

Silven Trumpeter 05 - December 2003 Edition

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The Silven
Trumpeter
The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

Chris Pramas Interview

We interview the founder and CEO of Green Ronin Publishing and discover the ins and outs of d20 publishing
page 08

RPG Comedy

Our monthly comic continues as Kou and Ali educate us on the subject of RPGs
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COVER STORY:

Best Served Cold

by Edward Kopp
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cover art : Scott Purdy

Sound off!

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

Write to Dana at :
adriayna@yahoo.com

Errata

In our previous edition (Trumpeter 04 - November Edition) we published an article that was the result of a Q&A with artist Todd Lockwood. The images accompanying the article were referenced as being copyright of Todd Lockwood. The images are in fact copyright Wizards of the Coast. Our thanks go to Mr. Lockwood for pointing this out to us.

From the Editor

Winter is a fun yet frustrating time for gaming. On one hand, the holiday season means new books, dice, games, and computer upgrades—a multitude of new toys for the serious gamer. On the other hand, the holidays can fragment a good gaming schedule with family obligations and travel plans leaving many empty seats at the gaming table.

So how does the gamer get through it? For the CRPG gamers out there, be sure to take time for yourself to game over the busy holiday season. For the PnP gamers, if you know that your group is going to be missing a few sessions, as players, take a few notes on the current adventure so to refresh you when you get to play again. If you are the DM, be sure to have an adventure synopsis at the start of every session to refresh players, or fill in those who had to miss.

For the December issue of the *Silven Trumpeter*, we decided to do something new—have a “winter themed” issue in concordance with the upcoming holiday season and winter solstice. Our cover story, by Edward Kopp our new assistant editor, is a fiction piece about a frigid dragon hunt. Other winter-themed articles include *Player Characterization: Winter Wonderment*, where Pike Stevenson takes us through how to include climate when designing a character; *Winter as Character*, where Scott Fitz looks at how to personify winter; and *Faith Based Initiative: Gamers Guide to Hanukwanzmas*, where Eytan Bernstein details the upcoming holidays and potential gifts for any gamer.

As always, your comments, criticisms, or questions are welcome. Happy holidays!

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Crossroads E-zine



Top Industry News

Call of Cthulu CCG to be Published By Fantasy Flight Games

Chaosium, Inc has licensed Fantasy Flight Games to produce official Call of Cthulu collectable card game based on the popular Call of Cthulu RPG. Christian T. Petersen, C.E.O., of Fantasy Flight Games says that the card game will feature a new, fast paced, dynamic experience for players. The CCG is set to release is spring of 2004.

► For more information : <http://www.fantasyflightgames.com/>

ScriptEase for Neverwinter Nights released

The ability to design complicated, engaging, and exciting modules using all the crazy scripting power of the Aurora Toolset is now within reach. A group of talented programmers at the University of Alberta has created the answer to our non-programming dreams - ScriptEase! There is also a step-by-step tutorial with lots of screenshots to get you started on this powerful software.

► Download here : <http://www.cs.ualberta.ca/~script/scripteasenwn.html>

True Dungeon Releases New Products

True Dungeon has announced a series of new upcoming products. One such product, called Treasure Kits, resemble tokens that players can use throughout the dungeon. Treasure Kit tokens are collectible and are divided into common, rare, and vary rare varieties.

► For more information : <http://www.silven.com/news.asp?case=show&id=395>

WotC developing an all-new G.I. JOE Trading Card Game for Fall 2004

Wizards of the Coast will first release the G.I. JOE Trading Card Game in a two-player starter set and randomized booster packs with each card featuring dynamic artwork that brings the guts and glory of the G.I. JOE universe into every TCG player's deck. Expansion sets are planned for release in 2005.

► For more information : <http://www.gamingreport.com/article.php?sid=10918>

Sean K Reynolds has a Contest for Anger of Angels

Sean Reynolds is hosting a contest on his website to promote the newly released Anger of Angels product, published by Malhavoc Press.

► For more information : <http://pub17.ezboard.com/fseankreynoldsboardsfrm1.showMessage?topicID=1436.topic>

Palladium Announces Rifts® World Book 5: Triax & The NGR to ship December 5

Triax & The NGR is one of the most popular Rifts® World Books of all time and a must for technophiles. The New German Republic (NGR) is the European counterpart to the Coalition States, only their Triax technology and war machines are even more advanced and deadly. They need them too, because the NGR is surrounded by the bloodthirsty Gargoyle Empire and the lesser threat of the Brodkiel in Poland. Page after page is filled with the high-tech robots, power armor, weapons and vehicles of Triax, plus the denizen, weapons and war machines of the Gargoyle Empire.

20 O.C.C.s (character classes). 13 types of power armor, including the Ulti-Max, Dyna-Max, Predator, Super Hunter, Devastator and Dragonwing. 14 Military vehicles and five commercial ones. 8 types of cyborgs. The Gargoyle menace and their weapons. Comic strip and artwork by Kevin Long. Additional art by Siembieda. History, overview and adventure ideas.

Cat. No. 810

Retail Price: \$21.95 – an unbeatable price for a book this size.

Page Count: 224 pages.

Cover: Kevin Long.

Interior Art: Kevin Long and Kevin Siembieda.

Written by: Kevin Siembieda.

Date of Release: December 5, 2003. At the printers.

Palladium Announces Rifts® World Book 24: China One: The Yama Kings to ship December 10

Rifts® World Books are back. Starting with the single most requested part of the world, *China*. When we sat down to plot the book, we quickly realized that we could never squeeze it into one volume, so we're releasing **Rifts® China One** and **Rifts® China Two**, back to back only a couple of weeks apart in December. Rifts® China, Book One presents the Hell on Earth setting, demons, ghosts, monsters, villains and more. That says it all.

► See the full release schedule: <http://www.palladiumbooks.com/press/press2003-11.html>

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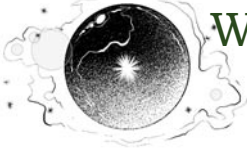
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Gaming Tips by Scott Fitz



Winter as Character

The weather is something that everyone always notices and talks about but can't do anything about. It is an important part of everyone's life, yet it seems to be ignored in games. However, it is seldom ignored in literature. Writers find weather to be the most important part of the setting because it is dynamic; it can change. Most of the setting is static—buildings, mountains, and roads simply don't change. That is to say, they don't change unless the weather acts upon them.

Take "the old Victorian house at the top of the hill," for example. Boring I know, but these will be simple examples to prove a point. Think about how the house looks in your mind's eye. Now an author can describe its various aspects, but it is what it is. Now apply weather to the scene: the old Victorian house at the top of the hill stood calmly against the clear blue sky; the hot summer wind blew leaves and paper against the old Victorian house at the top of the hill; the lightning backlit menacingly the old Victorian house at the top of the hill, all the while the heavens wept from dark rain clouds; or the light spilled cheerfully from the windows of the old Victorian house at the top of the hill upon the soft Christmas snow. See how the weather (and related description) changed the look and the mood of the old Victorian house? This same house now can serve the author's need by setting a calm, abandoned, scary, lonely, or cheerful mood for the piece. And the joy of using weather is that it can change again as the author needs it.

Weather does more than change the tone and feel of a story. It can enhance the drama. Which is more exciting, a "fight in an open field" or a "fight in an open field in pouring rain with thunder and lightning?" You can add yet more layers of drama to the scene by adding knowledge of an impending flood by the nearby river. Weather and its impact can transform a basic and boring chance to score some experience points into something players will remember for a long time.

Presenting or playing totally non human things, such as trees, rivers, wind, seems difficult and counter-intuitive (and requires a thesaurus). People cannot easily relate to the inanimate. To handle settings and weather, many writers personify them. By treating the setting and weather as a character, with its own view of the world and ways of interacting, the writers can use all their character tools and technique on their setting and the weather. This way they can use the weather and setting to set a mood, define a pace, add drama, and become an important part of the story.

Gamers might not know all the tricks and techniques of a writer, but they do know how to play and portray a character. By taking the above writer's trick, a GM can easily determine the weather and the tone it will set in the game. Simply select a character that defines the weather for the day, season, or region. Think about that character's temperament, abilities, and motivations. Then translate those actions into the weather, spinning any description to fit the character. This may sound hard, but chances are you are already doing it without knowing it. Think about the how you would describe the actions of a hulking barbarian, and then think about how you would do it differently if you were playing a dandy elf rogue. It is something that most gamers do unconsciously. This "weather character" becomes a very important NPC you are portraying. He, she, or it determines the weather and how it and its effects are described in the game: setting or contrasting the mood of the game, effecting the pace, and enhancing the game experience.

There are five "characters" that I use for personifying Winter in my various campaigns. For each one, I will give a physical description, two narrative examples, and explain a little bit about what I have done. Once you see it in action, you will see how easy it is to implement.

Old Man Winter

Old Man Winter is a heavysset, heavily bearded, elderly man. He is dressed in fur-covered robes. He is old and cranky, but just as powerful as he was in his prime. When he gets his ire up, he can be mean spirited and is able to take out his annoyance on the world.

Example 1

You are trudging down the road to Appleton. It is cold. Very cold. The wind is steady and strong. It is against you. No matter which way the road winds in through the hills, it seems to blast you. The snow is deep and wet. When you get to Appleton you feel beaten down. You can try to go on, but you are feeling very fatigued, as the cold has taken you down a notch.

Example 2

As you step out of the inn, you note it went from an ice-cold clear night, to a thick hard snow. The wind is strong and steady. It is not enough to make a terrible storm but just a few steps short. The groom brings your horses; he is huddled over in two blankets like a whipped dog. You can see his breath as he walks the horses to you.

You can see precious else farther away between the dark and the snow. *<player interaction>* With some effort, you get your mounts onto the road. The mean, old wind pushes against you, slowly moving daggers of cold through your cloaks.

You can see how the weather is impacting the character's lives. It is generating fatigue, disturbing their plans, and reducing their effectiveness. It sets a tone of harshness and despair. The short clipped sentences help convey the age and the crankiness. Sometimes I will use my "old man voice" when portraying the weather or an outdoors winter scene. Winter can be seen as an opponent that the characters would like to fight, but can not.

Ice Queen

The Ice Queen is a beautiful wizardess, dressed in blue and white gowns trimmed with sparkling ice gems and fur. She is well groomed, well dressed, well mannered, and the personification of polite. She is also notably or extremely vain and fickle. Best advice? Be respectful, stay on her good side, and give her compliments. If you cross her, you will probably not live long enough to regret it. She will fight with her sister spring, so the end of winter will sometimes be dramatic.

Example 1

You follow the winding road to Appleton. The morning is crisp, clear, but deceptively cold. The beautiful curvy hills are covered in a silky snow. The bright sunshine does little to warm you, but lights up all the ice upon the branches and puts a shine to the snow. No wind disturbs the delicate powder from this morning's gentle snow. The nearby IronHeart Mountains in the distance are draped in a couture snow, making the already impressive mountain range look stunning. It is enough to make a paladin wonder at the beauty of nature. *<Looks to paladin's player to see if he picks up his cue.>*

Example 2

As you all step out of the inn, you see that the shining stars of the ice-cold night are nowhere to be seen. Now, it is hail—perfect little daggers of ice. The cold that has been there all day and night seems deeper. The Ranger knows this kind of cold can kill a man if he is not careful. The groom brings your mounts. "It seems she be angry with you leaving," he says while he hands out the reigns. "Don't think she wants ye to search for another woman this night." *<player interaction>* You take your mounts out into the dark and deadly snow.

The descriptions have a female flare to them, impressing on the beauty the Ice Queen brings. For better emphasis, I also use an elegant and cultured tone of voice. Underneath the beauty is always the underlying danger. This foreshadows any weather related danger, so anything you throw at them after it is fair game. In general, if the players are careful, respectful, and appreciate the winter's beauty, the weather will be on their side. If not, they are just steps away from evil winter magic.

In addition to mood, this type of weather will also foreshadow that the young woman they are searching for is a deadly beauty. Perhaps she peeved the Winter Wizardess off, now anyone outdoors will pay for it. See how the narration about the weather will help set the PCs expectations about anything beautiful. It may save their life, because they will be thinking of the cold beauty they are "rescuing" rather than just assuming she is an innocent maid.

Mad Winter Wizard

Imagine a wide eyed lunatic with a wintery wand of wonder. He mumbles to himself, occasionally ranting to the wind. Ill kempt and unpredictable; he is the kind of villain people hire players to stop before it is too late.

Example 1

The late summer rain was turning to ice as you dashed towards Appleton. The familiar road seems wrong under the unseasonable, even unnatural, darkness of the rain. Halfway there, the wind picks up a wild blow. It is like the winds have gone mad, blowing and the gentle rain sideways and freezing it.

Example 1.5

There had been an almost spring-like thaw for the last few days. It looked like Winter's grip had loosened some. Yet now, the snow was wet, icy, and deep... dangerous to travel on. It is like the weather is conspiring to keep you here.

Example 2

As you leave the inn, the dump of snow that occurred over a candlemark earlier has left the sky cold and clear, like the terrible storm of the late afternoon never happened. It appears the weather has no surprises for you now, as the groom brings up your mounts. But you never know. "Here you go," says the groom handing all of you your reigns.

The Winter Wizard is a mad man, Winter gone unpredictable. The weather seems to be coming from a random weather chart (and sometimes does). This unpredictability sets a tone of chance, that anything is possible. I choose this kind of weather when I want to promote risk taking in my players.

Snow Angel

The Snow Angel is a beautiful girl, with white fluffy wings in a white robe. She is always smiling and happy. While she can be mischievous, she is never cruel. She helps people when she can. While winter can sometimes be dangerous, it seldom will be on her watch.

Example 1

It is a pretty day as you meander the road to Appleton. The sun is shining. The air is warmer than it has been, and the snow is dry and bright. As you crest the last hill before Appleton, you hear children's

laughter, and those of you who can make a perception roll/check can see the children throwing snowballs in the orchard in front of you. *<GM to players, "Any characters have similar happy memories?">*

Example 2

As you leave the inn to go on your rescue mission, you see the sky is clear, the stars and moon are winter bright, and it is warmer than you expected. Your mounts prance a bit as the groom brings them out. The night is quiet, except for the hooves crunching the light powder from the earlier playful flurry. *<player interaction>* Your mounts move easily to a trot through the town which is all tucked in for the night warm and cozy under its blanket of white.

The mood the Snow Angel projects is happy, helpful, and fun. The weather is window dressing rather than a problem. I have to admit, this is my default winter weather persona. Note: Normally you should never mix narration and game mechanics. I added a bit of game mechanics to the first narration. It enhances the feel for the scene rather than distracts the players from it. Also by giving "stage directions" to my players, I can help enhance the mood I am looking for. Note that I did such with the Ice Queen's examples as well. The players can take the opportunity for role-playing an aspect of their history, or they can ride on. It is their choice. It is simply a set of character cues, not a blatant "You have happy childhood memories! Tell us what they are right now!" command.

Santa Claus

The Classic Big Jolly Guy. He is what Christmas stands for, not what it has become.

Example 1

The road to Appleton has been easy going, despite the snow and cold. The wind has been gentle and at your back, rather than the biting wind you felt last time you were here. You see a farmer and his son doing some wood cutting a little ways in from the road as you pass. Cresting the last hill, the wind shifts and brings the delicious smells you remember from the Inn at Appleton. The snow is deeper in the little valley, and the road is not cleared. It is still fairly easy going. There are children playing in the Orchards you are passing through... and it seems a few adults too. As you approach Appleton, you pass by cottage where the mother has put up the garlands for wintertide in the windows.

Example 2

As you leave the cheery inn, you note the sky is bright and clear. Though the snow is deep, it will not hinder you in your search for the lost girl. The groom,

munching on one of the famous Appleton winter apples, brings your mounts up. "Here you go good sirs, and madam. I packed a few apples for your mounts in the saddlebags." *<player interaction>* As you ride out, you can hear the chimes of a sleigh coming towards you.

Weather, season, and the setting always go together. The weather and season define the "actions" the larger setting can take. When using Santa Claus winter, it is always friendly and warm (though still cold enough not to melt the winter wonderland). The mood is joyful and family oriented. The mood is reinforced by the weather and people's responses to it—and their general outlook. By contrasting the difference in winter from the last time the players were here (Old Man Winter, for example), I enhance and reinforce that it is different this time and that everything is basically right with the world.

The weather is something that everyone always notices and talks about, but can't do anything about. It is an important part of everyone's life and now Game Masters can make it an important part of their character's lives. It is as simple as creating the "characters" that best reflect their "Winter" (and "Spring", "Summer", "Fall") for their campaigns. By simply playing their important new NPCs, the players will experience a new level of weather and game play.

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▶ <http://www.silven.com/articles.asp?case=show&id=67>

Text only version here:

▶ <http://www.silven.com/print.asp?case=article&camefrom=ezone&id=67>



Silven Crossroads Interviews

Green Ronin Founder : **Chris Pramas**



Bradford Ferguson conducted this interview with Chris Pramas of Green Ronin Publishing on November 14th of 2003. The interview was a telephone interview that was transcribed for readability. Silven Crossroads would like to thank Chris Pramas for his time and thoughtful answers.

Q) What is it that you personally love about gaming?

Chris Pramas: It's fun. It's a nice diversion. It is something that I can do that is both entertaining and allows me to use my head. Something creative, which is nice. Especially with role-playing games (RPGs), you can apply all sorts of things to them. I love to read history books, and it is very easy to work in stuff from history or the current day into your gaming.

Q) Do you game on a regular basis? Are you normally the Dungeon Master or a player?

Chris Pramas: I have a weekly roleplaying group. For most of the last three years, I have been the game master, but recently I offloaded those duties onto someone else because I was finding it difficult to find prep time. Every week was like, "Oh, people are going to be here in an hour! I need to figure out what I am doing tonight." It was just too much of a hassle. Honestly, I love to play - I rarely get a chance to play. It's a nice change of pace. I also play board games and miniatures games on a regular basis.

Q) Who makes up Green Ronin and how did you join forces with those people?

Chris Pramas: There are four core staff people. There is myself, Nicole Lindroos, Hal Mangold, and Evan Sass. When we started, it was just Nicole and I. We had known Hal for many years in the game industry.

Hal had worked for several companies including Pinnacle as their Deadlands Brand Manager. At the time, Hal had taken a tech job and he was out of the industry and was interested in keeping a finger in the industry. At first, we just hired him freelance to do the cover designs and then to the graphic design of books. Over time, Hal got more involved and started laying out just about all the books and he started art directing. He then quit his tech job and joined Green Ronin full time.

Evan is someone else that we have known a long time. He is a really good webmaster. Originally, Hal was doing the webpage and he did not have enough time, and

Evan is really good with web design. So we hired Evan on a part-time basis to do the upkeeping on the website and the occasional proof-reading work.

Q) Does everyone besides Evan Sass work full-time for Green Ronin?

Chris Pramas: Evan has had stints where he goes full-time for a few months. He contracts at Microsoft. Microsoft is strange about the way they handle their contractors because they do not want anyone to have a full-time job. *Chris chuckles* They have enforced periods where you cannot work for them - that way they do not have to give their contractors benefits. During those periods, Evan will often work three months for us full-time and then go back to Microsoft.

Q) What is it like now to be a d20 publisher as opposed to a writer/designer? Has your life changed drastically in the past few years?

Chris Pramas: Well sure *Chris laughs*. Yeah, it's very different. The biggest thing is that I do not have the time that I used to have for design work. When I worked for Wizards, my job for a long time was to just write D&D stuff - and that is what I did all day. Since I run a company, it is a lot harder to find time to do design work, because design work requires you to spend many hours uninterrupted. Running a company that puts out two or three products a month, Green Ronin's schedule is now extending through the end of 2004 and I have to contract people and deal with marketing and contracts and up teen things like that and people call all the time. It is difficult to find time alone so I can get design work done. It is different in that way.

On the more positive side, being my own boss is quite pleasant *Chris laughs*. It's nice to be the guy who makes decisions on what books we are going to do, how we are going to do them, what people we are going to work with, who we want to work on a particular project, when it is going to come out, how to market the product, and all that sort of stuff.

Q) What do you believe that Green Ronin brings in the way of fresh thinking to the heavily saturated d20 market?

Chris Pramas: *Chris laughs* That's a good question. What we have tried to do from the beginning is to give people the "total package." One of the things that you hear when people are defending books that are not that good is, "Well, it has some good ideas. I am gonna use some of the ideas in my campaign." Usually, that is shorthand for "This book really basically sucks and because I spend 20 to 25 dollars on it, I am going to spend a bunch of time fixing all the broken rules, so I get some value out of it." What Green Ronin tries to do is give people books that they do not have to spend a lot of time fixing. We do this by working with professional designers, by having high standards of editing

and design in general, and also by wrapping that all up in a nice package - with a good cover, nice cartography, and good art and graphic design. We basically provide you with the total package.

I think of lot of people, especially over the past year, have become more interested in pushing a lot of books out of the door without really making sure that they are good. We have been willing to do things like we did for Skull & Bones. We waited until it was good before we published it. I could have published that book nine months ago and it would have been terrible. We just pushed it off until it was ready, and the response we have gotten has been great so far. People have been giving it great reviews, they have been very enthusiastic about it, and that is what we try to do. We have to balance that with the realities of business, but we were the first to give people the good stuff.

That whole array of things is what sets us apart from a lot of other companies. We are also willing to try things that other companies aren't like Testament: Roleplaying in the Biblical Era. People thought that was a crazy idea, but I am thrilled with how that came out.

Q) Did GenCon Indy 2003 meet or beat your expectations?

Chris Pramas: It totally exceeded them, actually. Leading up to Indy, everyone in the industry was really apprehensive about whether people would follow the show. There were a lot of people saying, "Oh, it will be terrible, they are going to lose half their audience." Peter himself said that they were going to be happy if they only had a 20 percent drop in attendance this year. It turns out that they did not have any drop in attendance this year. Green Ronin had its best GenCon by far - we sold more products than we ever had before at a GenCon. We've got no complaints. The ENnies were nice to us, too.

Q) Why did Green Ronin decide to make Mutants & Masterminds - Crooks, which is a 128-page book, a hardback book?

Chris Pramas: Well, we are sort of experimenting with what formats work and don't work. There are some people who intrinsically believe that hardbacks sell more than non-hardbacks. We're doing a scientific test of that theory by having Crooks at a 128-page hardback and then in January, the Mutants and Masterminds: Annual #1 is coming out and will be the same page count but not hardback. We are going to compare the sales and see what is the case. The hardbacks display nicely and have a nice heft to them. People tend to like them because they seem sturdy. We thought we would give it a shot. That was the smallest hardback that we have done so far.

I personally think that Crooks will do better because it is kind of a monster book...

The difference is that the Annual is pitched at players and there are more players than Game Masters. That balances them out.

Q) Roughly how many copies of the core book of Mutants and Masterminds have been sold?

Chris Pramas: We don't tell people that sort of thing, because information has a lot of value especially in a very competitive market. But what I can say about it, which will be meaningful for anyone who has been following the d20 market, is that Mutants & Masterminds has now outsold Death in Freeport, which was the first d20 product. That should tell you something.

I'm not really sure about the numbers of the first book...

The point is that when Death in Freeport came out, the only competition we had was from Wizards of the Coast and Atlas Games. So at the time, there were only three companies that were doing stuff for d20 - now there are hundreds of companies. We sold quite a lot of Death in Freeport and now after a year on the shelf, Mutants and Masterminds has sold more than that.

Is it safe to say that those two products have sold over 20,000 copies each?

I cannot comment. Unfortunately, there are people in this industry who are extremely competitive and who are willing to do less than scrupulous things. Sales numbers are something that we keep tight to our vests because knowledge is power.

Q) Overall, how has Green Ronin been doing with respect to sales and the bottom line?

