

Asgaard

D20 SYSTEM MAGAZINE

GENCON

RIDE A FIERY DRAGON
ACROSS WISCONSIN

RACE FOR RETRIBUTION

AN ADVENTURE FROM
BARD'S PRODUCTIONS

ANTHROPOMORPHS

ATTACK OF SWORD WIELDING ELEPHANTS

FEYSPEAKER & STILTLING

TWO VERY DIFFERENT PRESTIGE CLASSES

PLUS:

D20 NEWS, PRODUCT REVIEWS, THE ENNIES, MONSTERS FROM THE CREATURE COLLECTION, A LOOK AT THE WORLD OF PALAESTRA, THE BODY POINT SYSTEM, SLAYER SENSE, AND MUCH MORE...

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Morrus Dancing

Well, here we are at the second issue of Asgard Magazine. You may well notice a few changes in this issue - on the bad side we have some advertising (an unfortunate necessity, I'm afraid), but this is hopefully balanced out by the more professional look of the magazine as a whole. After the first issue was released, I received numerous offers from people who offered to handle the formatting and layout of the magazine, and my thanks goes to Jake Badger who has taken on this task. I hope that you will agree that he has done an excellent job and dealt with many of the complaints made about the previous issue.

I am very pleased to see the submissions start to roll in. As we receive more and more of these, Asgard Magazine will get better and better. We are already receiving plenty of offers of contributions from d20 publishers, so you can expect to see exclusive materials within these pages very soon. If you wish to send material for inclusion in Asgard, please remember to send a proposal email first. If we are interested, we will then send you some basic submission guidelines. One note, though - we are not currently looking for more fiction based articles.

This month I'd like to talk about publisher websites. Regularly I am faced with the arduous task of trawling through publisher websites in search of d20 system news. At times, this task can exceed the arduous and venture into the realm of the traumatic - sites that have not been updated since April, others that require years of experience in the field of orienteering just to find the most basic information, and publishers that, for some reason, don't see fit to provide complete information on the products they do tell us about - price, page count and so on.

I fully appreciate that running a d20 publishing company can be a difficult and time consuming task. But excellent sites such as those of Malhavoc Press, Green Ronin Publishing and Privateer Press prove that providing a simple, up to date website is easily possible. One does not expect flashy shockwave intros or sound effects from a publisher website - all one is looking for is accurate information. And it can hardly be denied that providing information on your products is to a publisher's advantage - that's why the site is there in the first place!

Publishers, please make the effort - it makes my life easier for one thing, and I am sure that the website that you present to the world has a direct effect on your sales!

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INTERVIEW WITH JOHN WICK

A NEW PRESTIGE CLASS FROM RYAN NOCK

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**ALL NEW REVIEWS AND CUTTING EDGE D20
SYSTEM NEWS**

D20 News

It's been a busy month in the d20 industry. The most notable event was, of course, GenCon. Sadly, I was unable to attend this year, but I have heard many reports. One interesting point seems to have been the lack of d20 publishers in attendance - obviously the major players were there, but many have expressed surprise at how many of the large pool of d20 publishers did not attend. A number of products debuted at GenCon, including Green Ronin's Hell In Freeport and d20 Character Record Folio, Fiery Dragon Production's Nature's Fury and Counter Collection, Deadlands d20, Twin Crowns (a new setting) and more. More on products later.

Another notable event this month was Ryan Dancey's announcement concerning the many violations of the d20 Licence and the Open Gaming License that he saw while at GenCon. Most of the errors appear to be minor violations - improperly updated sections of the OGL, unauthorised use of trademarks or the lack of clear identification of Open Game Content in various products. One company managed to completely forget to include the OGL in their product at all (although this was allegedly rectified with a quick application of glue and a paper insert).

There's been a lot of concern about the d20 situation regarding this announcement (see how careful I am to write this column without using certain trademarks!). However, it doesn't seem that the situation is anything for the fans to worry about - most companies can rectify the problems with stickers and inserts. Product recalls don't appear to be likely except for a few extreme cases, and the publishers will no doubt take more care in future.

And of course, I shouldn't neglect to mention the ENnies. The EN World d20 Awards Ceremony went without a hitch and was attended by a slew of d20 publishers and, of course, the host - Gary Gygax. Green Ronin, Privateer Press and Malhavoc Press were the main winners, each going home with more than one award, and Jamis Buck won the Best Fansite award for his RPG Generators site. To the publishers' surprise, they were presented with framed awards at GenCon by Mark Clver (a member of the nomination committee), and Mark was kind enough to provide us with several photographs of the winners posing with their awards.

Product news

The City of Freeport, the flagship setting of Green Ronin Publishing, is to be featured in Paradigm Concepts' Shattered Empires setting. Paradigm produce the ENnie nominated Bloody Sands of Sicarus and believe that Shattered Empires and Freeport are a perfect match. This highlights one of the strengths of the Open Gaming License - as Chris Pramas of Green Ronin pointed out: "Freeport was designed so it could be easily dropped into any setting and that remains the case. The Freeport presented in Arcanis is one vision of how the city can be integrated into an existing world; it isn't meant to be the definitive one." Green Ronin also announced their new monster book - Jade Dragons and Hungry Ghosts. This book, due to be released in September, features a whole slew of monsters inspired by Japan, China and other Asian locations.

John Wick's Wicked Press announced a new adventure, the second in their 'multi-module' series. As yet I am unclear as to the exact nature of a 'multi-module' (it bears the tag line 'never the same game twice'). This second module, Who Killed Lord Davenport?, is a murder mystery. I will be interviewing John Wick next month in Asgard Magazine, and will also be taking a look at What's That Smell?, the first module from Wicked Press.

Mystic Warriors from Mystic Eye Games is a book containing over 20 prestige classes suitable for any campaign as well as the schools of the Mystic Warriors themselves. I'll be taking a look at this one next month also, and we will be featuring exclusive material available only in Asgard Magazine by Mystic Eye.

Fantasy Flight Games has started its marketing for the upcoming Dragonstar setting. This setting is a space-based setting in which anything not scientifically possible (ie. faster-than-light-travel) is accomplished by magic. This magical-technological mix sounds intriguing and, we are promised, is not reminiscent of Spelljammer. The Galaxy is ruled by great Dragons who take it in turns as Emperor - and at the moment it's the turn of the evil dragons. FFG also produced an introductory primer for the setting, which you can download from their website at <http://www.fantasyflightgames.com>.

Atlas Games' Feng Shui/D20 crossover product, Burning Shaolin, looks interesting. Supposedly it contains rules for fast-paced John Woo style cinematic martial

arts combat. Atlas also announced an encounter book entitled En Route, which contains a collection of short encounters easily insertable into any campaign. This book is slated for September.

Forbidden Kingdoms is a d20 pulp-style setting from OtherWorld Creations (the people who brought us Diomin). It is best described by their own product blurb: "Imagine...Jules Verne meets Doc Savage. The entire game takes place along an alternate Earth time line that supposes that Nikola Tesla's genius had been recognized in his own time. Thus, Earth is forever changed. The sciences take a radical turn and academic exploration is never quite the same." There is introductory material available at OtherWorld's website: <http://www.otherworlds.cx/>

In Brief

Bastion Press have announced a series of d20 sourcebooks: Arms & Armor (January, 2002), Alchemy & Herbalists (February, 2002) and Villains (March, 2002). Dark Quest Games have an interesting d20 cyberpunk product line up starting in December. Rising Force Productions are a new publisher who have released the first comedy d20 module, Crush The Doomed Kitty. Citizen Games have released some more teasers for their d20 wild west game Wild West Adventures, slated for release in January 2001. In addition to their Body & Vigor system, you can now download a Desperado Primer and a Character Sheet. You can get them from their web page. Auran have released a 'digitally-enhanced' adventure - a CD-ROM containing a PDF file (the adventure) and several 3D scenes, ambient sounds, printable player handouts and other items. Fast Forward Games have announced their first D20 Core Rulebook, containing "hundreds of historically authentic demons, wonderfully described and masterfully illustrated." Privateer Press have renamed the third part of the Witchfire Trilogy. It will now be called The Legion of Lost Souls and will be out late September.

And lastly... Eric Noah's Unofficial D&D 3rd Edition News celebrated its second birthday recently. Without Eric's site and his support, EN World would not exist and you would not be reading this magazine now - so I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to Eric!

Product Reviews

By Jesse Dean

Warning: These reviews may contain plotline spoilers.

TOUCHED BY THE GODS

ISBN# 1-887801-99-5

Designed by Michelle Nephew

Published by Atlas Games

<http://www.atlas-games.com>

Cover Price: \$23.95

This review originally appeared on www.AtFantasy.com

Touched by the Gods is the fifth product, and first sourcebook, in Atlas Games' Penumbra line of d20 products. Touched by the Gods details a number of cults, cabals, and secret societies. It is not designed for any specific campaign setting and most of the organizations within are suitably generic enough to be inserted into any campaign setting. It is priced at \$23.95

Presentation

The Touched by the Gods is a one hundred and twenty-eight paged, hardbound book. The margins are one inch wide and are illustrated with symbols of the various cults and cabals found within the book.

The cover illustration, by Helena Wickberg, is a beautiful piece depicting the ceremony of some sort of sun/fire god. The book retains Penumbra's traditional 2-color design surrounding the illustration. The interior artwork, by Scott Reeves, is composed of a number of pieces primarily detailing characters but with a scattering of scenes.

Overview and Analysis

Touched by the Gods is divided into an introduction, fifteen sections, each detailing an organization, and an index. Most of the organization sections provides a stat block detailing the organizations formal name, nicknames, brief description, symbol, and patron deity (if any), an introduction to the organization, the organization's goals, its organization, how to join the organization, and adventure hooks. A few have significantly less than that.

The organizations are varied, ranging from the Davlika, a hippiesque commune of cursed goblinoids dedicated to spreading peace and unity, to the Forge, a group of wizards wishing to ascend by assuming the perfect form, to the Ten Thousand Heroes, a loosely allied group of warriors training

themselves for the battle to end the world.

Here are a brief summary of the organizations:

The Athenaeum: A loose confederation of libraries, monasteries, and scholars obsessed with obtaining and recording all information. They offer anyone the answers they seek, for a price.

Davlika: A group of goblins who have found religion by magical means and now infect others with their false faith

Death's Forsaken: A secret society of heroes, all of whom have been resurrected or raised from the dead and have become sensitive to the worlds beyond death

The Forge: An alliance of powerful magic-users that seek to transcend mortal existence by transferring their spirits into perfect vessels

God Seekers: A group dedicated to seeking out and cultivating mortals which it believes have the potential to become divine, seeking to reduce the chance for them to become evil.

Justicars: A secretive cult dedicated to eliminating those who have used law to protect themselves from justice

Lurient's Legacy: A loosely organized, cell-based, revolutionary group dedicated to balancing the amount of wealth between the social classes, ending needless wars were only the commoners are hurt, and protecting cities from the onslaught of evil creatures prowling the streets.

Openers of the Way: A cult that has spent the last ten thousand years looking for the Chosen One, a reincarnated champion of good, to defeat the eventual rise of the demon Golthara. Unfortunately, they are not sure who they are looking for.

The Order of Endings: A group that believes that this existence is merely a preparation for eternal life in the netherworld. They seek to destroy undead and those who have been brought back from the dead

The Reborn: An organization of humanoids reincarnated as animals. They see themselves as spirits of nature who must maintain a balance between civilization and nature by manipulating civilization from within.

Sheperds of the Root: A religious group that seeks to topple civilization and usher

in a golden age of primitive enlightenment

Spirits of Bohnaraii: A group of young nobles who believe they have the spirit of the god Bohnaraii within them, which will give them the power to perform a miracle in a situation of seemingly certain death

Survival Cults: Five racist cults that seek to maintain the superiority, purity, and ideals of their race

Ten Thousand Heroes: A brotherhood of warriors driven to prove themselves as the latest incarnations of ancient heroes through acts of bravery in battle

Way of the Wolf: A diabolic sect of werewolves beholden to a Lupin Tehran, a werewolf lich who they think is the undying embodiment of the Divine Wolf

Each of the organizations detailed in the book is generic enough to be used in any setting, while maintaining intriguing premises. Their backgrounds are diverse enough to provide a variety of different options within a campaign without being too out there, though a few, namely the Openers of the Way and the Davlika appear to be mostly useful for comic relief.

Even without an interest in using all of the organizations, most have material that can be used without using the organization.. Seven gods, three domains, four spells, four prestige classes, fourteen feats, fourteen magical items, three monsters, and a template provide crunchy bits that are useful and balanced. Of particular interest are rules for a new type of magical item: the graft. Grafts are special magical items, produced by the Forge, which replace body parts on humans. They are effectively a form of magical cybernetics, and provoke interesting ideas for a setting where they are a more prevalent.

On the down side, some of the ideas in the book have been seen before. The Survival Cults are basically variations of existing racist ideas, admittedly with lots of new ideas for the non-human versions. The Shepherds of the Root are very close to the Cult of Moander, from the Forgotten Realm setting, right down to the implanting of cult members with a seed that turns their insides into a plant.

Conclusion 5/5

Touched by the Gods is an excellent first sourcebook from Atlas Games. It succeeds in every way in what it set out to do. It presented a number of cults and organization for a d20 campaign that are easy and fun to use, providing tools to create memorable allies, enemies, and patrons. Comparing it, both in physical quality and in material quality, to the WotC books of late, it is definitely worth its 23.95 cover price.

TWIN CROWNS: AGE OF EXPLORATION FANTASY

ISBN# 0-9712145-0-6

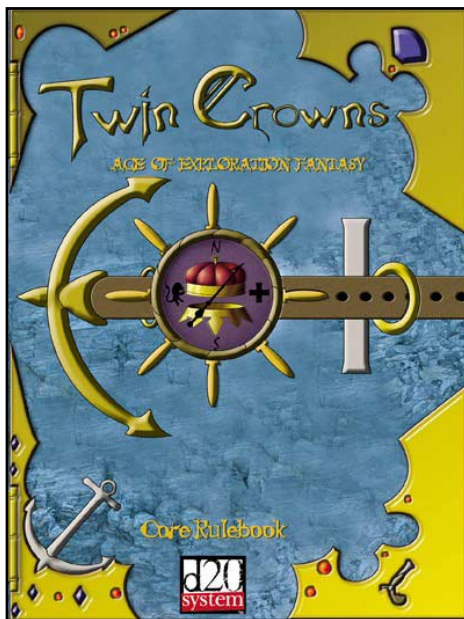
Designed by John Fugano, Steve Novella

Published by Living Imagination, Inc.

<http://www.livingimagination.com>

Cover Price: \$24.95

Twin Crowns, Age of Exploration Fantasy, designed by John Fugano and Steve Novella, is the first in Living Imagination's line of d20 products. It serves to as the campaign setting for the world of Ptalamanar and is composed in equal parts of rules material and setting material.



The Book

Twin Crowns, a standard, laminated, perfect bound, book, is three hundred and four pages long. The interior covers are blank. The margins depict a stylized pattern skin to a heraldic symbol.

The cover, by John Forish, appears to follow the lead of Wizards of the Coast and Swords and Sorcery Studio by presenting it as a book. This particular illustration has a strong naval and royal theme to it with symbols of crowns, a gun, and a sextant as part of the illustration. The interior artwork, by Matt Clerico, Geof Davis, Robert Diaz,

John Forish, Chris Loots, and Felix Plaza, is largely unexceptional. There are some good illustrations but there are just as many poor ones. Many of the pictures have captions.

The Meat/The Good/The Bad

Twin Crowns presents a lot of material, ranging from races, to feats, to spells, to nations, to DM's advice. The book is divided into a player's section in a gamemaster's section, though there is not that much material in the gamemaster's section that would spoil any real secrets for the players. For some reason, the book decides to follow the model of the Player's Handbook in presenting its new rules material. The first six chapters names and type of content match that of the Player's Handbook almost completely. There are several formatting errors in the book.

The book starts off with an introduction to Ptalamanar, providing an overview of the book and the setting. There is nothing particularly exceptional or unexceptional about this.

Chapter Two introduces the races of Ptalamanar. In addition to standard ones, like dwarves, half-elves, half-orcs, and humans, this chapter presents several new ones and variations on existing ones. The new ones include khesta, which appear to be variations on hobbits, kithraas, asexual amphibious humanoids whose health depends on them producing an egg every year, and shallorians, feline humanoids who serve as a lower class in the Twin Crown Empire. The variant races are all elves, and share their names with Elven subraces in the Monster Manual. Wood elves are basically akin to the Player's Handbook elves, high elves are militaristic fanatics who wish to take over the world, and wild elves are essentially honourable savages. This new races appear to be balanced, which makes this book rather unique among those races that have been published by d20 companies so far.

Chapter Three details the role of each of the classes in Ptalamanar and introduces five new prestige classes. The information on the role of each classes is largely, standard saying their roles in society as well as those religions and organisations they are likely to join. The new prestige classes are arcane ritualist, bounty hunter, diplomat, divine ritualist, and privateer. None of them are overly powerful and, save for the two ritualist classes, could be used in most any campaign. The privateer in particular is well-developed and fits seamlessly into the new naval rules introduced in the book.

Chapter Four introduces new skills for the setting. The creators of the book avoid creating unnecessary skills, and most of the "new" ones introduced are mostly subsets of the Profession and Speak Languages

skills. The other new skills include Arcane Ritual and Divine Ritual, which are used in the casting of ritual magic, and Sea Legs, which is used to perform actions on a ship when the ocean is not calm. The reasoning behind creating an entirely new skill for Sea Legs is unknown, as the Balance skill would have worked just as well in this particular instance.

Chapter Five introduces new feats for the Twin Crowns setting. The vast majority of these are divine feats, but there are also feats related to features unique to the setting such as ritual magic and the need to recharge magical energies. The divine feats are intertwined with the ritual magic system. Each of the feats requires a certain level of devotion to one of the deities, and the appropriate ritual to match. The feats themselves are flavourful and provide intriguing abilities for a religious character to gain. In total there are over one hundred new feats introduced in the book.

Chapter Six details equipment that is unique to the Twin Crowns setting. The majority of this short chapter provides an expansion on the details on firearms provided in the DMG, with some notes on a drug called kruff, the magical powder known as korba, and a disease that kills horses called Hjorguskludr.

Chapter Seven provides information on naval adventuring. A number of topics on that affect naval travel are discussed and the various ship classes, statistics for these classes are , a system for resolving sea voyages, and a system for resolving combat between ships are all introduced. This information appears to be statistically sound and serves to fill a notable gap in the d20 system. If you wish to provide the mechanics for naval adventuring without creating your own, or borrowing from another game's source than this information is valuable.

Chapter Eight discusses magic and religion. It serves to introduce the mythology of Ptalamanar, its deities, the different levels of initiation that a character can hold, the effects of sanctified ground, death and resurrection, magical recharging, and holy sects and orders. The mythology and pantheon are internally consistent and interesting, feeling as if they truly fit the setting rather than having just been thrown together to fill match with certain portfolios. The information on various levels of divine initiation is useful as it relates directly to a character's rank within a particular church as well as his ability to access divine feats. In Ptalamanar each living sentient being is given five chances at life. Each of these lives is referred to as a Gift. Before the last of his Gifts is gone, it is not too difficult to bring back a dead person as their spirit wanders back to a shrine, temple, or cathedral that matches their faith. In that

holy place a simple ritual, known as the Ceremony of Life, can bring any spirits that are waiting in the temple back. After a person has lost his fifth Gift it is impossible to bring him back, even with powerful magic. There are some spells that can prevent a person from losing one of their Gifts if they are cast soon after an individual's death as well as those that ensure a character loses their Gift. Another feature of magic unique to Ptalamanar is the requirement for casters to recharge. After a number of days equal to their spellcasting level a spellcaster must return to an appropriate location (a nexus for sorcerers, wizards, or bards and a temple, cathedral, or shrine for clerics or paladins) and spend a period of time recharge their magical abilities. Druids and Rangers do not have to do this, but they are unable to regain spells outside of a natural setting. The new sects are interesting and fit the setting well.

Chapter Nine discusses spells new to the Twin Crowns setting. Differences in resurrection magic, how dispelling magic affects rituals, and the role of death magic are all discussed. In addition several new domains, and eighty new spells are introduced. The domains are largely deity-specific. The new spells range from specific ones to round out domains, to deal with unique features of magic in Ptalamanar, to elemental and necromancy based attack spells. These are largely useful and balanced.

Chapter Ten introduces a new system for ritual magic. The Twin Crowns system is based around rituals being advanced skill-based spells that create permanent or extremely powerful effects. Each one requires several weeks to prepare and consumes experience points in the process. Each ritual requires the use of a magical item known as a ritual scroll as well as a consumable substance called korba. After the preparation of a ritual the caster may cast the ritual at any time resulting in an effect that varies depending on the ritual. Casting a ritual requires a skill check using the appropriate ritual skill. There are chances for critical success, success, flawed success, failure, and critical failure. Unfortunately neither this chapter nor the section on the appropriate skill explains exactly how one achieves a critical success or failure. The information on flawed successes is also difficult to find, being detailed in the Overreach Ritual feat in Chapter Five. This chapter also leaves out tables for critical successes and failures with divine rituals and repeats the table on arcane critical failures twice. Luckily Appendix E contains the required tables. Beyond these flaws, the ritual system is sound and interesting, and easily transferable to other settings (I plan to steal it for mine once errata telling what is up with critical successes and failures comes out).

Chapters Eleven through Fourteen detail

the world of Ptalmanar, including its history, and gazetteers for the Northern Empire, the Southern Empire, and Other lands. These sections are rich in culture, and detail providing more than enough information to properly play a character from each nation and run a campaign set in any of the detailed regions. The major flaw for these chapters is the fact that many of the cultures draw noticeable parallels with existing real-world cultures. The people of Jarlway are very similar to the Vikings (they are even called Vikings), the Highlanders are pretty much Scottish Highlanders, The Ten Nations are basically American Indians, the Calumbrians are similar to the medieval French, the people of Estrados are similar to the Spanish, the people of Krushkov share many traits with the Russians, etc.

Chapter Fifteen discusses adventuring in Ptalmanar. It discusses eight topics that are important to Ptalmanar campaigns, and can be used for adventures.

Chapter Sixteen introduces several new magic items and relics. These are largely interesting, though not as flavourful as those found in other products such as Relics and Rituals, and balanced. Some of the items designated as minor Relics seem to be a bit weak for the designation, but this is hardly a fatal flaw.

Chapter Seventeen introduces new monsters for Ptalamanar and discusses several, such as Dragons and Dark Elves, which have unique roles in the setting. There are not an especially large number of monsters, but those that are present are interesting and useful.

The book finishes off with several Appendices. The first one provides maps for the primary regions detailed in the book, the Empires and the colonies. The map is not that great, especially compared to that of the Kingdoms of Kalamar and the Forgotten Realms, but it serves its purpose. Appendix A provides a calendar for Ptalmanar. Appendix B describes each of the regions coat of arms. Appendix C provides a time line. Appendix D provides a time line of Imperial Royalty. Appendix E provides a compilation of all the pertinent tables in the book. There is not index or glossary.

Rating: 4/5

Twin Crowns has a lot to recommend it even if you do not intend to use the settings. The game material is very easily useable in most any setting, and for its cost it provides more than enough material to validate the purchase, especially compared to the amount of material you get in say, one of the WotC class books. The setting itself is interesting and very useable, as long as you do not have a problem with setting cultures that are similar to real cultures.

NATURE'S FURY

ISBN# 1-5884-6171-8

Written by Mike Mearls & James Bell

Published by Fiery Dragon Productions

<http://www.fierydragon.com>

Cover Price: \$9.95

Nature's Fury, with adventures by Mike Mearls and James Bell, is the fourth module released by Fiery Dragon Productions. Both of the included adventures, Swords Through the Ice Gate and The Crystal Tower, are site-based adventures with an icy theme to them. The first one revolves around a gateway to a world locked in ice and the second centres around a wizard's tower on an ice flow. While nominally set in the setting of Karathis discussed on Fiery Dragon's site, they are very easily inserted into most any campaign setting. There are even details included to do so.

The Book

The module, a standard laminated, staple-bound booklet, is forty pages long. The margins are blank and are generally 1.5" wide. The front interior cover contains a number of useful tables for keeping track of challenge ratings, the traps in the second adventure (The Crystal Tower), and the hit points of the iceberg in the second adventure.

The cover illustration, by Brian LeBlanc, depicts a small horde of bugbears facing off against a group of fur-clad humans. This is, in my opinion, the best Fiery Dragon cover by far and aptly conveys the mood of the first adventure. The interior artwork, by Todd Secord, is composed of black and white drawings that are largely unexceptional save for those drawn from the work of Claudio Pozas.

The maps are informative, including a grid and scale. Also included are the distinctive counters that have allowed Fiery Dragon to stick out from the crowd in module production. This set is artistically rendered by Claudio Pozas and is generally well done.

The content of the book is divided into two adventures and five appendices. Each adventure contains an introduction, an adventure synopsis and background, a section on modifying the adventure, a list of keyed encounters, the adventure aftermath, and the adventure's maps. The appendices summarize the monsters and NPCs of the adventure, introduce the new magic items included in the adventure, and include the obligatory legal text.

The Meat

The first adventure, *Swords Through the Ice Gate*, by Mike Mearls, deals with the opening of an ancient gate between the PC's world and the frozen world of Gillidia. Through the machinations of a newly awakened white dragon, and the recovery of a gate key, the gate was reopened resulting in the curse that covers Gillidia to extend through the gate and a tribe of bugbear servitors of the white dragon to capture the inhabitants of a village known as Owen's Point. This is where the PCs come in. For whatever reason, the PCs arrive in Owen's Point to find the villagers missing and the area covered in snow during the middle of summer. Obvious signs lead to the gate where they discover that there is some internal dissent in the bugbear tribe. Not all of the bugbears support the dragon with the same levels of devotion and their are opportunities to get the majority of the bugbear tribe to stand aside while the PCs deal with the dragon and rescue the captives.

The second adventure, *The Crystal Tower*, by James Bell, deals with the tower of a long dead renegade wizard, which once sat on a glacier. The glacier has since begun to break apart and the piece with the tower has floated within site of a coastal city. Two groups have taken an interest in it. One, the Academy of the Kathendas Enclaves, once contained the dead wizard within their ranks and seeks to recover a piece of his work known as the amulet of wizardly power. The second, the DeSardo family, seeks to recover the magical talisman in order to gain some control on the Academy's direction. The PCs are brought in by the Academy, while the DeSardo family has sent a group of operatives to recover the amulet. With that set-up in place, the PCs must navigate a trap and puzzle-filled tower with a hostile, and unknown, enemy group also seeking it out.

The Good

In many ways this is *Fiery Dragon's* best release so far. Both of the adventures are interesting, site-based adventures filled to the brim with good ideas and interesting settings. *Swords Through the Ice Gate* utilizes a good combination of action and negotiation to avoid the tedium that many site-based adventure can evoke. The ritual combat, which takes place in a pool filled with large chunks of ice, to determine who leads the tribe is particularly interesting due to its cinematic potential. *The Crystal Tower* takes the traditional trap-filled wizard's tower scenario and adds a number of elements to make it more interesting. The melting glacier as a time limit idea, while not completely new, is intriguing in

this particular case. The addition of a rival group with the same ends is similar in its utility.

One thing that is also exceptional in this module is its Using in the Campaign section. While many modules contain one, the sections included in *Nature's Fury* are truly exceptional, containing a variety of good and useful ways to adapt the adventure to alternate campaigns. In addition there are several suggestions to making the adventures more interesting, such as making the rival group in the *Crystal Tower* more dynamic in their actions rather than static.

The Bad

There really is not very much that is negative about these adventures. If you truly abhor site-based adventures you probably would want to stay away from them. Beyond that this adventure is a good buy.

