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## Editor's Note

Hello, and welcome to the 27th issue of the Silven Trumpeter!

Writing these letters is hard. I used to think it would be so neat to be able to have my own little mini-article every month, but after getting stumped on nearly every one I've ever written, I think I've changed my mind! In a hunt for direction, I once sat at my local bookstore and read the letters from the editor of dozens of magazines. Some editors wrote about life-changing experiences, while others gave a bland rehash of what appeared on the table of contents. But I didn't find anything that seemed even remotely appropriate or relevant to what we do here, so I was left on my own.

But I did find out something interesting!

On the fifth day of this month, Wizards of the Coast is sponsoring Worldwide D&D Game Day. Game stores around the world will be running adventures for veteran and unversed gamers alike, with the sole intention of letting everyone have a good time. If you're near a participating store – and a list of them can be found at <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/dnd/20050726x&page=2> – go on in and check it out! With new adventures released exclusively for this event, it should be a great chance to have a good game as well as to meet some new gamers.

Speaking of new gamers, we have some in this month's issue of the Trumpeter! I'd like everyone to meet Robert Adams, who has done plenty of behind-the-scenes work in the RPG industry and is taking a stab at the writing angle with us. We also have Anthony C. Hunter and Elizabeth Koprucki, both new fiction authors in the industry, but with very different styles and genres.

So enjoy the work from our new writers as well as those who've been with us for a while, and check out a Worldwide D&D Game if you're near one. And if you have anything you'd like to see me say here, drop me a line, will you?

Cheers!

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

# The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

## A HEARTLESS INTERROGATION

by Matthew J. Hanson

Starlanko the Magnificent, journeyman wizard and master salesman, had recently earned the privilege of being invited to dine at the house of Lady Verden, a wealthy elven aristocrat who lived in Avalos forest.

It had not turned out exactly as Starlanko would have hoped. In fact, the floor around him was now covered with shards of broken glass, most likely a result of the elite elven warriors who had just smashed through what had once been a spectacular portrait window.

"Leska Vail, you are under arrest," spoke the lead elven warrior. He had a weathered look about him, and wielded a sword in each hand. "Surrender peacefully, or we will have no choice but to use force."

Vox rose, and put her hands in the air. Starlanko had always known that Vox was not her real name. He had heard her referred to by the name of Leska Vail once before, and indeed now that he thought about it, the leader of the elven warriors was the same one he had encountered in the Dark Woods several months ago. If only Starlanko could remember his name. Leska Vail was not Vox's real name either. As near as Starlanko could tell, her real name was the name used by Vox's mother, Lady Verden.

"Bibly, darling, do you know what this all means?" Lady Verden asked, as she looked on in horror.

Vox smiled. There was a twinkle in her eye. Ever since Vox had returned to her mother's house, quite against Vox's will, Lady Verden had done nothing but berate Vox and her companions. Starlanko could easily understand why Vox had disappeared from home years ago, and why she now delighted in bringing embarrassment to her mother's home. "It means I'm saved," Vox replied. "They've come to put me in prison."

Vox strode over to the elven strike team. One of them tentatively approached Vox, and when it seemed she was not about to resist, placed a pair of manacles around her wrists.

Another of the elves, a young-looking elf clad only in the simplest of clothes and bearing no weapon, whispered something to the leader. Starlanko was sure he recognized this elf. His name was Terren, and they had been trapped together in an underground vault during the aforementioned incident in the Dark Woods. Evidently Terren remembered Starlanko as well, and the elven monk was able to jog his commander's memory.

The elven commander—Captain something, Starlanko knew he was Captain something. He thought it started with a vowel. E maybe?—whatever his name, his eyes focused on the wizard, who still sat calmly in his dinner chair. "Starlanko the Magnificent, isn't it?"

"At your service," Starlanko replied. "Funny us meeting like this."

"Extremely funny, I would say. Last time we met, you disavowed any willing collaboration with the suspect. Yet the next time I find her, I find you

### About the Author

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

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again in her presence."

"And you surmise that it is too improbable to be a coincidence," Starlanko said. "Of course you are quite correct. You see, as foolhardy as it seems, I have taken it upon myself to reform Leska Vail."

"Indeed? Are you a royal corrections officer, appointed by the Poet Prince?"

"No. I admit it was probably fool-hearted of me, but I cannot but hope to search even the darkest heart for a glimmer of light. Isn't that right, Funbane?"

"Quite so, master," replied Funbane, "for there is no soul that hath fallen so far that he cannot be regained."

"Oh." The commander shrugged. "Well if the sword says so, I suppose we should let the prisoner go of her own accord."

"Really?"

"No. She's going to stand trial in the royal court. And I am taking the rest of you with me for questioning."

"Of course," said Starlanko. "Anything I can do to be of assistance."

"Tell us in your own words, Mr. Starlanko, how did you first meet Leska Vail?" asked the elven interrogations officer. They had reached Avalos City, the capital of the elven realm. The elven commander, who Starlanko had deduced was named Ekrastrion, sat in the corner taking notes.

"It was on a robbery," replied Starlanko.

"You found each other to commit a crime."

"No, it was a coincidence, really. We happened to both be going for the same target. Robbery is not a method I normally approve of. Indeed, I think the right to the protection of property is paramount among our legal precedents. Sometimes, however, there are times when we need to bend the rules. I was able to convince the Androthian authorities, who had jurisdiction over the alleged area, that my actions were justified, so that really ought not to be a concern."

"And Leska Vail was also there to acquire the same items, for similar reasons?"

"Vox? No, of course not, she was there merely for gold and gems. We had quite a silly mix-up, really."

"Then when you realized she was committing criminal acts, you no doubt attempted to stop her?"

"Of course not. I was terrified of getting caught myself, I didn't dare take the risk."

"I see," said the interrogator. "Then why did you join with her after that?"

"I didn't," Starlanko replied. "At least not right away. Later on, you see, I was doing some dealings with the Church of Hadarus. Trying to buy some Life Insurance."

The interrogator raised his eyebrows upon hearing the words Life Insurance. "I've heard that can cost an arm and a leg."

"Yes, fortunately they weren't mine. They belonged to a deceased cleric of Hadarus, whose body had been desecrated. I thought I would need Vox's help in order to retrieve the items, so I sought her out."

"And then you began traveling together?"

"Yes."

"To commit more acts of larceny?"

"No, to reform her," Starlanko explained.

"Leska Vail is a hardened criminal. What hope can there be of her ever giving up her ways because she wants to benefit society?"

"She won't do it to benefit society, she'll do it to benefit herself. The first step is a bow she found. She's under the impression that is a *keen vorpal shortbow* that requires the wielder to be lawful. I have suspicions that it is something else."

"And how did she acquire this bow?"

"She stole it," Starlanko confirmed. "But that's not really the point. The point is, while I am helping her on her quest to become lawful, I am trying to point out many of the other benefits of being a law-abiding citizen, and to show her ways that she can use her talents in a manner that profits the general humanity, or elfity, and in doing so benefits herself."

At that moment a messenger entered the room, and handed something to Captain Ekrastrion. "It seems," he said, after gazing over the message, "that somebody would like to have some words with you. Follow me."

\*\*\*

Starlanko had never been to a royal palace before. Sure, he had seen many fine houses in his day. He hobnobbed with aristocrats, and was on a first name basis with the Duke of Lestanva, but this was a whole different level. Despite the manacles, despite the magic wards, despite the army of body guards ready to crush his skull at a moment's notice, Starlanko the Magnificent was honored to be in the sitting room of the royal palace of Dallius the Poet Prince, high monarch, and ruler of the elven nation of Avalos.

"It's quite the nice place they've got here," Starlanko said. Though Redreck grunted a noncommittal response, the comment mainly had been for Starlanko's own benefit. "Do you think he picks out the fabrics himself?" The wizard pondered.

Redreck had never been one for small talk, and Vox refused to speak while in captivity. Funbane had been taken away from Starlanko, as Funbane was still technically a sword, and despite the wizard's ineptitude at melee combat, swords were not generally things that prisoners were allowed to have.

The guards were the worst of the lot. Starlanko could not even get the corners of their mouths to twitch with the mirth of a repressed smile. So Starlanko sat in a comfortable chair, wearing uncomfortable restraints until the massive double doors of the sitting room swung open.

The thing that surprised Starlanko about the doors was not their size or their decoration, he had seen similar doors before, but the silence with which they opened. No creak and groan of wood against wood that he was so accustomed to. Not even the whisper of a paper door sliding. There was no sound, and if he had not been facing the doors to see it, he would have thought that Dallius had entered via the ethereal plane.

Dallius, Poet Prince, was dressed from head to toe in a suit of emerald green silk, over which



he wore a darker green cape lined with a white spotted fur. Both his ears were pieced with golden loops, and more rings adorned his fingers. A golden amulet set with a clear diamond hung from his neck, and around his head was a simple golden circlet.

Yet for all his finery, Starlanko could see there was something wrong with the Poet Prince. Starlanko had heard tales of the prince. All accounts made him to be the most charming of elves, full of life and hope, a man who could sway nations with his song. The elf Starlanko saw before him was not that man. His eyes were dead. They looked through Starlanko, not at him. His whole face seemed heavy, as though his cheeks might suddenly drag the prince to the ground.

The soldiers present all went to one knee when Dallius entered, and Starlanko joined them, as it seemed the proper thing to do. Every person in the room was on his knee, with the very noticeable exceptions of Dallius and Vox.

"Please rise," the prince said.

"I am honored, Your Highness," Starlanko responded.

"Do you know how difficult it is to be a prince?" Dallius asked. Starlanko assumed it was a rhetorical question, until the pause became uncomfortably long, and he was forced to answer.

"No, I do not, Your Highness."

"No. You wouldn't. Let me assure you, it is very difficult. There are wars, famines, and pestilences to deal with. Taxes, bureaucrats, and tedious aristocrats who think I have nothing better to do with my time than listen to their mind-numbing drivel. Do you think I have nothing to do with my time other than listen to their mind-numbing drivel?"

"You probably do."

"Yes, I do," said Dallius as a matter of fact. "The greatest annoyance about being royalty is that it makes one into a target. There are assassination attempts, kidnappings of my relatives, and of course thievery. It's the thief's greatest bragging right to have something stolen from a prince, be it his crown, his scepter, his great-great-great grandmother's burial socks, or his bow."

Starlanko snuck a quick glance at Vox to gauge her reaction, but she remained stone faced as ever.

"I have tried to deal with these thieves," the Poet Prince continued. "I have tried adding more guards, I have tried getting rid of all my material possessions—so they would have nothing to steal—I have even started using an ancient bow that could only be wielded by a person who is lawful. I figured, if a thief cannot use it, why would she steal it? Little did I suspect, she would commit a criminal act, and then try to become lawful so she could use her plunder. I must say there is a small part of me that is impressed. Leska Vail has to be the second greatest thief I have ever known."

"What do you mean *second* greatest?" Vox spat out.

"I mean there is one who is greater than you. She only stole one thing from me, but it is far more valuable than all the gold, all the magic, all the socks that you have ever pilfered."

"Yeah? And what's that?"

"She stole my heart."

"Oh please," Vox groaned.

Without blinking, Dallius the Poet Prince drew a dagger and held it by his neck. The guards flinched, about to leap in and stop him from slitting his own throat. There were magics powerful

enough to do such things. But Dallius meant no harm to his body. He cut downward, slicing through his glimmering shirt, and pulled it open on one side.

There, in his left breast, was a gaping hole. Starlanko could see the fabric of the shirt's back.

"I need you to get it back for me."

# The Silven Bestiary

by Kyle Thompson

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

This month's Silven Bestiary covers three monsters based on legends from Japan and Hawaii. Want a hyper-intelligent fox with illusion abilities? Covered. Want a person with a flower body or one made of leaves? Again, covered here. I personally think this is one of the neatest things that can be done in crafting new monsters, so I hope you enjoy.