Chris Pramas: The thing about the d20 market now is that there is just too many people in it. Basically, anyone with the desire to publish and a credit card can start putting products out. The d20 pie itself is pretty large. Literally every month, there are more people who want a piece of the pie, so the pieces are getting smaller for everyone. The challenge for d20 companies in the current environment is to survive long enough so that their competition goes out of business, because that will surely happen over the next year or two. The way the numbers are now, even for the top companies, they are not where they were like a few years ago, certainly.

It is a hard time especially after D&D 3.5, which really threw a wrench into everything; not everyone has switched over as there are some people who want 3.5 stuff and there are some people who do not. Half the time, even the people who are playing 3.5 are not using all of rules and are using 3.5 as a depository of house rules. People say, "We're gonna use 3.5 for this, that, and this and then we are gonna stick to 3.0 for everything else." It has created a bunch of problems for d20 publishers, especially for people with a big amount of backlist titles like we have.

Q) Quick question, Pocket Grimoires 3.5?

Chris Pramas: We have not been planning on doing them, because since we have done them, other companies have done products that were just like them. We can say, "Hey, that was our idea!" But the market does not care. When we went out to sell it, we would have to compete with products that have already been released and potentially serve that need. Ideally, I would do them, but you have to ask yourself if it would be

worthwhile when other companies have released similar products.

Q) Green Ronin has a nice list of products coming out in the next three months. Why so many products and how do you insure a high standard of quality? Do you ever worry that your products are competing with themselves?

Chris Pramas: I don't think that we are putting enough products out that we are really competing with ourselves. If you look at the mix of things, they appeal to different audiences. I do not think that a Mutants and Masterminds product, for instance, competes with the Mindshadows Campaign Setting. We settled a long time ago on the number of books that we would like to do optimally in a month - which is generally two to three. That gives us enough revenue from new books coming in to support everyone at the company with some money left over to support new projects. Our business model is designed so if we put out the number of books that we'd like to put out and sell a minimum amount of them, then business is good.

One of the problems with the current marketplace is that things are so driven by front list. There are some people that think that what people should really be doing is scaling back and doing just one cool book per month. That would be great if I believed if the distributors and retailers would buy twice as much - I would be more than happy to use that model. But, that is not how they are operating because there is so much stuff coming out. It does not matter if I went from two books to one, because there is still 40 d20 books coming out that month.

We picked the two to three book threshold as what we thought we could achieve on a regular basis and maintain our level of quality. That is why you have never seen us try to do six products in a month. I just don't think that is something that we can keep up and still pay attention to level of quality without the use of enormous resources.

Q) For Green Ronin, what was 2003 like compared to 2002?

Chris Pramas: On the one hand, we got a lot better at hitting our stride and getting more books out. That was certainly a positive. It was also the time that we were watching Mutants and Masterminds take off, because it launched at the end of 2002. We also saw a lot of weirdness in the market with the 3.5 launch and the general toughness of the market.

Everyone is plowing the same field with the fantasy genre, so you are seeing more and more weird niche books that would not sell a lot even in a healthy market. The topics are so esoteric that only some people would be interested in them to begin with. This is because the most obvious books have been done already - and in many cases been done multiple times by different companies - that it gets harder to come up with good books that will have a broad appeal that will allow you to sell enough. There have been race books. There have been four or five different sea combat rulebooks. Some companies are repeating themselves and other companies are doing things that have been done three or four times before.

Q) How has Green Ronin changed over the past year?

Chris Pramas: The core of the company has not changed all that much. We have had to become more careful about how we do things and where we spend our money. It was easier in the more liberal times to do a book that had high costs because we could be assured of selling a large amount of it in any case. Now, it is not always a sure thing. We have to be a little more careful how we allocate our resources.

Q) Besides the trends you have already mentioned, what trends do you see happening recently in the d20 industry?

Chris Pramas: I think a lot of people are trying to find their niche - something they can offer that other people are not offering. Not everyone can obviously succeed at that. There are a bunch of companies that are staffed by well-meaning, nice people that don't really have something to offer the community at large that other companies don't do better. That's just how it is with life, I guess.

The marketplace is so competitive now that companies that have gotten a lot better than they used to be and are putting out better books than they were a year ago, they are still seeing their sales decline. That certainly must be frustrating, "Wow, my books look three times better than they did a year ago, yet they are selling half as much!" I think we are probably going to see several companies go out of business or radically restructure what they do. Some of them may leave d20 entirely.

The thing about the role-playing business is that it does not take a lot for a company to keep going. You can take the meager profits that you make off of one book and roll them into the next book and hope that sells better. When a card game company has a big bomb; they are just wrecked. But a role-playing game company can continue to shuffle along with a horrible half-life such as showing up for GenCon when everyone thought they were out of business.

A lot of people have predicted that there is going to be a big crash as there was with collectible card games in 1995, and because of the economics of RPGs, that is just never going to happen. You are never going to see 12 companies go out in a six month period. Unless people were incredibly foolish by printing 25,000 copies of something... the economics are just different.

Q) Will we see more imprints in the d20 industry?

Chris Pramas: It's entirely possible. That's how Green Ronin ended up with print publishing the stuff by the Game Mechanics, because all the Game Mechanics guys are fellas I used to work with at Wizards. When they were laid off, they started the Game Mechanics. They knew enough about the industry to know that if they started a d20 company this late in the game, their sales were not gonna be enough. It did not matter who they were, eventhough these were guys who worked on the core D&D books and designed d20 Modern. Unfortunately, that sort of stuff does not translate to sales as much as designers wish that it did. They were savvy enough to know that they were better off making a deal with Green Ronin because we have a track record and

we could sell more of their books. That has been a very good deal for us (Green Ronin) because I know those guys and I have worked with them before and they do really top notch stuff. I knew that I could rely on them to put out products that were of a level of quality commensurate with our other products.

That relationship has been very fruitful for both parties - it gets their stuff in print and they can sell more than they otherwise would, and it allows us to expand our books into new directions like d20 Modern. We were not planning to do a whole lot of d20 Modern support other than Ultramodern Firearms, but working with the Game Mechanics has allowed us to move into that area as well as allowing us to broaden out. I would not be surprised to see more deals like that in general in the game industry. It is sort of like the computer game model where there are designers and publishers.

Skull & Bones itself was going to be published for Adamant and then Gareth Skarka decided that he was going to have a hard time and he would be much better off teaming up with someone. They brought the project to Green Ronin, and that is how it all happened.

Q) Since you are the head of one of the major d20 companies, do you receive tons of submissions and how do you deal with that?

Chris Pramas: I receive some... Our website says that we do not accept unsolicited submissions which I think holds off a lot of them. If we did accept them, I would spend too much time looking at proposals. Unfortunately with our staff being so small, our time really is at a premium. But, I still get them anyway. *Chris chuckles* Eventhough we tell people not to send them, we get them all the time. I'm not buried in them either.

Q) What is your creative process like when you are designing or writing? What is the atmosphere like? Do you play music or drink lots of coffee?

Chris Pramas: When I am designing, I have a process where I like to do a bunch of research up front. When I am working on something like the "V for Victory" game which I wrote for Polyhedron - that was straight up historical research. Even if I am doing fantasy writing, I may want to be looking at myths or how another game tackled this problem or topic. I do a lot of reading and jot down notes for a couple of weeks and let things percolate in my subconscious. Eventually, something bubbles up to the top and that is when I start to design.

When I am actually writing, I prefer to do it in the office and I usually play music. In fact, if you look at some of

my old D&D books that I wrote, I had a credit in there for "Musical Thanks." Those were the bands that I listened to a lot while I was writing those particular books.

Q) Are you going to commission Graeme Davis again?

Chris Pramas: Yes. Actually, Graeme just finished another Freeport book for us that he co-wrote with Keith Baker, the WotC setting search winner. Graeme will then follow that up with a Mythic Vistas book that that is going to come out toward the end of 2004. Graeme is great.

I'm a big fan of Graeme and his Warhammer FRP adventures...

Chris Pramas: Yeah, me too. That is why I when he got laid off from his computer job and was looking for work. I was like, "Graeme, let's talk." It was great when he did Tales of Freeport, I was delighted to get him to work on the line. He really took to Freeport, he likes it a lot, which is probably no surprise because Freeport was inspired in tone by his old Warhammer stuff. It was nice to find out when I got a manuscript from him that, unlike a lot of other old time writers who had really good editors, Graeme really is a very talented guy and turned over some great writing.

ABOUT CHRIS PRAMAS

"Green Ronin founder Chris Pramas has been working in the game industry for the past ten years. He got his start as a freelance writer, and made his name working on such game lines as Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, Feng Shui, and Underground. He later jumped into the deep end, starting his own company, Ronin Publishing, with two partners. Having gained some important business experience dealing with the struggles of every small game publisher, Pramas then pulled a 180 and landed a job as a RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. He spent four years working for Wizards, ending his time there as Creative Director for Miniatures R&D. While still at WotC, he started Green Ronin Publishing as a side venture. Green Ronin proved so successful that after leaving Wizards in March of 2002, Chris was able to jump right into running the company full time. He has won three Origins Awards and two ENnie Awards for his work. He is best known as the author of the AD&D Guide to Hell, Dragon Fist, and Death in Freeport."

-quote from Green Ronin Website

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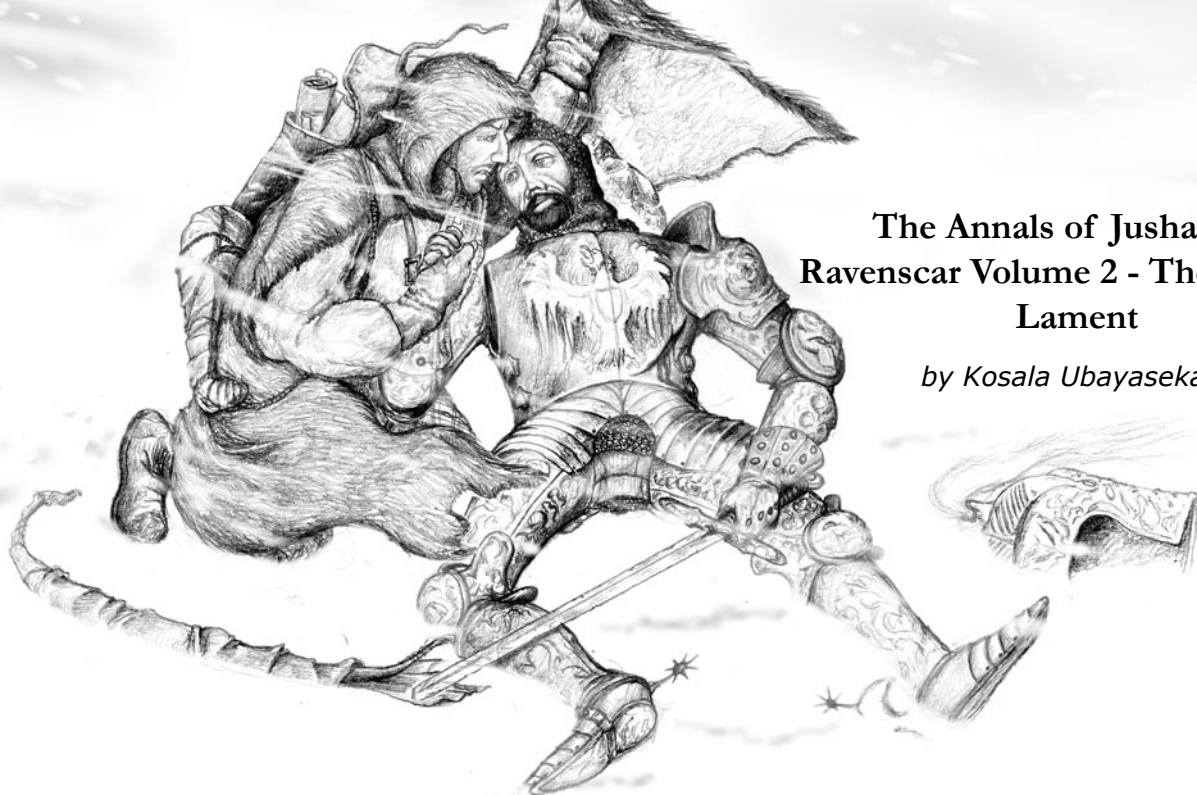
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The Annals of Jushaén of Ravenscar Volume 2 - The Knight's Lament

by Kosala Ubayasekara



And so, once again my quill touches papyrus to scribe the songs of an unheard poet. Welcome, gentle reader, to the second volume of my compilation, filled with yet more words of beauty and wisdom from those I have encountered in my travels. It was my thought to share the joyous song of a certain hobbit in this volume, however, it so happened that I chanced to come upon a dying knight this morn, and my mood at present is that of great admiration of those solitary champions of truth and honour. So it is with this thought that I present the chronicle of a knight that I encountered on a desolate, winter road.

The Knights Lament

Alone I ride on many roads, be they dark or be they light,
And by my side hangs a blade, for behold I am a knight.

Night and day I seek out evil, none such may my blade avoid,

For every heart that justice hungers, I shall food and drink provide.

One may wonder how it is that I,

Choose to live my life this way,

And if they venture to ask me why,

This then I would say.

Some years ago a farm I had, and shared it with my wife,

A gentler woman never did live, who filled my heart with life.

Like a fresh breeze on a summers day, or the single candle at night,

This love of mine did give me hope, and all my days made bright.

Some years the harvest did sadly fail,

And hungry we our time would wile,

Then she would curl up in my arms,

And lo! My heart did smile.

Alas, it happened one fell winter that I rode into town,

To return and find my farm, burnt to the very ground.

My beloved lay in the snow, where our grain to defend she tried,

Against the bandits that came from the cold, razing far and wide.

Curse that evil that was abode,

That day, and on winter steeds rode,

In vain to stop the blood I tried,

But woe, her lids closed and died!

Thus, it happened that now I rode, over highest mount and deepest dale,

Slaying that evil that deigns to claim, the innocent and the hale.

And so I did till the rage in my soul, ceased to mourn and cry,

Having sought out one last great fiend, I fought and now I die.

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Sex Really Dangerous?

By Raymond Huling

The Book of Erotic Fantasy is the most revolutionary Dungeons and Dragons product since the advanced game.

How do you like that? Not very well, I expect—one aspect of this statement is flat-out false and the rest is likely hyperbole. Nonetheless, the *BoEF* reigns as the most talked about and controversial RPG supplement of the year, in no small part because of Hasbro's histrionics and heavy breathing, but also due to the odd and much-disparaged sexual history of *D&D* itself. Even more, this publication marks the farthest advance yet of the important trend toward mature themes in d20 and all other RPGs.

But what does all this blather about maturity really mean? Surely, the mere introduction of sex alone doesn't qualify. Does the game really *need* this stuff? Yes, we should take a look at all of these questions and more from several angles. Before anything else, however, let's amend the blatant error in that initial statement.

Legally, the *BoEF* cannot claim any association with *Dungeons and Dragons*. As is well known, Hasbro yanked the D20 System License from Valar Project's publication, while simultaneously changing the text of the System Reference Document (SRD) in order to provide some semblance of justification for the move. It has been correctly and routinely observed that the revision conflicted not only with other publishers' products, none of which suffered revocation, but with Hasbro's own. Other than the surprising use of the word 'humaniform' (why not 'anthropomorphous?') this aspect of the melodrama shouldn't interest us.

The true greatness of this event lies in the expectations—assumptions, even—that this decision evinces. Hasbro took this action in attendance of both the public's inability to distinguish between its products and those of other publishers and the consequent outrage in response to what would amount to the presentation of sexually explicit material in a children's product. Hasbro had to anticipate a number of contingencies, among them the following progression of thought: *toy companies make toys; a toy company makes D&D; D&D is toy; everything associated with D&D is a toy; toys are for kids; sexuality is not; oh no!* In the business of logical analysis, we have a technical term for this sort of reasoning: 'moronic.' Unfortunately, we can't fault Hasbro for expecting an act of moronism on the part of the public; even worse, the illogical conclusion parallels the correct one—by which I mean that the *Book of Erotic Fantasy* has been written in order to provide sex rules for the *Dungeons and Dragons* game, and everybody knows it. We also know that we can't admit this; we all have to pretend that the book doesn't do what it has been meant to do.

The willful distortion of the book's intent—remember, we can't even refer to it as a d20 product—takes place at more than one level—audience, corporate, game-

wise, historical. This serves as pretty good evidence of the book's importance—we certainly wouldn't have all this hoo-ha over the ramifications of a book that sought to explore, say, gourmet cooking in the fantasy RPG. Look at the very first review of the complete book at EnWorld: staff reviewer joegkushner proceeds almost immediately and continues throughout the article to address the question of what the book offers to the gamer who "[doesn't] need rules for sex or anything of that nature." What?

We'll give Kushner the benefit of the doubt here, just for kicks, by supposing that he means to help out consumers whom the book's title leaves at a loss. *Book of Erotic Fantasy* does, after all, sound a bit like a collection of Boris Vallejo prints—not that this removes us too much from the actual contents. I mean that if someone should press his way past the buzz and the flashing red lights to bump naïvely against naught but the bare title of the work, and should he buy the thing and then cry foul, well, it seems that we wouldn't have gone too far from one of those stories of American kids who, thinking they'd come upon a nice strip club in Amsterdam, found themselves instead in a brothel. An eye-opening and even distressing discovery, but face it, they hadn't gone in there looking for Vermeers. Kushner draws precisely this conclusion at the end of the review. Why even consider the use, then? His entertaining this position smacks of nothing else than a pandering to those who, embarrassed by the subject matter, seek some egress from their attraction to the work in a blotting out of all but the sexless parts.

We'll examine the many curious phenomena caused by the rumor and appearance of this book, but, before we do, it would benefit us to exclude one approach from our consideration: the psychological or psycho-social. By this, I mean that while it's child's play to remark that for an audience consisting mostly of un-athletic, upper middle-class white American males, the most popular sexual image has been that of an aggressive, domineering, powerful black woman—usually identified as inimical. This thought process doesn't really move the conversation forward. Neither does it help to admit that the equalization of ability scores across genders (remember when female characters suddenly developed the muscular strength of males?) did not take place because of lobbying from female gamers who sought a level playing field, no, it's Lara Croft. Guys wanted to play hot chicks without screwing up their power games. We'll proceed superficially, then, and address the arguments as they stand, rather than interpret them as signs of deeper and probably unpleasant motivation.

This caveat does, however, introduce one demo descriptor that we should keep in mind—in fact, why not let it introduce our first enquiry—does Hasbro's decision occur as no more than another instance of that most American of perversities, the preference for violence over sex? After all, for a game, the core rulebooks of which have been written for and marketed

towards thirteen year-olds, doesn't the approval of the one over the other seem a bit inappropriate? We have to take this as seriously as they do—Hasbro sets the age appropriateness of their *Dungeons and Dragons* products at a minimum of thirteen years. *Everything* has to justify itself to this recommendation, from comprehensibility to explicit depictions of violence and sex; all aspects of the publication must be appropriate for the minimum age they explicitly market to. Their liability begins right there. Surely, some of these kids targeted by Hasbro must have noticed that, earlier this year, the United States invaded Iraq preemptively on the justification that the latter possessed weapons deemed illegal under international law, the most preeminent of these being poison gas? But what's this *cloudkill* spell? Poisonous vapors that kill things, that's what. Perhaps one might characterize this as a conjuration seldom used—but the prevalence of *fireball* tossing exceeds cliché. Then we have acid as an energy type, a recent development in the third edition rules which makes it much more readily available as a weapon. These days, the use of weaponised acid occurs most frequently in mutilation attacks against women in India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia. The core rule injunction against player characters of evil alignment intensifies the problem—Hasbro condones this kind of violence as possible acts of goodness. Given all of these associations and implications, does the acceptance of horrific violence and the proscription against a focus on sex in any d20 covered product match the maturity level of your average American thirteen year-old?

The answer is yes.

Of course this makes sense—these moral quandaries don't exist for children. Kids suffer from ignorance and immaturity to the extent that they can't even *perceive* the conflict here. They may, on the other hand, pick up on maturely presented sexual themes. Hasbro made the right decision and incidentally, continued the proper regression of the official position on the role of sex. A child might comprehend the reality behind the presence of prostitution in a medieval fantasy role-playing game, so TSR removed the table of Harlot Encounters from second edition *D&D*. And how the good executives at Wizards of the Coast must pride themselves on the way in which they've continued this trend through the marvelously clever technique of occluding nipples with weaponry in their illustrations—while maintaining the comics-code approved portions of that diabolic instrument, the mammary gland, at teen-aged boy approved levels of enormity. A special pat on the back for that last part.

Once more, hard to disagree. This corporation knows the consumers it advertises to, and plays an intricate game in which it tries to appeal to them without offending their moms. Actually, this sometimes produces amusing results, as the creative staff tries to slip things under the radar—check out the cleverly concealed Troll's penis in the new *Monster Manual*. Such minor transgressions aside, *Dungeons and Dragons* will remain in accord with the sexuality that has graced it since the beginning. It remains a somewhat grotesque blend of Tolkien's and Frazetta's, i.e. that of an old man who wished forever to remain in adventurous boyhood and that of decorative breasts in

need of rescue. Why evolve what works?

Leave it to the third-party publishers and distance yourself from it as far as possible—sound advice for Hasbro, I think. The demographics and sophistication of the consumer base *have* changed, and third-party publishers and the Internet have increased the rate of these changes. I don't think that it goes too far to say that, for many of us, a state of exhaustion has been reached, if not boredom. Sure, we still like killing stuff in that good old way, but the somewhat paranoid, somewhat hysterical repression of mature themes in *D&D* has led to a certain dissatisfaction. Let the OGL handle this—for now, anyway.

This may seem to dismiss the virtues of the famous twins, the *Book of Vile Darkness* and the *Book of Exalted Deeds*. The *BoVD* owes its maturity sticker to one aspect alone—sort of explicit violence and a few breasts. It attains to the same level of gore as an EC comic book (*Tales from the Crypt*, etc.). In contrast, the *BoED* justifies its rating in two ways (and with three nipples): one, the "book deals with tough questions of ethics and morality in a serious manner," and two it "borrows material directly from real world religions." The second reason is nonsense—the question of whether such a usage will offend or harm has nothing to do with maturity and only to do with a person's particular religious beliefs. The first reason, however, is entirely in accord with what we've said previously with respect to children and moral issues, and this speaks volumes in regard to the expectations of maturity level laid down by the core rules. The intended purpose of the *BoED*, as stated in the same Introduction I just quoted, corroborates this: "The *Book of Exalted Deeds* is for players who aren't satisfied by slapping a good alignment on their character and then acting no different from the neutral characters in the party." This statement clearly communicates the supposition that people don't play alignment in *D&D*. Tacitly, it says that to play maturely is to play according to the rules of alignment.

Does the *BoED*, then, go on to pose serious moral questions? No, it merely looks at the core rules, notes what actions or beliefs have been designated good, evil, or neutral, accepts these designations, and then asks players to actually play good characters in accord with them. This represents the entirety of its ethical enquiry. Thus, in the few pages where moral questions receive discussion, it comes up that a good character should not direct violence against non-combatants—but the very first sentence of the GOOD VS. EVIL section of the System Reference Document reads: "Good characters and creatures protect innocent life." Where's the development? This amounts to no more than an emphasizing of the pre-existing definitions; the *BoED* in no way puts into question any previous moral designation. Continuing with the passage on non-combatants—the example used refers unflinchingly to a *fireball* spell, the use of which amounts to a neutral or good violent act against combatants and an evil one against non-combatants. All in accord with what has been written before; the book *can't* contradict the description initially afforded to the spell, not just because to do so would overturn the alignment, but because such a development in an official product would require Hasbro either to eliminate the spell from the core list (!) or to market *Dungeons and Dragons* to

a different audience.

