your character to dedicate herself to the gods.

Sadly, the next bit was rather confusing as the book detailed how each region and race reveres and views the gods. I only say sadly because of my personal ignorance in regard to the overall setting. This is one of those parts where people unfamiliar are going to get lost, as it rattles off names, places and events that have absolutely no meaning to you. That said, if you are a fan of DRAGONLANCE, you will find this section quite informative, helpful and well-written.

Prestige classes are kind of iffy. While this section won't have much head scratching, it will have the followers of some gods getting the shaft, while others bathe in new glorious abilities. Sadly, quite a few of these classes' abilities are severely limited, such as the Coinswords, Righteous Cohorts and Soulbrokers. These prestige classes are probably best used as non-player characters, or even antagonists for your story.

The new divine spells are well done, with some new variant rules, such as clerics casting spontaneously from their domains as they would cure or inflict spells to emphasize the importance of choosing your god. The spells themselves are by and large very useful and creative, with my only complain being against the uber-powerful spell *virtue manifest*. If a spell needs fully half of a page detailing the ethics and consequences of using it, then it might just be a little bit too powerful.

The brand spanking new magic toys for your players are pretty average with nothing really standing out in particular, although it does give some ideas for GMs to make their own. The artifacts are interesting, and the Kender Spoon of Turning was a good laugh. The book does a good job of explaining how these artifacts helped shape the history of the world.

At the end of the book we get to cosmology of DRAGONLANCE. It comes complete with a detailed description of how the gods interact with each other, some new holy monsters and pretty much everything you would want to know about the various churches. My only complaint is that this would have been much more helpful had it been placed at the front of the book instead. Other than that, it's very solid.

Conclusion

Other than the required reading, this book is pretty much has quality written all over it...or written in it, if you prefer. In all honesty, I probably would have enjoyed this far more if I had

prior experience, as it is a very good read. Thankfully, most of the new material can be used in other settings with a few names changed around to reflect different pantheons, so even if you aren't planning on running a DRAGONLANCE campaign, you can still get some mileage out of it.

Class: Supplement

Str 17 (Physical): As I said, it passed the “whack it with a big heavy object” test without a hitch.

Dex 13 (Organization): Even though I probably shouldn't have gotten into this without foreknowledge of the series, the composition of the book really didn't help much.

Con 14 (Value of the Content): Most of the new stuff is pretty good, although a few bits are either too limited to be useful or too powerful for the hands of mortals.

Int 17 (Quality of Content): I honestly can't find any real fault with any of the new content, numbers-wise. I especially like the suggested domain casting rule.

Wis 15 (Options & Adaptability): Even if you're not a fan of DRAGONLANCE, most of what is in here can be used elsewhere.

Cha 16 (Look & Feel): Although the art that is inside is nice, there are too many long stretches of text.

Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer

Author: Giltônio Santos

Publisher: Secular Games

Reviewed by: Kyle Thompson

Review Date: January 30, 2006

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

The *Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer* is a d20 supplement that expands on the popular prestige class from the *Dungeon Master Guide*: the arcane archer. It is a 35-page PDF file that contains tons of alternatives to the arcane archer as well as several NPCs. The PDF retails at \$5.00 at edge.rpgnow.com.

From the Publisher

Archers of elven legend will blast your campaign!

This book is the first in the series by Secular Games called Advanced Character Guides, a collection that takes a standard prestige class and brings new rules and concepts to improve your experience with it. Each of the SRD prestige classes will get its own volume, and we hope to offer new and exciting variants every time, toned accordingly to all of them.

Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer will be your next step into this popular character option. With the rules presented in this 35-page PDF, it's possible to optimize the choices related to the class, and take it to a huge improvement in the long-time development. Inside, you'll find:

- A 20-level arcane archer core class, if you want to play one from the very first level.
- New feats that improve the arcane archer in what she excels.
- Alternative arcane archers that best suit non-standard elf sub-races or character choices.

