

Villains and Vermin! Uncommon Evil! The CBG Big Bad Evil Guy (BBEG) Issue!

The Campaign Builders' Guide

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A Community-Written E-zine for OGL Gaming

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EDITORIAL

FROM ATOP THE WORLD

For the theme of this issue of the Campaign Builders' Guide, we decided to go with the theme of memorable villains. This issue is the CBG's "Big, Bad, Evil Guy (BBEG)" issue, and who better to talk to you about pure and absolute evil, than me, Ishmayl? That's right, for the new guys here on the site, and for first time readers, it can be quite overwhelming to have such a menacing presence, such as myself, constantly overlooking such a peaceful, tame site and an e-zine focused on communities and creation. In fact, few people have tasted the wrath of Ishmayl without coming away with quite the scorched sensation! As of the most recent poll, the terrible evilness of me is ranked somewhere between a dreaded wildebeest lich and a legendary... dire.... pumpkin. With *really wicked eyes*.

Okay, it's true, I'm a fake. My eight pound tabby scares me to death when he hisses, and I've never even seen a wildebeest. But while I may not be chock-full of badness myself, I can appreciate a good villain. Heck, who can't? Whether it's Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter*, Cardinal Richelieu in *The Three Musketeers* (with Tim Curry!), or one of my personal favorites, Donovan, the Nazi scum from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* ("He chose... poorly"), villains make entertainment memorable. Games - especially role playing games - should be no exception.

As players, we remember the battles where we finally brought down the evil Groggar, a demon from the abyss so ruthless that he slaughtered sleepy little farming villages for fun, and kidnapped a little girl with the intention of using her body to become fully physical in the world. As GMs, we spend hours upon hours plotstorming (no, that's not a typo) these perfect villains, planning the ideal moment to spring them on the unsuspecting players.

Villains from existing sources can certainly provide a great deal of inspiration for RPG foes. Whether you borrow a look, and agenda, or a unique speech pattern, there are loads of villains ripe for the picking. At the same time, overusing this angle can make your BBEGs predictable and uninteresting. If your characters only ever face bad guys based on *Batman* films ("Everybody, chill"), pretty soon, you're not borrowing, you're boring.

That's why it's so important to spin those villains a bit. If some aspect of your villain reminds the players of a favored BBEG, you can play on the feelings he originally invoked in them. And by twisting him around *just a bit*, maybe adding a fresh coat of paint and some new highlights, you can still create something new, interesting, and memorable. That's what this particular issue of the Campaign Builders' Guide is really all about: taking classic villainous traits and ideas and spinning them on their heads, giving you a new way to portray your BBEGs. Give it a try, you really can't go wrong.

-Ishmayl
Overlord *Extraordinaire*

As an important side note, I would like to take this time to introduce **Fantaseum, an Alliance of Creative Communities**. Fantaseum is a collaboration of smaller, creative communities around the web dedicated to the hobbies we know and love. Currently, it consists of **PlotStorming** (www.plotstorming.com), a site dedicated to writers, role playing gamers, and fans who enjoy any genre of fiction, the **Cartographer's Guild** (www.cartographersguild.com), a community for cartography enthusiasts, and the **Campaign Builders' Guild** (www.thecbg.org), a one-stop site dedicated to the building and creating of adventures, settings, and entire campaign worlds.

Uncommon EVIL

by: Nathan Ellsworth
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Dragons, wizards, vile priests, wild orcs, fiends, and dark elves are the standard villains of fantasy. Born to evil, it's expected for them to commit nefarious deeds, but the classics can be overused. When the villains lose their mystique, or when the players aren't excited about bashing orcs, its time to consider uncommon EVIL.

To qualify as uncommon EVIL, the villain must come from a race that makes the players drop their jaw once they realize what they're facing. Perfect choices for villains can come from races that are usually heroic, good, benign, overlooked, lackeys, or adventurer fodder. When a player faces off against a being that breaks the stereotype, they're likely to remember them.