I'm not saying that any mature reflection has to find *fireball* evil; I'm saying that, in all official products, the possibility for genuine ethical debate has been eliminated: mature and immature considerations *cannot* disagree—not because of issues of playability or historical accuracy, but because of advertising. Hasbro has proven itself incapable of producing mature products—accept it and move on.

Or not! A good number of gamers have expressed quite the contrary opinion: "not in my game!" They don't need it; they don't want it. Why, the Man Himself said as much in response to a solicitation of his opinion on the *BoEF*:

To my way of thinking that sort of material is absolutely unnecessary. If individual DMs want to have it in their campaigns, fine. Producing supplemental material of the sort gives detractors of the RPG more ammunition with which to attack while providing nothing of substance or value to the game form. The motivation for publishing such material is most likely money to be made from pandering thus. (Enworld 11-01-2003; 12:32 p.m.)

This from Gary Gygax? Yes and it's perfect—we want to address community response and much of it has been negative. The arguments can be grouped then according to the grounds on which they rest: utility/relevance/necessity; liability/responsibility; and exploitation/sensationalism. This quote epitomizes just about every position against the *BoEF* and does so with customary panache.

Let's take this apart and see what we're dealing with here. First, necessary for what? Kids, if you want to spend the next *thirty years* humping it through dungeon after dungeon, killing orc after orc, dodging trap after trap, with nary a tongue-kiss to show for it, ok, this book may not be for you. Not that there's anything wrong with that! Look at the old men who play chess in the park. They have fun; everybody likes them. I wouldn't want them to judge my sexy adventures, and I wouldn't offer my opinion on the tedious, simplistic, two-tone game that they enjoy. But to question *necessity*? None of it's necessary. Quite the contrary, this hobby typically gets in the way of what *is*. Or, if we want to interpret the word 'necessary' to mean "what allows us to achieve the ends we desire, with regard to this game," who decides this but us, the consumers? And who but us pays for someone else to figure out a bunch of rules to facilitate this endeavor?

Still, no principle of self-determination will silence the nay-sayers—you know, those who supply the negative press *that doesn't exist anymore*—the ones who have been occupied for the past fifteen years with video games, music, and movies and couldn't care less about some amusin' RPG. What about them? Well, I defer to Mr. Gygax on that point: "TSR's reaction to criticism was quite foolish, IMO. No matter what they did those criticizing would not cease, and they bought no product either." (Enworld 11-01-2003; 01:09 p.m.) Right. Last night, the local news broadcast a segment on tongue-splitting—concerned parents will likely find this practice

a bit more exciting than a paragraph on the Gnomish Kama Sutra. No one cares! Sorry, but we should all relax. If the *Book of Erotic Fantasy* should raise a blip on someone's moral radar, we have been well-advised, by Mr. Gygax and others, to ignore whatever criticism may result. Completely a non-issue.

Now, to be accurate, that last quote bore a qualification: "However, cheap sensationalism dealing with sex is hardly a mature response to anything other than a desire to make sales." What if they mean to exploit us, these Valar types? They come in here with their flashy photoshops and frank presentations of fantastic eroticism—what prevents them from taking advantage of our tender gaming innocence? *What if they want to make money?* Mr. Gygax, no sap, is onto them. Fine. I'll buy that assessment for the sake of argument—I've seen it expressed more than once, but I'd like in exchange an explanation of why pandering to prurient interest carries a stigma that indulging bloodlust does not. Or have we have already covered this ground? Moving right along, then, let's ask instead whether any and all products on a sexual theme amount to cheap sensationalism. *Nymphology* certainly does, and proudly, but everything I have seen from Valar expresses only the deepest sincerity from the preview (I burned my copy. How did you destroy yours?) to the website to the interviews. This doesn't mean to say they're humorless; quite the contrary. Nowhere in the *BoEF* will I come across in a hideous pun on the line of a magic-user named Baykdore (neither do I intend to indicate that I don't find any of the idiotic jokes in the Mongoose publication funny; some them, I do, sadly for me).

No, I celebrate the *Book of Erotic Fantasy*, because it will provide me with a consistent and reasonable way to resolve role-playing situations that, previously, I've always had either to improvise or to work out rules for during my increasingly diminished free time. We've needed this product for *years*. In fact, the revolutionary quality of the work becomes most apparent when we apply it to the task of fleshing out aspects of the game that have historically been left incomplete. Everywhere that we do this, we upset the usual order of things.

Consider this mangled situation from *Slave Lords*, in which the party has been invited to attend some week-long celebration or other at the request of a soon-to-be-kidnapped duchess (or something). The introduction to this segment includes this revealing statement: "Below are some suggestions for events that may occur during the course of the feast. Note that none of these directly involve violence or battle." Note that the authors thought it necessary to point this out! The passage continues: "**Romance:** if you use this event, decide which player and NPC will be involved. As each day goes by the NPC makes greater efforts to be in the company of the player character, perhaps asking to dance or walk together. Other guests notice this affection, commenting on it between themselves." Ribaldry! To top it all off, we then receive, not only the worst role-playing advice of all time, but counsel that almost *has* to contradict the previous instructions: "Player characters should react to the situation just as they would in real life." No way am I going to do that! My character is not representative of me, and I

certainly don't want him or her getting involved in the kind of shenanigans—maybe that's not entirely true. At any rate, the point is that romance in *D&D* publications has been primitive and poorly handled since the beginning of the game. If we attempt to deal with them using the material presented in the *BoEF*, if we ask questions of consequences, pregnancy, disease, mores, marriage, etc. We see how deeply this game despises any role-playing situation outside of pseudo-heroic combat. As with so much else, romance has always enjoyed no more than the usual lip service, and, where it hasn't been risible, has been pathetic or even sexist.

Try the same approach with the 3.5 game and see where it gets you. Turn to the succubus entry in the *Monster Manual* (you know right where it is, don't you?) and, first enjoy the euphemism:

"A succubus drains energy from a mortal it lures into some act of passion, or by simply planting a kiss on the victim."

Of course, in the *BoEF*, we'll find ways to unlace that piece of verbal lingerie, for starters with the Perform (Sexual Techniques) skill and the Seductive feat. Obviously, the book wants us to think more deeply about this creature, elevate it above the status of some kind of netherworld kissing bandit, and we should, because any investigation of the succubus will bring us to recall that the word first appears in the late middle ages—a rather propitious remembrance.

D&D morality has *nothing* whatsoever to do with that of the medieval period—nor should it—the medieval mind saw nothing wrong with raping beneath one's class. Morality in *Dungeons and Dragons* adheres to no principle other than corporate fiat; it has no rationale other than marketing. Any application of material found in the *Book of Erotic Fantasy* exposes this uncomfortable fact.

Other disquieting components of the game system come under the light of a new scrutiny, because of the ideas presented in the *BoEF*, none more important than that of race. The imagist core class that the *BoEF* introduces directly confronts the racial concepts presented in the core rules. The legitimacy of *D&D's* reflexive attribution of alignment based on race has long been questioned. The third edition responded, weakly, to these criticisms by making alignment a typicality or tendency of a race, rather than a quality. It maintained, however, the association of evil with ugliness—one which the *BoEF's* imagist not only shares but actually intensifies: "Imagists tend to equate beauty with goodness," and "creatures or things that are evil, ugly, or perverted from their nature are abhorrent to an imagist." This character, required to have a good alignment, seeks to beautify the world—an undertaking that may include active attempts to remove "evil and ugliness." You see the problem here, but hold on. What makes all of this so interesting—and demonstrates how thoroughly the authors have considered the implications of their work—is that the flavor text that precedes the game material here presents a conversation between a fey kissed elven imagist and her half-orc daughter (for the moment, we'll ignore that it also includes an awful analogical comparison on the part of the imagist.). Further, this person obsessed with goodness and even

more with beauty is said to have engaged willingly and spontaneously in sex with a creature of a race typically evil and well-nigh definitionally ugly. What's going on is that the *BoEF* is complicating everything, including notions of beauty and racial stereotypes.

The question of miscegenation raised here helps to tie the *BoEF* with the work of other third-party publishers—Green Ronin's *Bastard's & Bloodlines*, for example—that have chosen to explore the implications of themes that Hasbro must ignore. The *BoEF* really comes into its own when it supplements the work of publishers for which it doesn't play an adversarial role. When it comes to the handling of mature topics, third-party publications succeed in every way that the big Double-D has failed. The foremost example of this is Sword and Sorcery's *Shelzar: City of Sin*. True, it does annoy that, in the text, the authors refer to the place as the City of *Pleasures*, while as a rubric, one finds only *Sins*, but they also tell us up front that "sex, drugs, violence, and perversity may not be appropriate to family viewing hours, but they can certainly add spice to mature fantasy role-playing." Absolutely. *Shelzar* astonishes with its frankness and open-mindedness with the way they seamlessly integrate sexual themes into plot hooks. There's a thought: imagine sexual *drives*; imagine sexuality actually considered as a motivation. Who knew? Indeed, sex provides the impetus for nearly all motion on the planet, but it took *three decades* for it to find a legitimate place in the world's most popular role-playing game? *Shelzar* presents it with perfect rationality: as an example, tension in the city has developed over a brothel called *Calastian Love*, the Calastians being a militaristic people with an increasingly strong presence around town and the phrase being an expression exactly parallel with Greek love. That an establishment catering to homosexuals refers to itself this way, well, that's just a bit more than the Calastians can stand. Trouble's brewing. How could we not look at this as the most natural of situations? This sort of complication has *always* existed (look at the history of the Knights Templar)—and it can lead to fighting! Tactical gamers take note! It's absurd to suggest that this sort of story has no place in an adult's game—and it's offensive to argue that it shouldn't.

Where the *Book of Erotic Fantasy* really swoops in to save the day is in one of the adventures provided in the back of *Shelzar*. The PCs find themselves selected out from the crowd for a night of carousing with the High Priestess of the local Trickster god. This ensues: "she takes them on a whirlwind tour of Shelzar, visiting inns, brothels, and gambling dens before retiring to her home, where she wines and dines them before settling down to an evening of exuberant lovemaking, enhanced by drugs and potent magic." I want to play this out. I have rules for drinking, gambling, eating, and drug abuse, but, thanks to that extraordinarily selective prudery we've remarked upon, not a single table or chart for sex resolution—or any resource, other than last weekend (!), for detailing the scenario.

In game terms, this is precisely what a mature treatment of sexuality means: the capacity to encompass, explore, and play through the full range of relations available to the characters—and the full range of the consequences that may befall them. Some may object that only those who pay too much attention to

the illustration of a troll's inner thigh will have any use for this sort of material. That's a point, but it escapes me how our predilections rate as more unseemly than those of the guy who spends his time figuring out how to attain an Armor Class of 105. What's the greater perversion? Who cares? Ultimately, we have to deal with a fait accompli: The *Book of Erotic Fantasy* is here and selling *huge*. This constitutes a turning point in the development of Dungeons and Dragons and, as a result, for RPGs in general. We'll hope that the movement continues in a healthy direction.

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by Kou and Ali



Silven Crossroads Interviews

Flagship Studios CEO : Bill Roper

Flagship Studios has been formed by David Brevik, Max Schaefer, Erich Schaefer, Bill Roper, and Kenneth Williams to create quality computer games. Joining them as additional co-founders are David Glenn, Peter Hu, Philip Shenk, and Tyler Thompson. The entire founding team was previously employed at Blizzard Entertainment®, where they were instrumental in the success of the best-selling Diablo® series of computer games.

Known for their individual work on some of the best-selling computer games of all time, including the Warcraft®, StarCraft®, and Diablo series, this core team of experienced artists, programmers, designers and producers have worked together for close to a decade. Notably, they created and played key roles in developing the wildly successful Diablo franchise that has sold in excess of 13 million units worldwide.

Founded in 2003, Flagship Studios is a creator of innovative entertainment software. With developers that are renowned within the gaming industry, the company is focused on creating games that set the standard in interactive entertainment.

Flagship Studios, the new software development company formed by a group key figures who recently left Blizzard Entertainment, has launched their official website and revealed some details about the mission of the company. While their first game has not yet been announced, we sat down with Bill Roper to find out who they are and what they hope to accomplish as a new and innovative force in the interactive entertainment industry.

Q: Thank you for taking the time to tell us more about Flagship Studios. Gamers around the world are anxious to know more about the new company and, of course, the new games that will be developed.

Bill Roper: Of course! We

all have a real desire to stay as connected as possible with the worldwide community of gamers, and we appreciate the chance to do that through your website. We can't wait to talk about what we're up to - well, as much as we can, at least, during this early stage of the company and the game's development.

Q: The pressing question on the minds of many gamers regards your collective departure from Blizzard Entertainment, an announcement that at least somewhat shocked the gaming community. How did the decision, as a team, to leave Blizzard come about and why did you decide to leave? Was it a coordinated effort, or did it just sort "happen" during a brainstorming session or perhaps in a more "relaxed" atmosphere with someone throwing out the idea of creating a new development house?

Bill Roper: Actually, we didn't plan on leaving Blizzard, but that's the way things ended up working out. Basically, we were looking for a higher level of involvement concerning the sale of the Vivendi Universal Games unit and felt we had to go as far as tendering our resignations to try and open a direct line of communication with the decision maker's in France. As was their right, they decided to not afford us that opportunity and chose instead to accept our

resignations.

To be honest, that came as a shock to us, but we looked at it as a new opportunity to start all over again doing something we love. Sometimes life throws you a curve and - to use a baseball analogy - hopefully you've been sitting on that pitch and you can drive it out of the park.

Q: The games division of Vivendi has been on and off the sale block for some time now. Did this uncertain status have any influence on your decision to depart?

Bill Roper: It was a contributing factor to our desire to talk with the folks in France that eventually led to our departure.

Q: This question is for Bill Roper. What was it like for you having your cell phone number published in some news stories?

Bill Roper: That was really a consequence of the unexpected nature of our departure from Blizzard. Dave, Erich, Max and I were standing in Erich's office, making the snap decision to start a company, and we realized that once the news got out about our departure, no one was going to be able to get a hold of us. I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket and said, "Well, I guess this just became the company phone, then."

Fortunately most people respected what we were trying to do, and the vast majority of calls were people trying to get in touch with is about what our future plans were. We also got more than a couple of gamers calling to wish us luck, and that was some really great support to get.

Q: Your group has worked together for quite awhile now on various projects. It is obvious that you all seem to be on the same page, but what is the main goal of the new company?

Bill Roper: Flagship Studios intends to establish a focused computer games development house comprised of the very best individuals in the industry. The company is dedicated to making games that set the standard in interactive entertainment through fostering of a small, focused development group solely committed to the creation of world-class games.

We want to create an immersive and compelling game play experience with both single and multiplayer gamers in mind with experiences that will appeal to both hard-core and casual gamers alike.

We also will create an interactive, online gaming network designed to provide players with easy access

to our games. This experience will be supported in numerous ways, including the maintenance of close relationships with the worldwide gaming community.

Q: Your team is well known for their involvement in high-profile (and best-selling) products in the games industry. How are you preparing for the inevitable high expectations, of both gamers and publishers, of your new product?

Bill Roper: We've always felt that we are our own harshest critics and have the highest expectations for doing the best job that we can, so we're going to work very hard to live up to our own standards. We know that people are looking at us with pretty high expectations, and we don't want to disappoint them, so you can bet we're already spending a lot of hours going over design ideas, modeling game play, and iterating on all aspects of the play experience.

I think it's also important to point out that we want to keep the gaming community as informed as to the progress of the game as we can, so that they have as good an idea as possible as to what we're making and what to expect. Obviously, that level of detail is going to be extremely low this early in the process, but as time goes by, we'll keep you all updated.

Q: Several members of your team were instrumental in developing the design, structure and interface of Blizzard's online gameplay service, Battle.net. Will you be utilizing that knowledge and talent to develop your own online gaming service for multiplayer gameplay in your games, or is that a project that is planned for a later date?

Bill Roper: One of the best things about Blizzard is their acceptance and encouragement of involvement from people all throughout the company, so while we certainly didn't invent Battle.net, we had a lot of exposure to it and had input on areas that directly interfaced with the projects we were working on. We learned a lot from the Battle.net team as well, so we have a solid footing from which to build a way for gamers to hook up online and play our games.

Q: You are waiting to make an announcement regarding the game title and possible projected release window with your selected publisher. Do you have any feel for when that announcement might be made? Are you at liberty to reveal which publishers are being considered?

Bill Roper: No, and no. Setting a release window this early in the process of making the game would be utter and complete speculation. We have internal development milestones we want to meet, and we do have an idea of how long the game will take to make, but saying it will be ready for a certain day or month years from now is just a goal and is really a disservice in the context of setting people's expectations.

As far as publishers go, we've talked with just about anyone you can imagine, probably some you wouldn't think of, or even know about. The games industry had really grown up over the past decade, and the number of people who came to us to discuss publishing opportunities was a little overwhelming. We really count ourselves fortunate to have made these contacts and are excited about some of the possibilities. Hopefully we'll have something to announce in terms of a publishing partner in the relatively near future.

Q: You have hinted that fans of your past games will enjoy this new project but that the game will "not be what anyone expects". This is rather cryptic and leaves the door open for a great deal of interpretation. Without revealing too much about this project, are you at liberty to reveal any more "hints" about the game at this time?

Bill Roper: Only that we're not looking to chase our past success, but want to go in a new direction in many regards. When Dave (Brevik) dropped the concept on the table, our first reaction was, "Why isn't anyone doing this?"

Q: Obviously, your collective reputation precedes you and many fans are very excited about this project and your new development studio. Thank you for taking the time to address our questions. We look forward to more information about Flagship Studios and this new project as development continues. We especially await the "big announcement" concerning your first game!

Bill Roper: Thanks again for giving us the chance to talk about Flagship and our direction as a company. We all look forward to staying in touch with the great group of gamers out there that have played the games we worked on in the past and want to know what we're going to do in the future.

We are indeed excited about this new venture and will keep you posted as more news is released from Flagship Studios. Although Bill indicated the game will be something different from games that have been done before, we at Silven are hoping for some type of RPG. Check back here for new information on this exciting new studio.

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Best Served Cold

by Edward J Kopp

The tribes of Talgori have come together to hear the telling of the stories. Ice Claw, chief of Keeping Stories, is sitting in his giant igloo made of ice and mammoth skulls and bones. The ancient Talgori, the northern species of the bear like Ursava, sat finishing his ritual smoke. His gigantic ursine form sits with hulking shoulders and a gruff white snout. He sits across from the entrance way closest to the fire, the place of honor. Across the inside of the igloo above the entrance hangs an ancient Talgori skull. Inside is enough room for the young cubs who rambunctiously enter Ice Claw's domain to gather and hear the stories of their people. In they pour; a mixed age lot of white furry cubs filled the wild energy of youth. Upon entering the igloo and sensing the seriousness in the air around them they stop jostling to let Ice Claw speak...

Ho! You've come for the story of the death of the great glacier dragon. Settle yourselves and listen well. It was many generations ago, before my grandsire's grandsire. The dragon had killed and eaten many of the Talgori, we Ursava of the polar ice. Even as we hunt the mighty mastodon, woolly mammoth and rhinoceros along the edges of the great glaciers, the white dragon hunts the Talgori.

The grieving mother One-Eye Half Claw knew the time had come to take revenge on the great white ice dragon called Tungujuluk, the Eater of Children. The cold heart of Tungujuluk had eaten her two newborns not but two cycles of long light and long dark past. She asked among the Talgori who would come with her to make war and take revenge upon the great dragon of this land of eternal winter. No one came forward. The fear of the Eater of Children froze deep into the hearts and souls of all the warriors present.

"Ho! What is this, a band of warriors or maidens?" asked One-Eye Half Claw. The warriors shifted and murmured, remembering the names of young cubs never to grow to adulthood, eaten by Tungujuluk. All looked to the greatest warrior among them, and perhaps of all time, Bloody Jaws Breaks Ice. He was renown for having feasted upon more frozen hearts of the great ice wyrms than any Talgori. It is even said that many of those hearts were the childer and grandchilder of Tungujuluk.

With a grunt and a shake Bloody Jaws Breaks Ice stood to his full height. "By the spirit of Skull Shatter the Elder, the first Talgori, I swear I shall feast upon the frozen flesh the Eater of Children has for a heart!"

The gathered warriors and elders grunted their approval, but one grunt sounded mocking. A grin glinted in the sly eyes of Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes. Though not the greatest warrior, he was known for his cleverness and the lengths he would go for a joke.

"What of you Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes? You mock the great warrior Bloody Jaws Breaks Ice. Can you do better?" chided One-Eye Half Claw.

To save face among the Talgori, Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes was forced to join the war party of One-Eye and Bloody Jaws as they went to destroy the Eater of Children, the great white dragon Tungujuluk. Ho!

The next evening as the aurora began to chase itself in the evening sky the young cubs came again to the igloo of ice and bone, the place of Telling Stories where Ice Claw lived...

Ho! Settle yourselves. Listen. It is time to tell the tale of the war One-Eyed Half Claw brought to the ancient and monstrous Tungujuluk, the Eater of Children. Tungujuluk had come to the land of the Talgori many generations ago, passing his seed to many childer and grandchilder. To protect himself from his progeny, Tungujuluk lived deep in a glacial cave hidden from prying and murderous eyes.

Tungujuluk was a grand and evil creature. He had earned his name many times over, tracking female Talgori as they were giving birth and snatching the mewling as his favorite treat before disemboweling the now weakened delivering female helpless before him. Tungujuluk would devour the newborn and mother saving the afterbirth as part of the ancient magic that kept him alive for such an unnatural number of years. The elders said that destroying the cauls hidden in the Eater of Children's glacial cave will set free the new born souls he had gathered to keep him eternal. When they are free then can Tungujuluk be destroyed.

Ho! Come closer and hear how crafty Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes found the glacier the great wurm Tungujuluk had it's lair in. It was a great glacial cavern filled with many splits and cracks that a soul could forever roam. The clever dragon had filled it with pit falls and many dangerous traps to keep his own progeny from finding and killing him to become their chief. Frost Blinds was indeed clever and watched the Eater of Children sneak off into the crevasses surrounding his lair in search of new born Talgori to fill his magical hunger.

Frost Blinds was not only clever and quick, but also an impressive hunter whose ability to track by scent was legendary even among the giant bear like Ursava. As Tungujuluk left his glacier, Frost Blinds was already

sneaking in and following the scent trail through many dangerous pits and ice bridges at last to the hidden lair. Sewn together to make the evil dragon's medicine blanket were the cauls of newborn Talgori ripped from their mother's wombs.

The vast ice cavern was delicate in its beauty and form. A fire would have destroyed Tungujuluk's medicine blanket, but also bring the cavern down, killing Frost Blinds. Instead Frost Blinds ripped each one to shreds by his own paw, releasing an infant soul with each claw tearing ancient leathery pieces and others that were fresh with blood and birthing juices. Tears streamed down Frost Blinds face as the tiny spirits touched his heart to express their thanks for releasing them from eternal bondage. When the last of the cauls were shred and the final tiny infant soul touched Frost Blind's heart in thanks, he scooped up the frozen tears that lay like diamonds at his feet and threw them into the sky so they would glitter for all eternity reminding the Talgori of the souls lost.

It was now time to bring the war of revenge upon Tungujuluk, the Eater of Children. One-Eye and Bloody Jaw waited for Frost Blind to tell them the souls had been freed. They met together to council for war. With the souls of all the Talgori babies free the monster Tungujuluk was now vulnerable. The time to bring war was now and off the three warriors went.

Looking deep into the eyes of each young cub before him Ice Claw took a deep pull from his pipe, finishing the sacred smoke and filling the igloo with his voice and magical smoke...