## Kitsune

### Medium Magical Beast

**Hit Dice:** 14d10+31 (101 hp)

**Initiative:** +7 (+4 Improved Initiative, +3 Dex)

**Speed:** 50 ft. (10 squares)

**Armor Class:** 21 (+3 Dex, +8 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 18

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +14/+15

**Attack:** Bite +17 melee (1d6+1)

**Full Attack:** Bite +17 melee (1d6+1)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Breath weapon, possession, spell-like abilities, trip

**Special Qualities:** Alternate form, hoshi no tama, low-light vision

**Saves:** Fort +11, Ref +12, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 13, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 22, Wis 15, Cha 15

**Skills:** Bluff +19, Hide +20, Gather Information +19, Listen +19, Move Silently +20, Search +23, Sense Motive +19, Spot +19

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Run, Toughness, Weapon Finesse

**Environment:** Any temperate

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 13

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always chaotic good (Myobu) or always chaotic evil (Nogitsune)

**Advancement:** 15-20 HD (Medium)

**Level Adjustment:** -

*A fox-like creature approaches you. It has many tails flowing out behind it. Just by looking into its eyes, you can tell that it is highly intelligent. Suddenly, the world around you starts to look strange and out of the ordinary, and the fox-like creature's mouth begins to glow with the heat of flame.*

Kitsune originated in Japanese legends. It is said that these highly intelligent foxes can live for a very long time and that they gain one tail for every hundred years they live, up to a maximum of nine. When a kitsune has all nine of its tails, its fur turns silver, white or gold.

## About the Author:

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

Kitsune are natural born tricksters.

There are two types of kitsune, but use the same stats for both. The only exception is in the alignment. Myobu are kind and generally only play light-hearted tricks on those that are in the mood, while nogitsune are malevolent and enjoy picking on the weak and the poor in harmful ways.

Kitsune can telepathically speak to anyone within 60 feet. They understand verbal common as well, but do not speak in such ways.

## COMBAT

Myobu generally avoid combat because they are often liked by the good-aligned bipedal creatures they live near. As such, they reside in relative peace with these people, only playing good-humored tricks on them. Myobu have been known to occasionally protect those they live nearby, relying on an attitude of 'only I can pick on these people.'

Nogitsune, on the other hand, will play mean and harmful (and even fatal) tricks on the people they live near. They do not directly initiate combat, but

often provoke it. If faced with combat, they only fight to the point where they realize they won't win (if the battle even reaches that point).

In combat, a kitsune will generally take full advantage of its breath weapon and spell-like abilities. They tend to avoid direct melee. If someone were to try to enslave or command a kitsune by forcefully taking its hoshi no tama, a kitsune will fight to the death.

**Alternate Form (Su):** A kitsune's natural form is that of a fox with many tails. It also has a second form. In its second form, a kitsune is a medium size humanoid that looks exactly like a human of the same gender as the kitsune except that its tails still show. In its alternate form, a kitsune has the same statistics and abilities that it has in its normal form. The only exception is that in its alternate form it is able to wield all simple and martial weapons.

Kitsune often will use this form and become one with society, occasionally forming romantic relationships with other humans. They wear baggy clothes so as to hide their tails. If they are ever found out, most townsfolk will frown upon such attempted relationships and force the kitsune away, although the human lovers may still meet with them in secret.

A kitsune's alternate form may not be dispelled, but can be discovered with a *true seeing* spell. Switching forms is a standard action that does provoke an attack of opportunity.

**Breath Weapon (Su):** 50-foot cone of fire once every 1d4 rounds, damage 8d10 fire, Reflex DC 19 half.

**Hoshi no Tama (Su):** Every kitsune possesses a hoshi no tama (literally 'star ball' in Japanese). The hoshi no tama is a spherical object that resembles a star. They are generally a foot in diameter and are of extreme value to the kitsune. Any kitsune that is more than five miles away from its hoshi no tama loses its breath weapon, spell-like abilities and the ability to possess others.

If summoned (as per a *summon monster IX*), there is a twenty percent chance that the kitsune will possess its hoshi no tama at the time. A kitsune will instantly attack anyone who tries to forcibly take its hoshi no tama. It is rarely given as a gift, but if a hoshi no tama is acquired and its respective kitsune is still alive, the kitsune will follow the possessor unquestionably in hope of getting its hoshi no tama back.

A hoshi no tama is worth 5,000 gold if a buyer can be found. The price rises to 20,000 gold if the respective kitsune is still alive.

**Possession (Su):** A kitsune may use this ability once per day. It is exactly the same as the *magic jar* spell except that the kitsune may use its hoshi no tama as the receptacle. The Will save to negate the effect is DC 21 and is Intelligence-based.

**Spell-like Abilities (Su):** 1/day- *fireball*, *flaming sphere*, *magic aura*; 3/day- *blur*, *minor image*, *misdirection* (DC 18, caster level 6th); At will- *dancing lights*, *daze*, *flare*, *ghost sound* (DC 16, caster level 6th).

**Trip (Ex):** A kitsune that hits with a bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the kitsune.



## Kupua

The kupua people come in many different forms that all deal with nature. Their bodies range from leaves to flowers to birds. Detailed below are several examples of the kupua people from Hawaiian legend.

### The Kupua People

In Polynesian mythology, the kupua are a group of heroic tricksters, but in Hawaiian mythology they are traditionally seen as monsters. According to Hawaiian mythology, they are often evil, but it is not impossible to find a kupua whose intentions are good. For example, it is believed that some families have a kindly kupua that watches over them.

The kupua are generally made up of things from nature, such as clouds or even animals with supernatural abilities. Regardless of the material the kupua is made of, it always has some form of supernatural ability.

One Hawaiian legend of a kupua is that of Akuapehuale (god of the swollen billow). Akuapehuale was said to devour his enemies and was feared and hated by all, including his own tribe.

	<b>Kapoekinolau</b> (the people who had leaf bodies) <b>Medium Plant</b>	<b>Kapoekinopua</b> (the people who had flower bodies) <b>Medium Plant</b>	<b>Kapoekinomanu</b> (the people who had bird bodies) <b>Large Magical Beast</b>
<b>Hit Dice</b>	1d8 (4hp)	1d8 (4 hp)	4d10+4 (26 hp)
<b>Initiative</b>	+0	+1 (Dex)	+3 (Dex)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	30 ft. (6 squares)	10 ft. (2 squares), fly 80 ft. (16 squares) (average)
<b>Armor Class</b>	14 (+4 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 14	16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 15	15 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 12
<b>Base Attack/Grapple</b>	+0/+1	+0/+1	+4/+12
<b>Attack</b>	Slam +1 melee (1d4+1) or short sword +1 melee (1d6+1)	Slam +1 melee (1d4+1) or short sword +1 melee (1d6+1)	Claw +8 melee (1d6+4) or feather blade +7 ranged (1d6; see text)
<b>Full Attack</b>	2 slams +1 melee (1d4+1) or short sword +1 melee (1d6+1)	2 slams +1 melee (1d4+1) or short sword +1 melee (1d6+1)	2 claws +8 melee (1d6+4) and bite +3 melee (1d8+2) or feather blade +7 ranged (1d6; see text)
<b>Space/Reach</b>	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.	10 ft./5 ft.
<b>Special Attacks</b>	Entangle	Entangle	Feather blade
<b>Special Qualities</b>	Plant traits	Plant traits	Low-light vision, evasion
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +1	Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1	Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +3
<b>Abilities</b>	Str 12, Dex 10, Con 11, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 17	Str 12, Dex 12, Con 10, Int -, Wis 13, Cha 18	Str 18, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 10
<b>Skills</b>	-	-	Knowledge (nature) +2, Listen +6, Sense Motive +4, Spot +15, Survival +3
<b>Feats</b>	-	-	Alertness, Flyby Attack
<b>Environment</b>	Any warm forest	Any warm forest	Mountains
<b>Organization</b>	Solitary, pair, group (3-10)	Solitary, pair, group (3-10)	Solitary, pair, group (3-10)
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1	1	3
<b>Treasure</b>	None	None	Standard
<b>Alignment</b>	Always neutral	Always neutral	Always neutral
<b>Advancement</b>	2-20 HD (Medium)	2-20 HD (Medium)	5-8 HD (Large); 9-12 HD (Huge)
<b>Level Adjustment</b>	+0	+0	+2



### **Kapoekinolau (the people who had leaf bodies)**

*A humanoid figure made completely of leaves and foliage shambles towards you. It carries an old short sword and looks ready to protect its natural home.*

Kapoekinolau are humanoid in shape, but consist solely of leaves and small foliage. They occasionally wield short swords and are peaceful in nature. The only reason they may attack is if the locations they guard and tend are in immediate danger.

Kapoekinolau do not speak.

#### **COMBAT**

Most kapoekinolau lack real combat experience and fight out of instinct to protect the beauty of nature. They can be summoned by a *summon nature's ally I* spell and will aid a nature-loving person unquestioningly. Druids often befriend these beings by showing the surrounding forests kindness and respect.

**Entangle (Sp):** Once per day, a kapoekinolau may cast *entangle* as a first level druid.

**Plant Traits (Ex):** A kapoekinolau is immune to poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. The creature also has low-light vision.

### **Kapoekinopua (the people who had flower bodies)**

*A humanoid creature made completely of flowers gracefully approaches you. A short sword is belted to its side with vines.*

Kapoekinopua are humanoid-shaped plants that generally appear in a more feminine physique,

although male-shaped ones are not uncommon. Like the kapoekinolau, they respect nature and expect everyone to follow suit.

Kapoekinopua do not speak.

#### **COMBAT**

Kapoekinopua also lack true combat experience, preferring to live out their lives peacefully, but should a threat occur they attack with whatever they can, as fast as they can.

**Entangle (Sp):** Once per day, a kapoekinopua may cast *entangle* as a first level druid.

**Plant Traits (Ex):** A kapoekinopua is immune to poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. The creature also has low-light vision.

### **Kapoekinomanu (the people who had bird bodies)**

*A large bird with brown feathers flies directly at you. Suddenly, one of its feathers seems to take on a sharp edge and fires off toward you, streaking through the air at great speed. The bird-thing lets out a great screech and circles around for a second attack.*

Kapoekinomanu are a peaceful race of bird-like people who often join in protecting small mountain villages. Many find these creatures to be helpful and kind.

Kapoekinomanu have been known to give their lives for the town that they adopt. They speak common.

#### **COMBAT**

Kapoekinomanu always make full use of their Flyby Attack feat and almost never set down during combat, making them extremely hard to hit. They

tend to start combat using their feather blade ability, unless they are surprised and do not get the opportunity.

**Evasion (Ex):** With a successful Reflex save against an attack that allows a Reflex save for half damage, a kapoekinomanu takes no damage.

**Feather Blade (Su):** Once every 1d4 rounds, a kapoekinomanu can launch one of its golden-brown feathers at an enemy. This feather deals damage as a short sword (1d6) with no strength bonus. The kapoekinomanu must succeed at a ranged attack to hit with this attack.

**Skills:** Kapoekinomanu have a +4 racial bonus on Spot checks.

# Interview with Micah Skaritka

by Nash DeVita

While at Gen Con Indy 2005, I had the opportunity to interview Micah Skaritka, president of Apophis Consortium and author of *Obsidian*.

**Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about who you are and what you do inside the company on your own and as a company as a whole?**

I run Apophis Consortium. It used to be five guys that ran it but it has dwindled down to pretty much just me. I have a couple of people that help me out – the people that do conventions and stuff with me. I've just hired one of the writers of *Shadowrun* to help me with one of the new projects. That should help add a different element to the game, even though we do get compared a lot to *Shadowrun*.

Other than running the company and writing books and publishing books, I own the record label that we are on. Right now we only have seven bands on the label, but we are growing and each of the bands is getting new releases and better exposure. As we're selling albums, we're signing new bands. That is actually helping me pay for a lot of the art in the next book. The two ventures go hand-in-hand. They share the same bank account so it is kind of the same company.