The four villains that follow: a high elf supremacist, a kobold lycanthrope warlord, an earth elemental tyrant, and a treant eco-terrorist should at least make players pause. All could be dastardly arch villains, beyond hope of redemption, but three have the possibility of being very dynamic. Whether players go for the kill, or try to convince the villain to mend their ways -- they won't have faced a foe like this before.

Enjoy *Uncommon EVIL*, its good to be bad!

- Anaximander, the Lord Visionary -

"The only thing redeemable about humans is that they can be trained. They're brash, disrespectful, conceited, self-absorbed, and malodorous hellions, so like unruly children, or worse -- mongrel dogs. And just like children they need a firm hand, a firm elven hand, to

mold them into a responsible member of society. Those that don't respond, well, if they must act like mongrels, they'll be treated like them."

Break the Stereotype

Elves are creatures of mythology, born from magic at the beginning of history, and often tied to nature and primordial forces. They build mighty empires only to abandon their great works with the spread of the younger races. Their ties with magic and their long history and lifespan give them a unique outlook on life. Most are thoughtful and calculating, however this may border on egotism due to their race's age and accomplishments. *YAWN*.

Consider the hardships the "common" elf faces as the younger races spread and grow in power. They witness the fall, or at least erosion, of their mighty empires and way of life. Their watch, often helplessly, as their land slowly disappears, sacred sites are desecrated, magic is stolen, and their people are singled out and harassed. They constantly face the fear of marauders from the monstrous races and the threat of war between the young empires always seems to loom on the horizon. Its a tough thing to face for a race unused to death and chaos.

With a little nudge, it isn't hard to imagine a group of elves "snapping." The younger races have pushed them too far, and they dream of pushing back. All the disgruntled elves need is a strong leader with an equally powerful vision.

The Rise of the Visionary

Anaximander -- a minor son of a noble -- married at a young age, and he took his bride to tend the family orchards at a remote elven village. The early years were blessed and they had a child.

Human bandits attacked the village looking for elven riches and magic. They struck when he was in the fields, but he noticed the fires and

ran back to the villa. The bandits had waited for him with his wife and child -- someone said he was the leader. They immediately killed his boy before his eyes and demanded all the elven treasures. But the village had nothing -- it was a simple farming community -- and he told them as much. The bandits were furious, they didn't believe him, and one of them moved to maim his wife. Anaximander attacked in desperation. They cut off his arm at the elbow, beat him and left him for dead, and then burnt down the village for spite. But he didn't die.

Anaximander demanded justice from the nearby human settlement. Their council had initially promised to protect the elves, and he considered them honor bound to rectify their failure. They promised to bring the bandits to justice, but the months passed by without resolution. He grew bitter, and began to formulate his own plan.

He united the handful of survivors from the village, and then called upon distant relatives and loved ones of the ones that had died.

Anaximander formed a posse and they methodically hunted the bandits to exact their revenge. Every time they killed a bandit they left them strung up in the square of the human village who had failed to help. The hunt was exacting and in the end all but Anaximander and two of his posse died, but they were victorious.

Word of Anaximander's deeds spread and his fame grew. Similarly his band of followers also grew, and he realized his job wasn't done. They roved elven lands and struck out at any who dared to harass his people, but it was only his first step.

He vied for political power back home, and he claimed a new path for his people had been revealed to him in a dream. Anaximander championed a war against the monstrous races that had continuously plagued elves -- not to destroy them, but to contain, control, and guide

them. The elves had to look past their disgust of the vile nature of the orcs, goblins and their kin and recognize how -- with a firm elven hand -- they could be molded.

Anaximander, dubbed The Visionary, succeeded. For the first time in ages, his people marched from their homeland, and his daring raids took the chaotic and monstrous humanoids by surprise. His success brought him more prestige and political power. The Visionary unveiled his ultimate plans: the elves couldn't stop with the orcs and their ilk, they had to conquer and guide all the younger races. If the young races can't control their people and secure their borders, the elves should do it for them.