- Sample arcane archers to be used as ready-to-play NPCs or inspiration for your own characters.
- New spells and magic items for characters which take the bow as a favorite weapon.

All of this material was created not only with players in mind, but is also worth a GM's time and energy. *Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer* is presented in two formats (one landscape full-color and one B&W vertical printer-friendly), with cover and interior illustrations from the best artists brought to you by Secular Games.

Presentation

The cover features a wonderful piece of artwork depicting a female arcane archer standing by a tree with mountains in the background. In the branches of the tree, a male arcane archer crouches and in the bottom corner stands a second male arcane archer. The cover was done by Glauco Nobre, Ig Barros, and Kenzo Abeki.

The interior images range from black and white to color. The majority of the art is color and the black and white images are not out of place. The interior art is as good as the cover art and was provided by Fernanda Chiella, Glauco Nobre, Kenzo Abeki, and Pulyx.

Content

Inside the *Advanced Character Guide: Arcane Archer* there is a lot of new material. First is a 20-level core class version of the arcane archer for players who want to start play in the class. Next are several new feats that are helpful to any kind of archer as well as archery school feats that help elf and half-elf characters. Following the feats, there are seven racial variations of the arcane archer prestige class, including the divine archer and the psychic archer. After this, the PDF contains four NPCs that have stats at three different levels (Levels 2, 7, and 14). The book is wrapped up with the core arcane archer spell list as well as some new spells and magic items.

The Core Arcane Archer

At first, I was a little worried when I first saw this because I am wary of an attempt to bring a prestige class to a first level character by making it a core class. However, this was done extremely well and the class seems very balanced. The class starts out only giving minor archery feats and slowly introduces the arcane archer prestige class abilities.

The Feats

This portion of the PDF starts out with general and metamagic feats. The feats are useful to almost any archer, though some are uniquely useful to the arcane archer and its variants given later in the publication. All of the feats seem to be in order and well balanced.

Following the normal feats, there is a section entitled Archery School Feats. These feats may only be taken at first level and by elven or half-elven characters. The schools each have their own black and white symbol as well as their own special ability. These feats are good for adding some flavor to elven and half-elven characters.

The Variants of the Arcane Archer Prestige Class

Overall, this section was enjoyable. Each of the variations is unique in its own right. These prestige classes are rooted in the arcane archer prestige class, but have slight changes in abilities, base saves and base attack bonuses. Also, some of the prestige classes require that the candidate for the class is of a certain type of elf. My only qualm with this is that the blizzard archer prestige class requires that the candidate be a winter elf or half-elf of winter elf descent. The description goes on to say that the winter elf is described in a *forthcoming* supplement entitled *Lines of Legend: Winter Elves*. In my opinion, at least the basic statistics and habits of the winter elves should have been provided. The class is still good and will probably be furthered by the upcoming supplement when it is available.

The NPCs

This section contains four different NPCs: Aleyna Shadowlily, Eredon the Artisan, Haya Sunbringer, and Ottis the Vulture. Each of these NPCs is accompanied by background information for their lives. The background information is accompanied by statistics at levels 2, 7 and 14. This is really cool because the background information is split up by each stat block showing what the character looks like at different points of the provided back story.

The Magic

The spell list for the arcane archer core class appears to be complete and well put together, containing the basics as well as spells that would be beneficial to an archer. This includes four new spells.

The magic items presented in this section are interesting and well thought out. All of them are useful to any archer, but many could be useful to any sort of character.

Conclusion

While not all DMs use or allow the arcane archer in their campaigns, if you are a DM looking to incorporate an NPC arcane archer or you know that one of your players is looking at this option, this is an invaluable resource. If you are a player who enjoys archery or playing an arcane archer, this pdf is well worth the five dollars. It even comes with a print version that will help you conserve ink when you take it to your next gaming session.

Class: Prestige Class Supplement

Str N/A (*Physical*) N/A; it's a PDF.