Ho! Listen well for I shall tell you of the war brought upon a monster that was thought invincible. Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes saved the souls of the ensorcelled new born. It was One-Eye who had lost her new born cubs to the Eater of Children two cycles of light and dark previous and still the fire burned cold within her and drove her for vengeance. Now that Tungujuluk had lost his protections, it was only a matter of tracking him down and destroying him just as so many of his progeny, who had fallen prey to Bloody Jaws Crushes Ice. With such a mighty warrior as Bloody Jaws, another so crafty as to find the hidden lair as Frost Blinds and the perseverance of the loss of One-Eye these three heroes went to defeat a monster.

Tungujuluk was crafty and evil. He knew that someone had found his medicine blanket and destroyed it. He felt the magic become weaker and weaker until it was gone. No longer protected by such strong magic, he worried his childer may try and destroy him. Out among the ice plains there are many secret crevasses and passages that he had used for generations to attack birthing Talgori and ambitious progeny. The way became so twisted and convoluted any attacker on Tungujuluk would become lost and confused in all the ice for the Eater of Children preferred to attack from hidden ice caves.

Tungujuluk was powerful and monstrous to behold. The largest ice wyrm ever. His wings beat the wind into gales, his claws carved black ice like it was blubber and his voice was so terrible it froze the Talgori in their step. His toothy maw could rip an adult woolly mammoth in half with a single snap of his jaws and his tail whipped furiously, lashing like an angry cat, snapping bones of any and all who tried to attack him from the rear.

The Eater of Children had other powerful magics. He could call upon the weather spirits to do his bidding and had them make a great snow blizzard to cover his tracks and screen him from attack. Though no longer immortal until he could make a new medicine blanket, he was still physically immense and capable of defending himself with great savagery. An evil wyrm like that doesn't get to live so long on just one protective magic. The winter spirits rose up at his bidding and roared across the land bringing cutting icy snow and strong winds that pulled the breath from your mouth before you could breathe it. With magics as strong as this, Tungujuluk felt safe.

One-Eye Half Claw began her own medicine. She had spent the last two years not only grieving for her lost cubs, but also learning the songs of power that would calm the weather spirits. The snow cut deep and the wind blew strong, but nothing could overcome the grief and revenge that froze One-Eye's heart. With Frost Blinds and Bloody Jaws she set out and sang to the weather spirits, asking them to be calm and tell them where Tungujuluk was hiding. One-Eye did a medicine dance and offered the spirits milk and honey to bribe them. Around in a circle One-Eye danced. After each circuit she would ask the spirits to show her where the Eater of Children was hidden. One time around, No. Second time around, No. Third time around and the spirits were distraught at One-Eye's perseverance, No. The fourth time she asked they said Yes. Ho!

Ice Claw sent the cubs home for it was late. The next day as soon as the sun began to set and the first star was seen in the sky the youngsters crowded into Ice Claw's igloo to hear more of the story of One-Eye and her war...

Ho! You've come to hear finally how the great evil that had plagued the land, Tungujuluk the Eater of Children, was defeated in war. It was a great and bloody battle in the end. One-Eye had made strong magic with the spirits who brought a scent, the smallest tendril of Tungujuluk's scent, and let it whisper softly into their noses. Breathing deep of the scent of their prey the three surged forward to bring battle upon the ice wyrm.

Through many long crevasses and over icy bridges did the three run. A light snow began to fall, airy and fluffy, filling the sky with feathers of snow. These flakes reminded the three of the uncounted Talgori who had been ripped from mother's womb. It felt as though the soft gentle touches of all those souls were guiding the three towards the Eater of Children. Two snowflakes brushed against One-Eye Half Claw, caressing her with the love only a newborn can give its mother. Her cold-hearted vengeance blazed into a full fury of righteous anger. Ho!

The scent grew strong and their anger grew with it. But this would just lead them into Tungujuluk's trap. Blood rage and unthinking fury had led many Talgori to their defeat when facing the massive wyrm. First they must reverse the trap, keeping Tungujuluk from launching into the air. And for this One-Eye was ready. Once the crevasse the Eater of Children was hiding in was upon them One-Eye had Frost Blinds and Bloody Jaw start their own medicine, calling upon the ice itself to block the only retreat left. One-Eye climbed high up the glacier above the dragon and threw herself onto his back, smashing his wings and knocking him flat.

Now was the time for Bloody Jaws Breaks Ice to rage into the front of Tungujuluk, ripping and tearing for the foul creature's heart. As Bloody Jaws attacked, Frost Blinds leapt for the massive hind quarters, tearing and shredding at the dragons hide with massive black claws. Bloody Jaws had ripped open a large wound across the wyrms side and began digging deeper, tearing chunks of flesh out of the body, digging for the frozen heart. One-Eye was stunned from the force of the fall and as the monster turned its head at her it bellowed out in rage and fear. It was bloodied and trapped.

The dragon rolled onto the side Bloody Jaws was on hoping to crush the great warrior beneath its massive body. It shook it's tail and lashed at Frost Blinds and even though he was tearing into it's flank with all four claws he was flung off and smashed into the wall, breaking in two. Frost Blinds Foolish Eyes belched out blood from his ruptured insides. He took that blood and with the last medicine he had threw the bloody snow at the eyes of Tungujuluk blinding him. And then he passed through the sky with the blessing of the souls he had already saved.

The power in the voice of such an ancient wyrm was almost more than One-Eye could survive. Rearing back to catch One-Eye with the full force of his magic Tungujuluk let blast a mighty roar. The immense cold created ice out of the very air One-Eye tried to breathe. The last of her rage and medicine began to fade as the freezing cloud settled around her. Her limbs grew heavy with ice and the Eater of Children reared back to crush her in his massive jaws. As he launched forward the bloody snow hit him in the face, blinding him with frozen gore when suddenly the pain inside him became so intense he lifted himself to see what had happened. Bloody Jaws was still alive and digging so deep into the body of Tungujuluk he had finally latched his crushing jaws onto the frozen heart. Glistening in red gore the mighty Bloody Jaws clawed his way through the chest of the mighty ancient wyrm. Blood poured from the gaping wound as jaws clenching a giant heart and tore through the dragon's body. Once, twice, three times he chewed and tore the bloody thing into pieces, which fell steaming and shattered onto the ice.

Tungujuluk the Eater of Children was dead. Bloody Jaws Crushes Ice began to methodically eat the body of the dead beast, crunching bones to get to the marrow and saving the heroes portion for the half frozen One-Eye Half Claw. She would never eat her share of the war booty for she never fully recovered from the blast of evil that struck her full on. Her war was finished and an evil foe destroyed. Such is what happens to all the enemy of the Talgori, we crush them, eat of their hearts blood and gnaw on their bones for the marrow fat. It is good to be strong Talgori. Ho!

The young cubs left the igloo of bones where the stories are told to the dens of their mothers. On the wall, in reverence to the ancestors, was the polished and painted skull of Bloody Jaws Breaks Ice, looking down at Ice Claw in silent approval...

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It is with most urgent ambition and sheer boredom, that I sought to undertake a task so monumental and so incredible that it would astound and entertain me for eternities to come. A bland empty space is no dwelling for an intrepid being, like myself, so I must empower the universe with thought, feeling, and the divine grace and gift of life. From segments afar I enlisted the services of fine thinkers, crafts persons, generators of idea and souls, and to impart life into a bleak existence.

It was with great joy that these `designers' as I have so called them entertained me, and themselves, with fanciful ideas of a being that is mortal; for more entertainment was gained from these beings than from any other.

I gave them guidelines to follow, for the multiverse as created must exist within the rules governing all things. These rules were to be the essence of conflict, for mortals in conflict are indeed valuable tools to observe. To aid in this conflict a struggle of people vs. nature was instituted to test the guile and true wit of these mortal creations. But they must interact, and the nature of a city named Silven and a theme of crossroads was implemented to aid in this facet.

The designers set off with my first instructions, design the people of Silven. For this is the essential task at hand, is it not? Without entertainment, there can be no entertained. The discussion was off and running, and while some wanted to skip to the end, and others wanted to discuss finer points of physiology or philosophy, the discussion stayed on track. When it was all said and done, the designers had created from the void a cosmopolitan arrangement of people, twenty-seven unique soul containers in all.

But alas, only twelve could fit on our world for now, and it was up to the designers to pick sides and choose favorites. And so it with great pride that our designers choose the following races for the place of Silven Crossroads: The plantlike Green, the mysteriously undead Zaer, the strange Mushu, the humans of natural design, strange Traveling Gnomes, the Elves of lore, the vicious looking lizardmen of the Sauriods, the steel-hearted Steelsouled, the Gamnors, the Ryth, and the elusive Arama-S'ol. They set out for twelve, and could only decide on eleven. Such is the way of things.

With this relative success I am interested to see where they pioneer further into the void of the unknown. Only time shall tell in its infiniteness, and it always does tell. I can hear the whispers on the wind already chiming away... classes...classes...

Participate in this ongoing world building project here:

<http://www.silven.com/forums.asp?case=threads&forumgroupid=15&forumsubsectionid=83>



A Fall from Grace

by Kosala Ubayasekara

[Author's Note: The following tale is intended for mature audiences only]

My name is Valen Romanz and I am undead. I have made this observation many times this past month. The ways of the gods are not to be judged, this I know. Yet standing in this damp, dark cell I am forced to gaze in loathing at my new master. This too, not for the first time. He lay asleep in his velvet lined coffin and stirred not a muscle as he awaited the coming of dusk. His was a life of roaming the darker places and flight from the light. His was the mastery of the creatures that had passed beyond death and returned. His was the castle I now called home. Nehlin de Vries, Count of Darghaad Keep. Nosferatu.

The great irony of my predicament is the fact that before the untimely demise of my 'real' life, I was a student of theology and the Holy Word. I was learning to protect and save the world from creatures such as the one to which I now found myself a slave. Heralding from a long line of historians, my path in life was decided when I set quill to parchment and drew my first line at the tender age of one. Seldom did a day pass since then when I was not wasting my father's parchment in inelible scribbling or amusing the household by running around with dabs of ink on my face. The methodical nature of the scribe was one that appealed to me the first days of my education in penmanship and has stayed with me over the years, leading up to my apprenticeship in the Gosforln Abbey. Noted for its holy warriors and its considerable library, the church attracted my wanderlust as well as my curiosity for the written word of scribes now gone.

It was in the very church of my tutelage that I first encountered the Count. I remember vividly the day some months ago when he came to the church on the pretext of studying the Holy Scriptures assembled in our library. I remember the piercing gaze and the unholy aura of fear that heralded his arrival into a room. A tall, spectre of a man in a flowing robe that had the look of something that is outside its proper time. Long, black hair framed a strong face and his piercing dark eyes looked upon me. Alas, that I was so secure in the fact that nothing evil could enter the holy confines of the church. This one surely studied me carefully before bringing me into the fold of the damned.

He fed off my blood for the first time a mere two fortnights ago. I was in evening prayer in the chapel when he entered. Not pausing to even greet me, he simply strode forward and grasped me by my hair. Before I could call for help, I felt the fangs of my doom bury themselves into my neck and my life's blood seeped from me. All I could do was clutch his dark robes and wait for the demon to finish his feeding.

Imagine my surprise when a few days later I awoke. I have spent the last month denying my fate but I now realize that it is futile. The Gods must have some reason from sparing me from death; I must be their tool in some greater task, for surely I have done nothing in my life to deserve this end. I must believe that that is true.

It would be so easy to end the count's life now, but I cannot bring myself to do the deed. The Count, in mockery of my state, has even brought a mallet and stake into his bedchamber and has on numerous occasions challenged me to end his existence while he slept. But it seems to be the strange nature of my plight that I cannot. An alternative was, of course, to end my own existence, and this I have tried to achieve on numerous occasions. Yet here I still am. Every cut I inflicted upon myself healed, every river I threw myself into refused to let me die, and tying weights to my feet merely taught me a side effect of my conversion to the undead—I can breathe underwater.

The Count says that I will be acclimated to the new nature of my existence which holds undiscovered joys. Yet I loathe myself. I am a hunter who has become the beast. For the first time, I see what it is I was being taught in the Church to fight. Fear the lure of damned immortality. Beware the seduction of the darkness when it beckons you. It is a fate worse than death.

Much to the Count's amusement, I refuse to drink human blood. He points out continuously that the blood of cows and sheep is not going to sustain me, and indeed, I feel weak at times. But I vowed to him that I would never rip the life from another, at which he simply burst into laughter and exclaimed "What god will accept your vows now that you are Vampyr?"

He stirs. Dusk has fallen and he awakens immediately, sitting upright and stretching in a mockery of human behaviour.

"Ah Valen," he says. "Come. It is time for your final passing into the life of a Vampyr." Striding on his long legs, he moves to the window and leaps out. Unable to stop my legs from following, I leap after him. As we both fall, our bodies change and assume the shapes of bats. The strong air currents of the mountains catch my frail wings. I must, with regret, confess that the thrill of flight exhilarates me. Being able to see the world from this perspective has yielded it to be more beautiful than I ever imagined. I realized the first time the Count instructed me on how to make the transition from humanoid to bat that the Vampyr were not restricted by natural boundaries in their other forms. The bat transformation does not render us blind.

The Count came to a halt on the branch of a tree, in the forest far below his Keep. This was a road well travelled and one of the Count's favourite feeding grounds. We did not wait long before a lone figure appeared on the road. The count descended in front of the traveller, transforming into a man. The figure stumbled backwards and the long cloak covering the traveller dropped to the ground. Revealed before us was a young girl of enchanting beauty, and the fright displayed on her countenance did little to diminish the fine curves of her face. The count approached her as she stood transfixed. I could smell her fear from my perch on the tree, and my own bloodlust tingled in my throat.

The Count stopped in front of her and grasped her about her slender waist to pull her close. He ran his hands appreciatively across her back and then gently grasped her bosom to feel the heart beating wildly beneath it. Smiling in satisfaction, he pushed the girl to her knees in front of him and bent over her form, his mouth covering her throat. A small gasp escaped the girl. I could feel her throat trying to scream. Disgust overwhelmed me as I watched the Count feed, but my thirst was greater. Having denied my undead body its sustenance this past month, the bloodlust burned fiercely, and I turned from the scene thinking to flee the road. But I found my feet following a different path, and soon I was kneeling in front of the feeding Count. Raising his head he motioned for me to feed.

I watched the girl's face for a long moment and thoughts of my vows and past life came in washes, flooding my mind, but above it all, the constant throbbing of the bloodlust in my throat. I grasped the girl from the Count, entwining her body in my arms, and holding her close, I closed my now erect fangs on her throat. I could feel her warmth and the hands that clutched my cloak, as I fed on the warm, sweetness of her blood. The last remnants of my soul slipped away from me as the red fluid of my sustenance rushed down my throat, which assumed a life of its own, craving more for every drop that passed my lips. The girl's last ties to this world slipped away as I fed unceasingly. The power that filled my being was such that an unearthly cry of triumph escaped me even as tears rolled down my cheeks in anguish.

"Welcome to the world of Vampyr, Valen. You will find this life harsh, yet rewarding. We are many, much more than your pitiful churches dare admit to. You will receive first hand tutelage in our ways of life, for it is your destiny to become it's historian."

It took many moments before the turmoil of euphoric feelings from the evening left me, and settled once again to one of customary disgust. I still cradled the girl in my arms, and could only whisper, "What now?"

"Now we bury her," came the nonchalant reply.

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Vision 2: Society of Spears - The Spartans

In this issue we will explore one of the most militaristic states in history, the Ancient Greek Kingdom of Sparta. The Spartans organized their state to support their military and in return the military insured the stability of the state. This militarism shaped both the nature of the people and the way the state functioned. The purpose of the Spartan state was to control the subject populations on which they depended: the *helots* (serfs) who worked their fields.

Part I - The History

The early history of Sparta is obscured but the Spartans became the dominate power in Laconia (the southernmost part of Greece) by the 7th century BCE and reduced the conquered people to the status of *helots*. The need to control the *helots*, who were prone to revolt, and to keep their neighbors in line led the Spartan to develop a society that emphasized martial virtues almost to the exclusion of all others. Spartan training aimed to mold them into healthy and strong Spartans, both men and women. The Spartan women were taught to become healthy mothers and the men to become superb warriors.

Spartan training began at an early age for boys and girls alike, structured athletics taught them endurance and discipline. The Spartan system aimed to create a disciplined and ordered society consisting of ordered and disciplined people.

A boy began military training at age five, leaving home to live in barracks and learn the basics. At ten, the boy began competitions, at twelve he became a 'youth', his hair was cut and his training increased. The youth was assigned an older Spartan who would act as his mentor and teacher; this relationship often lead to lifelong friendships. The youths were denied shoes, to toughen their feet, and only allowed one cloak, to force them to learn how to endure the elements. Only minimal food was provided, encouraging the youths to forage (or steal) additional food. If caught stealing they were punished for being caught, not for the stealing itself. All of this aimed to make a tough, self-sufficient warrior out of the Spartan.

At the age of 18, the Spartan man became a full citizen, a *spartiate*, his first year was spent training younger men, then he was assigned to one of the 'messes' of about fifteen Spartans of his age group who would eat and live together. During this time a *spartiate* would be married off to a girl of about his own age but he would not be allowed to live with her, only slipping off to see her when he could. At some point, around or after 30, he would finally be allowed to live in his own house with his wife. However, a Spartan remained liable to be called up for military service for thirty years after the end of his training and there is record of a Spartan, Hippodamas, who died in battle at the age of 80.

Spartan girls participated in athletics and dance, sing and play musical instruments, learned the legends and traditions of Sparta and prepared to raise a family. Spartan girls and women were better treated and fed than most (or even all) of their contemporaries in the other Greek city-states. They could inherit and own property. Spartan woman were athletic and strong, a fact remarked on by many ancient writers, participating in competitions among themselves and exercising throughout their lives. The women of Sparta were also noted riders and breeders of horses (one, Cynisca, was the first woman to own horses that won races at the Olympic games).

The Spartan men fought as *hoplites*, heavy infantry armored in bronze breastplates, carrying bronze faced shields and armed with spears and swords. (It is from this period that the phrase "Return with your shield or on it" originated with the Spartans, telling the soldier not to be a coward. The heavy shields were the first thing that a fleeing *hoplite* would abandon.) The Spartans wore red cloaks which identified them both on and off the battle field. Because of the Spartans red became the color of choice for military cloak throughout Greece.

Hoplites fought in a formation called a *phalanx* composed of multiple ranks of infantry that stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a solid wall of interlocked shields and projecting spears. Each *hoplite* protected the man next to him as well as himself and iron discipline was needed to hold the formation. Because of their training and focus on the military arts, the Spartans were, man for man, the best army in Ancient Greece. This elite army was Sparta's main tool of diplomacy; the reputation of the Spartan army made it very effective bargaining chip.

For Spartans, the two most important concepts were bravery and duty, both warrior's virtues. Spartans did not abide cowards who were called *tresantes*, which means tremblers, and they were excluded from public life. *Tresantes* were forced to wear colored patches on their cloak to identify themselves and they were not allowed to marry or hold public office. Fearful of the spread of cowardice, the Spartans would not even allow the sisters of a *tresantes* to marry for fear that their children would also be cowardly. It was said that a Spartan mother would kill her own son if he returned from war a coward.

The Spartan government was unusual in that it had two lines of kings, both supposedly descended from Hercules. In theory, when a Spartan army marched one king led it while the other stayed behind to maintain the kingdom. The kings were often highly competitive with each other, each having his own vision of what the Spartan state needed to do to succeed.

The kings were assisted in their governance by the *Gerousia*, consisting of 28 men over the age of 60 (chosen for life) and five *Ephors*, chosen annually. Working together they decided policy for Sparta. Both the *Gerousia* and the *Ephors* were chosen by the Spartan citizens. In practice, the kings were the most

influential and powerful part of the government but their could be brought down by concerted action of the *Gerousia*. The Spartan citizens were able to voice their opinions through the Assembly which could advise and direct actions, but the king and the *Gerousia* could set aside its decisions.

The majority of the Spartans were very conservative and proud of their traditions, which sometime made them slow to adapt to changing circumstances. Spartans disdained luxury for its own sake and did not even mint coins for their own use. They preferred a barter economy though some of their kings had coins minted to pay outsiders. The story that the Spartans used currency made of iron unfortunately appears to be untrue. The culture of Sparta was that of an armed camp that devoutly worshiped their gods. The Spartans had dance, music and sports, but little else of the high culture usually associated with the ancient Greeks; no theaters, and no schools of philosophy.

The most famous battle in Spartan history is Thermopylae (480 BCE) a narrow strip of land between mountain and sea. Where the 300 Spartans, led by King Leonidas and supported by several hundred allied soldiers held back the entire Persian army of Xerxes (estimated at 100,000 soldiers). The Spartans held against the Persian assault for two days before they were overwhelmed and brutally slain. The time gained by the Spartans sacrifice allowed the rest of the Greeks time to organize a successful resistance to the Persian invaders.

Some of the most famous anecdotes about the Spartans come from Termopylae. In one story the Spartan Dienekes was told that when the Persian fired their arrows, their number blotted out the sun. He replied that it was good news for the Spartans, since they would be "able to fight in the shade". When the Persians commanded King Leonidas to lay down his arms, he replied, "Come and take them." After the Persian war was over, a tomb was constructed for the Spartans by the Greeks bearing the legend:

Go and tell the Spartans, passers-by

That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

After the defeat of the Persian invasion, the Spartans went on to battle the Athenian Empire for the dominance of Greece in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE). The Spartans were victorious, but the era of Spartan dominance was short lived. Spartan manpower was used up at a great rate during this a period. It literally took a generation to raise a new Spartan and continual warfare sapped Sparta's strength. Eventually, Sparta itself was invaded and much of the land returned to freed *helots*. Sparta was never again able to regain to its former status. By the time of the early Roman Empire, Sparta had become almost a theme park version of itself, displaying athletic contests, festivals and demonstrations of arms to curious Roman tourists before at last fading out entirely as a culture.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Sparta makes an excellent model for any warrior society, human or non-human. Even as a human culture, there is something almost alien about the level of militarism and focus on physical perfection and discipline in Spartan society. It could make people uncomfortable to visit such a place, allowing for interesting role-playing.

Characters could go, or be sent, to a Sparta analog to:

- Convince the Spartans to send troops to aid against an invasion or in some other vital military endeavor.
- Hire Spartans to train or lead an army.
- Learn new combat techniques.
- Recover an important relic, magical or not, that the Spartans took as loot after a great victory in the past.

The Spartans will look down upon and be distrustful of men who are not warriors. After all, what sort of man is not willing to fight for his country? They might be fascinated by female warriors or repulsed by them, depending on how they presented themselves.

The Spartans may require their visitors to prove themselves in contests of arms, skill and endurance. Races and wrestling contests would both be excellent choices as traditional Spartan contests.

A Spartan culture as a place of origin for a character would allow for many role-playing opportunities as he (or she) tries to come to grips with a world very different from the society he grew up in and was used to.

Supplemental d20 Material:

In D&D terms, a typical Spartan would be armed with a spear (used one-handed in defiance of usual D&D rules) and short sword and armored with a breastplate and a heavy shield. Their weapon focus and specialization, if chosen, would usually be in the spear. Other suggested feats for a Spartan warrior: Endurance, Improved Initiative, Run, Toughness.

New d20 Feats

Spartiate [General]

You have survived the grueling and often brutal training required to be a Spartan warrior. This intensive training gives you an edge in combat.

Prerequisites: Growing up in a Spartan-type culture, Strength 10, Constitution 12.

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to Initiative, a +1 bonus to Will saves and a +1 bonus to Survival checks. When wearing your national costume, you receive a +2 circumstance bonus to Intimidate checks. You receive a +1 morale bonus to saves against Fear effects, this bonus is raised to +3 if you know you are being watched by other people (apart from those causing the fear).

