The Silven Trumpeter

The Official Magazine of Silven Crossroads

From the Editor

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

Welcome to the seventeenth edition of the *Silven Trumpeter*! This month our featured theme is cartography. Throughout this issue, you'll find a host of new RPG related maps, map-themed articles, and even some map-making tutorials for those of you interested in wetting your feet!

Why the cartography theme? Cartography is often an important element of RPG design. RPGs were birthed from war-gaming, after all, where maps and layouts are a vital element to the game. The recent 3.5 edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* has placed an additional emphasis on using miniatures and battle maps, and never has there been such a wide variety of maps, minis, and other cartography-related elements at the gamer's disposal. We also have great companies like Dwarven Forge and Castlemolds producing three-dimensional dungeons for the avid gamer.

With all this said, however, perhaps the most important element comes from the map's function in a game itself. While any GM worth her salt can describe a scene in vivid language, the inclusion of a map makes that scene all the more concrete in the eyes of her gamers. Maps are not just be part of the game-player interface, however, as maps can play a vital role within a game as well. Treasure maps, hidden secret pages, and other symbolic drawings can be the central focus of a session or entire campaign!

So delve into the depths with pen in hand and enjoy this special and unique issue! As always, please contact me with any questions, comments, or criticisms. Happy holidays and happy gaming!

As a special note to our readers—because of the holiday season coinciding with our normal publication dates, we will not be publishing a January edition of the *Silven Trumpeter*. Our next issue will be published on February 1st, 2005.
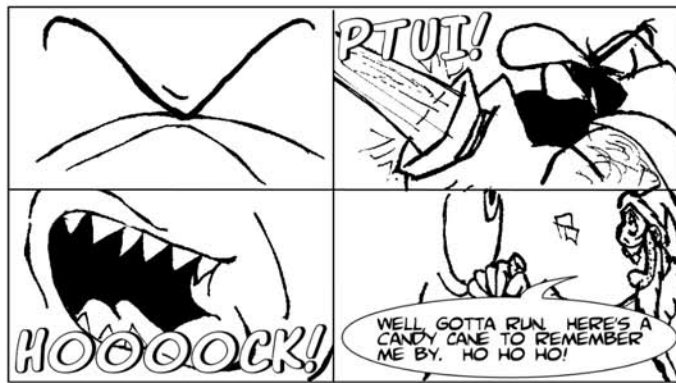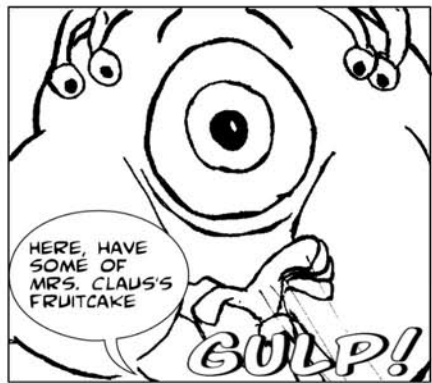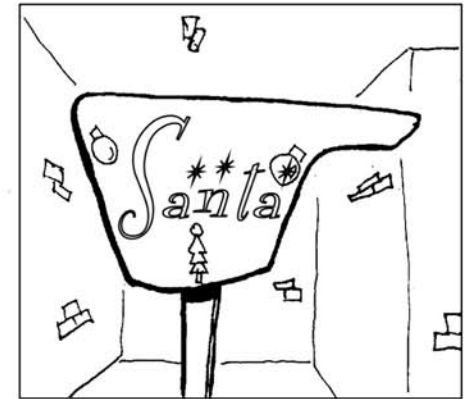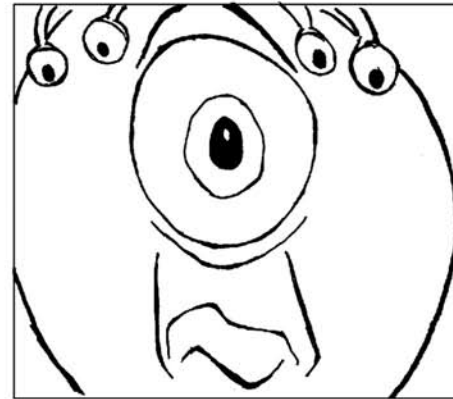
Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Trumpeter

Contents

by Dana Driscoll

Interview: Brennan Taylor and Ed Cha

Brennan Taylor (Galileo Games) and Ed Cha (Open World Press) have recently embarked upon a new kind of venture—a low-cost distribution company for indie publishers. We caught up with them via email to discuss this exciting project they call Indie Press Revolution (IPR).

Why don't you begin by telling us how you got the idea for Indie Press Revolution?

Ed: I was trying to figure out a better way to sell my books. In other words, I wanted to sell them more profitably. Traditional distribution just wasn't working for me as a smaller publisher. It's great when you're selling thousands upon thousands of books. But when you're not, it might not be so good. This is because you're only getting about 40% of MSRP. Take away from this agent fees, shipping costs, warehousing charges, not to mention the costs of printing, artwork, editing, and layout, and you have very little left, if anything, even if you've done the writing yourself!

When I met Brennan at I-Con [A Sci-Fi/Fantasy convention in Long Island,] earlier this year, he talked to me about his new book *Bulldogs!* and how he went with a small print run, sold direct, and still managed to make a profit. I knew that other people were doing the same thing, basically selling directly through their web site and at conventions, but I didn't realize that it could be done profitably. I started thinking, "What if a bunch of small quality publishers got together and started selling their stuff in one place? We could increase each other's sales by offering one-stop shopping, share shipping costs on combined orders

allowing us to give free shipping to our customers, and do all of this while preserving price integrity through a 'direct sales first' approach." This would be a cooperative project where people could share print ideas, artist recommendations, and marketing strategies, all in a confidential and secure forum.

So Brennan and I got together and started brainstorming on how to pursue this plan. We agreed that we didn't want to become like just any other online retailer selling anything and everything. We simply wouldn't be able to compete. Instead, we would only carry the best of the best in the independent press, so that anyone ordering from our web site would be assured of their purchase knowing that we only carry quality stuff. I think a lot of people would also be pleased to know that most of their money is going directly to the creator-publisher.

Brennan: That conversation was a real eye-opener. Ed and I had almost identical experiences as we tried to manufacture and market our games through traditional routes. Small publishers really have a major disadvantage the way the distribution system is set up. Bigger publishers have the advantage of size, and they can use their clout to get better deals as well as enjoy the benefits of the economies of scale. Many indie publishers like us, on the other hand, are doing print-on-demand (POD) which has the advantage of being relatively inexpensive for getting a product out, but also raises the cost per unit of your game. Once everyone takes their share, there is virtually nothing left for the creator. You can even find yourself losing money on each book you sell through traditional distribution. By banding together as indie publishers, we can cut a lot of overhead costs. And by selling

directly to the gamer, we get to pocket more of the profit from our work.

What is the main goal of the IPR?

Brennan: Our main goal is to help small, quality publishers get their games out there and actually earn some money off of their work so they can continue publishing this great stuff. There are a lot of truly excellent indie games out there, and no more than a handful of gamers may ever get to see them. Having all of these great games in one place should really help with exposure and allow for one-stop shopping for the best of the indie press. We want to create a community for indie publishers where we can share resources and take advantage of the experience and knowledge we've accumulated. A great game idea could be out there, and its creator may never get the chance to publish or have people play it. What we're trying to do is help that person do this and do it right— that is, profitably.

Ed: It's important to understand that what we're doing here is not only a business venture, but an artistic endeavor as well. There are so many quality products coming out that rarely get noticed simply because they don't get the shelf space or enough attention. Most of these publishers just disappear after doing one or two books, and we want that to stop! What we're doing should help extend the lifespan of new products and keep a game from getting left on the discount shelf.

How many individuals/companies have joined IPR so far?

Brennan: We have six clients right now, and we expect to have seven or eight by official launch this month. Ed's company, Open World Press, and mine, Galileo Games, were the first clients, of course. We also have Justin Jacobson's Blue Devil Games, which makes great d20 products, including the double ENnie-nominated *Poisoncraft: The Dark Art*, and SloeBrownWolf, which operates a great online community of gamers and designs awesome t-shirts using a nerd theme. Very cool stuff that any gamer would want! Keith Senkowski's Bob Goat Press, the publisher of the demonic horror RPG *Conspiracy of Shadows*, a sort of "X-Files" meets traditional fantasy role-playing, signed on with us, too. Our most recent member is Ron Edwards of Adept Press, one of the founders of the RPG writers' community, The Forge. Ron is, of course, very well-known among indie publishers. He was really enthused by the idea, and we are ecstatic to have him on board! In addition, we have about half a dozen or so other creator-publishers we are negotiating with right now, so I think we might just add a couple more by the time this interview is posted at Silven Crossroads.

Ed: We expect to have at least 10-12 clients signed on by the end of the year. There is also a special program for new artists that we are thinking of putting in place sometime in 2005 as well as a secret project I have in mind...

How are you handling the logistics/ distribution at IPR?

Brennan: I take care of the warehousing, which is free for all our members. We prepare two shipments a week, sending all of our orders within the U.S. by Priority Mail. Since we're concentrating on indie publishers, many of whom only produce one or two games, we can easily cover this volume. Some of the clients I talk to think I'm crazy to be taking of this all on, though. Fulfilling orders is the part most of these guys really hate, and since we take care of all of it in one place, it's just another great reason to sign on with us.

Do you plan on getting into distribution services for the indie publishers? Do you have a game shop outreach program in place?

Ed: Absolutely! We know that there is a vast market out there that we will never reach solely through our website. There are customers who just do not buy online, and even if they did, they might not know about our site. That's why we want distributors and retailers to join us. They can tap into this market. We can't. We want them to support our "direct sales first" approach because it is healthy for smaller publishers. You've got to be profitable in order to keep on producing. And I think they want that!

If we can sell direct through our web site initially and then release our products through distribution, it's a "win-win" situation. That way, we can reach as many potential buyers as possible and do it with a business plan that works for our clients. Also, I think it's very significant that distributors and retailers will know that when they order from us, they're getting stuff that has a proven sales track record and a growing customer base.

Do you have any quality standards or other requirements for individuals/ publishers joining the IPR?

Ed: So far, we've had an invitation-only policy. That means all of our clients have been recruited. We look at the overall quality of their products, the reviews they've received, customer response, and reputation. I think, going forward though, we'd like to open our doors so that anyone putting out great product can come to us first.

We want only reputable clients. Any unethical behavior, including but not limited to, failure to pay artists and plagiarizing the work of others may result in our decision to not renew an account. I absolutely abhor people who do this to hard-working artists who get paid very little as is, and often late, and it goes without saying what I think of people who steal ideas from others. Of course, we haven't seen any of these

problems with our current clients, or prospective clients for that matter, and we don't expect to.

If an individual is interested in signing up, what should he or she do?

Ed: That person should first look really hard at their product to see if it matches the quality standard that we're establishing. We're only looking for top-quality stuff. In other words, if you don't think what you're making is better than anything else already out there, I doubt we will either. In addition, although we're open to looking at manuscripts by newcomers to publishing, we prefer working with those who have experience in this industry and understand its realities.

Brennan: They can contact us via e-mail, submissions@indiepressrevolution.com, and we can discuss their products and planning. IPR has some very experienced people involved, so we can give really good advice and assistance to people trying to get started in publishing. Part of our goal is to help people with quality games get a foot in the door, and so we are open to talking to anyone with a great manuscript and the right funding. We definitely want to be honest about how hard all of this can be though. Independent publishing requires some serious intestinal fortitude, and most of all, a love of the hobby. That's really the only thing that will get you through in this tough business!

Are there any new projects on the horizon for you two other than IPR?

Brennan: I am currently finishing up a diceless system for magic-based games called *Mortal Coil*. The system is really portable and will be usable for just about any setting, but I am developing three different campaign settings for it, including one with magical gangs of street kids, one where the characters are gods from dead religions who meet and work out their rivalries in the modern day, and another one still to be decided. The *Mortal Coil* system is great for really intense story-based role-playing. I also have two other new products in the early stages, a spy game

called *Dead Drop* that will be reminiscent of the work of John Le Carre, rather than Ian Fleming, and a game called *The Fifth World* based on Southwest Native American mythology, where the characters are people who have just recently emerged from the underworld into a world full of monsters and must carve out a space for themselves in this hostile place. I always have too many projects!

Ed: I'm working on my third book in the *World of Whitethorn* series. It'll be a highly detailed, and I think my readers know when I say "detail" I mean it, city-based adventure setting. *World of Whitethorn 1C: The City of Cala*s should have hundreds of shops and other interesting locations in the city, as well as the surrounding areas, ready for use by any GM. I'm thinking of publishing it in not only d20, but another system as well.

In addition, I'm also talking to someone about publishing a novel based on the *World of Whitethorn* series.

We thank Ed and Brennan for their time and eagerly await more news and the official opening of the Indie Press Revolution. For more information, you can visit Indie Press Revolution at http://www.indiepressrevolution.com. For information about Open World Press, visit http://www.openworldpress.com. For information about Galileo Games, you can visit http://www.galileogames.com.

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by Chris McCoy

Pickled Chuba

The elf, quite possibly the largest specimen Chuba had ever seen, passed lazily through the market place, eyeing purchases with a look of haughty amusement. He must have found the humans' goods to be of laughable quality for the elf occasionally chuckled to himself after he put a piece of merchandise down. He muttered sometimes but his trailing goblin shadow could not make out the words. No matter, thought Chuba, that nice, fat purse at his side was what really mattered. Soon the elf's coin would be his and so would the dozen pastries he had spied earlier. Chuba had found that merely stealing money and then paying for the donuts he so loved was easier than breaking into a bakery and looting it in the middle of the night under the watchful eye of the town guards. At least his last experience had taught him that. The baker's wife had a mean back swing with her broom and poor Chuba still sported the welts on his head from her unyielding defense of her husband's prize donuts.

The elf turned a corner and walked away from the increasingly crowded marketplace. Chuba ducked under a stall, pausing for only a moment to steal a coconut from its rightful resting place, and ran into a deserted alleyway that ran adjacent to the street his unsuspecting target had just turned down. The stealthy goblin hugged the wall, staying close to the mid-afternoon shadows. His squinty eyes peered around the corner and caught sight of his prey, who was hunched over and talking in some foreign tongue to an unseen companion.

The guttural tongue was nothing like Goblin. The words were short and sharp, reminding Chuba of the arcane speech his former master had used when casting his fiery spells. But these words lacked the tangible aura of power that hung in the air when the Pyrowizard had chanted in that language. The tone was different too. It was as if the elf was talking instead of chanting, a playfulness underlying the harsh speech. But to whom was the elf speaking?

The goblin deftly vaulted over a fallen barrel and crouched behind it, peeking around the edge to get a closer look at this strange elf. Chuba's eyes went wide with surprise at the sight that lay before him.

The elf's cowl had fallen away from his face, revealing vibrant green hair and pale emerald skin. Reptilian green eyes glanced downward upon a diminutive silver dragon, which was perched on hind legs and grooming herself. The vibrant coloring of the scales marked the dragon as a female, as did the high shrilling of the dragon's chirps. Chuba remembered hearing a few things about dragons from his master and was thus able to determine that the green elf's companion was indeed a female. The silver dragon chirped cheerfully as the green elf scratched her stomach affectionately. The silver dragon playfully nipped the elf's fingers in return. The elf broke into melodious giggles and fell onto his back, laughing and rolling about with the equally amused miniature dragon.

"Baby loves the Silvy." The elf said happily.

Chuba could only stare in disbelief at such oddities.

A green elf and a tiny silver dragon who apparently shared some sort of childish love for each other had found their way into Chuba's world.

For the first time in his life, Chuba thought of himself as normal.

The goblin shook his head, trying to clear his mind of bewildering conclusions about the two's relationship. He didn't want to think of the possibilities! He just wanted the coin purse that now lay abandoned in the middle of the street as the two rolled about happily in the dust of the road. The pouch had fallen to the ground in the midst of the duo's lighthearted romp and was now only a few feet away from Chuba's hiding place.

He didn't hesitate. Chuba ran out from behind the barrel, scooped up the fallen purse and ran with as much speed as his little legs could muster, away from the bizarre elf and his silver-scaled companion. The sounds of their playfulness faded into the distance as the goblin thief made his way through the refuse choked alleyways and out of the city, back to his little cave in the nearby Flamepeak Mountains. The donuts would soon be his.

The sun was dipping below the cloud-cloaked horizon as Chuba returned home. His small cave was nothing more than a twenty-foot hollow carved into the stone by a long dried up river. But to the goblin who never before had anything of his own, save a ragged blanket and his own shrewd sense of survival, the small hole at the base of a wind blasted mountain was as grand as any pasha's palace.

The goblin's home had been decorated with many

different sorts of gaudy trinkets: a broken clay statue of a goat, several pieces of half finished jewelry, a bent bronze gong the size of two goblins, even a mounted and stuffed prize fish that Chuba had stolen from some merchant's home. The remains of past meals littered the cave floor, creating a maze of half eaten donuts and the bones of rats and other small animals. Chuba was not a very good hunter but he had been able to provide quite nicely for himself, depending on the coin he could steal or beg and the small animals he could catch. The goblin had even managed to get a hold of a prized down mattress, stuffed with real goose feathers! All he had done was slip a few rat droppings into a merchant's drink and watch as the man ran off to retch behind his stall. It had been an adventure all in its own to lug the mattress away from the market without getting caught but it had been worth every strained muscle! This was Chuba's domain and here he was king.

Chuba could barely contain his excitement as he rushed into the cave and climbed on top of his bed, bouncing up and down with anticipation. His mind raced with the possibility of what flavor donuts he could buy with his ill-gained coin. The purse was heavy, the heaviest one he had stolen yet. It must contain hundreds of gold coins! The exhilaration was too much. Chuba ripped the coin pouch's strings open and placed a calloused hand inside, pulling out the purse's contents.

"Huh?!"

Chuba eyed the contents of the purse curiously, finding not coin inside but something completely and utterly different. Something he had never seen before.

The bag was filled with some sort of fruit or vegetable. Chuba knew that much. They were a deep green and covered in small bumps. They looked like miniature cucumbers but smelled strongly of vinegar and some sour substance Chuba couldn't identify. The smell was repugnant but oddly pleasing to the goblin. He sniffed one of the odd pieces of produce and smiled slightly. It might not be a donut, it might not be money, but it

was food. A strange, new wondrous food.

Chuba's teeth sank into one of the sour smelling treats and a satisfying crunch echoed through the chamber. He chewed and chewed, savoring the unusual taste in his mouth. It was one of the most delicious things he had ever had! He stuffed four more into his already full mouth and chomped away happily. Before the hungry goblin realized it, he had eaten every single one of the cucumber-like fruits and was left with nothing more than an empty, foul smelling pouch.

"Aww… No more!" Chuba cried out sadly and burped loudly.

The goblin looked around in search of any dropped ones but could not find any. He sighed and patted his full belly, pleased to have found such a yummy treat. Chuba yawned and crawled into his comfortable bed, tired from his day's adventure and a satisfying meal. Before he knew it, the little goblin was asleep and dreaming of a land filled with an endless supply of those strange yet savory fruits.

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"Chirp!"

Chuba groaned quietly and pulled his pillow over his head, shutting out the bird's call. Some stray bird must have found its way into his cave because the chirping sounded awfully close to his head.

"CHIRP!"

His pillow went flying in the direction of the infernal chirping and a resounding thud reported that he had indeed hit his offender. Silence fell upon the cave again and the grinning goblin settled down for his return to the dream world.
Until something with sharp little teeth bit down on his nose.

Chuba shouted out in pain and surprise, literally jumping out of his bed and onto the ceiling. His

hands wrapped around a low hanging stalactite and he peered about with bewildered eyes. He found himself staring into the eyes of a certain diminutive silver dragon who was beating her wings furiously and chomping down on his nose with a mouth full of needle-like teeth.

Chuba's grip on the stalactite lessened and he plummeted to his bed below. The injured goblin bounced once on the bed before landing unceremoniously on the stone floor. Chuba saw stars as he picked himself off the floor and he glared menacingly at his hovering tormentor.

The cat-sized dragon nimbly flew out reach as Chuba tried to tackle her and missed. A deep, resonating sound reverberated throughout the chamber as the goblin rammed his head into the bent gong. The silver dragon fluttered back out the cave opening. Chuba stood awkwardly, his head aching beyond measure. His vision blurred as he stumbled towards the cave entrance, determined to hunt down that accursed dragon and make a snack out of her. He made it to the cave opening before the thundering pain in his head grew too overwhelming and darkness rushed up to claim Chuba. He fell to the stone floor with a thud and knew no more.

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"LUNCH! WAKE UP!!!"

The words boomed inside Chuba's pain stricken head and prodded him to consciousness. Wearily, he opened his eyes and squinted, trying desperately to clear his vision of the big green blur that hovered in front of him. As his vision began to clear, Chuba realized he was no longer in the safety of his cozy cave. Abruptly, the blurriness went away and the pitiful goblin could do nothing but stutter uncontrollably as he realized that he was staring into the smiling maw of a colossal green dragon.

The dragon's jaws were twisted into a bemused smile, revealing row upon row of jagged, ivory teeth. Each tooth was the size of a full grown human and capable

of chomping through steel. The dragon sniffed the goblin who emptied his bladder at the sight of such a powerful creature; the smell of tangible fear mixed with other earthy scents. Impossibly large eyes stared back at the frightened goblin, a look of glee within those emerald depths. Chuba tried to move and found that he could not. He was lying in the palm of the green wyrm, pinned in place by a pair of razor sharp claws.

Chuba looked about frantically, seeking a path of escape, any salvation from the particularly painful death that was certain to come his way at the jaws of the dragon. Craning his neck to peer past the dragon's claws, the goblin discovered that his captor was perched on a massive cliff. Chuba was suspended an impossible number of feet in the air in the outstretched talon of an offended green dragon. The dragon's clawed feet grasped the cliff and his wings were tucked behind him, to allow the goblin to see just how high up he really was. The grinning wyrm lowered his amused gaze down upon the shaking goblin and chuckled deeply.

"Lunch! Where are my pickles?!" The dragon spoke in raspy Common, cocking his head ever so slightly to the left.

Chuba stopped shivering and looked up at the dragon with fear in his eyes. He sputtered out a few words and threw his hands over his eyes, blocking the immense dragon from view.

"Who's…Lunch…?"

The dragon howled with laughter at such a ridiculous question.

"You are lunch! Or you will be! Pickle wants pickles! But there are no pickles, only a goblin! Did you eat the Pickle's pickles?"

Chuba did not know much about dragons but he had heard tales during his childhood. Dragons were supposed to be creatures of frightful presence, a commanding creature of destruction and arrogance.

Dragons would kill without a second's thought, viewing everything but them to be inferior. By claws or magical spells, death was certain for any lowly creature that crossed a dragon's path, especially a creature as lowly as a goblin. Dragons were the most powerful of monsters, beasts to be feared and respected.

But what about this strange dragon who was demanding his pickles and referring to himself as Pickle?

And what was a pickle?

A furious beating of wings drew the confused goblin's attention skyward. An agile silver form fluttered in front of the dragon's snout and preached atop it. It was the small silver scaled dragon that had gotten Chuba into this mess. But where was her green elven companion?

Unless…

"You elf from before!" Chuba exclaimed and looked up at the green dragon with amazement. How had so large a creature turned into something as mundane as an elf?

"Yuppers! Pickle is Baby! Baby is Pickle!" The dragon sang melodically for a few moments as the silver dragon chirped along in harmony.

It was more than poor Chuba could bear. He threw his hands over his eyes again and cowered the best he could, drawing his knees up to his chest and cursing his horrific misfortune for ever stealing from the strange elf that had actually been a magically shape-shifted dragon.

"Where are my pickles, Lunch?"

Chuba cried out in pain as the dragon flexed his talons, nicking the goblin's behind. He shifted painfully under the dragon's claws and rubbed his rump, flashing a look of anger and fear at the offending wyrm.

"What are pickles?!" Chuba shouted and glared at the dragon called Pickle. "Chuba no take pickles! Chuba only take wonderful green thingies! So tasty, so yummy! Chuba loved them so he eats them!"