**Well, I'm glad I was able to assist in that than. We picked up a CD while waiting for you.**

Thank you very much.

That pretty much keeps me busy right there – both of those endeavors.

**Can you give us an overview of the *Obsidian* system and how it is utilized?**

The actual system for *Obsidian* is not praised. It is not an applauded system but that is not what I am going for. I am going for a role playing game. I personally do not like rolling dice, [so] the system is really simple. When you have to roll dice, the system is there for it. It is a d6 system where you are rolling a number of d6 equal to what you have in your skill, versus a basic difficulty number.

We do use a hit location chart, something I think is very important as it adds more realism to the game. It is a very brutal system. Many players say (not that they don't like it, but) it is difficult to survive. I want it to be realistic. I want players and characters to have to think outside of the box. Instead of always using a gun, try to think of a different way to do it. Well, if you use a gun and they pull out a gun, someone is going to die. It is you or them, a 50/50.

**How about a brief overview of the setting itself?**

The actual setting, I think, is really interesting and is really original. It is set in the future after the apocalypse. The apocalypse, in this case, was the manifestation of hell. Hell shows up on Earth and pretty much takes over. It herds humanity into a cluster and, strangely enough, some greater divinity shows up and gives the remaining humans these weird powers to protect themselves. What they do with these powers is build this gigantic city, the Zone. It is kind of like a *Judge Dread*–

esque city. That is where the remains of human civilization resides. Demons can no longer get into the city, so humanity is pretty well protected. Corporations have been formed to try to build equipment and develop science to battle the demons. There are still cultists living within the city that are doing their masters' bidding – summoning demons, gathering human sacrifices, and that kind of thing.

You can play either side, actually. It gets kind of dark playing as the bad guys, but the good guys are really trying to protect humanity as a whole.

**What were your primary influences for *Obsidian*?**

Probably just about every totally awesome movie from the last twenty years or so. I was a big fan of *Aliens*, *Event Horizon*, etc.

Another big thing was [*Vampire: The Masquerade*]. When I think of *Vampire*, I think of a bunch of gothic kids playing this game. My thought was, there are a lot of cool people out there that are not necessarily into gothic music but are into the industrial music that I am into. I wanted to write a game that encompasses the things that those bands and those songs are about such as the machines taking over.

There is so much more that I wanted to do. I wanted to keep it dark and gritty and show that it is fairly hopeless.

**When did *Obsidian* first come out?**

We released it in 1999 – so six years ago we put out the first edition. Then we put out *Wasteland* and *The Zone*. We then released a second edition [in 2001] which was pretty much just a re-edit. I changed some art and the format of the book and added some new rules. We then put out the *Demon Codex*.



**Do you have any work prior to *Obsidian* in the role playing industry?**

Nope. That was the awesome part. I didn't even know how to promote a book. We just decided to get a booth at Gen Con and we came with our book – which I have to say is a top quality book. The art is really good, it looks good, it is hardcover, it's got foil embossing on the front. We just showed up. No one knew who we were. They had never heard of the company. I hadn't done any pre-release or anything so no one knew anything about it. It was well received. The first year we were voted 'Best New Game' by Jonathan Tweet (who did third edition *D&D*). Within a couple of years we were winning 'Moodiest Game' (which we stole from White Wolf and I was pretty excited about).

**That is really saying something, since White Wolf Publishing is the second largest role playing publisher out there right now.**

Oh, they are huge. Their system is awesome. When it comes down to it, their system is better than our system, but I like our setting better.

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

Yeah: don't. Just don't.

(laughing from both sides of the conversation)

There is no money in this industry and it will drive you insane and bankrupt. I really don't have any money. The only reason we are still able to publish books is because of the record label.

**What do you think is one of the most important elements when designing a game, and how do you reflect that within your own game?**

It is definitely the setting. The setting is, in my opinion, by far the most important thing. The rules of the actual game... you could really just do a d20 system game. I am really opposed to d20 but it is a system that is available for anybody.

The setting is what is going to help develop your characters and where you are playing. For example, a modern day setting is really cool, but you have to have a twist to it or else ....

**It becomes boring, just like life outside of the game.**

You are just living life. Exactly. I think that is the whole thing with *Vampire*. The fact that it is a common [modern] day setting and you can really relate to it, but there is an underground to it all.

**Other than your own, what is your favorite RPG game currently & what is your favorite game of all time?**

Hmm. I am a big fan of *Call of Cthulhu*. I think that, as a game, is kind of what I strive for my own. I like the horror aspect of it.

To be honest with you, I don't play any other games. I used to play *Vampire*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun*, and those other things in the early nineties, but in about '93/94', I quit playing them to work on *Obsidian* and ever since, we only play *Obsidian*. Frankly, my friends don't want to play anything else, so that is what we are 'stuck' playing.

**What do you think the current state of the RPG industry is and how do you feel about it?**

I don't know. I think it is kind of sad. I see a lot of companies come and go. Some of these companies with some of these books that come out are actually really good but in the small indie press, it is hard to stand up against some of these big companies that are pumping thousands and thousands of books.

I think that the d20 system is kind of corrupting everything. You've got people throwing out splat books because it has got "d20 system" on the front of it and everyone is buying it. I have a feeling that in the next couple of years that trend will actually slow down and reverse. I think that people are going to start coming back to 'home made' systems.

**With the state of the RPG industry in mind, where do you see your company in one year or even in upwards of five years?**

I have this really great idea for a new game. It is based on *Obsidian* but it is a stand alone hardcover. It is going to have the same production of the first book (but hopefully better). It is *Obsidian* set in Europe. I have streamlined the

rules, I changed a lot of stuff in it so it is a lot easier for people to play and understand. It is more adventure-oriented. I am hoping to steal away some of the *D&D* players because it has more of an adventure feel rather than an investigatory feel to it.

**Would you look at that as something along the lines of 'Obsidian 3,' or as something that is so far off of the radar that they can stand side-by-side?**

*Obsidian*, as it is now, is pretty much the last bastion of humanity. The last people left in the world. They really don't know, though, because there is no trans-oceanic communication. Little do they know that Europe is thriving thanks to the Vatican being able to hold off and fend off the demons. It is a completely different setting.

**Do you have any projects on the horizon beyond that one?**

No, not really. We have that and we are working on an adventure booklet module with five or six different adventures in it. I think it will help bring in some players by showing them how we do games. Adventures are the best way to do that.

**Speaking of the adventures and the new line coming out, how do you tackle a new writing project?**

It really depends. If putting out a supplement, which is most of what I have done, you have to figure out 'what does the buyer want?' I remember buying books that were all just setting material. While that is great, I want some more mechanics for the game. I think that works better. At the same time, there are books that are all mechanics and I want more setting. When I tackle something, I try to put a little bit of all of that in there.

**Is there anything you'd like to add?**

I do appreciate everybody that buys the game and plays the game. I know that it is darker and is not a d20 system game so it can be a bit harder to get your friends to play. I hear a lot of people that buy the game and buy all of the supplements for it but they just can't get their friends to play. Let your friends borrow the book. Once they read it, I can't see why they would not want to play.

I also appreciate you taking you time to talk with me today.

**I too greatly appreciate your time on the line and here with me today. Thanks again.**

*I'd like to take the time to once again thank Micah Skaritka for his time with me while at Gen Con '05. It was highly enjoyable and informative.*



# The Once And Future Gamer

## Them's Good Eatin'!

by Sean Patrick Fannon

Gamers eat. Boy, do we eat! Jenny Craig salespeople look at us walking through malls and think "There's my Jag payment." In our circles, "Extra Large" is a synonym for "Wee Folk." Instead of just a couple of lines from our favorite movies, we can put entire scenes on our t-shirts.

All right, all right, simmer down. I know not **all** of us are overweight. Seriously, though, even those of us in decent shape tend not to be the icons of healthy eating. They just have infernal metabolisms, is all.

(And they will pay in the end. Oh, yes, they will pay. Their precious metabolisms will crap out like the engine of an '82 Yugo, and *then* where will they be?)

Sorry. Where was I? Oh, yes. Eating. Specifically, eating – gamer style.

Gaming sessions inevitably last pretty long. It's almost certain that at least one regular meal time will come and go during the course of a game gathering, normally lunch and/or dinner. What normally happens is people fending for themselves at lunch, grabbing some fast food on the way to the game. I am fairly certain that our hobby has put the children of quite a few Taco Bell, Burger King, and White Castle executives through some very expensive schools.

For dinner, there's the ritualistic ordering of the pizza. Pizza. The `Za. Hot pies. Greasy wheels. Deep dish, hand-tossed, thin crust, stuffed crust. Pepperoni, Canadian bacon, goat cheese, barbeque, pineapple, every-meat, veggie-style, tofu chunks, kitchen-sink specials...

You know, I think I've actually crossed my pizza threshold.

"Impossible! Pizza is of the gods! You can never have too much."

Lies, I tell you. You *can* have too much pizza. I've consumed more baked dough with sauce, meat, and cheese than there are elves in Greyhawk. There *is* a limit. Take that pizza out of my face or you'll be wearing it. As underwear.

Yes, it has the powerful draw of actually being brought to you, so that you don't have to leave the gaming environment. That will always be the Pizza Man's power over you, won't it?

Just so you know, there are other things that get delivered. Chinese is healthier by far and quite yummy. Those neat little containers it comes in fit nicely on a game table and take up *way* less space than a pizza box. Just don't eat the little red peppers, or the game is off for the time it takes to get you out of the ER...

As well, lots of cities and towns have really cool services that can pretty much deliver anything, and I do mean *anything*. Wanna chow some steak? You can get it, with a baked potato right there. Salads, gyros, shrimp, pasta... seriously, it blows my mind what you can order. Truth be told, though, be prepared to use the microwave a little, since some things just don't hold their heat as well as others.

### A New Comestible Frontier

The absolute coolest thing you can do, though, is to try something really novel, something that may well be like exploring an alien ship for most of you.

You know that room that has the refrigerator and the microwave in it? That's called a kitchen. There's a device in there, a lot like the one your mom (or at least your grandma) used to use when you were growing up. It's called a stove!

That's right, kiddies. Cooking. Someone among your group has half a clue, and the rest of you should learn anyway. Not only can you actually save money and maybe eat a little healthier, but it can be a heck of a lot of fun! Let's face it, we're groups of friends getting together to spend the day with one another. The game is important, yes, but taking a small break to be social and break some bread can be a powerful experience in its own right.

You can totally geek out about what's going on in the game while your prepping the food, and keep the conversation going right through dinner.

Oh, hey, here's one – you can *keep gaming through dinner*. I don't necessarily mean bring the plates back to the gaming table, either. Some of the really coolest things we did when I was gaming in the San Francisco area (with some of the old Hero Games crew and their most excellent friends) was to have meals – amazing meals, mind you, prepared by people who really love good food and good wine – that we actually roleplayed through. As the GM, I'd structure the story so that the group was actually somewhere that they could have

a sit-down meal at, and then we'd just get into character and eat a meal worthy of adventurers as we sat around the table and "live acted" it a bit.

Sure, that won't always work for all groups, or for all sessions or games. Just something to consider, though. The cooking thing is a good idea, regardless. I promise you that some homemade hamburgers and tasty brats cooked out on the grill will make for a far more memorable weekend experience than one more slice of (urp!) pizza.

### Who's got the Munchies?

Now as to the matter of snacks, there are two basic truths.

You shouldn't.

You're going to.

You know what's really tasty? Slices of apple and slices of cheddar cheese. If you're gonna eat cookies, at least get the good bakery kind and slow down on the cheap-o over-processed stuff. Skip the donuts and try some baklava.