Rating: 5/5

COIN'S END

ISBN# 1-889182-53-2

Designed by Andy Miller

Published by Kenzer and Company

<http://www.kenzerco.com>

Cover Price: \$11.99

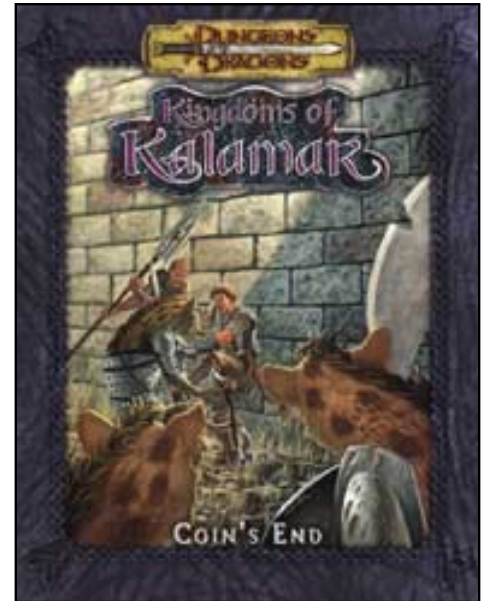
Coin's End, written by Andy Miller, is the fourth in Kenzer' and Company's line of d20 modules. Serving as the sequel for *The Root of All Evil* and *Forging Darkness*, it is written for a group of four to six fifth level characters. It is set in the Reanaaria Bay area of Tellene, in the Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. It is an event-based module with an even mix between combat, negotiation, and role-playing.

The Book

Coin's End, a standard laminated, stapled, booklet, is forty-eight pages long. The inside covers have maps on them. The margins are partially white and partially marbled and are an inch wide. The interior covers are covered with maps of the outside of *Castle Triumph* and the *Land of Skarrna*.

The cover illustration, by Hung Vinh Mac, is a quality piece depicting a battle between a group of adventurers and gnolls next to a large wall. The interior art, by Tommy Castillo, is comprised of miniaturized versions of the *ImageQuest* (tm) illustrations provided at the back of the book.

The maps are flavourful and interesting, providing Kenzer's typical high quality of informativeness and usefulness.



The Meat

Coin's End picks up where *Forging Darkness* left off, with the PCs preparing to travel north for the final confrontation with Daresh. If the PCs have not completed the previous module than five hooks are provided to introduce them to the module. Regardless of whether they have completed the previous module or been introduced to the adventure through one of the presented the campaign hook the PCs are presented with the *Coin of Power* that they need to confront Daresh and instructions to visit the village of Haanex and speak to the wizard Veoden.

The module assumes that the PCs start in the city of Zoa and provides two alternatives to approaching Haanex: by ocean or by land. By ocean is the easiest, and is less eventful than by travelling by foot. Random and not-so random encounters are provided regardless of which route the PCs choose.

Assuming that the PCs decide to follow through with their instructions to visit Veoden, they are granted a vision of Daresh's castle and a cryptic warning that "evil vannot stand evil's touch." He also recommends that they should stay hidden in their journey to their north.

With that, the module breaks off into detailing the History of the *Land of Skarrna*, its capital and its politics. More information is provided in this module than the Kingdoms of Kalamar setting, including a listing of all of the Skryvalkkers of Skarrna and a map of Skarrna showing rough boundaries between each of the Skryvalkker's domains.

After this section the remaining material

is a series of detailed encounters mixed between quasi-random encounters that can be placed in a wide general area to ones that can be placed with a little more difficulty. Some flexibility is allowed in the potential of where the PCs can go. Opportunities also exist to add both hostile and friendly NPCs to the group's roster before its final confrontation with their ultimate target: Daresh.

Daresh waits in the castle of the former ruler of Natfal, a domain of Skarma. Renamed Castle Triumph, it is currently manned and surrounded by a large portion of Daresh's gnoll forces. Several ways are provided for the PCs to sneak into the castle, both obvious and a bit more secret. The castle itself is filled with a mix of gnolls, werebeasts, and gargoyles in addition to Daresh herself. After Daresh's death, the PCs now must escape from the castle. The module assumes that Daresh dies spectacularly, blowing up the top of the castle, and presents the PCs with the challenge of escaping the castle with the gnolls encamped it all riled up and a gnoll adept and a pack of gnoll and ghoulish followers chasing as they flee.

The module wraps up with a description of the aftermath of the module and hints at potential future adventures....

The Good

Coin's End provides a suitably epic conclusion to Kenzer and Company's first trilogy. Its strengths are very similar to that of its two predecessors. It is jam packed with material that makes the game run easier. Hand outs, good maps, and the twenty-seven perforated ImageQuest (tm) pictures all make this adventure especially useful. It follows the trend of previous modules in further fleshing out areas of the setting that are pertinent to the adventure, providing most of the setting information need to run the module. The numerous encounters, quite a few of which have nothing to do with the actual quest, add to the flavour of the world and provide a deal of detail that cannot be gained from regular random encounters. For those who prefer random encounters, four pages of tables for the region in and around Skarma are provided in the back end of the book.

The Bad

Coin's End's main faults lie with the assumptions it makes. At several points in the adventure it assumes that the PCs follow a particular course of action and for most of the remainder of the module the flavour text and the action is based around that. The most glaring of these assumptions are its assumptions that a group of non-evil bandits join the group at one point and

that the module ends with the destruction of the two Coins of Power and their subsequent large explosion. The entire end to the module assumes that this happens, and the aftermath section fails to consider the potential of one or both of the Coins still existing.

Rating: 4/5

Coin's End is a worthwhile purchase if you wish to gain more information on the Lands of Skarma, if you ran the first two modules in this series, or if you want to plunder this module for individual encounters or ideas that are easily useable with most any other setting or campaign.

NIGHTMARES & DREAMS

ISBN# 0-9708265-2-4

Written by Doug Herring,
Andrew Thompson, Kenny Lewis,
and John Kubisz

Published by Mystic Eye Games
<http://www.mysticeyegames.com>

Nightmares and Dreams is the second product in Mystic Eye Games' line of d20 products. Designed for use with the Hunt: Rise of Evil campaign setting, Nightmares and Dreams contains monsters created from the dreams and nightmares of people on Earth. The Hunt: Rise of Evil campaign setting is not required to use Nightmares and Dreams. More information on the Hunt: Rise of Evil campaign setting can be found at www.mysticeyegames.com.



The Book

Nightmares and Dreams, a standard laminated, perfect bound booklet, is seventy-

two pages long. The margins are filled with the illustration of a gargoyle encrusted wall and are generally 1" wide.

The cover illustration, by David Manuel, depicts a Soul of Evil fighting a Pardoner. It is a decent illustration that matches the mood of the content well. The interior artwork, by a variety of artists, is composed of black and white drawings of each of the monsters. The drawings really are a mixed bag. They vary from reasonably well-rendered and creepy, such as the Incinerated, to those that are less than stellar, such as the Blob.

The Meat/The Good/The Bad

Nightmares and Dreams contains thirty-two monsters, three templates, ten magic items, two NPCs, four adventure hooks, a poison, and a spell. The monsters, which are primarily undead, outsiders, and aberrations, follow a horror theme with varying degrees of bizarreness. While in many cases this bizarreness creates interesting and innovative monsters, in some cases the resulting monsters are bizarre almost to the point of being unusable in campaigns outside of Gothos.

One area of particular note in Nightmares and Dreams is the Nightmare/Dream entry found in each monster's description. Each one is a short piece of fiction detailing the Earth inhabitant's dream that resulted in the monster's existence. Most of these are rather interesting and add a lot of flavour to the entries. In some parts of the book this section is more enjoyable than the actual monster, and often times provide some insight into ways that you can use that monster.

The included extras, beyond the monsters, are largely used to highlight and supplement the noted monster. Several monsters include the magic items that can be used to summon or create that particular monster, or item that can be made from that monster's remains. Like the Nightmare/Dream entries, these generally add to the value of the particular entries providing them with a greater level of useability.

Rating: 3/5

Nightmares and Dreams is a worthwhile buy if you are a fan of the Hunt: Rise of Evil campaign setting, if you love weird and bizarre monsters, or if you wish to add some more horrific monsters to your campaign. Many of these monsters would suit certain domains of Ravenloft well.

A Sneak Peak

With Russell Morrissey

I have on my desk the proof copies of a couple of upcoming d20 products. I should warn you that these are not the final copies and could well change before they go to print. That disclaimer aside, I'll dive into my 'sneak peaks' at Maiden Voyage from Atlas Games and Demonology: The Dark Road from Mongoose Publishing.

Maiden Voyage

Atlas Games

This is a 32 page adventure set at sea. It is designed to be easily used in any campaign featuring a sea voyage and features murder, mutiny and a ghost ship called The Sea Maiden.

The adventure takes place over four days, and is divided into chapters - one for each day. The adventure begins, appropriately enough, with a section detailing plot hooks and a few pre-journey events before continuing with a map and room-by-room description of the ship itself. A new god is introduced here - Krakas, Lord of the Maelstrom.

Life aboard ship is well dealt with, and DM's shouldn't have a problem creating the appropriate atmosphere. Sections dealing with rumours on deck, a full page detailing a card game named 'Skulls' and a few preliminary encounters all serve to set the scene, and the DM is given help by way of various aids at the back of the book. The NPCs are well detailed, each getting a full half page including portrait, a typical quote ("Get out of my galley! If you touch that keg, I'll chop your fingers off and serve it with gruel tomorrow night!") and roleplay notes, along with the obligatory stats.

An so into the adventure itself. Each of the four days, as previously mentioned, is granted its own chapter. The first day serves to introduce the characters to life onboard ship. On day two, the crew starts to get restless: bad omens are seen and morale starts to get low. By day three, murder and mutiny are added to the mix and the PCs become involved in a ship-board whodunnit and on day four they

come across the ghost ship Sea Maiden. It's difficult to say more without ruining the adventure for you!

All in all, this appears to be a very useful plug-in module that can be easily introduced to any campaign. It is entirely self-contained and has no setting-specific content (as is the case with the entire Penumbra line of products from Atlas Games), and comes complete with a number of useful bits and pieces - player handouts, a 'combat table' listing the key combat stats for each NPC or monster with blanks for you to fill in the initiative rolls and damage taken by each. The adventure also features a new monster (the Sea Scourge) and a new monster template.

Counter Collection I: The Usual Suspects

Fiery Dragon Productions

By now, most readers will be aware of Fiery Dragon Productions' Counter Collections. Preview versions of the counters were available at GenCon - according to the letter accompanying the collection, the actual product will be perforated and the colours will be 'more vivid and detailed'.

In front of me I have the unperforated non-vivid preview version. The collection consists of 450 counters, most of which are 1-inch square, each mounted on stock card. Each counter bears art by Claudio Pozas, a box in which you can enter a number (Goblin 1, Goblin 2 and so on) and an arrow to indicate facing. Most of the creatures are repeated several times (sometimes up to 20 times), and in these cases, often one of the counters will have a larger box for writing a name rather than a number.

I used the counters last night in my regular Tuesday night game, and they proved an unmitigated success. No longer am I using my twelve plastic skeletons to represent all and sundry (yes, the ogres are very emaciated...).

The counters are nearly all 'monsters' -

they aren't really suitable for PCs and NPCs. These, apparently, will be the subject of Counter Collection II. The range of monsters seems to cover most common types, with a few additions (beholders, dragons and so on). There are also a few horses and one or two carts, which proved useful. OK, so I'd rather have lead miniatures. But 450 lead miniatures would require a small mortgage, and these counters are perfectly adequate.

As a bonus, Fiery Dragon have also included a short 8-page adventure. It's nothing major, more of a short interlude - but for free it's a nice touch.

Web of The Widow

Auran

The title of 'the Future of Roleplaying' has been claimed by many - from Neverwinter Nights, to 3E D&D, to the d20 system and Open Gaming License itself. This 'digitally enhanced adventure' is another such claimant. It comes in a standard DVD-sized CD-ROM box, and contains a CD, a reference manual and three colour maps.

To clarify - this is not an online game or one intended to be played on a computer. The computer is used to enhance the adventure itself, which is still supposed to be played in the traditional pen-n-paper manner. To this end, we get nice 3D scenes (which the players can view from different angles using the mouse), sounds, music and, of course, the adventure itself - which is a 120 page pdf with various printable game aids. The 3D setting and music are certainly very pretty and, if used appropriately, would certainly serve to enhance a game. The adventure itself, of course, needs to be printed (as a pdf file is far from an ideal way to run an adventure) and this will add to the cost.

For those with a conveniently placed PC (or a laptop) and a suitable budget, this does seem to be an interesting development in tabletop gaming. Perhaps when computer-based aids become more common, it will seem natural to run a computer enhanced adventure along with combat trackers, NPC generators and so on in real time. Personally, I find the computer more useful as a preparation aid - but I am curious as to how this combination actually plays out. I would be hesitant to review or rate a product such as this by merely looking at it, so for now I will await the review with interest

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Milwaukee on a Fiery Dragon

GENCON 2001 REPORT

By James Bell

Fiery Dragon Productions

<http://www.fireydragon.com>

This was my second GenCon. I had been last year, less than a month after Jason, Todd and I had started Fiery Dragon Productions, intending to produce d20 fantasy adventures. So, this year I felt like a veteran, in that I wasn't totally unprepared for the sheer amount of people crammed into the place.

We arrived in the morning on Friday, August 3rd, which just happened to be my birthday, so I felt that it was a good omen. We arrived at the Hotel Metro around 11:00, checked our bags, changed into our Fiery Dragon shirts, and went searching for a place to eat. Milwaukee is an odd place; we knew that there were twenty thousand people less than four blocks away, but the streets were empty and most places weren't yet open for business. We finally found a place that served food before 11:00 - The Saladmaker - and ate a hearty lunch (we were still on Toronto time!)

The walk to the Midwest Express Center wasn't bad at all, not like last year, when Jason and I stayed on the far side of Milwaukee. This year we were in prime convention territory, and we had a home-base booth waiting for us inside.

We picked up our badges from the Exhibitor booth, left for us by the Sword & Sorcery gang at White Wolf, and immediately proceeded up the escalators to the third floor exhibit hall. Todd wasn't able to make it last year, and he was looking forward to scouring the vendors for rare and out-of-print material. We all wanted to check out the latest wave of d20 stuff, and to meet some of the companies that make up the fairly friendly d20 community.

Actually, that was the number one thing on my list: meeting people. I was looking forward to meeting Clark Peterson and Bill Webb from Necromancer, whom I've talked to, but never met in person. And Steve Wieck of White Wolf, whom I've talked to, but never met in person. And Mike Mearls, whom I've talked to, but never met in person. And Monte Cook, whom I've ah, you get the point. I just wanted to meet everyone that I had shared telephone or e-mail conversations with and see what they were like in real life.

We did a quick circuit of the exhibitor hall, noting a ton of places that we'd have to come back to when we had more time, and then worked our way to our rendezvous spot at the Sword & Sorcery booth. Well, it was really more of a table; S&S had a small corner of the White Wolf booth consisting of one table and a merchandising rack. Really, it was all that was needed - there are only, what, twelve products out under the S&S banner? Four titles were debuting at GenCon. Clark and Bill were both working the booth when we arrived, as was Anthony Pryor, the developer for the Scarred Lands.

We had missed a busy opening day on Thursday, when all of the hard core fans get in and buy the products they've been waiting for. Friday, we were told, was a bit more sedate, though business was still brisk. It was clear from the start that Clark and Bill were having a blast. These are two guys who truly love the game and exuded joyous energy. Well, they did on Friday - as the weekend went on, you could see the beginning effects of Con Exhaustion. Still they held up, their spirits buoyed by a Gygax-signed copy of *The Tomb of Horrors*.

We worked the booth from 2:00 until close at 6:00 that day. We sold a fair amount of our first S&S release, *Nature's Fury*, and had lots of interest in our preview copies of the Counter Collection, which was coming out in September. We learned that most people do not differentiate between the Sword & Sorcery brands. Most didn't care if it was a *Necromancer* adventure, a *Scarred Lands* sourcebook, or a *Fiery Dragon* counter pack. They just liked what *Sword & Sorcery* had put out thus far, and were looking forward to "our" products in the future. We were asked a lot of questions -- mostly about release dates on *Scarred Lands* source material, which we deflected to Anthony - and sold a lot of product. It has been a long time since my old retail muscles were used, and I was happy, but drained after the four hours in the booth.

It wasn't all about sales, though. It was mostly about Mike Mearls. Every fifteen or twenty minutes, someone would come up looking for him, assuming that we knew his location. I explained that, knowing Mike (at least, electronically), he was probably working his way through the convention floor collecting contracts for d20 products the way some people collect Magic cards. I

believe I used the phrase "Mearls, the d20 slave" at one point, confusing the guy I was talking to, as he wasn't sure if I was making an in-joke about Mearls' success or lambasting the guy for selling his soul. For the record, we couldn't be happier for Mike getting his name on 60 releases a year, not to mention the six or seven pseudonyms that he's been working under.

After the exhibit hall closed, we were able to return to our hotel and check into our room, which was great. The Hotel Metro has a very cool art deco look, and the room followed this trend. Low on energy and hungry, we made our way to a place called something like "The Crazy Witch's Casino and Steakhouse." We had a huge dinner and then walked back to the Convention Center, where an online community hosted by Eric Noah would be gathering. Finding the lifelike security guard statue, we soon met Eric, Kevin, Justin, Mr. and Mrs. Master (first name, *Dungeon*), and the rest of the group. We also, finally, met Mike Mearls, who was wearing a matching Fiery Dragon shirt.



We stayed at the meeting for a bit, which had been moved up into the board games hall, and then left early to grab a beer and get some sleep. All in all, Friday was a decent day, spent mostly learning the lay of the land and having some face-to-face time with people we'd known only online before.

Saturday was a day for business. We had established our plans, we knew our targets, and we had outlined our goals. Saturday was great.

We ate at the same place as the day before, since it was still the only place open before 11:00. Then we hit the art show and talked with Matt Wilson for a bit. A great guy, he's someone we'd love to use if he could ever fit us into his incredibly busy schedule. We moved on to the convention floor, buying or trading for several RPG products from our list: *Little Fears*, *The Last Exodus*, *Feng Shui*, *Sketch* plus a host of d20 products. Made a quick stop at the

Wizard's Attic booth, but Eric Rowe was out-and-about, so we just picked up some more products. The person ahead of us in line for payment was buying our third release, *To Stand on Hallowed Ground*.

We worked the booth for a while, but cleared out when Monte Cook had his signing time. Even though the organizers hadn't listed it in the Con Guide, and wouldn't make a PA announcement, plenty of people still showed up to have their DMGs or other products autographed by "the Man." We had talked with Monte briefly, but the evening was to culminate in a *Sword & Sorcery* dinner, so we knew we'd have more time with him later. We had a great time talking to other companies, met some of our fellow d20 developers, and worked out a deal with a writer we'd been interested in for a while. Saturday, I felt, was a day of accomplishments. In addition, our products had been selling briskly and were well received, and response for our work in general was positive.

Dinner that night was great. Despite our reservations, we had to wait nearly a half-hour for our table. Mark Rein*Hagen was there, and came over to say hi just before our table was ready. We were a party of eight: Clark & Bill from *Necromancer*, Steve Wieck from *Sword & Sorcery*, Todd, Jason & I from *Fiery Dragon*, and Monte & Sue Cook from *Malhavoc Press*. We had a great dinner, some fine drinks, and fun conversation. Business was discussed and plans were made, and talking to the people at that table was the high point of the weekend for me.

After dinner, we went to the White Wolf party. It was a great time, though the memories get somewhat hazy later into the night. We hung out and played pool with Peter, Kyle and James from *WotC*, and briefly saw Mike Mearls again, before he replenished his drink and stumbled off into the night. We made our way back to the hotel around 4:00, and waited for our wake-up call, which came an hour later. Jason had a family function to return home for, and he left for the airport early in the morning. Todd and I managed to organize ourselves and head out around 11:00 Sunday morning.

Our plans were immediately dashed as we saw our regular breakfast joint closed on Sunday. I was also surprised to find that this disturbing trend of closed stores continued through to the *Puff n' Pill*, especially as I was in serious need of some Advil.

We ate our breakfast and lunch from the hot dog vendor on the corner, and then once again entered the convention to dot

our Is and cross our Ts. We sold out of the copies that were brought of *Nature's Fury*, which made us quite happy. Mearls and I managed to autograph a few, and then we attended the unpublished, unscheduled, unknown *Sword & Sorcery* Question and Answer session on Sunday afternoon. I think S&S people outnumbered those who had come to hear about our product line up, but we were surprised anyone had shown given the total lack of promotion.

Making our last rounds, we managed to bump into Nicole from *Green Ronin*, which is the one company that I wanted to talk to but hadn't been able to find (Chris Pramas was busy running *Chainmail* demos in the *WotC* castle). We talked about business and the state of the d20 world, and their two new releases, which debuted at the convention. Business was very good for them, and I think that most of the *Freep-ort* product they brought had sold out by Sunday afternoon.

We had a final wrap-up and re-cap with

Steve, said goodbye to Mearls (who was going over the alphabetical list of exhibitors one last time to make sure that he hadn't missed anyone), and left for the airport. In line ahead of us were other passengers destined for Canada - their backpacks bulging with RPG product, and GenCon badges still around their necks. Our bags were stuffed with modules, rulebooks and magazines, but we still managed to squeeze them under the seat in front of us on the plane. We were back home by 10:00 that night, exhausted, but excited and charged about the future.

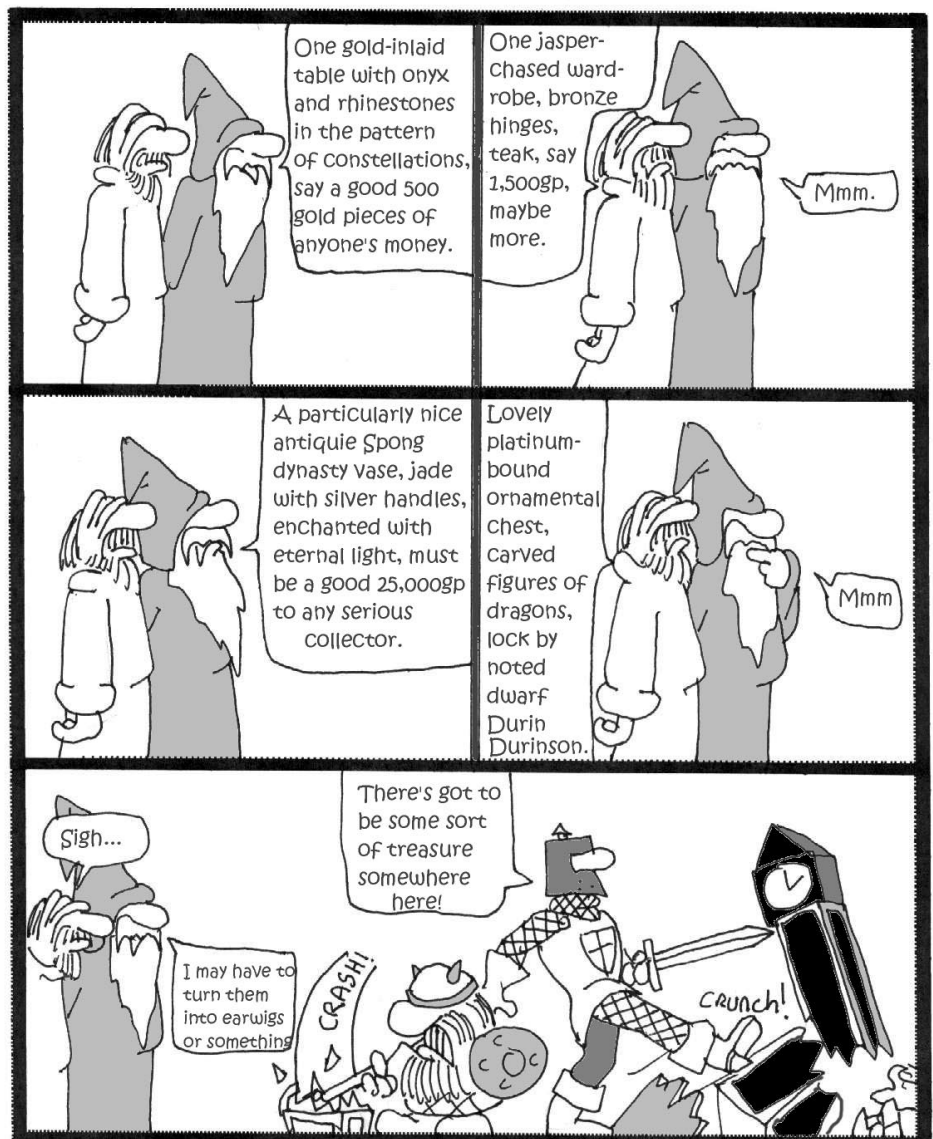
GenCon was a relation-building exercise for us. We met with our existing freelancers, possible future freelancers, our *Sword & Sorcery* partners and many of the other d20 developers. The e-mail conversations will be a little more personal from now on, and we'll be a step ahead next time.

We can't wait until GenCon 2002!



The Short Straw

(c) Adrian Czajkowski 2001



I'd like to thank the academy...

ENNIES 2001

By now you all know who the ENnie winners were . You've probably read the ceremony transcript which was due to appear here in Asgard magazine but which you all demanded be made available at EN World moments after the ceremony itself.

What you didn't know, and what the winners didn't know, is that we had had the awards printed and framed so that we could present them to the winners in person at GenCon. Mark 'CreativeMountain' Clover, a member of the nomination committee, travelled across country by foot, trekking through snow, ice, hail, wind and rain to bring these awards to the publishers and has kindly provided some photographs of the winners holding their well-earned awards.



Nicole Lindroos
and Hal Mangold
Green Ronin Publishing



Matt Wilson and
Brian Snoddy
Privateer Press



Monte Cook
Malhavoc Press



The ENnies, ready for delivery



Sue Weinlein Cook
Malhavoc Press



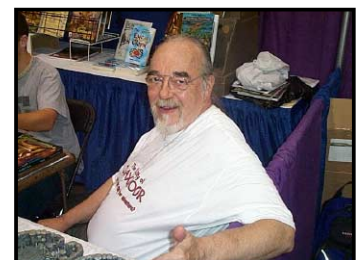
Monte Cook and
Sue Weinlein Cook
Malhavoc Press



Clark Peterson and Bill Webb
Necromancer Games



Hal Mangold, Chris Pramas
and Nicole Lindroos
Green Ronin Publishing



Gary Gygax
ENnie Presenter



The Feyspeaker

By Ryan Nock

As the dwarves forced their way through the woods, the sound of the revelry grew stronger, more inviting. Desperately they sought to find the source of the happy sounds of song and dance, hoping that perhaps the revellers would spare them some food. Finally they broke into the clearing, seeing the inviting flicker of bonfires in the middle of a spinning ring of exotic creatures. Luscious food lay scattered on the grass of the clearing around them, and the dwarves' leader urged them forward, despite the unease they felt beneath the gaze of the tall, imposing woman leading the dance.

The Faerie Realm is home to a myriad of fey races- centaurs, dryads, gremlins, hags, nymphs, pixies, satyrs, will-o'-wisps, and unnamed nations of others. The fey races live nearly forever in the Faerie Realm, a land which closely parallels the real world like a mist-filled mirror, accessible only through persistence or by the gracious whim of the fey themselves. Outsiders like humans, dwarves, or even elves are seldom welcomed, but a few humanoids with enough resilience and the right disposition can convince the fey to accept them as friends.

Feyspeakers are the revel-leaders of the fey, guiding the races of the Faerie Realm in dances of power both for their own delight and for protection. Usually only fey become Feyspeakers, but a majority of outsiders who befriend feykind go on to adopt this position of prestige. A Feyspeaker is almost universally respected by feykind, though some of the more capricious and bitter denizens of the Faerie Realm resent the presence of outsiders in the role of the revel-leaders.

Most Feyspeakers are bards or sorcerers, since some arcane magic is required to fulfill the requirements of the position, but many druids with a little arcane experience also feel an affinity to the fey races. Though those without magical powers cannot hold the position of Feyspeaker, they can assist Feyspeakers in Fey Dances, those celebrations of myth than many long to see, but fear to be ensnared by.

Hit Die: d4.



ILLUSTRATION BY JESSICA JONES

Requirements

Spellcasting: Ability to cast one spell with each of the following descriptors, at least one of which must be 3rd level or higher. Descriptors: (charm), (compulsion), (figment), or (glamer). Sample spells include change self (glamer), minor image (figment), hold person (compulsion), and charm monster (charm). Note that according to the Player's Handbook, no druid spells are figments or glamers, and no cleric spells are figments.

Feats: Spell Focus in either Enchantment or Illusion.

Skills: Bluff 4 ranks, Hide 2 ranks, Move Silently 2 ranks, Perform 4 ranks. Speak Language (Sylvan).

Other: Must be fey, or must win against a fey in a contest which the fey considers his or her speciality. For instance, she may beat a will-o'-wisp in a game of hide-and-seek, or a centaur in a race, or a satyr in a drinking contest. This might even be a bit unorthodox, perhaps by knitting a kilt faster than a pixie can unravel it, or outstripping a hag in a race to see who can lure more people to their deaths on the night of a full moon. The result of the contest can be judged by a relatively unbiased audience of fey, or it can be determined by the fey admitting defeat. A Feyspeaker must be accepted by feykind before she can cross the gap from the land of her birth to the Faerie Realm.