Pickle's eyes narrowed menacingly and a great roar escaped from his gargantuan maw. Chuba let out a wail of despair and fell to his knees with his hands over his ears, recoiling from the dragon's wrath.

"YOU ATE PICKLE'S PICKLES!? BBBBBAAAAAAADDDDD LUNCH!!"

The silver dragon purred softly and nuzzled the dragon's nose ridge, chirping accusingly at the trembling goblin.

"YOU HIT SILVY WITH PILLOW! Ooooooh, Pickle gonna eat 'cha now!"

The dragon brought the goblin up to his jaws and dangled him over his open mouth with a pair of talons. Chuba screamed out in agony and pleaded for his life.

"Please, no eat Chuba! Not Lunch! Not Lunch! Not even snack! Chuba no taste good! Please, please, please….Chuba sorry! NO EAT CHUBA!!! WWWWWWW AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!"

The goblin's shrieking caused Silvy to fall over chuckling and almost lose her perch atop the green dragon's nose. She chittered excitedly at Baby who was busy swatting the suspended goblin with his serpentine tongue.

"Tasty Lunch though!" Baby moaned as the minute dragon nudged his head again, looking at him with persuasive eyes of molten silver. He sighed and put the goblin down on the edge of the cliff.

"Silvy thinks Lunch is funny!"

Chuba could only stare up at the pair with a look of fright-filled amazement.

"Dance Lunch! DANCE!"

The goblin, mesmerized by some unseen power, found himself dancing back and forth. His body was not under his command as he leapt backward in a somersault. He tumbled about unwillingly, caught up in the magic of the dragon's suggestion spell. For hours the poor goblin, battered and frightened, danced and danced, never stopping for rest. The laughter of the two dragons rang throughout the night as they amused themselves at the dancing goblin's expense.

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"Lunch is done dancing!"

The suggestion spell ended abruptly while Chuba was in the midst of doing a handstand and he fell to the ground and did not get up. He was too tired, too exhausted from eight hours of dancing every single dance he could remember and he even made up a few that sent the dragons roaring about in laughter. The goblin looked up at his leering tormentors and garbled out two words.

"Chuba… hungry…"

"Chuba not hungry for pickles is he?!" Baby demanded, flashing his teeth threateningly.

Chuba shook his head frantically.

"Chuba never touch Baby's pickles again! Never, never, never. No pickles for Chuba, only for Baby…and err, friend." He vowed, pointing up to the hovering silvery dragon.

"That Silvy. She thinks you're funny so you can live! But when Silvy wants a laugh, Baby is gonna find you and you are gonna dance for Silvy. Silly dancing goblin. Hehehehe…"

Baby babbled incoherently for a few moments and then spoke in that guttural tongue he had spoken in earlier. Silvy nodded enthusiastically and chirped in agreement. Baby smirked and turned his fickle attention back to Chuba.

"You can go, Dancing Lunch! But remember, Baby is the Pickle Dragon and if you eat any more pickles, Baby is going to eat you! Bwhahahahaha!"

Chuba didn't even stick around long enough to hear the dragon's last words as he scrambled up the cliff and ran as fast as his stumpy legs would go. He soon found a path and tumbled down it, cursing his ill fortune every step of the way.

Chuba hated dragons but he found himself hating pickles even more.

He never wanted to see another pickle again, regardless of how good they may be.

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Silvy regarded her lifemate with passion and amusement. He was so endlessly entertaining with his childlike disposition and joking mannerisms. She nuzzled Baby's arm with her cheek and lay beside him, under the canopy of stars, high in the Flamepeak Mountains. Her moon-kissed fingers laced through his flowing green hair as she kissed his handsome, elven face good night.

Baby opened his emerald reptilian eyes and turned a loving smile at his beloved. She was so beautiful when she took her elven form, a true masterpiece of moonlight majesty. He laughed softly at the remembrance of the day's events and the amusement they had found in the little goblin thief named Chuba. He has learned his lesson, the dragon mused, and will no longer steal…at least from those who are more powerful then he. Baby closed his eyes and snuggled up against his slumbering mate.

That night Silvy dreamed of dancing goblins.

Baby's dreams were, as always, filled with an endless supply of pickles and mischief. A new creature appeared in his dreams and he smiled while he slept.

And wondered just what a Pickled Chuba would taste like.

by Elizabeth R.A. Liddell

Frost*burned*!

Wizards of the Coast has officially released its first PDF-format product: the supplement *Frostburn*, for the bargain price of…*exactly the same as the print version!* What on earth? Now, with the number of independent and smaller-company games and supplements sold online as PDF files, and the pioneering efforts of Malhavoc Press in the parallel production of print and PDF format games, it is no small wonder that a gaming giants such as Wizards of the Coast (WotC) has also begun to take an interest in the PDF market. But up until now, the accepted standard has been that a PDF is a cheaper way to buy your games. Let me tell you, if I'm going to pay the outrageous price of $34.99 for a role-playing game supplement (not even a whole system, mind you), I sure as heck want the shiny cover art and slick pages under my hands.

I spent some time looking into the PDF gaming market and came up with two possible outcomes of this development. Either WotC will succeed in its endeavor to sell PDFs at print prices, with all the implications thereof, or it will find itself shut out of a rapidly growing market in the modern world. Read on for all the gory details!

Where It Began…

To start out, I'd like to go over some of the great features of PDF-format games. First, a gamer with a laptop can ditch the piles of books in favor of his computer. Anyone with Adobe Acrobat Reader, a free program, can search a book to find the particular rule or detail she's looking for. More importantly, the PDF is usually a fantastically inexpensive way to find and explore new games and supplements. It is easy to drop $5.00 on a new game when one hour's work at a minimum wage job will pay it off. The advent of PDF publishing is the ideal situation for the college student gamer!

PDFs are also a blessing for the independent game publisher. When many publishers see the role-playing game market as saturated, it can be next to impossible to get a new product into print. With PDFs, it is far easier and much more affordable to publish your own game. This means that all the great ideas that would have been lost a decade ago can now be released upon the world in electronic format, giving gamers endless new material.

In a nutshell, you've got everything you need: low cost, a huge selection, new products and ideas to work with, and the convenience of having all your games at your fingertips. What's more, you don't even have to get out of your pajamas to go shopping for a new game – it's only a few clicks away.

The Market Grows: Malhavoc Press

A few short years ago, there was a breakthrough in the PDF gaming market. A new gaming company, headed by long-time game writer Monte Cook, began releasing its books in PDF format as well as a standard print version. Though it was feared that those who purchased the PDF would then avoid purchasing the print copy, Malhavoc Press found just the opposite. Many people would make the small investment in their PDF books. Upon finding material that they liked, they would happily shell out the extra money to acquire a print copy.

A wise strategy used by Malhavoc Press is that of releasing its books in PDF format a few weeks or months before sending the print version into the market. While part of this comes from the simple fact that it takes less time to publish a PDF than a physical book, there is also the element of anticipation at play. Someone waiting for months for *Beyond Countless Doorways* would probably snap up the PDF as soon as it was available simply from a desire to get his hands on the material. Assuming he didn't hate what he saw, he would more than likely purchase the print book from his game store as soon as it got there, as well. This practice has helped encourage consumers to buy the product in both formats.

Being a more widely acclaimed company, combined with the fact that they are also offering print versions of their books, Malhavoc Press is in a position to ask a little more than the standard price for their PDF books. A book from that company might cost from ten to fifteen dollars, while an independent game will probably fit safely in the five to ten dollar bracket.

Personally, I'll mope for approximately 6.8 seconds before saying "heck, it's worth it" and pitching in the extra few dollars. After all, a truly professional product probably is worth spending a bit more.

Enter the Corporate Monster

This whole environment changes when the corporate giants take the field. Wizards of the Coast recently released its first PDF-format book, the supplement *Frostburn*, via Drive Through RPG <http://www.driv ethroughrpg.com>. It was released simultaneously with the print version and at exactly the same price. The implications of this are astounding.

Our first reaction, of course, is to wonder why something that costs so little to actually produce costs as much as something that requires the paper, a cover, binding, shipping, and other assorted costs. We also get the impression that WotC thinks it's too good to offer any of its books for anything less than its standard (may I say exorbitant?) rates. Other, unprofessional companies may dirty their hands by offering 'discounted' PDF products, but a 'real' product would never stoop to such lows.

Some of us will say that this is typical behavior of WotC. In an industry where everyone is fighting against popular culture and the corporate world, the purchase of TSR by Wizards of the Coast and the purchase of that company by corporate stronghold Hasbro can all-too-easily be seen as a selling out. They've given up the values of the small, independent company struggling to stay afloat, and replaced them with a corporate hierarchy in which profit is the only consideration and the true creativity and passion for the game is lost in the shuffle. The outrageous PDF prices, coming after the controversial release of the 3.5 core rulebooks, only reinforce this perception of the company.

Where Does It Go?

From here, the situation will probably go in one of two possible directions. We'll follow a "worst possible case" scenario where WotC succeeds in its endeavor to sell PDFs at print prices; then, we'll consider the

opposite result. Of course, it's a little more complex than that, and the implications of either path will have an impact on the gaming community.

WotC succeeded with the 3.5 core rules. People griped and moaned and complained, but they bought the new books. The difference, of course, is that there wasn't much of an alternative then. If you didn't upgrade your rulebooks, you were left out of the game. In this situation, players can stick with the tried-and-true hardcover book and avoid the overpriced PDF entirely. However, there is a possibility that the same thing will happen in this situation as happened with 3.5: that people may simply accept the price for the product they want. "Alas, a PDF is $35.00 and I wish it were cheaper, but I like PDFs so I'm going to buy it anyway."

Unfortunately, if WotC can successfully sell PDF products for full cover price, that will rapidly become the market standard. The other large companies will jump on the massive profit margin available through PDFs at print prices. Then the prices of smaller companies like Malhavoc Press will probably follow. As it becomes more and more commonplace for a PDF to bear a price near or identical to a print book, one sold at a mere $5.00 will imply a product of much lower quality and value than those sold for four or more times that cost. For anyone to seriously consider a game to be a quality product, an independent game designer would almost have to list her books at the same high prices as the professional companies, lest potential customers dismiss her product as inferior.

The professional companies may earn wild profits from this venture, but it will be a costly situation for the independent game designer. While a consumer may pay upward of thirty dollars for a professional product, no one will shell out that much for an independent game that they've never heard of before. Simply ask someone who has tried to sell a print run of a new game in the last five years: it's nearly impossible to get people to invest that much in an unknown product. A product from a somewhat well-known company might fare better, but only if their products are consistently high quality. They could

keep their PDF prices low, and risk the connotations of a cheap PDF product, or they might follow suit and raise their prices to maintain their image of professionalism. Keep in mind that this is a worst-case scenario!

In the end, the independent game market will return to the same struggling position it was in before the advent of PDFs, when publishing a game was a one-chance endeavor that was likely to fall flat on its face. The losses for the designer won't be as severe as if she had tried to do a print run, but it will be a harsh blow in an industry where getting your idea out into the world is just as important as making money.

This will leave most of the market to larger, professional companies that would be capable of selling their books in a print format anyway. Then, when everyone charges upwards of thirty dollars for each book, and each game requires multiple books to play, role-playing will quickly become a pastime only for those with a considerable amount of disposable income. So much for gaming as an affordable college hobby.

Remember, though, that this is a worst-possible scenario. It is only one possible outcome, and I don't think it's the way things will go. Rather than letting WotC keep us all under its thumb and keep its lordship over the industry, I think the market will make its own decision in favor of a cheaper product.

There's not much to say here. If people are looking at the *Frostburn* product and don't think that a computer file is worth the same amount as a print book, they'll buy the print book. With a price of $35.00, I can't imagine that many people have bought or will buy this book as a PDF. If a print version was not available, I could see people possibly accepting the price of the PDF. Then again, since many people print out PDF books anyway, the end cost of a color publication like *Frostburn* would end up around $50.00 from the paper and ink used to print it. I think most people would rather have a physical, professionally printed book for that kind of money.

Furthermore, given the attitude that some people have of WotC as a corporate sell-out, an individual's respect for the product will likely fall. When a product usually only costs an average of ten dollars, someone may decide that a thirty-five dollar product needs to be owned by at least three people to be worth that cost. What better way to even the odds than to simply drop a PDF into your Shared folder? I know that *Frostburn* is sold as a secure PDF, meaning that it is more difficult to share, but just the other day I found a copy on my local university's student network – and it is a rather small university!

With such a situation, it seems likely that unless WotC changes its approach to the PDF market, they're going to lose their place in that market. They might continue to put books on DriveThroughRPG.com, but it's likely they're just sit there unsold. There's not much profit to be had if no one buys a product! Now, I don't see the industry leader just sitting and watching their sales hover around the zero mark, so I think that in the long run, they will fall into line with the rest of the PDF market. I imagine that well within a year, their prices will come down.

Supporting this prediction is a recent development with White Wolf's PDF products. When they released their new World of Darkness core rulebook and the *Vampire: The Requiem* sourcebook in print, they simultaneously released them on DriveThroughRPG.com. Like *Frostburn,* they were sold at the same price as the hardcover print books. Since their August release, however, the prices have been reduced: now it's only $14.00 for the core rulebook and $25.50 for *Vampire: The Requiem*. The rest of the White Wolf products on the site have also been price-slashed.

The obvious implication of this is that the PDF books just weren't selling at their hardcover prices. White Wolf probably lowered the prices as an acknowledgement of the nature of the PDF market. If this is the case, then WotC may very well reach the same conclusion and likewise lower their prices. If not, they risk falling out of the PDF market altogether.

Looking Forward!

While the price of *Frostburn*-as-PDF was certainly astounding, I think it won't last for long. The PDF market simply won't tolerate that kind of price level in its midst, as demonstrated by White Wolf's price cut. It is a possibility that WotC will stubbornly refuse to lower its prices and tolerate their poor PDF sales. However, I think it is more likely that, given time, they will accept the standards as set by the consumers. Until then, we'll just have to suffer a few more shiny print books until PDF prices come down.

by Dana Driscoll

Exclusive Interview: Tabletop Adventures, LLC

We recently caught up with Daniel Brakhage of Tabletop Adventures, LLC for a discussion about their products and recent entrance into the PDF publishing industry. Their first product, *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons,* has been climbing the top lists at RPGNow since the end of October. This interview was conducted via email on November 18, 2004.

Your company is a new entrant to the d20 market. Can you tell our readers a bit about the founding of your company? How did you get started?

Well, we actually made our initial plans for forming the company more than ten years ago. We kept thinking that there had to be a way to make money from all of the detailed planning we did for our games. We had also designed a *Star Trek RPG* and initiated inquiries at Paramount. But, just at that time, they had given the contract for a [Star Trek] RPG to a new company. At that time, we looked into the possibility of print publishing but didn't think that it was practical pursuing the matter at that time. We then moved away from each other and went on to different things. But we continued to harbor hopes that we could do something in the gaming industry, since we enjoyed gaming so much. We really wanted to share our games and what we enjoyed with others.

On February 15th of this year, I called everyone together, and we discussed the implications of starting a gaming company for gaming aids by tying into the OGL. The advent of PDF publishing changed the equation and allowed us to start in the business without all of the drawbacks that had been present in our last discussions. We spent several weeks discussing potential products, our production capabilities, and financial considerations, and we finally decided to "go for it." At the beginning of the summer we formed Tabletop Adventures, LLC to bring help to the harried game master. Our first product, Bits of Darkness: Dungeons was on sale just in time for Halloween and by the time this is printed our second product, Bits of Darkness: Caverns will be out. I'm really pleased with how well we have done so far.

Do you plan on producing only d20 products or are you looking to expand into other systems or create your own?

Actually, our first product, *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons* does not advertise itself as a d20 product. It used the SRD for stats and is fully compatible on that level but it could very easily be used with nearly any system out there. We decided not to market it specifically as a d20 product because we didn't want people to pigeonhole our products when they could be just as useful in other gaming systems.

Currently, I don't believe we have the financial war chest to create our own system and market it the way that we would like, but we are discussing re-vamping our space game some day.

I guess the short answer to your question is that we are open to opportunity and the needs of gamers everywhere. We will see where that leads us.

As a new publisher, have you encountered any difficulties entering the PDF publishing market?

The legal complications took some study but I would say one of the biggest difficulties we have had so far is in the marketing arena. None of these are insurmountable but it seems that marketing is our biggest challenge so far.

What do you consider your company's greatest success to date?

Well, I think our biggest success to date is getting our first product out on schedule. Seeing *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons* produced with the high quality art and content that we desired was a great thing. We didn't want to publish at all if we couldn't produce high quality products, and I believe that *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons* proved that we could do just that. To be able to demonstrate this to ourselves was a big moment for us. As I do this interview, our second product *Bits of Darkness: Caverns* is running through its final stages of production and should actually be out by the time this interview is published. Once again it is on schedule for release before Thanksgiving. Actually, we had tentatively planned to have it out in December but things were proceeding so well we were able to move it up to the thanksgiving release.

Your first product, Bits of Darkness: Dungeons, was recently released. Can you tell us a bit more about it?

Well, *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons* was an expansion of a gaming aid I had made for myself some years ago. I had noticed a couple things in games that I thought detracted from the whole experience: 1) if the game master described something in detail it was usually key to the game, and 2) when I became really busy in life my preparation time and description during my games suffered; and 3) when we tried to buy aids or modules for our games they hardly ever seemed to fit our own campaigns without major revamping. *Bits of Darkness: Dungeons* was created to deal with all of these problems. It contains what we call "Bits" and "Shards." Bits are small pieces of description that can be added almost anywhere to add ambiance and maintain interest. They are a heck of a lot more fun then saying "The room is empty" and they are ultra easy to use. They can be printed out on cards and drawn randomly, rolled on percentile dice, or picked and placed with malice aforethought. Shards are generally longer descriptions and they may need some thought in placement (like stairs and things). In addition we have decided that every product we produce will contain something extra. We want to make sure that we give the customer "something extra." For that reason we included a collection of descriptions that can be used in catacombs. Best of all we took care to carefully construct the descriptions so that they didn't "clash" with a GM's campaign. They're all fun and easy to use, and they were fun to write.

You have a November 24 scheduled to release your Bits of Darkness: Caverns. Can you give us a preview of what this product will consist of?

We noticed that too often in our games when players were in caverns all it really seemed to be was a dungeon that was hard to map. We wanted to change that. Some of us made a field trip to Mammoth Cave, and another had other experience spelunking. We wanted to make it possible for the GM to communicate some of the cool wonder that we found in the underground. *Bits of Darkness: Caverns* offers 120 great descriptions that will make it easy for the GM to give players the "feel" of exploring caverns. In keeping with our goal of providing something extra, we have also included an article on fantasy caving and a short one on the formation of caverns. You don't need to read these to use the product, but they are there for those who want to go a little farther. We have also included a resource page that offers additional ideas to help a GM get inspired about caverns.

What is your company's game design philosophy?

Basically we are starting with producing the products that we would have liked to have had available all these years of game mastering. We call our line of products the Harried Game Master line because we want to produce the things that a busy game master needs to keep his or her game on the cutting edge of drama and suspense. The problem is that we as game masters never seem to have enough time to do all the things we want to so things can fall through the cracks. Tabletop Adventures is here to plug the cracks in peoples' games for them.

The mark for me of a great game has always been— are my players still telling stories from that gaming session years later? I really love it that my players still talk about particular games that we played over ten years ago! I have found that what makes that happen is a moment in a game where everything became real for them! We want to help make more of those moments for game masters. So I guess if we wanted to boil it down it is: Make it real, make it easy, and make it fun for busy people. That's our philosophy. We want people to be able to augment their imaginations with products from Tabletop Adventures. We are truly here to provide help to harried game masters everywhere. Just tell us what we can do for you. We're here to help.

Do you have any other projects on the horizon you are willing to discuss?

Shards of the City will do the same thing for cities that we have done for Dungeons and Caverns. Like all of our products they will be made so that they can be inserted in virtually any campaign with no or minimal adjustment required by the GM. *Shards of the City* will differ from the other products so far in that there will be more descriptions that can be developed into full-blown encounters or adventure hooks. Our other product is *Shards of the Heart*, which will be out in the beginning of February. This is something quite different in that it will have NPC encounters and descriptions that can be used to expand role-playing and personal interaction. As appropriate for a Valentine's Day release, it will be a bit more flirty then anything else we have put out. For some years I have tried to ensure that there were NPC "relationships" that could be developed in my games for players that were interested. Let's face it. Gaming is like a good movie or story and every good movie or story I can think of has some sort of romantic entanglement attached. *Shards of the Heart* will provide some ready relationship hooks, some will be good, some will be funny, and some will be down right poison.

After that we have several pages of projects still listed from our initial brainstorming session. We will be around for a while; "God willing and the crick don't rise" as my dad used to say.

We thank Daniel for his time and look forward to what Tabletop Adventures have to offer! For more information, you can visit the Tabletop Adventures website at http://www.tabletopadventures.com. Specific questions on products can be directed to overlord@tabletopadventures.com. Finally, Silven Members gain a discount on Tabletop Adventures products. You can visit the link here (http://www.silven.com/promotional/tabletopadventures.asp) for more information.

by Matthew J. Hanson

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent:

Light, Schmigt

About the Author

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

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Starlanko the Magnificent knew that dozens of eyes were staring at him and his compatriots as they entered the nameless elven village, even though no faces could be seen.

"Are you sure this is the right place?" asked Candessa Voliar, one of Starlanko's associates. Starlanko also traveled with the heavily armed Redreck the Fierce, and his talking sword Funbane.

"I have it on very good authority that he's here," replied Starlanko.

"So what do you know about this guy?" Candessa asked.

"He's the second son of a minor noble, enrolled in a wizarding academy. Worked hard, excelled at magic. After graduation there was a falling out with his parents, he left for the life of an adventurer and never looked back."

"Anything else?"

"Funbane."

Starlanko kept Funbane at the sword's insistence. Starlanko had never fought using a sword and sincerely doubted he would be able to should it prove necessary. One of the sword's few semi-useful skills was that it new a lot about history and nobility. "Arthel Belous was born to Exelor and Vallia Belous in the year—"

"Thank you, Funbane," Candessa said. Often Funbane knew a little too much about nobility.

"You're most welcome, Your Ladyship."

Starlanko briefly caught sight of a young elf peering through a window before one of her parents yanked the child out of sight.

"They don't seem to be happy to see outsiders," Candessa observed.

"They don't get a lot of outsiders," Starlanko replied, "and the ones they do are usually trying to kill them."

"What do you mean?" Candessa asked.

These sorts of villages are often the targets of drow incursion."

"The dark elves? I thought those were just fairy tales."

"Fairy tales don't slaughter the able-bodied, sell the children into slavery, and leave the decrepit alone in the woods," Starlanko admonished Candessa. "Ah, there we are," Starlanko's tone was friendly again. He pointed to a long low structure. Light shone through the windows. "That looks like some sort of public building. Let's start there."

The inside of the building confirmed Starlanko's

assertions. Elves sat around tables sipping from simple wooden cups. Every elf sat silently, poised on the edge of his or her seat. They listened to Starlanko's footsteps for the slightest hint of danger. Along one of the walls was a long counter behind which stood a female elf who seemed to be the bartender. Starlanko crossed to her.

"Greetings," Starlanko tipped his hat, "my name is Starlanko the Magnificent. I was hoping to partake in a fine beverage."

"What would you like?" The elf spoke quietly, but the in the silence of the room her voice reverberated like a bell.

"An ice wine if you have it," said Candessa.

"Mead please," said Starlanko.

"Whisky," said Redreck.

"I'm sorry," the elf said, "we don't serve those."

"Something white?"

"Something dark?"

"Something?"

"I'm sorry, we don't serve alcohol here."

"No, it's our fault," Starlanko apologized. "We should have asked. What do you serve?"

"We have mochas, espressos, cappuccinos, flappuccinos, iced mochas, iced cappuccinos —"

"Thanks," Starlanko could tell it was going to be a long list, and he would not know what any of the words meant. When in doubt go with the first one the list. It is the one they most want you to buy, and since Starlanko's point was to buy something: "I'll take a mocha."

"I think I'd like an iced cappuccino," said Candessa.

"Hot cocoa please."