If you do fail a save against a Fear effect, you lose all bonuses from the *Spartiate* Feat for the duration of that Fear effect (as well as suffering from the usual Fear effects).

Special: Except when using your Intimidate skill or dealing with other warriors, you suffer a -1 penalty to all Charisma checks and Charisma based skill checks.

Usually this feat can only be chosen at 1st level and only by a Fighter (or similar class).

Spartan Woman [General]

You have been raised in the rigors of a warrior society, while not a warrior yourself you are still very tough in both mind and body.

Prerequisites: Growing up in a Spartan-type culture, Strength 8, Constitution 12, Wisdom 10.

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to Fortitude and Will saves. You also gain a +1 bonus to Jump and Perform (dance) checks.

Special: Usually this feat can only be chosen at 1st level.

Both of the above feats are slightly more powerful than a basic feat. In the case of the Spartan Woman feat, the additional bonuses (Jump and Perform) are limited enough that it is not particularly unbalancing. However, the *Spartiate* feat is well above the usual curve which is why it includes minor limitations, but primarily it should impose certain role-playing limits on a character who takes it. A DM should be careful if she allows these feats in her game to make sure that they are not abused.

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Chatting with Gary Gygax

by Kosala Ubayasekara
& Gary Gygax

Welcome to the tenth edition of our regular monthly debate and informational pieces done in collaboration with Mr. Gary Gygax, the original creative mind behind the Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game. This month focuses on Gygax's upcoming D&D module, *The Hall of Many Planes*.



Q1: To get us going, lets iron out some basic facts about the module. Is it aimed at a particular gaming system and if so which?

I wrote the module for the *Legendary Adventure* game system, but as so many D&D fans expressed a desire to be able to play it, we decided to make it a dual system product as was my earlier LA game module, *The Hermit*.

Q2: You have mentioned before that it would take a typical gaming group about a year to play through the module. Why did you want to create such a huge module and are you the sole author on the project?

Having a long mission seems to me as a GM to be a most desirable thing. A long and demanding quest is epic, more heroic in nature, and "feel" than ones of lesser length. That players seem to like such a challenge is evidenced by the combining of my earlier works--the G-D-Q and T modules. In fact, I announced the epic to come to my group, and they were eager to try it and see if my assessment of such an adventure was accurate. My players agreed once they were involved in the quest. Early on in the adventure, the characters are given opportunity to quit the quest and return to the normal universe. The entire lot of players rejected that notion without hesitation. They were determined, committed, and would not rest until they accomplished the mission or died trying.

The reward at the end of the quest was such that they were doubly pleased, I must add.

Q3: Lets get into some detail about the module itself. Is this a combat intensive gaming experience or a more puzzle/problem oriented module?

None of the above. It has such a variety of encounters that one cannot peg it into any single slot. There is everything in it from pure role-playing and no roll-playing whatsoever to pure hack & slash, with all manner of challenges lying between those extremes, problem solving included. I will say, though, that there is plenty of combat, because as an old hand at adventure writing, I know that the majority of RPGers hold that to be a desired element.

There is a lot of punning included, so no one will doubt it's my work ;).

Q4: For such an expansive work, I imagine the level of detail will be considerable. How large a role will a game master play in this module?

As a GM who loves to wing adventures, I surely left plenty of latitude for those of the same stamp. As usual, I state clearly at the beginning that whatever doesn't suit the GM should be ignored and his or her own creativity can be substituted.

The hard and fast portions are the backstory, the powerful main non-player characters involved, and the strange mini-cosmos the party ends up in. The events within that setting are mutable, and what order the adventure scenarios are undertaken is up to the players...or possibly the GM.

To conclude, I did hopefully furnish the GM with all needed to run each encounter by the book, if you will, while encouraging their added input even if no changes are made in what I present.

Q5: Does the whole module take place in a single geographic area? What kind of locales can a player expect to encounter in general terms?

The characters are within a mini-cosmos that contains a multitude of gates to other places. Those portals transport the group to all manner of strange places, and the variety of environments might well astonish the staid RPGer. In short, I do believe this is a module unlike anything heretofore created.

Q6: Is the module aimed at advanced gamers or can novices get into the action and enjoy the depth of the module quickly?

The *Hall of Many Panes* assumes a level of playing skill that is moderate only, but with that a high degree of reasoning ability. A novice to the RPG form might have difficulty surviving the challenges presented in the module if the Game Master was also relatively inexpert. A veteran GM with a group of inexperienced players can direct the team in regards to which encounters they undertake first, so that the players will gain "battlefield experience," and quickly become veterans. Those that are slow in learning might well have to create new characters along the way, but there is a provision for that even though the mini-cosmon environment is otherwise closed.

Q7: Who is publishing the module and when can we expect to see it on store shelves?

The *Hall of Many Panes* is being published by Troll Lord Games, and it is currently slated for preview at the GAMA show next year.

Q8: What is the estimated retail price for the product?

That I am unable to answer, for the Trolls have yet to inform me. The plan is to make it a boxed set, as the adventure material will fill two good-sized books and there are sufficient other components to warrant such a format.

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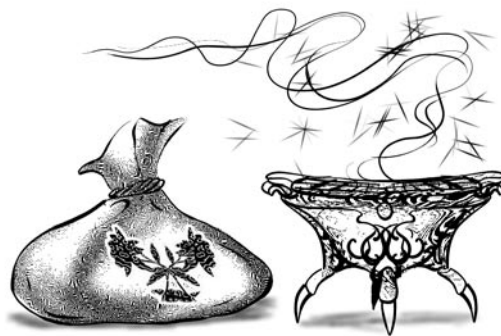
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Faith Based Initiative: A Gamer's Guide to Hanukwanzmas

By Eytan Bernstein



The holiday season has several festivals in which gifts are exchanged. These holidays – Hanukah, Kwanzaa and Christmas – are affectionately known by some as Hanukwanzmas. This is due to the blending of traditions that has occurred among the three holidays; chief of these traditions is the act of giving gifts. This month's Faith Based Initiative will be exploring the nature of these holidays (as well as others) and appropriate presents for any gamer.

Hanukah

Hanukah – otherwise known as the Festival of Lights – is a Jewish holiday commemorating the Hasmonean victory over Antiochus Epiphanes (and the Seleucid empire) in 164 B.C.E. The Hasmoneans or Maccabees were fighting against the Hellenization of the Jewish people. The Festival also celebrates the miracle of the oil – a belief held that after the Greek attacks, there was a shortage of oil for temple's sacred lamp. The Jews only had enough oil to burn the sacred lamp for one night. The miracle is that the oil burned for a full 8 days until more could be found. This is the reason that Hanukah is celebrated for 8 days. Many Jews light Hanukiahs – candle holders with 8 candles and a lighting candle – to commemorate the miracle. It is traditional to give small gifts to children during the holiday, but it has more recently evolved to the point where larger gifts are given to all. The holiday is celebrated on the 25th of the lunar month of Kislev. It usually corresponds to the month of December, though it can start as early as late November and end as late as early January.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a holiday celebrating African culture and community. It was founded in 1966 in America by Dr. Maulana Karenga – chair of the UC Long Beach Black Studies program. It is not considered a religious festival, but a cultural one, celebrating the African community and the 7 principles of Kwanzaa: Unity, Self Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith. Kwanzaa is celebrated between the 26th of December and the 1st of January. Gifts are given to celebrate the bounty of life and to give thanks to the community for its continued celebration of African values, spirituality and fellowship. You can find more information about the customs, traditions, and values of Kwanzaa on its official site <http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/7principles.html>

Christmas

Christmas is a holiday that at its essence, celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is believed to be the savior of all Christians who died for their sins. I am not going to go into the various controversies surrounding Jesus – those are the subject of another article. It is interesting to note that the date of Christmas – December 25th – has absolutely nothing to do with the date of birth of Jesus. It is actually the birthday of Mithra – a warlike god worshipped by the Romans at the time of Jesus. In the 4th century CE, Emperor Constantine of Byzantium decided to mark December 25th as Christmas in order to dissuade people from joining the powerful cult of Mithra. This also had the effecting of absorbing some of the traditions of Mithraism which in effect, neutralized it.

Throughout its history, Christmas has absorbed many outside customs and traditions. For instance, use of mistletoe and wreaths was a pagan custom. Santa Claus came into the picture quite a long time ago in the form of St. Nicholas – a man that may have existed in the 4th century. He was an ascetic sort who performed miracles and gave gifts to children. He became more and more mythical as time progressed. In a process of cultural syncretization, his myth absorbed aspects of pagan myths of Ancient Greece, medieval Russia and later Scandinavia. The giving of gifts by Santa has come to be associated with the wholesomeness of childhood and the special magic of Christmas.

Other Holidays

Some people find that the three holidays mentioned above do not correspond with their belief systems. Many of these people have turned to more esoteric traditions including certain forms of nature and earth worship such as Wicca. These people are more likely to celebrate the Winter Solstice (on December 21st) than other holidays. This holiday commemorates the turning of seasons and was known as Saturnalia in Ancient Rome. Most scholars believe that Christmas holiday has absorbed many of the activities and traditions associated with the Winter

Solstice. Among Pagans*, the winter solstice is also known as Yule. Other pagan holidays have been adapted into Christian festivals. For instance, Samhain – the last harvest – has come to be associated with Halloween Oct. 31st (and all Saints day). Other pagan holidays include Imbolc the Whispers of Springtime (Feb. 2nd), Ostara the Spring Equinox (March 21st), Beltaine the Joyous Revelry (May 1st), The Summer Solstice or Midsummer (June 21st), Lughnasadh the first Harvest (Aug 1st), and Mabon the Autumnal Equinox (Sep 21st).

* Please Note, the author is not using the term pagan with any negative connotation. It is simply a name used to refer to people who hold ancient beliefs apart from present traditional religions.

The Presents!!

Now that we have a firmer basis for the upcoming holidays, we can begin to talk about some great gift ideas. In this second part, I plan to describe gifts that I think most gamers would like to receive. This includes RPG books, novels, DVDs, movie gift certificates and video games.

RPGs

Wizards of the Coast has released a number of excellent products in the last few months. Here, I am going to talk about what I think are their best:

The Draconomicon is one of wizards best products to date. It includes detailed information on playing Dragon PCs, using them as NPCs or monsters, dragon familiars, the draconic language, and many new dragon entries. It is among their most detailed and well done product to date and is truly worth its cost.

Read a review of it here : <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=180>

Complete Warrior is a far superior follow up to the *Sword and Fist* book originally written for D&D 3.0. It has several new core classes – including the Swashbuckler, Hexblade, and Samurai – that focus on different aspects of combat. It includes many new and revised prestige classes and a bunch of new feats that will help make any character a well oiled machine in combat – if that's what you're looking to accomplish.

The Miniatures Handbook is good in that it provides some alternative classes, new feats and a bunch of new spells. Unfortunately, it is often incompatible with regular D&D 3.5 as it is designed for the use of miniatures. Despite this, it has a great deal of new crunchies (feats, classes, prestige classes, spells) that can be easily mixed in with a normal campaign. Put out at the same time as the handbook are several new sets of miniatures. These allow for a great deal more flexibility in combat situations, though some of them are a bit flimsy. There are follow up sets already out and several more in the works.

Read a review of it here : <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=169>

The Book of Exalted Deeds is a follow up to the original *Book of Vile Darkness*. It contains a ton of new feats, prestige classes, and spells that can be easily adapted to any campaign. Some of the book is slightly unbalanced – namely the vow of poverty – but can work under the right circumstances. Overall, it provides a great deal of material for an effective "good" campaign.

Shadowrun was taken over by Wizkids a few years ago and is just beginning to put out new products. New products are being produced via Fanpro by a small number of freelancers working with FASA veterans. Recently available are the *Sprawl Survival Guide*, the *Character Dossier*, and a reprint of *Rigger 3*. Many fans in the RPG world hope that more Shadowrun products come out and that they begin to put out some more novels. FASA, your presence is sorely missed.

Whitewolf is going through some major changes. It has decided to end its long running World of Darkness series this March. It will actually chronicle the long discussed event of Gehenna in a series of products meant to close out its lines – especially Werewolf and Vampire. There is some debate about the reasoning behind this. Some feel that the metaplot of the game has gone on far too long and that it is definitely time to end. Others feel that Whitewolf is forcing them to change their games based on its decision to end its line. Others will simply play the game the way they want without interference either way. If you are a fan of the ongoing struggle of the World of Darkness, you may wish to pick up the series of books concerning the final nights. I am not going to go into the specifics here as Whitewolf publishes so many sourcebooks that it would be impossible to describe them all. You may also wish to consider picking up some of the clan novels as they are fast and entertaining to read.

DVDs

While there are several DVDs worthy of interest by gamers at the moment, the only one that truly deserves a significant look is the extended version of the *Two Towers*. I watched it the other night and can say that it is probably the finest DVD created to date. While some of the extra footage may not seem as vital to the story as some from Fellowship, all of it is interesting and entertaining. The collectors DVD is beautifully packaged with an adorable statue of Gollum. The extras are almost too extensive and feature virtually everything you could want in a DVD. It became available November 18th in stores and I highly advise readers to either purchase it or intimate to a friend or relative that you'd really like to see it.

The *Matrix Reloaded* DVD has some interesting footage – especially concerning the extensive car chase – and is definitely worth it for fans. Some may find that the sequel as well as *Revolutions* were somewhat lackluster compared to the original, but the DVD still has worthwhile extra features and plenty of entertainment value.

The X2 DVD is excellent. The movie itself was spectacular – a major improvement on an already impressive franchise. The extras on the DVD are extensive – it goes into history, effects and all sorts of other fun things for the mutant lover in all of us.

Movies

A number of movies are out (or coming out) this holiday season. A gift certificate to some of them might make a good gift or you could just go with your friend or relative to catch a flick. Some of the films I would recommend are as follows:

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King is not out yet, but it is easily the most anticipated film to ever hit the big screen. The first two were spectacular and the third is supposed to be better than both of its predecessors combined. I have been waiting almost a year to see this film and will probably own every incarnation of its DVD. These films truly revitalized the fantasy genre and we can only hope to see more quality movies like them in the future. There is an event known as Trilogy Tuesday, occurring on December 16th. It is a full day event, starting in the late morning in which all three movies are played in row – Fellowship, The Two Towers (both extended) and the premiere of Return of the King – with short intermissions. I couldn't manage to get tickets, but they are available on e-bay at exorbitant prices in some locations. If you do have a source for these tickets – Silven would owe you a great tribute.

Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World is a great movie for those that like sea adventures and historical wartime films. It has spectacular cinematography and a commanding performance by Russel Crowe. Every minute is well used and the film is really taut in its delivery.

Early word on *The Last Samurai* with Tom Cruise is extremely positive. I have yet to see the film, but have a feeling that it will be an excellent holiday movie. Check out our Silven forum thread on the film to talk about your thoughts on it.

Video Games

The Temple of Elemental Evil has been out for a number of months, but it is still a great buy for the avid gamer. It is quite extensive and the game play is good – if you use the patch put out to fix some of the errors. There were a number of significant glitches in the game, but most were fixed by the patch. The game is a computer version of the Greyhawk D&D module that was reprinted in 3rd edition. It was originally published in the 1980s and is probably the most well known of all the D&D modules.

Baldur's Gate II has several additions coming out. These are great for true fans of the extremely popular video game series. Three novels have been published in the Forgotten Realms setting, based on the video games and they read quite well. They may not be the height of classic literature, but they are solid fantasy novels.

My Picks

We have great gifts to choose from whether you

celebrate Hanukah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Winter Solstice or some combination of them all. While I think that any of the products above would make good gifts for some people, there are a few that almost anyone would like under their Christmas Tree (or stocking, basket, Hanukah bush etc.) *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* DVD is a most own for any gamer as is the X2 DVD. These are both classics in the genres of sci-fi and fantasy and will be watched for decades to come. Most of us will see *Return of the King*, but it deserved mention. The film comes out at on December 17th. If you were lucky enough to get Trilogy Tuesday tickets, there are few better gifts. The best role-playing D&D products released recently are the *Miniatures Handbook* and the *Draconomicon*. If you are looking to buy an RPG book, but your budget is tight, these are the best ones.

A Look Ahead

We've looked a bit at the major traditions that give gifts during the holiday season. We've seen that there are a large variety of gifts to choose from for your gaming friends and family. There are countless other video games, RPGs, novels, films, and DVDs from which to choose – these are but a sample of some of the better ones. The important thing is to know the gift recipient and pick something that would be enjoyable for them. The holidays season is often lacking in fun and you can help make that happen. It also couldn't hurt if the gift you give is enjoyable to more than just its recipient.

In next month's column, I will be examining the resurgence of anti-roleplaying sentiment. I will explore the history of this movement including Rona Jaffe's *Mazes and Monsters*, Christian Fundamentalist, the Michigan tunnels mystery and beyond. This will be one of the few articles in which I will take a specific position against a certain idea. I feel that these groups are promoting censorship and ignorance. I hope to shed light on their positions and help you make your own decisions concerning their actions. In the meantime, go out and enjoy the holidays. Use this article as a guide to what to get your favorite gamer for whatever holidays they do or do not worship.

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PC (Player Characterization) : Winter Wonderment

By Pike Stephenson

Winter is a powerful season, dare I say the most powerful of all. From frigid winds blasting both mountain and man to icy rain that rends the heat from tree and bone, winter is without mercy. This devastating season's affect on the human spirit is equally traumatic. People can shift more dramatically than the weather. Cheerful and pleasant attitudes become morose and sarcastic and as cold as the temperature outside.

This month, let's explore three types of character backgrounds in which winter can play a predominant theme in the character's persona and playability: those who grew up knowing only winter, those who experience it seasonally, and those who experience it for the first time. With each of these, we will look at a positive and negative attitude towards the season and how you can implement these attitudes into your character come the first snowfall.

Born of the Tundra

Whether you are playing in a fantasy game or a space-opera, there will come a time when you will experience lands or worlds that are an endless plain of white. A lifetime spent in the grasp of a single season will greatly influence the mindset of a character. People born and raised within this environment are stout, pragmatic, and often brutal for one cannot be indecisive and hope to survive. In genres of fantasy up to early modern times, settlements tend to be small and tight to protect against further weather problems, raiders, or savage beasts. Vegetation is scarce and survival is a way of life. In fantastic to futuristic genres, small cities to entire worlds can exist within and under the relentless tundra.

Positive attitudes and traits associated with this type of character would be:

- Having knowledge, skills, and experience that would aid to the survival of self and one's companions if they were to travel in or be trapped within a frozen wasteland.
- The character may be honest to a fault, for lies and half truths can be a matter of life or death when it comes to survival.
- Keen instincts honed by a lifetime of hunting and fishing, traveling to other settlements or outposts, and possibly working as community sentry to protect the people the character cares about.
- As a character quirk, they can be awful surly during calm, warm weather but as the temperature drops it rekindles their inner child and reminds them of home.

The opposite side of this character type would be a person who despises his culture and heritage. They would have similar skills as the positive persona but might not be as good or didn't care enough to try very hard. This isn't the rule but an avenue to explore. Other traits could be:

- They would tend to be angry at the world for being stuck in such a horrible place and absolutely, without a doubt, have no intention of ever returning.
- Their disposition, as with their counterpart, would change as the temperature drops to something darker, savage, and possibly psychotic.
- They may have suffered many losses at the merciless hand of winter (the cold, bandits, etc.) and keep people at arms length to avoid any further internal pain or personal loss.
- Fear of the frigid climate, after a near tragic accident (trapped within the snow or falling through thin ice), may be a possible personality trait to explore.
- The character might feel contempt towards those who cannot take care of themselves and are unable to fathom the awesomeness of a true blizzard.

Winter as Seasonal

For those who know of winter as a seasonal guest, its grip isn't as tight on their lives. They may have seen times of pure and powerful cold but its effects are temporary. Daily routines would change but life would still move on. Nevertheless, they still carry strong feelings toward it.

- Those who enjoy the turn in the weather would associate the cold with warm moments of family unity and blessed events such as the birth of a child or the overwhelming generosity of a stranger.
- Their skills would be limited to how often they were exposed, purposely or not, to the colder weather. They may have traveled frequently to snow capped mountains to work or for recreation.
- Games are often associated with winter, like skiing, sledding, and snowball fights, along with warm drink and nights spent around an open fire.
- Some societies celebrate the season with cultural and religious events or pay homage to the gods of Winter in hopes of an early spring.

The opposite of this perspective would be people unappreciative of winter's wonder. They can appear quite selfish, merely concerned with how the weather affects transportation, businesses and how inconvenient it is. Cold, dark weather does have an effect on a person's psyche and can be displayed in some of the following suggestions.

- Wet, cold and miserable are three words that will issue from their lips minute after minute. They will have no desire to venture out and risk any injury, no matter how slight or fatal, to help anyone else. Misery loves company and they will ensure that they aren't the only one suffering.
- Any sign of jubilation is strictly forbidden around them for there is nothing fun or frivolous about winter.
- They may have been sick to death as a child thanks to winter and every year they can feel the strength slipping from their bones.
- This person may see the weather as a personal attack on them, as if someone guided the frigid winds in an attempt to ruin their life.

The Winter Novice

Believe it or not, there are people who have never seen an actual winter. Whether they live in a tropical zone where anything under 80 degrees is considered a cold snap, or they hail from underground societies that have yet to touch the surface world, their perspective on winter is truly unique. Those of the kind heart take each new experience with joy and happiness:

- Winter is a remarkable and wondrous thing. The frozen tears that fall from the sky and gently kissing their cheek would fill their heart with glee.
- They might feel as a child, in amazement for the first time at how beautiful the snow drifts can be. Watching the snow can almost be dangerous for they might stand for minutes or hours, until their fingers and toes are numb and their body temperature reaches dangerously low levels. To them, the experience would be worth it.
- They may see this as a bold, new challenge and chronicle their adventure for their brethren to read and enjoy for generations to come.

Beyond the wonderment rests a demon called fear. It lurks about the ear and whispers evil notions, conjuring dark emotions and imagery that can corrupt the most stoic of minds. For those who have yet to experience the blustering winds and the bone-chilling climate, the fear of the unknown can be a powerful enemy.

- The sudden disintegration of the sky could send even the most antisocial or diabolical person running for help or home in complete terror.
- What if they were raised to believe that any alteration in life was a curse? Would this not be the ultimate of curses? Another take could be that the person sees this as an assault upon her enemies, for the White Death from Above would surely slay them all!
- This unnatural phenomenon could be the death of them for the character would be caught unprepared for the temperature extreme. Their ability to move or find safety would be impeded and they could be prone to assaulting the first helping hand made available.

So, the next time your Game Master tells you that a cruel winter is sure to come, you can do more than bundle up and wait it out. Look to see if one of these winter related traits fit your character and apply it liberally. Think back to your character's roots and see if there is more you can add. I guarantee that you'll turn up the role-playing dial a couple of notches and help make the gaming experience a memorable delight.

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Polyglot : Riddle Me This!

A monthly column by Dana Driscoll

Welcome to Polyglot, your source for RPG language insight. This month, I take a look at a very different way to use language within a campaign—as a challenge in and of itself. Riddles and word puzzles can be extremely useful to a DM to create a unique experience for players, encourage role-play, and give an alternative to standard dungeon or NPC encounter. Using riddles and word puzzles in your game does not come without its own problems, however. They can be tricky to implement and require considerable consideration, planning, and skill. This article will detail the pros and cons of language-based challenges, tips for implementing them, and some ideas to get you started.