Class Skills

The Feyspeaker's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Animal Empathy (Cha, exclusive skill), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), and Spellcraft (Int). See Chapter 4: Skills in the Player's Handbook for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

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

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Feyspeaker gains no additional proficiency in any weapon or armor.

Feyspeaker's Vows: As a condition of her acceptance into the Faerie Realm, a Feyspeaker vows to defend feykind from the intrusions of non-fey. A Feyspeaker must retaliate against any non-fey who threaten or harm a fey, though the extent of the retaliation can range from annoyance to combat and curses. Likewise, feykind take care of their problems and do not need humans and elves to get involved. Only rarely will a Feyspeaker accept the aid of outsiders, and even more rarely will she solicit it. Though a Feyspeaker does not lose her abilities for failing to fulfill these vows, she might alienate many fey, who would perceive her as abandoning her duty.

Spells Per Day: For the purposes of determining spells per day, caster level, and (for spontaneous spellcasters) spells known, whenever a level as Feyspeaker grants the ability "+1 level of existing class," she adds 1 effective level to one of her previous spellcasting classes.

Spellcasting Restrictions: The Feyspeaker may freely cast any spells she

has access to that have the descriptors of (charm), (compulsion), (figment), or (glamer). Aside from those, however, the DC to save against her spells is reduced by 5. For instance, if a Feyspeaker who was formerly a sorcerer with a 16 Charisma cast a 3rd level spell, the DC would normally be 16 (10 + 3 for the spell's level + 3 for the sorcerer's Charisma bonus). However, if she cast a fireball, the save DC would be only 11, 5 less than usual. This reduction of save DC does not affect spells cast through a Fey Dance (see below).

Additionally, the number of spells she may cast that have a directly damaging effect (such as a finger of death, fireball, or prismatic spray) is limited to one spell per day per level of Feyspeaker. Spells that deal damage as a secondary effect or through summoned creatures (such as summon swarm, telekinesis, or whirlwind) do not count against this limit. Like the fey races, Feyspeakers prefer magic that misdirects, embarrasses, or drives off opponents. In some cases the DM may need to adjudicate which spells fall under this restriction.

Fey Dance (Su): One of the traditional forms of magic for feykind is the Fey Dance, in which a Feyspeaker leads a group in song and dance, using the gathered power of the dancers to strengthen her spells as she and others spin in a frolicking circle. A Fey Dance lasts for the spell's normal casting time, plus at least one minute per spell level, and requires more dancers the more powerful the spell is. At the conclusion of the dance, each participant other than the Feyspeaker must make a Perform check (DC 10). Non-fey may assist in this dance, but they receive a -2 penalty to their Perform checks. Similarly, though the dancers usually participate through their own free will, charmed dancers will suffice. Only creatures who know the purpose of the dance, however, can contribute to it.

If the number of successful performers equals or exceeds the spell's level, the dance has enhanced the strength of the spell.

The Feyspeaker then makes her own Perform check, adds the spell's level, and uses the result of her check in place of the normal DC to resist the spell's effect. The Feyspeaker's Perform check cannot benefit from cooperative efforts (as detailed in Chapter 4: Skills in the Player's Handbook) except from the cooperation of other Feyspeakers.

Dancers who are disrupted from their dancing, such as if they are attacked or immobilized, cannot contribute to the final round of Perform checks, but as long as any troublemakers do not disrupt enough dancers to cause the spell to fail, the dance can still be completed. For instance, if Ogres attack in the middle of a Fey Dance to cast a storm of vengeance and knock several dancers unconscious, if any defenders manage to protect at least nine dancers there is still a chance the spell could be completed. By no means are the dancers forced to continue to dance while endangered, but it is possible for dancers to finish a spell if the need balances against the danger. If, however, the Feyspeaker breaks from the dance, the spell automatically fails.

A spell cast through a Fey Dance has a range no further than it can be seen or clearly heard, and thus those familiar with the dangers of the fey can try to flee to safety. Typical spotting distance is 50 feet in thick forest, 100 feet in light forest, or 400 feet in open fields. Though it is possible to see or hear a dance unclearly from a greater distance, the magic reaches only as far as the sensation of the dance is lucid. If a spell's range is normally shorter than the range at which it can be seen, use the spell's normal range.

A Fey Dance often lasts for hours, the enhanced spell not taking effect until the dance ends and the Feyspeaker wishes to complete the casting. Thus a dance could begin early in the day and last as long as needed until a tribe of marauding Ogres stumbled upon the dance. Of course,

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Fey Dance, Resist Nature's Lure, Speaker's Attunement	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Feysight	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+1	+1	+3	+3	Speaker's Attunement	+1 level of existing class
4th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Feat of Splendor	+1 level of existing class
5th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Speaker's Attunement	+1 level of existing class
6th	+3	+2	+5	+5	Beltane Dance	+1 level of existing class
7th	+3	+2	+5	+5	Speaker's Attunement	+1 level of existing class
8th	+4	+2	+6	+6	Beguiling Dance	+1 level of existing class
9th	+4	+3	+6	+6	Speaker's Attunement	+1 level of existing class
10th	+5	+3	+7	+7	Dance of the Faerie Realm	+1 level of existing class

dances of extreme length may tire out the participants. Each hour that a dance lasts, the dancers must make a Constitution check against DC 20 or take 1d6 points of subdual damage from fatigue.

As noted above, spells cast through a Fey Dance do not have a reduced save DC, even if they don't have the (charm), (compulsion), (figment), or (glamer) descriptors.

Resist Nature's Lure: A Feyspeaker gains a +4 bonus to saving throws against the spell-like abilities of feykind (such as dryads, nymphs, and sprites).

Speaker's Attunement (Su): As a Feyspeaker advances in her powers, she becomes attuned to particular races of feykind, gaining the abilities of many different types of fey. At 1st level and every odd level thereafter, a Feyspeaker gains one of the abilities listed below, depending on which type of fey the Feyspeaker wishes to emulate. Some choices have prerequisites and cannot be chosen unless the Feyspeaker meets the proper requirements. As a Feyspeaker gains these abilities, her appearance takes on faint aspects of the attuned fey race, hinting at her powers. All spell-like abilities granted through this power function with the Feyspeaker's caster level.

Banshee's Moan: Prerequisite: Caster Level 15+. The Feyspeaker can release a wailful moan as a standard action, filling the hearts of listeners with a feeling of gelid woe. All living creatures within a 30-foot spread must succeed a Will save (DC 17 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or become panicked for 2d4 rounds. A panicked creature has a -2 morale penalty to saving throws and must flee. This is a sonic, necromantic, mind-affecting fear effect. A creature that successfully saves against the moan cannot be affected by the same Feyspeaker's moan for one day. The eyes of a Feyspeaker with this ability always look faintly bloodshot, as though she had been recently crying.

Centaur's Swiftmess: The Feyspeaker's base speed increases by 10 while running, but not in normal (walking or hustling) movement. Feyspeakers with this ability also tend to let their hair grow out long, into something of a mane.

Cheshire's Smile: Prerequisite: Caster Level 8+. The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to vanish as invisibility three times per day. Whenever she smiles, she always smiles widely, displaying her teeth, which become flawlessly white.

Dazzling Beauty: Prerequisite: Caster Level 15+. As her face and figure grows

ever more beautiful, the Feyspeaker's body becomes so dazzling that any creature that sees her must succeed a Will save (DC 17 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or be stunned for 2d4 rounds. A creature that successfully saves against the Feyspeaker's beauty cannot be affected by it again for one day. A Feyspeaker may suppress this ability at will, as a free action.

Dryad's Touch: The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to speak with plants with any plant she touches three times per day. The Feyspeaker's skin and hair change slightly in colour as the seasons pass, like unto a dryad's.

Flight of the Fey: Prerequisite: Caster Level 8+. The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to dimension door once per day. The Feyspeaker's eyes seem to widen just slightly, as though she is innocently alert.

Gremlin's Mischief: The Feyspeaker gains a +4 bonus to all Disable Device checks. Disable Device is henceforth considered a class skill for the Feyspeaker prestige class. The Feyspeaker's eyes sparkle with a mischievous gleam at odd moments, and her smiles often turn to pleased smirks.

Guidance of the Will-o'-Wisp: The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to create ghost sounds or dancing lights at will, but only at night or in areas of general gloom. At night her skin always appears pale and faintly luminous.

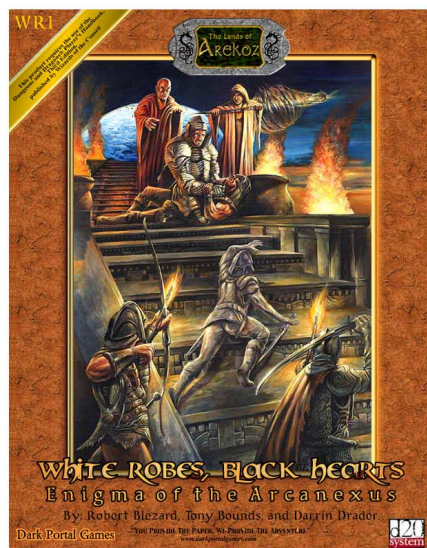
Hag's Visage: Prerequisite: Caster Level 12+. As a free action, the Feyspeaker may twist her face into a hideously ugly expression of sneering distaste and mockery. She may return her face to normal as a free action as well. Anyone who sets eyes on her must succeed a Fortitude save (DC 15 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or be weakened, taking 1d4 points of temporary Strength damage. This damage lasts as long as the victim remains within sight of the Feyspeaker, and for one hour thereafter. A creature that succeeds its save cannot be affected again by the same Feyspeaker's visage for one day. The more often the Feyspeaker uses this ability, the more her face begins to resemble the hideous visage.

House Goblin's Favour: The Feyspeaker gains the favour of small house goblins (tiny creatures often called 'hobgoblins'), which function as a permanent unseen servant at the Feyspeaker's control that cannot be dispelled. Every night she must leave a small bit of food by her sleeping spot, or the house goblins won't help her for one week.

Kiss of the Nixie: Prerequisite: Swim skill. The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to cast water breathing once per

WHITE ROBES, BLACK HEARTS Enigma of the Arcanexus

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day. The Feyspeaker grows very small webs between her fingers and toes.

Pixie Archery: When using a bow the Feyspeaker may, as a full-round action, fire an enchanted arrow that deals no damage, but forces a target struck by it to succeed at a Will save (DC 11 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or be affected as though by a sleep spell. Like a sleep spell, this ability cannot affect creatures with high hit dice. She may fire a sleep arrow three times per day. Her strides become slightly longer, as though she were held aloft by the light fluttering of wings.

Satyr's Debauchery: Prerequisite: Caster Level 12+. Simply by singing or playing a musical instrument, the Feyspeaker can use her spell-like ability to affect all creatures within a 60-foot spread as with the charm person spell. Creatures can resist this effect with a Will save (DC 11 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus). A creature that successfully saves against the charm cannot be affected by this ability from the same Feyspeaker again for one day. Feyspeakers with this ability tend to develop a strong taste (and capacity) for alcohol and love-making.

SPEAKER'S ATTUNEMENTS

Attunement	Prerequisite
Banshee's Moan	Caster Level 15+
Centaur's Swiftness	-
Cheshire's Smile	Caster Level 8+
Dazzling Beauty	Caster Level 15+
Dryad's Touch	-
Flight of the Fey	Caster Level 8+
Gremlin's Mischief	-
Guidance of the Will-o'-Wisp	-
Hag's Visage	Caster Level 12+
House Goblin's Favor	-
Kiss of the Nixie	Swim skill
Pixie Archery	-
Satyr's Debauchery	Caster Level 12+
Trackless Step	-
Trick of the Changeling	-

Trackless Step: The Feyspeaker leaves no trail in natural surroundings and cannot be tracked. When in any natural setting, leaves, grass, snow, or spray of water highlights her hair, just enough to add an exotic flair to her appearance without looking dirty.

Trick of the Changeling: The Feyspeaker gains the spell-like ability to change self three times per day. Infants within thirty feet of the Feyspeaker often cry out in fright as she passes.

Feysight (Ex): At 2nd level, a Feyspeaker gains low-light vision if she doesn't already have it. She also gains a +4 competence bonus to Spot checks to find hiding fey.

Feat of Splendour (Su): Beginning at 4th level the Feyspeaker can perform a feat of splendour once per day, gaining an enhancement bonus to her Charisma equal to her caster level that lasts for one minute, or for the duration of one single performance, including a Fey Dance. Activating this power is a free action. This enhancement cannot grant bonus spells, but does provide bonuses to Charisma-based skill checks, and can raise the DC to resist Charisma-dependant spells and abilities.

Beltane Dance (Sp): Starting at 6th level, a Feyspeaker may lead a Fey Dance of a different sort. For the purposes of whether this fey dance succeeds, the Beltane Dance is equivalent to a 4th-level spell, requiring at least four dancers to succeed Perform checks (DC 10).

The casting of the Beltane Dance involves the burning of large amounts of incense in a huge bonfire, and requires ten minutes to complete, continuing thereafter until the Feyspeaker wishes it to take effect. As the revellers dance and frolic, they feel their hands sweat, their hearts quicken, and their skin yearn for the touch of others.

When the Beltane Dance takes effect, all humanoid or fey creatures of medium-size or smaller within spotting or hearing distance of the dance must succeed a Will save (DC 14 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or be affected as by multiple potions of love. Affected creatures become enamoured with every other creature in the area, and for the next 1d3 hours engage in acts ranging from very friendly conversation to passionate love-making, as is appropriate to each creature's personality. Affected creatures do not leave the area of their own free will, and generally become irritated with those who try to pull them away from those they have become enamoured with. In the aftermath of the dance, the enamouring effect remains faintly persistent, but the memories of the revellers are typically cloudy, helping to avoid some potential embarrassment.

This dance is typically performed at special fey holidays, but a less formal version can be prepared and enacted easily enough whenever the whim strikes a group.

Beguiling Dance (Sp): At 8th level, whenever a Feyspeaker leads a Fey Dance, if the Feyspeaker chooses to let the dance last beyond the required minimum casting time, all creatures that hear or see the dance must succeed a Will save (DC 16 + the

Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) or be compelled by a mass suggestion to stay and listen to the dance's completion. This ability can affect no more creatures than the Feyspeaker's caster level, and creatures will stay no longer than a number of hours equal to her caster level. This compulsion is not language-dependant. This power helps attract groups that know better than to linger near a fey dance, but it requires two more dancers than normal to succeed their Perform checks (DC 10). Thus, a 6th level spell cast through a Beguiling Dance would require eight dancers to succeed their Perform checks, instead of the normal six. If at least six succeed, the spell still functions as normal, but the Beguiling effect does not trigger.

Dance of the Faerie Realm (Su): In the most powerful dance of the fey, the Dance of the Faerie Realm, or the Dance of Timelessness, feykind lure outsiders into a celebration of such beauty and pleasure that their minds reject the possibility of leaving. This dance takes an hour to cast, and requires 28 dancers to succeed their Perform checks for it to work. The dance typically lasts late into the night, attracting many non-fey into its clutches with the effects of the Beguiling Dance.

When the Feyspeaker finally lets the dance conclude, she chooses among all non-fey who have are within range. Unless the Feyspeaker wishes to spare a given creature or person, all those within range must succeed a Will save (DC 9 + the Feyspeaker's Perform check) are transported to the Faerie Realm, a misty world that closely parallels reality, but which is filled constantly with revelling, dancing, and celebration. Unless the Feyspeaker or the fey of the Faerie Realm decide to free the victims, they remain in a state of perpetual bliss, partaking in debauched pleasures for years. During this time they are affected as by the temporal stasis spell, not growing older, nor requiring food, nor being vulnerable to harm of any sort.

Once every month, each victim may attempt a new Will save (DC 19 + the Feyspeaker's Charisma bonus) to break free of the grip of the Faerie Realm. Additionally, killing the Feyspeaker who led the dance frees all those whom her dances affected. Those who break free return to the world in the same place they first entered the dance, only foggily recalling the time they spent in the Faerie World. Many of those of weak will are drawn into these dances, never to be seen again.





THE STILTLING

By Tony Pi

Most folk believe smallfolk lack the strength to use polearms given their size, but they've never seen a Stilting fight. Stiltlings are impressive combatants, standing tall, balanced on a pair of weapons for legs and bringing down foes with a staff swirling ankle-high. Using their hands and feet in perfect synchronisation, these smallfolk have literally risen above their so-called limitations and embraced their own unique style of polearm fighting. Most Stiltlings are rogues, bards, rangers or monks, though any smallfolk may undergo the rigorous and acrobatic training to become a Stilting. Their favourite saying is, "Tall, small, no difference at all". There are great leg-ends of grandmaster Stiltlings, striding the world on mile-high stilts.

Hit Dice: D8

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Size: Small

Skills: Balance 8 ranks, Jump 6 ranks, Tumble 6 ranks.

Feats: Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting, Skill Focus (Balance)

Class Skills

The Stilting's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Jump (Str), Perform (Cha), Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier

Class Features

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: Stiltlings are proficient with light armour and no shields. They are expert improvisers, however, and can use any polearm using their unique fighting style (see below).

Polearm Proficiency: Stiltlings may use the following weapons as stilts: halfspear, quarterstaff, shortspear, javelin, heavy lance, trident, glaive, guisarme, halberd, longspear, or ranseur. Other Medium-size or Large weapons with similar straight shafts can be used as stilts, but not for the weapons' standard uses unless the Stilting is otherwise proficient with the weapon. The standard limitation on the use of Large weapons by Small creatures is offset when the polearm is used as a stilt. Most of the Stilting's other special abilities require his use of one or two such stilts.

Born on Stilts: Adapting a weapon for

stilt use is a simple matter for the Stilting. As easy as slipping on a pair of shoes, no adaptation to the weapon is necessary, though some prefer footrests to simply gripping with their toes.

A Stilting is considered 'on stilts' only if he has two stilts. He may use them to boost himself above the ground, doubling his effective height. He must use both his hands and feet to grip the poles, but may use the polearms as a pair of legs, walking on the blunt end of the polearms. While on stilts, the Stilting's ground movement rate doubles. The stilts need not be of identical type or size. He must be carrying no more than a Light Load and wearing no more than Light armour. A Stilting cannot cast spells with somatic components while on stilts (until 6th level, when he gains true balance).

Pole Strike: A Stilting may strike with any polearm, even when using them as stilts, but can only use them as effectively as a club (1d6 damage, x2 critical, Bludgeoning). Magical Piercing and Slashing weapons do not add their bonuses during a pole strike, but a Bludgeoning weapon does. The Stilting may use both stilts to attack if he wishes, like a standard two-weapon attack.

Odd Ballet: The Stilting teeters on his stilts in an odd but defensive dance. While on stilts, the Stilting gains a +2 AC dodge bonus.

Grand Vault: A Stilting with at least a single stilt may add +10 to any Jump or Tumble check a number of times per day equal to his Dexterity modifier, using the stilt in a dazzling display of agility. The Tumble skill used by the Stilting includes such feats as stepping over an opponent, or using the stilt to break a fall.

Great Sweep: A Stilting with a stilt may whirl the weapon with his legs in a grand

circle, allowing him to make a trip attack as though he were of the same size as his weapon.

Trick Strike: A 6th level Stilting may now use the damage, critical, threat range and type of his polearm stilts once per day. Note that special weapon abilities (e.g., a guisarme's bonus to trip attacks) cannot be used while the weapon is being used as a stilt. Only one trick strike per round is possible.

True Balance: The Stilting can now balance on stilts using only the toes of his feet, leaving his hands free (exhibiting extraordinary balance and strength). He may now cast spells requiring somatic components, and perform other tasks that require the use of his hands while on stilts.

Uncanny Disarm: A Stilting confronting an opponent who wields a polearm in melee combat may attempt a disarm as though he had the Improved Disarm feat. The defender does not gain the +4 bonus for weapons of different size, or for using a weapon in two hands. Often is a foe surprised when a Stilting leaps upon the shaft of his weapon and deftly deprives him of it.

Sunder Shaft: A Stilting confronting an opponent who wields a polearm may strike at his opponent's weapon as though he had the Improved Sunder feat. Due to his knowledge of polearms, the Stilting's strike does +5 damage to the weapon struck.

Startling Reach: While on stilts, a Stilting may temporarily increase his reach by an extra 5 feet for a number of rounds equal to his Dexterity modifier, once per day. He may pole strike or trick strike.

Fling Staff: Once per day, the Stilting may take a single stilt and spin it fiercely, flinging it as a standard action like a ranged weapon. The weapon has a range increment of 20 feet, a critical threat range of 19-20/x2, and inflicts 4d6 Bludgeoning damage (ignoring magical bonuses if the weapon normally inflicts Piercing or Slashing damage, but not magical Bludgeoning bonuses).



Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Polearm proficiency, born on stilts
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+0	Pole strike, trick strike 1/day
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Odd ballet
4th	+4	+1	+4	+1	Grand vault, trick strike 2/day
5th	+5	+1	+4	+1	Great sweep
6th	+6	+2	+5	+2	Trick strike 3/day, true balance
7th	+7	+2	+5	+2	Uncanny disarm
8th	+8	+2	+6	+2	Trick strike 4/day, sunder shaft
9th	+9	+3	+6	+3	Startling reach
10th	+10	+3	+7	+3	Trick strike 5/day, fling staff



Beasts of Battle

by Scott Green & Erica Balsley

ASTRUSA (BLACK STRANGLER)

Small Beast

Hit Dice: 2d10+2 (13 hp)

Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft, climb 30 ft

AC: 13 (+1 size, +2 Dex)

Attacks: 2 tentacles +5 melee; or 2 tentacles +5 melee, bite +0 melee

Damage: Tentacles 0 plus 1d3 strangulation; tentacle 1d3, bite 1d4

Face/Reach: 2 1/2 ft by 2 1/2 ft/0 ft (5 ft with tentacles)

Special Attacks: Improved grab, strangle

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +1

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6

Skills: Balance +8, Climb +8, Hide +10, Listen +4, Spot +4

Feats: Weapon Finesse (tentacle)

Climate/Terrain: Temperate/warm forest

Organization: Pair or gang (3-6)

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: 3-5 HD (Small); 6 HD (Medium-Size)

An astrusa appears as a monkey-like creature about three feet tall with two 5-foot long whip-like appendages located just under its arms.

An astrusa has black fur covering its body with a spatter of gray down its back. Its eyes are black with gold flecks. The appendages are hairless, black in color, and leathery to the touch.

Combat

An astrusa attacks by locking its tentacles around its prey's throat. It can also whip its opponent with its tentacles or use its bite, though this is not its preferred means of attacking. Its favorite method of attack is



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to wait in a tree until its prey is underneath it. The astrusa then drops on it and wraps its tentacles around the victim's neck.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the astrusa must hit an opponent of Medium-size or smaller with both tentacles. If it gets a hold, it can strangle the opponent.

Strangle (Ex): An astrusa that locks both tentacles around its prey's throat suffocates the opponent for 1d4 points of choking damage per round the hold is maintained.

The opponent must either hold its breath or begin taking suffocation damage. A character can hold his breath a number of rounds equal to twice his Constitution. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check (DC 10) in order to continue to hold his breath. The check must be repeated each round, and the DC increases by +1 for each previous success. If the victim runs out of breath, he falls unconscious (0 hp). In the following round, he drops to -1 hp and begins dying. In the third round, he suffocates.

A victim can escape the grapple by making an opposed grapple check or an Escape Artist roll against the astrusa's grapple roll. A single attack against a tentacle (AC 14) that deals 4 or more points of damage causes the astrusa to release its hold.

Skills: Astrusa use their Dexterity modifier for Climb checks and receive a +8 racial bonus to Balance and Hide checks.

NOBLE STEED

Large Magical Beast

Hit Dice: 5d10+25 (52 hp)

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 60 ft

AC: 17 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural)

Attacks: 2 hooves +10 melee, bite +5 melee

Damage: Hoof 1d6+5; bite 1d4+2

Face/Reach: 5 ft by 10 ft/5 ft

Special Qualities: Speed, airwalking, scent

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +2

Abilities: Str 21, Dex 15, Con 20, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 7

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +7

Climate/Terrain: Any land

Organization: Solitary, mated pair, family (solitary mare plus 1-3 foals), or herd (5-20)

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 5-15 HD (Large)

Noble steeds resemble large warhorses in nearly every way. They are massive horses with sturdy bodies and long, powerful legs. They have extremely long tails, reaching nearly to the ground. Their manes are also unusually long and flow back from their head and neck in long, graceful locks. The huge hooves of a noble steed let loose a small shower of sparks when they run.

Noble steeds are highly prized by paladins as mounts. Adult wild noble steeds are incapable of being tamed; these animals must be raised as foals in captivity if they are to be tamed. Domesticated adult noble steeds can cost as much as 800 gp when they can be found. Noble steed foals cost around 400 gp.

Combat

Much like their mundane counterparts, noble steeds attack with a combination of hooves and biting.

Speed (Su): Once per day a noble steed can increase its speed to 100 feet per round for 1 hour for every 2 points of Con. After this, it must rest for 2 hours for every hour it ran. During its rest, it will be incapable of moving at any speed greater than a slow walk.

Airwalking (Su): While using its speed ability a noble steed acts as though affected by the airwalk spell as cast by an 8th-level sorcerer. The spell duration is ignored, however; the noble steed can airwalk as long as it uses its speed ability.





Anthropomorphology 101

By Vacuum Elemental

You can create many variations of monsters by simply changing their monster type. What's wrong with freaking out your players with a wolf ooze or a treant aberration?

This article shows you how to turn most monsters into a monstrous humanoid. Good? Bad? Ugly?

ANTHROPOMORPH

"Anthropomorph" is a template that can be applied to any aberration, animal, beast, construct, magical beast, ooze, plant or vermin. The creature's type changes to monstrous humanoid. As such, it should have at least two arms, two legs, and one head, or a human like torso, arms, and head. Unless noted otherwise, monstrous humanoids have darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Monstrous humanoids are proficient with all simple weapons. They also speak at least one language.

Hit Dice: Change to d8.

Speed: Speed remains the same. If the creature normally cannot walk it now can with a base speed of 30 ft for medium sized creatures. The creature retains all other forms of travel (flight, borrowing, swimming, etc) at the same speed.

AC: Same as base creature.

Attacks: Same as base creature, and can also perform unarmed strike.

Damage: Same as base creature.

Special Attacks: Same as base creature.

Special Qualities: Same as base creature.

Saves: Same as base creature.

Abilities: Same as base creature, unless the intelligence score is less than 4, in which case the new intelligence is 10 plus the base creature's intelligence.

Skills: Same as base creature.

Feats: Same as base creature.

Climate/Terrain: Same as base creature.

Organization: Varies

Challenge Rating: Same as base creature.

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; standard items.

Alignment: Any

Advancement: By character class.

EXAMPLES

Cat Anthropomorph

Tiny Monstrous Humanoid

HD: 1/2 d8 (2 hp)

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft

AC: 14 (+2 size, +3 Dex)

Attacks: 2 claws +4 melee, bite -1 melee

Damage: Claw 1d2-4, bite 1d3-4

Face/Reach: 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft./0ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: -

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1

Abilities: Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 12,

Wis 12, Cha 7

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +5, Hide +17*,

Listen +4, Move Silently +9, Spot +4

Feats: Weapon Finesse (claw, bite)

Climate/Terrain: Any land

Organization: Company (2-4), squad

(11-20 plus 2 3rd-level sergeants and 1 leader of 3rd-6th level), or band (30-100 plus 20% noncombatants plus 1 3rd-level sergeant per 10 adults, 5 5th-level lieutenants, and 3 7th-level captains)

Challenge Rating: 1/4

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; standard items

Alignment: Neutral

Advancement: By character class

Cat anthropomorphs speak Feline and Common.

Elephant Anthropomorph

Huge Monstrous Humanoid

HD: 11d8+55 (104 hp)

Initiative: +0 (Dex)

Speed: 40 ft.