Entrenched as the leader of his people, the High Visionary has designs on the entire world. He watches from the great marble tower of Caledon as trained eleven warriors and their charmed slave army march forth to bring peace and order to the world.

The Vision

The dark experiences Anaximander had earlier in his life has embittered him to everyone but elves. He views many of the younger races as hopeless -- the orcs, goblins, and their ilk are only suitable as menial slaves and charmed shock troops. While the other races, humans included, simply need the guidance of the elves to save them from themselves. He believes that only his people understand the course the future must take, and that if to ensure tranquility they must use a firm hand or even the blade, so be it.

The High Visionary's goals are simple: bring all the younger races under the rule of the elves. He has no qualms about putting the monstrous races to the sword -- they've shown their true nature time and again. If the smarter ones show reason, they will make good slaves, and perhaps eventually earn their freedom. The other humanoids are given a choice: submit or become slaves. Those that submit are allowed

to live with a modicum of freedom that grows the longer they prove their worth. The new middle class in the regime the Visionary has established.

Forces of the Elven Will

It usually comes as a surprise to many facing the High Visionary's forces that non-elves comprise the majority of his army. Charmed monstrous humanoids -- goblins, orcs, and ogres -- are the basis; the elves have channeled the humanoid's chaotic blood lust into something productive. Willing slaves lead their charmed ilk while an elf or a free humanoid serves as an officer. Free humanoids serve as advanced forces, and entirely elven units are the most elite in the Visionary's army.

Basic force - "*Monster Squad*" - Elf officer, slave orc sergeant, 6 charmed orcs & 6 charmed goblins

Advanced force - "*Scout Squad*" - Mounted elf officer, mounted free human sergeant & 8 charmed goblins on charmed wargs

Advanced force - "*Heavy Monster Squad*" - Elf officer, human sergeant, 4 ogres, 4 orcs

Advanced force - "*Free Squad*" - Free human officer, human sergeant & 8 humans

Elite force - "*Deathdancers*" - 7 double-sword wielding elves

Caledon and the great city of Raes-Ell

Raes-Ell is the capital and seat of elven power. The city rests on both sides of the powerful Sarha River nestled in a valley and surround by rolling forested hills. The city is grand, but not as large as it could be because it is only the center of government and education and the residence of the elven and free humanoid elite. No trade or production of any kind takes place in Raes-Ell -- all of that has been relegated and distributed to other nearby cities.

Caledon collectively refers to five tall marble and glass spires that stand along the Sarha River at the heart of Raes-Ell. The High Visionary and all the staff of the Regency

resides within High Caledon, the tallest and grandest of the towers.

- Zukairo, Bloodclaw -

Zukairo snarled and leapt. Horune's eyes nearly bulged out of his skull as he fell under the weight of the saurian lycanthrope.

"You fool!" the wizard snapped. He struggled but Zukairo pressed him down with his viciously clawed foot. "Let me up now, and I'll forget this insolence!"

The lycanthrope purred and pressed down with the talon on his foot -- the wicked point easily pierced the wizard's flesh forcing a whimper from Horune. "There's only one fool in this room, but we'll soon rectify that."

Break the Stereotype

Yippy, craven, and annoying cannon fodder. Kobolds are always the toadies of the dungeons and wilds, and even the goblins beat up kobolds. Only dangerous in large numbers to fresh adventurers, anyone with experience can cut a swath through an entire tribe. *They stop being interesting when they can't draw blood.*

After being kicked around all their lives, its understandable if some kobolds get fed up and try to get even. If they can get past their natural cowardice, and if they have a determined leader, a band of kobolds could be a force to be reckoned with -- they have the numbers. And if the kobolds are trained and stronger than average, they just become deadlier. Its time to give kobolds some teeth.

From Toady to Terror

Zukairo and his tribe had the misfortune of living near the wizard Horune. The wizard needed subjects for experimentation, and the kobolds were easily obtainable. Fascinated by reptiles, Horune wanted to create a loyal and intelligent predator that he could release upon

his enemies. The wizard had procured a few rare predatory dinosaurs, and he sought a way to instill in them the intelligence and the fear based loyalty of the kobolds.