Overview and Limitations:

What exactly is a language-based challenge? A large number of items can fall into this category, but most commonly found are four major types: riddles, short word puzzles, word-logic puzzles, and longer/short story based puzzles. In the most general of senses, a language puzzle is just like a lock that needs a key (or a good rogue)—it is a challenge to overcome before a goal. This goal could be treasure, gaining entrance to an area, or even the preserving of one's life. Language puzzles range quite a bit in shape and sizes. They can be large, small, detailed, simple, auditory, visual, or interactive—all depending on the type of puzzle, location, and creativity of the dungeon master.

While language puzzles are a great tool, they can also create their share of problems. Before discussing word puzzles in detail, there are some drawbacks a DM should consider. First are the limitations of the players themselves. Some people are good at solving riddles, while others are not. Translating this to game terms, some characters should be better at solving puzzles due to high scores, abilities, or skills but since player herself is poor at doing so it creates a role-playing conundrum. Too many word puzzles can be frustrating for players who do not enjoy that type of challenge.

Another problem is that sometimes if players cannot come up with an answer to a puzzle, the session will literally stop until they solve it, especially if they encounter a puzzle in a dungeon. For these reasons, I suggest incorporating puzzles at points that PCs can come back to them after giving some thought, or making puzzles "optional" side-quests. Another good solution to both of the presented challenges is to let players give the puzzle some thought for ten minutes or so on their own. If it appears that they are getting nowhere and are stumped, allow them to make a check (in d20, a Intelligence check) for a hint.

How do you handle experience for puzzles? Several options exist, and depending on your own style, you may prefer one or the other. You can base experience on how difficult the puzzle was for the players and give them it as a group. You can assign individual experience to whoever solves the puzzle, or group experience if it is solved as a team. Or, you can forgo experience for the puzzle altogether and instead gives the PCs an in-game reward (such as a nice item, gold, or needed information).

Another problem a DM faces when incorporating word puzzles into a campaign is where to find good puzzles. While the Internet is a great source (and the source of the puzzles quoted throughout this article), it should be used with caution. It is entirely possible that your PCs have already encountered the word puzzles you pulled from the 'net. Some puzzles, especially riddles, may not fit your setting—the idea, concept, or object of discussion may simply not exist. Other puzzles you find you may want to tailor specifically to your campaign. Finding puzzles goes along with meta-knowledge that your players may have. If your players have already solved the puzzle before, it is a good idea to either prepare a back-up puzzle or to simply ask that character not to participate in the solving of the puzzle.

Implementing Puzzles In Your Game:

So now that we have a working definition of what type of puzzles falls into this classification and some limitations/issues to watch out for, we can begin to discuss when, where, and how they can be used. As you might guess, there is no one answer to this question. From my observations and experience, the most widespread use of language puzzles is within dungeons themselves—solving a riddle to open the secret door, rearranging letters to form a word that gains the party access to a treasure, or answering a series of riddles to

Example Riddles:

answers at the end of the article

*My roots are above and I
grow downward. What am I?*

What bites but has no teeth?

be allowed to progress through the dungeon. While dungeons are a great place for riddles and word puzzles to be found, they shouldn't be the only place.

An excellent alternative to implement puzzles is in NPC interactions. As stated before, a riddle or word puzzle is a challenge to overcome—something blocking the party from their goal. In most cases, when PCs are dealing with NPCs, they have a very specific reason to do so. More often than not, this reason involves information or objects that the NPCs have that the PCs want. NPCs may also be consulted for missions or advice. A multitude of possibilities exist to work a puzzle into such an NPC interaction. Here are some ideas:

Example Riddles:

answers at the end of the article

*Lighter than what
I am made of,
More of me is hidden
Than is seen.*

*When young, I am sweet in the sun.
When middle-aged, I make you gay.
When old, I am valued more than ever.*

*The party has worked their way through the
dungeon and finally has in their grasp what
they have been searching for-- the treasure.
To get at their prize, however, they must
solve one last puzzle.*

*Three ornate chests—gold, silver, and
bronze—appear in the center of the room.
Each chest has the following inscription:*

Silver Chest	Gold Chest	Bronze Chest
Treasure is in this chest.	Treasure is not in this chest.	Treasure is not in the gold chest.

Another inscription is carved into the floor below the chests, "One of these chests contains the treasure you seek. The other two contain abominations that will result in your certain death. At least one of the chests speaks the truth and at least one of the chest speaks lies."

The "abominations" the chest speaks of can be in the form of magical traps or powerful monster encounters.

- The NPC's brother disappeared over a year ago, leaving only a small riddle in his bedchamber. It is up to the PCs to discover what the riddle means and rescue the boy.
- A bored northern boarder guard wishes for some entertainment in the form of the PCs answering a small riddle. She'll let the PCs through the gate without incident if they can solve her tale.
- The NPC is an old sailor with a quick wit and a sharp eye. He'll only hand over the goods if the PCs can defeat him at a game of insults.
- A wandering salesperson offers the PCs a discount to a large purchase if they can solve the answer to his tale.

Many other possibilities exist for uses in a non-dungeon setting. This list will help you get started creating your own:

- The party scholar wants to gain access to the largest library in the country but lacks the funds to buy her way in. An alternative exists—the library will sponsor access to those who can prove themselves at solving a word puzzle.
- The PCs seek shelter in a cave entrance during a snowstorm. The cave turns out to be the home of a powerful, but reclusive, creature. The beast will only allow the PCs to leave if they can answer his questions.
- A local fair is in town. A cash prize is being offered for the one who has the quickest tongue and can best their "champion" in a riddle contest.
- The party finishes up a local dungeon crawl and finds a small, intricately carved, white book among the treasure. The book is magically sealed and will not open without the solution to the riddle etched into its cover is spoken.
- A larger campaign itself can be centered on solving a riddle. The party may have to travel from place to place, gathering pieces of the riddle until it is completed and then must be solved.

The “Look” and “Feel”

Part of the charm of language-based puzzle is that you can use it to help set the mood of an area, session, or larger campaign. This is especially true for puzzles that are visually represented to the PCs through detailed description or through actual representation on a sheet of paper or playmat.

I highly recommend preparing in advance all language puzzle materials, regardless of where you plan on using them within the game. Even if you are only using a simple riddle, the PCs are still going to need a visual representation of that riddle to help solve it. Printing out the riddle or puzzle on parchment or writing it in fancy letters on a simple sheet of paper will give it added mood-setting effect. If you are using a more complicated language puzzle, it is imperative that the PCs have a visual representation of what it is they need to solve. Otherwise, poor comprehension or description can lead to missing information—hence, an insolvable puzzle.

How the puzzle is represented within the game itself also deserves some consideration. For example, is it simply carved into a doorway that the PCs must pass through? Many interesting options exist for a dungeon location, including:

- Wrapped around the support pillars in the room.
- On the floor or part of the actual floor, similar to the second puzzle from the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.
- Parts of the riddle are found in different rooms of a dungeon, so the PCs have to visit many different parts to piece together the information before the riddle can be solved.
- The puzzle is written in an ancient script that requires the use of a “rosetta” stone of sorts to decipher.
- The question written on the outside of the door with the answer carved on the inside. Solving the puzzle is as simple as closing the door.

Language Puzzle Resources:

There are several good places to look when planning for a language-based puzzle in your campaign. If you play d20 games, *The Book of Challenges* published by Wizards of the Coast is overall a good resource, but has only a few language-based puzzles. Checking out your local library may provide some surprising results—and may have information that you can be fairly certain your PCs haven’t stumbled across. As always, the Internet is an invaluable resource. A simple Google search will turn up a multitude of results.

When developing or finding language-based puzzle sources, keep in mind the pros and cons of using them, finding obscure ones that your players haven’t encountered before, and being ready to give the answers in-game if the players are getting frustrated.

answers to riddles: 1) Iccle 2) Frost 3) Iceberg 4) Wine 5) The Bronze Chest is the correct choice. If one assumes that the Silver chest is telling the truth, then all three statements are true, negating the inscription. If one assumes that the Gold chest is telling the truth, then all three statements are false, again negating the inscription.

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Breaker Morant

Antipodean Adventures

"Shoot straight, you bastards. Don't make a mess of it!"
- Breaker Morant's last words

On February 27th, 1902, Harry "Breaker" Morant and Peter Handcock were shot by a firing squad in Pretoria, on the orders of Lord Kitchener. Another Australian, George Witton, was sentenced to life imprisonment. They were all court martialed for the murder of seven Boer prisoners. Ever since that event, "Breaker" Morant has become a symbol of the way in which Australians were, in the past, treated as somehow lesser than the British. Witton's book, *Scapegoats of the Empire*, pretty well sums up the feeling. Their case was one of the main reasons behind the decision of the Australian Government to never allow Australians to be placed under total foreign legal command from that time on.

What Happened?

When the Second Anglo-Boer War broke out in the Transvaal, South Africa, Australia sent along some of her sons to help out the Mother Country. The region was populated by the Boer, the descendants of German and Dutch settlers. They had attempted to build an independent colony in the Transvaal, having left the British-dominated Cape in 1836, but England would have none of that. The war was officially about quelling a rebellion among the Boer. As with most conflicts, there were mitigating factors. Three staples – gold, diamonds and land – were heavily involved.

'The Breaker'

Breaker Morant was a man of many facets. An accomplished poet, bushman, soldier, fighter, thief and drinker, Morant was given his nickname due to his skill with horses. He emigrated to Australia from England in 1883, at the age of nineteen. His background is something of an enigma, mainly due to his capacity for lying about his origins and even his real name.

Morant was married in 1884 after working a stint with a traveling circus, but matrimonial bliss did not last long. His young bride kicked him out when she discovered that he had not paid for the wedding and was being charged with the theft of some pigs and a saddle. Breaker strapped in for a few years of hard drinking, running up bills and living day to day as a sheep drover. In was in this time that he managed to pen some poetry for *The Bulletin*, under the pseudonym 'The Breaker.' He was a popular man, and his verses well well-received.

In 1900, Breaker Morant joined the army. When he left Australia's shores, he had been promoted to Lance Corporal. Upon completion of his training, he set sail for

South Africa as a soldier in the British Army. The war provided not only a chance for some adventure, but also an escape from the men and women he had cheated and lied to in Australia. He also had vague plans to return home to England.

After his first stint, he did return to England, where he rang up more debts and became engaged to the sister of his friend and comrade in arms, Captain Frederick Hunt. He decided to return once more to South Africa in 1901, where he joined up with a group called the Bushveldt Carbineers – a mainly Australian regiment put together to garrison the Northern Transvaal and round up small groups of armed Boers. It was formed in response to the new type of warfare being experienced by the Anglo forces. Instead of uniformed, trained troops, they were facing roving bands of 'commandos' – mostly made up of poorly equipped farmers and locals who were fighting for freedom and for their land. The Bushveldt Carbineers worked outside the usual rules of warfare on a semi-official basis. It was this semi-officiality which would be the death of Morant and Handcock.

A botched raid on a Boer farmhouse, wherein the group was surprised by four times the number of men they expected, resulted in the death of Captain Hunt. His body was found mutilated and castrated, his face having been stamped on by hob-nailed boots and his legs slashed. His clothes had been removed. When a Boer man named Visser was captured wearing Hunt's clothes, Morant snapped. Enraged and still mourning the loss of his fiancée's brother in such brutal circumstances, he accused Visser of torturing and killing Hunt. He then ordered the immediate execution of the surrendering Boer.

Morant, Handcock and Witton (alongside four other soldiers, including two British officers) were charged with murdering prisoners who had surrendered. An inexperienced lawyer, Major Thomas, was appointed to defend them. He arrived one day before the trial began, and was refused an adjournment. Morant was dismissive and contemptuous of the judge and his accusers, stating repeatedly than he had received orders that they were to take no prisoners. During the trial, the courthouse was attacked. The accused men fought as bravely as any other soldier present, and the Boers were defeated, but this had no effect on the outcome of the trial.

They were convicted, after a series of court martials, of the murder of seven prisoners, although they were acquitted of the murder of the German missionary. Handcock produced letters from the wives of fallen Boers, which suggested he was in their company

at the time of the missionary's demise. Morant and Handcock were sentenced to death, and Witton to life imprisonment (he was released after serving three years). The British soldiers involved received only a dishonorable discharge, whilst all Australians implicated were either gaoled or executed.

The story has significance for Australia because of the way our soldiers were scapegoated by the British. Morant and Handcock were to serve as an example to the rest of the army – their execution was nothing more than politics. The British were eager to accept a Boer surrender, and it was thought that the punishment of these colonials would speed the process along. Breaker Morant was certainly no hero, but he probably did not deserve his fate.

NPCs

Peter Handcock: An Australian blacksmith with a wife and child who signed up for the army because he desperately needed the money. He was a larrikin and a lieutenant. His wife only found out about his death from a report in a local newspaper.

George Witton: An idealistic young man who joined up to be a hero. His parents were firm believers in the idea of the British Empire and supported him in his decision. After his release from prison, he became a bitter man.

Major J.F. Thomas: A solicitor from a small town who was more experienced with small town work than murder and court martials. He was disorganized, aloof, and unconfident, although he did his level best to defend the Australians. After he resigned from the army, he refused to use his title.

Adventure Ideas

- 1) The PCs witness the execution of Boer prisoners by their comrades in the army, in contravention of the accepted rules of warfare. They must decide whether to turn a blind eye or to get involved. Things may be muddied if they are called upon as witnesses or even co-conspirators.
- 2) The PCs enter the scene in the middle of the dispute. They must resolve the issue one way or another. They may attempt to rescue Morant, Handcock and Witton.
- 3) The party is given clear verbal orders. They follow them (presumably), before finding themselves arrested on trumped-up charges of war crimes. They must prove their innocence or at least clear their names.

Campaign Ideas

- The PCs could easily be a crack squad similar to the Bushveldt Carbineers, charged with the duty of rounding up Boers and making them sign oaths of allegiance to the British Empire. The Boers span three generations and are extremely brutal in their actions. The PCs will be torn between the desire for revenge at the atrocities they and their comrades are subjected to (like Captain Hunt) and the often conflicting

orders from above. They may find themselves in a similar situation to Morant and Handcock – about to be scapegoated by the British. They must decide what, if anything, to do in order to escape their fate. Perhaps they will turn rogue and 'go bush.'

- On the other hand, the PCs could themselves be Boers, determined to defend at all costs and intimately familiar with the land. Adventures would consist of them bringing down Anglo/Australian units and stealing supplies and weapons. The Boers are fighting for independence, and will go to any lengths to secure it.

Other Genres

Fantasy: Serving as soldiers in the Golden Dragon Army, the PCs do constant battle against roving bands of orcs barbarians. After one such adventure, wherein the PCs are clearly outmatched and outnumbered, the cavalry arrive! Unfortunately, they are there to arrest the PCs on charges of excessive cruelty against the foe....

Modern: The PCs are Corporate Carbineers, charged with the task of hijacking the secrets and plans of rival companies. One of their superiors has been murdered, and the Corporate Carbineers have sworn revenge. They are closely watched by the police.

Science Fiction: The slave miners of Cubisia-6 have banded together to end the rule of their cruel overlords. The PCs are a crack squadron who must bring down this rebellion by any means possible, whilst maintaining the illusion of gentlemanly conduct in the eyes of the interstellar community.

Pulp: The PCs are 'specials'—ordinary soldiers who have been somehow given strange powers. They are to form a new team of rogue warriors, fighting Nazis and other threats to world peace on their own terms.

More Information

Film

Breaker Morant (1980), written and directed by Bruce Beresford, is the best visual source for what happened and also for capturing the flavour of a Morant/Boer-centric campaign. It is an excellent and entertaining Australian film.

Books

Nick Bleszynski, *Shoot Straight You Bastards!* (2002). This book has been the focus of a great deal of negative criticism, and has been called 'bad history'. Nonetheless, for the purposes of general information and for roleplaying, it provides information and mood.

George Witton, *Scapegoats of the Empire* (1907). Written some time after his release from prison, this book provides a first person account of the events in Pretoria. Its contents should be taken with a grain of salt, as Witton's feelings changed dramatically (and understandably) over the course of his prison term.

Bill Woolmore, *The Bushveldt Carbineers and the Pietersburg Light Horse* (2002). This is something of a narrative, and also goes into great detail about the role of the unit and biographical details regarding its members.

Websites

These websites are of varying quality and depth.

<http://www.anglo-boer.co.za/>

http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-anzac-characters/breaker_morant.htm

<http://www.picknowl.com.au/homepages/rkfadol/breakermorant.htm>

<http://www.halenet.com.au/~jybryant/morant.htm>

The Breaker's Last Poem

In prison cell I sadly sit,
A dammed crestfallen chappy,
And own to you I feel a bit -
A little bit - unhappy.

It really ain't the place nor time
To reel off rhyming diction;
But yet we'll write a final rhyme
While waiting crucifixion.

No matter what end they decide
Quick-lime? or boiling oil? sir
We'll do our best when crucified
To finish off in style, sir!

But we bequeath a parting tip
For sound advice of such men
Who come across in transport ship
To polish off the Dutchmen.

If you encounter any Boers
You really must not loot `em,
And, if you wish to leave these shores,
For pity's sake, don't shoot `em.

And if you'd earn a D.S.O.,
Why every British sinner
Should know the proper way to go
Is: Ask the Boer to dinner.

Let's toss a bumper down our throat
Before we pass to heaven,
And toast: "The trim-set petticoat
We leave behind in Devon."

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Star's Night Part 4

By Aaron Todd

With the help of an unknown man on a speeder bike, Ynara was able to isolate the Bollen from its bodyguard. She learned, however, that her son is stuck on a very remote planet with little hope of retrieval. She knows she has to try, but she is going to need more than just herself to do it.

Ynara had gotten enough money off of the Bollen to get her more than just to the planet. She hated stealing, but she couldn't hold down a job with what she had to do, so she just stole where she had to—preferably from those that could afford it. She hadn't got much money off Bollens in the past, but she did get some from the occasional one that had some information that led her to the next step. Her sporadic rolling of one of them had made her slightly known among their dealer culture.

Running around the galaxy got expensive. She had fuel expenses, food, and repairs to her ship. She didn't have to worry about lodging, since she slept on her ship, but that didn't cut down on the expenses that much.

The Bollen had told her some more information, at least narrowing down her search to a few settlements where she might find her son if he was still alive. Danuno apparently only kept a few settlements on one continent, but they were large and spread out very wide. He didn't want to draw too much attention to any one section of the planet even if he did have security on his back pocket. It was just not wise to concentrate his organization to one place if he could go anywhere. It also served him well so that he didn't have to worry about the settlements expanding and running into each other.

Most of the settlements didn't even know of the others existence, and if they did, they had no idea how far away they were; certainly too far to travel from one to the other on the ground. A runaway or a straggler could not wander very far above the ground, so they certainly were unable to make it to another settlement.

The Bollen also told her some previously unknown information about the planet. Much of the information about the planet had been kept under wraps by the authorities, and now she knew why. Before this, she knew little more than the fact that it was a giant rock gloating in space. Rumors abounded about the place, but she had never been able to substantiate anything. The less people knew about the place, the better for them. People like Duano could continue their operations without interference from other, private organizations.

The environment of the planet was completely poisonous to most forms of life, and as humans go in the species battle for survival, they are not the most resilient. The mining operations were completely underground. The miners brought ore to the surface, where it was dropped off and left for pick up by a stationed group of guards. Of course, the guards that were employed were of a race that didn't breathe air like most species. They were one of the only species in the galaxy that could survive on surface, and they didn't come out until the ships left. This gave the mining operation an added level of security. If no one was able to walk around, no one could hop the ship and escape.

The transport pilots were also instructed not to land if they saw anyone on the ground as they approached. As they neared each encampment, they would as a part of standard approach, circle the land at a few hundred meters, going in concentric circles inward until they landed. This would enable them to spot anyone that might be hiding and waiting for someone to land their ship so the runaways could ambush. The pilots were all well trained and knew that they might lose their heads if someone did manage to hijack their ship. And they were paid very well for their services. This was as gainful employment most could get.

An entirely different set of pilots handled the cargo off-planet. They came by once a week to haul off the ore that was mined. They had similar security measures but landed at a hatch that would bring them inside an environmental shield and would stay on the ground much longer. These pilots would load their ships with the aid of some of the local workers.

Cargo hauling was significantly more dangerous, and pilots would often bring several of their own guards to watch over the ship as the ore was loaded aboard. The local guards were normally sufficient, but when it came to one's ship, one's livelihood—a dangerous livelihood at that—there was no question that they would not trust someone that they didn't know to protect them.

The Bollen dealer's descriptions were vague enough, but they would certainly help her. When she got much closer to the planet, perhaps to one of the satellite planets, she'd be able to gather some more detailed information. In places like that, information was seldom difficult to come by for the right price.

As she returned to the street, she looked around, absolutely certain that authorities would be there at any moment, also checking the status of the Bollen's ART. He could get up at any time, and now that she had what she came for, the last thing she wanted to do is have to test a theory that she'd been given about one of their weaknesses.

She saw the ART still lying on the ground. There were a few kids that had surrounded it and were poking at it with sticks. Either they had never seen one before or were just curious to see if it was still alive. It still didn't move, so the kids kept poking. The ART had been down the entire time that she interrogated his boss, so the computer-aided brain that he carried would maintain no record of her as a threat.

Confident that she had avoided the ART, Ynara began heading back to the dock where her ship was being berthed. She had barely taken a step when she heard sirens as if that single step she had taken was on a landmine. In the rush, she couldn't tell which direction they were coming from, so she just chose a random direction and ran. As she ran back towards the street she had come from a few minutes earlier, she could hear the sirens getting louder.

Just before getting to the street, she ducked inside the entrance of the building on the corner. She hadn't even turned around when the security rover went flying by. Screaming by with sirens running full and engines blasting the street dust into two large spiraling cones behind it, the patrol didn't slow it went by her.

She stepped back out into the street ignoring the offended home resident yelling in what Ynara assumed were obscenities in the local dialect. She could speak a little of the local language, but did not have much grasp on the varying dialects. So she just smiled and waved apologetically as she left.

She still needed to get back to her ship fairly quickly. The presence of security only added to the urgency. There was no doubt that the Bollen would talk. They might not take him very seriously, but he would talk nonetheless. That could result in them tracking her down and detaining her. She wanted no part of that.

The street was still very crowded, so she figured she could mask her trail pretty easily. Instead of heading down the side of the street to make better time, she headed straight into the crowd. The more people that surrounded her right now the better.

She'd gotten about halfway to the port when she realized that she still needed to get some food to stock the ship before taking off, so she ducked into a

small store off to the side. She got lucky as they did have some basic travel rations. Not all stores carried these, but in a place like this, many stores did like to cater to travelers.

Once back in the street, she found her way unabated to the dock. There she found her ship—Journey's Luck. It was berthed in port 19 on the city side of the yards. She used the passkey to open the door that the guard had given her. As she approached, she noticed that the loading ramp was down. She wasn't expecting any supplies, and she didn't have a copilot with her on this trip.

She had very little choice but to go up the ramp. She could find a place to hide and wait for someone to come out, but she could wind up waiting for hours, and then not have anyone come out. So, it was up and into her ship.

With pistol in hand, she headed up the ramp slowly, looking around for anything that might give her a clue as to why someone may have invaded her ship. She could see nothing missing right away and there seemed to be no damage, but that did not preclude the idea that someone may have just planted a tracking device on board.

She headed for the cargo hold. Inside the ship and to the right, she headed down a short hallway, which still looked untouched. She didn't want to turn on any more lights, but there were some on already. She couldn't remember whether or not she'd left any on, but they were on just the same.

The cargo hold door was still locked. That left a good deal of doubt that there was anyone in there, but she would have to check it more carefully before she took off. After all, who would lock themselves in and wait for someone only to leave the outside door to the ship open.