AC: 15 (-2 size, +7 natural)

Attacks: Slam +16 melee, 2 stamps +11 melee; or gore +16 melee

Damage: Slam 2d6+10, stamp 2d6+5; gore 2d8+15

Face/Reach: 10 ft. by 20 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Trample 2d8+15

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +7, Will +4

Abilities: Str 30, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 7

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6

Feats: -

Climate/Terrain: Any land

Organization: Company (2-4), squad

(11-20 plus 2 3rd-level sergeants and 1 leader of 3rd-6th level), or band (30-100 plus 20% noncombatants plus 1 3rd-level sergeant per 10 adults, 5 5th-level lieuten-

ants, and 3 7th-level captains)

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; standard items

Alignment: Neutral

Advancement: By character class

Elephant anthropomorphs speak Elephant and Common.

Gibbering Moulder Anthropomorph

Medium Sized Monstrous Humanoid

HD: 4d8+4 (22 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

Speed: 10 ft., swim 20 ft.

AC: 19 (+1 Dex, +8 natural)

Attacks: 6 bites +4 melee

Damage: Bite 1

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Gibbering, spittle, improved grab, blood drain, engulf, ground manipulation

Special Qualities: Amorphous

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

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 13

Skills: Listen +8, Spot +12

Feats: Weapon Finesse (bite)

Climate/Terrain: Any land, aquatic, and underground

Organization: Company (2-4), squad

(11-20 plus 2 3rd-level sergeants and 1 leader of 3rd-6th level), or band (30-100 plus 20% noncombatants plus 1 3rd-level sergeant per 10 adults, 5 5th-level lieutenants, and 3 7th-level captains)

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; standard items

Alignment: Neutral

Advancement: By character class

Gibbering moulder anthropomorphs can speak Common, but seldom say anything other than gibbering.

Animated Wooden Shield Anthropomorph

Small Monstrous Humanoid

HD: 1d8 (4 hp)

Initiative: +1 (Dex)

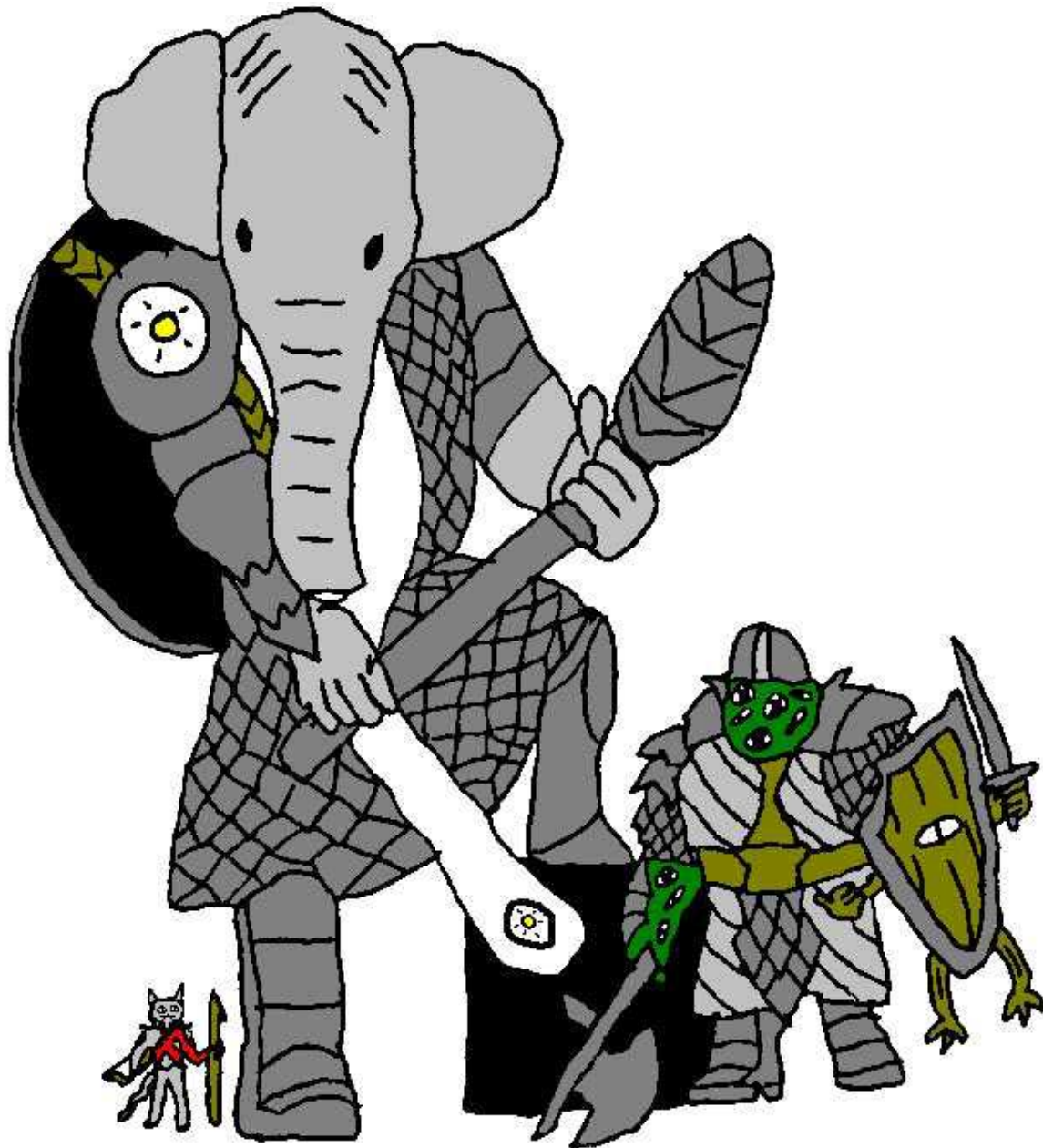
Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 14 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +2 natural)

Attacks: Slam +1 melee

Damage: Slam 1d4

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.



Special Attacks: -
Special Qualities: Hardness (5)
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -5
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con -, Int 10, Wis 1, Cha 1
Skills: -
Feats: -
Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground
Organization: Company (2-4), squad (11-20 plus 2 3rd-level sergeants and 1 leader of 3rd-6th level), or band (30-100 plus 20% noncombatants plus 1 3rd-level sergeant per 10 adults, 5 5th-level lieutenants, and 3 7th-level captains)
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; standard items
Alignment: Neutral
Advancement: By character class

Animated wooden shield anthropomorphs speak Weapon and Common.

SPELLS

Awakening

Transmutation
Level: Sor/Wiz 6
Components: V, S, F, XP
Casting Time: One day
Range: Touch
Target: Any aberration, animal, beast, construct, magical beast, ooze, plant or vermin
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Will negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

As Druid spell with same name with increased categories of targets. Creature intelligence must be less than 4.

Anthropomorph Others

Transmutation
Level: Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Target: Any aberration, animal, beast, construct, magical beast, ooze, plant or vermin
Duration: Permanent
Saving Throw: Fortitude negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

Same as polymorph others, except changes are limited to creating a monstrous humanoid version of the target (see Anthropomorph template).

THE DAEMONFORGE CHRONICLES

CHAPTER TWO

INTERLUDE

The frail old man paused for a moment and laid the heavy tome on the delicately carved wooden desk he sat before. How long had he been doing this? How many years had passed and how many friends had he buried? He knew it was futile, yet he felt compelled to continue. With an audible sigh, he retrieved the book and resumed his reading.

He stopped again some minutes later, shook his head and reread the passage he had just finished for a second and then a third time. He set the ancient text down again, this time with trembling hands, rose and hobbled down the endless stacks, eyes darting and searching. He returned to the desk a quarter of an hour later, laden with three more fragile tomes. He feverishly began to check and cross-reference the four books.

Countless hours later, he halted. He stared sightlessly at the pile of tomes for a long time. His mind raced as he considered and discarded theories rapidly. He glanced briefly at two divergent passages and something clicked. Perhaps it was possible after all - but how to achieve it. Pushing the books to one side, he opened the desk drawer and retrieved an inkpot, several quills and a ream of parchment and began scribbling furiously.

Yes. YES! It was possible - theoretically. He quickly gathered the books, scooped up his papers and hurried from the dusty library. It was time to speak with the Master!

THE ONE-EYED WENCH

Marcus accepted the proffered hand, bobbed his head and kissed it with a perfunctory kiss. Even in the cold rain, Gabriella's skin felt warm to the touch. He quickly released her hand, straightened and said, somewhat stiffly, "I am Marcus Belisarian, lately of Kercim. What, in the name of all the Patrons are you doing out on the road in weather such as this - if I may be so bold as to ask?"

As he spoke, Marcus gestured absently toward the swollen clouds that continued to march in from the Sul Myn with his right hand, which still held Herzsilber. Her eyes followed his motion, running down the gleaming length of the sword as the rain washed away the last vestiges of fiend ichor. Her gaze locked on the pommel and an undecipherable look played across her face for the briefest of moments before the impish grin returned. "Perhaps you should return your shiny sword to its resting place before it begins to rust," Gabriella purred.

Marcus felt himself beginning to blush. "Perhaps you should, as

well," he replied, stabbing a finger towards her bared blade.

Without waiting for a reply, he spun away from her and slammed his sword into its sheath, looking for Fleet. The gelding was about 20 paces distant, idly pawing at one of the fallen fiends. Marcus whistled sharply and called, "Fleet - come away there!"

The roan spurned the body once more, tossed his head a couple of times, neighed loudly and trotted over to Marcus. He caught the reins just below the bit and examined the gash on the horse's shoulder. Satisfied that it was nothing too serious, he turned back towards Gabriella. "This is Fleet..." his voice trailed off as he saw that she was nearly back to overturned wagon.

"The Pale Lord take that woman," he cursed softly as he led his horse towards the wreckage. Fleet snorted in agreement. They found Gabriella kneeling in the mud by the heads of the two chestnut trace horses. Marcus saw that the left hand horse was dead, or nearly so. Either fangs or talons had ripped open its throat and a small, bloody bubble formed, then burst, as the last bit of air rattled from the doomed animal's lungs.

The right hand horse, a mare, lay on her side, struggling feebly to rise. Gabriella had one hand on the animal's neck and was speaking softly. At first, Marcus thought the mare was fine, until he saw its hindquarters. There was a gaping wound just below the left haunch and whitish strands of severed tendon were clearly visible through the ruined flesh. The poor creature has been hamstringed.

Marcus shook his head sadly and started to draw his sword.

"No," Gabriella whispered.

She mumbled several words in the strange language she had used in the fight against the fiends and made a horizontal pass over the prone horse's head with her dagger. The animal ceased struggling. Marcus thought for a moment that the mare was dead; then he saw the gentle rise and fall of its flank - it was merely asleep. Slowly and deliberately, Gabriella placed the tip of her dagger in the soft hollow just behind the chestnut's ear. Marcus focusing on the weapon for the first time, noticed that the blade had wavy red lines running along the length and that a small globe of red metal served as a pommel. 'Curious,' he thought.

The horse stiffened reflexively as she drove the blade into its brain with a swift, sure motion and then it was over. Gabriella patted the dead mare's neck, then rose and faced Marcus, wearing a pained expression.

"It could not be helped..." Marcus began.

"I know," she replied, cutting him short. "It's just that she was with me a long time."

Her bravado and mocking smile were gone, replaced a look of dejection and of loss. Glancing down, she sighed, "I have got to get out of these wet rags."

She pushed past Marcus and moved to the back of the wagon. The door she had burst from earlier lay in the mud, apparently torn off by one of the fiends. She paused for a moment and surveyed the interior of the wreck. "Damn them!"

Marcus, who had quietly followed her, peeked over her shoulder and saw that all manner of belongings - clothing, cooking utensils and foodstuffs - were strewn about. Most had come to rest in the muddy water that was slowly filling the compartment. Marcus glanced at Gabriella and saw her brow furrowed, as if she was concentrating on something.

"Alright, Lös, it's safe to come out now."

Marcus heard something move inside the wagon and his hand dropped instinctively to the hilt of his sword. Something dark leapt from the wagon's interior towards Gabriella with an ear-splitting 'yowl'. Herzsilber nearly cleared the scabbard before Marcus saw it was a cat, which Gabriella deftly caught and cradled.

"Lös, this is Marcus of Kercim. Marcus of Kercim, this is Lös - my traveling companion, confidante and champion." A hint of humor returned to her voice as she held the feline up and introduced it to Marcus.

He involuntarily recoiled a step as he got a clear view. It was, without a doubt, the biggest, meanest looking tomcat he had ever seen!

Lös' coat was a deep, almost bluish, gray and was crisscrossed by a score or more old scars. One of its ears was gone and only half the other remained. The tail had two distinct kinks in it and the bottom third only had a few patches of fur on it. A prominent scar ran diagonally from the middle of its forehead, across the right eye and ended at the right corner of its mouth. The milky whiteness of the clearly sightless eye immediately reminded Marcus of his father, for the scars were eerily similar. The good eye was a deep emerald color and contrasted sharply with the gray coat. He judged the cat to be well over 20 pounds, twice the size of the scrawny alley cats in Kercim. "What in ugly cat," Marcus said under his breath, not realizing he was speaking aloud.

The right hand horse, a mare, lay on her side, struggling feebly to rise. Gabriella had one hand on the animal's neck and was speaking softly.

The cat looked up at its mistress and made a noise somewhere between a growl and a meow. She laughed, "Lös says that you are nothing special to look at either."

She placed Lös atop the wagon. "You two get acquainted while I see what I can salvage from this mess. I believe there's an inn several leagues from here that we might be able to make before nightfall. Can your mount carry two?"

Marcus nodded absently, then realized he had just committed himself to traveling with her, at least to the inn. He started to say something, but Gabriella winked at him then disappeared into the wagon, peeling the rain-soaked shift off as she went without the least bit of self-consciousness. He cursed softly to himself and looked up to see Lös regarding him coolly, eye narrowed and ear slightly flattened. Marcus returned the stare until Lös, with an idle flick of his tail, dismissed the human and began grooming himself. Exasperated with both cat and master, Marcus stalked over to Fleet and made a pretense of checking the horse's saddle and bridle.

By the time Gabriella emerged from the cab of the ruined wagon, the rain had subsided to a light drizzle. She wore a deep green v-necked tunic with billowing sleeves. Green suede breeches, several shades lighter than the tunic, disappeared into knee-high boots stitched from finely tooled brown leather. A matching belt and bracers tamed the flowing tunic at her waist and wrists and the belt was hung with a dozen or more pouches of various sizes. Her dagger, now sheathed, rode on her right hip and a short quiver, filled with crossbow bolts, hung from the left. The prod of a crossbow was visible over her left shoulder and a large

satchel, bulging at the seams, was slung over her back.

"Pity," she sighed while subduing her wild hair with a broad leather band. "I started the day with a moving home and a fine team and have naught but that which I can carry by noon. Hopefully the day will improve," she continued ruefully. Flinging a large cloak with alternating green and brown vertical stripes over her shoulders, she glanced at Marcus, "Ready?"

Marcus nodded. He had already adjusted Fleet's load to allow her to ride tandem, so he mounted and held out his hand. She accepted his lowered arm and easily swung up behind him. Marcus was keenly aware of her body pressing against his as she settled in. Fleet responded to the light touch of his heels and started moving past the ruined wagon and dead team. Without turning her head, Gabriella said, "Coming, Lös?"

The scarred gray tom took three quick hops along the side of the wagon and leapt nimbly onto the roan's rump. Aside from a startled snort and single head toss, Fleet stoically accepted his ever-increasing load, although he did throw Marcus a reproachful look. Marcus grinned silently and patted the gelding's neck; he knew just how the horse felt. The odd quartet - man, woman, horse and cat - slowly disappeared into the misting rain, leaving the battle site behind.

The journey to the inn was uneventful. Marcus said little, although Gabriella talked enough for the both of them and more. She told him that she was recently out of the Red Harbor and bound, as he was, for Egran. She had been caught in the open by the storm and given up trying to reach shelter, choosing instead to pull her wagon up under a copse of trees and wait the storm out. No, she did not know where the fiends had come from or why they attacked her, although she did know that small bands sometimes made their way into the interior of the Kessel, bypassing both the Grey King's cavalry and local militias. She made a good living, she said, creating potions and trinkets of minor magic and selling them in the towns and cities she visited.

He responded to most of her chattering with non-committal grunts. When he asked her direct questions about her origins, or that of House Malvai, she skillfully parried them. She would only say that it was a minor merchant house from the northernmost parts of the Kessel. He considered pressing her further when their destination appeared out of the rapidly approaching dusk.

The inn was a ramshackle two-story building. The first level was made of stone and was surmounted by a post-and-plaster second. The sagging roof badly needed to be re-thatched and large chunks of plaster were missing from several sections of the upper level, exposing the timber beneath. The two outbuildings, a barn and a storehouse by the look of them, were in even worse shape. Wood smoke was rising from the cracked brick chimney, however, and they detected the faint smell of cooking food.

Marcus made out a buxom, blond-haired lass, left eye covered by a patch and holding two huge tankards of ale, on the weathered sign. Barely legible lettering announced The One-Eyed Wench Inn and Tavern.

'What is it with missing eyes?' he thought. 'First my father, then that damn cat and now this inn - this can't be good!'

He pushed a vague sense of foreboding away, replacing it with the promise of a hot meal and roaring fire. As they dismounted, Marcus saw Lös disappear around the corner of the building. He looked at Gabriella, eyebrow arched in an unspoken query. She merely shrugged, that maddening half-smile on her lips. She slipped past him and moved toward the inn's door, paus-

ing momentarily to whisper something to Fleet as she passed. He couldn't hear what she said, but the roan whickered in response and nudged her. 'Traitor!' he thought, glaring at Fleet as he followed Gabriella inside.

They were met at the door by a petulant looking, dark-haired lad, perhaps ten or eleven years old. He asked mechanically if they had any animals that needed tending. His demeanor improved dramatically when Marcus indicated they did and then tossed him a silver noble. The boy snatched the coin from the air, bit down on it and stowed it inside his tunic in one fluid motion. He flashed them a toothy grin and darted past them to see to Fleet.

The comfortable interior of the inn belied the mean exterior. The low-beamed common room of the tavern measured perhaps twenty paces per side, with an enormous fireplace on one side, with a well-made bar on the opposite side. A dozen trestle tables were crowded into the center of the room and the walls were hung with a number of heavy tapestries. A set of stairs, located on the right side of the bar, led upstairs and a heavy cloth curtain covered an opening centered just behind the bar. A dozen other travelers were scattered about the room, singly or in pairs, although the chamber could accommodate ten times that number.

Several sets of eyes lingered on Gabriella in mute appreciation as she doffed her cloak and shook the water from her hair, but most patrons favored them with nothing more than a cursory glance. They moved to the bar just as the innkeeper emerged from behind the curtain. He was a short man with a receding hairline and expansive belly and wore a grease-spattered smock over his homespun tunic. "What'll it be?" he inquired.

"A hot meal, some spiced wine and a dry place to sleep," Marcus replied, dipping his hand into his pouch. "What's on the menu this eve?"

"Mutton and radish stew, black bread and potatoes. I'm fresh outta spiced wine...how 'bout a nice ale from the Isles?" Marcus nodded his assent. "That'll be two for the meal and five for the room."

Marcus laid thirteen silver coins on the bar. "We require two rooms."

The innkeeper scooped the coins up with a pudgy hand. "Suit yerself. My name is Marston if ya need somethin'. Pog'll be right out with your meal."

They made their way to the closest unoccupied table to the hearth while Marston bellowed for Pog. A thick-shouldered man, shrouded in a worn, patchwork cloak, sat at the table next them, hunched protectively over a flagon of ale.

He glanced up as they seated themselves and Marcus met his hooded gaze. The man's broad features, deep-set eyes and heavy beard spoke of dwarven heritage, although he was clearly a "breed". His hair and beard were both dark, almost black, and his piercing gray eyes flicked rapidly over Marcus, darted to Gabriella, then returned to Marcus. He held Marcus' eyes for a moment with his own, inclined his head in an almost imperceptible nod and returned to his drinking.

They spread their cloaks out on the benches to dry them out and shared a smile as the lad, evidently Pog, arrived struggling with a huge platter of steaming food and cold drinks. No sooner had Marcus dipped his spoon into his stew than Lös materialized at his elbow, eyeing the large chunks of mutton expectantly. He shot the cat an evil look and turned his body slightly to deny the tom access to his bowl. Spurned, Lös rewarded Marcus with an indignant hiss and moved to his mistress. Gabriella stifled a laugh and gave the cat a piece of mutton. He glared at Marcus with a look of feline

disdain and then fell upon the unsuspecting mutton with gusto!

They were well into their meal when the door of the inn opened and four heavily cloaked forms entered, stamping their feet to chase off the evening chill. They moved quickly to the bar. "Ho there, good Marston. Four mugs of your finest and be quick about it. We have a powerful thirst this eve," one of them called loudly in a gravelly voice.

Marcus noticed the dwarf-breed stiffened slightly at the sound of the voice and Gabriella, facing the bar, saw that the color drained from Marston's face as he passed through the curtain and to greet the four recent arrivals. As they pushed back their hoods, she caught the metallic gleam of armor and weapons under the cloaks. She caught Marcus' gaze and flicked her eyes toward the bar. He slowly shifted his body so that he could see both the dwarf-breed and the newcomers.

**'What is it with missing eyes?'
he thought. 'First my father,
then that damn cat and now
this inn - this can't be good!'**

Marston placed four flagons of ale on the bar with trembling hands, then mumbled something and retreated behind the curtain. The tallest of the four snatched his mug up and turned to survey the common room. He was broad-shouldered and ugly. His sloping forehead, jutting lower jaw, heavy ridge above his eyes and the slight greenish cast to his skin reflected significant orcish involvement among his ancestors. Black leather armor, reinforced with metal studs protected his torso and the hilts of several weapons protruded from beneath his earth-brown cloak.

He swept the room slowly with a menacing expression, pausing briefly on Marcus and Gabriella before continuing. He finished his first pass, then fixed his gaze on the hunched back of the dwarf-breed. A smile crept onto his face, stopping just below his eyes. He raised his mug and said, "The blessings of the Patrons on this place and all who visit here."

Utter silence greeted his toast, for everyone in the common room, with the exception of Marcus and Gabriella, were busy examining their shoes and avoiding the orc-breed's gaze. Seemingly unconcerned, he drained his flagon in one swig and reached backwards to place the empty container on the bar, never taking his eyes from the dwarf-breed. Marcus noticed him make a small gesture with his left hand, then he began moving slowly forward. In his wake, the three remaining at the bar quietly set their mugs down and began to spread out in a rough semi-circle. Alarmed, Marcus looked back at Gabriella and saw that her bared dagger was resting in her lap.

She was stroking Lös calmly with her right hand and whispering very softly to the cat. He looked back and saw the orc-breed halt about two paces behind the dwarf-breed. His hands rested lightly on his weapon hilts and his smile broadened to reveal a mouth of rotten teeth. "Ah, Demetri! You really should have stuck to the wilds, you were taught better than that. What were you thinking? Come along quietly now, no need for a scene!"

The orc-breed began to laugh as his heavy-bladed shortswords slithered from their sheaths.

To Be Continued...



The Living City of Light Aten

The great city-state was settled in the years following the Folly of Irongate. Developed as a trading post between the races, Aten soon rose to similar prominence as did its predecessor on the surface. Though vastly populated by humans, all of the races can be found here, and the lower humanoids find solace in the segregated neighborhoods found here. The middle-class is bustling, and guilds are common, Aten strives to become a leader of the Dragon's Eye. Halfling burrows are found here, and while discrimination is not condoned by the majority of the populace, acts against halflings in particular have become commonplace.

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Keep Going

-Chapter Two-

The Pale Mists of Skaukator

By Ryan Nock
Illustration By Ryan Nock
& Jessica Jones

Their target finally in sight, Sant Kerrel nodded to Kendra for her to begin casting her spells upon the both of them. Standing at the prow of the airship, Sant Kerrel frowned quietly at how close their quarry was to Skaukator. At night, the ship was a black hole in the glowing field of souls moving around and through the city. Sant Kerrel prepared himself for his duty nervously, but found himself paying more attention to the captain's shouts to the crew or to the quiet hum of Kendra's chant as she layered her magic over them, than to how the fiendblood might have escaped his cell. It worried him that Kendra was using only the most necessary flight magic to reach the Pale Hand, leaving most of her energy for offence and attacks.

Bountiful Shades-of-Gray, the Bugaboo woman, emerged through the crowd of eager warriors standing near the figurehead. She scratched her hair vigorously, cocking her head in confusion. "Why the hell are there only two of you getting magic?"

Sant Kerrel sighed heavily, tearing his attention away from the rapidly nearing airship Pale Hand to glare at their 'guest.' A handful of other warriors stood nearby just in case, all members of the Soul Guard, but Kendra was their only magic-user, and she could only carry one of them at a time. Sant Kerrel did not want to spend the potentially last moments of his life arguing with a lunatic. "Ma'am, we only have another minute before we're going to have to go. You should stay back where it's safe."

Bountiful turned her head so the mountain winds wouldn't blow her hair in her face. As she spoke, she pointed at the ship ahead

of them. "Well, be careful and play nice with the demon man. He got out of his cage somehow, and I don't really think he likes you."

Sant Kerrel huffed a sigh, then frowned when he saw Kendra smiling. The Bugaboo woman kept talking unabated.

"My gut tells me you should take others with you, but the Lord of Pookas tells me you don't need it. This will be good for your soul."

Sant Kerrel nodded condescendingly. "That's good. We only have enough magic for two of us to get down there anyway, so I'm glad your lord is happy. Now please--"

Kendra finished her last spell, sighing slightly as she spoke up, "Miss, my friend Kerrel is just as worried as you are, but this is our duty. We really need to be going. . . . Well, about now."

The captain's voice shouted out from the aftcastle of the ship where he stood commanding the crew, ordering them to go. The Pale Hand flew only fifty feet away, but it was too dangerous to get close enough for a direct jump from ship to ship. Nodding to Kendra, Sant Kerrel swung his legs over the ship's railing and gritted his teeth. The Pale Hand was flying straight for the walls of Skaukator, and though the defenses of the city would kill the fiendblood Chance before he could make it over the wall, they would also kill any of the crew still trapped on board. With only a few minutes before the ship and everything on it was reduced to a lifeless husk, they had to act quickly.

Kendra tucked her grip under Sant Kerrel's shoulders, then hummed inquisitively. He nodded in reply, and together they leapt off the edge of the ship's prow. For an instant they fell toward the Mist, and then Kendra's flight spell took effect, driving them forward in a burst toward the Pale Hand. Never having gotten familiar with the sensation of flight, Sant Kerrel held on tightly to Kendra, trusting she would handle the magic.

As they neared the ship, he could make out perhaps a dozen men working mindlessly to guide the ship. The Pale Hand yawed upward, lofting high enough to crest the walls, and Kendra sped them higher and faster to reach the stern of the windship. Even this close, though, he still could not see where Chance was hiding.

Kendra dropped him heavily to the aft deck, but Sant Kerrel was relieved to have a solid footing again. He readied his warhammer and crashed forward loudly in his heavy armor, stopping at the stairs leading down from the aftcastle.

"We'll dispel the one near the starboard rigging first," Kendra stated, and Sant Kerrel ran forward, taking the steps three at a time and trudging toward one of the charmed crewmembers. According to the griffon rider who had escaped from the Pale Hand, chance had killed most of the crew with a poison cloud, then magically ensorcelled the survivors to pilot the ship.

Suddenly Chance's voice called out from overhead, in the rigging lines attached to one of the masts. "Pitch us to the right, steep!"

Sant Kerrel tried to locate the source of the voice, paying little heed to the movements of the charmed crew until the deck began to pitch to the side. He shouted in surprise and hooked the head of his hammer on a rigging line to keep from falling over the side.

He turned and shouted to Kendra, who was flying easily by the side of the leaning windship. "He's in the rigging!"

Kendra, her eyes already scanning the maze of lines and sails, nodded and gripped her tuning rod tightly. Sant Kerrel followed her line of sight to see only one man standing in the rigging, and before his eyes the man's appearance rippled like a disturbed pond. When the waves faded away, Chance's smirking face stared down at them.

"I didn't kill you yesterday," he shouted down, stretching his wings and arms in a yawn. "I think if you had the chance to hear me out, you'd agree to—"

Sant Kerrel shouted to cut off the fiendblood. "What did you do to the crew?"

"The ship was too slow, too heavy. I tossed them overboard."

The channeling rod in Kendra's hand began to crackle, and she thrust out her other hand toward Chance. The air hummed in a line out from her palm, reverberating like thunder as it struck Chance in the chest. The impact of the arcane cracked the man's chest, and his body crumpled forward, falling out of the rigging. Because of the lean of the ship, his body missed the deck and fell straight into the Mist.