His experiments succeeded in a way he never dreamed of. He created a new breed of lycanthrope: kobold weredeinonychus (think velociraptors from the *Jurassic Park* movies), and Zukairo was his most promising creation. As lycanthropes, the kobolds kept their sneaky and non-challenging demeanor, but now they held a deadly secret that they could unleash when they closed on their intended prey.

Unfortunately for Horune, Zukairo was more cunning and strong willed than his brethren. The kobold and a few of his brothers turned on their master after a handful of missions under the wizard's direction. He claimed Horune's tower for his band of lycanthropes, and they rampaged the wilderness and surrounding villages for months, but a band of adventurers eventually routed them and toppled the wizard's tower. Only Zukairo and a handful of his brothers escaped with their lives.

Zukairo moved until he found another tribe of kobolds. They were being bullied and made to serve a tribe of orcs, but he quickly turned the tables. Zukairo only killed as many orcs as necessary to assert his dominance, and then he created a new regime. This time he planned ahead -- he had learned from the debacle at Horune's tower. He left the orcs as the figurehead rulers to take the fall when the next band of adventurers show up. Then he and his brothers set about afflicting select kobolds (the smartest of the bunch) with lycanthropy and teaching them how to control the curse. Their small force assembled, Zukairo began his raids again.

A Kobold Kingdom

Outwardly, Zukairo's goals are simple: amass wealth, power, and subjugate the races that normally lord over kobolds, which basically

amounts to every intelligent race. He strives to remove the competition in the region by systematically hunting down and killing or conquering the neighboring tribes of monsters. The kobold recognizes a live lackey is better than a dead corpse, and he tries to restrain his marauders during their assault and only kill those who resist or cause trouble.

Zukairo also plans and conducts raids on the more civilized communities for food, loot, and slaves. His reputation often precedes him and his forces only have to threaten a village and demand tribute -- it amuses the warlord kobold to see humans cowed.

All the kobold's actions are focused towards his ultimate goal: Zukairo wants to carve out a niche for himself and those loyal to him. He hopes to shape a small monstrous kingdom where he and his fellow lycanthropes are the elite. His greatest concern is keeping hold of this kingdom against outside interference -- namely pesky adventurers and heroes.

Clan Bloodclaw

The warlord is divided on how to deal with his lesser kobold brethren; he wants to see his race amount to something, but he has little patience for the majority of his sniveling kind. Zukairo and his clan constantly look for bands of kobolds to take in and train. They assess their charges and elevate the smartest and strongest to positions with greater prestige -- effectively trying to create a superior race of kobolds. And Zukairo picks only the most aspiring of the superior kobolds to bless with lycanthropy.

Weredeinonychus almost exclusively remain in their hybrid or animal form. The only time they change into kobolds is to sneak into places or to trick assuming thick-skulled adventurers. They take great pains never to reveal their true nature, and thus far no one except for their brother lycanthropes know that they are descended from kobolds.

The warlord relies primarily on orcs and other monstrous humanoids to fill the ranks of his slowly growing army. He and his lycanthrope brethren serve as the elite units and enforcers of his will.

Basic force - *Marauder Squad* - Two kobold weredeinonychus & 6 orc rangers

Basic force - *Bloodclaw Warriors* - One elite kobold fighter & 8 orc warriors

Advanced force - *Elite Marauder Squad* - Six kobold weredeinonychus & six elite kobold rangers

Elite force - *Bloodclaw Enforcers* - Four kobold weredeinonychus fighters

Te Char

Te Char is a semi-permanent collection of camps on the banks of the Coiling Snake River. The central camp houses the core of Clan Bloodclaw and the warlord's massive crimson tent sits at the epicenter. All the other loyal clans established their camps around Bloodclaw's depending on their rank and prestige. The camp has no means to support itself besides fishing, and the majority of the food and materials are brought through tribute and raiding parties.