The truth is, you can seriously skimp on the snackage, or you can pool your resources and actually buy some decent stuff that is more fun and more interesting overall. Heck, if you're going to suck down enough extra calories to fuel the next shuttle launch, at least make it worth it! Go to the *good* grocery stores where the produce section has thunder for a sound effect when the automatic sprayers come on and spritz the produce. Get the gourmet stuff, man! Try some new things! You can do a little culinary "traveling" even if you're still sitting in the basement rolling dice.

Pita bread and hummus is a kickin' snack table choice, trust me, and your heart will greatly appreciate the switch up. They've got flavored hummus now, too. Trust me on this. Grapes are nature's perfect finger food, and dipping apple slices into some vanilla yogurt is seriously tasty.

The more adventurous of you might want to find out, at long last, just what a persimmon is, or what a starfruit tastes like.

Gotta have chips and dip? Fine, do the salsa thing. Salsa is one of those really perfect inventions – so many varieties, and all of it fat-flippin-free! In that I am currently working at losing an entire human being from my frame, this is one of my saving graces.

All right, I've ranted enough for now. Just take this away with you, and I will be happy.

Try to eat a little better, and try to take care of yourself. There aren't enough of us to waste on useless heart attacks caused by horrifically bad diets. I am learning the folly of my terrible habits, and clawing my way slowly back to a healthier self. It's worth it, and it's not all that hard. Eat good stuff, even eat fun stuff.

Just don't eat **all of it**. At least, not in one sitting.

Oh, one more thing.

Grease and dice. Bad combo. Don't do it.

Wait, wait... one more "one more thing."

Food stains on the character sheet might be a badge of honor in some circles, but food stains on the laptop is just gross ... and expensive.

### You're all in a tavern when...

So here's some ideas for food you can have on hand to represent a typical tavern meal, if you want to really go for the immersion thing with the food and game play. This is, of course, assuming a classic fantasy setting. Certainly you should adjust for other genres (for example, Tang and squeezy cheese is good for some sci-fi games...).

- Un-sliced bread, preferably stone ground or otherwise "Old World" in nature.
- Sharp and aromatic cheeses, with cutting board and knives.
- Apples, pears, grapes, and all sorts of fruits.
- Meade, wine, or micro-brew beer for those of age.
- Sausages or roast beef.
- Stews with lots of meat, potatoes, and carrots. Bread bowls are cool if you can manage it. Otherwise, bowls with their own handles so that the stew can be sipped rather than requiring a spoon is good.
- Anything easily eaten with fingers or by jabbing a large knife into it. Granted, the imagination allows for some rather interesting interpretations there...

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

# THE LEGACY OF GILGAMESH - PART 1

by Anthony C. Hunter

The rain was coming down with a steady, monotonous beat as Special Agent Corrine Young drove the black, government-issued sedan into the driveway of the old, two story house. I saw the media people pressing up against the police barricade, shouting their inane and incessant questions, and I looked over at Corrine and told her the same thing I had told her on every case we had worked on together over the past seven years.

"Corrine, I would prefer to avoid being identified by those people," I said, and pointed over towards the noisy crowd.

Corrine laughed a short, bitter laugh as I settled my hat on my head and flipped up the collar of my raincoat. "No problem, Robin," she said, "I'd prefer not to have to explain to the media why we need a librarian on this case. You go on up and have a look at the scene, I'll join you as soon as I placate the masses."

As I got out of the car, I could hear Corrine identifying herself to the media as Special Agent Young and telling them that if they would wait in the parking lot a few doors down, she would have an official announcement for them as soon as she had examined the crime scene. I stayed in the shadows by the edge of the drive as I approached the house. I was almost to the front porch when a rough voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Hey pal, yer not supposed to be up here. Get on back down with the rest of the newsies." I looked up at the heavysset policeman who was motioning

me away from the house. Sighing, I pulled my identification and handed it to him as the rain beat down upon my hat and resonated off the metal roof of the porch. The officer examined my identification as if it were some type of foreign object. Looking up, he began in a belligerent tone, "Consultant? Waddya mean, consultant?"

With a barely concealed sigh, I began to speak slowly and clearly, in an effort to make this oaf see reason. "Officer, as you can see from my identification, I am a special consultant for the FBI. I am an expert in matters such as relate to this case, and you are hindering my examination of the crime scene." The fat cop started to get red in the face and was raising his flashlight once again toward my face when Corrine interrupted him.

"Sergeant Walters! That man is with me. I would appreciate your cooperation."

The flashlight was quickly lowered, and Sergeant Walters stepped aside, asking in a loud voice, "How the devil do you become an expert in . . ." He hooked a thumb over his shoulder towards the house, " . . . something like that?"

Looking at him as I stepped up onto the porch, I answered, "Just lucky, I guess, Sergeant."

As I entered the house, Corrine walked up to a plainclothes detective who was just coming out the door. She said, "Roger, good to see you again. Wish it were under different circumstances. How are Louise and the kids?" Extending a hand as she

spoke, Corrine gave a businesslike handshake to the detective.

The detective gave a quick look over his shoulder at the doorway he had just come through and barely concealed a shudder before smiling at Corrine and answering, "She's doing well, Corri, she wishes you'd stop by more often, and the boys miss seeing their favorite aunt."

I stopped at the doorway and looked over at the detective. "Have the ME and the Crime Scene crew finished in here?" The detective nodded, and I pulled a handkerchief from my pocket to help block the odors as I entered the main room, ignoring the familial small talk and concentrating on my first impressions of the scene.

All of the furniture had been removed from the room, and a black circle filled with arcane symbols and markings dominated the area. In the center of the circle was the spread-eagled body of a middle-aged woman who had been clumsily and brutally cut open. The splattered blood upon the lampshades and light bulbs cast erratic red and brown shadows around the room. I slowly walked around the room and had crouched down just outside the circle and was concentrating on the markings when I heard a snicker from behind.

"Hey buddy, you falling in love or something? Forensics can get you some eight by tens of her, if you'd like."

I looked up and started to stand as the detective and Agent Young entered. The detective barked out, "Hey! Wise guys! Go tell Walters I said you two just lucked into the 'Canvass the Neighbors' lottery. Out, now!"

Looking over at me, he said, "Sorry about those clowns, sometimes they think the only way to deal with a scene like this is to be a wise guy." He extended his hand, "Roger Barnes, CPD Homicide."

I took his hand and shook it. "Robin Carson,



librarian and occasionally, FBI consultant." I waited for the inevitable comment or joke.

Barnes laughed, "Librarian, eh? Must be one heck of a tough neighborhood if it makes you an expert in this kind of thing. Well, Mr. Carson, I wish you the best of luck, and there are two more bodies upstairs, same sort of situation. Once you're finished with your examination, let the ME know and he will remove the bodies."

I nodded and began walking slowly around the circle again, pulling a small, bound book from my jacket pocket and began sketching the scene and especially the markings that were in the circle. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Corrine coming in and only partly registered what she said.

"Robin, you can get the crime scene photos if you need to study what was done here."

I nodded and continued writing as I looked at the circle. Pausing, I pulled my hat off and rubbed my hand through my short black hair, and seeing nowhere to put my hat that wasn't covered in blood splatter, returned it to my head. I continued to write and sketch the last few symbols that completed the circle as I answered.

"Yes, photos. . . this won't take long, Corrine." Finished here, I closed my book, and started up the stairs. The scene upstairs was very similar, except that there were two bodies in the circle, one a teenage male and the other an adult female. Both had been cut up in the same fashion as the one downstairs.

Taking a quick look around, I nodded at Corrine and said, "I've seen enough, you may tell the ME to take the victims away."

As we started down the stairs, Corrine asked, "Well, is this the work of the same perp? It looks just like the house in Kenosha that we found a couple of weeks ago."

Stopping on the stairs, I looked at her. "This is very similar, but it isn't the work of the same person. The symbols are almost identical, although a few are in the wrong sequence, and the handwriting is different. The person who wrote this is right-handed, and our killer from the other sites is left-handed." I started back down the stairs, pulling my hat down and turning the collar of my coat up in preparation for going out into the rain.

In a slightly amused voice, Corrine said, "Wait a minute, I didn't know you did handwriting analysis."

I smiled as I answered her. "Not normally, but I am left-handed myself, and one summer when I was seventeen, I broke my left arm and had to spend the next few months learning to use my right hand. It gives the cuneiform a slightly different angle. It wouldn't hurt to have a real handwriting expert verify that, just to be sure, although I'm about ninety-nine percent sure that we have two different killers."

I paused and looked over my shoulder, "If you have forensics check the bathroom, you will likely find traces of the same type of oils that that the other killer used in the cleansing ritual. I would be interested to see what they find, because seeing what was used for the cleansing would tell me a lot about the person who did this."

Agent Young shook her head. "Why clean them up just to kill them? I never understood that from the other site. Is it a psychological obsession or something?"

I removed my hat and ran my hand through my hair again. "Part of the ritual. Whoever these people are...well, they are performing a ritual that is supposed to allow them to consume the spirit of their victims. To consume the soul and gain their strength and vitality, make themselves stronger, and to extend their life." I waved the hand holding

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

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

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

the hat in a gesture that encompassed the living room and the ritual circle that filled it.

She tilted her head slightly and said, in a disbelieving tone, "You are telling me that someone is butchering these people so that they can live forever?"

I paused for a moment before deciding how much to tell Special Agent Young. "Of course not. What I am telling you is that someone believes that's what they are doing, and that's what really matters. The person who performed the ritual here is not as familiar with it as the one who did the ritual in Kenosha, or the one in Flagstaff."

Firmly placing my hat back on my head, I looked Corrine in the eye and said, "There are not that many people around who are conversant with ancient Sumerian cuneiform, so it shouldn't be too hard to track this person down. And for the record, I have several people who can account for my time for the largest part of the past several days, if you need to know that."



Agent Young smiled at me and patted me on the shoulder. "That thought never would have occurred to me, but if you want to send the list and the times to my email, just for the sake of completeness, it will probably make the director happy."

I chuckled. "Yeah, I thought so. By the way, I'm only going to be available for the next week, then I'm leaving Chicago."

With a slight frown, Corrine asked, "Going on vacation, or fleeing the scene of the crime?"

Maybe she was afraid I had done this. I answered her, "Neither, I've been offered a job in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Maybe I can get away from this kind of thing." With that, I went out the door into the rain, while Agent Young headed towards the gathered reporters to give her statement.

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*Standing in the shadows of a large elm tree on the edge of the crowd of rubbernecks, a middle-aged man in a cheap suit and cowboy boots watched as the medical examiner's crew carried the bodies of his victims out. He was positive he had performed the ritual correctly, and he felt a tingling in his body that was surely a sign of the power he had received, but he felt disappointed that the change had not been more dramatic. When he watched the old Arab fellow do the woman in Flagstaff, he saw the man get visibly younger looking. Perhaps it was because the man was old to begin with that it made such a difference.*

*He had watched the Arab man leave the house, and then he had gone in with his digital camera and recorded everything carefully. Then he followed the man for the next five years, waiting for an opportunity to observe him again, for surely that type of power was not something you took only once in a great while. Just think, do that several times a month for a year or so, and you could have the strength of a god.*

*Finally, the Arab man had begun making what appeared to be the preparations the watcher had been hoping for. He would go in after the Arab man made purchases and find out what had been bought, and made note of every purchase in great detail. When he realized that the man had chosen a single woman who lived in Kenosha, he rented an apartment across the street and set up so that he could watch the apartment. In a stroke of luck, he saw the Arab man and the soon-to-be victim in the bathroom, watching with interest as the man anointed her with oils.*

*The parabolic microphone he had purchased from a Radio Shack had let him record what they were saying, the Arab man chanting something in a strange, singsong language, apparently some Arabic dialect or something. When the couple went downstairs, the woman going willingly, obviously thinking they were going to get kinky in the living room, the watcher was able to see most of the action from his vantage point across the street.*

*The parabolic microphone had picked up the chants of the Arab man, and the sounds of the woman, even when they changed to gasps of horror as the Arab man began to cut her flesh with his wavy-bladed knife. After the Arab man left, the watcher snuck across the street and photographed everything again, just as he had in Flagstaff. Now, however, he was sure that he could perform the ritual himself, and keep himself young and strong forever. No more of being laughed at for being the scrawny geek who didn't date much.*

*He watched the gathered scene and realized he knew who his next donor would be. That FBI chick, now she had some power in her. Much more so than that middle aged lesbian couple and their teenaged son that he took tonight. Maybe she had enough power to make a visible change, and not just the tingling. Yep, she would bear watching. He had gotten good at that; he even began to think of himself in that way. The Watcher.*

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I was just finishing up with cataloguing a new acquisition for the rare books department when my email alert beeped. With a sigh at the intrusion of the twenty-first century into my realm of quiet and treasured old books, I sat at the desk and jiggled the mouse to deactivate the screen saver. The animated depiction of Stonehenge by night disappeared and my email client opened up.