Dex 17 (*Organization*) Exceptional organization. Everything is easy to find.

Con 14 (*Value of Content*) Its hard to ask for more here, though as I stated earlier, it should contain the winter elf if it is going to use it as a requirement for a prestige class.

Int 15 (*Quality of Content*) The content appears to be well balanced and is entertaining and interesting.

Wis 15 (*Options & Adaptability*) Easy to implement into any campaign and presents lots of options for character creation and advancement.

Cha 16 (*Look & Feel*) Pictures are aesthetically pleasing and fun. They don't take up space and add to the content of the product.

Tribe 8 Second Edition Player's Handbook

Authors: Bob Woods with additional writing by Matthew Hickey, Nicholas Pilon, Alexander Freed, & Larry Sayers

Publisher: Dream Pod 9

URL: <http://www.dp9.com/>

Reviewed by: Nash J. DeVita

Review Date: Jan. 16th, 2006

Reviewer Bias: I was introduced to the Silhouette system about four years ago when I pick up Heavy Gear 2nd Edition. That purchase was followed very shortly thereafter by Tribe 8 (First Edition). This title was received for review and future play.

This is the core rule book for *Tribe 8 Second Edition* (along with the *Silhouette Core Rules*). This is a 253-page trade paperback with art (cover and interior) from Ghislain Barbe, Kieran J. Yanner, Marc Ouellette, Charles-Emmanuel Ouellette, & Normand Bilodeau.

From the Back Cover

We are the dispossessed, the Children of Hom, the Fallen, we are the Eighth Tribe and we stand alone. We are those who walk away, those who turn our backs on the Seven Sisters, on our mothers and fathers, and venture into the wastelands around us to find our destiny, to find our calling. Some of us are rebels or outlaws, others malcontents and lunatics, victims and terrorists, but we are one; we are the Children of the Fall. Listen to me, my brothers and sisters, we must no longer stand idle and silent; our time has come. The ashes are vanishing and in their wake a new world is dawning, a world that is our destiny to discover and to reclaim. The past, the camps, the Z'Bri, they are all just that – the past. The future is dark and unknown; the future belongs to us. – Altara Ven, “The Manifesto of the Fallen.”

Tribe 8 is a roleplaying game set in a tribal future where Players are blessed with mystical insight and marked by destiny. This book features:

-A detailed world background, with history, meta plots explained and revised Capal setting;

-Extensive Player Character creation guidelines, along with weapons and equipment to use;

-Z'bri and Fatima creation guidelines along with tons of nasty beasts to fight;

-Dual-stats for the powerful Silhouette CORE rules system, a highly acclaimed game engine that uses classic six-sided dice, and the widely popular d20-based rules placed under the Open Gaming License.

Presentation

The cover features three individuals in various action poses. The figure on the left is a redheaded man in somewhat bulky-looking armor. He is wielding a large sword. The spiky hair ties well with the rods that are protruding from the back of his armor. The character in center is a larger, bald man with a number of tattoos and piercings. His brown shirt (or jacket) is open, revealing even more tattoos. The scholarly looking, dark haired woman on the

right is quite slim and wears a tattered dress. There is a glowing orb being projected from her right hand. Behind all three is a very large and very blurry blue figure with what appear to be horns and wings. The image is blurry, so that not many details can really be seen. There is no specific credit for the cover artist.

All of the interior art work is black and white and in an anime/manga style that Dream Pod 9 (DP9) has become known for. This style works superbly with the feel of this game! The largest images through most of the book are about a third of a page. There are a few images, like tech schematics, that are a full page. The image placement, as far as position and content relevance, is top notch.

Content

This title offers the basics of this game, not the basics of the system. For the system basics, see either the OGL Core Books or *Silhouette Core Rules*. The exceptions to the basic rules are offered within, though.