Initially, the camp was designed to be mobile for security, and because of Zukairo's distaste for remaining stationary. However, the warlord understands the wisdom in providing a stable capital if he hopes to create a kingdom. He's already drafting plans to make Te Char a permanent settlement, and those plans require a lot more laborers, willing and otherwise.

- Raul'ghar, Artificer of Vengeance -

"How the mortals struggle. They should be content, even happy, that I've finally given their worthless lives a purpose. Send the lot to the forges!"

Break the Stereotype

Elementals rarely appear in fantasy except as summoned beings. They serve as guards and adventurer fodder -- a minor impediment to the party on their way to the main adversary. *Mere impediments are rarely memorable.*

However, elementals have a home plane -- they get summoned from somewhere -- they must have their own lives and civilization. Every time a mage summons them, they're pulled from their lives and forced to serve some squishy mortal. That would upset, nay infuriate, any intelligent being. What if an elemental gets exiled to the world and it decides to get even for all its perceived slights.

The Exiled Duke

Raul'ghar worked his way up in the earth elemental Court. It took over seven hundred years, but nothing happened fast among the entities of stone. Then the King committed his forces to help a war between mortal gods, and there was a schism amongst the Court. Raul'ghar and a few of his brethren had no desire to participate in what they saw was a mortal affair, and they rose up against the King when they thought he was weakest.

However, the King was far from powerless, and he had brokered support from the other elemental courts. Raul'ghar and his companions had their forces decimated, and all the Dukes save Raul'ghar were slain. The Duke fled to a minuscule mortal world to lick his wounds and plot his revenge.

It rankled the Duke to have to hide amongst mortals. He'd been summoned sixteen times in his life to one world or another and forced to serve bumbling mages. And when he became a member of the Court, the summons only intensified. Nothing good ever came from serving the squishy arcanists, or any mortal.

Raul'ghar remained quiescent for years until he uncovered some lost ruins in the mountains he'd claimed. The city reeked like the arcanists

he so despised -- summoners and golem artificers -- and he initially considered destroying it, but then he uncovered the library and arcane forges. Raul'ghar began to study the ancient magic, and conceived a plan.

The elemental Duke determined a way to summon elemental-like beings and craft golems using the life force from mortals instead of calling upon beings from his home plane. Raul'ghar enjoyed the delicious irony, and set about kidnapping and sacrificing mortals to fuel his arcane forges and build his army. He slowly conquered the uncivilized tribes of humanoids in the valleys and foot hills until none remained, but it wasn't enough.

The Duke isn't happy with the size of his army - - he has grand designs. However, only the more civilized villages and cities remain, and Raul'ghar is wary of retribution from the kingdom's army. Instead of direct assault, he sends out kidnapping squads to feed the forges and scouts to assess the strength of his opposition. And the information his forces have brought back seems very positive.

Dreams of Home

Raul'ghar is driven by vengeance. Above all else, he wants to return to the elemental plane of earth and depose or slay the current King, but to do that he needs an army. He also has a passionate hatred for most mortal races due to their offenses against elementals, and he takes every opportunity to harm them. Luckily, he's devised a way to accomplish both goals.

Normally Raul'ghar could use his power as a Duke to summon and control an elemental army, but to do so would draw the unwanted and dangerous attention of the Court. The Duke uncovered a real prize when he discovered the arcane library and forges. He's using the knowledge he acquired to craft his army, but he needs mortal lives to fuel the arcane processes that birth his minions. While he's happy to sacrifice mortals in this fashion, it process takes

time and makes him a target for mortal retribution.

Until recently, the Duke has felt that he and his forces are too weak to act upon a large scale against the neighboring kingdom. However, his kidnapers and scouts brought back very positive and thorough information about the forces that would oppose him. Raul'ghar utilized this intelligence, and he's sent out his initial stronger forces to cull entire villages to feed his forges.