Checking the inbox, I saw the bold text indicating three new messages. The first was obviously offering a great deal on medical supplements that I have no need for, so I deleted it without bothering to open the message. The next was from Taylor Windham, my mentor from England, letting me know that he would be in the states next month, and wanting to get together while he was here. I hadn't seen Taylor since last October, when I helped him to find his kidnapped niece, Cecily. I shuddered as I remembered the frantic dash through old catacombs, carrying an unconscious Cecily to safety. It would be good to see him again, especially under better circumstances.

I typed a quick response, giving Taylor my mobile phone number and the number and address for the new house in Chattanooga. I told him that I looked forward to seeing him and that he was welcome to stay with me, as the new house would have a guest room. I also asked about Cicely's health and her progress with her studies. Looking over the message, I decided not to tell him about the current case, not until we knew a bit more about what we were facing.

The third email caught my attention with a subject line of **The Imposter is very dangerous to us both!** Opening the email, I quickly read the contents, then read them more slowly a second time, frowning over what was on the screen before me. Then I printed a hard copy and immediately picked up the telephone to call Corrine.

**To Be Continued...**

# Behind the Scenes

## Part I: Bluebooking

by Robert M. Adams

Billy asks you if Jangle the thief can make a couple of raids on a nearby village while his companions rest at The Snickering Reptile for the evening.

While you want to allow Billy every opportunity in your game to role-play his character, you also want to avoid situations that detract from the rest of the players such as a sneaky raid on the nearby, unsuspecting village. True, the raid is in character with Jangle, and – believe me – Billy will argue this point with you, but what Billy does not realize is that his evening gallivants tends to be lengthy and steal time away from the other players.

Don't believe me? Just try it, and see how many of your players sit and yawn and chatter as you attempt to run Jangle through his little adventure. Players tend to get the "Oh, I came here to game and now I'm not gaming, so what am I doing here?" attitude when you do this to them.

Would you like some friendly advice? Do not do it! Now, as a DM, you have a very important choice to make; do you let Billy role-play the raids right then and make your other players suffer through what could be an hour of sneaky time?

Alternatively, do you tell him that it will have to wait until after the session ends? What can you, as a DM, do so that your players do not suffer?

I am going to let you in on a little secret that has passed down from generation of DM to generation of DM: bluebooks.

Bluebooks are a way for you as a DM to keep track of what your players are doing in their 'down time'. For my games, this means whatever they decide to do as individuals, ranging from working on item creation feats to establishing a relationship with an NPC. All this and more they put down in their bluebooks. What are bluebooks? Do you remember those little spiral-bound notebooks from college? When used to keep track of character information and downtime they are called bluebooks.

At the beginning of each game session, I hand to each player a specific notebook that they then use to record what they want to do during their downtime. In addition to being a way to communicate to the DM without being distracting to the other players at the table, the notebook serves as a catalogue of 'off camera' events that shape the character's life. At the end of each game session, I collect said notebooks.

Over the next several days, I go over the information printed in the books and respond accordingly. In the cases where the players are asking for something that requires rolls, either I roll the check or I will have the player roll in front of me the next session. Sometimes projects that the players are working on as individuals can get very involved, and on more than one occasion, the bluebook has spawned plot twists and ideas from players. So, as well as being a way to communicate to the DM and a record book for the off-camera events, the bluebook also serves as a plot device for DMs who want to more directly involve their players in the storylines.

So what happens in the aforementioned scenario? Simple: I tell Billy to put that information in the bluebook, as best as he can with as much detail as possible and that I will look it over for the next game session. In this case, let us say that Billy

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writes something like the following. "Jangle excuses himself from the dinner table at the Inn early that night and grabs his horse and quietly rides for Victimtown. When he arrives, he carefully shadows the people coming from the playhouse, looking for the one with the deepest pockets. Once he finds his target, Jangle will follow him home and wait until the target is asleep, then he will sneak into his house and take whatever he finds. Then he quietly sneaks out the back door and arrives back to The Snickering Reptile before dawn so the other players do not get suspicious."

As a DM reading this, I have to dissect several things and make some decisions as to how to respond to Billy about Jangle's little vacation. For posterity's sake, let us say that I tried contacting Billy but he's been very busy at work, so I decide to make the rolls myself (as a DM, I do have this privilege). Looking at what Billy wants to do, I decide that he needs to make five rolls: Hide, Move Silently, Open Lock, Search, and Spot.

Since the first thing that Jangle does is sneak into town, he needs to make a Hide check. I decide that since it is very late in the afternoon when Jangle arrives at Victimtown, that there is a change of

Alternatively to the bluebook idea you could also do this using electronic mail. There are both pros and cons to this and I will go over a few of these. On the bright side, if you use email to bluebook then your players will be instantly updated. They will not have to wait until the next gaming session to find out what the results were from their activities. By using electronic mail, your player can have a much more hands-on bluebooking session due to the constant exchanges of email messages. You can even use Irony's Online Dice Roller found at <http://www.irony.com/mailroll.html> and let the players make their own rolls. This nifty program actually lets a player make a roll and email it to you. The neat feature is that the player must enter your email address before the program will roll. Thus, there is no question of cheating. Conversely, you can also email the player with the rolls that the NPC makes; this shows a level of trust from DM to player.

While all this is grand and fun, it does take up a considerable amount of time. This is the major con of doing bluebooking through emails: the time demands. Another con would be for those people, and I admit I can be one of them, who simply like to have a written record of what a player does. Obviously, if you absolutely have to have a written record with email, you could print it and then compile the messages into a blue book. In the end though, I believe that using either email or pen and paper is about the same.

guard going on and that most of the new shift is still waking up. Because of this, the DC on his Hide check is 13 to not be noticed. I roll the die and score a 22, easily enough to get by the unsuspecting and groggy guards. In the bluebook, I write something like "Jangle easily sneaks past the groggy guards and makes it into Victimtown."

The next thing that Billy had listed was that he wanted Jangle to go to the playhouse and watch for Mr. Fatpants. To do this, I decide that Jangle needs to make a Spot check, DC 15. Again, Jangle succeeds with a score of an 18, and is easily able to spot an overly obese, slightly drunk man walking with two women, all lavishly clothed and wearing exquisitely expensive jewelry. Given the result of his Hide check from before, he only requires a Move Silently roll. I score a 17 – not bad, since Jangle needed a 15 – and so he is able to follow them home without a problem. I then mark this down in Billy's bluebook. Something like "Jangle followed Mr. Fatpants and his two 'lucky ladies' home without being noticed."

Now is where it gets rather tricky, because Jangle has to wait for them to go to sleep and then sneak inside and rob them. There is one more check necessary. For completeness, I make a Listen check and get a 12. Jangle does not hear anything coming from the house, but he is unsure if they are asleep. Since I know that Billy likes to play Jangle as the cautious thief, I decide that Jangle would wait until he knows for sure that his marks are asleep.

After waiting for about thirty minutes and not hearing any more sounds coming from the house, Jangle needs to open the locked door to the manor. I decided that the door was a good, strong lock, so Jangle would need to succeed on a DC 25 to open the lock. I make the roll for Jangle and get a 21, a failure! Since it is possible that the people upstairs wake up, I decide to give them a Listen check and roll a 5. Nope, they are sleeping like babies about to be robbed by Jangle the thief. Taking more caution this time, Jangle again tries to open the

lock, but now the difficulty has increased to a 26 (as per the rules in the DMG on failures increasing the original Difficulty Class). I make another Open Lock roll for Jangle and get a 27, a success! Jangle is able to get inside. I now roll two Search checks: one at a DC 15 to find the jewels and another at a DC 20 to find the hidden safe. Jangle succeeds at both rolls and cleans house before slipping out the back door of the manor unnoticed.

I now write this all down in Billy's bluebook so that he knows what transpired. Something like; "After waiting a few minutes, Jangle was unable to determine if the revelry had died down and Mr. Fatpants had gone to sleep. Not completely convinced, he hid in the alley and dodged the guards while waiting thirty more minutes to make sure. He then crept to the front door and, after some difficulty, was able to get the door unlocked. Jangle then went about robbing Mr. Fatpants blind, finding a safe. Inside were several portraits totaling about 2,000 gold, fifty gems worth 5,000 gold pieces, 1,400 gold, and 300 silver. Jangle also found the family jewels – probably worth about 1,500 gold pieces. Jangle then hurried out the door and into the darkness; overall a nice night for the thief."

In the morning, Jangle returns to the Inn, a little weary-looking but richer because of his side trek. Of course, this could have gone another way and the player could have read in his bluebook that he was currently in a deep, dank cell in the prison at Victimtown. Since he succeeded, I put in that he was successful and some detail, enough to describe the scene and the outcome. You could imagine the face of Mr. Fatpants when he got up that morning – I sure did!

Allowing your players room to steal without having to worry about the watchful eyes of the Paladin of the group is not the only way to use the bluebook, however: consider



a character wishing to work on a magical item or building a keep, for instance. They would be able to keep accurate notes of the passage of time and include the details of what they do in the party's downtime. Using such a method as bluebooking, you are able to more accurately reflect the passage of time in your game without having to sacrifice valuable game time to the 'normal' or intense stuff that requires more bookkeeping than role-playing. You can also provide a place for players to do things apart from the other players. The only downside is that the DM now has more work to do.

Another possibility with bluebooks is to run a two-person adventure on the side for Jangle and Sir Crackenheads that the other players don't even know about. In addition, players could be approached by NPCs in their bluebooks, or even, Heaven forbid, die in the bluebooks. Of course, the latter is a little extreme, and since you want the players to actually *like* the idea of bluebooking their characters, then you may want to leave the dying of the characters to the actual game.

Clearly, bluebooks are very useful tools for both the players and the DM, and can lead to interesting possibilities and side treks. They also serve as a place for conducting 'down time' so as not to distract the other players with single-player missions. You can use them as often or as little as you wish. If you so wish, you can even award extra experience as an incentive for your players who choose to exercise the bluebook option.

Next article, I will cover experience and a few ways you can award experience in addition to the normal 'defeating of the monsters' that we have come to know and love from *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Now comes the big question: What do I do if a player protests what happens in the bluebook? I am glad you asked! There are a couple of ways that you can handle this. First, you could ask them what they think they may have done differently. For example, let us pretend that Billy insists that Jangle had actually wanted to have gone inside without waiting so that he had not been as affected the next morning due to lack of some sleep. You could talk with Billy and ask him if that is really how he feels. If he says yes then you ask him again, just to be sure. If he then answers that Jangle would have gone charging in it is time for you to make a decision or a roll – would Mr. Fatpants have been asleep yet? In this case you could make a percentile roll, giving Jangle a 50/50 chance that Mr. Fatpants had already gone to sleep.

What happens if you roll over a 50 and Mr. Fatpants is still up and Jangle walks in on them? Again, you have to use your noggin here and consider the layout of

the house and where Mr. Fatpants may be. It is still entirely possible that Jangle could have gotten away with robbing Mr. Fatpants while he was upstairs in his bordure. In either case you should consider making another listen check for Mr. Fatpants and then proceeding on from there.