She headed for towards the cockpit. She'd pass her room along the way and there was only one other small room, a lounge of sorts. It was just past the cockpit, but completely open. There were no doors in or out of it, so it was not a likely place to hide.

She didn't stop at her room. She'd come back to that later, as well. That only left the cockpit. The door was closed, but then, she tended to leave it closed. Understandably nervous, she approached the door. She was not a woman that was easily rattled, but someone had been on her ship, and she did not like that. Her ship was her home. It was all that she had, and no one likes having her home invaded. With her gun at the ready, she turned the handle of the door.

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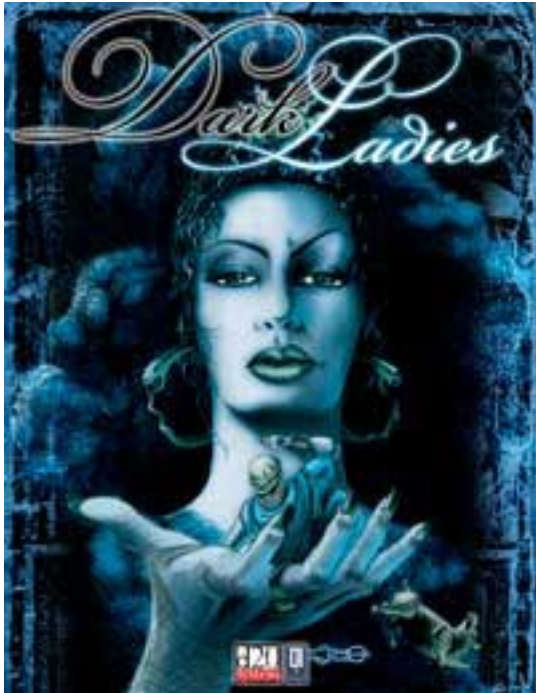
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d20 Review: Dark Ladies

"Dark Ladies"

Author: Andrew Hind and Chris Hind
 Publisher: Oone Roleplaying Games
 Reviewed by: Lance Kepner
 Review date: 11/17/2003



Rating Snapshot

CLASS: Electronic Supplement

STR: NA (*Physical*). PDF document.

DEX: 14 (*Organization*). Clickable Table of Contents is a help.

CON: 12 (*Quantity of the Content*). Could expect a lot more.

INT: 8 (*Quality of Content*). As the number implies... flawed, but not without promise.

WIS: 9 (*Options & Adaptability*). The villains aren't particularly useful, esp. without CR's. Enchanted Armor is only slightly redeeming.

CHA: 12 (*Look & Feel*). Art is decent quality, with only minor excursions into the absurd or poor taste.

Scoring definitions.

18 = Superior. Best of the best.

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

14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.

12 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.

10 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.

8 = Subpar. Flawed, but not without promise.

6 = Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.

4 = Very Bad. Among the Dirty Dozen.

2 = Inferior. Worst of the worst.

Putting the Wrong Foot Forward

Dark Ladies is a 46 page .pdf publication by OOne Games who are known for their artistic and eye-pleasing maps. Dark Ladies is, however, not a map, and perhaps portents to what OOne Games should stick to. The premise of the work is the highlighting of female villains, which Dark Ladies constantly refers to in archaic terms as villainesses. While the premise is somewhat sound, the writing and language used in Dark Ladies might make a reader a Dark Lady. Grammatical errors, and typos abound, and Dark Ladies forwards some not-so-subtle sexist attitudes, and that is all found on page one. Despite this, Dark Ladies has some redeeming qualities if readers can gloss over the unprofessionalism and ferret out the useful tidbits of information.

Off to a Bad Start

Dark Ladies opens with a one-page synopsis of female villain archetypes. They do not say archetypes are not stereotypes and proceed to give us the run down on Hags, Seductresses, Matriarchs and Manipulators to name a few. While this information could be useful to generalize or brainstorm your own villain, it serves a much greater purpose to any who read it. The text on page one clearly defines the authors' viewpoints on women, and tries slightly to obscure that fact. If you are a gamer who believes in equality then please skip page one, delete it if you can from the document. If you enjoy the subjugation and de-emphasizing of women, or you run in or are running in a campaign that has such views, page one of Dark Ladies might have a place within your library.

OK. You are saying. Is it really that bad? I will not deceive you and tell you that it is the anti-female manifesto, but as a college educated and fairly well read gamer, I was offended. Thankfully, such information does not go beyond page one.

The Villains

The major section of the publication is dedicated to the history, background, and stat blocks (as well as pictures) of seventeen female villains. The villains range from historical to high fantasy and are an interesting read with few of the problems above. Some of the villains are historical in nature, and thus may be hard to fit into a non-historical setting. I found them to be intriguing, and I enjoyed seeing real-world figures put into gaming terms. The other villains are from literature, such as the Witch Circe from Greek mythological fame. Occasionally a sidebar gives an interesting magic item, spell, feat, or new monster that goes along with the accompanying villain. These mechanics are reasonably balanced (some are not, so be careful), and are more flavor than fluff. Some issues arise within the stat blocks, or characters themselves, but are easily changed or adapted for any OGL compliant game. The exclusion of a Challenge Rating (CR) from the stat blocks is perplexing, as it is not easily identifiable by class levels as to what challenge a villain might be.

What Book am I reading?

The appendix to Dark Ladies makes you ask the question above. It includes the process by which a player may tan or preserve the armor, skin, or such of many beasts, and includes a list of monsters that have available armors. I personally find this list excellent, the power levels are relatively on par with the standard setting, considering the players would need to encounter such beasts and slay them in order to gain some armor. A list of twenty-seven beasts and armor are listed in a nicely formatted chart for easy printing. Why this is in the book, I don't know. Should you argue? If you really wanted more Dark Ladies by page 43, I'd wait for a supplement. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Conclusion

Ignore the first page of text in this book, and things will be fine. The villains presented in Dark Ladies are not astonishingly wonderful that a gamer throws down his or her hat and proceeds to wonder how he or she existed for so long without that particular evil NPC. The villains in Dark Ladies are slightly interesting, but less adaptable than one would possibly like. The end of the book contains information that does not pertain at all to Dark Ladies and belongs in a Ranger, Druid, or Craft supplement. But I respond more to the last three pages of the book than the other 43.

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d20 Review: Draconomicon

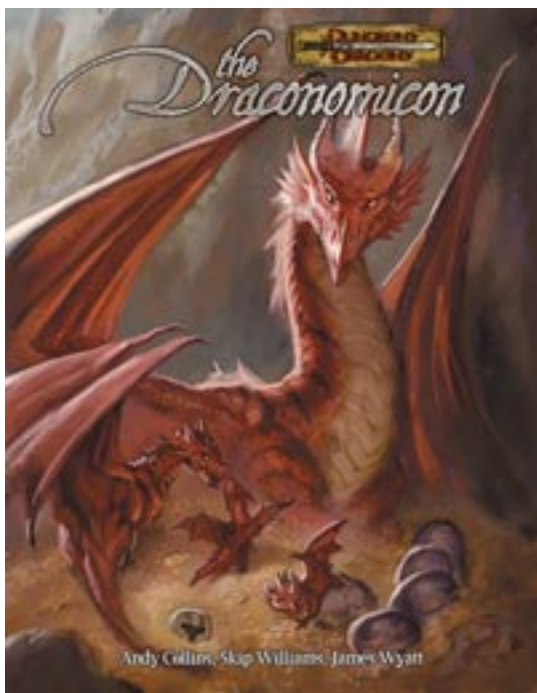
"Draconomicon: the Book of Dragons"

Authors: Andy Collins, Skip Williams, James Wyatt

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast

Reviewed by: Bradford Ferguson

Review date: 11/10/2003



From the Back Cover

"This lavishly illustrated supplement for the D&D game presents a comprehensive overview of the most evocative creatures in fantasy roleplaying. Along with the physiology, psychology, personality, and society of dragons, you'll discover statistics for all ten of the classic dragons at each of their twelve age categories. With new feats, spells, magic items, and prestige classes for dragons, their allies, and those brave or foolish enough to hunt them, *Draconomicon: the Book of Dragons* also provides illustrated lairs for each of the classic dragons and rules for generating their all-important treasure hoards."

Presentation

Draconomicon: the Book of Dragons is a 288-page hardcover book that is simply a gorgeous book inside and out. The interior of the book is full color and is fantastic. The cover art by Todd Lockwood (BTW, Silven interviewed Todd Lockwood and you can read the interview here <http://www.silven.com/articles.asp?case=show&id=63>) is superb. The interior art which is mainly by Todd Lockwood and Sam Wood is great. There are tons of illustrations all over the place and I will make mention of them in their respective chapters. The layout is excellent and alternating colors are used in tables for readability. Overall, the production value of the book is very high. I think that WotC was able to "out-do" itself with this book.

Chapter 1: All About Dragons

The first chapter is 52 pages long. Because

Rating Snapshot

CLASS: Monster Supplement

STR: 14 (*Physical*). Sturdy hardcover, but with glued-in binding.

DEX: 14 (*Organization*). Very well organized, player's perspective should be first though.

CON: 18 (*Quantity of the Content*). Every base is covered from dragon cohorts to dragon evil overlords.

INT: 18 (*Quality of Content*). The quality of the writing is great.

WIS: 18 (*Options & Adaptability*). The DM or player has everything needed to utilize dragons more in their games.

CHA: 17 (*Look & Feel*). Todd Lockwood's (and others') art is great, but I'm saving my 18s here for *Mutants and Masterminds* and artsy RPG books like *Mechanical Dream*.

Scoring definitions.

18 = Superior. Best of the best.

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

14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.

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Draconomicon: the Book of Dragons has a litany of great illustrations, I will often highlight the great illustrations along with the content. The anatomy and physiology of dragons is discussed with illustrations of a dragon's skeleton, internal organs, and musculature. Each of the anatomy drawings has numbered labels so you can refer to each part highlighted in the text. The age cycles of dragons are detailed from hatching to twilight.

Draconomicon is very comprehensive and describes dragon senses, modes of movement, combat abilities, dragon society, draconic language, and dragon religion. The deities of dragon religion are formatted exactly like they were done in *Deities and Demigods*; however, there are no huge stat blocks for deities (this is a good thing). Also like *Deities and Demigods*, the religious orders are glossed over as opposed to the detail that was given to the religions in *Faiths and Avatars* (2nd-edition AD&D). There is no discussion about holy days or religious garments or duties specific to that order or even the actual structure of the church. This is a book about dragons and not dragon religions, so I digress.

The last and best part of Chapter 1 is a section called "Dragons by Kind." The major chromatic and metallic dragons are covered: black, blue, green, red, white, brass, bronze, copper, gold, and silver. Each entry gives habitats and habits, identifiers, various measurements, a close-up shot of their heads (and each one is unique), and a bottom-up shot of what the dragon looks like with its wings spread out. The headshots of each dragon are fantastic.

Chapter 2: A DM's Guide to Dragons

This chapter spans 44 pages. It discusses the different roles that dragons can play in a campaign.

Draconomicon gives detailed advice on running a dragon combat encounter with accompanying diagrams of space and reach for different sizes of dragons and diagrams of flight strafing runs that show turning the radii of different flight maneuverabilities. There is a section on "Dragon Feats" which introduces a new fearsome type of feat: Metabreath Feat. Two of the nastier feats are Clinging Breath and Lingering Breath. Clinging Breath allows the breath weapon to stick to its foes like napalm, and Lingering Breath lingers in the air like a cloud. There are dragon-specific spells and dragon magic items and even prestige classes that are specific to dragons (non-dragons cannot take the prestige classes). One of the seemingly more dangerous dragon prestige classes is the Elemental Master. The Elemental Master can change the elements of its breath weapon. These feats, spells, and prestige classes can definitely add a nasty edge to your dragons (in case your players are hard to impress).

Chapter 3: The Player's Perspective

This chapter also spans 44 pages. This chapter has feats, new clerical domains, spells, magic items, and prestige classes that are all designed for Player Characters to take or utilize. There are feats such as Dragon Hunter and Dragoncrafter; the latter allows the PC to create dragoncraft items such as dragoncraft armor. A vast majority of the feats focus on dragons, but some are related to fighting huge monsters. The spells focus on combating dragons or creatures with similar special qualities to dragons. The 3rd-level spell *Find the Gap* allows an assassin, paladin, or ranger to ignore opponents' armor, shield, and natural armor bonuses. One spell that seems to me to be too low level, even though dragons could make a save against the spell, is the 3rd-level *Suppress Breath Weapon* which does what its name implies and is useable by bards, sorcerers, and wizards. I think that this should be a fourth or fifth level spell.

The prestige classes are very well done and all deserve mention by name: Dracolyte (worshipper of the draconic gods), Dragonkith (dragon servants), Dragonrider, Dragonslayer, Dragonsong Lyrist (who performs the power of the dragonsong), Dragonstalker, Hoardstealer, Initiate of the Draconic Mysteries (martial characters who seek the mysteries), Platinum Knight (protects good-aligned dragonkind), and Talon of Tiamat (furthers the ends of evil dragonkind). Wow! Since I have a talent for the obvious, you could definitely have a campaign that frequently focused on the influence of dragons. If you are a player and your DM throws dragons at your group, then one of these prestige classes would definitely give your character an edge, but they do not guarantee victory against dragons.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the sections on dragons as PCs or special mounts or fiendish servants. This book covers it all at a high level of quality. Andy Collins, Skip Williams, and James Wyatt did an excellent job with *Draconomicon*.

Chapter 4: New Monsters

Like its two predecessors, this chapter comprises 44 pages. This chapter has a bevy of new dragon and dragon-related monsters. Drakes and Landwyrms are both of the dragon type but they do not have as great a range of abilities. Drakes do not cast spells, nor do most of them have breath weapons, nor are they as supremely intelligent as dragons. Landwyrms cannot fly or use breath weapons; nevertheless, they are fearsome foes. A litany of Planar Dragons is presented including battle, chaos, ethereal, and tarterian dragons. So if you want to spice up the adventures in the Planes, you have dragons to drop in. A half-dozen templates are sprinkled throughout the chapter: Dracolich, Draconic, Ghostly Dragon, Skeletal Dragon, Vampiric Dragon, and Zombie Dragon. Draconic creatures do not gain wings and flight, nor do they get special immunities, they are simply a little tougher than normal creatures - a mild disappointment in a great creature chapter.

Chapter 5: Sample Dragons

This chapter is 78 pages. The back cover does not mislead us; all 10 major dragon types have full stat blocks for each of their 12 age categories. Not only that, but there are some great color illustrations that show the dragons' different colorations at different ages. For example, a bronze dragon wyrmling is bright orange with hints of a bluish green, while an old bronze dragon is grey and blue like its water subtype. The illustrations are awesome. There are also maps for sample lairs for each color dragon and each one is unique to the dragon's mindset. The copper dragon is a prankster so he has a maze as the first part of his lair, whereas the dark red dragon has a huge pit (150+ feet) and a false chamber in his lair. I must digress as I get excited very easily...

All the sample dragons have a paragraph description of their personality, they have a name (so if you just want a red dragon name, you have a list of 12 to choose from), and a full stat block including how big and how deadly their breath weapon is and what sorcerer spells they know. This entire chapter is quite lengthy and could be looked at by some as filler material; however, I view this chapter as a superb aid for the Dungeon Master. If you look at the Monster Manual, you will see that if you want to run a dragon encounter then you would have to take out a piece of paper and draw information from the various tables and ability listings - definitely a pain in the arse! With *Draconomicon* it's all at your fingertips and each block has an associated personality if you choose to use it. You will also notice that the personalities vary greatly from wyrmling (youngest) to great wurm (oldest). A good deal of thought was put into this chapter, just like the rest of this book.

Appendix

The appendix numbers 12 pages for a few reasons: treasure tables and sample hoards for each Challenge Rating and a couple of handy indices for the book. The sample hoards are great though you may need to vary some of the details as some of the items mention the Greyhawk / Standard D&D gods. The goods vary substantially and the magic items are conveniently listed separately.

Conclusion

Draconomicon is simply a great book (check out my scores below). I think that it is easily one of the top five books of the year in the D&D/d20 industry. If you have been playing roleplaying games for a long time and are currently playing D&D/d20 fantasy, you **MUST** get this book. Do whatever you need to do to get this book (within the confines of the law). This book was a real pleasure to read and is especially useful for campaigns that feature dragon encounters from time to time. If you are relatively new to gaming, or if you are a player who will never DM, then this book will be less useful to you.

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"Dungeons and Dragons: Book of Exalted Deeds"

Authors: James Wyatt, Christopher Perkins, Darrin Drader

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast

Reviewed by: Lance Kepner

Review date: 11/03/2003

CLASS: Supplemental Material

STR: 16 (*Physical*). Strong, hard cover. Typical WotC binding.

DEX: 16 (*Organization*). Follows Book of Vile Darkness layout, making information access in both intuitive.

CON: 17 (*Quantity of the Content*). 191 pages of new material.

INT: 16 (*Quality of Content*). Exceptional material, well written content.

WIS: 13 (*Options & Adaptability*). Companions the BoVD exceptionally well, but its content is limited in focus, and may not be directly applicable.

CHA: 15 (*Look & Feel*). Cover art is lacking, but internal art is superior to most WotC products.

For the full review see:

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=177>

"Anger of Angels" (electronic edition)

Author: Sean K Reynolds

Maker: [Malhavoc Press](#)

Review by: *Bradford Ferguson*

Review date: 11/02/2003

CLASS: Supplemental Ruleset (Angels)

STR: NA (*Physical*). This is an electronic (.PDF) supplement. It is incorporeal and has no physical form.

DEX: 12 (*Organization*). Everything in the latter part of the book in its place, but role stuff in the first half seems scattered.

CON: 16 (*Quantity of the Content*). Very beefy .PDF. Very comprehensive on the subject of Angels in d20 RPGs.

INT: 14 (*Quality of Content*). Well-written and well-researched. Subject seemed dry to me at times.

WIS: 14 (*Options & Adaptability*). Genre seems limited to me. Lots of races and feats. Templates a bonus.

CHA: 12 (*Look & Feel*). Black & White interior. Blurry abstract art is no good.

For the full review see:

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=176>

Scoring definitions

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"Dungeons and Dragons Miniatures Handbook"

Authors: Michael Donais, Skaff Elias, Rob Heinsoo, and Jonathan Tweet

Publisher: [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Reviewed by: Lance Kepner

Review date: 10/29/2003

CLASS: Supplemental Material

STR: 16 (*Physical*). Strong, hard cover. Strong bindings.

DEX: 14 (*Organization*). Lack of many topics and content limited the necessity for chapters, but made limited content harder.

CON: 12 (*Quantity of the Content*). There is content for both interested parties, but not a full book for either.

INT: 15 (*Quality of Content*). Much of the content is extremely poignant, while some is reprint from rulebook.

WIS: 15 (*Options & Adaptability*). Core classes, feats, and spells can see tabletop play, and skirmish variants and extensions are sure to keep miniatures people happy.

CHA: 16 (*Look & Feel*). The miniature artwork really adds to the book as a whole. If nothing else, look at the book for the artwork.

For the full review see:

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=169>

"e-Adventure Tiles - Dungeons Volume 1"

Artist: Edward Bouelle

Maker: [SkeletonKey Games](#)

Review by: *Bradford Ferguson*

Review date: 10/21/2003

CLASS: 2D Terrain

STR: NA (*Physical*). These are electronic (.PDF) supplements. They are incorporeal and have no physical form.

DEX: 16 (*Organization*). Added cheat sheet in the intro .PDF helps when you need to print additional tiles.

CON: 14 (*Quantity of the Content*). More tiles, lower price, better value.

INT: 18 (*Quality of Content*). Great art. Each tile has handy thin black and white scissor lines.

WIS: 16 (*Options & Adaptability*). Set appears to have every base combo that you need. You can draw in details if need be.

CHA: 18 (*Look & Feel*). Did I mention great art?

For the full review see:

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=163>

For all d20 reviews we did during the month of November, see our main site at:

<http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp>



d20 Hero : 'Shade', The Wayfinder

by Bradford Ferguson and Chris Axtell

This d20 hero is ready to add as-is to your d20 campaign. You can find more heroes on our site at <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp>. The text in this article is to be considered open game content and is distributed under the terms of the Open Gaming Licence found at <http://www.silven.com/siteinfo.asp?case=ogc>

Shade is based off the Wayfinder Variant Ranger class written by Chris Axtell. Please visit his feature article in the D&D section of Silven Crossroads for details on the abilities listed in his statistics. You can find it here <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp?case=show&id=37>.

Montague "Shade" Smith has always been outdoors. Montague would scout out all the nooks and crannies of the local woods when he was let out of the house by his parents to play outside. He sometimes lost his sense of direction but he always used natural guides to find his way back to areas that he was familiar with.

When Shade was in his early teens, he became more rebellious and often skipped out on supper and instead ate trail rations for his evening meal. He made it a habit to sleep out in the woods. His parents disapproved of his choice to sleep out in the woods, but they couldn't complain when he came back home in the morning and performed his daily work until the early afternoon. He often came back from his forays covered in dirt and leaves from head to toe. This covering saved his life one night when a group of wolves came impossibly nearby to his sleeping nook.

Shade started exploring ruins and preying upon goblins and orcs. During a chance encounter, he became recruited to join the same elite unit that Baledun came to join.

Shade, male human Wayfinder 4: CR 4; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 4d8+4; hp 27; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 35 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +3 armor, +1 shield); Attack +6 scimitar (1d6+2), or +7 Comp. Longbow (1d8+2); SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +3; AL NG; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Goblin, Orc.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4, Concentration +2, Craft (trapbuilding)+3, Craft (leatherworking) +3, Craft (weaponsmithing) +2, Escape Artist +9 (vest), Handle Animal +2, Heal +3, Hide +11, Jump +6, Knowledge [geography] +4, Knowledge [monsters] +3, Knowledge [nature] +3, Listen +2, Move Silent +4, Open locks +7 (vest), Profession (farmer) +3, Ride +4, Search +2, Spot +6, Survival +9, Swim +4; Shadow (masters of wild), Skill Focus (Survival), Skill Focus (Hide), [Track].

Possessions: *Vest of Escape*, MW Studded Leather Armor, Small Wooden Shield, Mighty (+2 damage) Composite Longbow, Scimitar, Dagger, 20 arrows, Backpack full of personal basics, Artisan's Tools (trapbuilding, leatherworking, weaponsmithing), Rope

Ranger Spells per Day: 1. Spells Prepared: (1st) Entangle.

Abilities: Wild Empathy, Pathfinding (d2), Guide (self + 3 others), Scout +1, Safe Passage I, Rugged life (thirst/hunger +1, cold 1/-)

Animal Friend: "Buster" (donkey, carries most of the gear)

Shade served as the tracker and the scout for the mercenary group. He assisted in the ambush of caravans, led the deep reconnaissance, and trained groups that rebelled against their enemies.

One night, during a guerilla attack, Shade guarded the rear of the group as they entered a trade outpost. Inside, Baledun watched in horror as the slaughter on innocents started. Baledun was screamed at until he acquiesced and took part in the atrocity.

This event caused the breakup of the mercenary group, but not without additional bloodshed. In a fit of guilt-laden rage, Baledun murdered the instigator of the atrocity. Shade broke up the fight, but not before making his mark on Baledun's flesh.

Shade, male human Wayfinder 8: CR 8; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 8d8+8; hp 51; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 feat); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +4 armor, +1 shield); Attack +11/+6 scimitar (1d6+3), or +11/+6 Comp longbow (1d8+2); SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +5; AL NG; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Goblin, Orc.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Concentration +3, Craft (trapbuilding) +5, Craft (leatherworking) +4, Craft (weaponsmithing) +4, Escape Artist +9 (vest), Handle Animal +3, Heal +4, Hide +17, Jump +7, Knowledge [geography] +6, Knowledge [monsters] +4, Knowledge [nature] +4, Listen +5, Move Silent +12, Open locks +7 (vest), Profession (farmer)+4, Ride +4, Search +3, Spot +7, Survival +14, Swim +4; Improved Initiative, Shadow (masters of wild, +2 hide/spot), Skill Focus (Survival), Skill Focus (Hide), [Track].