The elven woman disappeared behind some whirly and grinding contraptions that produced black colored liquids at a pace far slower than opening a tap. Starlanko took the opportunity to survey the room in greater detail.

In the darkest corner of the room, at the plainest looking table in the establishment, sat a lone human. He was dressed from head to toe in black clothes. His hair was unnaturally black, and his skin was unnaturally pale. The man wore black lipstick and black eyeliner. On his shoulder was perched a black raven.

"That's him," said Starlanko.

"He's not what I expected," said Candessa.

"Me neither, but I'll still wager that's him. As soon as

our drinks are ready..."

"Would you mind talking to him without me?" Candessa asked.

"I don't mind. May I ask why?"

"I'd like to get a chance to know the locals. I've been a little... frustrated lately."

"Ah yes. Of course."

"Here you are," the elven woman handed the trio their drinks.

"Good luck," Starlanko said to Candessa, though he wasn't sure he meant it.

Starlanko and Redreck walked to the table with the lone human. "May I join you?" Starlanko asked the heavily made up man.

"Oh, Gods, it's starting," the heavily made up man said. He voice was low and wispy. He spoke with a strange accent, softening his vowels, and dropping his *r*s.

"What's starting?" Starlanko asked.

"The tourists," the man scoffed.

"I'm sorry, I'm not a tourist. My name is Starlanko the Magnificent and I—"

"Even worse. Corporate interest."

"I think perhaps we got off to a bad start. Are you Arth—"

"Mange. My name is Mange."

"I'm sorry," said Starlanko, "I was looking for a Arth—"

"Mange," the man emphasized. "My. Name. Is. Mange."

"Oh, how silly of me," Starlanko laughed. "I'm actually looking for somebody named Mange."

"Right you are."

"Mr. Mange."

"Mr. Mange?" Mange feigned looking around the coffee house. "I don't see any Mr.'s here."

Starlanko mentally regrouped. This was not the encounter he had been expecting, but he could improvise. "Mange, I'll get to the point. I hear tell that you've some impressive spells. I hoped we could make an arrangement and let me take a look at them."

"You want I should show you me spell book?"

"Yeah."

"Fat chance, fat cat."

"I'd make it worth your while."

"I've got news for you, governor: some people can't be bought."

"What about—"

"Not for sale. Period. End of story. I ain't in this game for profit, this is my art. I'm the sculptor."

"Of course. You have to create, the sculpture is already inside the block. You just have to chip away the stone around."

"Yeah."

"Yeah, and who cares if it ever gets seen, right? You're not doing it for the artistic appreciation. It doesn't matter if all those stuffy guild members realize your greatness, what's important is the creation."

"And true genius is never realized till after it's dead."

"If then," Starlanko said. "Of course it is possible that if your spells got out to the public they could be used to help the people."

Mange paused. "You almost had me trusting you there. The people are a hopeless teeming mass. Meteor them all and the let the roaches inherit the earth I say."

"That's funny. I thought you were here to save lives."

"Save lives? Afraid not. I'm here to drink coffee."

"I mean I thought you were in this village to save lives. The drow?"

"Am I talking to myself here? This village is the best source of coffee there ever was, and I'm not letting the drow stop me from getting my fix."

Redreck spoke up, "You know there's no alcohol in it?"

"Alcohol's a sucker's drink," Mange replied. "Caffeine is the artist's substance of abuse. You ever been spiked through the head?"

"There was this ogre—"

"Well I haven't, but I imagine it would feel a lot like going through caffeine withdrawal."

"There's probably a cantrip that can help you with that," Starlanko suggested.

"The only cure's the hair of the dog what bit you. I do some of my best spell crafting while under the influence."

"I don't doubt it. Maybe if you let me take a peek at your work—"

"How many times do I have to repeat myself? No means no."

"If that's the way it has to be," said Starlanko. "I hope to talk to you again." Starlanko rose and turned away without tipping his hat. He and Redreck returned to the high table where Candessa was sipping her cappuccino. She was alone, which made Starlanko's mouth twitch into a half smile.

"How'd it go?" Candessa asked.

"He's not at all what I expected," Starlanko admitted. "He'll be tougher to crack than I thought, but I'm not giving up yet. How about you?"

"Not good," Candessa admitted. "I don't understand these elves. Not one has approached me. I've tried flirting with a couple. I've gotten better responses from inanimate objects. No offense."

"No taken," said Funbane.

"I don't understand it. Half-elves have to come from somewhere right?"

"Yes, but that somewhere is not here. City elves, or the even elves of Avalos or Bardon forests. This is the Dark Woods; the elves are different here."

"I'm convinced," Candessa said. "You sure you want this guy's spells. I'm happy to leave at any time."

"*Nyalpaara-Nashaal-ivs-il Dwormoro-Mnala-ivs-ek Knool-un.*" The unmistakable sound of a spell incantation came from Mange's corner of the room. He stood, pointing all the fingers of his right hand at a figure nobody else had noticed until now.

It was an elf, but it was very different from other elves of the village. Its skin was coal black, and its hair was bone white. It was a drow, and the two daggers it clasped were probably coated with poison.

Fortunatly there was no need to test this theory. As soon as Mange finished speaking a streak of blackness leaped from his hand. It was pure darkness; the kind which must have existed before Leolus created the sun, or his sister Lavlanor created the moon and stars. It was shadow in the purest form.

The shadow enveloped the drow, and then with a soft hissing sound, forced its way inside the drow's pores. The dark elf whimpered, then fell dead.

"Yes," replied Starlanko, "I'm sure I want his spells."

The drow in the coffee bar had been an advance scout. Word spread quickly, and the once motionless village sprang into a hushed flurry of organization. They no longer worried about the recent outsiders. The village had to prepare for an attack by the drow.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" Starlanko asked a tall elf who seemed to be coordinating the effort.

"We do not need your help."

"I'm sure you don't *need* our help. You're more than capable of taking care of yourself, but I felt we should at lease offer to assist you."

"We can take care of ourselves."

"Then is there someplace we can wait out the battle?" Candessa asked.

"I'm a very busy man," said the elf. "I'm afraid I haven't time to deal with you."

"Let's get out of here, Starlanko," Candessa said. "If they wanted our help, that would be one thing, but they obviously don't. It was a cool spell, but I don't think it's enough to risk our lives over."

Starlanko was half inclined to teleport away, but then Funbane spoke.

"This be not bravery," the sword said. "In refusing our aid, thou might seeth thyself as the noble hero, but thou art nothing more than a slave to foolish pride. There is no honor to refusing aid in thy hour of need. There is no honor is losing a battle that could be won. It is may be glorious to stand alone against the darkness, to fight ever on past even the end of all hope, but it be more glorious still to stand with fellows in the phalanx of light and turn back the darkness."

"Olstor," the captain summoned another elf. "Take these outsiders to the west gate. They are to assist in its defense."

The soldiers at the west gate were a somber lot. They were sparse in numbers compared to what Starlanko had seen the rest of the village. Most had the look of veteran soldiers, a few were young, but many seemed to be getting on in years. None spoke.

"Something doesn't seem right," Candessa said to Starlanko.

"We're a delay," said Redreck the Fierce. "They can't keep every front strong. We hold back the enemy long enough for the other troops to win a decisive victory. Maybe force a retreat, maybe allow our troops to regroup. It's dangerous. They might break through our lines and quickly catch the others from behind. But I don't think there's any choice."

Candessa was stunned, partially because of what Redreck had just said, but more because it was the first time she had heard Redreck string more than five words together. Starlanko was not taken aback, because he knew better. He knew that Redreck did not stay quiet for the sake of staying quiet. Redreck was a quiet man because he did not speak unless he had something important to say. Now he had something important to say.

Candessa recovered, "Are you saying it's a suicide mission?"

"Cut off the leg for the body to survive."

"Starlanko, you're not going along with this."

"Relax," Starlanko said, "We'll do what we can, but I'm not going to die here. Stay in the back, throw out some spells. We're high enough in level that we can take a few hits if necessary. If things start looking bad, I've got a teleport prepared. We'll be back to civilization before you can say prestidigitation."

Candessa bit her lip but she said nothing more.

"They'll wait until night to attack. You two get some rest," said Redreck. "I'll let you know."

Starlanko, not being one to turn down an opportunity to sleep, soon had his back against a tree, and his hat over his eyes.

It seemed like Starlanko the Magnificent had just drifted off to the land of dreams when: "Wake up," Redreck's voice called him back to the world of reality.

"It's time?"

"Soon. The scouts fired signal arrows."

Starlanko roused Candessa. The two wizards positioned themselves in the rear lines of the battle, on the second of two hastily constructed embankments, but still within spell reach of the front lines. Redreck joined the troops near the gate, but not before Starlanko cast several spells on the warrior to increase his physical power.

Starlanko cast several beneficial spells on himself, and then he had nothing to do but wait. Time passed. Starlanko heard a muted din from behind him. Elsewhere the battle had begun.

The first sign was a hail of black fletched crossbow bolts that sprung from nowhere. The drow archers had slipped into firing range without being detected.

A few of the forest elves were wounded. The rest immediately took cover, then responded in kind. The first wave of arrows was not intended to strike their targets. Each archer had a handful of enchanted arrows, which burst into light when they struck a solid object. From this light Starlanko located a cluster of drow, and he hurled an explosive ball of fire into their

midst. Candessa also cast a *fireball* and an unknown caster unleashed a column of divine fire upon the advancing drow.

Many of the dark elves fell, those that did not were dazed by the sudden assault, but the order to charge was given, and the drow rushed the gate. They seemed to come from thin air. From the shadows of trees, from holes in the ground. In a matter of rounds the drow had gone from an unseen force to an overwhelming army. If there had been time to think, it would have boggled Starlanko's mind. How could such a large army appear so fast? As it was, Starlanko did not have time to think about it.

The drow had reached the first wall. Arrows rained down upon them, the plant life was attacking them, clouds of noxious fumes filled the air, but still the drow advanced. They could afford to keep advancing. They had the numbers.

Then the big guns arrived. All that had preceded this had been shock troops: the expendable guard to deplete the defender's resources. Starlanko knew what was coming when the lights started to flicker. The magic lights created by the elven arrows, still burned brightly but there was a patch were the lights were giving way. There was magical darkness strong enough to quench the powerful spells the elves placed on their arrows , and the darkness was moving his direction. While the battle raged on around Starlanko, the wizard paused. His attention shifted to the darkness. He knew that at its heart was the key to victory or defeat.

As the darkness drew nearer Starlanko made out three drow at its center. In the middle was a female drow wearing a long black robe. In one hand she held an ash gray staff with a large piece of obsidian placed at the apex.

To her right was another female, heavily armored, whose shield bore the symbol of the drow's cruel spider goddess. To the left was a male warrior, covered in black armor, and wielding a jagged sword.

A few hundred feet from the wall, the group stopped. The robed female began to cast a spell. Starlanko had prepared for this. He countered with a *dispel magic*, and the drow wizard's incantation fizzled to nothingness. The wizard's eye crackled with arcane energy. She leapt into the air, and sped towards Starlanko. The darkness followed her, it enveloped Starlanko, allowing him to see only vague shadows. The drow's staff struck Starlanko knocking him to the ground. It was not a particularly damaging blow, but it bought the drow the time she need. She cast the spell again, and this time the gates burst open.

Drow poured inside the walls.

Starlanko, needless to say, was not happy. With the darkness surrounding the drow wizard, it was difficult to aim precisely, so Starlanko let loose a *lightning bolt*. It was not the sort of spell that required precision.

The electricity struck the drow full on, but she barely flinched. "Bring it on," she hissed.

The two wizards traded spell after spell. Sometimes they avoided the brunt, sometimes not. Soon they both began to wear. The drow paused from casting spells, and swooped again at Starlanko, swinging her staff.

Starlanko's first instinct was to retreat. But something stopped him. The drow was close now. Her silhouette was nearly on top of him. Starlanko drew his sword. He had not been trained for physical combat. Starlanko had never used a sword in his life, but now he drew his sword, sidestepped the drow's staff, and plunged the sword into her stomach.

He withdrew; she came at him again. Starlanko parried her staff then slashed her shoulder, then her chest, then a glancing blow off her skull. Strikes that would have done in a typical human, but like Starlanko, the dark elf was of beyond average power, and could absorb far more than logic would dictate.

"I underestimated you," the drow said. "You are quite the accomplished swordsman."

Starlanko wanted to say that he was not actually an accomplished swordsman at all, nor a swordsman of any sort, but the evidence clearly indicated otherwise.

The drow waved her hands, and muttered a magical incantation. Starlanko's sword flew from his hand, and fell to the ground far below.

Okay, so he was not *that* skilled a swordsman.

"Give up now, and I'll make it quick."

"No thank you," said Starlanko.

"You cannot win. Your sword is gone. Your spells are depleted."

"I still have one spell left," Starlanko said. "Good bye." Before the drow could react, Starlanko the Magnificent was gone. He had teleported away.

"Coward," the dark elf sneered. "I shall eat your heart another day."

"*Grurgeczhek-Shargoorfi-im-Veiliki-ivs-il Jeelin-az*."

The drow wizard whirled around just in time to feel a sphere of boiling hot acid collide with her face. It tore open her skin, leaked through her skull, and dissolved her brain. She fell dead.

Starlanko the Magnificent had not teleported very far.

Starlanko took the opportunity to quickly quaff two potions, then he surveyed the scene. Things did not bode well. The courtyard between the two walls was littered with bodies, many were dark elves, but many also were not. With relief Starlanko found Redreck, still alive and going strong, currently fighting off three drow at once. Two drow. One drow. Redreck moved on to the next batch. In Redreck's wake Starlanko saw the body of the male drow warrior who had accompanied the wizard. The armored female was currently trying to escape the mauling grasp of a massive bear.

Starlanko could not find Candessa.

Starlanko jumped from the embankment and quickly searched for Funbane. He found the sword.

"What happened back up there?" Starlanko asked.

"I beg thy pardon. I should not have acted thus."

"It's all right," Starlanko reassured him. "It might even be okay if you did it again."

"No, it was not meant for thou."

Starlanko had more important things to do than argue with cryptic swords. He sheathed Funbane.

"Behind you," (or rather "be'ind you") a calm yet angst ridden voice warned Starlanko. The wizard spun in time to realize a dagger-wielding drow had snuck up on him. Starlanko tried to dodge. He did not succeed completely, but managed to turn a stab in the back into a cut on the arm.

The would-be assassin rolled, then disappeared again into the shadows.

"You like darkness? You like the shadows? I will give you all the shadows my heart can hold." Mange cast a spell. A pitch-black figure rose from the ground. If sounds could cast shadows, the figure would have uttered the shadow of a scream. Then it grasped at something Starlanko could not see. It wrestled the hidden drow into the pale light, then dragged it into a dark portal in the ground. Taking the drow to the place from whence the apparition came.

"Don't think this means I like you," Mange said. Then he added, for assurance, "You wanker."

Mange sped off to join the main of the fighting, and he was not the only one. Other elves were coming to reinforce Starlanko's position. The tide of battle was turning.

"I don't understand it," Candessa said, as she flopped down at Starlanko's table. They were celebrating the victory. The elves were throwing a party, and the humans were the guests of honor. Mange was off in a corner brooding. Redreck was enjoying a variation of the classic drinking game, "drink until you fall down." In this variation he went one on one against a series of elves. Each time a new elf started, he or she started sober, while Redreck's blood alcohol level was cumulative.

Up until recently Starlanko had been schmoozing the elven spellcasters, to see if there were any secrets he could glean. Earlier that day he had gleaned a few secrets from the spell book recovered from the remains of the drow wizard.

Now he sat at his table, slightly inebriated, talking to Candessa Voliar, who seemed more than slightly inebriated.

"I mean I just don't understand. We saved their entire village. Their entire... village. And they still don't... I'm pretty aren't I?

"Yes, of course. You're very pretty."

"Thanks. You're not just saying that?"

"No, I really mean it."

"But if I wasn't... I mean if I wasn't pretty, and I asked you if I was, would you say that?"

"Candessa Voliar. You are one of the most beautiful women I have ever met. I have met nymphs who pale before you in comparison."

"Thank you, Starlanko the Magnificent." Candessa said. She placed her hand on Starlanko's. "I like your hands." She ran her hand up to his shoulder. "And your arms." She moved it to his cheek. "And your face," Candessa said. "And your lips."

The next morning.

"Starlanko?"

"What? Where did... oh. Right."

"Did we...?"

"I think so."

"Oh. How was it?"

"Well, you were rather drunk, but so was I, so it was sort... I don't think it really mattered in the end."

"Oh. Listen Starlanko. I don't think we should... I mean I don't normally. I don't think it's a good idea to mix business with pleasure."

"No, of course not."

"Starlanko. Tell me you're not falling for me."

"I'm not falling for you."

"Look me in the eye and tell me you're not falling for me."

"I'm not falling for you."

"Okay."

"Didn't I tell you before that you were wasting your time, governor?" Mange greeted Starlanko when they reunited in the elven cafe.

"You know what really holds us down?" Starlanko said. He did not wait for Mange's answer. "The sun. Always shining down on us. Not so much here, but still. Brightening our days, filling our lives with sunshine. Makes me sick. You can try to hide from it, sleep through the day. But the sun is always just a few hours away. Waiting to strike."

"What's your angle?"

"One of the drow had this on her," Starlanko retrieve the evil wizard's staff from his *bag of holding*. As soon as he took it out the area around Starlanko instantly darkened. "At first I thought she just cast *darkness* on the staff, but its more than that. It's been going strong now for over a day."

"Is that supposed to impress me?"

"It was easy to figure out, once I had a look at this,"

Starlanko produced the drow's captured spellbook. "*Eternal shadow*. A spell that creates everlasting darkness. That chipper sun will never bother us again."

"Oh, I see. If I let you look at my spells, you'll let me take of copy of this *eternal shadow*?"

"I wouldn't dream of it," Starlanko gasped. "This spell here- it's not just to be tossed around like some sort of *magic missile*. This spell is a work of art, not a bartering chip."

"You know, the thing is..." Mange began. "The thing about art is... you know, after you've died and people are finally ready to appreciate the work you've done... somebody's got to see that work, don't they? I mean, you can't just keep it all to yourself."

"That's a good point, Mange," Starlanko said. "Let's discuss this further."

by Dana Driscoll and Kosala Ubayasekara

Mapmaking Tutorial 1 : Small Village

Welcome to the first Adobe Photoshop mapmaking tutorial. This tutorial will provide you with some basic techniques to create a simple outdoor map. These techniques can be applied number of different types of maps to create quick yet unique creations.

A Few Preliminary Points

This guide assumes you have some knowledge of the basics of Adobe Photoshop. If you do not, refer to the sidebar of this article "Photoshop Basics" for more information. This tutorial was created using Adobe Photoshop 7 on Mac OS X. Negligible differences exist between the Mac and PC versions of Photoshop.

I cannot stress how important it is to use layers in Adobe Photoshop. For each effect you create, you want to make sure that it is created in a new, separate layer. This allows you flexibility later on and allows you to selectively add effects or change selected features of the map. You can always combine layers later on, but it is nigh impossible to separate features from a single layer.

Background Creation

First, create a new blank document. I recommend working in a fairly high resolution so that if you ever want to print out your map, you can be sure that it will come out as a high-quality, clear print. I set the size of the file at 11 x 8.5 inches (keeping the *Silven Trumpeter* size considerations in mind) and set the resolution at 300dpi. You may want to use a lower resolution if your computer is older or you do not have a large amount of RAM installed.

Once the new document is open, begin by creating a new layer for the background of the map. Next, find a brush that has some texture to it and lay down a layer of green (or the background color of your choice). You can adjust both the Opacity (how dark the paint appears on the canvas) and the Flow (how fast the paint comes out through the brush) to create different effects.   Figure 1 shows the first step of the map.
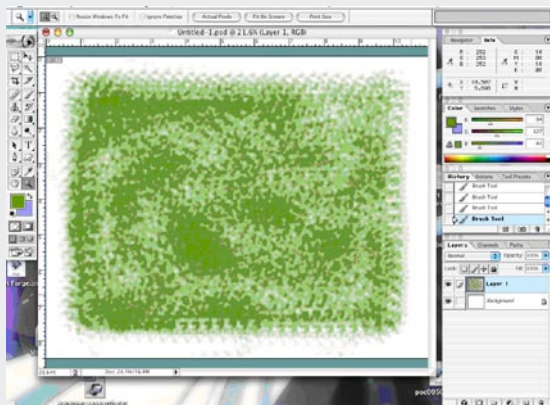
Next, switch to a slightly darker green and make a second pass over the background area. Then find a slightly lighter green and do a third pass. Repeat until you are satisfied with the background. The result is a multicolored yet subtle background for the map. Notice that I've left my edges raw—this is a stylistic choice. You always have the option of either filling the entire workspace or creating some other edge effect at a later point. You can see my result in Figure 2.

At this point, it is possible also to apply a Photoshop

filter to further enhance the effect of the image. I was satisfied with the result, however, and chose to create a new layer for the next element of the map—the path or road that goes through the center of the map.
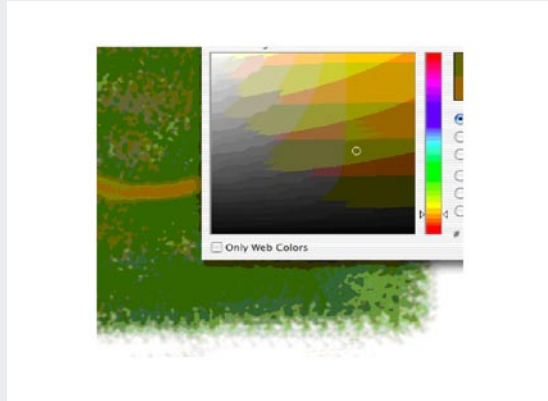
At this point, you'll want to switch to a new brush for creating the path or road. As we did for the background, apply several closely colored shades to the path. Using a variety of different brushes is a quick way to get different textures on one map with little work.

Now that the path is complete, we will add additional features to the background of the map. Create a new layer for a river, which will be flowing from north to south. Unlike the earlier features, we'll use a solid brush for the river to give the river a very defined edge.

A solid brush makes the river look a little flat, so, next create a layer effect on the river layer. Access layer effects by double-clicking anywhere on the layer in the Layers Toolbar except for the name of the layer itself. (Double-clicking on the name will allow you to rename the layer.) Use a Bevel effect so that the river appears to sink into the surrounding background green area. You can see this step in Figure 3 below.
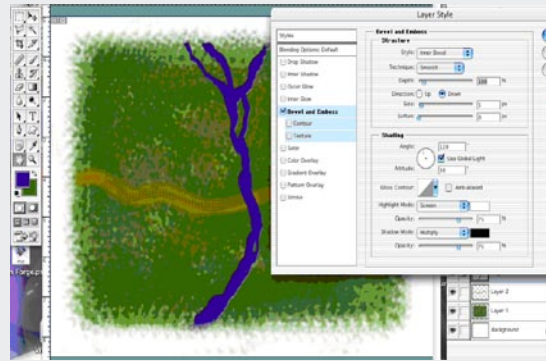
To add more subtle effects to the river, use the Selection Wand to select the river on the river layer. Selecting the river alone allows you to apply other color effects on the river, but not to paint beyond the boundaries of the river. Using the same techniques as before, add a few light blue highlights to the river and a few dark blue areas to simulate waves or water.

Right now, the river looks a bit artificial, so next we'll give the river a slight bank. With the river still selected, create a new layer and select that layer. Next, invert the river selection. (In the menu, you can find this under Select > Inverse). Inverting the selection will allow you to paint only beyond the bounds of the river and not over the river itself. Next, choose another textured brush and a light yellow paint. Turn down the Opacity and Flow on the brush and lightly apply some paint to the edges of the river. See Figure 4 for an example.
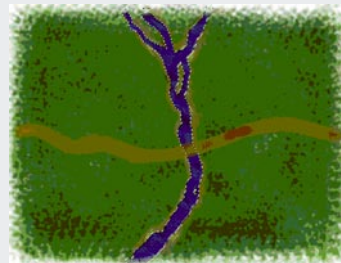
At this point, if you want to add any additional features to the background of the map, feel free.

Now we will focus on the foreground elements. Create a new layer for the houses and the buildings that will be a main feature of the map.