Sant Kerrel shook his head in surprise, and was about to congratulate Kendra when slow clapping came from a nearby crewman. Again he and Kendra turned in surprise, and again Chance's voice greeted them.

"Miss me?" the man asked, and as before, his features shifted to those of the fiendblood. "If you want to go on killing innocent men, feel free, but we're about to reach Skaukator's barrier. You'd be better off leaving now."

The ship bucked, then righted itself, and Kendra flew to beside Sant Kerrel. Sant Kerrel looked from her to Chance in confusion. "Was that an illusion?"

Chance shook his head, turning to loosen one of the rigging lines. "No. You killed someone. I don't really appreciate you killing my crew. You're becoming nuisances."

Kendra took a step back in shock, then grimaced and concentrated on another spell. Chance stopped trimming the sails and looked to her, then clicked his teeth in disapproval. He began to speak words to a spell, but his body stopped moving in synchronicity, and the words seemed to come from every direction. Just as Kendra was about to finish her own spell, Sant Kerrel felt the protective magicks on him fade away.

"Kendra," he asked nervously, holding his warhammer defensively, "which one is it?"

Kendra shook her head, backing up close to him. "He countered my spell, and my flight's gone."

Sant Kerrel glanced down over the ship's railing, seeing the shallow Mist of the low slopes speed past them thirty feet below. If they waited long enough to jump, they might land shallowly enough to reach the city gates before the vapours killed them.

"Kendra, we don't know which is which. Without your flight we can't save any of them, so we have to go."

The air whipped over his ears dully, muting the sounds of the crew working. Finally, Kendra spoke. "He's got something planned. If we just leave, he wins. We have to stop him, even if it means killing everyone on this ship."

"No, we can't do that." Sant Kerrel looked at her in shock, then shook his head. He turned to the rest of the crew and shouted, "Listen, the ship's about to crash! You have to be ready to jump. If you don't you'll all be killed."

The nearest crewmember, who no longer looked like Chance, shrugged his sun burnt shoulders. "That's silly. We're the Pale Lord's chief windship. The defenses won't stop us."

Sant Kerrel laughed lightly in surprise, then louder when Chance's voice came from somewhere nearby, cursing.

"Nice trick," Sant Kerrel shouted, trying to draw Chance out, "but we're not going to let you get into Skaukator. You can't scare us off."

Chance's voice was nearer this time. "No, but I can drive you off. You're not crew on this ship, and aren't protected."

His voice suddenly came from above, clearer than before as it shouted to the crew. "My friends, you need to fly this ship straight into the Skaukator library if you want to get cured before the poison takes you. Aim the ship directly for the centre of the library courtyard."

Kendra was preparing another attack, but Sant Kerrel recognized what she was casting and grabbed her hand to stop her. "You can't be certain. Don't attack yet."

She nodded angrily, then pulled out of his grip and began to draw another rod. "Be ready to catch him."

Sant Kerrel stepped safely away, getting close to the below where Chance hung in the rigging. Skaukator loomed dangerously close, and the sound of the defenses filled the air like the last rasping breath of a dying creature.

"Chance!" he shouted upward, hoping to distract the fiendblood as Kendra finished preparing her attack. "If the defenses kill us, they'll kill you too."

Chance could not reply before a powerful downdraft of wind struck him, knocking him off balance and out of the rigging. Sant Kerrel swung with his warhammer to strike the falling fiendblood, but Chance spread his wings and caught himself in mid-air high enough so that Sant Kerrel's blow only struck him in the foot.

Chance swore and landed on one foot, flapping his wings to keep himself slightly aloft as he hopped backward toward the aftcastle.

Sant Kerrel led with a pair of driving swings of his warhammer, forcing Chance's back to the stairs. Chance propelled himself upward with his arms and wings and lashed out at Sant Kerrel's chest with a kick, but he just struck Sant Kerrel's breastplate, not even slowing him.

He aimed his next warhammer swing for Chance's hip, but the fiendblood flipped sideways over the stairs' railing, guiding himself with his hands as his wings carried him upward to the back of the ship. Sant Kerrel chased him, smashing his hammer through the wooden railing where Chance's hands had been. The fiendblood buffeted Sant Kerrel's head with the edges of his wings as he flipped aerially and landed on the aft most railing. Sant Kerrel lost his balance from the blinding attack and sagged onto the floor, trying to regain his bearings.

From behind him came Kendra's shout, and a crackling trio of arcane bolts flew across the deck and struck Chance in the chest, leaving searing holes in his ragged shirt but barely fazing him. Chance balanced easily on the railing, his wings supporting him though he stood on only one foot. His glare never leaving Sant Kerrel's eyes, he pointed to the prow of the ship.

"Lightblood, you're out of time. I hope you understand eventually what I'm trying to do."

As Sant Kerrel struggled to his feet he turned his gaze to see the forward keel of the ship speed over the city walls. A brilliant white haze pierced upward through the ship, an intangible curtain tearing through the hull as the Pale Hand flew through it. Kendra sprinted heavily up the steps onto the aftcastle and fired a whip of flame from her hand toward Chance, but the Fiendblood simply leapt backward and winged away.

The curtain had reached the mizzenmast, and Sant Kerrel sprinted for the aft railing, grabbing and carrying Kendra with him. From behind him he heard the cries of fright from the crew as the barrier tore their souls from their bodies, and he shut his eyes tightly as they fell over the stern of the windship.

Their momentum carried them enough that even as they fell back from the ship, they still crashed forward into the lower wall. He held his grip on Kendra despite the impact, but he realized that the force had knocked her unconscious. With no magic to stop their fall, Kerrel watched the ground and Mist rush upward. Then another force struck him in the chest, and after a moment's surprise he found himself hanging on the wall, stuck to it by clinging strands of energy. He looked around for his rescuer, and then in the dimming light of the barrier overhead he made out the floating figure of Chance, hovering less than ten feet away.

"I don't know much about you, orc," Chance said softly, "but I know why you work for your lord. You don't know the truth of what he's done. If you did, you'd be helping me, but your fires are too bright to see clearly."

Sant Kerrel tried to grab for Chance, but the spell binding him from falling held his limbs to the wall. "Just let us go free. We're just doing our duty. What do you want that is so good but that you can't tell the Pale Lord about?"

In the distance came the sound like two huge rocks striking each other, and the wall behind Sant Kerrel trembled from the force. The barrier light faded to darkness, and only Chance's crimson eyes' glow told him where the man was.

"Tell the Pale Lord that knowledge not used is wasted, as good as destroyed. If he keeps on destroying as he has, then he'll lose his battle as surely as he's dead."

The sound of cracking sails came from overhead, and both he

and Chance looked up. The silhouette of Sant Kerrel's ship blocked out the dimly light clouds as the airship tried not to drift into the Skaukator barrier. Chance chuckled and beat his wings, lifting upward then diving away, skirting the wall toward the city's main entrance.

Sant Kerrel began to shake Kendra, hoping to wake her before Chance's magic faded and dropped them the rest of the fifty feet to Mist-strewn rocks below.

Sant Kerrel found himself at a loss watching Kendra try to shove her way past a phalanx of spectral guards blocking the ruined entrance to the Skaukator library.

"The fiend who crashed that airship into your library tried to kill us. If he's in there somewhere, we need to stop him."

The leader of the phalanx opened his mouth to speak, and for the first time in seven years Sant Kerrel felt the painful hush of a spirit's voice, like a whisper directly beside his head. He tried not to squirm, and knew that it would only make him look bad if he futilely tried to cover his ears.

"You are not needed here. The Wraithguard has been assigned the task of recovering the deserter, since you have failed to do so."

Kendra coughed and clenched her fist, then turned to Sant Kerrel. "They're joking right?"

Sant Kerrel raised his hand, trying to calm Kendra down. There were hundreds of spirits gathered to see the commotion, compared to just the two of them and the Bugaboo woman, who had insisted on coming with them.

Bountiful pressed past him and thrust out her finger into the chest of one of spirits, as though she had wanted to thump him on his chest. "Listen, you ruffians. The Wraithguard just added a few more members on the 'wraith' branch thanks to you. These two tried to stop that young fellow, Chance. All your men did was die and fall overboard. I'm sure you're going to have a great time finding them in the Mist. I bet you don't even know what Chance came into that library for, do you? He probably escaped you, didn't he? Outsmarted a few thousand Wraithguards? It's nice of the Pale Lord to let you play as guards, but your tough exterior is an act we can see right through."

The phalanx spirit forced Bountiful's hand out of his chest and raised himself up imposingly. "We have already determined what the fiendblood stole, and members of the Wraithguard are searching the Serewail at this moment for the spirits of the crew. Likewise we have more than enough guards to investigate this library. You will leave or you will have to answer to my superiors."

Kendra scoffed. "You idiots. Are your superiors as-"

"Kendra!" Sant Kerrel said forcefully. "We'll do what they say. Sir, we'll do what you say. We should not have intruded on your duties."

Kendra turned to him, then started walking after him as he turned to leave. "What's wrong with you Kerrel? You're giving up that easily?"

He lowered his eyes and trudged quickly toward the rest of the crew. "I can't believe you had the gall to go up there and harass them. They're dead; let them do what they want. They don't have much else."

Kendra slowed briefly in surprise, then raced after him when he didn't stop. "Kerrel, you're just going to let them tell us what to do because they're dead? You're never this passive."

Sant Kerrel shrugged and finally cleared the crowd of mutely watching spirits. It seemed like every ghost in a city of hundreds of millions of ghosts was watching the library, waiting for some-

thing to happen. So little ever changed here that any action was enough to interest everyone. Though he could still see the spectres of once-living people going through the motions of an actual life, he doubted those motions ever changed. Even with millions of inhabitants, the city was dead, stiff and unchanging.

The captain slapped Sant Kerrel on his arm when he got back to the crowd of the living. "What did they tell you three? I suppose they're being stubborn as ever."

Sant Kerrel nodded. Kendra glanced at him in confusion, then spoke to the captain. "The leader of the investigation said that they evacuated the library, and that there's no one there. I warned them that the fiendblood can use illusion magic, but they just ignored me."

The captain nodded, rubbing his chin. "Right. He's probably the same guard who harassed me the first time I came here. Not that I truly expected differently. It took us nearly an hour to get into the city, so for all we know that demonblood has already slipped out the gates."

Bountiful came out of the crowd last, complementing a spectre on her haircut as she came up to Sant Kerrel, the captain, and Kendra. "Those men aren't so bad when you get to know them. They were all kids once too, and all children love the Bugaboo."

Sant Kerrel sighed. "What a worthless excuse for a god."

Bountiful pulled her flute out of her sleeve. "I should switch your hands for that one. Maybe you'll show more respect when you hear what guard said to me once I'd gotten rid of your disruptive influence?"

Kendra turned to her expectantly, but Sant Kerrel noticed her glanced often at him, as though waiting for an explanation. The rest of the crowd of the crew, eager to hear something they could understand to shake the sense of unease in the dim night of crowded Skaukator, gathered close to hear Bountiful's information.

"Well," Bountiful smiled, tapping her flute into her palm absent-mindedly, "the guards mentioned that the loremasters had finished searching the library for missing articles, and that that poor young boy Chance has apparently stolen several old treasure maps and notes of trade routes and times. There's more missing, but they're not sure if its because some spirits took their books with them when they were told to leave the building."

"That's all this was," Kendra asked in surprise. "Just a gambit to get some trade routes and to find some money? Why would a fiend go to all that trouble?"

Sant Kerrel smiled self-assuredly. "Not everything's a righteous cause, Kendra."

Kendra planted her hands on her hips. "Did your mother tell you that?"

The captain pushed Kendra back, lowering his voice to an intimidating murmur. "Leave the man alone. He was a pirate, nothing more, and you should both be content that you're alive."

Bountiful nodded, and her wavy gray hair bobbed sadly. "Yes. It's so disappointing. He had such potential to be an interesting chase, but now I don't really see a reason for me to stay around. Just a petty brigand. You'd think the Bugaboo would give you something more dangerous to practice on."

Kendra shifted uncomfortably in her armor. "He might've been a petty thief, but he killed a whole ship full of men and women. Captain, . . . I need some sleep."

A hush fell on the group as a tall, formerly elfblood spectre glided into their midst. At the sound of his voice, half the crew tried to brush away at their ears, to get the noise away, but to no

avail.

"The Pale Lord's court does not sleep, and neither do his followers when there is a duty to be performed. The Lord bids me to bring you to his presence."

Sant Kerrel forced himself to breathe calmly, and then he addressed the spirit before it could turn away. "Who does he need?"

"Everyone who was directly involved in this last conflict, plus I imagine the Helper will impose her presence upon him as well. Follow me."

Sant Kerrel bit his lip, holding back a curse. Kendra tried to drag him along, but he bared his tusks at her. "What I want to say to you wouldn't be polite to say in public. When we get back to the ship, then. But until then, I don't want to hear any more of your. . ."

Sant Kerrel let his sentence trail off, and then strode unwillingly after the spectre, down a trail that suddenly opened amid the crowd of spirits, forming a road toward the twin spires of the Pale Lord's tower.

"Do you think they'll understand," the spirit asked Chance, now disguised as a hobbling pregnant woman visiting with the spirit of her grandfather.

Chance looked around cautiously to make sure all the guards were out of earshot, and then he nodded. They walked the trail of the Twilight March, toward the Chapel and the Forge, a trail he trusted would soon be followed. Despite his disarming appearance, his voice remained the same.

"Oh, hell yes they'll follow. They're both Soul Guard, and all of them are always dwelling on death. Even if they're not persistent enough to follow us on their own, the Pale Lord is smart enough to make them want to follow us. He'll recognize the signal when we send it to him."

"Hey, Samuel, did you get everything we needed?"

The spirit nodded, carrying the surprisingly tangible scrolls and books in his intangible arms. "More than we will probably need, Chance, but knowledge is useful. I do not want to discuss it here. When we are further down the road, you can stop to sleep and I shall tell you then."

Chance shrugged. "If you want to, but we shouldn't risk it. If they catch us, all this work is worthless, and all that knowledge you just gathered would be worthless."

Samuel murmured softly, a knowing smile on his wraithlike face. "More than you can guess."

Chance watched Samuel for a moment, then stepped in front of him and glared at him. "Alright you bastard, tell me what you're holding back."

Samuel chuckled. "I have never been threatened by a pregnant woman before. Keep going before the guards see us. When it is safe to drop your charade, then it will be safe to tell you."

"Nothing we do is safe, especially with the Pale Lord watching us."

The pair started walking again, Chance hobbling along in his disguise. Samuel shrugged. "Saving every soul in this world is worth taking the risk."

Behind them, the city of Skaukator rasped softly like a dying beast.



CHAOTIC STOOPID!

BY VACUUM ELEMENTAL

Warning: Attempting the antics performed in the Chaotic STOOPID! campaign may cause extreme belittling by your peers.

On a dark and stormy night a group of gamers got together at vacuumelemental.org, each roleplaying a group of roleplayers. Tonight we introduce them as they begin to play last month's Asgard feature module "Rites of Passage"...

The DM

Arthur by Armek

"Arthur is a little impatient, a little power hungry, a little stupid, a little unattractive and...well just plain little in general. He may be boring at times but he's the only person the group can tolerate to DM."

The Players

Frank by Doppleganger

"Frank is new to D&D, and just doesn't "get" the rules. He often misapplies the use of skills and abilities. In fact, he often ignores the rules altogether and assumes his character Zirrdt is a superhero from a fantasy novel, capable of amazing abilities.

He tries to 'role-play' a bard by having the character speak in rhymes and constantly play the drums. His bard will attempt to use music to charm just about anything, whether it works or not."

Bob by Custodes

"Bob is one of those players that loves to get something for nothing and tries to take advantage of the situation whenever possible. He also consistently tries to use out of game knowledge to his advantage. He lives with his grandmother and has decided to take revenge by playing the old fogey in the group. Bob has also played in the same games as Arthur for several years as well as DM'ed and wonders if he's being picked on for killing Arthurs Favorite Character 'Grunthak the Barbarian' two weeks ago to 30 trolls.

Grandpa Stokes: The Mighty slayer of dragons. (who won't respond to any other name) Is really old, because that's the best way to raise your stats, Once had 3 red dragons step on his house so he killed 'em all with his ray of Dragon slaying might which has run

in his family for generations. He constantly complains about his arthritis and sciatica and will tell annoying long stories about Beatrice and how she went to the market last week to get my Goats bladder of rheumatoid-b-gone but got liver spot-b-gone by accident and it reacted with my hair-b-there potion and went Haywire. Grandpas Familiar is a Toad named

Lord Valiant who says he is actually a Prince of a small country with enormous wealth. In an effort to help his friend Grandpa will try to continually get any visible princesses to kiss him and make him a prince again."

Gary by Tiefling

"Player: Gary

Character: Bubbles, the Fighter Babe. Gary always plays females, preferably stupid ones. He's not so bright himself, constantly trying to 'charm' enemies with his character. They always carry a comb, lipstick, mascara, and nailpolish.

Bubbles is a moronic fighter. She kills anything that's ugly, but she tries to do so as cleanly as possible. She doesn't like anything 'icky', and she usually stops to polish her nails after each fight."

Bruce by Blake 1001

"Bruce is a long-suffering player. He knows that he knows the rules better than the other players, or the DM, for that matter, and he'd DM, himself, except that nobody wants to use his nifty home-brew system (heck, nobody's even read through the 780 pages of the latest version 7.3.1 - which as just as well, because he's doing version 7.4.1 tonight after the game...).

Bruce is concerned with playing the game 'right,' in accordance with the rules (well, the good rules anyway, some of the rules were just obviously poorly-thought-out...), and also just in the painfully obvious sense of the way fantasy /should/ be done. Bruce is stuck playing the Cleric, /again/.

Friar Boniface is a CG priest of Pelor, expelled from the comfortable duties of scribing and chanting that he aspired to in an isolated monastery for his refusal to follow the dictates of a heavy-handed and foolish superior. He's out to help overthrow evil overlords who collect outrageous taxes from poor peasants, and stuff like that. He hopes to make a name for himself, achieve high level (office) in the church and implement reforms..."

The Game - Rites of Passage

Arthur (DM): "You are travelling through the hilly woods, south of Cutter Jack's. Place your characters on the map."

<Ringing sound from Frank's general vicinity>

Frank: "That's my cell. It's probably her checking up on me. Hold on a sec. Hi babe? Yes. Yes. 9:00, no problem. Yes. Yes. Me too. Bye!"

Bob (Grandpa IC): "Arr... Mie mateys, I smell gold in that there water off the port bow."

Bob: "Wait a sec are those the trellises on our ship or trees? I can never tell with your maps, I always put a legend on mine."

Arthur (DM): "Ship? YOU ARE TRAVELLING THROUGH THE HILLY WOODS..!' You are on your way to Cutter's Jack. You're seeking adventure, and have never been there before, so you decide it is as good of a place to find it as any.

Gary: "Why are we together? Can I flirt with these guys? What's the cloud cover like? Pass the nachos!"

Frank: "Could you elaborate a little on the weather conditions for us. What is the current temperature? What is the humidity? How much cloud-cover is there? What is the approximate wind speed? And in what direction? What is the barometric pressure?"

Bruce: "This is a fantasy game, you goof, nobody ever heard of barometric pressure in the middle-ages! And, in a magical universe there's no reason to think that anything like that even exists. Those clouds could be being hearded by chinese dragons or something for all we know! For the sake of continuity, though, it'd be nice to know WHY we were traveling through the woods.

Arthur (DM): (*scrambles through his notes*)

"Uh...hold on I've got some weather stuff here...the sky is dark grey from heavy cloud-cover. It is muggy and the temperature is slightly higher than you'd like it. There is a very faint northeastern breeze. For other questions you'll need a Knowledge (Meteorology) skill. And Bruce, as I already said you are on your way to the town of Cutter's Jack. You're seeking adventure, and have never been there before, so you decide it is as good of a place to find it as any."

Bruce: "If it's as good a place as any, than any other is just as good - why couldn't we have sought adventure where we were? For that matter, how did we end up traveling together? (*heavy sigh*) Maybe

we should at least introduce ourselves:

Bruce (Friar Boniface IC): "Hail and well met, I am Friar Boniface, Pelor's blessing be upon you! I am seeking for to do good in the world and fight for the causes of freedom and justice and smite the foes of God and mandkind... and, uh, stuff like that... Who are you?"

Frank: "Actually Bruce, barometric pressure is a naturally measurable phenomenon which even lowly animals such as bats can detect metabolically. They use this information to predict whether or not there will be a lot of insects outside, so they don't have waste energy leaving the cave if hunting yields will be low. Since we are in a magical universe, this kind of sense should be common among fantastic superheroes such as us. In B.S. Salivator's thirty-ninth novel of the 'Duergar' series, the protagonist uses this ability to defeat the hordes of obstreperous, overzealous clerics that were rampaging the countryside on days with excessively high pressure."

Bruce: "You would quote the second-worst fantasy series ever to back up a point! The word 'barometer' didn't even exist until the 19th century when some aristocratic english git with nothing better to do was messing around with mercury and vacuum pumps. It stupid to using things like that in a fantasy RPG - it spoils the whole 'willing suspension of disbelief!'"

Bob: "Wait a sec I know for a fact that you can tell the barometric pressure of the surrounding territory in your bone mass as it will expand or contract slightly. That's why old people and people with broken arms can tell if it's going to rain/snow or not. Grandpa Stokes is 50 yrs old so he should be able to tell. "

Arthur: "Frank, in this game you are not even heroes yet, let alone super or fantastic. And Bob, elderly or not, my ruling on the Knowledge skill requirement stands. Bruce, I'm not here to develop your characters. You figure out why you are here. I'm just saying here you are. OK? (*slight groan*) If you want to shake hands and meet in the middle of the woods

then that's fine by me...As for the actual game, you spot a deer (*points at map*) running south. It looks frightened."

Gary (Bubbles IC): "I charge the deer!"

Frank: "A deer? Zirrdt is a hero, he doesn't fight deer. Where are the orcs and skeletons? Zirrdt moves off the right side of the map to look around. OK Arthur, what do I see over here?"

Bob: "Whoah, he never throws anything in unless it's important, it's probably possessed by a demon or something. I cast Sleep In that area."

(*The players enter combat and slay the deer. While investigating the area the deer appeared from they meet up with two hunters.*)

Arthur (NPC David IC): "Ho strangers! Boy are we glad to see you! I'm David and this is Andre..."

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): "You always introduce yourself first."

Arthur (NPC David IC): "Oh stop it!"

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): "Well you do!"

Arthur (NPC David IC): "Anywho, we were stalking that piece of meat you've got there (*points at the deer*) when something suddenly startled it!"

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): (*points to David*) "Mr. Scardy Tights over here thought you were GOBLINS!"

Arthur (NPC David IC): "You hush!"

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): "Well you did!"

Bruce (Friar Boniface IC): "Hail and well met, good Huntsmen. My friends and I are travelling to Cutter's Jack - we've never been to a town named after a leather drinking vessel before, and thought it might be a hoot. These are my friends, Dri- er Turzzid?"

Trizzdt? whatever, the Dwarven Desi Arnez, the ditzy blonde and the crazy old man who killed your deer on the road."

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): "Oh I just love leather! Of course Mr. Fancy over here only buys silk..."

Bob (Grandpa IC): "Crazy Old Man?! I am Grandpa Stokes: The Mighty Slayer Of Dragons, Within My grasp is the Supreme power of the universe, and that is ourmeat!"

BoB: "I sound real intimidating so I'll use intimidation to scare 'em. I take 10 which gives me a 17 so unless they are higher then seventh level I scare the **** outta' 'em"

Bob (Grandpa IC): "I However will take mercy on you as the strongest are apt to do, and share some of it to keep yours bellies from failing. All you need do is give us the information we seek! do you accept?!"

Frank: "Good job Bob! Force 'em to cough up the information we seek! Torture it outta them if you have to!!"

(*Arthur wonders if Bob can take 10 on intimidation. He checks the books and then furrows his brow. He takes out another, smaller book and then checks his NPC sheets. (This take a few minutes...) *)

Arthur: "Uh...it says here you can only take 10 if you are not threatened or DISTRACTED...I'm going to rule that the sight of their muscles flexing distracts Grandpa...I'm going to roll a seduction check:

(*Frank sings one of Zirrdt's ballads in character to the tune of 'Strangers in the Night'*)

Bob: "Dude!? How can two guys successfully seduce a straight guy? Besides there is no such skill as seduction!"

(*Bob fails his roll*)

Bob: "Not knowing exactly what's going on I figure this must be some sort of body building thing. I show off my awesome musculature in comparison. (*rolls*)

Counter seduction 20! I am D.E.D Sexy!"

Arthur: "Let me get this STRAIGHT. Do you want to counter seduce or do you want to intimidate? I'm reading seduction from the bluff rules from Sword & Fist. I'm just trying to see if they distract you. You can still try to intimidate them, but since you are distracted you can't take 10. Let me know if you want to keep your counter seduction roll or if you want to intimidate. If you intimidate go ahead and roll. Though I guess you could try to do both, if they are into that sort of thing..."

Bob: "Oh, I'm pretty sure they're interested in this sorta thing. I'll Intimidate along with looking to D.E.D. sexy." (*Bob succeeds in his roll*)

Arthur: "Hearing Grandpa's statement, the two are overcome with a bit of fear mixed with subtle attraction."

Arthur (NPC David IC): "F-fine, you can control the meat, but we get some too right, as long as Andre does what he loves to do anyway?"

Arthur (NPC Andre IC): "You be quiet, your mouth is as big as mine!"

Arthur: "Andre continues to tell you all about the town, everything from where the best fruit can be found to who has the biggest sword. You gain a +5 bonus to all common knowledge checks about Cutter's Jack.

The hunters also tell you why they were afraid that you were goblins. There is a tribe that lives not too far from Cutter's Jack, and the town has placed a bounty on all of them. The town pays 1 piece of gold for every left goblin ear. It has to be the left ear so that people don't try to cash in twice. The bounties can be collected in at the town guard-house.

The hunters give you directions to a ravine with a mine shaft where the goblins are frequently spotted."

Frank, "Oh that's funny Arthur! You accidentally said *one* gold piece per ear! I'm sure you meant one-hundred gold per ear, otherwise the party would have to kill several thousand goblins just to get a decent reward."

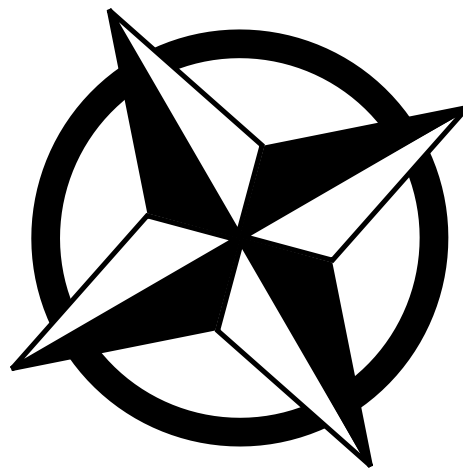
Arthur: (*checks his module*): "Well...that's the reward..."

Frank, "OK guys, let's head off to the ravine. Zirrdt needs to mutilate a couple dozen goblin families before dusk so he afford to buy dinner and a room. If there are any goblin children, Zirrdt might be able to afford dessert.

And so the party continues on to battle the goblins. You can see how the Rites of Passage game ended at vacuumelemental.org or you can check out their next module in next month's issue of Asgard



Worlds Apart



PALAESTRA

This month we are interviewing Wayne Peacock, author of the homebrew world of Palaestra

. Based on a mix of Byzantine Europe and the myths of Faerie, his world is an interesting departure from the standard quasi-medieval world found in most settings. His website can be found at <http://members.home.net/wdpeacock/palaestra/index.htm>.

Jesse: First off I would like to thank you for agreeing to this interview.

Wayne: Sure, I appreciate it.

Jesse: ok first off, what prompted you to create your setting?

Wayne: Well I guess 3e did -- It got me excited about D&D again, which I stopped DMing in ... 1984 or something.

Jesse: I was 5 years old in 1984 :)

Wayne: Thanks, kid!! I feel old enough already!

Well, dropping a lot of the "game balance" pretence that was so apparent in 1e and 2e -- arbitrary stuff like racial limitations, etc. Most importantly is was the skill/feat system, and the (more or less) single mechanic.

I had been playing and GM (and writing) games with much easier and coherent mechanics since I left the D&D fold -- I found my few return trips so jarring I never thought I would come back to it . The hap-

azard mechanics and arbitrary rules just got in the way of playing my character or running a story.