Warriors of Stone and Steel

All of Raul'ghar's forces are effectively elementals or golems, and every one is crafted within the soul devouring arcane furnaces of Mur'drek O-oan. The golems are mindless, but the elementals have varying degrees of intelligence, and the ssiv'raul -- Shards of Raul - - are the pinnacle of his army. The Shards are very intelligent elementals, shaped like wide and powerfully built men that serve as officers in the Duke's army.

Basic force - *Kidnapper Squad* - Shard fighter & 4 small earth elementals

Advanced force - *Crusher Squad* - Elite shard fighter & 2 huge earth elementals

Elite force - *Elite Infantry* - Shard priest & 4 medium shard fighters

Mur'drek O-oan

Raul'ghar couldn't care what the city was once called, he's renamed his capitol Mur'drek O-oan -- Just Vengeance. Grown with elemental magic upon the ruins of its predecessor, the city sits high on cliff overlooking a formerly fertile valley. The vile arcane forges that Raul'ghar and his minions constantly feed put of strange and twisted emanations that has killed most of the natural life of the region and warped what was strong enough to survive.

The Duke resides within the Mithril Heart, a second and smaller complex grown deeper in the mountain that cradles Mur'drek O-oan.

Filled with libraries and laboratories, the residents continuously seek to develop new processes and refine the old formulas used to create Raul'ghar's minions.

- Mylanthrevdi, Black Bark -

"Humans, I cannot understand them -- everything they plant only fruits death."

Break the Stereotype

Tree-men, children of nature, they dwell in the deep woods. Treants spend days if not seasons in deep thought, pondering the health of their demesne, and wandering their woods tending their charges. Often sagacious sages, and sometimes solitary defenders of the woods, tree-men rarely have a reason to interaction with the outside world. *Hoooo-huuuummmmmmm*.

Life from a treant's point of view: daily men enter your wood to fell your silent brothers and sisters. And for what? Their fires choke the sky,

their fields dominate the land that was once forest -- their ways are wasteful and destructive. And worse, their numbers constantly increase, and they continue to require more land.

As nature is tamed and the wilds are slowly pushed back, one treant has had enough.

Birth in Flame

Mylanthrevdi awoke over a hundred years ago in the woods he still calls home. He spent the first couple decades in quiet solitude -- he wandered his woods and communed with his charges. Then the humans came. A foreign king had granted the land to a noble, if he could tame the wilderness. The noble's men entered the woods to find lumber for their lord's manor and the new village. When the first tree fell, the treant felt it like a dull ache.

He immediately sought out the lumberjacks to talk, but the peasants ran in fright. Angered by the tales his men told, the noble and his guard entered the woods in search of Mylanthrevdi.



The noble proclaimed the woods were his, that he and his men would cull the forest as they saw fit, and the "monstrosity" better accept the fact and stop harassing the noble's men. Shocked by the audacity, the treant tried to seal off his woods, but the humans came in droves and used force and fire to open paths. Resigned, Mylanthrevdi called upon his charges to expel the invaders.

The noble had enough, he gathered his forces and rode into the forest. They set fire to the treant's personal grove and try to slay Mylanthrevdi in the blaze. A quarter of his body is charred and withered, but he escaped. The treant lost himself in the foothills and mountains, and he spent years pondering what he should do. Then Komurra found him.

Komurra was a cougar awoken by a twisted orc druid. Her upbringing and experience had left her scarred emotionally and physically, and the cougar latched on to Mylanthrevdi initially as a means for personal revenge. However, the longer she spoke with the treant the more her agenda evolved. Komurra kindled a desire for revenge within Mylanthrevdi that fit her grand designs.

The two started their trail of retribution in the mountains, but they soon pressed down into Mylanthrevdi's former demesne. It amazed Komurra how easy it was with the treant's help to destroy the village and the noble. She continuously spurs the treant to further action and they have begun a guerrilla war against numerous communities.