In the new layer, begin by drawing several squares with the Selection tool and filling them with a solid black. These will serve as "placeholders" for the buildings you will finish later. After you have the main set of buildings in place, use the Rotate feature (Edit > Transform > Rotate) to tilt some of the buildings to fit the road and the river. We will come back and deal with the buildings a bit in detail later. The results are displayed in Figure 5.

We'll add some trees as a foreground feature. I've decided place the edge of a forest to the south of the village while keeping the area north of the village as plains. I've also scattered a few trees throughout the village. Place your trees as you see fit.

To create the trees, create a new layer. Set the layer to include a Bevel effect so that the trees really stand out on the map. (I encourage you to experiment with the layer settings—these can really help produce quick and flashy effects.) To create the trees themselves, choose a round textured brush and a darker shade of green to set off the trees from the ground below. As you create the trees, switch green shades and brushes often so that the trees are varied in color, shape, and size, as normal trees would be. You can see the beginnings of the forest in Figure 5.
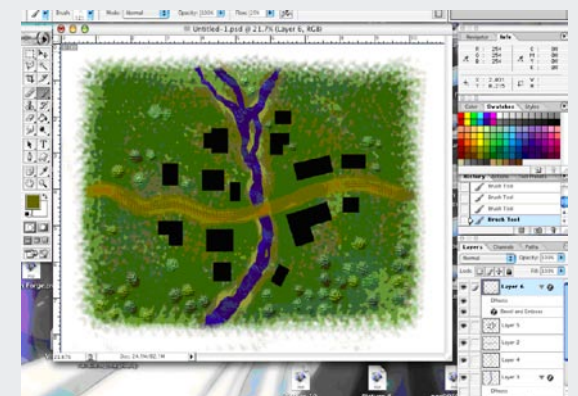
Now that we've finished the trees, we'll work on features of the town itself. First is the bridge, which will go over the river and connect the two parts of the village.

Begin by creating a new layer for the bridge (above the stream and path layers) and selecting the Line tool (in your left main toolbar). Create a short, thick, brown line over the path and river. Select the line and add a wood-like effect with a different shade of brown and a textured brush. To finish the bridge, change the size of the Line tool and paint shorter lines on both the sides of the bridge to represent the railing. Finally, move back to the path layer and erase the part of the path that goes over the water. The completed bridge is in Figure 6 below.
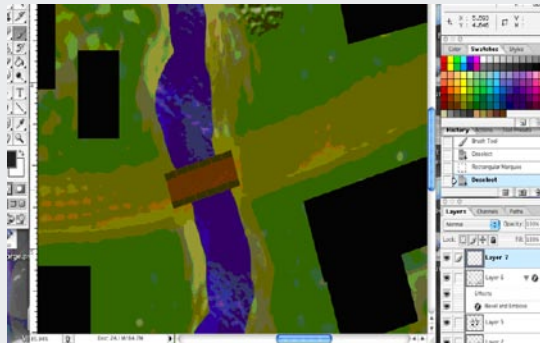
At this point, we are ready to go back to the houses to flesh them out. Because most maps (this one included) use top-down perspective, the normal method for creating buildings is to only draw the roofs. Luckily, they're easier to draw then the other, more detailed parts of a house.

To draw the roofs, we'll select two or three houses at one time in different places on the map and apply the same roof texture to each house. This will saves time and gives consistency to the buildings. I use a layered paintbrush look (same technique as before) for some of the buildings, but for others, could have used the mouse to hand-draw lines that look like a straw or thatched roof. Finally, I applied a Hard Chiseled Bevel layer effect to the houses to make

them appear a little less flat on the page. You can see the results in Figure 7.

At this point, we need to finish making paths around the houses themselves. Create new layer, take a smaller textured brush, and apply a light tan to create the paths from the houses to the main road. The results are in Figure 7.
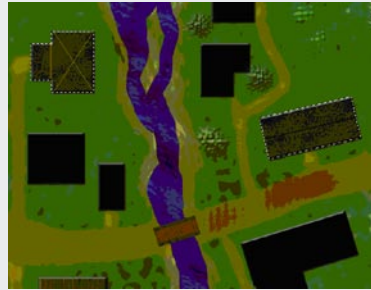
The final step in this process in creating the sample map was to apply the standard *Silven Trumpeter* map background to the file. You can see the completed map on the following page.

After that, Kosala will take you through some more advanced Photoshop mapmaking tricks.

Dana Lynn Driscoll

silven roads

Now that Dana has taken you through the basics of creating this map, let's take a look at the finer points of adding some detail to it. For the purposes of this tutorial I am using Adobe Photoshop CS running on a PC. For those of you working on smaller budgets, these methods are also doable on most low price image editing software like PaintShop Pro or even the free Gimp. A solid command of Photoshop is assumed for this tutorial.

Let's go back to the Dana's file and take a look at the roads on the map. Following best practices in creating these maps in Photoshop, Dana has drawn out her roads on a separate layer, allowing me to enhance the roads without affecting the rest of the image. I am going to select the road layers and then go into the effects panel accessed by the circular icon with an "F" in it.
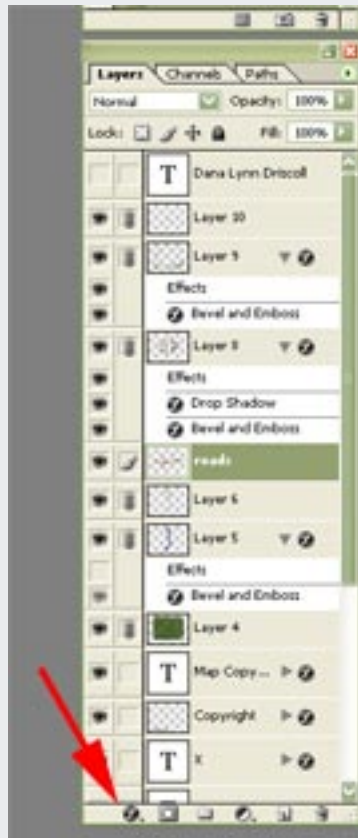
Thinking logically, the roads closer to the center of the village, in this case near the bridge, should be more worn that the roads on the outskirts. Since Dana has laid out the village in a roughly circular layout, I immediately think of the circular gradient tool as my main tool in creating this worn effect.

I am going to do a circular gradient effect, using a dark brown to light brown gradient, centered in the middle of the road layer. In the effects panel I select **Gradient Overlay** and select the style as **radial**. I then make the necessary adjustments with the sliders until I am happy with the results. Since I want to make some more adjustments to the layer outside the effects panel, I also set the opacity of the gradient at 80% to ensure that any changes made to the layer, show through the gradient.

In order to give the roads some gritty feel to it, I also add some **noise** to the layer. Closing the effects panel I head off to the menu bar and choose **Noise** from the **Filter** menu.

Now that is done, I also want to ensure that the roads have some natural depth to them. A road from a bird's eye view does not look flat at the border where it connects with its surroundings. So what we are looking for there is simply some added depth. A wonderfully simple and underestimated way to handle this is using the **drop shadow** effect. So let's head back to the effects panel.

I add a **drop shadow effect** to the layer, but I make sure to move the **distance** slider to 0. Then I increase the **spread** and **size** to about 5 pixels and the **opacity** to 100%. Now lets take a look at the before and after situation of our roads.

As you can see the roads have received some character and depth to them and are starting to look like they are more dynamic.

Before the edits

After the edits

Now let's leave the roads and take a look at the river running through the village and the bridge. The bridge here looks like your typical curved bridge over a stream. As such the top part of the curve (the middle of the bridge) should catch more light than the outer sides. So we need to lighten the top a little.

This is easily done, I simply go to the **Filter** menu and choose **Render** -> **Lighting Effects**. Setting the light source to **Omni**, I place it in the center of the bridge. Doing this automatically gives the bridge a nice curved effect and we need not do any more here.

Water is always a tricky thing to handle in maps and there are no shortcuts here. You simply need to draw

the effects that you would normally find in water, on the map by hand. Since a tutorial on using a digital stylus or mouse to handle drawing is beyond the scope of this tutorial I am not going to delve into that now. Lets move onto to the bushes around the village.

We are going to use the same tactic we used before to add depth to the roads. So I select the layer with the bushes on it, and head off to the **effects** panel. This time I add both a **drop shadow** and an **inner shadow**. The **drop shadow** I once again move the **distance slider** to 0 and keep the rest at default values. The **inner shadow**, I use at its default values. Combined with the **emboss** effect already there in Dana's original version, this creates clear contours to seperate the bushes and trees from the rest of the grass. The effect is subtle, but needed. Take a look at the picture below and compare it with the "after" picture of the roads above. You will have to look carefully to see the changes.

I am going to use a similar procedure on the layer with the buildings to give the effect of a little shadow around the buildings created by the roofs.

Finally we are going to spruce up the grass layer. Using the same methods we used on the roads, I am going to use a radial gradient to create an effect of darker, more worn green towards the middle of the village, and lighter green towards the outside. I want this effect to be very subtle since grass does not show the wear and tear a dirt road would show. Fiddling with the opacity slider and the right shades of green

finally gives me the results I am looking for. Just like with road, the grass still looks too smooth. I close down the **effects** panel and head off to the **Filter** menu and the **noise** submenu. I had a little noise to the layer, but much less than I used for the roads.

Now I am finally getting towards what I want for this map. Take a look at the final version on the next page.

Bonus Maps

Grab 9 maps done by Jeffrey Thetford for free at the link below

http://www.silven.com/ezine/TrumpeterDec2004ExtrasMaps.zip

silven roads

by Dana Driscoll

Silven Trumpeter Writer Spotlight:
Matthew J. Hanson

Each month, we will spotlight a new writer from the *Silven Trumpeter*. This allows our readership to get to know their favorite columnists and contributors. This month's spotlighted writer is Matthew J. Hanson, writer of the Starlanko the Magnificent column in the Silven Trumpeter. Matthew is a valued team member at the *Silven Trumpeter*, as this is the 11th *Silven Trumpeter* issue that Matthew has contributed to!

Why don't you begin by telling us a bit about yourself?

I grew up in a suburb of St. Paul Minnesota. Last Spring I graduated from Beloit College with BAs in Creative Writing and Theatre, and I'm in the middle of applying to graduate schools to study screen and/or playwriting starting fall 2005. I hope to someday make a living as a writer.

I'm currently living in the town of Homer, Alaska, where a good friend of mine is helping Mike Yourkowski get elected to the state senate. It's been a lot of fun up here, but I'm not quite sure what I'm going to do after the election.

I also want to mention that I've got my own website at http://www.matthewjhanson.com. It's mostly a "for fun" site, but it also has more information about my forays into the professional world. On of the things I most proud of is the mailing list I just got working. There's about a dozen different actual lists that you can sign up for, so people will only hear about the stuff they are actually interested in.

How did you get interested in gaming?

I started when my brother got the old *D&D* red box for his 12th birthday. Since he was older at the time he usually DMed. I'm pretty sure we disregarded or misinterpreted a lot of the rules. I remembers being a thief and be able to cast spells off a scroll as many times as I like. That doesn't seem balanced somehow. It was a lot of fun though.

College really cemented things for me. Before that play was always pretty sporadic, but in college I DMed a weakly session, while playing in a game or two.

What games do you currently play?

As far as systems, I'm strictly d20 for the moment, but more because of time and money restrictions rather than interest. I can't afford all the toys I want as it is. Since moving to Alaska I haven't been able to find a tabletop game to play in, but I've taken advantage of Silven's guilds, which allow me to play online.

What was the driving force behind you deciding to write?

That's a tough one. It's a drive that I know I have, but I can't really explain it. It's empowering? It gives me a sense of control? I don't know. Really, it's just want I enjoy doing. Plus, at this point I've committed four years of education to it, and I don't really have any other marketable job skills, so it looks like I don't have much of a choice.

What are your influences in your writing? Are there any particular authors you look up to?

I tend to think of specific works that influence me rather than authors. David Auburn's *Proof*, David Lindsay's *Abaire's Fuddy Mirror* and Tony Kushner's *Angles in America* all influenced my playwriting. I was also influenced by that Shakespeare guy, who I enjoy stealing from. I think that *The Princess Bride* is probably the greatest movie script ever written, and also a great novel.

With novel it's easier to think of things I enjoy rather than those that influence me. I like Neil Stephenson and Neil Gaiman a lot (what's with liking guys that have the same first name?) also the Harry Potter series is a lot of fun, though I sometime wish Harry would just grow up already.

You have an upcoming product for Silven Publishing. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Of course I can. It's called *Fifty New Ways to Blow Things Up: Starlanko the Magnificent's Big Book of Evocations*. It's a collection of fifty evocation spells with commentary by Starlanko the Magnificent (of *Silven Trumpeter* Fame). If all goes according to plan it will be the first book in a series, each one featuring a different school of magic.

One of the main points is that I wanted to have flavor text that could actually be read by the characters in the game, not just by their players. I also wanted it to be a focused book, which is why it's spells, spells and more spells. There's no prestige classes or magic items, and only one feat, which is tucked back in the appendix.

The idea was actually inspired a long time ago by a combination of two things. One was an open call that EN Publishing had for its evocation book. I wrote a couple spells for that, but the book never materialized. The other big factor was *Joe's Book of Enchantments*. I think Joe Mucchiello unwittingly (or perhaps wittingly) stumbled upon one of the greatest names possible. There are so many books out there whose names are two words, often alliterative, connected by an & that something with such a simple name really stands out.

So I thought, what if I had a book with a similar kind of name, with but that was about evocations. Thus Starlanko the Magnificent born.

I didn't start work on the book right away, but I liked the character I was creating for Starlanko so much, that I started writing short stories about him that the *Silven Trumpeter* was kind enough to publish. After it became apparent that the EN Publishing book was never going to appear, I started working on my own project. The plan had been to finish the text, then shop it around, but when Silven announced that they were going to start publishing game material, the match seemed obvious.

I've had a lot of fun making the book, which I think comes through in reading it. If Dana's [the editor's] notes are to be believed she's had to lol several times while reading it. (Whatever lol-ing means).

If the book sounds interesting you can sign up to the above-mentioned mailing list (http://www.matthewjhanson.com/phplist/lists/?p=subscribe&id=1) and I'll drop you a line when it's released.

We thank Matthew for his time and his constant contributions to the Silven Trumpeter. *The expected release date of* 50 New Ways to Blow Things Up: Starlanko the Magnificent's Big Book of Evocations *is set for early next year.*

About the Author
Khaz Axzen and wife Donna currently live in the Pocono mountains in north east Pennsylvania with their two children, Devan and Lauryn. When not working or chasing the kids around, Khaz enjoys reading, writing, watching Yankee games and shopping for additions to his fantasy knife collection.

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by Khaz Axzen

Cruxuzule Mamnibia, Demon of Zauurcrag, Part IV: Hounds of Hell

In parts one through three of "Cruxuzule Mamnibia, Demon of Zauurcrag," the frost elf Sarel Duthar and his dwarven companion Khaz Axzen narrowly escaped a lynch mob. With the aid of Captain Garelgar Janlyn and the former priest of Nuune, Amir Sotho, they battled gargoyles and prejudice on their way to the town of Allura. There they expect a final confrontation with the forces of evil, led by the blood demon Cruxuzule Mamnibia and its minions, the wolf-like demons known as the Daemokdelance. Join us for the fourth and final installment of "Cruxuzule Mamnibia, Demon of Zauurcrag."*

Thirty-one weary riders rode past the low rubble and mortar wall of Allura, Garelgar Janlyn and Amir Sotho at their head. The red and gold razorback insignia of Reban flapped in the cold north wind. An unnatural mist lay across the ground, and war drums could be heard over the rustling of dry autumn leaves.

"It would appear we are just in time," Garelgar said flatly, his voice loud in the eerie stillness.

"Or too late," replied Amir, looking at the cottages on either side of the road. All the homes' shutters were closed, and no interior lights could be seen.

Sarel spurred his nervous horse up to the head of the column beside Garelgar. "Some are here," he said. "I can feel them and their fear. Apparently they heeded your warning, Captain."

Garelgar nodded as they continued through town. As they crossed a small wooden bridge, the sound of rushing water masked the rhythm of the ghostly drums, which seemed to be speeding up.

In the center of town was a large brick and rubble cooking pit. Silhouetted by its glowing embers were several townspeople. A few wore armor ranging from wood and leather to what appeared to be old iron and greened copper. Bottles and jugs dangled from their hands as they stared in stunned terror toward the tree line in the south, toward the ghostly drums and tortured cries.

Garelgar signaled for the column to halt and dismount in front of the town hall building before he hailed the assembled citizens. "Ho! Men of Allura!" he yelled.

Several of the townspeople spun on their heels, unaware that Garelgar and his company had ridden into town. They dropped their jugs and hastily drew their weapons before they noticed the standard of Reban flapping in wind. They cheered half-heartedly when they saw the column of fighters behind Garelgar.

"They're drunk!" grunted Khaz as he joined Garelgar, Amir, and Sarel at the front of the line. "Gettin' their courage from a bottle!"

At that moment a ripping sound cut through the night, and they were buffeted by a hot, fetid wind that reeked of putrefying corpses and sulfur.

The men of Allura dropped their weapons and ran as a great black tear appeared in the air. Folding out on itself, the blackness within the tear swirled and roiled, shot with shades of gray and angry red. Lightning flared deep within the blackness, flashing with each beat of the ghostly war drums.

Pandemonium erupted in the town square as terrified horses tried to break away, eyes rolling in terror. Some of the horses bolted, dragging their surprised riders behind them.

"Let them go!" shouted Garelgar over the din, slapping his own horse on the rump. He and Amir walked through the ranks of fighters, restoring order. "Form ranks! The demon comes!"

The warrior priests of Beordin remained stoic in spite of the terror which filled the air. Their leader, Keldrid Thunderhand, stood with them, confident and imperious, his white, fox-fur cloak and long, unbound hair that blew wildly in the wind.

"Amir! Take your archers to the front!" directed Garelgar. "The rest of you flank the clerics of Beordin!"

Sarel quickly strung his bow and nocked an arrow as he fell into line with the archers. He winked at the ever-smiling Amir, who knelt on one knee before the line of warriors. Khaz lined up with the priests, growling and fingering the blade of his axe in anticipation. Keldrid continued to pace back and forth, barking commands and words of encouragement.

Several of the warriors gasped as the first Daemokdelance burst from the swirling black tear in

the atmosphere. Spreading its leathery bat-like wings to ease its descent, it landed lightly on its clawed feet. The creature's black fur rustled in the foul wind as its fiery red eyes surveyed the assembled warriors before it. Opening its fanged maw impossibly wide, the demon issued a chilling howl before drawing its black metal cleaver from its back and charging straight at the archers.

"Fire!" yelled Amir, and his archers loosed their arrows in unison. Some of the missiles bounced off the charging beast's armor, sparking as the iron tips were deflected, and the horned and fanged skull insignia on its breast plate flashed angrily. The rest of the arrows found flesh and bone, causing the creature to jerk spasmodically with the impact as they sunk into its exposed arms, legs, face, and neck. Somehow, the creature continued its charge.

"Fire!" yelled Amir again, and again eight arrows sped through the night, spinning the demon in mid-stride. It lost its footing and fell to the ground just a yard in front of the bowmen.

As the creature crawled toward the line of archers, the priests of Beordin fell on the twitching Hellspawn, hacking its huge, arrow-riddled frame to pieces.

More Daemokdelance issued from the rift and charged the warriors, howling in their bloodlust. Any semblance of order was now lost as the priests of Beordin met the demons' charge with their own, singing lustily to their god. Garelgar and his soldiers followed close behind.

Khaz ran headlong into the advancing line of demons. "Rhohadon!" he cried, invoking the dwarven god of battle. He leaped and hit a surprised demon square in the chest. The two combatants landed in the mud with the muscular dwarf on top. He struck the creature about the head and neck with his meaty left fist and the butt of his axe. The demon enveloped Khaz with its long arms, raking its claws across the dwarf's

broad, muscular back, tearing the dwarf's leather vest and flesh as it drew the warrior's neck toward its snapping, salivating jaws.

Oblivious to his injuries, Khaz rolled forward off the demon before its jaw snapped shut, tearing a chunk of his beard from his chin. Landing on his feet, Khaz turned and planted his feet, gripping his axe in both hands. The demon also rolled, turning over on all fours, and tensed to leap on the dwarf.

"Rhohadon!" Khaz cried again, as he brought his axe around from right to left. The blade did not slow as it sliced through the demon's skull. The creature's head exploded in a mass of bone fragments, brain matter, and blood.

The demon still twitched and lurched toward the panting dwarf, razor sharp claws blindly swiping the air. Repulsed, Khaz leaped on the creature's back, cursing and growling incoherently as his axe rose and fell again and again, seeking the Hellspawn's spine. Finally it lay still, a pulpy red mess at his feet.

Roaring in his triumph and battle madness, Khaz gripped the blood-slicked handle of his axe and sought another opponent.

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Sarel held onto his bow for as long as possible, sending arrow after arrow into the advancing Daemokdelance ranks. At the last moment the frost elf cast his bow aside and rolled to his right to avoid being crushed under a clawed foot. He looked up and quickly rolled again to his left, narrowly avoiding the black cleaver as it slammed into the earth, splattering him with mud and grass.

The frost elf rose to one knee, drawing his sword and slicing through the creature's leg in a single motion. Its crippled leg folding beneath it, the demon roared and lashed out with its weapon, but it was off balance,

and Sarel had already moved. Avoiding the blow, the frost elf spun and swung at the demon's neck. His blade sparked off the metal shoulder plates and cut through coarse black fur, biting deep into the demon's flesh.

Dropping its blade, the demon brought its clawed hands up to the gaping wound on its neck. Blood ran freely through its fingers and flowed down the front of its breastplate, which seemed to hungrily absorb the thick, vile liquid.

Seizing this opportunity, Sarel ran behind the stricken demon and hacked at the back of its injured neck, severing its spinal cord. Using his momentum, the frost elf delivered a spinning kick to the back of the creature's head. The demon fell to the ground, and the mist enveloped its grotesque form.

Sarel pushed his sweat-soaked hair back from his eyes and surveyed the battlefield. Although Garelgar's company outnumbered the demons, the Hellspawned creatures were making up for their lack of numbers with size and ferocity.

Running up behind the Daemokdelance engaged with Amir Sotho, the frost elf slashed at the back of the creature's legs, cutting through hamstrings and tendons. This diverted the demon's attention long enough to give Amir the opening he needed.

Fighting with two short swords, Amir struck at the distracted creatures exposed arms and upper legs several times before thrusting one blade up under the demon's breastplate. Using its own momentum, the little easterner pushed the blade deeper into the beast's vitals and twisted. Howling in pain, the Daemokdelance fell to the ground, its entrails spilling from the gaping wound in its belly.

"The demons are ferocious fighters, but they lack intelligence!" panted Sarel. "They have trouble focusing on more than one opponent at time!" The frost elf pointed across the battlefield. "Look! Some have even paused in the fighting to feed on the flesh of their victims!"

The mounted blood demon whipped and slapped its few remaining minions into order

"What do you propose we do, my friend?" asked Amir, breathing heavily.

"Follow my lead. Cut and move!" answered the frost elf. "Let the swordsman, with their heavy broadswords and axes, stand toe to toe with the demons. You and I can aid them just as I aided you."

Amir grinned wolfishly as he nodded in understanding. "Nuune be with you, brother," he said before dashing off to aid his comrades.

Many of Amir's fleet footed archers and trackers picked up on Sarel's strategy, as they cut and slashed, their continuous motion keeping their ungainly adversaries off balance and on the defensive. Garelgar's soldiers and the clerics of Beordin took full advantage of the opportunity, using their heavy weapons to inflict grievous wounds, crushing Hellspawned skulls, severing limbs, and delivering death blows. The tide of battle began to turn in the defenders favor.

An unearthly shriek cut through the night air, followed by a deep, guttural roar and the slow flap of wings. The battle stopped as the combatants looked to the sky.

Cruxuzule Mamnibia directed its hellish mount earthward. Dry, rotted flesh flapped from its skeletal, raptor-like frame. Its cruelly curved beak opened wide, and it shrieked, sending waves of fear rolling over the battlefield.