The stuff I began seeing on Eric's site led me to believe that I could tell stories about characters I cared about in the new system without having to wade through the ...well... crap that passed for 2e game mechanics and character creation/progression.

Jesse: Why did you decide upon a homebrew setting?

Wayne: A lot of reasons, actually.

First of all I really enjoy world-building. Setting is very important to me and I enjoy games where the setting and its cultures are integral to the character's motivations, and tie-in with the plotlines and politics of the stories. I've done a fair amount of freelancing in the past, but had to give that up for a while when our second child was born -- too many weekend-long writing sessions. Working on Palaestra is something I can do when I have time -- no set deadlines -- and I still get a chance to write, which is very important to me.

Secondly, and related to the above, I demand strong cultures from my settings. I want something more than "barbarians come from X" and "elves live in the forest." I want to know the motivations of these people and why they think and act like they do. How is their cultural identity tied to mythos of their world, their geography, language, etc.?

Greyhawk, for example, starts out with a lot of ethnographic information (cultural

migrations and such), but does not deliver in the end for me. Is there an identifiable "culture" of the Flanaess? I've read and read it, but I could not answer that question.

The Forgotten Realms makes it easy to come up with adventures, and the current incarnation is damned impressive, but once again, if someone put it to me to describe its people or mythos, all I could come up with is "too" (think about it). (As an aside here I really think that the FR developers should stop apologizing and denying that the setting is best suited for high-level play. They should run with it and let the apologists and whiners be damned.)

Now, I'm not saying that these settings are inferior, or anything as *_insane_* at that! It's just that they lacked something that I was interested in dealing with in games that I ran. To put it more plainly, I would not find running games in either of these worlds fun -- and that's the point of gaming, right? "Fun."

Thirdly, I have some problems with a few of the leftover conceits from 1st and 2nd edition D&D, mostly having to do with alignment and alignment-triggered spells, like detect evil. Changing those in a published setting just seemed like more work than developing something that I was happy with from the ground up.

At that point I wanted something that made a few of these changes, but was still D&D. I was happy with 97% of the mechanics of the game and, heck I wanted to play D&D! So I started by decided to concentrate on two cultures at first, but these cultures had to encompass most of

what D&D had to offer a player -- the races and classes. To make it interesting, I wanted these two cultures to be different -- not necessarily in a state of war, but tension is important.

What I (with a lot of help) came up with was Palaestra. In it we have Iconium, Byzantine-like human society and a non-human culture of Faerie -- forced into an uneasy relationship. Unlike many of the fantasy worlds humans are the junior power here. I play up the age advantage that most of Faerie have to the hilt. Most of the human elite they have met are in 10-12 level range, while the two Faerie druids and kings have been 18 or 20+. (Human power is tied to organization and a common faith and culture - Fae power is tied to numbers and a few incredibly powerful individuals.)

I know things are going well when the players pick up on the themes of the game. (I am blessed with great players). The Iconians in the game are devout (well at least on the surface), willful and utterly convinced of Logos (and humanities) eventual triumph. The Alfar (part of Faerie) are fiercely independent, mercurial, brave -- children of their culture.

Still, there is room to react against the stereotypes. One of the Alfar, Ingolf, distrust the Druids (the bulwark of Faerie society), and one of the Iconians is bound and determined to end slavery in his land -- a hypocrisy upon which much of the human empire is founded.

Jesse: What sort of inspirations (both gaming and non-gaming) influenced you doing your world design?

Wayne: Well, I have been doing a lot of reading about the Byzantines, a kind of lost chapter in the history of the West and they intrigued me. Their combination of Roman and Greek heritage, the importance they placed on philosophy and theology and learning in general. The intrigue, double-dealing and backstabbing and yet their utter faith. Wow, they were a goldmine of inspiration for the Iconians -- Byzantine culture was too neat to investigate in a game.

Since the game began George R.R. Martin's *_A Song of Ice and Fire_* series has been an inspiration for all of us. Want a lesson in Byzantine politics and military strategy? Read these book -- Martin even got the chain across the Bosphorus from the Byzanties!

Faerie come from many sources, chiefly my own readings of Celtic and Norse myths.

I wanted a chance to explore some of the stories I came across while writing for Changeling. Slavic myths have really been an unexpected treasure. They are amazing people and their stories are incredibly rich. Their historic relationship with Byzantium makes it even better. Sean Holland came up with some neat ideas on incorporating classical fey creatures -- the sylvia -- it's all come together quite nicely.

I've been influenced by several game-worlds such as Harn, but even with the few customisations to standard setting rules (Greyhawk). Palaestra is a D&D world and that is its chief game influence.

If anyone is interested, they can look at a more complete bibliography here: http://members.home.net/wdpeacock/palaestra/index_extras.htm

Jesse: When did you start on your setting?

Wayne: Some good friends and I worked on an earlier non-D&D campaign setting about 4 years ago that featured a central human city like Constantinople, but the human culture was Persian/Ottoman Turk. The project did not work, for a lot of reasons. I liked the idea of a central, cosmopolitan human city, but the setting we were working on was too big, too disparate, in my opinion. That concept of a city informed Iconium, although the cultures are/were different.

A lot of the impetus for Palaestra also grew out of a desire to come up with a setting that was not controlled by some company's idea of a meta-plot. When Eric's site convinced me that 3e was going to be different (better), we leapt at the chance to make a new world.

Jesse: Has it gone through many revisions since then?

Wayne: Not really. I still think we are working on filling out the first real "draft" of the world. There's a LOT of blank space.

I have a lot of neat ideas about the Other cultures of the area <http://members.home.net/wdpeacock/palaestra/others.htm> -- but I want to get Faerie and Iconium in a finished state first.

I have completely re-hauled the website once, but it was mostly an organizational change.

Jesse: How much influence do your players have on your setting?

Wayne: Quite a bit.

As any good DM, I forced to create the world in front of their wanderings - both physical and mental. Their recent foray into Roluguka prompted a better definition of the Rolgulkan gods, for example.

All have directly contributed either words or pictures (or both) to the website. I required a written background for each character, and they all did a great job -- some of those have grown into almost short story depth. Jessica Hanna's (Aeolif) desire to play a fianna defined a character class - and her no-holes-barred approach to an Alfar hero have helped define a race. Jon Hanna's (Zacarra) love of naval history will play a major role in upcoming games (ever heard of Greek Fire?). Jon's desire (mistake?) to have me fill in a bank period of his PC's life created the opportunity for an entire plot thread. Steve MacDonald's noble wizard (Theodorus) has had a great impact on wizardry in Iconium, although a lot of what is going on with his character is secret, it will out, in one way or another, in the end. He definitely has taken to Byzantine-style politics. (Heh, heh...)

Keith Martin (Ingolf) has done the most to help with Palaestra. He was the chief author of most of the church history. The Sylva are basically Sean Holland's (Martaine) to do with what he will, and he's work has paid off. Laura Heilman (Nicasia) has contributed all of the original art -- her Slavic/Byzantine orcs are just awesome.

My players are fantastic and they have coloured pretty much every aspect of the world. You can check the backgrounds out at http://members.home.net/wdpeacock/palaestra/a_characters.htm.

Jesse: What is important to you in setting design?

Wayne: A setting has to have character beyond the gee-wiz factor of floating cities and people with pointy ears. I want something that I can sink my teeth into as a DM and something that my players will have fun exploring -- by exploring I mean something beyond what's behind door #3. I mean exploring their culture, talking with the NPCs, getting into arguments over beliefs, etc.

If I'm serious about wanting to run or play in a campaign, I want a strong sense of verisimilitude in the setting. As opposed to an occasional fun game of something like Paranoia or Baron Munchausen. (sp?) I want something that's not necessarily realistic, but believable. It should be strangely familiar, even though it has magic (Middle

Earth), ray guns (Babylon 5) or superheroes (Astro City).

This can be done in a lot of ways. First of all it helps if the geography is believable - not "real world" in the mundane sense necessarily, but that rivers generally flow downhill and the mountains run near the coast -- a nod to plate tectonics and high school geography is a big help.

I know I've already harped on this, but believable cultures are also a must. One of the reasons that the cultures of Palaestra are drawn from real-world archetypes is so the setting will have that "familiar strangeness" about it (I borrow the term from Harn). The physics aren't necessarily real, but the fall-out is.

Not all settings have to pull from history to achieve verisimilitude, but I decided to run with it. Some settings do this very badly "I need Renaissance Italians...umm...jab 'em here on this glacier between the Aztecs and the Inuits!" Usually in these cases, the only "cultural ties" these groups have to their real-world counterparts is their names (maybe) and their clothing.

This has an added benefit in that my players have resources beyond *_me_* to fill out their character's background and culture. None of us are concerned about a historical recreation game -- the mundanities of a butcher's life in 1300's Constantinople, for example, would be boring. It's wonderful to have a player say "My house looks like this," and whip out a picture, or come to me with an idea for a prestige class based on the berserkers from Norse myth, or let me know of a cool Byzantine court position that would really fit well into the game. We all have a wealth of material to pull from and several guiding stars for our journey.

Lastly, the setting and the rules need to reinforce one another. I prefer rules that are based in the reality of the setting, not game mechanics. In Palaestra, for example, humans can be sorcerers, but there are some big societal negatives for playing a human sorcerer. (Read Nicasia's background, for more on that.) 3e allows me to do that. I can customize the setting with few real rule changes, unlike the silly, authoritarian "game balance" or "just because" conceits of the earlier editions.

Jesse: What do you think the strengths of your setting are?

Wayne: First of all I do NOT think Palaestra is a finished draft at this point, so I tend to concentrate upon what need to be done -- the campaign-level maps (although

the projection maps are great), detailing the sub-cultures of Faerie, the provinces and themes of Iconium -- there's still an awful lot to do!

We've done good job with the rules -- we've only changed things when necessary, and our changes are easy to remember and fit on a single side of paper.

I do think that Palaestra has managed to create a mythological/cultural framework for all the various non-human races that gives them the same weight as any human-centered D&D world. Non-human culture seems to be glossed over in many worlds -- the human pantheons are usually named at least, but often the non-humans seem to only have one god a piece?

I believe that the Logosian religion is a successful example of a monotheistic religion in a D&D game. It's various disciples, prophets and saints manage to give as wide a variety of choices as any pantheistic religion that I've seen implemented in a game. More importantly, it "feels" Byzantine. The empire and culture it spawned are rich with possibilities and likewise have the depth of character I crave as a DM.

I think that the two meta-cultures balance one another well. They are extremely different, but not to the point that relations aren't possible. Neither is perfect, both have examples of incredible generosity and hypocrisy.

As an example, I love some of the arguments that have gone on between my players and their run-ins with NPCs. Cormac is a Cimbri (half-elf) who runs an inn in Tavia. One of the fae characters, Aeolif, was shocked that Cormac attends the human church and was even more shocked to learn that he was raised in Tavia. Humans murdered Aeolif's first love (he was a pawn in a political game). To her humans were money-grubbing, slave-owning, backstabbing killers for the most part. Cormac (who did not argue with her characterization) took Aeolif to the hospital, the alms house and the orphanage -- common, church/state-supported institutions in large human cities. Cormac then pointed out to Aeolif that none of these exist in Faerie...

Jesse: What do you think the weaknesses of it are?

Wayne: This is starting to sound like a job interview...

1) It's unfinished.

2) It will not fit everyone's idea of fantasy roleplaying.

Want to play a Monk in palaestra? How

about psionics? Tough luck.

Want to play Tumblebottom Leafkiller or Faux NativeAmericanName the elf princess? Nope.

Want to play something a realistic as, say Harn? Nope, Palaestra's not that either...

Jesse: Why should a reader look at your setting?

Wayne: You should look at Palaestra if...

...you want a setting that emphasizes cultural roleplaying.

...you want adventures filled with intrigue, myth and magic.

...as a player you want resources beyond gaming sourcebooks and the DM to help craft your character's background and society.

...you are interested in various Faerie myths and/or Byzantine culture.

...you want to adventure in a D&D setting that includes the fantastic, but has the feel of something that might have been.

...you want to participate in the struggle between faith and mystery.

... you want to do all the above and still use as much as possible of the plethora of d20 products and support material.

... you want to learn a great deal about organizing material on your own world in a manner to be of use to your players and see an example of how to adapt the d20 system to suit your own ends.

Jesse: How and why did you adapt the d20 system away from the core mechanics?

Wayne: At present there are 14 Rule O's (rule changes) in Palaestra. I don't think there will be more. You can see them all at http://members.home.net/wdpeacock/palaestra/r_houserules_0.htm For the most part they are minor. We only had one big problem with the rules.

I guess by biggest problem with the rules as written is Alignment. It bothers me as a player because I think actions should determine "alignment" not the other way around. It also upsets me when folks act like alignment, as written, is merely a roleplaying aid. It's simply not *_just_* that, it's a game mechanic. For one thing, alignment is a spell trigger (Detect Evil,

Protection from Good etc.) I think the societal implication of a spell determining

someone's morality -- especially a spell that every Tom, Dick and cleric can cast are HUGE. Rather than risk a rant, let's just say it severely weakens verisimilitude in my opinion.

This became an even bigger issue as I tried to simulate a Byzantine-like, monotheistic religion while doing the initial drafts of Palaestra. What about "evil" priests? Trying to create a religious structure that would leave room for the many heresies, and lapses of morality that needed to part of a Byzantine-like church made the as-written alignment rules impossible to deal with.

After much gnashing of teeth and posting and counter postings between the rules brain trust for Palaestra (Keith Martin, Stewart MacWilliam, Sean Holland and myself) we came up with two rulings. I believe Stewart and Keith were the ones that actually came up with these. (These are discussed in much more length on the website, BTW.)

The Always Rule

The only time alignment, especially the concern with evil or good, comes into game-play is when the game deals with diabolic, perhaps irredeemable evil or otherworldly, angelic good - so called, big "E" evil and big "G" good. In simple terms, "Evil" is a fundamental element of the universe; "evil" is culturally relative.

In Palaestra we will use the "Always" rule to determine if standard alignment rules apply - such as when spells like detect evil or protection from good are effective. If the alignment description for a spell or character class, etc. uses the word "always" then apply the standard alignment rules. For example, paladins are always lawful good. Therefore paladins must conform to the alignment rules and, in turn, can be affected by protection from good spells.

Clerical Alignment and Excommunication

Cleric (Templars) and priests gain spells because they are confirmed by the sacraments of the church. Therefore, while most priests begin the game with an Alignment close to their patron saint, they may "stray" without that causing the loss of their class abilities.

These rules allow for alignment to exist in Palaestra, which is important since I feel that it is one of the central game mechanics of D&D, but turned its uses for the "good" of the setting. While it means that a priest

can get away with murder, literally, it makes the idea of faith stronger -- it has to be more than a payoff for spells, etc. It makes the digging out the cancers which infest the church far more difficult, but more rewarding. It give the offices of the church incredible power, which is exactly what they should have.

Jesse: Is there anything within your setting to offer, besides inspiration, to a casual reader, who is not interested in actually running a homebrewed setting?

Wayne: There's a fair bit of system stuff: new feats, new classes, new rules, combat manoeuvres and such that I think most D&D fans could use. I also keep a nifty chart of feats grouped by type -- it does not contain the Psionic feats, but 98% of the other "official" feats, along with many other sources are listed there. I include book and page # to make it useful

for players.

Moreover, there's a great adventure log taken from the Byzantium on the Shannon thread off EN's Story Hour board. The logs on the site get cleaned up and I usually add some information that I think the characters would recall.

If you are interested in the character's story there are also links to .pdf's of the characters' sheets and each player has written their PC's background too which you can read. Under the setting link, you can also find maps, and NPC lists as well.

Jesse: It was nice being able to interview you! :)



The Short Straw

(c) Adrian Czajkowski 2001





Hit Point / Body Point System

By Ryan Nock

Hit Points (HP) do not represent actual wounds beyond the most minor things such as scratches or bruises. Rather, HP represents a character's endurance and determination to keep moving and dodging attacks despite minor injuries and exhaustion. A character's actual capacity to withstand physical trauma is represented by Body Points (BP).

Hit Points

A character with high HP has learned how to turn a major blow into a more minor one, and has developed the force of will to ignore fatigue and pain and keep fighting. He might drop to the dirt and get bruised instead of standing still and being peppered by arrows. He might twist desperately and pull a muscle so an axe chop only grazes him. He might refuse to lie down and die despite painful burns all across his body from a Dragon's breath.

The more HP a character has, the better able he is to avoid dying, regardless of how tired and weary he is. In order to avoid serious injury, he incurs a minor one, getting grazed, bruised, or even just winded. Eventually, however, even a determined character gets too tired, can no longer fight the pain, and drops his guard. In game terms, he runs out of HP.

Body Points

All creatures have BP based on their Constitution. Small or Medium-size creatures have BP equal to their Constitution, while larger or smaller creatures have more or less BP. See *Creatures of Different Shapes and Sizes*, below.

Effects of Damage

Damage doesn't slow a character down until his HP or BP reach 0.

When a character's HP reaches 0, he is fatigued; he cannot run or charge, and he suffers an effective -2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity. In addition, when a character is reduced to 0 HP, he must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10) or be stunned

for 2d6 rounds. The character does not, however, have to continue to make Fortitude saves in further rounds. Unlike standard D&D, hit points do not go into negatives, but instead all further damage is dealt to BP. A character with 0 HP has exhausted himself, and is no longer able to mount a sufficient defence against further attacks.

When a character's BP reach 0, he's unconscious and dying. He must immediately succeed a Fortitude save (DC 10) or die from his injuries. If he succeeds, he remain unconscious but dying.

Death and Dying

A dying character must make a Fortitude saving throw every hour (DC 10 +1 per hour of unconsciousness). If the save fails, the character dies. On a natural 20, or a success by 10 or more, the character stabilizes and begins healing naturally. A character can also be stabilized by a successful use of the Heal skill (DC 15), or by any form of magical healing that heals at least 1 HP. See below for details of magical healing.

Healing that raises a character above 0 BP makes the character regain consciousness, but the character will be fatigued.

Healing, Magical and Mundane

Characters recover 1 HP per character level or hit die per hour of rest, and 1 BP per day of rest. Higher level characters heal more quickly both because of their stronger resilience and because a given number of HP represents less injury and fatigue to a high level character than to a low.

For example, if Mialea, a 10th level Wizard, is injured, she heals 10 HP per hour, and 1 BP per day. If a Lamia, a 9 hit die creature, is injured, it heals 9 HP per hour, and 1 BP per day. Dramatically larger or smaller creatures heal more or less BP per day. See *Creatures of Different Shapes and Sizes*, below.

Magical healing affects HP as normal, but has a unique effect on BP. All magical healing works similarly, regardless of whether it is a cure light wounds, a magi-

cal spring, a paladin's lay hands ability, or anything else. Any magical healing heals the normal number of HP, and then 1 BP for every 5 HP healed, rounded down. A heal spell heals all HP and BP damage.

The foremost exceptions to this rule of healing BP are the various polymorph spells and lycanthropic shapeshifting. Instead of healing a day's worth of HP, these spells instead heal a day's worth of BP, as determined by the creature's natural size, not that of its assumed form.

Direct Damage to BodyPoints:

There are several ways a character can take BP damage while he still has HP, the most common of which being critical hits, inflict wounds spells, and fumbled saving throws.

Critical Hits

A critical hit represents a strike that bypasses all the target's defenses and hits an actual blow. Most 'hits' in combat simply represent the target having to expend great effort to avoid a serious injury, but a critical hit actually strikes the target. Critical hits deal damage directly to BP, and do not deal multiplied damage as in normal D&D. However, because of the increased danger of critical hits in these rules, the threat ranges for weapons are reduced.

Old Range	New Range
20/x2	20
19/x2	20
18/x2	19-20
20/x3	20
20/x4	19-20

For effects that increase a weapon's threat range, such as the feat Improved Critical, or the Keen Edge spell, simply increase the threat range by 1, such as from "19-20" to "18-20," or from "18-20" to "17-20." For example, a warrior with a Keen Scythe and the Improved Critical (Scythe) feat would have a threat range of 17-20.

Any attack that the target cannot avoid,

such as if he is bound or held, is automatically a critical hit. Only attack forms that normally require an attack roll can be critical hits. Some spells, such as Melf's Acid Arrow, do call for an attack roll, and thus can critically hit. However, most spells, such as fireball or magic missile, cannot critical in this way. See Fumbled Saving Throws, below.

Inflict Wounds Spells

Just as cure wounds spells heal both HP and BP, so do inflict wounds spells deal both HP and BP damage. Whenever a character takes damage from an inflict wounds spell, he also takes 1 BP damage for every 5 HP the spell inflicted. A harm spell reduces a character to 1d4 HP and 1 BP.

Fumbled Saving Throws

Sometimes, through clumsiness or poor luck, even the most heroic character can be seriously injured or killed by dangers they could otherwise normally endure.

A fumbled saving throw can represent many things, either poor luck on the victim's part, or good luck for the attacker. A target might react too slowly and be caught fully in the blast of a fireball, or a sorcerer might aim his lightning bolt straight into the target's chest.

Whenever a damaging effect allows a Reflex saving throw to reduce or negate its damage, if a character rolls a natural 1 on his saving throw, the save might result in a fumble. Roll again with the same save modifiers against DC 10. If the second roll is a success, the damage is dealt normally, but if the character fails the second save, any damage the effect would have dealt is dealt directly to BP.

These rules can also be used for damage caused by the exhaustion of heat, cold, or starvation. A normal save or check would result in HP damage, but a natural roll of 1 could result in damage to BP.

Falling

Sometimes, damage cannot be avoided, such as when a character falls hundreds of feet off a cliff. Normal falling deals 1d6 BP damage per 10 feet fallen. If a character is falling nearby a solid surface that could be used to slow or cushion the fall, the character can attempt a Reflex save (DC 10 +1/10 feet fallen) to have the damage be dealt to his HP. If simply falling freely, such as from a flying carpet, the damage is automatically dealt to BP. A character can, however, attempt a Tumble check (DC 15) to treat

the fall as if it were 10 feet shorter, both for the purposes of damage and for the Reflex save above.

Creatures of Different Shapes and Sizes

Small and Medium-size creatures function effectively the same in regards to BP. Both have BP equal to their Constitution, and heal 1 BP per day. However, creatures much larger or smaller than humans have different amounts of BP and heal at different rates, proportional to their body size. Additionally, some types of creatures that lack anatomies function differently from normal creatures.

Note: The following rules sacrifice realism for ease of implementation. Though the actual BP figures for very large creatures would be much higher, giving a storm giant 1000 extra BP would imbalance the current Challenge Rating and experience system. If you wish to implement these changes despite the difficulties in balancing encounters and assigning XP, see the end of the article for optional rules.

Smaller Creatures and BP

Tiny, Diminutive, or Fine creatures simply have fractional amounts of BP compared to how many they would normally have. Tiny creatures have $\frac{1}{2}$, Diminutive creatures have $\frac{1}{4}$, and Fine creatures have $\frac{1}{8}$ their Constitution in BP, rounded down, to a minimum of 1. These BP are in addition to whatever normal HP the creature might have.

Smaller creatures also heal more slowly, since an equivalent wound on a smaller creature is far more dangerous. Tiny creatures heal 1 BP every 2 days, Diminutive creatures every 4 days, and Fine creatures every 8 days. They heal HP at the normal rate however, 1 HP per hour for every level or Hit Die.

Larger Creatures and BP

Large, Huge, Gargantuan, and Colossal creatures require somewhat more effort to convert. Larger creatures all have extra BP beyond their standard HP equal to their Constitution scores (just as Small or Medium-size creatures). Additionally, any extra HP granted from high Constitution are now considered extra BP, to represent great size. These bonus BP come only from extra HP of the base creature, not Constitution-derived bonus HP for class levels.

For example, in Core Book III a Storm

Giant's HP are listed as 19d8+114, and its Constitution score is 23. Thus, it has the normal 23 BP from its Constitution, plus 114, for a total of 137. It has 19d8 HP, for an average of 85, plus 137 BP. In standard D&D 3e, high-level characters have high HP because of extreme training, whereas most of the HP for large creatures come from their extreme bulk. In the HP-BP system, this translates to high-level characters having a lot of HP, and large creatures having copious amounts of BP. Some creatures, however, have both bulk and skill, such as a Great Wurm Red Dragon with 260 HP and 431 BP.

Larger creatures also heal more quickly, since an equivalent wound on a larger creature is far less severe. For every day of rest, Large creatures heal 4 BP, Huge creatures 10 BP, Gargantuan creatures 25 BP, and Colossal creatures 50 BP. They heal HP at the normal rate however, 1 HP per hour for every level or Hit Die.

Creatures without Anatomies

Constructs and undead are tireless, and do not specifically have either HP or BP. These creatures do not weaken, and their bodies must be destroyed utterly to defeat them. In game terms, any creature that does not have a Constitution score (typically just constructs and undead) is considered to only have HP. When their HP is reduced to 0, they are destroyed. Effects that deal BP damage, such as critical hits or inflict wounds spells, deal normal damage to these creatures instead.

Optional Rules

Like all optional rules, these rules have the potential to shift the balance of a game away from the standard for D&D 3e.

Traditional Critical Hits

Critical hits function more like standard D&D 3e, with standard threat ranges and critical multipliers. Whenever an attack is a critical hit, it deals the multiplied amount of damage to HP, plus a number of BP damage equal to the weapon's critical multiplier. For example, a critical hit with a longsword (Dmg: 1d8, Crit: 19-20/x2) would deal 2d8 HP damage, plus 2 BP damage. A critical hit with a scythe (Dmg: 2d4, Crit: 20/x4) would deal 8d4 HP plus 4 BP.

Realistic Big Creatures

Instead of the rules for larger creatures presented above, give creatures of large size or larger bonus BP. This change will drastically alter the power (and thus the Challenge Ratings) of big creatures. It is more realistic, however, because a troll that's twice as tall, twice as wide, and twice as thick as a human is overall 8 times as large, and thus perhaps 8 times harder to kill through injuries (2x2x2). Likewise, a storm giant is 4 times larger in all direction, and has 64 times as much body mass to resist wounds.

Large creatures have BP equal to their Constitution x 5. They heal 5 BP/day.

Huge creatures have BP equal to their Constitution x 50. They heal 50 BP/day.

Gargantuan creatures have their Constitution x 500. They heal 500 BP/day.

Colossal creatures have their Constitution x 5000. They heal 5000 BP/day.

Epic Adventuring

In games where the players want more realism without exactly increasing the danger, this optional rule allows characters to still die from falling 100 feet into lava, without making peasants a dangerous threat because of critical hits. Critical hits function as in normal D&D 3e, and fumbled saves do not occur. BP damage can only occur when a character runs out of hit points, or when the damage is unavoidable, or when it comes from environmental sources like falling. Thus, critical hits will not be massive threats, but a character who is pinned can still be quickly dispatched, and swimming through acid lakes will be appropriately deadly.

Implementation

These rules help to create a gaming atmosphere with greater physical threats, since even a lowly blind kobold could kill a high level character with a well-placed hit. This tends to encourage roleplaying slightly more than combat, since the player characters will be in more danger. Some of the optional rules can help you implement the level of realism and danger you want, while still making it believably stupid to say, "It's only a 50 foot fall. I'll survive."



On Gaming, Online!

By Vacuum Elemental

I'm busy. I don't have time to schedule an afternoon every week to play D&D, but I love the game. What can I do? Play online.

I'm too busy to schedule an afternoon in a chat room. A popular chat program, WebRPG, is now charging for online play and another, OpenRPG, won't work with my firewall. What can I do? Play by post or email.

I'm a roll player as much as I am a role player, so as you can imagine I sometimes get bored with board games (message board games that is). It just doesn't have the same feel as pen & paper tabletop gaming. I've met a few people who brag that they can play for hours without a single die roll, but in my games that never happens. Without dice we are (in the words of "Blake 1001") little more than kids running around yelling "bang you're dead". So how do you have dice rolls on a message board? I've seen a few places where people roll their dice at home (or have their computer do it privately) and tell everyone on the boards what they rolled. For me every time a crit is rolled you always wonder what REALLY went on behind the scenes.