For another solution, you could also just allow Jangle to be successful, remembering that the player said that Jangle wouldn't wait and the next time a similar situation occurs have Jangle jump in. Of course, not all situations are the same so it is better to fall on the line of cautiousness when bluebooking a player's character. Remember, in the end, they are the character, you are their DM and they are trusting you to make the best decision for their characters in their absence. So don't be afraid to make difficult decisions, but do it the way that you think that their character would and should a discrepancy occur, handle it with tact.



# AMENDS

by Elizabeth Koprucki

The land stretched flat to the horizon. Devlana walked across soft sandy ground crisscrossed by shallow rivers. Around her it was the same, except for ahead. Ahead, there were trees, forming a line of shadow between blue and blue.

The Borderlands. She had never understood how wide they were, especially near the Audra river delta. The sun glinted off the streams, giving no relief to her eyes. There were flies and gnats, and she was sure they would be worse upriver.

She checked the canteen hanging at her belt. It was still heavy – good. The water here was still brackish, although becoming less so.

Kiri had said it was two days' walk to her village from Renata. Devlana had traveled for a day already, going westward until the gentle hills around the city flattened out into the delta. Now she turned north. She was sore, and completely unused to walking this much. Her feet were more accustomed to delicate slippers than the boots she had bought for this journey.

Kiri. She never managed to think about her without wincing, or sighing, or almost coming to tears. *I'm sorry. I'm coming here to tell you I'm sorry...* Was that the reason? Maybe she just wanted to lessen her guilt. Maybe she needed to see how Kiri's life had turned out. But if it had turned out well, why should she interrupt it and bring back painful memories? She had come this far, but maybe she should have never left Renata. Would she even be able to find her?

Elizabeth Koprucki has loved fantasy for almost as long as she can remember, but has only been roleplaying for the past few years. She's perpetually working on a novel or three and likes to make art and jewelry inspired by her characters. She has entirely too many interests and is always on the lookout for a few more.

She thought about her as she walked toward the trees, which never seemed to be getting any closer. She had met Kiri at the market in Renata. At the time, Devlana had been a powerful noble, an advisor to both the Mage Prince and the Prime Minister of Cytherea. She had gotten her position because of certain gifts. Her unusual abilities to sense the thoughts and feelings of those around her made her a valuable asset at Court. But her talents had only left her bitter. It was her job to sense the true intentions of courtiers and members of Parliament and she had quickly become disgusted with hypocrisy.

Then she had met Kiri at the booth where the young sculptor was selling her wares. Kiri had recently come to Renata from a Send'ari'i village, and was still homesick sometimes. She was deeply ambitious, but mostly honest, a fact that Devlana didn't appreciate until it was too late.

Devlana almost stepped into a small stream and brought her mind back to her surroundings. The shadow on the horizon was now definitely a

forest, and there definitely were more gnats. She remembered Kiri talking about herbs that would keep them away, but she didn't know which ones they were.

She was amazed she had gotten this far, with no experience in camping, or traveling on her own. She even seemed to be on course and not to have turned too far northward. At least this area didn't usually have problems with bandits. It was very open, and there tended to be people around. At the moment, she could see several fishing boats on the edges of her vision.

She wondered once again what kind of welcome she would get from the Send'ari'i. She knew they dealt with a lot of travelers, living as they did on the border of Cytherea and Erienthe. There would almost certainly be someone who spoke Cytherean – necessary, since she hadn't picked up any of the Send'ari'i language from Kiri.

Kiri...once more her mind went through the story. She had thought of it too many times in the past five years.

Kiri had come to Renata looking for a patron. She was quite talented, and Devlana decided to support her. It was a good fit, and Devlana found herself confiding in Kiri about her discontentment. And then, one day, the Prime Minister said he had heard about her unrest and disgust with politics. Devlana's first thought, not completely rational, was that Kiri had somehow spread it. At the time, she didn't realize that the sculptor had no other noble contacts. In disgust, fearing for her reputation, she had revoked her agreement with her and told the Sculptors' Guild that their newest member was untrustworthy. No one would be her patron after that, and Kiri was forced to go back to her village in deep disgrace.

Kiri had insisted on her innocence all along, and Devlana should have been able to sense her honesty. But she was too angry to pay attention to her instincts. And then, after Kiri left, she

discovered the truth. Kiri wasn't the only person Devlana had confided in over the years, after all. Someone had overheard her complaints, and rumors had spread until they reached a rival of hers. This rival had used these complaints to his advantage. Kiri hadn't known about any of this - she had been honest to the end, and Devlana had ruined her life.

She hadn't thought about it for a while - she had enough to do to regain her lost reputation and prestige. Her gifts were rare and valuable, especially in combination. Even in a land that embraced magic, no one could find a replacement for her. Public opinion turned against her rival, whose missteps didn't end. He ended up exiled from Court and Parliament. Devlana had won. But she couldn't forget about Kiri. She kept trying, until finally, five years later, she decided to make amends. Finally completely disgusted with the people she had surrounded herself and carried favor with, she resigned her position, left Renata and her beautiful house, and set off for Kiri's village with only what she could carry. She planned for the journey a little, enough to survive and have rations. She was going to apologize, if Kiri would accept it.

Now she was closer. She could see the trees that clustered around the river as it turned from salty to fresh, as it narrowed and became one cohesive waterway. Kiri had said her village was the one closest to the delta.

She slowed down, partially from exhaustion and partially from doubt. Once more, she wondered if she should even be doing this. For all her complaints about dishonesty, she was as manipulative as the other nobles. What right did she have to come here and interrupt whatever life Kiri had found, expecting forgiveness? Maybe she should have stayed back among others like her. Maybe she wouldn't even be able to find Kiri.

Devlana was almost limping when the first hut came into view. They matched Kiri's descriptions

of them, made of wood with thatched roofs. The ones closer to the river were on stilts. There were boats on the bank, and clothes hanging up to dry.

Children were staring at Devlana as she walked into the village. She knew she didn't look that different from the average Send'ari'i. But these people knew their own. They knew she didn't belong. Still, she was able to get directions to Kiri's hut from a young pearl sorter. She noticed several villagers following her as she walked - not hostile, just watchful.

The young man had said Kiri's hut was the furthest upstream in the village. The huts seemed to be loosely grouped around the central area, with several firepits between them. Devlana could see gardens behind them, and the occasional chicken or pig wandering around. The scent of spicy incense drifted out from some of the huts. The village followed the course of the river, a little back from its banks.

She came to the last cluster of huts and hesitated again. But she had come this far, and apparently Kiri was here. She might as well see her.

In front of one of the huts was the woman she couldn't forget, although she seemed a little older, more worn. She hadn't noticed Devlana yet. She was finishing a large pot on a potter's wheel. Near her, two young boys played in the sandy dirt, their faces too similar to Kiri's to mistake. A man came out of the hut and she paused in her work to smile at him. He picked up the boys, one in each arm.

Throughout the journey, Devlana had kept herself shielded. Her emotions were tumultuous enough without sensing those of others. But now, she opened her awareness a little. Kiri and her family really were content. As she watched, Kiri turned back to her wheel and lifted the newly made pot onto a board. One of her neighbors picked it up and put it by others. Nearby, people were stoking a fire in what was probably a kiln. It seemed like Kiri had half the village helping her! She had

often talked about her extended family wistfully; now she was among them again, confident and loved. She had lost the edge of loneliness Devlana had felt from her in Renata. And she was no less creative or skilled. Shelves of work surrounded the area, and there seemed to be more inside the hut.

Kiri hadn't noticed her yet. She could just leave, satisfied that she was happy. She had no idea if Kiri carried any lingering resentment. But Kiri had been concerned about her, back in Renata. She would want to know that Devlana had also found her peace here.

Devlana walked forward, and Kiri looked up and met her eyes.

# Lights, Camera, Action!

by "Dregg" Carpio

## Under Siege

The great Mountain Dwarf Pefo Ironlung sat atop the cliffs, looking down into the dark valley far below. He sat and pondered where his life had taken him, and where the path would lead in the future. Pefo was still young for a Dwarf, just pushing about 175 years of age and accomplishing the 15th level of proficiency in his skills of battle.

In his days, to be a fighter was simple. You had to have great strength and a strong weapon, and nothing could put you down. Hearing a great battle cry, the average Orc would run for the hills, and those stupid enough to stick around became fodder for the slaughter. Those were the days, when men were men and Elves could multiclass at 1st level. The days when Bards had to train as Druids, and Barbarians had to be Human.

Pefo knew these days were long gone. All he heard nowadays was talk about being flat-footed, feats, and nonsensical numbers for AC. He saw Gnomish Bards, Half-Orc

Paladins. Was he the only one left on Oerth who measured his Strength in percentages? Who still thrilled at the thought of double weapon specialization? Who even cared that the Girdle of Giant Strength could not be used with the Girdle of Dwarvenkind? This thought sat heavy on the old Dwarf's brow, and it made him feel alone in the world.

He yearned to hear the call of his creator, but it never came. Instead, the deity decided to create a new Dwarf from the fabric of space to carry on his quest, and filed Pefo back into the forgotten folder of notepaper and yellowed sheets, and the world has forgotten about his kind and the way he battled for epic adventure.

There are many characters like Pefo, as well as many wonderfully published modules, adventures, and world settings that have fallen to the wayside as the phenomenon known as d20 has invaded our gaming tables. *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) players have learned a new way to play, gamemaster, and put together a game. The key ingredient of the game became a second thought as feats, skills, and other special abilities and mechanics took the forefront and took away the special tool that was most important in any role-playing game... imagination.

The role-playing game (RPG) had gone full circle, returning to its humble wargaming beginnings with the addition of the built-in miniatures rules in d20 combat, and the multitudes of combat and movement rules. Where once the battlefield was formed in the minds of the players, the rules now enforce the use of miniatures and battle maps to play out combats that can take hours to resolve. A combat-oriented class in d20 has to keep on top of too many factors these days to enjoy the heroic battles that once took place every week at Joe Gamer's table.

This is not to say that the d20 craze has not created some wonderful offshoots. Green Ronin was one of the first to use the d20 engine under its other guise of the Open Gaming License (OGL) and has created its own way of how to run a game off of the game mechanics that powered D&D. The OGL was adopted by other companies, and great games like *Spycraft*, *Big Eyes Small Mouths d20*, and the *Conan* RPG came to be.

The great thing about the OGL compared to the d20 license was that d20 enforced the rule that the publisher must require the use of the *Dungeons & Dragons* core rulebooks, and the publisher could not include or replace the rules for character generation or character experience in the publication. The OGL changed the rules for the publisher, as it allowed the designers to give a complete system in one book without giving homage (or in some cases, royalties) to Wizards of the Coast.



### **Want to convert those D&D and AD&D modules and manuals?**

As I mentioned in the beginning of the article, *Castles & Crusades* makes converting older TSR, Judges Guild, and Mayfair Games supplements pretty darn easy. For one thing, the *Players Handbook* did not come with any sample monsters or baddies for your heroes to test their skills on. Even though you can find a 4 page monster supplement at the Troll Lords website ([www.trolllords.com](http://www.trolllords.com)), the best way to introduce some conflict is to break out those dusty old tomes from your closet and put them to use.

C&C monsters use the same format of stat blocking that the old D&D and AD&D modules did. The Hit Dice of the creatures still spell out the threat level against the party. The only things different are that THAC0 (to hit armor class zero) no longer exists and, of course, since it is an OGL product it uses the modern formula of Armor Class. This is nothing but some simple math on the part of the CK.

Assume that all the special abilities of the creature work as written. To figure out the monster's Armor Class in C&C, take the creature's original armor class and subtract that number from 20 (in the case of a negative armor class, add the number to 20). This will give you the OGL AC equivalent. To figure out the monster's Basic Attack Bonus, just add the creature's HD to the d20 roll, and apply any special attack modifiers from the creature's description. The only thing that does not cross over well is movement, but that can be eyeballed as C&C does not use tactical movement and does not really require you to map out the monsters or players movements.