Landing in the midst of the battle, the enraged demon lashed out in fury. Wielding its whip of decay in its left hand and its red, Hell-metal sword in its right, it dealt death to whomever came within reach. The warriors watched in horror as a priest of Beordin rotted before their eyes after being cut in half by the demon's

barbed whip. Daemokdelance and human alike were trampled under the skeletal bird's taloned feet or hewed by the demons moaning, hissing sword.

"Fall back and regroup!" yelled Garelgar, waving the tattered Rebanian standard. His chain mail and leather shirt were torn open, revealing deep, jagged claw marks on his chest. His men responded to the call and drew back from the battle. Even the berserking Khaz and injured Keldrid Thunderhand, limping badly and bleeding from an open wound in his hip, fell back from the raging demon and its feasting mount and rallied to the brave mercenary Captain.

A dozen men remained of the thirty-one that rode into Allura. They formed a ragged line behind Garelgar. With their weapons in their hands and grim determination etched into their features, their heads pounded with adrenaline as they gazed across the battlefield at the hellish scene before them.

The mounted blood demon whipped and slapped its few remaining minions into order. They cringed and fell over themselves in fear of their master, flanking the imposing figure. Behind them was the rift, swirling and pulsing blackness, shot with flashing, angry light. It seemed to have grown larger during the battle, and the ghostly war drums grew louder.

Cruxuzule towered above even the ten foot tall Daemokdelance, its fire red eyes boring into the line of defenders. Its blood red armor shone in the crimson moonlight as it raised its swaying, baboon-like, horned head and loudly sniffed the air. Its hairy, canine legs tensed and relaxed as it controlled its grotesque mount. It spread its spiked wings for balance as it raised its arms, signaling the charge.

Sarel's sharp elven eyes noticed the briefest of shadows flit across the demon's shining armor,

as if something huge had flown across the moon. Cruxuzule noticed it also as it snapped its bestial head to the sky. The blood demon lurched suddenly to its left as an icy missile sped from behind the defenders toward the demon's head. Like a giant hail stone with a tail of blue fire, the missile narrowly missed the demon but sheared through its mount's right wing.

The birdlike creature cried out as its wing exploded in a shower of bone and yellowed flesh. The giant ice missile continued on its course, slamming into the swirling black portal behind the demon's line.

Flashing and wavering, the portal seemed to reverse its outward flowing. The hot, foul wind blowing from within ceased and the void began to shrink. It folded in on itself, and for a moment, it sucked in the gathered mist. Then it exploded outward, showering the battlefield with steaming hot coals and ice particles.

Garelgar used the momentary disturbance to signal the warriors' final effort. "Charge!" he cried, holding the spear-tipped standard before him like a pole arm. He aimed directly at Cruxuzule Mamnibia's injured mount. The creature whipped its head around to meet his charge and took a blow to the side of its skull. The steel tip broke from the pole with a loud crack. Rearing back, beak open wide, the creature dove at the human standing before it. Garelgar drove the broken end of the standard pole up through the creature's mouth, driving the makeshift spear into the hellish bird's brain cavity. The captain was forced to his back, the wind knocked from his lungs with an audible whoosh.

Sarel and Khaz were there to defend their fallen leader, hacking and chopping at the beast's bony neck and separating its foul head from its body. The dying creature thrashed about, knocking aside several warriors and throwing the blood demon from its back.

Before Cruxuzule could recover, the source of the giant hail stone glided toward earth: a great green and gold dragon. Clinging to the dragon's back was a female elf, her long, white-blond hair and black, cheetah-spotted cloak flowing behind her. As the dragon descended, its form began to change. Magic rippled and crackled around it, and it was shrouded in a bright white light. The female elf leaped to the ground, drew her slender sword, and waded into the fight beside the warriors, who had resumed their battle with the demons.

By the time the wyrm reached the battlefield, it was no longer a merely a dragon. It appeared to be a mixture of both dragon and elven features. It stood on two massive dragon legs, balanced by its long tail and wide, clawed feet. Its torso and muscular arms were elven and were covered by shining green and gold dragon scale armor. Small horns jutted from its forehead while its elven face was partially obscured by its long, flowing, green and gold hair. In its right, clawed hand it held a massive sword, easily as long as two men. It appeared to be the twin of the sword held by Cruxuzule Mamnibia, but instead of red metal etched with evil black runes, the dragon elf's sword was gold and shining silver, and the runes shone white and clear. Thus armed, Rathistar, of the druidic order of the dragon, moved slowly and purposefully toward the blood demon.

Cruxuzule flew into a rage and charged at the dragon elf, trampling dead warriors and demons. The ground blackened under its foul feet. Rathistar seemed to float just above the earth as he picked his way through the bodies to meet the blood demon's charge.

They met in the center of the town square with a clash of steel on steel. Sparks flew as their blades met, and the two giants held each other's gazes. Cruxuzule's hate-filled, fiery red eyes stared directly into Rathistar's black and gold-flecked orbs. Growling savagely, the blood demon lashed out with its plague whip, but a word of power from the dragon elf turned the offending weapon into ice. It shattered against his scale armor, floating to earth in a puff of icy dust.

Roaring in frustration, the blood demon pushed Rathistar back, and again their blades met, both combatants striking and parrying furiously. The ringing of the two blades was a nearly continuous knell as they hacked and slashed at each other, their blades a blur. They battered each other with massive fists and whipping tails, but neither gained a decided advantage.

They circled the battlefield, each looking for an opening. Cruxuzule taunted the dragon elf in its sinister, rock-scraping-rock voice, "Your soul will be mine, elf! I will torment it for eternity!"

Rathistar responded in a rumbling yet melodious elven dialect. "We have met once before on the field of battle, Hellspawn, and you made the same empty threat! Look around you. Your minions are defeated, their souls sent back to whatever hell they came from. I will do the same with your own twisted black soul!"

Cruxuzule winced, as if the elven words were daggers. Around them, the demon could see the human warriors hurriedly dragging their injured companions from the battlefield. The female elf, Kimba Truehart, druid from the order of the cheetah, was administering healing spells to those most in need.

A low rumble came from the demon's throat, erupting from its simian mouth as a frustrated growling roar that sent shivers up and down the spines of all that heard it. Cruxuzule launched itself at the dragon elf, sword held high. Rathistar knocked the demon's blade aside and swept his own blade back, dragging it across the demons armored chest. Sparks flew, and white light erupted from Rathistar's sword as his blade laid open the Hell-metal armor. The foul black flesh beneath parted and steaming hot blood poured from the wound.

Cruxuzule tried to summon more Hellspawn with the droplets of blood that fell sizzling on the ground, but the spell was interrupted as Rathistar swung his sword at the demon's head, shearing off a goat-like horn and cutting deep into the misshapen skull.

Blinded by its own blood, the demon struck out furiously, but Rathistar stepped aside and struck Cruxuzule in the midsection with his heavy tail. The dragon elf reversed his blade and brought it down on the back of the demon's neck, cutting its head from its grotesque body in a gout of steaming hot blood.

A bloodcurdling scream echoed through the night air. The demon's body turned into crimson mist and dissipated in the wind. Its evil sword seemed to writhe like a serpent in the grass before it too dissipated in a puff of red mist.

An eerie silence settled over the battlefield, broken only by the moaning of the injured and dying and the howling of the cold north wind. Clouds covered the stars and the red moon as a light snow began to fall. There was no celebrating by the victors.

Sarel found Khaz standing bare chested in the midst of dead, smoking, and rapidly decaying demons. The dwarf was covered in blood, much of it his own, and his axe hung limply from his right hand. He blinked and looked around himself, as if just waking up. Upon seeing the frost elf, Khaz smiled and said, "A'm hungry," before collapsing in a heap.

Amir ran up and immediately began administering healing spells, giving Sarel an encouraging look. "I will do what I can, Sar. I am sure Nuune will guide my hands," said the former priest. "Are you injured?" he asked the frost elf.

"No," he replied, looking across the square. Kimba Truehart was attempting to aid Keldrid, who was refusing. He had taken a vicious wound to the belly in the last moments of the battle.

"It is an honor for a priest of Beordin to die while fighting denizens of Hell," explained Norge, Keldrid's second in command. Tears streamed down his rough, bearded face. "It is our purpose." The big Nordic cleric stooped and placed Keldrid's sword in his bloody hands.

His transformation complete, the now fully elven Rathistar strode over to the dying Keldrid. He stood over seven feet tall, and his hair retained a green tinge. Small horns still jutted from his forehead and his shoulders were unusually broad for an elf. He knelt at Keldrid's side and placed his hand on the priest's cheek.

"I fought alongside your forefather, Beordin Demonsbane, during the great war," the dragon elf said softly, easing Keldrid's pain with his magical touch. "Your brave soul will join his, and together your heroic deeds will ring through eternity. Now rest in peace, Keldrid Thunderhand." With that, Keldrid Thunderhand passed into the afterlife.

Of the thirty-one brave souls who rode into Allura, only eleven survived.

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"I wanna go check out dem Graume dwarves in Ghan," said Khaz, wiping the ale from his freshly trimmed beard. Garelgar had asked where he and Sarel would be headed. The dwarf still had a bandage on his left hand. He had lost his little finger in the fight with Cruxuzule Mamnibia and the Daemokdelance a week prior. Expecting a rude remark about dwarves, he shot a look at Amir Sotho across the table, but the little easterner just shook his head and laughed, taking a long swig from his tankard.

Garelgar motioned for another pitcher of ale to be brought to the table they occupied in the rear of Allura's lone inn. It had been renamed Beordin's Hearth.

It had not taken long for the sleepy little town to return to normal after the demons' defeat. Norge Fireblade and the two remaining priests of Beordin had already returned to their homes in northern Brynhalla, and Garelgar had sent his four remaining outriders back to DeVothia to bring the news to the Baron. Rathistar and Kimba had departed for Zauurcrag to make sure the rift opened by the demons was destroyed. He and Kimba would then return to the north and their homes in the Furia forest.

"I wish you two would stay awhile," said Garelgar, pushing Sarel's and Khaz's travel warrants across the table. "I could use a couple of good right arms to bolster the patrol. The pay's good, ya know?"

"Thanks for the offer," responded the frost elf, placing the warrants in his cloak. "We will, however, look for you upon our return this way. Together we can look at the completed monument."

Where their fallen comrades were buried, Allura's elders were planning on building a monument. There were also plans to cover the entire town square with cobblestones, as nothing would ever grow again in the areas despoiled by the demons.

"Its best that way, Gar," joked Amir, "we'd go broke trying ta feed a dwarf anyway!" Khaz was used to it by now, and he tossed an apple in the former priest of Nuune's direction while standing to leave. He and Sarel had chosen to leave at night, inconspicuously.

"I'll be looking forward to it," responded Garelgar, as he and Amir rose to see the pair to the door. Once outside in the cool night air, he said his farewells, and watched the pair walk west and disappear into the woods.

THE END

by Nash J. Devita

Product Spotlight: Deliria

Author: Phil Brucato
Publisher: Laughing Pan Productions
Review Date: *October 25th, 2004*

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes while at Gen Con Indy 2004 just before an interview with the author, Phil Brucato. I also managed to get into a demo of Deliria run by Phil while at the convention.

Deliria is primary title from independent publisher Laughing Pan Productions. This is a very different sort of RPG in the fact that it tells the story of normal people in not-so-normal situation not exceptional people who are used to their situation.

Deliria is a 318 page hardcover. The title is glossy and full color (and what exceptional colors they are!). The included artwork is from Phil Brucato, Jeff Holt, Mark Jackson, Elizabeth Leggett, Marrus, Lucinda Maberry, Heather McKnney-Chernik, Kess Roobol, Ruby, Christopher Shy, Andy Simmons, Néné Thomas, and Audre Vysniauskas. The covers were illustrated by Audré Vysniauskas and Elizabeth Leggett.

From the Back Cover
Enchantment in your own back yard

A breath of song
There's a place beyond the sunset. You can find it if you dare.

A twist of smoke
A realm where ordinary people live extraordinary lives.

And a dream
The crossways open. New faerie tales begin.

Welcome to Deliria
What might you become?

Presentation

The cover features an eye-catching, beautifully illustrated face which is placed within a flower. This white and purple-ish flower is surrounded by an elliptical ring of turquoise. Outside of this ring are circles that look almost like soap bubbles catching the sun perfectly. The title is presented in a very strong, angular font in shades of yellow and orange. This is all set upon a (mostly) flat black background.

I have had this book in my possession for almost 2 months now and I have yet to get over most of the digital illustrations. They are absolutely breath-taking. They are original in design, rich in color, and filled, but not cluttered, with detail.

Content

Deliria is a superbly written title. Phil Brucato is an brilliant word-smith. The text feels as if it simply flows from the page. The writing here is not simple, not at all. This title actually took me some time to fully read. Some of the passages seemed a little verbose but they described things perfectly so, in reality, I can not see them being much, if any, shorter. The language used here is top-notch. Phil clearly did not write this title for the 'lowest common denominator'. I am a huge fan of the English language and love it used to this degree.

The first couple of chapters describe the setting for what it is and the stories for what they are. Being as that the setting itself is somewhat vague, some of the details are a little vague. There are tons of options and examples that are presented herein, however. Faerie tales have been around for ages and will continue to be around for plenty of time to come. There are many, many differences within them but some things that are (fairly) constant.

More than the options, the more interesting bits of these chapters are in the specifics and definitions. Described in great detail are things such as 'What is Deliria?', 'Why does one place become a passage to the land of faeries?' and 'What are some common specific places found in that realm?'. Each of these is described with such surgical precision that the answers seem real. I almost feel as if **Goblin Markets** are real and accessible (if I can get to one).

Some items get even more specific than the above. Varying **Faerie Kingdoms** or **Dominions** are also presented. Given here are the broad general details that cover all dominions and specifics of some of the varying kingdoms.

Again, faerie tales cover a lot of ground, yet there are some things that have remained somewhat constant (even if there is a large list within these constants). What a faerie tale is, at its heart, has remained constant even if the settings (place and time) have changed. What the 'heroes' of these stories do is also somewhat constant. Well, the idea of what they do

remains constant even if there is a countless list of specifics. The journey, the protagonists, and antoganists all hold regular features. These are all described within to help make the stories told through *Deliria* feel like 'real' faerie tales.

The times have changed, inside and outside of faerie tales, but at the heart of things, very little has actually changed. Even in modern times we still have valiant knights and evil monsters, princesses and evil witches.

If we are going to discuss faerie tales, we really need to talk about faeries. Who are they? What do they do? How are they represented in reality? Once we understand the physical aspect of faeries, logically, we must move beyond that. What are faeries like? Why do they, for the most part, do what they do? Where do they hold humanity? All of these questions and more are answered.

Also answered are questions about what faeries can do. Faeries are known through faeries tales for great magic. Both magic and shape changing are discussed next. Styles both old and new are described within.

Deliria utilizes the 'compact system' – named for its compact design. Compact or not, the compact system is riddled full of options (which make it that much easier and cleaner to use). A deck of cards, 2d10, or the generation system that is found on the CD-Rom included with this title can be used for 'challenge' resolution.

An action is chosen by the player, the GM sets the challenge rating, and the player draws, rolls, etc., to determine if the result is high enough to succeed or not. Having only read examples of usage of the others vs. having actually used the card draw method, I prefer the card draw. It is clean, fast, and cards are readily available. A simple task would have a difficulty level of 3 while an extreme one would have a difficulty of 21 or so.

My preferred method of character creation and therefore trait rating is "off the cuff". When we played the demo game this is how it went: each player gave a brief description of who the character is and what they do – age, job, etc. From there, we just guessed, with the GM of course, at what the trait should be rated near on a scale of one to ten. From there, we drew and had our result. My character was a highly book smart but not overly physical young man in his early twenties. When trying to save a drowning character we determined that he had a physical trait of about three. When it came to speaking an ancient language, however, since he was a theology student, he had a seven. This was all "off the cuff" through discussion between the GM and the player.

Of course, there are much deeper, more tangible methods of trait generation. I found that I really liked the 'off the cuff' style, however, since it really let the story flow – there were no character sheets to get in the way.

Being as that we were telling a story, character creation went like this: 1) Tell me a story about this person. 2) Tell me who you (the character) are. 3) What is special about you?

From here, each player simply told a brief story about his character. Then we all told a story together guided by the GM. I was fortunate enough to have the writer as a GM.

That is what *Deliria* is all about – telling a story. If something makes telling a fun story easier, do it. If something gets in the way, change it. This was one of the most enjoyable games I have every played, partly, I believe, from the lack of rules but the amount of details that *Deliria* allows.

Conclusion

Reading this title was a joy though it took quite some time. Even paging through and gazing at the illustrations is even a task that can take quite a bit of time as well. All of that time is time well spent. This title is a refreshing change of pace, not just from the read and the illustrations but in playing it as well. Playing in the demo under Phil was great fun. I can't wait to play another game of Deliria!

Be sure to visit the web site, link above, for further details on *Deliria* and to take advantage of their holiday sales promotion if you so see fit. The sale can really help make this a great deal to one that should not be passed up.

I can not recommend this book and game enough!

Deliria is not a cheap title. It weighs in at $40 US. It is $40 well spent in my opinion.

by Nash J. Devita

Indie Spotlight: Laughing Pan Productions

While at Gen Con Indy 2004 I had a chance to sit down and speak with Phil Brucato about his company, Laughing Pan Productions, his role-playing game, *Deliria*, and much more. The December Indie Spotlight focuses on this great role-playing company and game!

Why don't you start by telling us who you are and what you do?

I am Phil Brucato, obviously. I originally started as a journalist and fiction writer in the late 80's. I got my first professional break in fiction in 1990 selling to *Mary Zimmer Bradley's Sword and Sorcery* anthology and fortunately managed to avoid the whole 'rejection slip routine'. By the time I got my first rejection slip I had already sold four stories and had two published columns. I have worked hard at refining my style, but I never had to struggle, desire, and overcome the years worth of rejection slip aspect of being a writer, which is good since I never wanted to be a writer. I've been a story-teller since I was a kid, but I wanted to be a film maker and I wanted to be an actor. I had majored in both of those things in college. I actually have an art degree with an emphasis in theater and a minor in cinematography. I just realized that when I started to work in those things, I have also worked in music, radio, and modeling, I realized that my talents didn't really lie in those directions professionally. Fortunately, I stumbled across writing and found that that is where my talents lie so that it what I have been doing professionally since 1990 and doing for a living since 1992.

I can definitely see the connection between cinema and RPG so it seems like a natural flow. I am glad to have you here as a writer, that's for sure. I wouldn't want to lose any more talent to the seemingly already, at least a little, flooded, and sometimes monotonous, writers.

Can you give us a brief overview of Deliria and how your system, or systems as the case is, works?

Deliria is 'fairy tales for a new millennium.' It is the game of ordinary people in an extraordinary world. Rather than going with the hyper-powered heroes or the angst-ridden misfits, I wanted to take and run with the idea of ordinary people who stumble across or are drawn into the magical and are transformed by that and who transform the world in return.

I was looking at classical fairy tales, the work of Charles DeLint, Neil Gaiman, Emma Bull, and Alice Hoffman – writers who don't write about the last Psion of kingdom of whatever. These are authors who write about people like us who 'discover enchantment in their own backyard', to use a phrase from *Deliria*. The emphasis in *Deliria* is on normal people, but normal people who become enchanted and learn and become magical through their experiences.

In terms of the system, I wanted to go for a flexible drama- and character-based system which could have varying levels of complexity depending on what you wanted. Looking at the gaming industry, I have seen most RPGs moving to deeper and more complex rules where the audience for fantasy, which has never been larger than it is right now, is getting less and

less patient. With computer games, books, movies, card gaming, and live- action gaming, there is more emphasis on 'I want it. I want it quick. I want it now, rather than 'I want to wade through twenty-five three hundred page books to figure out how to play this game.'

I was noticing that there were an awful lot of people who were really fascinated by the idea of role-playing if they just didn't have to memorize huge rule books and didn't have to spend half of their yearly income on supplements just so they could play. This being the case, I wanted a system that anybody could pick up and understand, anybody could play like that [snapping fingers] with additional levels of complexity for the people who really felt they needed the 'crunchy.' I came up with the *Compact System* which was designed by myself, Karl Lepp and Juliann Lepp. It is a cross-compatible system that can be played with either live action, tabletop, or Internet without conversion and without having to purchase additional rules. It could also be played on a narrative level with virtually no rules, a basic level with very few rules, or an advanced level that has rules for many different circumstances. The players are able to decide what level they want to play at rather than having to decipher a huge text book and then realize they only needed to use one core mechanic.

On your rules, are you generally set from the beginning in using the basic level, the advanced level or can that vary from situation to situation pretty easily?

The way the rules are written, they are introduced from a basic level and then says, 'if you want to get advanced, here are the optional rules.' In fact, for all of the optional character rules, they are all contained on the CD-Rom which is included with the book. That has a ton of optional rules and optional advanced character rules. The rule book itself is written as basic as we could make it and still be comprehensible. When I am running the game I run it at a narrative or basic rules level. I have never been a fan of rules. In fact, my fondness for role playing games comes and goes. I have always love the interactivity and the dramatic social levels of role playing but I have always hated memorizing the 'stereo instructions' and arguing over what die pool for this or what this rule interpretation actually means. I want to go in there, tell a story, bang, bang, bang, and let my imagination and the imagination of my fellow players run rather than picking through arcane gibberish and trying to figure out what the author was trying to say.

By 'rules light' are you also implying that it is also 'dice light' in those instance or is there still a lot of dice rolling going on?

You don't have to actually roll dice at all. The mechanics of the Compact System allows you to use playing cards, dice, or a computer program if playing on the Internet, or you are really good and you can really wing it, there is a narrative level that does not use cards or dice. When I am playing, I very rarely use draws, the generic term we use for cards or dice or whatever the chance mechanic is. We very rarely use draws at all. Most of what I use when I am playing or running it is narrative.

When did your system first come out?

It came out late last year, just late of the Christmas distribution and the Christmas rush so we had a lag time on momentum. We got a number of review copies out but now, in summer, those reviews are only starting to come out. People are only now starting to hear about us. Because we are an independent company, we have hardly anything for a marketing budget so we have been 'barn-storming' for the past four months to get people to hear about us through word of mouth.

What, in your opinion, is the most important element when developing any game, be it role-playing or whatever else and how did you reflect that in Deliria and some of your old work as well, even when under a supervisor's constraints?

Actually, first I want to clarify something. In my days with White Wolf Publishing I did not have 100% creative control but about 95% creative control. At the time I was working at White Wolf, and I understand that the situation has changed dramatically since then, I had pretty much carte-blanche. My manager, when I was hired to do Mage: the Ascension, handed me a copy of Mage first edition that had just come back from the press and said 'it's all yours. We don't have the slightest idea what to do with it.' My hands were very rarely tied, or even controlled, at White Wolf, thank God.

That being said, the most important thing with rules is clarity. That someone should be able to pick them up, read them, and understand them rather than having to argue about them for forty-five minutes.

Or have to hit a message board for clarification or something like that because it was never input or up to interpretation by so many fans.

I have tried, throughout Deliria, to note important elements of the rules with bulleted text, things that need reference have icons next to them to let you know what they are referring to, any place where something is cross-referenced there is an icon and it gives the page number.

That is something I very much like to see. I am so tired of searching for cross-referenced material and scratching my head since I have forgotten which page it is found on.

(Phil pulls out a copy of Deliria to show an example of this)

It is very easy to see what you are looking at. There are colorful icons, off-set text. There is no room for confusion what-so-ever.

I wanted to make sure that everything was clear and easy to read. I know from experience, the last thing you really want to do is try to pore through pages and pages of closely spaced text. There is also a four page, forty-five hundred word index.

And it works! This is something that any of my readers know I am always very happy to see.

The index even references the inside jokes, authors, influences, etc.

This looks to be one of the most complete indices I have seen in a long time if not ever seen – complete with 'see also's, and references to JRR Tolkien, **Lord of the Rings**, various quotes, **Harry Potter**, variant rules, and variant characters…

So, the short answer to the short question is: clarity, ease and clarity.

This index definitely helps the ease which is not prevalent enough – epically with hardbacks and the thicker the books become.

Do you currently have any titles aside from your core book that are available or are in the works within the line?