To soothe my paranoia I created a web site that uses server side scripts to roll dice and store the results in a public database. Here is an example of what you'll see in your browser:

```
ID = 3317
Username = Asgard
Note = Just a test roll.
Date/Time = 7/21/2001 1:28:50 AM
Dice = 2
Sides = 6
Mod = +3
Rolls = +6 +2 ++3
Total = 11
```

You can link to this record with the following URL:

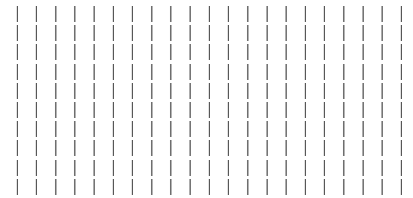
<http://www.16.brinkster.com/krisinchico/searchroll.asp?username=Asgard#3317>

You are free to use it even if you never play on our board. You just put in your character name, the number of dice you want, the sides per dice and the modifier (+/-). No passwords or email verification or spam or anything else. No banners or annoying pop up advertisements for butt cams. The die roller creates a URL for you to cut and paste into a message board or email. This allows everyone to see your roll in an objective environment.

We have the dice. What else is missing in message board games? Maps and minis!

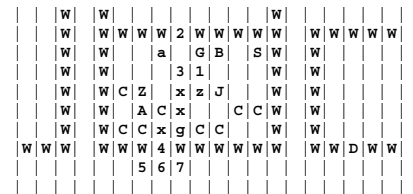
One method of mapping is to attach a

picture of the map and have each player colour over this. An easier method is to just use ASCII characters. For example, here is the standard grid.



If you cut and paste this grid into a message, you'll notice that it perfectly fits in the text box. To insert a character in the grid, make sure you've toggled your insert key.

Here is an example of one of the maps from an existing game I'm running:



Each letter and number symbolize either a person or thing, sort of like a miniature.

For my adventure I try to premake all of the maps in this ASCII grid format. Sometimes I will show the character the grid they are in and also all adjacent grids. As they move out of their grid the next grid is used.

We have about 15 games going on right now and there is always room for more players and DMs. Current games include the Sunless Citadel, several d20 modules, official RPGA core and adaptable games, and some homebrew creations. We are also host a parody party of gamers in a campaign known as "Chaotic STOOPID!".

One complaint about play by post or email is the slow pace of the games. Why not try participating in several games at once? Online games allow you to choose a pace you are comfortable with.

Our particular site is:

<http://www.vacuumelemental.org>. It is hosted by Wizards of the Coast and now uses an upgraded version of UBB (a popular forum format). If you go there you will also find a comprehensive list of other web sites for playing online. Happy gaming!



Story Craft

Interesting Places



By Ryan Boel

Before I start, I would like to give a shout out to my pre editor editor Frank. This article goes to 2 edits and I would like to thank them both for the hard work they put into helping me on my articles and wanted to thank them.

Welcome to the second instalment of Story Craft. In this issue, I will be telling you how to spice up boring places in your campaign. Have your players run into a town where nothing interesting seems to be going on? Do they walk through the forest and have a couple of fights but that's it? Well I'm here to help you add certain pizzazz to those boring encounters. To do this, I will be using a simple formula that should enhance any location in your game.

To use this formula, you will need to have a small description of your setting. If you do not have one, first you should get a pen and paper, and brainstorm for ideas. This consists of simply writing down every descriptive word or phrase that comes to mind when you think about the location. Next, you should review the notes from your brainstorming session and compose sentences and descriptions of the setting. Don't forget to use an active tense rather than a passive one when describing present and future situations, so that your words describe things that are taking place. Also, make sure you underline the words that you are using from your notes to help you keep track of words you've already used.

I asked my friends to send me some campaign settings that they would like to see sparkle with flavour. Ryan Knock sent me the following description.

"The port city of Palesi is the capital of the Nation of Tennas. Located on a huge bay that opens onto a hundred-mile long inlet, Palesi resembles little else than a 15th century version of Boston, complete with lots of taverns, a few prominent colleges for scholars, and a fairly cold-temperate climate that snows a lot. Palesi was built over the ruins of the destroyed capital of the

ancient Seren Empire, which was very similar to Earth's Roman Empire. The technology is on par with 14th century Europe. Same architectural talents, no real firearms to speak of, weapons and armor fairly advanced from a medieval standpoint. The arcanology level is fairly modest. A large number of low-talent magic-users provide minor heating magic during the winter, but otherwise only a handful of people have much magical talent. There aren't any unified schools or societies of magic-users that I've made up, and even clerical magic is fairly rare. The people of the nation have lived close enough to magic for enough generations that they're not surprised or frightened by magic much, but they just don't see it very often. The city is predominantly human, with only a handful of other races (much like in 14th century England there weren't than many Russians). The most interesting thing about Palesi currently known to the players is that it has a very large opera house that is a popular shelter for citizens during blizzards. It seats several thousand, and provides entertainment, food, and comfortable seats for people to sleep in if they get snowed out of their houses.

"Tennas is a human nation, and within its borders is an ancient abandoned Elvish forest called Ycengled. The abandoned forest to the south, Ycengled, was once home to the last refuge of Elves on the world, but a few centuries ago most left in a scattered exodus to find new homelands with fewer humans nearby. Only a fraction of the original population remain, but they're enough to make life difficult for people trying to pass through the woods. For all the Elvish peoples of the world, Ycengled is sacred as a last refuge. It is bordered to the north and west by ocean, to the east by the Otdar Mountains, and to the south by the Orcish nation, the Republic of Sindaire."

After reviewing this bit of article, I've found quite a few interesting places, like

The Formula

Step 1 - Review the description, underlining or highlighting any locations and concepts that might interest your players. You're primarily looking for elements that you can use to add plot hooks.

Step 2 - For each location, attempt to create a mysterious occurrence; something whose source or cause is not immediately apparent to spectators. The sources of these phenomena should be Mundane, Arcane, or Divine in origin. A mundane occurrence is one that is created by a natural trigger; the roof leaks, spilling water on a mouldy curtain in an attic. This mould makes the family living in the house ill during the monsoon season. Arcane mysteries are the work of wizards or sorcerers; intentionally or accidentally. For example, a magician whose laboratory is situated next to a gem cutter's shop, and her experiments have attracted a number of minor earth elementals that are responsible for the disappearance of a noticeable amount of the stock. And finally we have Divine mysteries, which are acts of the Deities in your game world.

Step 3 - Tie it all together. This is where you tie up all the loose ends you have written down and kept track of so you will have an adventure -- or maybe even several.

colleges, the opera house, the bay, and Ycengled. With so much to choose from, I will take the locations one by one, starting with the Opera House. It's a refuge and many people like to go there regularly to watch a play or musical performance. Because the theatre is a part of the cultural landscape, many different kinds of people will go there on a regular basis. Next, I needed to add a mystery or two. While brainstorming for ideas, I came up with a

mysterious ghost of a former opera singer. I decided that she could be a lonely bard who doesn't believe he is dead. But I still didn't know what her motivation was for haunting the Opera House.

I also want to add an Arcane mystery to round things out. Usually, this could be anything from a talking cat to a singing candelabrum, but I want to continue with the winter theme. I thought about the layout of modern theatres. There is usually a section where the audience sits to watch the play, called the house section. In our Opera House, above the house section is a giant, crystalline snowflake that has an enchantment equivalent to a Continual Flame cast upon it that shines with a blue light effect. I decided that this version of the Continual Flame spell will be the equivalent of a 3rd level enchantment, because it does not look like a flame, and will be dimmed or brightened via a controller. I'll call this spell the Improved Continual Flame, and this dwomeer is appropriate because it is not too expensive for the Opera to afford, because of its relatively low level. Also, I will keep track of this spell so that it can be used again in the city, and assigned to a local mage's spell book so that players can track him down and learn the spell if they so desire. There are also a few other questions that I'll need to answer eventually, like where the snowflake was crafted and by whom, and who controls the Improved Continual Flame's enchantment -- is it done via an object or is it a specific person affiliated with the theatre?

Finally, the elements we must tie together are the Opera House, the ghost singer, the phantom bard, and the snowflake chandelier. How do we tie all of these elements together to create a plot hook? We should start at the beginning, defining who the characters were before they died. The ghost singer is Celes, a talented entertainer whose life was cut short on her way to the Opera House. The phantom Bard is Edward; a famous performer and childhood friend of Celes. The two had been engaged and she was returning home to Palesi after training with a famous elven troupe in Ycengled. She had planned to meet Edward outside the Opera House when she arrived, but was waylaid by orc raiders who were stocking up to prepare for an impending blizzard. Edward waited, mulling over a song he had written to celebrate their shared love. He had hoped that she would sing it at her debut performance in the Opera House, but

she never arrived. Heartbroken, he sulked back home, taking a long and winding route so that he could reflect upon what transpired. He was mugged and murdered by Nalfesh, a notoriously cruel member of the local Thieves Guild. Once the blizzard had passed, Edward's father Gorman was inspired by grief and determined to create a tribute worthy of his son and future daughter-in-law's memory and crafted the crystalline snowflake for the Opera House. The owner of the Opera House Borgesh paid a local wizard named Cowall to enchant it so that it would be ever burning. Outside the theatre, before every harsh storm, Celes' ghostly figure is hysterical with frustration, trying to get in. And inside, the grim ghost of Edward wanders the halls with a scroll in his hand.

See what you can do with just a few brainstormers and a location? If you wish to continue with the Opera House well ... I am hoping to submit to Asgard's sister magazine, Midgard =)

On to another email and this time I'll do this one with you. * pulls a letter out of the mailbag * Here's one from our very own Morrus! Lets see what He writes in:

"OK, Angelsboi.

I usually have trouble with the little places - shops, blacksmiths and the like. They all end up very similar to each other. How about this? A shop which sells supplies for wizards/clerics. Parchments, quills, inks, robes, spell pouches, holy symbols and the like. A few magical trinkets occasionally, but mainly the useful mundane stuff. Incidentally, it is important that these locations be kept low-magic and gritty, otherwise they are useless to me."

Ok, so we do step one right now. Brainstorming. Lets review the description of the location and concepts that might interest his players. What can we use to add plot hooks? This is a toughie. I say we focus on a small magical trinket. Nothing big mind you, maybe a ring or a charm bracelet. Gritty (he said it didn't he) so dirty, run down, poor side of town, Unscrupulous characters hanging their, old hags. Ok Brainstorming done.

On to Step 2; now we need to add either an Arcane, Divine or Mundane Mystery. Well since we don't know Morrus' deities and he wants it low key magic, we will add a Mundane Mystery. Looking back on the Brainstorming session we had, I see we have some unscrupulous characters and

its kind of run down. So how about a theft?

Step 3. Now we have to tie a theft, a small trinket and the shop together. Seems easy doesn't it? It's not. This is what I came up with:

A panic is running all over the small seaside town of Emerald Cove. The small town is run by the city council and is well known for the export of emeralds and their large lighthouse that guides the ships into a nearby port that's within three days walking distance. The children of Emerald Cove are missing and no culprit has been found. One of the Player characters decides to go to The Perfect Parchment to do some shopping. Outside the grungy storefront, they bump into a small girl that looks about 8 years old. She has dirty black hair, dirty skin, bare feet, and a lost look in her eyes. She runs off in silence despite their plea of helping her. Inside The Perfect Parchment, the players find the owner, a 5'4 woman weighing about 125 lbs. with scraggly hair, a missing eye, and snaggle teeth. She tells them that the little girl stole a small magical gem from the shop; alternately, she may accuse one of the PCs of stealing it, forcing them to prove their innocence. When the constable arrives to investigate, the players will probably tell him of the little girl. The constable says that it's impossible that the little girl could've stolen anything because she was reported missing four weeks ago. He explains there have been a number of children who were reported missing over the last few weeks. Puzzled and somewhat melancholy, he leaves without discussing the matter any further.

See? Now you have a plot line for your players to follow. Was the little girl really the constable's daughter or some kind of common illusion? And more importantly, why are the kids disappearing? See? We took Morrus' boring little shop and made several plot lines out of it!

Next Issue will be the third instalment 'NPC Necessities.' We'll be discussing how to Use NPCs properly and create a couple fun NPCs. Until next month, happy creating and may you all journey peacefully. So email me (Angelsboi21@hotmail.com) YOUR questions about NPCs and I'll try to answer a couple of them next issue. Heck! Even send me your Interesting Places and show me what you came up with!





SLAYER SENSE

BY RYAN BOELL

Wesley: "Remember the three key words for any Slayer:
Preparation...preparation... preparation."
Buffy: "That's one word three times."

Welcome to the second instalment of Slayer Sense. This column discusses how to run a D20 system game based around a certain popular TV show. You may have heard of it. There is a massive variety of campaigns that can be run in such a world - from campaigns centred around the Slayer herself to campaigns that deal with other, more ordinary individuals, heroic in their own way as they battle the evil. From Watcher Operatives to small groups of vigilante demon-hunters, from archeologists or scholars who seek out the truth behind the demon-infested history of the world to cults and cabals that deal with the infernal menace, players can adopt a wide variety of roles and play in many kinds of adventures. Before I jump right on in, I would like to say all rights are reserved and all copyrighted from Mutant Enemy Productions ©1997 and all that legal stuff. We good? We good.

This month we will take a look at some of the creatures that populate the Buffyverse - the 'forces of darkness' that the Slayer is chosen to combat. Let us look at the various denizens of the nether regions that plague our world. Each chapter will have a various look at something and then the creatures or classes will be dissected and examined upon more clearly.

CHAPTER 2: VAMPIRES

As contrary to what everyone believes, the world did not begin as paradise. No, it was a dark place and demons made Earth their home, their Hell. In time, they lost this reality as they made way for mortal animals and humans. What was left of the Old Ones, were certain magicks, creatures and vestiges. They say that the last demon to leave this reality fed off a human and mixed its blood with a human. The soul became infected and the human bit another, and another and another. Now



they wait and feed and watch for the Old Ones to return ...

There are half demons who walk amongst us who appear human but keep the demonic bloodline strong. Not always evil and not always good, usually they have a purpose, a reason for living and surviving. They are evil and will always remain evil but what makes them human is their capacity for love and emotions. In real life, there is Elizabeth Bathory and Count Vlad Drakul but in the Buffy verse there is The Master and Kakistos. As a vampire gets older, they grow more into their demonic visage and they become quite powerful. Kakistos had cloven hooves and horns and the Master was demonic in appearance.

If there are dregs of the demon society, vampires are it. The vampires flock to the Hellmouth because of the Mystical qualities it possess. The Buffyverse vampires are different (although not entirely) from our modern day vampires. It may look like you,

talk like you and remember your life, but its not you. Your soul is gone and a demon sets up shop inside your body. There is no halfway. But rumour speaks of a RARE ritual that can be used to give a vampire their soul back.

The Buffyverse vampires don't fly or turn to mist. In fact, they cant shapechange at all (except when 'vamping out'. They do not breathe, they do not reflect but they can be video taped. They also have potential for hypnotism although some have it much more trained then others. They have to be invited into someone's house, but once inside, they are free to return whenever. Holy water and crosses harm them as normal yet they can still enter churches and sunlight harms them as well.

With all that said and taken into account, lets look at the three Vampire Templates: New Born, Master and Ancient.

TEMPLATES

New Born

Hit Dice - Increases to d6
 Speed - same as base creature. If it could swim before, it can still swim and take no damage in running water.
 AC - Improves by +4
 Attacks - As per the base creature and gains the Slam Attack
 Damage - 1d6 (Only Human as the Buffyverse doesn't have Demihumans)
 Special Attacks -
 As per Base Creature (saves are 10+ 1/2 vampires Hit Dice + Char mod)
 Blood Drain (as per the Phb)
 Create Spawn (as per the Phb)
 Special Qualities -
 As per Base Creature and Undead type (see MM for details)
 Damage Reduction - (as per Phb)
 Turn Resistance - a vampire has +6 Turn Resistance
 Resistance - (as per Phb)
 Fast Healing
 Saves - Base Creature
 Abilities - Increase from the Base Creature: Str +3, Dex +2, Cha +2. They have no Con scores
 Skills - +8 racial bonus to Bluff, Sense Motive, Knowledge - Slayer, Spot, Listen, Hide, Move Silently
 Feats - Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflex, Combat Reflexes, Dodge

Master

Hit Dice - Increases to d8
 Speed - same as base creature. If it could swim before, it can still swim and take no damage in running water.
 AC - Improves by +6
 Attacks - As per the base creature and gains the Slam Attack
 Damage - 1d8 (Only Human as the Buffyverse doesn't have Demihumans)
 Special Attacks -
 As per Base Creature (saves are 10+ 1/2 vampires Hit Dice + Char mod)
 Blood Drain (as per the Phb)
 Create Spawn (as per the Phb)
 Special Qualities -
 As per Base Creature and Undead type (see MM for details)
 Damage Reduction - (as per Phb)
 Turn Resistance - a vampire has +6 Turn Resistance
 Resistance - (as per Phb)
 Fast Healing
 Saves - Base Creature
 Abilities - Increase from the Base Creature: Str +5, Dex +4, Cha -2. They have no Con scores. The negative Cha score is due to their 'Demonic' visage. They add the negatives to their Intimidate and Sense

Motive scores.
 Skills - +8 racial bonus to Bluff, Sense Motive, Knowledge - Slayer, Spot, Listen, Hide, Move Silently
 Feats - Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflex, Combat Reflexes, Dodge

Ancient

Hit Dice - Increases to d12
 Speed - same as base creature. If it could swim before, it can still swim and take no damage in running water.
 AC - Improves by +8
 Attacks - As per the base creature and gains the Slam Attack
 Damage - 1d10 (Only Human as the Buffyverse doesn't have Demihumans)
 Special Attacks -
 As per Base Creature (saves are 10+ 1/2 vampires Hit Dice + Char mod)
 Blood Drain (as per the Phb)
 Create Spawn (as per the Phb)
 Special Qualities -
 As per Base Creature and Undead type (see MM for details)
 Damage Reduction - (as per Phb)
 Turn Resistance - a vampire has +6 Turn Resistance
 Resistance - (as per Phb)
 Fast Healing
 Saves - Base Creature
 Abilities - Increase from the Base Creature: Str +7, Dex +5, Cha -6. They have no Con scores. The negative Cha score is due to their 'Demonic' visage. They add the negatives to their Intimidate and Sense Motive scores.
 Skills - +8 racial bonus to Bluff, Sense Motive, Knowledge - Slayer, Spot, Listen, Hide, Move Silently
 Feats - Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflex, Combat Reflexes, Dodge

Vampire Weaknesses

(Applies to all vampires) -
 Crosses repel them and if touched, they do 1d4 points of subdual damage a round.
 Holy water is acid damage.
 They can be coup deGraced ONLY by Decapitation and pointed wooden objects.
 Both are natural 20s

FEATS

Sense Undead [General]

Anyone can take this feat. Sometimes it comes as pangs in the groin region, sometimes its as fashion sense. If the PC takes 1 round, roll their Concentrate DC 10 + Vampires level + Vampires Bluff. If they succeed, they spot the vampire for what it really is.

SKILLS

Knowledge: Demons (WIS)

Many of the Watchers and Witches carry this knowledge with them as do many old tomes. Use this skill to find out how much you know.

DC 10 - You know it's a demon
 DC 15 - You know its Home Plane
 DC 20 - You know its Strengths
 DC 25 - You know its Weaknesses
 DC 30 - You know EVERYTHING about the demon. Strengths, weakness, home plane, etc etc

SPELLS

Invitation Revocation

Abjuration
 Level - Cleric 3, Wizard/Sorcerer 5
 Components - V, M
 Casting Time - 1 action
 Range - 10 feet
 Target - 1 portal
 Duration - Permanent
 Saving Throw - None
 Spell resistance - No

By reciting the following: '...his verbes, consensus rescissus ext' (by these words, consent repelled), the vampire can no longer come freely into a home or place they were originally invited, unless they are re-invited.

Soul Restoration

Necromancy
 Level - Cleric 9, Wizard/Sorcerer 9
 Components - V, M, S
 Casting Time - 3 rounds
 Range - Anywhere
 Target - 1 Vampire
 Duration - Permanent
 Saving Throw - None
 Spell resistance - No

The Spell Restoration spell is a VERY rare spell that has been lost among the gypsies people. The Orb of Thesela costs 5000 gp and is the main component. There is a 50% chance that you will become possessed while possessing the vampire with its soul. If casting for the first time, a 'curse will be lifted if you do this' needs to be stated.

Next Issue will be Vengeance Demons and a character write up!

Till 14, make it Buffy!



A RACE FOR RETRIBUTION

PART I

A Race for Retribution is the first of a four part series of short adventures that span character levels 1st through 5th. Part I is designed for a party of 1st and 2nd level characters. The party will investigate a small base from which raids on caravans have been made. They will find clues to a more sinister plot that could threaten the country side.

BY BARD'S PRODUCTIONS

[HTTP://WWW.BARDSPRODUCTIONS.COM](http://www.bardsproductions.com)

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Four years ago, a soldier from Stahl, Laender, decided to clear out the orcs to the south of the small town. Part of what fueled his motivation was a brutal racist streak against orcs and any others who may share their blood. Laender set forth with his wife, Aislyn, who also bore arms for Stahl; an elvish scoundrel named Ryn; Zeliik the sorcerer and a dwarven cleric of the sun god called Horace. This quintet set upon the three orcish tribes, the Bloodfiends, the Chosen Ones, and the Bone Crushers, all of which had very crude farms roughly 3 days walk south of Stahl.

With successful battle after successful battle the party continued to press the orcs to the west before the humanoids had a chance to muster a formal defense. Eventually the three chieftains rallied what remained of their followers at an orcish hall. Here a vicious skirmish was fought with the outcome being a clear victory for neither side. Horace fell to a Bloodfiend's greataxe and both Ryn and Aislyn were seriously injured, while the Bloodfiends and Bone Crushers both lost their chieftains and the Chosen Ones suffered heavy losses in their ranks. At the command from Laender, Zeliik used an ancient scroll to unleash an earth elemental which proceeded to tear the hall down to the ground while the party retreated, thus ending the horrible fight. The orcs fled south from the hall, their organization in ruins and their tribes blaming one another for their defeat.

The party returned to a crude orcish village they had destroyed and tended to their wounded in the shelter of some of the more sturdy hovels. Seven days later, a small band of soldiers and settlers arrived from Stahl with a commission from the mayor. The commission granted Laender money and rights to settle and govern the area around the orcish village. The Mayor figured that area would act as a nice outpost to keep the orcs from Stahl. Laender happily accepted the commission and his party quickly started helping settlers establish themselves in the new town of Laendersburg.

One of the first settlers was a half-orc cleric of the god of just retribution named Degarn. He felt that Laendersburg could use his aid in establishing a lawful existence for the villagers and started setting up a small shrine to his deity. Unfortunately, the Chosen Ones, under direction of the god of destruction, who had designs for Degarn, attacked one of the farms and killed a farmer who was seen earlier talking with Degarn. Even though he had nothing to do with it, Degarn was found guilty instantly by the usually fair Laender, simply

because he had orcish blood in his veins. The town's people, still enthralled by being in the presence of the living hero Laender, didn't object at the death sentence for Degarn. Seeing an undeserved execution before him, Degarn escaped to the south and prayed to the god of just retribution for retribution and destruction of the entire town, which backed Laender's racist judgment. However, because Laender and the town were fair in every other aspect of life outside of someone being an orc or having orcish blood, the god of just retribution felt that the destruction of the entire town was not warranted.

Degarn, not pleased with his deity's decision, left the fold and started making pleas to the god of destruction. As the years passed, Degarn was eventually granted full powers by the god of destruction. In return, Degarn must destroy Laendersburg and then continue on to Stahl to prove his faithfulness. To assist Degarn in his quest, the god of destruction instructed the clan leader of the Chosen Ones at that time, a minor priest of the god of destruction called Margrak, to submit to Degarn's will. This provided Degarn an opening to contact the other two tribes of orcs. After holding an audience with all three chiefs, and proving his power through various magics and combat, Degarn gained their alliance, on one condition. He must gain the Heart of Grakis, a sacred amulet of some power lost to the orcs when the orcish hall was destroyed.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

This is where things stand when the Party first enters into this series. The initial adventure is a simple raid into a small cave being used by a 2ndlevel half-orcish cleric of the god of destruction (Cabraah, an underling of Degarn) as a base of operations. He was instructed to raid caravans running between Laendersburg and Stahl. Degarn hopes to disrupt Laendersburg's only supply line. This will weaken the town somewhat, making it easier for him to invade it later on. The DM should refer to the Race for Retribution Series Town Information PDF for more details on the NPCs and towns.

The second installment is the Party's first run in with Degarn. They are to find out what's going on at the ruins of the orcish hall. Here they will find that Degarn is already exploring the ruins with a band of orcs. As the party trails him through the ruins they will eventually meet up with Degarn, who has located and now possesses the inert amulet, the Heart of Grakis. This will be a challenge for the party and

the DM as the fight will be a three-way one: the party, Degarn, and the undead that lurk below the ruins. Degarn will be defeated, but he will get away with the amulet.

The third adventure occurs in Stahl and Laendersburg and is more of a City adventure. Degarn, realizing the threat the party poses to his plans, hires an assassin (Ryn) to eliminate them as well as Laender. While being stalked by the assassin, the party will learn more about Laendersburg's past and will more than likely hold an audience with the Mayor of Stahl to warn him of the impending danger to Laendersburg and Stahl. On top of all this they will have to ferret out a spy in Stahl who is making plans of his own against the party.

The final adventure occurs with the Party infiltrating Degarn's small outpost to the west of Laendersburg and defeating him before he awakens the inert amulet and the orcish tribes gather. This is important, as the amulet will strengthen any orcs and half orcs within a certain radius if successfully activated by Degarn (this would also apply to PCs as well).

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Each part in this series is designed to be completed in roughly 3-4 hours of play-time. They all require minimal DM preparation thus allowing the DM to drop it into play on a moment's notice. It is still recommended the DM read through all 4 parts in their entirety so he will be familiar with the details of the story line. If the DM is going to use the entire series then some additional steps should be taken to provide some continuity for the players.

1) Space the parts of the series out. These parts were not written to be run one right after the other. It is assumed the DM will run the PCs through other adventures in between each part. This is important as the first part is written for 1st level characters but doesn't provide enough experience for them to reach the necessary level for the second part, which doesn't provide enough experience for them to reach the third part and so on. A recommend way to handle this is to have this series run every other adventure or session, for example:

Tonight – A Race for Retribution Part I

Week 2 – They explore the kobold caves

Week 3 – A Race for Retribution Part II

Week 4 – PCs deal with restless dead in town's grave yard

Week 5 – A Race for Retribution Part III

Etc.

This will provide the PCs a chance to gain enough experience to handle each part and will give the DM an overall idea as to where the PCs will be going next.

2) Use the provided rumor tables to establish continuity. Each part of this series has rumor tables in the appendix. It is assumed that while the PCs are completing the current part, Degarn is working toward his own ends. Information should filter into Stahl and Laendersburg reflecting the changes within the surrounding countryside. This is important for the players, as each part is designed to push them to their limits in tactics and role-playing. They should have a chance to get information that might provide them an edge in the coming part of the series. This also will give the PCs a feeling of continuity of the story line, as they normally won't be completing one part right after the other.

3) Finally, know your players. If they are inexperienced, help them along with suggestions on how to use skills and tactics, as these adventures will prove extremely difficult otherwise. Pay attention to the suggestions given at certain critical areas on how to adjust the monster's tactics if the PCs are struggling. These adventures were written to provide a strong challenge for experience players, and play testing has shown after each part, the PCs were victorious but severely beat down. Fortunately, after completing each part they will be able to rest and restock spells and supplies.

MAKING IT STAND ALONE

To adjust Part 1 to make it standalone, the DM needs to eliminate the use of the handout letter from Cabraah to Degarn. Cabraah will simply be acting on his own trying to build a power base between Stahl and Laendersburg, or any other towns of the DM's choice. The DM also shouldn't use the rumor tables referring to the other parts in the series. Finally, any towns of roughly equal size that are already being used by the DM can replace Stahl and Laendersburg.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

While written for 1st level characters, the tactics of Cabraah as they are written can prove challenging for 2nd level parties. For 3rd -4th level parties, replace the goblins with orcs, and for 5th-6th replace the hobgoblins with ogres. Statistics for the orcs and ogres can be found in the Wandering Monster section. Make Cabraah a level

equal to 1+ the party's average level. When selecting spells, he will favor Summon Monster and Animate Dead spells in conjunction with a Sanctuary spell on himself. This will provide a continuous assault of creatures upon the characters, which won't ruin the Sanctuary (assuming he doesn't directly attack a PC with spell or weapon), while he hangs back casting spells to aid his followers and harm his opponents (aid, bless, cause fear, doom, prayer, etc.). He won't be afraid to attack physically if it looks like it might tip the balance of the fight.