In many cases, the newer OGL books have removed the intense miniatures rules, and created systems that revolved around the player's imaginations once more. Still, there was one obstacle that remained: the feats. Even with the d20/OGL engine stripped of all its complex tactical rules, the player is still bogged down with trying to figure out what feats fit his character. In some cases, feats are a major restriction to character design, as the particular feat that perfectly fits the character concept could not be obtained until higher levels. Yes, it's something to work for, but it left a lot of would-be heroes a bit incomplete.

### **The Siege Begins...**

Enter Troll Lord Games. For a few years now, Troll Lord Games (TLG) has been publishing supplements for the d20 system. Some of these are their own creations such as the world of Erde, but they've also put out some great material by the father of D&D himself, Gary Gygax. This small publisher out of Little Rock, Arkansas was starting to build steam with a multitude of great supplements, but for most of us who enjoy the hobby from the other side of the table, the company was just another in a sea of d20 and OGL publishers. You might have even bought one of their modules or supplements somewhere at a convention or local gaming store and didn't even know it was them.

In 2004, that all changed. Game designers Davis Chenault and Mac Golden took a brave step forward with the OGL to create a system that, for all intents and purposes, plays like older versions of D&D, but utilizes the d20 engine that has been so popular in the gaming market. They are now known by at least 50% of gamers both new and old. Using the name of Gary Gygax's original gaming group, the "Castles and Crusade Society," Troll Lord Games hit the market with a game that not only gives the flavor of the fantasy games of old, but also allows backward compatibility for those who have stacks of old modules, game settings, and sourcebooks gathering dust in their hidden closet vaults.

The game itself is in no way perfect, but for an old-school gamer like myself, *Castles & Crusades* (C&C) has brought back the thrill of running a great fantasy game with little prep, and allowing me to use the one tool that the d20 system had tucked away...my imagination.

As I said earlier, *Castles & Crusades* uses the OGL for the core engine, but instead of being another carbon copy of D&D, the Troll Lords have devised a pretty ingenious use of the rules. The Siege Engine (hence the name of this article) uses the standard "roll a d20 and try to get over the difficulty number" in order to gain a success, but has a few alterations that make it something altogether different and exciting to play.

### **The Core Books**

*Castles and Crusades* was released in two books, and according to the publishers they are the only two books you will ever need to run a C&C campaign. The first is the *Players Handbook* (rather self-explanatory), and the other is *Monsters & Treasure*, the GM's guide to the game and monster resource in one.

The cover of the *Players Handbook* says it all: a great piece by artist Peter Bradley depicts a knight aboard his trusty steed fending off red dragons with an enchanted sword. The picture rests on a background showing a fantasy map and the various details of a large empire.

The book is hardbound (as the trend seems to be these days), and weighs in at a hefty 128 pages. Peter Bradley continues his awesome artwork throughout the book, giving life and some new looks to fantasy staples like the Magic User and the Gnome. The drawings are all black and white, but give so many flavors to the book that they should stir even the most dormant of imaginations.

The second book in the series, *Monsters & Treasure*, compliments the first book as a combination monster manual and GM's guide to treasure and rewards. Again we see Peter



Bradley artwork on the cover, depicting trolls being distracted by two human thieves while a small group of dwarven warriors sneaks up from the side. The layout and interior art was like a walk down memory lane; in fact, I got that same chill down my spine that I got in 1981 when my mom bought me the AD&D monster manual for Christmas.

My two major complaints about the books (especially the *Players Handbook*) are the layout and the spelling and grammar. Now, I guess I am a little more forgiving than the average gamer, so the spelling and grammar mistakes don't bother me at all, but the layout reminds me of a high school student trying to put together his first 10-page essay in MS Word. Even this is forgivable, but then I glanced over the magic section. It is *very* hard to find individual spells at a glance. That was a sore spot with me, but not enough to keep me from buying the book.

Ok, now that I have the appearances out of the way, let's get into the meat and potatoes of the book.

### **Character Generation**

Although C&C uses the standard Strength thru Charisma abilities, rated between 1-20, and generates a modifier used for dice rolls, the system also gives us "primes." When creating a character, 3 abilities (2 for non-humans) are chosen as the character's best abilities, and these are referred to as primes. C&C does not have a skill or feat system as we know it from other d20/OGL books, so whenever the player wishes to perform an action, it is simply a die roll combined with the ability modifiers against a target number derived from the ability itself. Primes are given a target number of 12, while for any action that does not use the character's prime ability (or abilities), the target starts at 18. Of course, for a more difficult action, the CK (the Castle Keeper, a.k.a. the GM) can further modify the target number.

After (or alongside) choosing abilities and primes, the player chooses a class. The core classes are available, and even a couple of old favorites like the "Assassin" and the "Knight" are included in the mix. The core C&C rules do not allow for multiclassing or prestige classes, but since it is basically a d20/OGL game, it's not hard to port over elements from any d20/OGL rulebook. The classes have some major and minor overhauls to them, but are still pretty true to the classes in the D&D *Player's Handbook*. Each class has primes associated with it, so players should try to hold off choosing their primes until they have chosen a class.

The races are pretty cut-and-dry. The Gnome has reverted to the burrowing, hill dwelling, forest lover that we all remember from older versions of D&D, so if you are looking for the steampunk inventors of modern fantasy, then you are barking up the wrong tree. Another interesting racial change is that of the half elf. During character generation, the player must choose either a Human or Elven heritage, which affects the abilities the character will have. I don't know if it was the designers' intent, but this description is a great homage to J.R.R. Tolkien.

The last steps of character generation are the standard picking of the gear, weapons and armor, and giving the new character a background. Most C&C characters take about 10 minutes to make, and the player is ready to jump into the action right away.

### **The Mechanics**

The Siege Engine, as this system is referred to, is based on the characters' prime abilities. A target number of 12 must be rolled if the attribute is prime, and 18 for the others. Most of the modifications to the rolls are either universal modifiers, adding from -3 to +3 to the difficulty, or add the level of the opponent.

### **C&C Fan Sites**

Author Jason Vey has a great collection of C&C goodies on his site, [www.grey-elf.com](http://www.grey-elf.com).

C&C fan Mythmere has given us the first C&C blog, and also a great collection of C&C must-haves at her site, <http://mythmere.tripod.com>.

Need info on new and upcoming releases, or want to chat about C&C? Check out the Troll Lords Forum.

The great people over at Dragonfoot.com have created a C&C forum that gets more hits than the parent company's forum. Dragonfoot is also a great place to chat about Basic D&D, AD&D, and other old-school games that most have thought forgotten.

For example, if the party's thief decided to pick the pocket of the militia guard to get the jail keys for possible later escape, the CK would add the guard's level to the difficulty and then have the player make the roll. So, in our example, the militia guard is a 3rd level warrior, so the thief would now need to reach a target number of 15 (prime ability target 12 + 3 for the level = target 15). It would be the same if the thief was trying to disable a trap made by another master thief. The CK would use the character's target of 12 and then add the trap maker's level (in this case 8th level), so the target would be 20. Pretty simple math to keep in mind.

The other thing that also adds to the very 'improv' nature of the system is another blast from the past: Saving Throws. Just like the good old days, the player has saves against Paralysis and Constriction, Gaze Attack and Polymorph, Breath Weapons and Traps, and Death Attack. Each of these saves is again based off the abilities, so the target is going to be either 12 or 18, as with the other action rolls.

## Magic

I cannot move on with out mentioning the game's magic system. For all that was pretty new and exciting with the core mechanics, the magic system fails here. Most of it seems to be a rehash of the D&D 3.x magic system with the serial numbers filed off the names. If I had any complaint this would be it: with all the wonderful magic systems coming from other OGL publishers, the C&C magic system could have been a bit more interesting. It could even base the magic on the prime attribute mechanic like the rest of the system.

## Castle Keeper Tools

The monsters portion of *Monsters & Treasure* is done stylistically like the original TSR *Monster Manual* tome - even the pictures of each of the creatures is done to resemble the original art (of course cleaner and more thought out). Most of your favorites are included, and some variations of other monsters that were found in other monster books. Honestly, there is enough in there to give your players a full dance cart of creatures to play with.

The last portion of the book goes over treasure, magical and non-magical, and how the CK should award it. Like D&D, the magic items are pretty straightforward and do not read like some odd math formula. Wizards make magic items, and heroes find them... period!

## Setting

The last of the books in print for C&C is *Castle Zagyg*. I have not read the book as of yet, but from the reviews I have read it is a must-have. *Castle Zagyg* (from the same roots as D&D's Greyhawk) is the campaign setting stemming back from Gygax's original Lake Geneva gaming group. It gives the foundation of a campaign world to be covered in several books and modules, giving a fully fleshed out campaign world for C&C. Volume

I of *Castle Zagyg* introduces us to Yggsburgh, the land that surrounds the mysterious Castle and the inhabitants thereof. *Castle Zagyg* also has some great alternate rules for multiclassing characters (not included in the core books), and some cool new spells that can be used in any C&C campaign.

As of this articles' writing there are currently 3 core books and 3 modules put out by Troll Lord Games. Each one is a very well-thought out and very nicely put together sourcebook. After learning from the many comments of the loyal fans, the designers have both improved the layout a lot and eliminated a lot of those typos.

In closing, I would like to mention some great fan sites that showcase *Castles & Crusades*. These sites are not official Troll Lord Games sites, of course, but they give a great example of the many gamers who have "Joined the Crusade." Until next time, I remain...

*Dregg*

# Reviews, Reviews .....reviews!

## Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

*Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (WFRP) is exactly what it says it is - fantasy role playing. It takes a different route than many fantasy role playing games, however.*

*page 28*

## Temple Games - ChiZo Rising

ChiZo Rising is a collectible game from Temple Games. In the collectible regard, it is like many other products available. It is not a collectible card game, however. This is a collectible tile game.

*page 30*

## How we rate

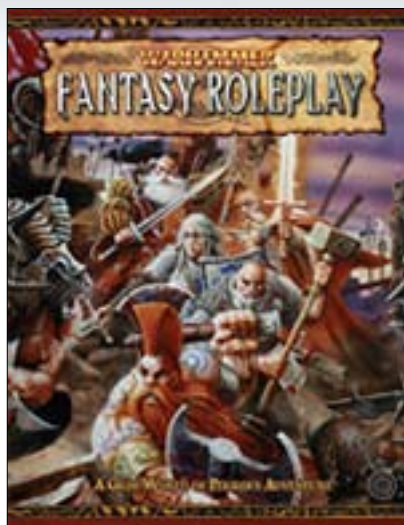
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12 = Fair. *Some gamers would like this.*  
10 = Average. *Most gamers would be indifferent.*  
8 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*  
6 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*  
4 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*  
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

### Scoring Definitions for non-d20 products:

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6 = Sub-par. *Flawed, but not without promise.*  
5 = Poor. *Some gamers would dislike this.*  
4 = Bad. *Most gamers would dislike this.*  
3 = Very Bad. *Among the Dirty Dozen.*  
2 = Inferior. *Worst of the worst.*

read on...



## Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

Authors: Chris Pramas with additional material from Dan Abnett, Jeremy Crawford, Graeme Davis, Kate Flack, Ewan Lamont, Aaron Loeb, T.S. Luikart, Todd Miller, Rick Priestley, Robert J. Schwalb, & Gav Thorpe

Publisher: Black Industries [<http://www.blackindustries.com/>]

Reviewed by: *Nash J. DeVita*

Review Date: *October 10th, 2005*

*Reviewer Bias: This title was recommended to me by a Wizards of the Coast employee while at Gen Con 2005. I tracked down the Black Industries booth and was handed a copy for review purposes. This came highly recommended to me and I understand why it won two (or three if you count the WFRP Old World Bestiary) ENnies this year.*

*Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (WFRP)* is exactly what it says it is - fantasy role playing. It takes a different route than many fantasy role playing games, however. *WFRP* is a 251-page hard back that offers complete system rules, a full background on setting, character careers, gear,

etc. Like many fantasy role playing games, this one also includes magic of arcane and divine origin as well as magical items.