Possessions: *Vest of Escape*, Studded Leather +1, MW small wooden shield, Mighty (+2 damage) Comp. Longbow, *Silver Scimitar* +1, MW Dagger, 20 MW arrows, *Potion of Lesser Restoration*, *Potion*

of Endurance, Potion of Swimming, Potion of Cure Moderate Wounds, Backpack full of personal basics, Artisan's Tools (trapbuilding, leatherworking, weaponsmithing), Silk Rope

Ranger Spells per Day: 2/1. Spells Prepared: (1st) Entangle, Speak with Animals. (2nd) Protection from Elements.

Abilities: Wild Empathy, Pathfinding (d4), Guide (self + 7 others), Scout +2, Safe Passage I, Rugged life (thirst/hunger +2, cold +1, heat +1), Wary Step, Predict Weather, Improved Tracking.

Animal Friend: "Buster" (donkey, carries most of the gear); "Rusk" (medium dog)

Baledun made good his escape. Shade, now sullen, sought the quiet refuge of the forest and spent weeks in quiet contemplation and reflection. While Baledun was scarred by the vile incidents, Shade never witnessed the brutal acts as he was generally off outside or away to provide alarm in case "the enemy" came back prematurely or sent for reinforcements.

Shade needed to feel the rush of excitement that he felt while operating for the elite unit, so he joined up with an adventuring group. However, Shade recently heard a couple of rumors of the whereabouts of Baledun. The insane Baledun has been able to keep Shade off his trail by using his followers to split up in random directions and meet back with him using well-traveled roads. But, eventually Baledun will slip up when his original personality doesn't assert itself at the right time.

Shade, male human Wayfinder 12: CR 12; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 12d8+12; hp 75; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 feat); Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+2 Dex, +4 armor, +2 shield, +1 ring); Attack +15/+10/+5 scimitar (1d6+3), or +15/+10/+5 returning dagger (1d4+3), or +16/+11/+6 Comp longbow (1d8+4, +1d6 shock); SV Fort +8, Ref +9, Will +8; AL NG; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Goblin, Orc.

Skills and Feats: Climb +7, Concentration +5, Craft (trapbuilding) +6, Craft (leatherworking) +5, Craft (weaponsmithing) +5, Escape Artist +9 (vest), Handle Animal +5, Heal +5, Hide +22, Jump +7, Knowledge [geography] +10, Knowledge [monsters] +5, Knowledge [nature] +5, Knowledge [war] +3, Listen +7, Move Silent +14, Open locks +7 (vest), Profession (farmer)+4, Ride +7, Search +5, Spot +9, Survival +18, Swim +6; Close Quarters Fighting (sword & fist), Faster Healing (masters of wild), Improved Initiative, Shadow (masters of wild), Skill Focus (Survival), Skill Focus (Hide), [Track].

Possessions: Vest of Escape, Ring of Protection +1, Cloak of Resistance +1, Studded Leather +1 of Spell Resistance (13), small wooden shield +1, Comp. Longbow of Shock +1, Silver Scimitar +1, Returning Dagger +1 of Plant-Bane, 12 +1 arrows, 20 MW arrows, Potion of Lesser Restoration, Potion of Endurance, Potion of Swimming, Potion of Cure Moderate Wounds, Potion of Protection from Elements (sonic), Potion of Remove Paralysis, Potion of Remove blindness/deafness, Scroll of Tree Stride, Backpack full of personal basics, Artisan's Tools (trapbuilding, leatherworking, weaponsmithing), Silk Rope.

Ranger Spells per Day: 2/2/2. Spells Prepared: (1st) Entangle, Speak with Animals. (2nd) Protection from Elements, Speak with Plants. (3rd) Neutralize Poison, Remove Disease.

Abilities: Wild Empathy, Pathfinding (d6), Guide (self + 11 others), Scout +3, Safe Passage II, Rugged life (thirst/hunger +3, cold 1/-, heat 1/-, plant poisons +1), Wary Step, Predict Weather, Improved Tracking.

Animal Friend: "Buster" (donkey, carries most of the gear); "Rusk" (medium dog); "Lindy" (medium dog)

Appearance and Role-Playing

"Shade" is a skinny, unshaven man. His skin is normally covered with hardened soil (that he uses to throw off the scent of any pursuers). His hair is likewise matted and caked with dirt. Despite his filthy appearance, he moves with a cat-like grace and his eyes are very piercing. Shade tends to stare at friend and foe alike.

This wayfinder is a man of few words. He does not mind socializing with man, he just feels no need for lengthy conversations or prodigious words. He speaks in short, terse sentences whether he is answering or asking questions.

The Player Characters can encounter Montague Smith during any stage of his life: whether during his rebellious youth, or while he scouted for an elite military unit, or when he isolated himself after the mercenaries were disbanded, or as he is now searching for Baledun (the Multiple Personality Villain). Even if Baledun does slip up and get captured by the wayfinder, Montague does not know what he would do with Baledun. Monty knows that Baledun is a loose canon, but he does not know the extent of Baledun's insanity. Monty would not instantly kill or even imprison Baledun. The two formed a strong bond while they were in the elite military unit and Monty would rather talk some sense into Baledun somehow.

(Background and Description by Bradford Ferguson Statistics by Christopher Axtell)

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VILLAIN : BALEDUN, MULTIPLE PERSONALITY VILLAIN

by Bradford Ferguson

This d20 villain is ready to add as-is to your d20 campaign. You can find more villains on our site at <http://www.silven.com/adnd.asp>. The text in this article is to be considered open game content and is distributed under the terms of the Open Gaming Licence found at <http://www.silven.com/siteinfo.asp?case=ogc>

Baledun (pronounced BAIL-done) quickly rose in the ranks of the army as a young man. His sharp wit and general athletic prowess and battlefield heroics helped him earn the rank of sergeant. Baledun caught the eye of his superiors by effectively leading his men in battle.

Baledun was invited to an elite military unit when he was 25 years old. This unit (think Special Forces) conducted raids deep into "enemy" territory. However, the enemy was commonly another kingdom of man. The unit destroyed caravans, conducted reconnaissance, committed arson in attempts to burn down city blocks (by the fire spreading), sowed chaos by supporting rebellious groups, and committed some vile acts along the way.

Baledun, male human Fighter2/Rogue2: CR 4; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 2d10+2d6+4; hp 22; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +4 armor, +2 shield) +1 Dodge +4 vs AoO; Attack +6 longsword (1d8+2), or +5 Mighty Comp. Longbow (1d8+2), or +5 dagger (1d4+2); SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +3; AL CN; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Elven, Dwarven.

Skills: Bluff +5, Climb +7, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +5, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Jump +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Read Lips +7, Ride +5, Sense Motive +2, Spot +7, Tumble +7.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Mobility.

Special Abilities: Sneak attack +1d6, Evasion

Possessions: mithral shirt, mithral large shield, mighty composite longbow (+2 Str), masterwork longsword, quiver with 20 arrows, dagger, potion of cure moderate, disguise kit, backpack with food and survival gear, 50 gp.

This experience as an elite soldier hardened Baledun and it slowly fractured his psyche from the inside. He became paranoid, benevolent, and vindictive. He became Baledun and "the others", because all these emotions could not fit into one personality at any given time. One of the others became a cleric of a god whose domains are protection and healing, so the other could heal the sick and protect the weak. Another "other" learned arcane rituals to bring hellfire down on his enemies. His elite soldier personality, his core, remained the dominant personality.

Baledun, male human Cleric2/Fighter2/Rogue2/Wizard2: CR 8; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 2d10+2d8+2d6+2d4+16; hp 48; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 20 (+2 Dex, +5 armor, +3 shield) +1 Dodge +4 vs AoO; BAB: +6 Attack +9/+4 MW longsword (1d8+2), or +9/+4 MW Mighty Comp. Longbow (1d8+2), or +8/+3 dagger (1d4+2); SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +9; AL CN; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Elven, Dwarven.

Skills: Bluff +5, Climb +7, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +7, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Jump +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Read Lips +7, Ride +5, Sense Motive +2, Spellcraft +10, Spot +9, Tumble +9.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack.

Cleric Spells Prepared (4/3+1; save DC 12 + spell level): 0 -- *create water, cure minor wounds, inflict minor wounds, read magic*; 1 -- *inflict light wounds, inflict light wounds, magic weapon, sanctuary*.*

*Domain spell. Domains: Healing (+1 HP healing per healing spell), Protection (*protective ward* 1/day).

Wizard Spells Prepared - 15% chance of spell failure (4/3; save DC 12 + spell level): 0 -- *daze, detect magic, light, ray of frost*; 1 -- *color spray, shield, true strike*.

Spellbook: 1 -- *burning hands, color spray, magic missile, shield, true strike*.

Special Abilities: Sneak attack +1d6, Evasion, Scribe Scroll, Summon Familiar, Turn Undead.

Possessions: *mithral shirt +1, mithral large shield +1, masterwork mighty composite longbow (+2 Str), masterwork longsword, quiver with 20 arrows, dagger, 2 potions of cure serious wounds, potion of neutralize poison*, Familiar: Weasel +2 Reflex Saves, Alertness. Spellbook. *disguise kit, backpack with food and survival gear, 4 gemstones worth 400gp*.

Combat Strategy: Baledun uses the magic at his disposal. He protects himself with the shield spell, and he attacks his enemies from range with his composite longbow. When engaged up close, he likes to cast on the defensive and use touch attacks of inflict light wounds (through spontaneous casting) on his enemies. Should he need to affect a quick retreat, he casts Sanctuary. Touch Attack: +8, Ranged Touch Attack: +8.

Baledun's mind completely shatters as he cannot reconcile these different actions and feelings. He becomes isolated from normal society as he is sought after for the villainous acts of some of his "others". However, he is able to escape due to his special military training.

The randomness of the different personalities makes Baledun a chaotic character to deal with on a consistent basis. For this reason, and because of his past actions, Baledun has attracted a following of assorted chaotic and insane anarchistic individuals.

Baledun, male human Cleric3/Fighter3/Rogue3/Wizard3: CR 12; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 3d10+3d8+3d6+3d4+24; hp 72; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 22 (+2 Dex, +6 armor, +3 shield, +1 ring) +1 Dodge +4 vs AoO; Attack +12/+7 *longsword* +1 (1d8+3), or +12/+7 +1 *Mighty Comp. Longbow* (1d8+3), or +12/+7 MW dagger (1d4+3); SV Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +11; AL CN; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Elven, Dwarven.

Skills: Bluff +8, Climb +9, Concentration +14 (+4 Combat Casting), Diplomacy +5, Disguise +10, Escape Artist +10, Hide +7, Jump +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Read Lips +7, Ride +7, Sense Motive +2, Spellcraft +14, Spot +9, Tumble +9.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack.

Cleric Spells Prepared (4/3+1/2+1; save DC 12 + spell level): 0 -- *create water, cure minor wounds, inflict minor wounds, read magic*; 1 -- *inflict light wounds, inflict light wounds, obscuring mist, sanctuary**; 2 -- *hold person, silence, shield other**.

*Domain spell. Domains: Healing (+1 HP healing per healing spell), Protection (*protective ward* 1/day).

Wizard Spells Prepared – 15% chance of spell failure (4/3/2; save DC 12 + spell level): 0 -- *daze, detect magic, light, ray of frost*; 1 -- *color spray, shield, true strike*; 2 -- *invisibility, scare*.

Spellbook: 1 -- *burning hands, color spray, magic missile, shield, true strike*; 2 -- *alter self, detect thoughts, ghoul touch, invisibility, scare*.

Special Abilities: Uncanny Dodge (can't be flat-footed), Sneak attack +2d6, Evasion, Scribe Scroll, Summon Familiar, Turn Undead.

Possessions: *mithral shirt* +2, *mithral large shield* +1, +1 *mighty composite longbow* (+2 Str), *longsword* +1, quiver with 20 arrows, masterwork dagger, 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*, *potion of neutralize poison*, *Necklace of Fireballs Type V* (1-9d6, 2-7d6, 2-5d6, 2-3d6), *Wand of Melf's Acid Arrow* (33 charges, 2 rounds),

Ring of Protection +1, *Hat of Disguise*. Familiar: Weasel +2 Reflex Saves, Alertness. Spellbook. *disguise kit*, backpack with food and survival gear, 5 gemstones worth 500gp.

Notes: This character could be very difficult to run in combat. If you want to give the players a run for their money with this character, prepare well by going over the magic items and spells at his disposal. This character would definitely be a "boss fight" and would have a multitude of crazed lackeys at his disposal. He attacks opponents at range with his *Necklace of Fireballs* and *Wand of Melf's Acid Arrow*. He converts his cleric spells in close combat to inflict spells. He uses the *sanctuary* spell to make a clean getaway. Baledun uses his *Hat of Disguise* to help him elude authorities. Touch Attack: +11, Ranged Touch Attack: +11.

Appearance and Role-Playing

Baledun looks around nervously with wide eyes. His hair is medium length with tangles and knots. He wears a mithral chain shirt, but hidden underneath he has a deep scar that runs from his upper left shoulder to his right abdomen. Baledun carries a turquoise-encrusted longsword at his side.

When Baledun speaks, he interchanges the words, "I", "we", and "they". For this reason, it is often difficult to tell if he is referring to a personality of his or one of his lackeys. Baledun can be found doing an assortment of things. His elite military personality may assault and rob caravans, raid villages and trading outposts, set fire to buildings in a large city. His benevolent and guilty side would heal the sick and protect the wounded.

There are several interesting situations that could creep up, or that you could play out as DM to make things interesting. First, Baledun's personalities could change in the middle of combat. For example, maybe Baledun will injure a character one round and then heal his enemy the next round. Another interesting situation could be where they here several different rumors about a mysterious figure and the group may assume the rumors are about different people (because the actions differ so greatly), but all the rumors are about Baledun. Finally, if you are DMing and your group experiences Baledun in some way, be sure to explain him to the group somehow (that he has Multiple Personality Disorder). You could use the hero "Shade" for this.

Final note: This character was a huge challenge to create statistics for. I have never played a character with more than 3 normal classes, and I would not really recommend it for a player character. The 12th-level character has a huge range of abilities. I gave him equipment according to the standard gold value for a 12th-level character, but it seems like I gave him too much. It's the Dungeon Master's job to give his players a challenge and you should use all of the tools at Baledun's disposal, UNLESS one of his personalities intervenes *evil grin*.

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Cartographer's Corner

by Dana Driscoll

Winter Cabin

Cartographers Index : Map ID 08

This simple winter cabin is a cozy and comfortable place for inhabitants to relax. In the lower left corner, a warm stone fireplace is surrounded by leather and skin couches and a large bear rug. Over the mantle and scattered throughout the room are hunting trophies—an elk head, a deer head, and a large fish. The lower right corner features a rugged wooden table and a small cooking/game cleaning area. The upper left has two sturdy wooden bunk beds with skin blankets.

The winter cabin can have several different types of inhabitants. It may serve as a shelter for weary travelers braving the dangerous surrounding mountain passes. A small group of hunters may make use of the cabin during their winter hunting excursions. The cabin may be used by rangers as a place to escape the snowstorms and rest from their tedious treks into the wilderness.

The surrounding area of the cabin is mostly wooded with dense coniferous trees. Game and wild animals abound in the surrounding secluded region.

Looking for our map making lesson?

Dana and Kosala will be continuing our map making tutorial in our January issue with more information and step by step guides to making your own maps using Adobe Photoshop.



About this section

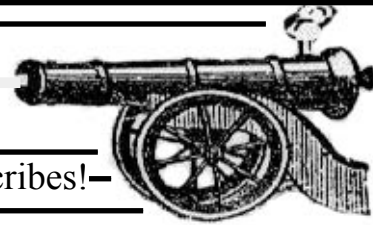
The Cartographer's Corner is your source for free, high quality color maps.

Each map that follows is a full page, in color and contains numbered areas so that a DM can easily make notes and keep track of what he or she wants where.

On this page we will present some adventure hook ideas that go with each map. These are usable in any fantasy based RPG and are presented only to give your imagination a kick start. We are very interested in hearing your feedback about how you use our maps. Head over to our forums and tell us.

<http://www.silven.com/forums.asp?case=threads&forumgroupid=1&forumssubsectionid=56>





Blizzards and Wizards ... Now That We Know They Are Dangerous

An Editorial by Dak Tumble

On Wednesday of last week, the city of Silven and its surrounding communities were enveloped in a continuous blizzard lasting four full days. By calling it a blizzard, however, one demeans the true nature of the phenomena. In actuality, giant snowballs hurtled toward the city for four days blanketing the entire countryside in a pocket of fifteen-foot deep snow.

Such an event is worthy of bar tales and epic songs, but alas, no brave adventurers thwarted the snowballs this time.

It was of course found out that famed wizard Orph Maloney was responsible. In his infinite wisdom, he issued a statement on white parchment, which was seen only by Jak the colorblind chimp who proceeded to wipe his arse with it.

Later we all found out that the crazed wizard's attempt to create a spell called "Snow Globe" as he called it had gone terribly awry. One can only imagine what truly happens when a wizard says, "oops!"

Such an event has not chilled the hearts of the people of Silven completely. They are quite warm thanks to the same wizard's attempts to fix the situation by unleashing hordes of fire elementals on the city. And then to fix the problem of the raging inferno, he released hordes of water elementals who managed to douse the flames but freeze in the chill wind of winter afterwards.

The community is gathering a committee of warriors and intellectuals to look into a procedure to deal with the water elementals once they thaw.

The entire event cost the city of Silven hundreds of coins.

In all of this, Silven has learned a valuable lesson. It does not pay to play with fire, nor does it pay to play with water, frozen or unfrozen.

Gnoll Pups Not Pets Says Mayor

In concordance with the mayor and the DSS (Druidic Society of Silven) a public statement has been issued.

Heretofore it is unlawful and unsound to keep Gnoll pups as pets.

Arch Druid Kamiya commented, "While these cute and cuddly little adorable gobs of soft fur look—ohh how much for the brown and white spotted one?"

The mayor insists, however, that raising intelligent and wild beings is asking for trouble.

The mayor had no official comment on the situation. He was too busy to comment, as he had to attend the opening of the Silven & Underdark caravan trail.

Citizens Speak out: No More Arenas

In a public show of outrage, Silven community members picketed City Hall yesterday citing displeasure over the announcement of a new Arena for the city.

The proposed Arena, funded by the Gladiators 'R'US foundation, would be the premier entertainment arena in the area. It would feature state of the art wooden benches, concession stands, and public outhouses. The arena would also feature the latest in pit fighting technology boasting an impressive five wild beast cages, thirteen man-operated pit traps, ten swinging axes of decapitation, and the all new and improved "Pit of Doom IV."

Community outrage is expected to continue, but the arena owners are not concerned. They say they will have a grand opening planned that will silence the naysayers once and for all.

Homeless Outraged Over New Shelters

In the continuing efforts of the Silven Urbanization and Restructuring Committee, the resurgence of new homeless shelters are being protested by the homeless of Silven.

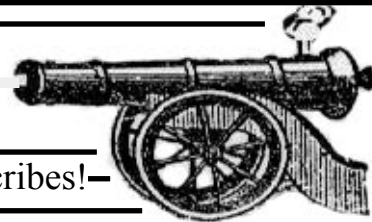
"Dis be an outrage ya see. They be tryin' to keep us down!" says homeless man Noah Teeth as he stands on a soap box addressing the gathering crowd of homeless outside City Hall.

"Dey can't force us ta live in comfort an' style! Dey won't take away our jobs! An' I'll be damned if I'll take a bath too." Continued Mr. Teeth.

Shouts and agreements from the crowd soon led to a full on march to the proposed site of the Shelter.

Along the way, the protestors carried signs and shouted such chants as "Hell no we won't go." "Beggin' your pardon?" and "Hobo 3:16"

The Fodder Cannon is a monthly humour section by Lance Kepner and Dana Driscoll. Readers are encouraged to contribute their own amusing shorts. Send to adriayna@yahoo.com.



Undead Cat released to solve Undead Mouse Problem

The Pet Resurrection service offered by local Priest of Pelor, Jandor Ul'Baal has spawned some interesting results.

While the service itself profits greatly from pet resurrections, a side business has presented itself.

In recent months, undead mice have been scurrying about the city, frightening women and prosing a public health hazard.

Mr. Ul'Baal has proposed that he can animate deceased cats to catch the undead mice at little or no cost to the city.

The mayor was unable to comment, but his aides suggest that it is a reasonable course of action to pursue.

From the community:

The Wonders of Holiday Decorating

By Mable Steward

The holidays are almost upon us, and what better time to use those strange nick-knacks and what-nots laying around the house.

Lord only knows when adventurers come into town they come with weird beast heads, horns, skins, etc. Am I right crafts people? You know what I am talking about.

But what they don't know is that they're all utter crap. We don't make them dragon skin armor or wyvern cloaks. We hand them a dyed piece of clothing and say 'here ya go'. You think they'd have caught on by now.

So what do we do with all this junk that they pay us to work on but we can't actually use? Well here are some tips for the holiday season.

Dragon Skins: Oh boy do these stink after a while. And they are quite heavy too. Depending on the age, it is possible to clean them up and use them for tablecloths.

Wyvern Skulls: Yes I have a few myself. Unsightly and awful looking things aren't they. Well, if you stick flowers around the base, and close off the bottom of the skull, it makes an excellent gravy container and pourer.

Unknown Horns: I have one and I am sure you do too. Who knows what they came from? Luckily they don't stink. With some pigments and some fresh flower arrangements they make excellent table centerpieces or even conversation starters. I know my Unicorn Horn generates a lot of response.

So there are just some basic tips for you to use this holiday season to liven up your home and clean out your attic at the same time.

Public Poll: Feast Day: Plans for the Holidays?

Orph Maloney, Wizard Extraordinaire

"Spreading the holiday spirit to Plane of Fire."

Mable Steward, home decorator

"Celebrate with friends and family... oh lord where's my Vallium?"

Arch Druid Kamiya, Arch Druid

"Tracking down some Santa Clause for thirteen reindeer violations."

Dak Tamble, bard wonder

"Working for this god damned newspaper. Hi mom."

Classifieds:

ATTN Goblinz and Frindz: Ur yu sik uf dem tring tu tak ur kaves frum us? Wi must fiet bak and stop dis outrage. Join us un munday neit in da trizz buy da laek. Wi will stop da mayor and da rest of dem.

Snow Shoveler for Hire! Piers Plowmund, local handyman, is extending his services to include snow shoveling and water elemental removal. Pay by the hour or the day.

Wanted: Monster Parts: Fredorick the Wizard is paying top dollar for monster parts, including ones that are starting to stink. Got Beholder eyeballs? Hydra hide, Owlbear claws, blood of a Chimera? Fredorick buys all.

Wanted: Small Children: No questions asked, discretion guaranteed. Hallap Shasto is looking to purchase small children. Humans preferable, but will consider all.

Lost: Small white pussy-cat. Last seen by Witch Matilda's residence before the snowstorm. May be lost in the snow. Reward: 200 gold.

Looking For Wife: Barton Beersblood is looking for a wife. I need someone willing to cook, clean, and pay for my booze. Sexual favors a plus. This offer won't last long, so interested parties should contact Barton at the Rusty Bolt Tavern.

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Printing Tips

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

Article pages and excerpts that we assume will be printed the most have been purposefully illustrated using light colors to conserve printer ink reserves. Printing out only the pages that you need will make it easier for you manage your ink usage.

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