Setting

This is where *Tribe 8* really shines. Yes, the most absolute basic principal behind the setting is that it is a post-apocalyptic world. This goes far beyond the attempt to rebuild or whatever, though.

Humanity damned itself via greed and corruption and abandoned the world of spirits. The spirit realm decided that it was not too happy about that and sent forth the **Z'bri**. The Z'bri destroyed much of humanity and enslaved the rest. These pockets of humanity were put into Camps.

Eventually, the Goddess grew tired of seeing her people treated in such a manner and sent her emissaries, the **Fatimas**. Eight in all, the Fatimas were nothing more than animated heaps of scrap given life through the Goddess. They did as was necessary and liberated a portion of humanity. Sadly, the Fatimas were not without flaw. Treacheries within their ranks lead to the death of Joshua, the only male Fatima.

The remaining Fatimas took their people and, in a wasted city on an island from the world that was, formed a new city. Those individuals who did not conform for whatever reason were cast out. Those exiled rallied under a prophecy spoken by Joshua with his dying breath: "... the outcasts of his Sisters' society would avenge his death and lead a revolution that would truly liberate all of humanity and restore balance to Creation."

Eventually, the Fallen became the eighth tribe and did just as was prophesied. They took the capital city of their enemy, the Z'bri, and ruled over the nation. Humanity, though, became even more splintered in the time since the Z'bri were defeated.

With the return of the faithful, even during the days of the camps of the Z'bri, spirits and magic returned to the world. **Synthesis**, as this magic is known, brings "the spiritual and material realms together" through a force of will. Z'bri still roam to this day, just not in the numbers that they used to. No longer is humanity only set upon by these outsiders, however. They are also set upon by other members of humanity as well as a plague of undead beings.

Characters

The basic character type in *Tribe 8* is a member of the eighth tribe, under the banner of Joshua. Characters of just about any archetype can be played, though. It just takes a little more work on the part of the players and the GM (referred to in this system as the **Weaver**). Characters can consist of individuals that still worship one of the other seven Fatimas, those who utilize technologies from the old world, nomads & survivalists, Z'bri experiments, or just about anything else that could be imagined in this world. The characters, no matter what the concept, can under take any number of adventures in the world of Hom ("home") – discovery of what lies beyond the known borders, survival against all odds against the Z'bri or worse, or even slaying the monsters around and protecting your home land and brethren.

Thankfully, no matter the trials, the characters can be armed with far more than their wits alone. The character could be a **Dreamer**, one who utilizes Synthesis, armed with a sword, club, bow, or even machine gun, and there are always members of your tribe to watch your back. Speaking of Dreamers, they can do some nasty stuff. Synthesis can be used to learn the truth behind a person's or object's past, destroy or return life, paralyze one with just a glance, alter his/her own flesh, or even teleport between shadows. That is just an extremely small sampling of the possibilities. Let your imagination run wild. If you can describe it, it can likely be done with enough work.

Conclusion

The background is so fleshed out that in just reading a great many story arcs jumped into my head. Sadly, I've never been able to run a game in this setting despite the fact that I have quite a few of the first edition books in my personal library. With the new edition, I believe I'll have an easier time explaining the background to others and convincing them to play. Of course, with this new edition, some of those books in my library are now defunct.

Despite the editing issues that are in this title in a few areas, I love this book. *Tribe 8* is one of the more original post-apocalyptic RPGs I have read in some time. With the changes that have been made to the background (advancement in time from the first edition), the game is now that much more accessible to players that are not familiar with the setting or genre.

Archetype: Core Rule Book/Player's Guide

Body 10 (*Game Mechanics*): Like all SilCore games, they can be daunting but highly worth it.

Mind 10 (*Organization*): Quite nice.

Spirit 11 (*Look & Feel*): This work is not just beautiful but inspiring too!

Attack 7 (*Value of Content*): Another book is needed along with this to play.

Defense 10 (*Originality of Content*): I've never seen a post-apocalypse setting like it before!