We have nothing else available at this time, but we do have five other books in the works. *Deliria*'s production values are very, very high. They are so very expensive for us to produce. One of my absolute dedications for this line is to keep the production quality as high on the rest of the books as it is on the core book. It's a pet peeve of mine to have a beautiful looking book with a great looking cover and deteriorating working on the inside and the supplements look like news print. The other books have been held up by financial constraints since we

have had to devote our resources barn-storming and getting the word out there these last few months, the production work on these books has fallen a bit behind. That being said, the five books that are at various stages of completion right now are:

Goblin Markets: The Glitter Trade which is a setting, characters, and stories book about those places where you can buy your dreams or sell your soul.

Everyday Heroes: Adventures for the Rest of Us which is a book about playing as ordinary, making stories about ordinary people. It sounds easy, but it's really not. How do you tell the story of the librarian who discovers the enchanted story book in her stacks and finds that her life has changed? How do you run the story of the little kid whose imaginary friend decided that he does not want to be forgotten about? How do you run the story about the family dog who's discovered that when mom and dad and the tribe, or pride, are asleep, a man made out of sticks runs around the house and rearranges the furniture? That is what **Everyday Heroes** is about, those kinds of adventures and characters.

Elden and Elder Folk which is a prestige book that we have coming out. I can't name names right now because some contracts are still being inked but this has 'A-list' art talent. The production values are as high as we can possibly afford. This is the book that deals with the Fae, the Elden, and the Elder folk, the different types of fairy beings. It describes their very strange ways, strange sights, offers dozens and dozens of characters and types and gives rules for using some of them as player characters.

Deliria: Between the Cracks which is an anthology, once again with 'A-list' talent coming in for this. There are a number of people who have already said 'yes' but again, contracts are still in progress so I can't say names.

Legacies & Weirds which is a book about the curses and the blessings of the other world and the ways in which they affect your life. There are descriptions of the *Legacies and Weirds* - there are dozens of them in the book. You would normally think of them as powers or as disadvantages but in fact they are far more than that. They are elements of every character's story. Legacies and Weirds, as a book, will also tell you a great deal about how those things become elements of a story and not just powers on a character sheet.

There are other books on the boards. There is the *Scad Case Files* which is a book about the law enforcement that is aware about the strange paranormal activities around them. There are several others the names of which I am blanking on off the top of my head but that is just because we are in the middle of a convention.

Aside from those books that are already in the works, I want to leave some flexibility in there because I am very, very responsive to and attuned to the fans and I want to see what people are asking about.

Another thing that we are going to be doing is offering, on our web site, supplementary material. As a long time gamer, I always hated the idea that I had to invest my life's savings and have a big pile of books on the table before I could play a game, so we are, rather than doing the 'supplement of the month' thing, aiming for three to four books per year with additional supplementary material coming out on our web site so that people can find out things they want without having to lay down fifteen, twenty, twenty-five dollars every other month for the new Deliria information.

We have talked a lot about Deliria and Laughing Pan Productions. Is there anything you'd like to add that hasn't crossed my mind?

I'd just like to add that there is a lot of really good stuff out there besides us; obviously, there are a lot of good people with a lot of imagination and a lot of fine ideas. There are a lot of people who are taking chances and putting everything on the line. You won't find these people in the pages of *Dragon*, you probably won't find their work on the front shelf of your local gaming store but if you look for it, it's there. Those people, probably even more than the big companies, need your support. Their work is usually worth taking a second or a third look at. That is where the imagination starts. That is where our hobby grows from. The big boys were once independent targets taking a chance on something new and radical, and there are still people taking chances on things that are new and radical and they are worth looking at.

We once again want thank Phil Brucato for all of his time. We can't wait to see more from him and from Laughing Pan Productions.

Be sure to stop by their web site, (http://www.laughingpan.com) for more information and to take advantage of their holiday sale!

by Jasminn D. Chan

Beyond the Table: Role-play in text- based virtual worlds

INTRODUCTION

While role-play is traditionally associated with table-top gaming and many-sided dice, the online worlds made available by MUDs, MOOs and MUSHes offer a role-play experience of a potentially wider breadth than the conventional Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) game.

Before someone jumps up to beat me about the head for making that sweeping statement, allow me to explain. As a petite young woman with a distinctly bubbly personality, I find it hard ("impossible" would be a better word!) for me to convincingly role-play anything taller than a gnome in a tabletop game. I may have a very good warrior character, but when I squeak, 'Die, foul fiend!' everyone at the table just tends to fall over giggling at my performance. This is where RPing online comes in. I'm aware that there are IRC-RP (Internet-Relay-Chat-Role-play) sites, but since I know MUDs best, I'll limit this article to role-playing in MUDs.

WHAT ARE MUDS?

For those unfamiliar with MUDs, the acronym "MUD" is an abbreviation for "Multi-User Dungeon." Though the name 'MUD' derives from those very old computer role-playing games that offered little more than dungeon crawling, monster slaying and the accumulation of wealth, MUDs go beyond simple run-of-the-mill dungeons populated by a few inhabitants. MUDs provide text-based virtual worlds containing "objects" (continents, landscapes, furniture, trees, buildings, food, etc.) and people (players) as well as "mobiles" (non-player-characters, or NPCs) for

players to interact with. MUDS are made up purely of descriptive and (depending on the situation) narrative text, and players interact via text-based commands.

The virtual world of a MUD in turn provides the foundation for a virtual community of players. Like any human society, a MUD with a large enough community will have its share of politicking, scandals, romance, murder and the like.

HOW MUDs PRESENT A UNIQUE PLATFORM FOR ONLINE ROLE-PLAY

Their text-based interfaces make MUDs unique among online worlds and communities. The text interface allows for far greater character customization than is possible in graphics-based online worlds because in a graphics-based interface players are limited by the range of graphics available for them to choose from. In contrast, a text-based interface creates an environment where the imagination gets free rein (within the constraints of language proficiency), thereby allowing for the uniqueness integral to memorable role-playing. MUDs also differ from forums and chat rooms. Unlike a forum, MUDs offer real-time interaction with another person; unlike a chat room, they offer objects and environments that give meaning to interaction - as opposed to a space where the only things that exist are "thee and me."

ROLE-PLAY IN MUDS AS COMPARED WITH TABLETOP SESSIONS

The nature of the MUD online experience means that you have far more control over the signals that you send out than you would in a tabletop D&D session.

In particular, the greatest difference between role-playing in a MUD online and role-playing face to face is the lack of visual and aural clues: body language and tone of voice do not apply. Far from limiting the experience, however, this very lack of non-verbal communication makes the MUD role-play experience unique. When role-playing in a MUD, players have almost total control of the signals they choose to send out, without the distraction of what the actual player looks or sounds like breaking the spell.

In a MUD's text-based environment players can define their communication—both mannerisms and speech patterns—via descriptions that replace the normal aural cues. An NPC maiden can say, "Good evening," in a voice "low and sweet as music," without the gamesmaster's own nasal baritone destroying the illusion. This scenario applies to visual cues as well. In graphics-based RPGs, players are limited by the graphics available to them; in tabletop games, they face the restrictions of their own physical appearance. In a MUD's text-based environment, by contrast, people can only 'see' what you describe about yourself, thus removing the distracting visual cues that result from my fellow players seeing my wimpy little self while I attempt to role-play Thor. The control of visual and aural cues offered by MUDs allows you to explore the experience of living in a totally different body and literally being a different person, as opposed to the tabletop role-play experience, where, in order to be convincing, there is a tendency to play characters somewhat similar to your given body type.

MUDs also differ from other RPGs in that they present an environment which is truly an independent world. Role-playing in a MUD is akin to being immersed in an ongoing story: actions have contexts and consequences. In table-top sessions, I more or less know my friends—their personalities and how they behave—even when they are acting in character. In a MUD, I 'know' someone only through the actions they take in different situations, and I do not have the option to buy the GM a pizza (extra bacon and anchovies) with a six-pack of beer to mellow him down.

This leads to a very equal sort of playing field for players. The MUD world seems as impersonal and indifferent to any individual's particular needs as the everyday world is. It may seem strange that an impersonal world is a plus, but it induces characters to go out and make friends with people.

ROLE-PLAYING STYLES AND RE-INVENTION OF THE SELF

With the tools for a total re-invention of the self at their disposal, MUD RPGers can pass off a fictional identity as the real thing. To me, this is one of the greatest attractions that role-playing in a MUD holds; it is a level of role-play that players in table-top situations simply cannot achieve. The textual medium allows for a suspension of disbelief that would break down in face-to-face encounters.

I have been role-playing for roughly ten years, three of those in tabletop D&D sessions and seven online. I have spent most of my online time in one particular MUD, but I do explore MUDs other than my regular one. Over this period of time, I have found three main categories or styles of role-players. One style does not necessarily exclude the others; role-play is dynamic, and it is perfectly possible for someone to utilize all three styles at once. But in my observation, most role-players tend to lean towards one main style when playing.

The three styles are:

1) my character as myself

2) my character as someone else

3) my character as someone whom I become

MY CHARACTER AS MYSELF

This seems to be the most common style of role-play, though some argue that it is not "role-play" at all. As a player, I simply pull myself lock, stock, and barrel over into an alternate world. While my race, appearance and body type may change, my basic personality remains the same. My character has skills and experiences relevant to an alternate world, that I, myself, do not know, but I still take events very personally, with no detachment and no real sense of my character as a separate entity from me. If another player insults me, for instance, I don't think, "Oh, my character just got told that his mother is uglier than a diseased frog." Instead, I react as though someone just called MY mother ugly.

This playing style works well in tabletop role-play, as it allows for fast and convincing reactions (after all, I really feel that way!), but it is far from the only style available in a MUD environment. I usually choose to play in this style if I want to focus on simply enjoying a world and its gaming aspects.

MY CHARACTER AS SOMEONE ELSE

Most people envision this very structured style when they think about role-playing. It seems to be the second most popular method of doing things. Using this style, I create my character by building up a list of unique traits, writing a brief character history, and defining my character's mannerisms and perspective on life. My basic personality may differ substantially from the one that I choose for my character, so when situations present themselves, I am very careful to remain "in character" with my reactions.

Now, when I get insulted, my character and I are NOT the same. It does not occur to me that I, personally, am being insulted. Instead, I think something more along the lines of, "Oh, he just called my devout priest a 'lecherous scrap of pork floss'! My poor priest! He is traumatized, horrified and angry! He's not even allowed to eat pork!" I therefore structure my character's reactions to the insult along those lines, having thought about how the insult would affect the character. While I am thinking this, though, I may in fact be rolling around squealing in delight at this particularly choice insult. My reaction stays separate from my character's reaction.

This style of role-play works well with both tabletop and online role-play, as it allows me to consider my character's reactions and play them to the hilt. It is a very common style in MUD environments, and usually what people think of when someone mentions 'role-play'. I generally choose this style if I want people to know that I am role-playing.

MY CHARACTER AS SOMEONE WHOM I BECOME

The third and last style of role-play in my list is the most rare. It is embodied by the concept of "sprezzatura" (coined by Balthasar Castiglione in his book *The Courtier*, in 1528), or "effortless grace." To quote the man himself, *sprezzatura* "conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless," so that "true art is what does not seem to be art; and the most important thing is to conceal it, because if it is revealed, this discredits a man completely."

In this style, I am concerned with the weaving of a persona rather than the construction of a character. I do not need to know anything about my character, nor is it necessary for my character's personality to bear any resemblance to mine. On the contrary, I use a kind of psychic "pot luck" process wherein I pluck a name from the air and simply go with it.

When playing in this style, I do not THINK ABOUT what my character would do. I BECOME the

character; I ASSUME the persona. My reactions are unthinking and processed in character, with no consideration in between of "Now, what would I do if I were this person?" I sublimate myself, and let my character's personality take over, much like some writers who say that their characters have minds of their own. When someone calls me/my character the "bastard son of a leprous rat," I/my character instantly retorts, "No, no, my father was rabid, not leprous!" In some of these cases, I may not even know that my beloved Daddy Rat was rabid, and not leprous, until the response pops from my/my character's virtual mouth. This way of playing bears some resemblance to the second style; when I shed the persona that I have assumed, I very well know that my father was (hopefully) not a rabid rat, and simply find my character's pedantic indignation hilarious. But in the second style of play, I did not have to change personas in order to appreciate the joke—I never gave up my own identity in favor of my character's identity.

I find this form of role-play unique to the virtual worlds provided by MUDs, probably because it is almost impossible in face-to-face RPG sessions. I can try to lose myself in the character of my barbarian, but unfortunately, I will still squeak—breaking the spell of my character for the other players. The process of losing oneself in a character is also arguably the most dangerous way of role-playing, as my real self is sublimated and/or hidden, which leads others to mistakenly believe that the persona they have interacted with is the same as the person behind the computer. This style is the most self-sustaining of the three and, if done well, the hardest to perceive—which is the entire point.

EXPLORING GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES ON MUDs

In addition to allowing an increased range of playing styles, role-playing in MUDs provides a safer venue in which to explore gender roles and stereotypes by combining both the anonymity of the internet with the ability to play a role without other players determining your gender based on your looks or the sound of your voice. Safer than what, you ask? Well, depending on where you live, possibly safer, and much less of a bother than physically cross-dressing and going out.

This is not to say that gender roles, stereotypes and cues do not exist. On the contrary, there is an unspoken understanding that a player describing themselves as a "cute 18-year old with huge breasts and legs up to her neck," or some such variation on this theme, is almost certainly a man (or boy). The same thing holds true for male characters. If you meet a terribly charming man in a MUD, odds are that it may actually be a woman!

There are cases, though, where the player in question has a good enough grasp of gender cues, roles and stereotypes to convincingly portray the other sex. This is a little different from the conventional idea of role-play, since it means that the role itself, in order to work, has to be essentially undetectable. For a good player, though, this kind of gender reversal opens up a whole new world that allows a glimpse of what it is like, however vicariously, to be someone of the other sex.

'BAIT AND SWITCH' AND GENDER-REVERSAL ROLE-PLAY CHALLENGES ON MUDs

Trying to convince other players that you belong to the opposite gender differs from role-playing, say, a fallen angel, because regardless of which role-play style I use, my fellow players will NEVER believe that I am actually an angel sitting at the keyboard and typing, with my wings neatly folded out of the way. Sometimes, though, an online role-player will use this very disbelief as part of a "bait and switch" technique to get other players to accept an alternate-gender role. In essence, I give other players in the MUD something unbelievable (I am a fire-breathing half-dragon) to think of as my "role," while they accept the foundation of the persona—including my falsified gender—as my true identity. This 'bait and switch' technique works for both the second ("my character as someone else") and the last style of role-play ("my character as someone whom I become"). It works because people tend to take gender for granted unless it is over-emphasized to the point of caricature (as mentioned earlier).

Gender-reversal in role-play really interests me, and because MUDs are like continuing stories, role-playing a character of the opposite gender is not a challenge that is surmounted once, then dismissed. Gender-reversal (while in character) requires a flawless, whole and, above all, effortless performance. This incredibly difficult task presents me with enduring challenges and entertainment.

CONCLUSION

MUDs, with their text-based interface, provide an environment where the players define and control almost every action and reaction of their characters. The absence of visual and aural cues makes a total reconstruction of the self possible. For some players, adopting the role of the opposite gender provides an additional challenge. Participants in face-to-face RP sessions cannot achieve this level of role-play because they can never totally suspend disbelief and accept the 90lb girl squeaking "Die, foul fiend!" while waving her dinner fork around as a burly and terrifying warrior. Thus, when it comes to role-playing, text-based virtual worlds like MUDs can offer users a more immersive role-playing experience than conventional tabletop RPGs.

MARIANA, DROW COP

by Melissa Piper

Officer Varcen reporting for duty, sir.

Ah, Officer Varcen, please come in and have a seat.

Your timing is impeccable, officer. The commissioner just called me with an assignment that is perfect for you. It will help you get your feet wet.

Before I give you your assignment, however, I have some items to give you.
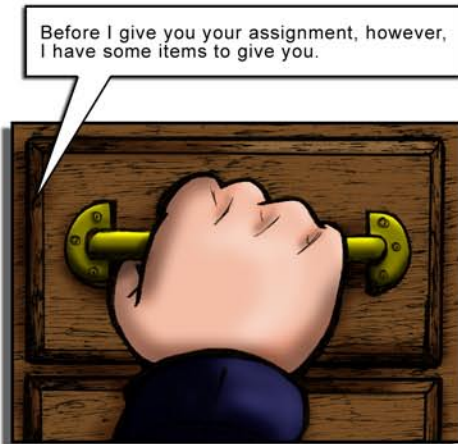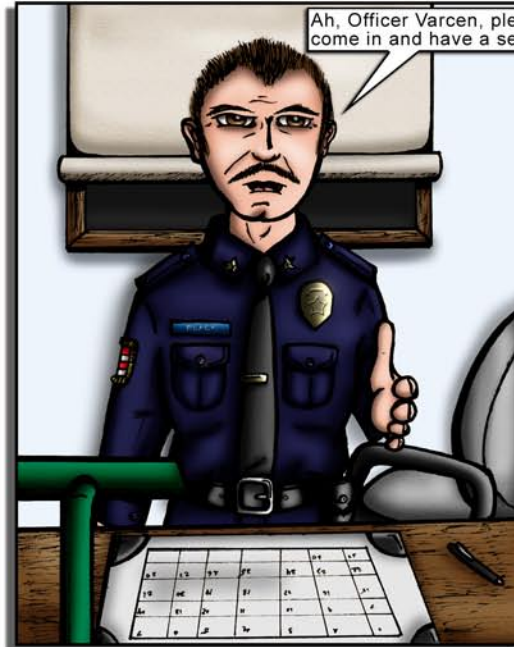
Here are your handcuffs, CB radio, and badge. I am also giving you a few ammo clips. You can pick up your gun from the weapons locker outside of my office.

3

by Nash J. Devita

Review: Ramshead Publishing – The Basic System v2

Authors: J. Parker
Publisher: Dilly Green Bean Games
Review Date: *November 27th, 2004*

Reviewer Bias: This title was received for review purposes as a PDF. I also reviewed the first version of The Basic System. That review can be found here.

The Basic System remains a very familiar feeling and flowing RPG system that has an aim not for one specific genre but attempts to be a universal system using a basic rule structure.

I mention that it feels familiar, at least to me, because I can see some (glaring) similarities to the d20 system.

Presentation

The Basic System Core v2 is a thirty-five page PDF. The font used is large enough to be easily read. The art has improved exponentially from version 1.9. Much of the art this go around is computer generated with some hand-drawn images. This is an excellent departure from v 1.9's clip art. The text remains large enough to be easily read as have the charts.

Content

Much like the last version I read, this is a short PDF so there is not much beyond the rules for one to read. It is called 'basic' for a reason. That is what you get. There are some 'extras' included to make things a bit more complicated.

This system uses seven basic attributes, or **Main Stats** as they are appropriately called here.

The similarities to the d20 system begin here. The seven main stats are Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma, Agility, Strength, Endurance, and Speed. The names are pretty self-explanatory as to what each represents. The text does break down each different stat and what the varying scores represent. Thankfully, there is now a standard within the stat charts! Where as the max numbers varied previously, each stat block utilizes the same numbers.

These stats range, in a basic powered game, from 11 to 20. Each point above the base of 10 is also used as a bonus akin to the Ability Modifier in the d20 system. This bonus, just as the d20 version, modifies different skills, damage, etc. The points above 10 can come from either random generation via dice or from a pool of points.

Mostly unlike the d20 system, there are also **secondary stats**. These are directly derived from the main stats. The secondary stats include things such as hit points, running speed, jumping distance, etc. We still encounter some similarities here as well, though. We also derive punching damage, lifting capacity, and initiative from some primary stats. Thankfully, the means of determining these items are different from d20. If they weren't, I would have stopped reading at this point, to tell the truth.

Characters can also have **Natural Abilities**. A character's main stats help determine how many natural abilities said character can have. These natural abilities, while a bit different, in most instances, can most easily be equated to feats of merits. The natural abilities range from main stat bonuses to ambidexterity and the loss of need for air and food. In my personal opinion, there are not nearly enough natural abilities listed. Some explanation is also required on some details – for example, do the points gained from main stat increases count toward future natural abilities?

Just as with main stats, it is possible for skill levels to reach level 20+ in a high enough leveled game. This high number is not the norm, thankfully. There are no specific skills listed. Instead, there are skill categories that specific skills fall into. There are ten different skill categories with an almost unlimited number of possible skills under each. This number has been cut down to eliminate some of the redundant or useless categories.

Skills are yet another place that *The Basic System* somewhat mirrors the d20 system. Success or failure

is determined by skill rank plus stat modifier plus 1d20.

The next item is quite different from the d20 system. That is **extras**. Extras are also akin to merits from some other games. Included here are contacts, organization memberships, etc. I hate to keep pointing out similarities but I can not help but think of White Wolf games and backgrounds in their games when looking over these.

There is also a wealth system that is quite nice. This alleviates the need to keep track of dollars and cents, gold and silver, or whatever the common currency. While somewhat similar to the wealth system in *d20 Modern*, it, at the same time, manages to be fairly unique.

I very much like how armor works in this system. This is one **major** difference from the d20 system. Not surprisingly, it is also the thing I like most about this system. All armor has a rating. Any damage over that is over that amount is taken by the wearer. Also, any damage over the armor value is, after damage is applied, removed from the armor value. I love the way that this represents the armor taking damage and major wear. Thank you for, what I can tell, keeping this the same! The only gripe I have here is that some armor protects only parts of the body yet the chart does not list any locations or location specific items (boots, gloves, etc.).

The rules for both weapons and vehicles are pretty common and are only lightly touched upon in this text. The damage amounts, I believe, have been looked over and balanced making these items much more acceptable.

Hit locations have changed wildly. Now, one no longer targets a specific location and rolls vs. a modified target but now roll only to see what body part is actually hit.

Experience is handled in a way I have grown to love. It is very much like many non-d20 games. A player spends experience points to improve his / her character. There are no set levels and mandatory paths of progression.

Character classes are mentioned very briefly in the **optional rules** section along with a couple of other items. I am **still** left highly confused by character classes. What are the benefits / drawbacks to a class other than hit points? If the answer is nothing, I think everyone would make sure to stay in a high hit- dice class. Issues of that sort are not discussed, sadly, just as they were not in the last version.

Conclusion

Still, in its current form, I can not fully really recommend *The Basic System Core* since the system is heavily derived from the d20 system and there are a number of gaps left wide open in this title. If some of the holes are closed I might be able to recommend this system to at least some gamers.

This system does have plenty of merit. It just needs to find its own identity. This version does help improve it greatly but I think there is still a bit of work to be done. Some of my issues with *TBS* were resolved. Other issues, like classes, were left completely unchecked.

by Shane Cubis

Antipodean Adventures: Workspace Battles

About the Author

Shane Cubis is a young, fit, Australian plagiarist with an affinity for Spider-Man. He has recently succumbed to internet peer pressure and now secretly refers to himself as a ´gamer.´ He wrote and starred in an award-winning short film, "Dream Date" (also starring Aussie cricketer Brett Lee), has had an article published in ´Knights of the Dinner Table,´ as well as regular articles in such publications as ´Tertangala,´ ´The Northern Leader,´ and ´Beanz Baxter.'

He has an Honors degree in History/Politics, and is currently studying to be a primary (grade) school teacher. On Saturdays he calls bingo - a job his nana got him five years ago. His favorite book is ´Catch 22,´ his favorite band is TISM, and his favorite movie is ´Back to the Future.´

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G'Day all. This month, as promised, I'll be looking at the freewheeling combat between labor and management that took place across the landscape of Australia in the last century. It is a massive topic, so for the sake of sanity I'll keep the focus on two specific events, both of which can be quite useful in a number of campaigns.

The Battle for Bulli

Mining is both a dangerous and profitable activity, a combination that lends itself to conflict between owners and workers. Since coal was first discovered in Australia, there have been men willing to go into the earth to dig it out, and other men willing to exploit these workers for profit. In the late 1800s, coal mining was a dangerous, dirty and deadly activity. Not only were there the constant threats of explosions and collapses, but the coal dust would eventually ruin the lungs of the workers, and many suffered from hearing and sight loss.