### From the Back Cover

"Adventure awaits... The Old World. A dark and grim place filled with peril and riven by war. From the teeming cities of the Empire to the Elf haunted forests to the loft crags of the World's Edge mountains where Dwarfs battle with Goblins and their vile kin, a shadow hangs over the world, cast by the dark corrupting hand of Chaos. All along its borders, the Old World's greatest nation, the Empire, seeks to hold back this dark tide. But even within the Empire there are enemies. Twisted cultists seek to bring about the Empire's fall, cold-hearted Beastmen stalk the forests, and loathsome Skaven ratmen spread plague and sickness from their subterranean lairs.

In *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, you are unlikely heroes in a grim world of perilous adventure. You venture into the dark corners of the Empire and deal with the threats that others cannot or will not face. You'll probably die alone in some festering hell hole, but maybe, just maybe, you'll survive foul Mutants, horrible diseases, insidious plots, and sanity- blasting rituals to reap Fate's rewards.

*Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is a complete game. All you need to play is this book, some dice, and a group of friends. Inside these covers you'll find:

- \* A quick system for character creation. You can make a character in less than half an hour and jump right into the game.
- \* A simple yet robust set of rules that let you handle everything from social interaction to Chaos mutations.
- \* A unique career-based system of character advancement and over 100 careers - from Assassin and Bone Picker to Trole Slayer and Zealot.
- \* Complete rules for magic, covering both Arcane and Divine Orders and over 175 spells. Power can be had, but beware the Tzeentch's curse!

- \* Details on the Empire and the Old World, from the social order to religion and belief.
- \* A complete introductory adventure, *Through the Drakwald*.
- \* A new short story by renowned *Gaunt's Ghosts* author Dan Abnett.

Welcome to the roleplaying game of the Warhammer World... Death and glory await!"

### Presentation

The cover features a small band of five adventurers who are (off to the side) beginning to battle with members of the Chaos Legion. The looks on their faces tell it all - this is another in a line of tough battles. The look on their faces, much like the background, is quite grim.

The interior is full-color. The pages are tan and most of the images are in color. The images for the careers, however, are all in black (as if they are only ink drawn).

### Content

#### System

*Warhammer Fantasy Roleplaying* uses only a couple of different dice systems. Much of the time, a standard percentile system is used. Lower is better. The character's Main Profile as well as his skills are written as percentiles.

Other than percentiles, a single d10 is used. Higher is better. I like the fact that the only dice that will be needed through the course of play are d10s. There is very little room for confusion on what system is used and what is better, higher or lower.

When rolling for a skill, a percentile is rolled. If it is lower than the score of the related attribute, success is achieved. The only time [I can think of] that the above is not the case is during opposed tests (when one person's roll is being compared to another's). Modifiers can apply depending on the difficulty of the situation.



## Characters

There are only four playable races in *WFRP* - Dwarfs, Elves, Halflings, and Humans. Race determines the values or how many dice are used to determine values when creating the initial Primary Profile and Secondary Profile.

Two of the races, Human and Halfling, also get random starting Talents. Talents are those characteristics that are in-born, such as ambidexterity, lucky, or poison resistance, to name just a few.

Beyond the profiles and features, the races are generally pretty similar to those of the same name in other fantasy games.

## Profiles

Every character is made up of two profiles - the Main Profile and the Secondary Profile. Those items in the Main Profile are all rated as percentiles. The stats in the main profile are Weapon Skill (hand-to-hand combat), Ballistic Skill (ranged combat), Strength, Toughness, Agility, Intelligence, Will Power (mental toughness), and Fellowship (charisma and social skill).

The items in the Secondary Profile are usually rated from 1 to 10. These include Attacks (number of attacks in 10 seconds), Wounds (damage that can be absorbed before becoming critically wounded), Strength Bonus (damage bonus in melee), Toughness Bonus (damage resistance), Movement (base land speed), Magic (this is somewhat rare), Insanity Points (how crazy you go. Remember, this is a grim world), and Fate Points (luck and destiny).

## Careers

Here is where, in my eyes, this game really shines. As characters grow in power, they advance in their careers. At first, this may sound like a class. It is not. Players choose how to advance but only with the areas that the career can move them and only as high as it can move them.

For example, the Bodyguard can advance Weapon Skill +10%, Strength +5%, Toughness +5%, and Agility +5% in the main profile. As a Bodyguard, however, one gets no experience in Intelligence, Ballistics, Will Power, or Fellowship so they can not be increased. The Apprentice Wizard, on the other hand, can advance Agility +5%, Intelligence +10%, Will Power +15%, and Fellowship +5% in the main profile as those are the facets of being that are practiced in that career.

Once all of the advancement options are fulfilled, a character can change careers. Experience is spent to advance the values of the main and secondary profiles as well as buy skills and talents. To change careers, the character must complete their advancement in the profiles, buy all skills, and buy all talents. That is not it, though. Jobs take tools. All of the tools necessary to work that job must be acquired before starting into a new career as well. I know it sounds like a lot, but it really is not. When upgrading stats in the main profile, they are purchased in increments of 5%. Also, there are not that many skills or talents in *most* careers.

There are sixty basic careers and fifty-three advanced careers! Of those, only select ones are [generally] acceptable to transfer into from another. The careers that each can transfer into or from are listed with each career. These are mostly career changes that make perfect sense. To use the careers listed above for example, an Apprentice Wizard is not going to transfer into Bodyguard. There is just no logical reason for that progression.

## Magic, Insanity, and Other Fun Stuff

Magic, no matter the source, brings great risk. Spellcasters, no matter the type, are toying with the forces of Chaos itself. Divine and Arcane spellcasters exist within this game, just like many others. Arcane spell casters risk bringing forth manifestations of Chaos when they cast, while Divine casters risk the Wrath of their gods. Despite this risk, there are some who still attempt this art.

As one would expect, Divine casters get their power from the gods. Arcane magic is not just studied like it is in some games, though. In *WFRP*, Arcane casters work from one of the eight winds of magic. It is these eight winds that give the symbol for Chaos its eight points.

When rolling for magic, multiple d10s are rolled - one for each point in the Magic stat. They are compared to a number assigned to the spell. If you have a greater number, casting succeeds. If two or more of the same value are rolled, Chaos manifests. I'm not going into detail about the effects but I will leave you with this - it is always bad.

Being hacked at, burned, and all around mutilated does not do good things to the psyche. There is only so much punishment any one person, adventurer or not, can take. Once that line is crossed, that character starts going insane. After collecting enough Insanity Points, the character may gain a Disorder (randomly rolled for). These disorders range from becoming a pyromaniac to reliving a traumatic moment over and over again. Insanity is viewed as the taint of Chaos by the general public. That being said, they do not generally take very well to 'crazy folk'. Hey, I did start out by saying that this is a grim world.

## Conclusion

*Warhammer Fantasy* has been around for quite some time. I am glad to see a new version of it hit the shelves for new and old gamers alike. It offers a nice, though dark, spin on fantasy and this new version makes it that much more accessible and worthwhile.

The advancement system alone makes this game a great investment. That, on top of the options, the background, the other systems, et all, make this a well thought out and superbly penned title. It most definitely deserves the awards that it won.

**Archetype: Core Rule Book**

**Body 9 (Game Mechanics):** Varied mechanics work well together. A lot of tables.

**Mind 10 (Organization):** Most things where they should be. Not all, but most.

**Spirit 10 (Look & Feel):** Fitting.

**Attack 10 (Value of Content):** Great value, even at \$40.

**Defense 9 (Originality of Content):** Nice take on a familiar genre.

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

**Magic 10 (Options & Adaptability):** There are a lot of system options and many stories to be told.



## Temple Games - ChiZo Rising

Developed by: Michael Palm and Sebastian "Neffs" Jakob, Kilian Brucklacher, and Jack Roberts.

Publisher: Temple Games [<http://www.templegames.com/>]

Reviewed by: *Nash J. DeVita*

Review Date: *October 10th, 2005*

*Reviewer Bias: Normally, I would not review this type of game since it is not an RPG. In the case of this game, however, I make an exception for multiple reasons. 1) We were asked to try out the game at Gen Con Indy 2005. 2) More importantly, it is a very different kind of collectible game that truly intrigued me. The sets and boosters were given to me for review & use purposes.*

*ChiZo Rising* is a collectible game from Temple Games. In the collectible regard, it is like many other products available. It is not a collectible card game, however. This is a collectible *tile* game. Just like many other games, it is a duel. It is not a duel of warriors, though. It is a breakdown of the Chinese Zodiac. The correct relationships are all represented among the twelve creatures.

*ChiZo Rising* is playable with two to four players and is playable right out of the box - provided each player has his/her own box of tiles. Each box contains one of eight sets of thirty-two tiles as well as two booster packs of eight tiles each.

### From the Back of the Box

"ChiZo Rising ushers in a new era in Collectible Games and features a unique tactical game play for 2 - 4 players. Based on a grid system, strategic Tile placement is key... command Mighty Creatures and Special Effects, engage in exciting matches and battles, and skillfully alter the playing area to your favor! This Starter Set includes everything you need to challenge other ChiZo Rising Keepers, and begin your quest to build the ultimate ChiZo Rising Tile Stack!

Each Starter Set contains 3 of the 12 Mighty Creatures (Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Pig), pre-constructed in 1 of 8 configurations."

### Presentation

The box front is a colorful image of all twelve creatures around the logo. The light background is bordered by a dark band, helping the image stand out quite a lot.

The tiles have a variety of art styles, from serious to highly comical. Each piece of art is highly fitting, though, and each tile is colorful and attractive.

### Game Play Basics

The vast majority of the game is played using the creature tiles. Each creature tile contains icons showing all of the other creatures with which it is compatible. These compatibilities, which I will describe in a bit, are very important. They also each have a Strength Value and an Intelligence Value. When in combat, both strength and intelligence totals must exceed the opponent's values for success.

Points can be scored through battle. This is the slow route to success, though. The fastest route to gaining points is via square completion. By making a square of four, nine, or even sixteen compatible creatures (see, I told you it would come up), one gains points equal to the square total. Making a square bigger than four is difficult but is well worth it since only twelve points are required for victory.

Creature tiles are not the only tiles in the game. There are also effect tiles that, well, affect the game play. It can change the way a creature works, give you a boost, or even harm your opponent(s) or your opponent's creature.

It sounds simple, but the strategy involved can be quite great. Do you risk an attack to remove an opponent creature even though the player may have an effect that could sway battle or even call another player for assistance in the battle? Do you place a tile in the hopes that your opponent does not have a compatible creature to take the square or does not even see it in the first place? The list of questions could go on and on.

Of course, the rules go into much more depth than what I have covered here. I said "Game Play Basics" for a reason. There are many more intricacies to the rules and the tiles that make the game that much more enjoyable and that much more of a challenge.

## **Conclusion**

This is the first game of its kind that I have been exposed to or am even aware of, and it has hooked me. It hooked me so much that I got another couple to buy decks and boosters while at Gen Con so we could all play together in the future. This was definitely my favorite game from Gen Con 2005 (and there were a lot of quality games I demoed). When considering the quality for the price, it is an absolute steal!

## **Archetype: Collectible Game**

**Body 10** (*Game Mechanics*): Fresh and Solid!

**Mind N/A** (*Organization*):

**Spirit 10** (*Look & Feel*): Beautiful.

**Attack 10** (*Value of Content*): Great game and a great price.

**Defense 11** (*Originality of Content*): I've never seen anything like it!

**Health 10** (*Physical Quality*): Nice hard cardboard, not flimsy cards.

**Magic N/A** (*Options & Adaptability*):

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