Health 8 (*Physical Quality*): It's a paperback but the binding is solid.

Magic 10 (*Options & Adaptability*): Many various styles of game are possible.

Bad Baby Productions



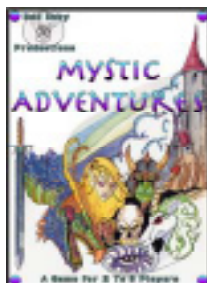
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50 New Ways to Turn Things into Other Things

a preview by Matthew J. Hanson

In 2005 we bought you the first book in the *50 New Ways* series entitled *50 New Ways to Blow Things Up: Evocation*. In it Matthew J. Hanson showcased 50 new spells to liven up the Evocation school of magic and give your mages that extra umph-factor.

Coming in April is the second book in the series entitled *50 New Ways to Turn Things into Other Things: Transmutation*. To whet your appetite, here is a spell from the book:

Corrosive Blood

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S, M^c

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Target: You

Duration: 1 minute/level

Corrosive blood turns your blood into a powerful dissolving agent. This does not cause you any harm, but if a slashing or piercing weapon deals damage to you, a small amount of this acidic blood spills forth, dealing 2d6 points of acid damage +1 point/2 levels (maximum +10) to the weapon in question. If a slashing or piercing natural weapon injures you, the acid affects the creature directly. Either way, the weapon or the creature may reduce the damage by half with a successful Reflex save.

Material Component: A flask of acid (10 gp).

Incantation

“My pain is your death.”

Notes on *Corrosive Blood*

This spell was created by one of those crazy mages who occasionally likes to fly into a berserker rage. Graken Thunderbone grew up on the edges of civilization and learned the magic art from his tribe's aged wise person. He loved to cast buffing spells upon himself before rushing into battle screaming and swinging his axe. This spell was one of his favorite, since he seldom cared about armor and almost invited attacks upon him.

Corrosive blood only helps if you plan to be hurt, thus it defiantly is not for everybody. If you think you will get hit, this spell works pretty well, especially against creatures that have many small attacks as opposed to one single attack that deals huge amounts of damage. It also works better against foes using natural attacks than those with manufactured weapons.

50 New Ways to Turn Things into Other Things comes out on the 17th of April and will be available for purchase as a PDF product from all major e-retail stores. The print version will be on sale a few months after that.

The artwork for the book is by Joe Slucher, who will be doing both the cover art and the interior artwork.



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In every issue of the Trumpeter we provide our readers with special offers on our products. Here is this issue's selection:

Map Foundry 01 - The Cave in the Cliffs

A completely vector based map product of a small cave complex. You can find the side and top views of the cave on the next page as a preview. For more information on this product go to the official product page where you can buy it for just **\$2**.