In 1886 the miners at Bulli Colliery struck for better conditions. In response, the company brought down forty blacklegs (strike-breakers or scabs) from Sydney to work. A large group of locals, including women and children, met the blacklegs as they arrived by train. The ensuing conflict was dubbed "the Battle of Bulli." A "War Correspondent" from the *Illawarra Mercury* takes up the story:

"Nearer and nearer came the iron-horse, but closer and closer stood the stone-wallers, in defensive attitude, volleying forth broadsides of verbal jeers, theatre and pleadings towards the invaders. The local engineer, having run the engine up to the crowd, hesitated to knock the persons down with it, who stood in the way on the rails where they crossed the main road."

The train now properly obstructed, the women ran forward, thrusting their children in the faces of the scabs and stating their case. "...[T]heir coaxings, cries, curses and tears appeared to melt the blacklegs like ice under sunbeams," continued the War Correspondent. Thirty-six of the men surrendered immediately, and the other four were quickly overwhelmed.

The next day another group of blacklegs were brought in, but this time they had a police escort. The miners were arrayed against the owners, local clergy and the local newspaper. After six months the strikers had to yield due to their extreme poverty and returned to work. None of the strike leaders or prominent unionists were rehired by the company.

This situation lends itself to roleplaying on both sides of the equation. Such a scene adds action to a political campaign and allows the characters to flex both their oratory and melee skills. I don't know that 'striking miners' could maintain its luster for a long-term campaign, but a Western-style game could definitely support this kind of action from time to time. For it to work, the town would have to be full of well-fleshed-out NPCs for the players to interact with, so that they learn to care about what goes on in Bulli. The other option is that they happen to be on the same train as the blacklegs (maybe they are drifters who sneaked aboard). They jump off at Bulli to see this angry throng of men and women, and are somehow called upon to mediate the situation.

Prime Minister Sends in the Army

"[The Australian Labor Party] must fight for what it believes is right, whether it brings electoral success or not."
                                                        -Ben Chifley

In 1949 a general miners' strike was held throughout New South Wales (NSW). The workers wanted (as always) a shorter week, more pay, and better conditions. Arbitration had been repeatedly delayed and stalled over the previous two years, and the miners finally decided that direct action was needed.

The conflict was painted by the government of the day as the Labor party versus the Communists, who held a number of positions of power in the Miners Federation; but the true line in the sand was drawn between workers and capital. In this case, the Labor government chose to side with money rather than those who had put them into power, leaving many with the feeling that their party had betrayed them.

Eight unionists were jailed, union headquarters were raided, and the strikers were both threatened and legislated against with sanctions. Arthur Calwell, a cabinet minister, threatened to put 'Communists and their sympathizers' into concentration camps. In the face of these actions and a national propaganda campaign including full page advertisements and an airdrop of leaflets, the miners held firm.

The governmental response to the continued strike

was to pass the National Emergency (Coal Strike) Act of 1949 of the Commonwealth and the Emergency Powers Act of 1949 of NSW. The former froze union funds and the latter gave the state government the power to maintain essential services. On August 1st, soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets entered the coalfields with the dual purpose of breaking the strike and mining the coal themselves to ensure that the flow was maintained. These tactics came as a massive shock to many workers, despite what had come before. The strike was broken within two weeks, but at a great cost to Labor credibility in the eyes of the miners.

The core of this event, in terms of a roleplaying situation, is the unexpected escalation of resistance to the actions of the player characters. Previously, the strikers had seen certain tactics used by their opponents and even from the party that was supposed to represent them. Being imprisoned for their actions was nothing new to the unionists, but actually mobilizing troops against their own constituents was an unprecedented move from the Australian Labor Party.

Such a major event as a national, general strike can be dropped into any 'modern era' campaign quite easily, whether the PCs are directly involved or not. The loss of services or the introduction of the army could impinge on the lives or missions of the party in a number of ways – especially if they are involved in something not quite legal. Even something as simple as being held up by angry, marching strikers is enough to serve as both a delaying tactic and a provider of background world information.

Campaign Ideas

Conflict between workers and owners is always in the cards, and tends to be quite virulent (and often violent). If your players are the kind to argue and try to talk their way out of things, then a managerial NPC who really does not care about their well-being is probably a good way to begin introducing these themes. If the PCs win an argument – especially a public one – they might find themselves attracting co-workers who want the party to stick up for them, too.

This newfound power can bring rewards, but also brings powerful enemies. What use is this power if all your allies are poor and all your foes are rich and well-connected? Negotiating their way out of sticky situations, by stalling or encouraging industrial action, can be an interesting way for a beleaguered group of characters to spend a session or two.

I think this sort of stuff sits well in the background of other stories. Starting a party off poor, so they have to take on jobs like mining, is a good way to throw adventures at them that they wouldn't normally find. Imagine defeating the Dark Lord of Grisailia one day, and having to fight management for a dental plan the next!

Other Genres

Science Fiction: The slave miners on Cubisia-6 have had enough. They would rather live free or die in the attempt. Their reptillian overlords appear to be unprepared for any such uprising, believing the slaves to be thoroughly cowed. The PCs must convince the holdouts to strike, and come up with a plan that won't get them all killed.

Fantasy: Dwarves are being exploited by human mine owners, and they have finally had enough! Rampant racism throughout local communities leads very few to support the dwarves in their movement, but they are renowned for their stubbornness. The economy of the local town will collapse unless a compromise is reached and the valuable minerals start being extracted and sold again.

Horror: Behind the scenes, a consortium of werewolves has taken control of a silver mine. They intend to have it shut down through a variety of accidents, and are attempting to cause strike action to further destabilize the day-to-day running of the company.

Pulp: A two-fisted union leader has been threatened with mysterious messages and attacked by oddly-dressed Asian assassins.

The PCs must find out who is behind the menaces before the back of the union movement is broken and the evil forces at work put the whole community into slave labor camps.

About the Author

"Dregg" aka James Carpio is a native of San Francisco, California who now lives in the wilds of Suffolk County, NY. James has written for the likes of Eden Studios, Fuzion Labs, random gaming E-Zines and is currently designing games for his own gaming company Chapter 13 Press (www.chapter13press.com). James can be found at most Northeast conventions and game days with his family doing demonstrations for other gaming companies he supports and running promotional support for I-CON, Gotham Gamers Guild and Wild Gazebo Productions with whom he is affiliated.

by "Dregg" Carpio

Lights, Camera, Action! Holiday Tidbits

The holiday season is filled with a lot of busy schedules, shopping lists, overtime, and family fun. How can one even pick up a game book and dice with so much to do? Simple! With the all above going on, the creative mind needs to have a large dose of escapism, a Thanksgiving feast for the mind. Do you really want to think about those large New Year credit card bills, or would you rather take out your anger on a few Orcs dressed in red furry little suits? Holiday anger management in the form of mass destruction or innovative problem solving is yet another therapeutic property of gaming.

With all the rain and snow of the season, a nice toasty room with a battle map, hot cocoa, and the bashing of enemy agents is the greatest feeling of all. It is almost as if the spirits of Christmas are opening your dice bag for you and picking out a shiny d20 to roll. Lets face it, 'tis the season.

This month, for your enjoyment I have written up an alternate universe Santa, Nicolas the Mad, aka Kris "The Crusher" Kringle, in the *Core Fuzion*™ rule set. He can be added to your festive holiday campaign or in a one-shot story to bring two-fisted justice to the season.

Kris "The Crusher" Kringle

80 Character points 75 Option Points 100 Complications

Int 7 Pre 10 Will 7 Tech 8 Move 7 Ref 7 Dex 7 Str 8 Con 9 Body 9

Run 16 Sprint 24 Leap 8 Luck 16

Stun 45 SD 18 Hits 45 Rec 17 Res 21

Complications

Delusion: Thinks he's a God (15)

Sadism (10)

Paranoia: Everyone wants a piece of him (5)

Obsessed: Christmas (15)

Stubborn (5)

Public Figure (10)

Sense of duty: Children's happiness (15)

Vow: Toys delivered by morning (15)

Dependants: Elves (10)

Talents

Acute Senses: Hearing/Smell/Sight/Taste (all level2)

Animal Empathy

Combat Sense (level 3)

Direction Sense

Double Jointed

Eidetic Memory

High Pain Threshold

Intuition

Longevity

Perks

Renown 9

Wealth 10

Skills

Perception 4

Concentration 5

Education 2

Persuasion 2

Athletics 3

Teaching 2

Local Expert: North Pole 2

Hand-To-Hand 4

Evasion 5

Marksmanship 3

Gunnery 3

Sorcery 5

Surveillance 3

Pilot Sleigh 5

Climbing 5

Contortionist 5

Stealth 5

Bribery 3

Conversation 5

Interrogation 3

Leadership 5

Trading 3

Lock Picking 5

Toy Making: Mechanics 5

Security Systems 5

Disguise 3

Oratory 5

Business 5

Espionage 3

Language 3

Survival 5

Nicholas "The Mad" is the 74th in the line of the Santa Claus name. Each Santa throughout time has left his position by either retiring or being killed in the line of duty. The current Claus was a notorious CIA assassin during the cold war with the Soviets who "accidentally" took out the previous Santa during the

latter years of the Reagan administration. Nicholas has earned the name "Crusher" from his fellow elves and gun Moll "Mrs. Kringle" due to the iron handed method he uses to run the North Pole, and the cold tough as nails way his keeps control over the other holidays. Nicholas being paranoid that assassin groups and Jyhads are waiting in the shadows to take him out, has fitted his sleigh with state of the art firepower and has train a special forces from amongst his elves to take care of any who would "get in his way."

Happy Holidays! And may all your gaming this month be Cinematic.

Kris Kringle

Twas the night before Christmas and all though the land

Roamed a pack of assassins with weapons in hand.

There was one thing they wanted, and it sure was not toys

To take out Kris Kringle, was the spark of their joy.

They loaded their Uzi's, wore HUD's on their heads

Only one goal this evening was to make sure Santa was dead.

They were given loads of money, and had state of the art tech

These men were open for business, ready to give the Jolly one heck.

All heard the stories and everyone true

That Kringle was a terror, wherever he flew

He extorted peoples money and collected their cash

And for those who would resist, their skullcaps he would bash.

The time had now come, the assassins hiding in snow

Waiting for their jolly red target, and his reindeer to go

When over the hill a loud noise brings on fear

As Santa and his blood thirsty minions soon will appear

A huge red hulking brute, brandishing pistol so quick

They knew in a moment it must be St. Nick

His black armored sled with cannons it clattered
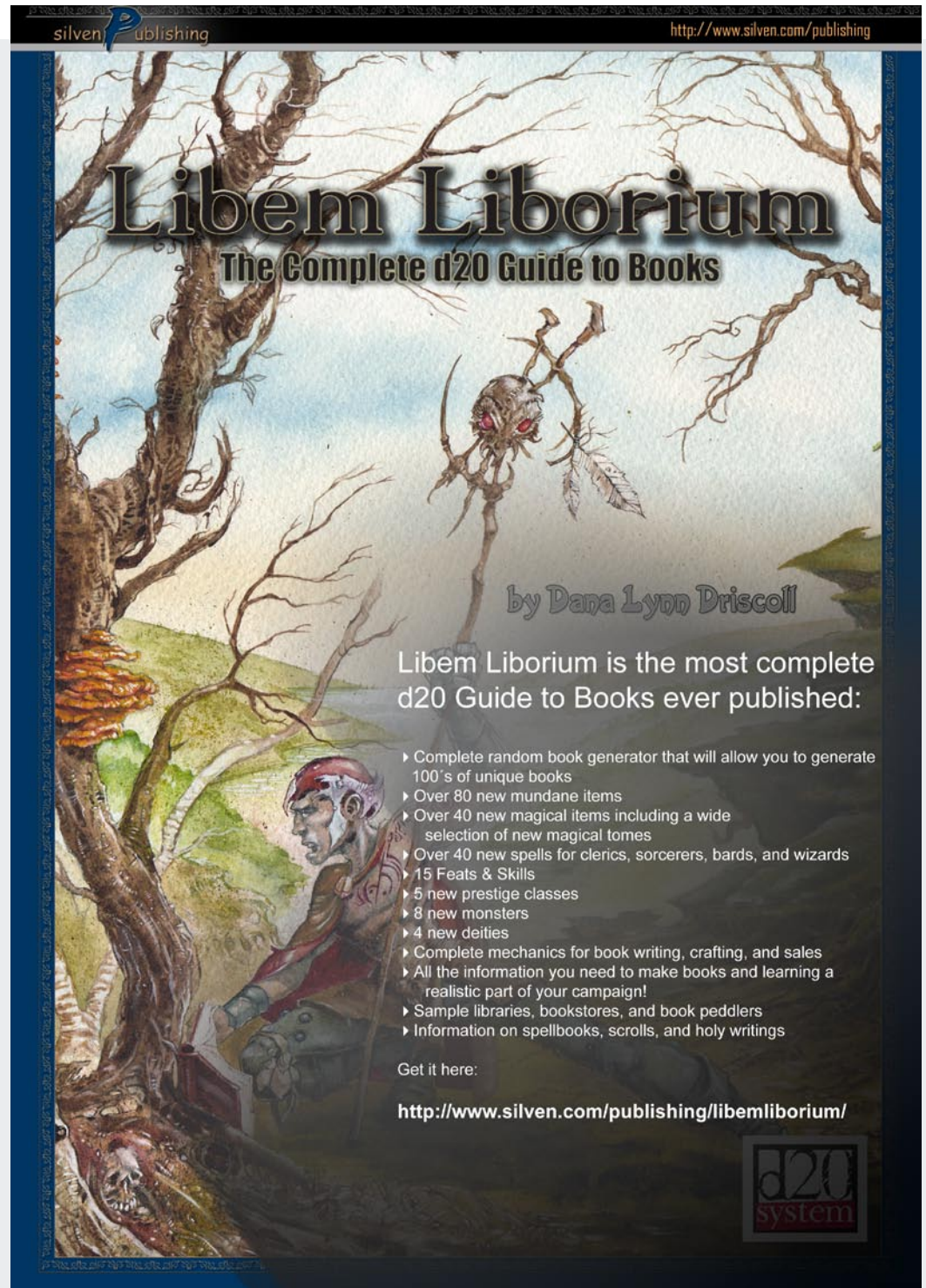
And with heat seeking missiles, it made the men scatter.

"Now, BASHER! now, GASHER! now, TRASHER and KILLER!

On, ROCKY! on CHICO! on, FINGERS and CHILLER!
Elves load my weapons! to the top of the wall!
Now Lock and Load! Lock and Load! Blow away all!"

About the Author

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

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by Sean Holland

Through the Lens of History: Using History for Better Gaming

Vision 14: "You can't get there from here"

Maps in the West from the Ancient World to the Middle Ages

Maps are more than ways to show how to get from place to place; they are tools to help us understand the world. Ancient Greek maps placed the Oracle at Delphi at the center of the world, and medieval European maps made Jerusalem the central point. Both illustrate important aspects of how these cultures viewed the world and their place in it.

Part I - The History

The oldest known map dates to between 6,300 and 6,100 BCE in Çatal Höyük (a prehistoric site in Anatolia, Turkey). It outlines a town plan showing some eighty buildings with a volcano (possibly erupting) in the background. There are fragmentary maps from Egypt and the Fertile Crescent region dating back to 2,300 BCE. Maps started becoming more common after 600 BCE, with surviving plans on papyrus from Egypt and molded clay tablets from Assyria and Babylon. It is about this time that the Greeks began to turn their creativity to maps.

We are told, by Strabo, writing around 10 BCE, that the first world map was compiled by Anaximander in the early sixth century BCE. This was followed soon afterwards by a treatise on geography by Hecataeus that showed the world as a disc. Both of these philosophers were of the school of thought that accepted the Homeric theory of a disc-shaped world encircled by the great river Okeanus with Delphi and the Aegean at the center of the habitable world. The

Pythagorean theory of a spherical world, formulated shortly thereafter, was taken up by Plato, Herodotus and Aristotle, and gradually won acceptance throughout the Hellenic world.

The greatest collection of information on maps and geography was Strabo's 17-volume *Geographica* which summarized the study of geography up until that point (fortunately for historians, as most of the sources he drew upon did not survive but at least Strabo's references remain). Strabo's work -as well as his miscalculation of the circumference of the world- was later used by Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek mathematician, astronomer and geographer, to write his *Geographia* (in a mere eight volumes) in 150 AD. Ptolemy's book was, it is said, illustrated with a world map, 26 regional maps and a multitude of smaller maps, none of which have survived, though the book itself has (and some historians are unsure if the maps existed at all). While Ptolemy's work was written at the height of Roman Imperial power it seem to have little or no contact with Roman mapping practices which were concerned with practical rather than scientific matters.

The earliest recorded Roman survey map dates to 167-164 BCE. The Romans seem to have preferred square or rectangular maps which suited the Roman fashion of placing a large map on the wall of a temple or colonnade. For the Roman, maps were practical tools for showing land ownership and planning buildings. The Roman developed many tools to assist in accurate surveying as new colonies needed to be divided quickly, properly and legally. Surveyors were needed to plan the roads, cities and fortifications that the Roman world depended on.

Around 10 BCE, *Orbis Terrarum* (Survey of the World), begun by Vipsanius Agrippa, son-in-law of the Emperor Augustus, was finished under Augustus' direction two years after Agrippa's death. The map, which does not survive, is believed to have shown the known world of the Romans. It covered a wall of a portico in Rome named after Agrippa. The map was annotated so that anyone planning to travel could further investigate his or her route. Sadly, none of this survives except as referenced by other authors.

The Romans used maps in an attempt to impose order and control on the lands they conquered. One of the forms of maps used was the itinerary map which was organized in a linear fashion, noting distances between cities with descriptions of the main geographic features. Entirely a tool to guide travelers on their way from one place to another, the itinerary map survived well into the Middle Ages, especially as a guide for pilgrims.

The Greeks, and later, Romans, often traveled by sea. Records of these journeys were called *periploi* (from *peroplus*, a sailing around or coastal voyage). These recorded the coastlines and landmarks, gave rough estimations of distances and suggested routes. One such work *Ora Maritima* ('sea-shore') , written in verse, by Senator Rufus Festus Avienius in the 4th century CE, details his travels from Massilia (Marseilles, France) to Gades (Cadiz, Spain). Avienius' record is of particular interest as the coast

west of Marseilles has changed drastically since ancient times. Some *periploi* included detailed trading information, what to trade, what to trade for and (in some cases) what gifts to give to the local ruler.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, much of the technology of mapmaking was lost. Some knowledge of map making methods remained available in the Byzantine Empire, but even there skills declined. In Byzantium, in the fifth century CE, Cosmas Indicopleustes, a widely traveled Alexandrian merchant and later convert to Christianity, was a believer in a flat world with the heavens above. Cosmas argued for such a view of the world, incorporating both Greek and Old Testament elements, and expounded on such views through his written works such as the *Christian Topography*, in twelve volumes (his works on geography and astronomy are lost).

Elsewhere in Christendom, the view of the Earth as flat returned to vogue with the so called T-O maps, these showed the world as a disc with a T the division between the three continents of the ancient world, Africa, Europe and (western) Asia, and the O describing the surrounding ocean. Jerusalem is usually, but not always, at the center of these maps. The first T-O maps appear circa 700 CE and they quickly became common throughout Western Christendom.

While large-scale cartography suffered from the loss of education and access to the works of the Greek and Roman writers, the practical use of maps for planning, continued as is evidenced by such work as the precisely drawn plans for the monastery of St Gall (St Gallen) in Switzerland. Drafted between 816-23 CE and placed on a grid with a scale of 2.5 Carolingian feet per square, the St Gall plan shows that not all Roman knowledge was lost and that practical mapping continued to be used.

It was not until after the rediscovery of lost Greek and Roman works during the Renaissance that European scientists, explorers and map makers discovered the next set of conceptual tools needed to advance into a more scientific age of cartography. But that is a story for another time.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

Maps have always had an intrinsic value beyond what they mapped. They show a part of the world that you can hold in your hand (or at least touch.) They show you much more than you can see by just looking out over the land. With maps you can see what lies beyond the next hill or where the river goes. But, of course, maps are not always accurate . . .

Maps are valuable; they can help you locate what you need, be it a lost city or the right place to trade for emeralds. Maps can define ownership, borders and political alignments. All of which can be useful, especially if your country is in a war. Border incidents can be so nasty.

The classic use of maps in gaming is the treasure map. But the territory that a map covers can change considerably over time (especially following cataclysmic events). An itinerary map would be the perfect choice for such a plot, as the characters would have to figure out what has charged at each stage and which way they have to go to get to the next part of the map.

Map can be politically valuable, as they may show claims and borders as they were originally fixed. For example, the original map showing the border between two aristocratic estates (or two nations) is needed to settle a land dispute that is near to spilling over into violence. Unfortunately, the map is in a distant monastery archive and must be retrieved before things go too far.

Or a map might show the way to an abandoned mine, lost because of shifting trade patterns or the threat of war. Maps of this sort might be used as the bait for

a classic confidence game. ("My grandfather used to work in the mine before the territory was overrun by the Duke's men. But he left me a map showing the way there.").

About the Author
Melissa Piper is an artist, writer, and computer programmer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She enjoys creating webcomics and websites in her spare time, in addition to role-playing. Melissa got her first taste of role-playing from Baldur's Gate, and she has been hooked ever since. In fact, she praises Baldur's Gate as her main influence in her choice to major in computer science in college. She would someday like to pursue a career in game programming and development so that she can produce and manufacture her own RPGs.

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by Melissa Piper

Modern Gaming: Cartography 101

Hello and welcome to the December edition of the *Silven Trumpeter's* Modern Gaming column! As regular readers know, I typically use this space to discuss various elements of role-playing games (RPGs) set in modern or futuristic environments. However, since this is a special map edition of the *Trumpeter*, I would like to take a break from the norm and talk about RPG cartography. Even though this will be a general discussion, you can definitely adapt all of this information to any modern or futuristic environment.

Gaming and Cartography: A History

If you are a long-time gamer, then you have surely noticed that the practice of RPG cartography has come a long way since its birth with the original *Dungeons & Dragons* game. In those days, making a home-brewed map usually required nothing more than a few sheets of graphing paper, a pencil, a ruler, and an idea. Dungeon Masters (DMs) spent hours sketching the outlines of a town or dungeon onto several sheets of graphing paper, and after taping each sheet to the next, the DM had a fully-playable establishment or area.

Over the years, however, technology has rapidly evolved. Three-dimensional computer and console RPGs hit the market, and gamers were immersed in new worlds like never before. Of course, as technology expanded and evolved, gamers and publishers alike discovered the new levels that they could take their gaming to. Gamers came to expect more from their role-playing experiences as technology raised the bar for gaming standards. It stands to follow, then, that everyone came to expect more from maps as well.

As computer graphics improved, new methods of RPG cartography were developed. Instead of merely sketching an outline on graphing paper, DMs discovered that they could now develop their maps with the aid of a computer, reducing the amount of time required to generate simple maps while increasing the complexity and detail of fully-rendered maps. Publishers also jumped on this newfound cartography tool, and maps became eye-catching images with greater detail than ever before. Gamers now could actually see each blade of grass surrounding the local farm and each shingle on a peasant's roof. These maps were realistic, and gamers enjoyed their appearance as much as their usefulness. In fact, these new maps became a statement in art as well as a useful DM tool.

The field of RPG map-making has practically become a field all its own, with professional artists specializing in cartography and the creation of visual environments. Publishers are constantly seeking great artists to develop maps that rival those of their competitors. The chore has become a little easier, however, as there are several mapmaking programs now available specifically for generating RPG maps. These programs usually present the cartographer with the basic elements of any good environment, such as trees, grass, rivers, and houses. However, the room that such programs allow for the development of varied maps is limited, since the designer only has a few choices when it comes to the type of house he can place or the type of tree he can plant. As a graduate in the field of computer science, I have come to learn both the possibilities and limitations of computer software. While I'm sure that the developers behind cartography software would love to

include more options, they must make a compromise between options and the size of the software. Simply put, more options equal greater software size and a slower-running program.

Most publishers want their maps to stand out and draw attention to their products, so it is likely that publishers will always seek the talents of individual artists and designers when they need a beautiful new map. Unlike a computer program that can store only a limited amount of textures and structures, artists have no limits and will continuously keep variety alive.