ADVENTURE HOOKS

To get the PCs started on the first part of the series, feel free to rely solely on the rumor tables provided. If they still seem a bit reluctant improvise any of the following:

- A merchant in Stahl has suffered heavy losses due to Cabraah's action and is hiring someone to investigate.

- The god of just retribution is finally enacting his retribution, but it's against Degarn and only Laender, not the entire town. To start this in motion he sends the PCs a dream of a half-orc wielding a divinely glowing mace that's crashing down upon a town. A moment later, a hero is wielding the same mace that crashes down upon the half-orc. Finally, the PCs see themselves being destroyed by both unless they head south from Stahl to investigate. This will work well if a PC is a cleric of the god of just retribution

- While coming over a rise, the PCs happen upon a smoking ruin of a caravan that was just attacked by Cabraah. Cabraah has since returned to his base, but there are tracks leading from the caravan which are easy enough for the PCs to follow. A merchant's dying gasp should encourage any Lawful Good PCs to investigate.

- Any half-orcs in the party feel a gentle tugging by the Heart of Grakis that lays buried in the hall's ruins. This tugging will lead them to Laendersburg first, which will expose them to the town's racism. They will closely pass by Cabraah's base on their way there.

- A ranger whose favored enemy is orcs or any other character who hates orcs will hear that Laendersburg is the place to be when it comes to destroying those vile creatures. Note, this could lead into inter-party squabbling as the town's racism may be seen with sympathetic eyes by these characters.

- A cleric of the sun god is instructed to deliver some minor religious item to the shrine in Laendersburg. The party is seen by Cabraah traveling alone, who flees back to his base before the party has a chance to react.

DM NOTES

This series addresses complex issues of right and wrong. Laender is a just and likable fellow who has an unhealthy hatred for orcs. Degarn, whose domains under the god of just retribution were Destruction and Law, has received those same domains under the god of destruction. He strongly believes in maintaining Law but wants to destroy any he deems as in the wrong. Thus, you might find certain characters sympathetic to Laender (rangers whose favored enemies are orcs, any character with bad experience with orcs, etc) and others with Degarn (possibly Paladins could understand his desire to punish the unjust Laender, possibly clerics of the god of just retribution who feel retribution is in order against the town's racist attitudes, etc). Finally, when the characters experience the town's racism first hand (especially if there is a half-orc in the party) they might have problems feeling like they are doing the right thing in saving the town.

As a DM you know that they will start a change in the town's attitudes if they follow through the entire series of adventures. However, until that point, you will need to be able to role-play the town and Degarn and others in such a manor to motivate the characters to ultimately do the right thing. This could be a challenge and some suggestions will be provided to this end through out the adventure.

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Player Handout 1

A suggestion for handout 1, is to soak regular paper in a pan of tea for 12-18 hours. Then let it dry. The paper will take on an old parchment look and feel. It should still be able to run through most printers allowing you to inscribe Cabraah's letter to Degarn on something a bit more interesting than white printer paper.

CABRAAH'S BASE

Cabraah happened upon this cave, which is located about 3 hours walk from the road between Stahl and Laendersburg, while he was recruiting the local goblins to assist him in raiding the caravans. The cave makes an ideal location, as it is about 1 day's travel north of Laendersburg. Thus most caravans are settling down for the night when Cabraah launches his attack on them.

The cave is actually situated in a small ravine that runs about 100 yards east west and is roughly 50 feet across. The south side of it is a gentle sloping grassy hill while the north side is a fairly steep incline (Climb DC 15) that goes up for 40 feet.

From the top of the ravine, the PCs can spot (DC 15) the cold campfire outside of the base. If they are tracking from the road (Wilderness Lore with Track feat DC 10) they will be able to easily see footprints leading down to the campsite (no roll needed, otherwise use the DC above to determine if PCs have found the tracks leading down into the ravine). However, due to the dull brown painting on the door and shrubs in front of it, they will have a hard time seeing the door from the top of the south side ravine (Spot DC 25) and impossible from the north side. If the PCs are tracking from the road, they will more than likely come from the south.

As the PCs move into the campsite, it won't be difficult to discern tracks leading up to the 3 bushes leaning against the door and side of the ravine. A quick check (Search DC 10) from this location will reveal the door into the side of the ravine.

1 Goblin's Quarters EL 1

◆ **South Door:** Simple Wooden, Hardness 5, HP 10, Break DC 13, Locked DC 15

◆ **West Door:** Good Wooden, Hardness 5, HP 15, Break DC 16, Unlocked

◆ **East Door:** Simple Wooden, Hardness 5, HP 10, Break DC 13, Unlocked

If the PCs listen at the door leading into the cave they might hear the 4 goblins within arguing, in goblin, over which is better eating, badger or dwarf (Listen DC 10). If the PCs try to pick the lock, the Goblins should make a Listen check (Listen DC 20) with every attempt. Once the door is unlocked, the PCs may try to get in the hall without alerting the goblins. The goblins should have a base Spot or Listen Check of DC 15 (they are very engrossed in the argument) that the DM should feel free to modify to fit the PC's actions (i.e. they move silently and make opposing rolls against the goblins' Listen rolls or the DM may simply use the base DC above). If the PCs rush in and attack and have not alerted the goblins, they should be allowed 1 full round (movement and attack) before the goblins recover, again due to their in-depth discussion on the use of dwarves as a food stuff. Then run the fight as normal.

If the goblins are alerted for any reason, two of them take cover (1/4 cover +2 to AC, +1 to Reflex Saves) behind the barrels. These two each have 3 javelins and will throw them at any target presenting itself. If PCs advance on them they will defend themselves with their short swords and will attempt to flank (Attackers receive +2 on Attack rolls) the PCs between themselves and the two goblins at the door in the northwest corner. The other two move to the door in the northwest and notify Cabraah they are under attack. These two will remain at the door waiting for PCs to try to move up and around the barrels to get at their companions. At this point they will try to flank the PCs.

Assuming the PCs have alerted the goblins, which is more than likely, please read the following:

The narrow hallway moves deeper into the side of the ravine. After 15 feet it opens up into a large room stretching 30 feet east west and the north wall is 20 feet from you. There is a small stack of crates in the southwest corner and a rack of barrels in the northeast corner. Two goblins grin evilly from behind the barrels as they launch their javelins, while two others cheer loudly by the door in the northwest corner.

If Cabraah hasn't been alerted and the goblins are all fighting, allow two full rounds to pass before he starts his preparations, as it will take that long for him to register what he's hearing through the door. (see 2 Cabraah's Quarters for details).

➤ **Goblins (4):** CR 1; Small Humanoid (Goblinoid); HD 1d8; hp 4 ;Init +1; (Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 15; (+1 Size, +1 Dex, +3 Studded leather); Att Short sword +1 (19-20/x2) Melee, Javelin +3 ranged 30'; Dmg Short sword 1d6-1, Javelin 1d6-1; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; Fort +2; Refl +1; Will +0; S-8 D-13 C-11 I-10 W-11 Ch-8

Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3; Alertness.

Possessions: Short sword (x4), Studded leather (small x4), 3 Javelins (x2), 14 sp, 49 cp (divided by them)

The goblins sleep on the floor in this area and the PCs will find ratty blankets, which they use for pillows and to keep warm. The three barrels still contain Fire-side ale (assuming they weren't damaged during the fight) which can be sold for 20 gp each. The crates in the southwest contain the following:

- Cloth of gold vestments belonging to the shrine of the sun god in Laendersburg (76.4 gp)

- Large well-done wool tapestry depicting Laender defeating some orcs (a gift from his wife, Aislyn, commissioned in Stahl. She would be very happy to see its arrival in Laendersburg) (98.5 gp)

- A small solid gold idol of a fair elven maiden (a statue commissioned by Zeliik in memory of his mother)(46.2 gp)

- 370 silver coins (37 gp)

- 2 potions of Cure Light Wounds, that look and smell like flasks of oil but have a sweet taste (50 gp each)

- 4 bolts of grey wool cloth (5 gp each)

- 10 sacks of wheat (5 sp each)

- 6 short swords (the goblins are using the other 4)

- 1 set of small sized studded leather (the goblins are using the other 4)

- 14 javelins (the goblins are using the other 6)

The food was going to Stahl while the other items were headed towards Laendersburg. Items that aren't associated with anyone in either town can be sold by the PCs without raising any eyebrows. Items that are associated with someone in either town will be identified eventually and the PCs will be asked to explain how they came by them, assuming they don't at least try to return them to the appropriate owners.

Lawful good PCs should strongly desire

to see these items returned.

2 Cabraah's Quarters EL3

🗡️ **West Door:** Simple Wooden, Hardness 5, HP 10, Break DC 13, Unlocked

If Cabraah hasn't been alerted, the PCs can make a listen check at the door (Listen DC 8) and hear Cabraah and his two hobgoblin bodyguards talking. They are discussing, in goblin, how to raid the next caravan. As soon as the PCs try to do anything to the door, Cabraah will be alerted to their presence and will start taking action, as detailed below.

🗡️ **Cabraah, Male Half-Orc Clr2:** CR 2; Size M (5 ft., 7 in. tall); HD 2d8+6; hp 21; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +3 Studded Leather, +2 Large Steel Shield); Attack +6 Masterwork Light mace melee, or +3 ranged; Dmg 1d6+4 Masterwork Light Mace; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +6; AL LE; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 8. Languages Spoken: Common, Orc, Goblin.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +1, Heal +8, Hide +2, Listen +3, Move silently +2, Profession +6, Scry +4, Spot +3; Lightning Reflexes.

Possessions: Masterwork Light Mace; Masterwork Studded Leather Armor; Masterwork Large Steel Shield; Potion of Blur; Potion of Cure Light Wounds; Potion of Aid; Scroll [divine, caster level 1; Doom]; Scroll [divine, caster level 3; Cure Moderate Wounds; Summon Monster II] 8 gp, 15 sp on person

Cleric Domains: Destruction, Law.

Spells Prepared: 4/3+1.

0 - Resistance, Virtue (x2), Cure Minor Wounds

1 - Endure Elements, Bless, Cure Light Wounds, Inflict Light Wounds

Plus 1 caster level for all Law spells, Smite (+4 attack bonus, +2 damage bonus for 1 attack) / 1 per day

🗡️ **Hobgoblins (2):** CR 1; Medium-size Humanoid (Goblinoid); HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 15; (+1 Dex, +3 Studded Leather, +1 small shield) Att Longsword +1 melee; Dmg Longsword 1d8; SQ Darkvision 60 ft; Fort +3; Refl +1; Will +0; S-11 D-13 C-13 I-10 W-10 Ch-10; AL LE

Skills and Feats: Hide +1, Listen +3, Move silently +3, Spot +3 Alertness

Possessions: Longsword (x2), Studded Leather (x2), Small wooden shield (x2), 13,17 sp respectively

🗡️ **Summoned Fiendish Wolf (1):** CR 1; Medium-Size Animal; HD 2d8+4; hp

13; Init +2; (+2 Dex); Spd 50 ft; AC 14; (+2 Dex, +2 natural) Att Bite +3 melee; Dmg 1d6+1 SA Trip, Smite Good; SQ Scent, Darkvision 60 ft, SR 4, Fire and Cold Resistance 5; Fort +5; Refl +5; Will +1; S-13 D-15 C-15 I-3 W-12 Ch-6; Treasure None; Alignment LE;

Skills and Feats: Hide +3, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, spot +4, Wilderness Lore +1;



Weapon finesse (bite)

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

SA-Smite Good (Su): Once per day the creature can make a normal attack to deal additional 2 points of damage against a good foe.

SQ-Scent (Ex): The creature can detect opponents within 30 ft by sense of smell;

Cabraah's Actions

If they are alerted to the PCs in room 1, here's how things will go in this room:

Rd 1 Hear fighting or shouted warning.

Rd 2 Hobs get equipment ready, Cabraah casts Endure Elements Fire on himself (24-hour duration)

Rd 3 Hobs wait by door for additional spells, Cabraah drinks Blur potion (30 rds)

Rd 4 Hobs wait by door for additional spells, Cabraah drinks Aid potion (30 rds)

Rd 5 Hobs wait by door for additional spells, Cabraah casts Virtue (10 rds) on 1 hob

Rd 6 Hobs wait by door for additional spells, Cabraah casts Virtue (10 rds) on the other hob *Rd 7* Hobs open door to room 1 and attack, Cabraah Casts Bless (20 rds)

Rd 8 Hobs attack, Cabraah heals hobs if damaged, otherwise, uses scroll to summon fiendish wolf to harry the spell casters or flank the most dangerous fighter (3 Rds)

Rd 9 Hobs attack, Cabraah heals hobs if damaged, otherwise, uses scroll to Doom (20 Rds) the most dangerous fighter

Rd 10 Hobs attack, Cabraah heals hobs if damaged, otherwise uses Smite on nearest opponent.

☛ **DM Note:** If the PCs seem to need a break after the goblins, don't have the Hobs and Cabraah enter room 1. Instead have them wait for the PCs to enter room 2. This will give the PCs time to heal after the goblins and potentially find the potions of healing in the crates. If the PCs are struggling with Cabraah and the 2 hobs, feel free to shorten the durations of his spells (Blur, Aid, Bless, Virtue etc.). He casts them before the PCs even know he's there so they won't know that they are ending early.

After things settle down, read the following:

This room looks to be a fairly comfortable bedroom. However, upon closer inspection, it is clear that the bed in the southwest corner is made out of a wagon bed supported by two empty crates. The desk along the southern wall is nothing more than a plank of wood lying across two damaged barrels. The small chest in the northwestern corner seems to be in good shape.

There is nothing of note in the bed and the blankets are worthless. The PCs will find the message from Cabraah to Degarn on his desk; give them handout 1. It is in orkish so when they get it translated read them the following slowly twice, informing them that they will need to write the translation down in their own words:

Degarn,
Tyrannical blessings upon you. I have established a small base and have been raiding the merchant caravans for the needed supplies for your troops. I hope to recruit more of the goblins in the surrounding hills to assist our action.

May The Destroyer visit our enemies, Cabraah,

The way the players make note of this will be how they or someone else interprets the letter. Do not read it again for them

after the initial two times, even to jog their memories. This will hamper some of the role playing when they start to investigate what the letter means.

The chest is locked and trapped. Cabraah has a key on his person that fits the lock to the chest and to the door leading into room 1 from the outside. If the PCs use the key ask them which way they turn it in the lock. If they turn it to the right (clockwise) they will set off the trap. If to the left it opens the lock and disables the trap.

➤ **Chest** (CR 2, Locked: Open Locks DC 20; Poison Gas 5' radius from chest (2d6 temporary Strength damage), Avoid: Fortitude save (DC 18); Find: Search DC 15; Disable: Disable Device DC 20) 9 pp, 41gp, 253 sp, 3 Gems[8gp Banded Agate; 8gp Hematite; 80gp Moonstone;]

3 Hobgoblin's Quarters

➤ **East Door:** Simple Wooden, Hardness 5, HP 10, Break DC 13, Unlocked.

This room is unremarkable. The two worn bedrolls suggest it to be something of a bedroom but the lack of personal items indicate that it isn't much of one. The chest in the northeast corner seems to be about the only thing worth investigating.

The hobgoblins used this room as their quarters. The two worn bedrolls are infested with fleas and any PC approaching them will see the insects leaping from the cloth. If the PCs insist on handling them, it is up to the DM's discretion as to whether or not they will gain a flea infestation and any diseases that might go with it. The hobgoblins stored their valuables in the chest. Much to their dismay it locks each time the lid is closed and they don't have the key. They've not had time to bash it apart yet so the PCs will find it locked and intact.

Chest (Locked: Open Locks DC 23) 13 gp, 178 sp, 902 cp, 3 sun bleached rat skulls, a red crystal (worthless but the Hobgoblins thought it was pretty).

Wandering Monsters

When traveling between Laendersburg and Stahl or in the surrounding areas, there is a chance (1 in 6) that the PCs will run into any of the following during the day.

➤ **Goblins (4):** CR 1; Small Humanoid (Goblinoid); HD 1d8; hp 4 ;Init +1; (Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 15; (+1 Size, +1 Dex, +3 Studded leather); Att Short sword +1 (19-20/x2) Melee, Javelin +3 ranged 30'; Dmg Short sword 1d6-1, Javelin 1d6-1; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; Fort +2; Refl +1; Will +0; S-8 D-13 C-11 I-10 W-11 Ch-8

Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3; Alertness:

Possessions: Short sword, Studded leather (small),

➤ **Hobgoblins (2):** CR 1; (Medium-size Humanoid (Goblinoid)); HD 1d8+1; hp 5 ;Init +1; (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 15; (+1 Dex, +3 Studded Leather, +1 small shield) Att Longsword +1 melee; Dmg Longsword 1d8; SQ Darkvision 60 ft; Fort +3; Refl +1; Will +0; S-11 D-13 C-13 I-10 W-10 Ch-10; AL LE;

Skills and Feats: Hide +1, Listen +3, Move silently +3, Spot +3; Alertness;

Possessions: Longsword, Studded Leather, Small wooden shield

➤ **Merchant, Illiksan, Male Human Exp3:** CR 2; Size M (5 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 3d6+3; hp 13; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +1 Longsword (19-20/2x) melee, or +5 masterwork light crossbow (19-20/2x) ranged; Damage 1d8-1 longsword, 1d8 light crossbow; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL LN; Str 8, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 15. Languages Spoken: Common, Terran.;

Skills and Feats: Appraise +8, Bluff +8, Decipher script +11, Hide +2, Intimidate +5, Knowledge +3, Listen +2, Move silently +3, Open lock +4, Search +7, Spot +2, Use rope +8, Wilderness lore +4; Alertness, Skill Focus (Appraise), Skill Focus (Decipher Script).

➤ **DM Note:** He'll have a single wagon with 40 gp of goods, DM's choice. No guards with the wagon. He will be able to answer most questions about either town and could provide additional rumors from the tables.

At night the chance of encountering something increases (2 in 6) and the following should be added to list above. Please note the recommended optional planned encounter with the Dire Bat:

➤ **Orcs (2):** CR 1; Medium-Size Humanoid (Orc); HD 1d8; hp 4 ;Init +0; (); Spd 20 ft; AC 14; (+4 Scale mail) Att Greataxe +3 melee, Javelin +1 ranged; Dmg Greataxe 1d12+3, javelin 1d6+2; Face 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SA (); SQ Darkvision 60 ft, light sensitivity (Light Sensitivity (Ex) Orcs suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls in bright

sunlight or within the radius of a daylight spell.); Fort +2; Refl +0; Will -1; S-15 D-10 C-11 I-9 W-8 Ch-8; Treasure Standard; Alignment Usually chaotic evil;

Skills and Feats: Listen +2, Spot +2; Alertness DM

➤ **DM Note:** These two orcs will be from the Bone Crusher clan. They know that their chieftain Ragnak has been talking with an "orc wannabe". They also know that they should give the town of Laender a wide berth (1/2 day's walk) when traveling. They were too young to fight when the hall fell but they remember that a huge (in comparison to their youthful size at the time) stone creature came out of the ground and tore the hall apart.

➤ **Ogre (1):** CR 2; Large Giant; HD 4d8+8; hp 26 ;Init -1; (DEX); Spd 30; AC 16; (-1 size -1 Dex +5 natural +3 hide) Att Huge greatclub +8 melee; huge longspear +1 ranged; Dmg huge greatclub 2d6+7; huge longspear 2d6+7; Face 5 x 5; Reach 10; SA (); SQ (); Fort 6; Refl 0; Will 1; S-21 D-8 C-15 I-6 W-10 Ch-7; Treasure Standard; Alignment Chaotic Evil;

Skills and Feats: Climb +5, Listen +3, Spot +3; Weapon Focus (Greatclub)

➤ **DM Note:** This ogre, Kallack, is aware that the three tribes haven't been feuding as much as they used to. He's also aware of the sacred place south west of Laendersburg (the orcish hall). Outside of that, he simply wants to bash things, like the PCs.

➤ **Dire Bat (1):** CR 2; Large Animal; HD 4d8+12; hp 30 ;Init +6; (+6 Dex); Spd 20 ft, fly 40 ft (good); AC 20; (-1 size, +6 Dex, +5 Natural) Att Bite +5 Melee; Dmg 1d8+4; Face 10 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SA (); SQ Blindsight (Blindsight: Dire bats use a high-frequency sonar that allows them to locate things within 120 ft. Silence negates this and then they can only see 10 ft.); Fort +7; Refl +10; Will +6; S-17 D-22 C-17 I-2 W-14 Ch-6; Treasure None; Alignment Always neutral;

Skills and Feats: Listen +11, Move Silently +11, Spot +11

➤ **DM Note:** As an optional planned encounter, the night before they PCs enter Cabraah's base, a Dire Bat should attack the PCs camp. Because the base is at least 1 day's walk from Laendersburg, the PCs will probably spend one night in the wilderness. This encounter will give the DM a chance to see how the PCs will fare against a tough foe. This will also give the PCs a chance to hone out some tactics of their own, which will be important for when they enter the base. If the PCs need an extra night to recuperate from this encoun-

ter they shouldn't be attacked by anything so they will be ready for Cabraah's base.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs should be directed to Laendersburg either right after clearing out the base or when they try to return the goods to Stahl (the merchants will indicate those items were going to Laendersburg and the PCs should take them down there). If there was an orc or half-orc in the party, they will be somewhat tolerated by the residents of Laendersburg for eliminating Cabraah's base but the PC will still find them rude. Laender will want to know what befell the party and will listen intently when Cabraah is described. If Laender is shown the note, he will tell the PCs some of the history of Laendersburg. Of course his telling will be thoroughly biased and colored by his racism. He will also be outraged at the idea of orcs moving against his town and will want to start making preparations. Laender will indicate that the PCs are free to go, but they should return as he might require their services in the near future. This will allow the DM to run another adventure between part I and part II, which is recommend if the average PC level isn't at least 2.

Assuming the PCs are third level or lower, experience should be awarded at a rate of 300 per CR faced and overcome (including the trap in Cabraah's room, even if they set it off). If the optional Dire Bat encounter is run, roughly a total of 1800 XP should be available to split. For role playing and how the PCs react to the racism, the DM could award 50-100 XP per character.

Degarn will eventually learn of Cabraah's fate and will realize he needs to start moving a bit more quickly so he might be able to attack before Laendersburg has time to prepare itself. This will lead to the next adventure in the series, where the PCs will investigate the orcish hall's ruins.

RUMOR TABLES

To use the rumor tables, the DM should have an idea how many adventures will be played before the characters encounter Part I. This will then determine which table the DM should use. The DM should then give the Initial Rumor to any character without requiring anything special (i.e. a Gather Information check, talking to the bartender, etc.) after they enter town and spend at least one night there.

If the PCs want to investigate the initial rumor further, they must spend at least 5 gold and a whole day. For every 5 gold they spend beyond the initial expense, the player may add a +1 circumstance bonus to their roll, however this could have unwanted side effects detailed below. The player should then make a Gather Information check. The DM should give them all rumors that have a DC equal to or less than the player's total check score. They may repeat this process with each new day, but this doesn't guarantee any new information and also could have unwanted side effects. If the DM wishes to role play the gathering of the information, that isn't a problem but rumors with higher DCs should be more challenging for the PCs to learn. All rumors listed are true; the DM may feel free to add false ones or ones that might lead to other adventures. Finally, the DM should include other rumors from the next parts in the series at the same time as he does the tables below. Again, this will provide continuity.

If 2 adventures are to be played prior to A Race for Retribution Part I, use rumor table A. For 1 adventure to be played, use rumor table B. Use rumor table C if Part I is to be played as the characters leave town.

Rumor Table A

Initial Rumor: A run-down shell of a man sighs to a sympathetic dwarf, "My last two ventures went belly up, this run to <Stahl or Laendersburg – DMs Choice> is my last chance. If them lousy goblins hit me this time, I'm ruined"

DC 10 Roaming bands of goblins have been known to occasionally attack small caravans between Stahl and Laendersburg.

DC 15 There really hasn't been any sort of organization to their attacks.

DC 20 On some raids hobgoblins have been seen acting as leaders of the group of goblins.

Rumor Table B

Initial Rumor: A mercenary with wounds only a few days old complains to his drinking companion, "I'm tellin' ya, them li'l goblins are gettin' more canny. They seemed ta actually ha a plan this time."

DC 10 Attacks occurring only a day out of Laendersburg seem to be coming more frequently.

DC 15 A couple of hobgoblins have been

seen raiding with a group of goblins.

DC 20 An orcish type figure was seen *hiding in* some bushes watching the raid.

Rumor Table C

Initial Rumor: A dwarf grumbles to his ale and any gods that might be listening, "T'aint right fer goblins and sich ta be way-layin' me wagon. Them beasties made me ruin a good pair o' boots by makin' me run all the way back ta town."

DC 10 All caravans and travelers are being attacked when they are roughly a day north of Laendersburg. (DM Note, because Laendersburg is a small town all caravans are 2-3 wagon with maybe 4 first level warriors at best.)

DC 15 An orcish figure is directing the attacks with the aid of two hobgoblins and a group of goblins.

DC 20 Some of the few survivors could have sworn a dark magic over came them, but they were too afraid to tell clearly, and ran away. (DM Note, the survivors were affected by a Cause Fear spell which Cabraah occasional prepares for caravan attacks.)

RUMOR AND INFORMATION GATHERING SIDE EFFECTS

As the PCs investigate the rumors, there is a chance they will draw the attention of Degarn's spies. This will lead to the encounter below. To determine if they have drawn attention to themselves, use the following system.

Give the party a base modifier of 2. Then add 1 for each 5 gold they spend above and beyond the initial cost of gathering information. Then add 2 for each additional day they spend gathering information beyond the very first time for this adventure. This modifier is cumulative until the PCs conclude Part I. Then the DM should roll 1d20, each time the PCs do any Gather Information checks, and add in the current modifier. If the total is 20 or higher, then the DM should run the encounter detailed below. Otherwise, the PC's actions haven't drawn attention to themselves.

Example

The PCs will be going through Part I two adventures from their current one, so the DM uses Rumor Table A. The PCs don't investigate the Initial Rumor any further so no Side Effect check is needed. The party is now only 1 adventure from going through

Part 1 and the DM uses Rumor Table B. The PCs are a bit more curious and do a Gather Information check. They decided to spend 10 gp but only 1 day worth of checking. The DM then does a Side Effect check at +3 (+2 for the base modifier, +1 for the 5 extra gold they spent). He rolls a 5 for a total of 8. The PCs haven't drawn attention to themselves. Finally the PCs are about to embark on Part 1 and the DM uses Rumor Table C for them. Very curious now, they spend 2 days gathering information and 10 gold on the first day and 15 gold on the second day. The DM then does a Side Effect check for the first day at +6 (+3 for the current check modifier, +2 for the first day spent, +1 for the additional 5 gold beyond the base cost). He rolls a 11, for a total of 17. The PCs are still unnoticed after the first day. For the second day, the DM does another Side Effect check at +10

(+6 for the current check modifier, +2 for second day spent, +2 for the additional 10 gold beyond the base cost). He rolls a 16 for a total of 26. The PCs investigations have been noticed .

Note that the Side Effect check is not related to how successful the PCs are in learning any information. If the DM is looking for a reason or wants to role play the Side Effect, Ryn in Laendersburg can act as the eyes and ears for Degam, for a fee of course. Or the spy in Stahl can take the same role. Finally, if the PCs take any unusual actions (threatening an informant or something similar) feel free to add additional modifiers to their check.

Side Effect Encounters

If the DM has determined that the PCs

have gained unwanted attention due to their actions, roll a d20 and add their Side Effect modifier to determine what occurs.

1-20 The PCs are given a note by a small child who then quickly runs off. The note is written in blood and reads in common, "The Lord of Destruction has been angered. Flee before his holy vengeance is visited upon you."

21-25 The PC's room in the inn is ransacked and anything the PCs had left there is now gone. The note described above has been left stuck to the door with a bloody dagger.

26+ The PC's are attacked 4 orcs a half days walk outside of town. Use the statistics found in the wandering monster table for the orcs.



CABRAAH'S BASE
1 Square = 5 feet

Bard's Productions Credits

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Publisher: Russell Morrissey
Columnists: Ryan Nock, Ryan Boell, Scott Green, Erica Balsley, Vacuum Elemental, Russell Morrissey, Jesse Dean, Tony Pi
Reviews: Jesse Dean
Adventure Provided By: Bards Productions, LLC
Cover Art: J Ryan Machan
Interior Art: J Ryan Machan, JL Jones, Vaccum Elemental
Graphic Design: Jake Badger

Asgard

D20 SYSTEM MAGAZINE

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