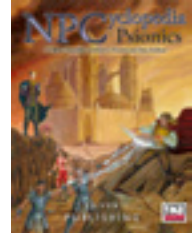
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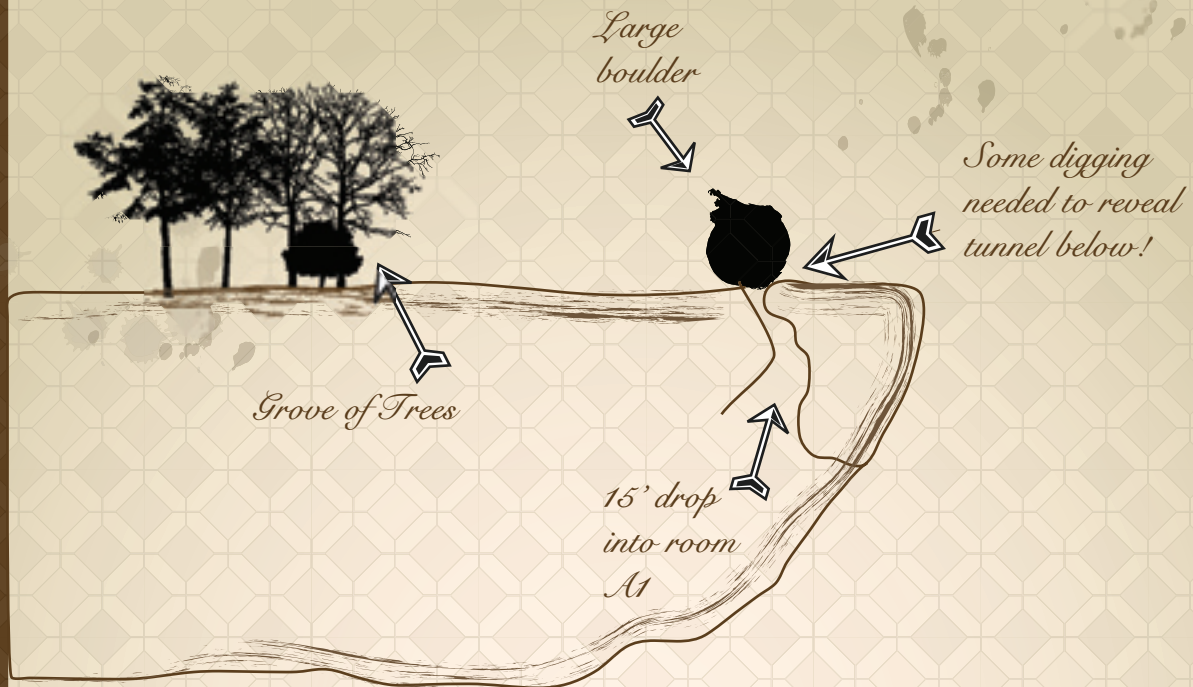
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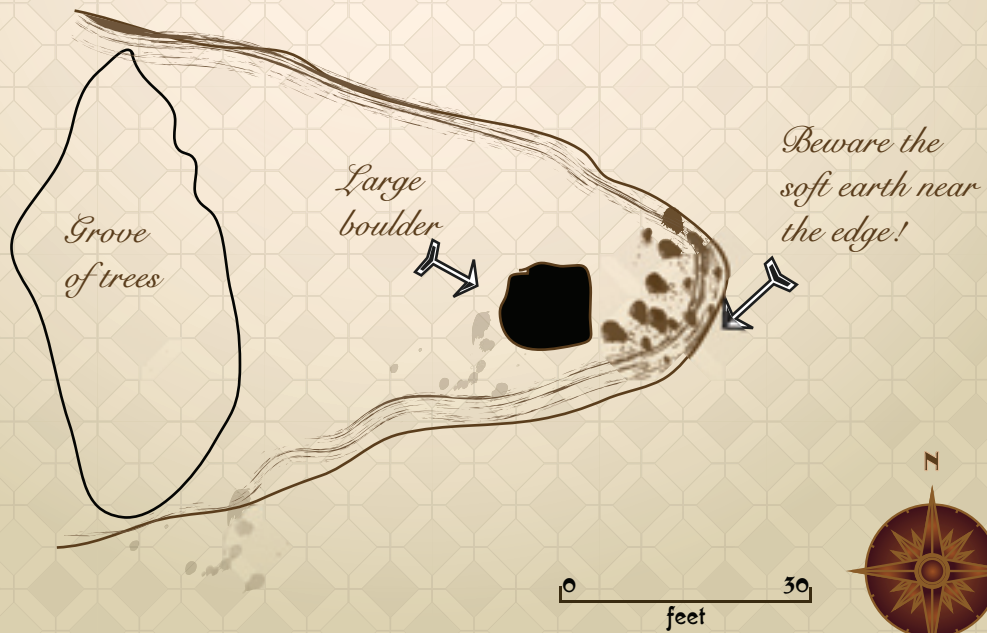
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from daVinci Games

Map ID: 01a - Side View



Map ID: 01b - Top-Down View



0 30 feet



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