I speak of this from my own experiences. Although I have not been an RPG cartographer for an extended period of time, I have done a few maps for small publishers. Currently, I am working with an RPG company on several town maps, each of which must reflect the town's environment and atmosphere. For instance, I was asked to generate a map of a town that was constantly pounded by torrential rains, but stays on the drier side thanks to the lush shrubbery and vegetation that shields it. Keeping all of this in mind, I created an environment that was dark and full of plant life around the town's outer edges, but was dry within. I did all of this even before I designed the town itself! This is why I say that as long as the standard of quality for cartography is high, publishers will need individual artists. They will want to give their settings personality, and software generally lacks the ability to add these unique touches.

Cartography Tips for Freelancers

Perhaps you are an artist looking to get a start in the field of RPG cartography, and you are wondering if all of my ramblings will give you any hint on how to get your start. Well, I am by no means an expert, but there are a few basic tips that I can share with you before you begin searching all over the Internet for the answers.

Building Confidence

First of all, know that you will face *a lot* of competition in your endeavors. I cannot stress the words "a lot" enough, as there are so many freelancers in the field that it will make your head spin. Whether these freelancers are trying to make a living off of their hobby or are just making a few extra bucks on the side, all of them are your competition, and all of them want the same opportunity to create that you do. Of course, if you are looking to do some volunteer cartography to get your name out there, the competition is lessened, but there are still plenty of beginning freelancers also willing to volunteer their time.

Also know that all of the work you do at the beginning of your search will be unpaid. You must first develop examples of your work that you can demonstrate to potential employers. Few, if any, publishers will hire you to create a map if they do not have a strong idea of where your skills and abilities lie.

Building a Computer-Generated Map

The first step towards developing maps professionally is to create maps for yourself to the best of your abilities. Not only should you plan the map's entire layout on paper first (use a sheet of graphing paper in order to keep everything proportioned correctly), but you should also create your final, professional version in a graphics program that gives you the ability to measure your layout on screen. I always use Adobe Photoshop to create my maps because it comes with a built-in ruler, and I believe it is the best graphics program out there for adding details. Some artists can do some great things with Microsoft Paint as well, but I never had much luck with that program.

Whatever graphics program you use, the main point you must remember when beginning the computer-generated version of your map is that it should be an appropriate length, width, and dots-per-inch (dpi) resolution. I typically create my maps at 11"x8.5", landscape orientation, at 300 dpi. This size ensures that the width and length of the map will consume an entire printed page, and 300dpi ensures that the map is of printable quality (anything below 300dpi will not have a crisp appearance on the printout). The file size will be *very* large, but following these guidelines is a great way to develop a professional document.

Once your file size is set, it is time to start creating. I cannot help you with the intricacies of designing your map, as this is where your skills as an artist and proficiency with your graphics program come into play. I can suggest, however, that you create your gridlines first and foremost. They may distract you during the creation process, but this is the best way to assure that all objects are proportioned correctly. If you are using Photoshop as your cartography program, you can use the rulers to measure the space between the gridlines. Pick a unit that suits the map well. For instance, if I am creating a map with fewer, larger structures, I may measure each block to be 1"x1". For larger towns, I may use 1/2"x1/2" squares. Use the map that you created on paper as a guide, and estimate the best ratio for your project. As another note for Photoshop users, this program includes a feature called "layers," which allows you to keep each object you add to the document separate from the others. I highly suggest containing all of the gridlines to one layer (naming the layer "Grid" will make things much easier). Not only does this assure that you will not destroy the gridlines during the rest of the creation process, but you can also "hide" the entire grid by making the Grid layer invisible. This is very handy for those of us who are distracted by the gridlines, but need them as a reference point. If you need help creating any other elements of your map, you will likely find tutorials on the Internet that will answer your questions. After all, there are many other artists out there who have run into the same problems that you are experiencing, and most are more than happy to share their solutions.

Keep all of the elements of a good RPG map in mind as you create. Not only should everything be proportioned correctly, but there should also be a title, unit of measurement (squares-to-feet, for example), and some sort of key. I usually create the key separately from the map, but you may want to number each building or other significant feature on the map so that it corresponds with the key.

After you have added the finishing touches, it is time to save the map in a format that is easily viewed on the Internet (that is where you will be uploading your map; more on this later). I cannot stress enough that you should save your map as a JPG, since it is the image format that will retain all of your details while keeping the file at a manageable size. Other formats, such as PNG and TIFF, tend to inflate the file size and may not display properly on all browsers. GIFs result in a smaller file size, but the colors tend to become pixilated and distorted, drastically reducing the quality of your map. JPG is a wonderful compromise, and it is one of the most common file types used on the Internet.

Building a Portfolio

Now that you have a finished map that you are satisfied with, it is time to build a portfolio (if you do not already have one). Although you can email your sample map directly to a publisher, I do not suggest doing so. After all, your image file will likely be very large, and not many people appreciate finding large files in their inboxes. When publishers send out open calls, they often request to see items in your portfolio, so it is always best to have one set up. Although this sounds like a daunting task, the marvels of modern Internet technology make portfolio building an easy process. You will find that there are several free websites that exist for the sole purpose of hosting portfolios. Personally, I recommend DeviantArt (http://www.deviantart.com). It allows you to upload an unlimited number of portfolio pieces for free, and it

also includes a built-in comment system where others can comment on your work and offer helpful advice. You can also build your own portfolio website if you are proficient in HTML, but I do not recommend using a webserver that generates pop-up ads. After all, I'm sure that you don't like having to close distracting pop-up ads, and neither will publishers. These ads give publishers a negative impression of your website, and may affect your chances for employment. Banner ads are not quite as distracting, as they typically do not interfere with viewing. Upload the best of your cartography projects to your portfolio, and soon you will have a solid platform as you search for employment.

Building an Interest

Even with a good portfolio, finding a publisher that wants to publish your work will prove frustrating. If you wait until a publisher decides to post an open call for cartographers, you may find yourself waiting longer than you expected. I suggest taking some time and searching for the websites of small RPG publishers and reviewing their submission guidelines. I say "small publishers" because the big guys like Wizards of the Coast are unlikely to give a beginning cartographer a chance. This is mainly because they already have experienced cartographers on their teams. Publishers that are just starting out likely need some additional talent, and are more likely to give newcomers a chance. It also helps to interact with other freelancers and find out which publishers are trustworthy. All too often, there are publishers that contract work from eager freelancers, but never hold up their end of the deal. I suggest recording the names, URLs, and email addresses of publishers that you would like to work with and taking the time to email each of them individually with a link to your portfolio. *Never* send a mass email to publishers, as this appears very unprofessional and may even cause your email to be marked as spam on some servers. It never hurts to send publishers a link to your portfolio, even if they do not presently have any open calls. If a publisher finds herself in need of a cartographer for her next project and she has your portfolio on record, she may just offer you the job before anyone else!

As mentioned earlier, the RPG industry is extremely competitive. It requires plenty of work and dedication in order to become a published cartographer, let alone a renowned one, but it is possible. If you have the talent and the dedication, someone will surely give you an opportunity!

Cartography for the Rest of Us

If you are not an aspiring freelance cartographer, then you might be a DM looking to make better maps. If you are just planning on making a map to use at your next weekend session, you can obviously follow the same procedures mentioned above on generating a map in a graphics program. Print the map, and *voila*, you have your playable map. But if you are running a play-by-post session and are in need of a map, the entire cartography situation becomes more complex. Not only must you generate a map, but you must also upload it to an area where all of your players can view and use it. Obviously, you would use the Internet to accomplish this task, but there are some methods you can use to make this task as easy on your players and yourself as possible.

The easiest way to use a map in a play-by-post campaign is to embed the image into one of your posts. In order to achieve this, however, you must first upload the image to a web server that permits "direct linking." Basically, a server that allows for direct linking allows you to upload an image to the server, copy the URL of that image once it has been uploaded, and paste the URL into your forum post. The image will then be displayed in the body of the post. Not all servers allow this, however, as direct linking steals bandwidth from the server that the original image was uploaded to (which is often considered to be a form of Internet theft if used in the wrong context). Free web site hosts, such as Geocities, appear to be a great place to upload and store your maps at first glance, but this is not the case. Most free hosts do not permit direct linking and replace the image with the infamous red "X" in Internet Explorer.

But don't fret. There is a plethora of free image-hosting websites that exist specifically for this purpose, most of which can be found by performing a simple search on any search engine. One notable image-hosting site that I discovered was Image Shack (http://www.imageshack.us), which does not even require you to register to upload an image. Be warned, however, that some of these sites will only host your images for a limited amount of time, so do your research before choosing a site.

If you have generated a map that you would like to use in your campaign, there are some different guidelines from that of the freelancer's that you may want to consider before uploading. Instead of creating an 8.5" x 11" map at 300dpi, consider making the map much smaller. After all, you do not want to post a map that will take too long to load or will consume more than the width of the screen. Doing so will detract from the convenience that you were striving for in the first place! Instead, consider making the map smaller than the width of the screen (maximum of 600 pixels in width is a good standard) and 72 dpi, which is the normal resolution for viewing. At this size, the map should download within a reasonable amount of time for a 56K modem user and will not consume an overlarge portion of the screen.

When you are running a play-by-post game with a static map, one concern is how to track character movements. If you develop your map in a program such as Photoshop, this does not pose much of a problem. Using the layers technique that I mentioned earlier, you can indicate each character with a simple colored circle (elaborate illustrations of each character are not necessary unless you want your map to be a true art statement!). Each of these character circles can be moved or eliminated as the action changes. When I use this method and the next round begins, I simply open my original map file, change the positions of the circles to reflect those of the characters, and edit my post that contained the original map. Although some DMs may find this to be a tedious process, I prefer it since it allows me to reflect the changes during game play without creating a new post each time a new round begins.

Depending on where your game is hosted, the code used to post the image will differ. While some servers may use standard HTML, others, especially message boards, use UBB. Research which code set your server uses, then learn how to use it. Servers using UBB often include the guidelines somewhere on the website, while HTML tutorials can be found all over the Internet.

Conclusion

While this discussion may have proven to be vastly different from what I usually cover, I hope you enjoyed it nonetheless. Cartography is a necessary part of most role-playing games, but it does not have to be a necessary evil. Maps may be more detailed and more eye-catching than ever before, but the basic principles behind them are still there: maps exist so that DMs and players can follow the game better, make the most out of their role-playing experience, and make the game fun. After all, isn't having fun the reason why we are gamers in the first place? So, be sure to make the most out of your maps. When the campaign is over and your players are still talking about the game, you will be glad that you did.

News from Silven Publishing

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[2004-11-24]

Coming throughout 2005 and 2006 is a series of adventures set in Mitarra. The first book *Mitarra - The Agenda of Itherelle: Centipedes* will introduce players into the adventure plot that will be woven through at least 20 adventures published throughout 2005 and 2006. Each book will also contain additional setting information for DMs to use to enhance their game and integrate the area of Mitarra into their own game worlds.

More: http://www.silven.com/publishing/productlines.asp?case=showproduct&id=20

[2004-11-24]

Coming in early Spring 2005 is *Fifty New Ways to Blow Things Up: Starlanko the Magnificent's Big Book of Evocations*. The first in a series of books delving deep into spells and spellcasting and empowering players of mage and sorceror classes with some exciting new strategies and spells.

More: http://www.silven.com/publishing/productlines.asp?case=showproduct&id=19

[2004-11-24]

Coming in early Spring 2005 is the most comprehensive d20 book on *Secret Societies* for the RPG industry. Soon to be available in PDF format, its packed with everything you will need to create and integrate powerful secret societies into your gameworld.

More: http://www.silven.com/publishing/productlines.asp?case=showproduct&id=18

by Rodney Lucas

Bits of Darkness : Dungeons

About: 40 pages, PDF format
Price: $4.95
Authors: Daniel Brakhage, Mark Potter, Vicki Potter, Randy Eliason
Publisher: Tabletop Adventures, LLC
Review date: 11/29/2004

Reviewer's Bias: As a DM I am always looking for ways to make my job easier and my adventures more exciting. I received a review copy of this product. This is not a playtest review.

From the Introduction

Welcome to Tabletop Adventures' line of products for the Harried Game Master. These Shards and Bits are created for your convenience, as a time-saving but game-enhancing device.

A DM's job is never done, and this product aims to make that job a little easier. When you develop a dungeon you don't always have time to fill in every little area. Then when game time comes you're stuck trying to come up with a description for that hallway or room that you left empty. And unfortunately, if you're an ambitious DM, you may create many more dungeon rooms than you have time to even fill with some nice "flavor" text. This supplement contains Shards and Bits to help with that dilemma. Bits are little dungeon descriptions that are designed to be "thrown" in anywhere to provide flavor and add a little excitement to areas of a dungeon that may otherwise be a bit dull. Shards are longer descriptions, meant to be selected rather than randomly added. Both the Bits and the Shards include not only "colorful" text

for a room, hallway, or area, but also d20 specific details for how to handle many of the areas. The real question about this product is whether or not the Shards and Bits work well.

Part One: Dungeon Shards

This first section of *Bits of Darkness* focuses on dungeon descriptions meant to help the DM fill in empty spots in his dungeon. The entries here range from detailed descriptions of a dungeon room to particular information about a hallway the characters may be traversing. The descriptions contain appropriate d20 stats for any checks that may need to be made, like trying to open a door that is barred from the other side or information about creatures that may inhabit the area being described. These Dungeon Shards are well-developed and provide some good ideas for rooms and other dungeon areas, but there are far too few of them. The supplement only gives the busy DM six of these Shards to choose from, and that really leaves you with the feeling that there should have been many more included. Never fear however, there's plenty more here to add to your arsenal of creative ideas.

Part Two: Dungeon Bits

The next section of *Bits of Darkness* makes up for the somewhat weak beginning by providing the DM with 100 short dungeon area descriptions. These "flavor text" descriptions are divided into sections for Sights, Sounds, Scents, and Stuff, the latter being a catch-all for descriptions that don't fit well into one of the first three sections. The entire purpose here is to provide

interesting descriptions for areas that you may not have fully developed when creating your dungeon. Anything from spotting rats that are hanging around a decomposing body to hearing screams off in the distance can be found in this listing. Once again, the proper d20 stats are included here, such as the DC (Difficulty Class) required to determine whether the characters stir up thick dust that covers a floor (which may cause irritation and coughing, affecting concentration), or the random statements that a party of adventurers may hear being whispered in the distant darkness of an unexplored corridor. A creative DM could easily use any one of these 100 bits to enhance the adventure, or even create a minor sub-plot for the players to become engulfed in for a time. The authors took the time to include at the back of this product the Dungeon Bits, formatted for printing on card stock so that you can make flash cards that can be shuffled and used randomly as you run your adventure. This is a nice touch for the most

extensive part of *Bits of Darkness*, and can add to the usefulness of the product. You can easily hide the cards behind your DM screen so that players won't even know that you're getting ideas from a published supplement.

Part Three: Catacombs

The third section of this supplement contains some very well-developed area descriptions pertaining to catacombs. Like the Dungeon Shards section, the text here is well-written but there just isn't enough of it. These chunks of text help to add real "flavor" to your game, and even give the inventive DM ideas for furthering the adventure. However, the authors only provide us with eight catacomb area descriptions. Considering that the entire book is only forty pages long, the authors could have easily taken the time to supply the DM with at least twenty or thirty Catacomb descriptions. This would have greatly increased the longevity of this product as a DM's tool for his ever-changing campaign.

Part Four: Bits of Trouble

The fourth part of *Bits of Darkness* provides the DM with descriptions designed to give the characters a little bit of trouble; areas that have the ability to drain the magic from enchanted items, teleport characters to different locations, and even permanently change the sex of an adventurer are well-crafted in this section. Once again, these are very well-written ideas that have potential, but with only six descriptions included, you are left feeling a bit slighted. However, if even one of these ideas helps you to further the adventure for your players, the product has at least done its job, even if only for a short time (in the life of your campaign).

Art

The artwork presented in *Bits of Darkness* is well done. The full-color cover art by Gillian Pearce is above average and catches the eye. The black-and-white interior art by Jesus and Javier Carmona is very well done and appropriately conveys the feel of dungeon interiors. Don't expect the quality of the masters in this supplement, but rest assured that if the art within a book is an important factor for you, what lies within will not disappoint. However, like most of the sections of this book, there isn't as much artwork as I would have liked to have seen, especially considering the quality of the work. And since this supplement is available only as a PDF, your ability to enjoy the art is defined by the quality of your printer. Looking at the art on a computer screen isn't an optimal experience. No matter how great your computer system may be, it gets tiring looking at pictures on the screen. But if you have a nice printer you will definitely want to print out the entire PDF so you can enjoy not only the supplement, but also the art as well.

Conclusion: Shards and Bits - Do They Work?

With a total of 120 ideas, this product, meant for use exclusively by the DM, delivers some great adventuring ideas. The supplement is well-organized and even includes an index that groups the text descriptions by type so you can easily find what you are looking for (types include hallways, rooms, stairs, mood setters, etc.). The art included is very nicely done, though minimal. This gaming aid is for the DM who is looking to add a bit of flavor to the parts of his dungeon he didn't have time to elaborate on in detail. If you're searching for that type of help with your campaign you may want to look into getting *Bits of Darkness*: Dungeons. But if you're looking for a supplement that gives you more than just a bunch of bare-bones room and hallway descriptions you may want to look elsewhere. Regardless of your reasons for picking up this book, you must bear in mind that its potential as a supplement that you will use often,

or for very long, is minimal. I would have preferred the authors to take the time to come up with many more ideas, especially in the Dungeon Shards and Catacombs sections, and then pay more for the product (between $10 and $15). However, at the list price of under five bucks it's definitely worth the money you'll spend.

by Melissa Piper

Review: Slave Drivers

About: 24 pages, PDF, full color, $7.
Publisher: The Game Mechanics (2004)
Reviewed by: *Nick Mulherin*
Review date: *11/16/2004*

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product. Warning: This review contains spoilers.

From the Back Cover

"In the big city, people go missing all the time. Some victims still move among us, unable to ask for our help.

Slave Drivers is a stand-alone modern d20 System adventure that also serves as the introduction to the new Bronze Head Campaign. Written to include modern FX rules, additional material is included so that *Slave Drivers* can easily be modified to fit any style of modern campaign. Also included is the *Bronze Head Campaign Standards Document* for those who want to play *Slave Drivers* as an RPGA-sanctioned event.

Requires the use of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* and *Urban Arcana* campaign setting, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc."

Introduction

The first adventure in the Bronze Head Campaign from The Game Mechanics, *Slave Drivers* is designed for a group of four to six 3rd-level heroes in a *d20 Modern* campaign with FX. Returning to their home office, Department-7 or otherwise, after their latest adventure, the PCs are involved in a car crash, but something's wrong with the driver -- he's dead, and has been for a while.

Presentation

Slave Drivers is a 25-page PDF with a full-color cover and color borders for the interior. Clarence Harrison's cover art, depicting a happy girl with an umbrella getting out of the rain and into a zombie-driven taxi, is excellent. Aside from Harrison's clear skill, the art clearly presents a narrative, something which, given Wizards of the Coast's choice to use faux-book covers on their books, doesn't happen as much in gaming since the advent of 3rd edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. There is no other art, except for the map of the taxi yard. Drawn in black and white and using line art, the map is clean and neat. It could be used in a game exactly as it would print out.

The presentation of the product is excellent, with a clean, readable font and reasonable margins. The sections have been arranged in a clear and logical manner, and the reader can easily find optional material and design notes in a number of sidebars scattered throughout the adventure or in the appendices attached to the end of the adventure. In the course of my reading, only one typo jumped out at me ("one mechanics," p. 14), which is, given the flood of errors that can be found in many game products, commendable and worth noting.

The Adventure and GM Resources

The premise of the adventure is fairly simple: the PCs find out a zombie was driving the cab after an accident, investigate, and trace the zombie back to a Metro Cab facility in a rough part of town. This facility turns out to be a front for a large company, Ogdoad Research, jockeying for a position from which they can survive what they believe to be an imminent return to the Dark Ages. Fair enough; I think it's a cool, appealing premise, with a great hook. But how does it work out in the text?

More than anything else, the length of *Slave Drivers* really stood out to me. Coming in at 8 pages, it's very short, almost more of a Side Trek (from the old

Dungeon magazines) than a real, full-fledged adventure or module. In the end, it shouldn't take any more than one session. The actual content of the adventure, from the inciting incident (the accident and discovery of the zombies) to the climax (the showdown at the Metro Cab facility with Annet), is extremely well-detailed, but any meat or added substance will have to come from the GM side of things.

That said, there's a lot to like about the actual content of the adventure. For starters, situations often have notes for dealing with different approaches to the problem and reaching the climax can be accomplished any number of ways. On some level, this should be part of any adventure, but the execution of it here is excellent. Also, the author details the Metro Cab yard thoroughly, providing enough information to run it without becoming overwhelmed. An enterprising GM could easily drop the cab yard into his own campaign with just the detail provided here. Furthermore, I found the advice in the sidebar on locating security features at the facility to be really helpful, as it boils down to using a simple +2/-2 adjustment (if the characters take special precautions on something, award a +2 to the appropriate checks, and, presumably, the reverse if they don't). It's simple, elegant, and will speed up play immensely, a good thing for a modern game to be sure.

Stylistically, the adventure mostly deals with an investigation; groups full of combat junkies will probably be disappointed, as the version of Department-7 presented here (and in the Bronze Head Campaign) is far more low-key than the core rules and *Urban Arcana* have it being. Of course, it's not really a skill-based investigation, either. Most of the information the characters need can be found without having to resort to skill checks, which means it ultimately might be the most successful with groups interested in heavy role-play. Bashing in the door, killing everyone, and then taking names will result in a very short game that night and large amounts of

problems for the PCs with Department-7, assuming they survive. The last encounter, depending on the number of zombies that Annet Antczak has available to her, could be rather challenging for a party that hasn't bothered to be careful on their way into the facility.

As a side note, the very format of the adventure tends to discourage wanton violence, as there are no stat blocks within the text. Every monster and NPC is detailed in the appendices. Everyone, except Annet, that is, who they only detail on her initiative card.

For a major encounter, particularly with a possible recurring villain, the lack of a stat block bothered me a little bit. The initiative card is great for combat. The rest of the GM Resources appendices were outstanding, including stats for the NPCs and zombies, new rules (a magic item, a ritual, two feats reprinted from *Urban Arcana*, and notes on the make and nature of the Metro Cab taxis). After this, The Game Mechanics include some pre-generated characters, initiative cards for the pre-generated PCs, NPCs, and monsters (along with some blank cards in case the players want to create their own characters). There's also a neat little sidebar here that gives details on how to create flesh-eating zombies more reminiscent of the zombies in movies like *Day of the Dead* (I'm particularly thinking of the recent sequel, although you'd probably want faster zombies for that, too) by replacing their slam attack with a grapple/bite combination.

Bronze Head Campaign Standards, v.1.0

Although not part of the adventure proper, the Bronze Head Campaign Standards document is included with the adventure and bears some brief consideration. A 15-page PDF, the standards cover using *Slave Drivers* with the RPGA, designing characters, and other details on the campaign. Of more interest than the information on the RPGA and character generation, however, is the section including write-ups on the organizations and such in the campaign (as in Department-7, for

example). The nicest thing about this section is its ability to be used as the basis for a homebrew campaign setting in itself, particularly in conjunction with *Urban Arcana*.

Conclusion

In the end, *Slave Drivers* is an excellent short adventure that might be a little bit too short. It has top-notch detail, is well presented, and helps GMs deal with different scenarios, but at $7, gamers might find it a little too expensive for what they get. Simply put, I wanted more adventure than I got. On the up side, The Game Mechanics will be releasing a sequel called *Flight 23* that should build on the world created here, so folks looking for more material in the Bronze Head Campaign and more struggles with Ogdoad Research will get what they're looking for.

What is the OGL?

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Printing Tips

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The Silven Crossroads ezine page has a link to a zip file with a printer friendly version of this magazine. If you found this file in a zip file then look in that file for the printer friendly version. If you downloaded this PDF by itself go to http://www.silven.com/articles.asp?case=ezine for the zip file containing the printer friendly version.

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.

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