Eco-terrorists

Mylanthrevdi's main goal is to curb humanoid destructive tendencies. Pragmatic, he realizes the futility of trying to stop them, so he only works to oppose their worst pursuits. His encounters with humanoids shaped his method: he won't seek them out to discuss the matter or ask them to stop. Action and force speak louder than words. Mylanthrevdi feels he is simply

giving nature the chance to fight back, and he has no qualms about killing a few humans, since they give no consideration to his charges.

Mylanthrevdi relies on guerrilla tactics in his crusade. Any site he sees as being destructive (a saw mill, stone quarry, large farm, etc) is a possible target. He enters an area, animates trees and brush to do his bidding, and leaves quickly once the damage is done. Initially he focuses on sabotage and property damage, but if he has to mount a third assault, he will order his legion to use force. He repeats as many times as necessary, and he escalates the intensity of the assault each time until he achieves his desired effect.

Komurra's goals differ from Black Bark's: she won't be happy until all sentient species are brought low and nature once more rules the land. She hasn't revealed her ultimate goals to Mylanthrevdi yet, and in many ways she acts as the power behind the throne. She constantly urges the treant to action and pushes him towards her goals -- Komurra is grooming him. Eventually, she hopes Mylanthrevdi will declare war on all civilization, and he will look to her for his general.

The Green Legion

All of Mylanthrevdi's forces are animated or awoken plants and charmed or awoken animals. He's more likely to use animated plants and objects in dangerous assaults since he won't lose any of his real forces if they're slain.

Basic force - *Secret sabotage squad* - Tiny awoken plant or animal leader and 6 tiny animated plants or charmed animals.

Advanced force - *Strike squad* - medium awoken plant or animal leader and 4 medium animated plants.

Advanced force - *Heavy assault squad* - 3 huge animated plants

Charred Grove

The Greenfang Forest itself has a dark

reputation among nearby residents and travelers. Many remember when all the residents of the nearby village simply disappeared. Another group tried to take advantage of the vacant buildings and rebuild the community, but they disappeared as well -- leading many to claim the woods are haunted. A reputation Mylanthrevdi and his minions cultivate in order to keep their operation in the Forest a secret.

At the heart of the Greenfang Forest a copse of new trees grow. The hectare of new growth looks out of place amongst the venerable trees of the rest of the wood, but on closer inspection the charred remains of mighty trees, some standing some fallen, can still be seen. The Charred Grove suffered the brunt of the noble's wrath when he first chased off Mylanthrevdi, and it wasn't until the treant's return that the Grove began to recover. Black Bark resides within the Grove when he's not engaged in a campaign, to provide a grim reminder of what

humans are capable of.

As a base of power and residence the Forest and Grove are non-ostentatious. There are no grand buildings or lofty court, only acres of stately trees and natural wildlife. It would take a trained eye to tell that some of the trees move of their own accord and animals eye intruders with all too intelligent eyes.

- The Author -

Nathan Ellsworth considered adding another villain to the article, but even he couldn't make a mechanical engineer villain sound interesting. And when he's not writing about treant eco-terrorists, he spends his time haunting PlotStorming.com raving about creativity, and urging people to write more.

The logo for PlotStorming.com features the text "PLOTSTORMING.COM" in a bold, italicized, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a circular icon containing a stylized blue and white globe or sphere with a central point.

PlotStorming.com offers writers and role playing gamers a forum to develop and improve plot lines as well as hone their writing skills. Fans of any genre of fiction will find numerous short stories and other works to enjoy and engage the imagination.

PlotStorming.com's goal is to nurture literary creativity through friendly community discussion, daily inspirational writing prompts, contests, and helpful critiques.

Looking for the PlotStorming fiction? It's on the way! Come back for next issue where we are happy to announce we will host the winners of the first multi-guild contest: Rushon, The City of Twilight Splendor!

Seraphine Harmonium's

The Door part 2

“Solarus Tyrolean, you summoned me?”

“Yes Proditus. The forces of light require your services.”

“I will do anything that is required of me.”

They had been underground for over a month.

The year would later be known as the third year of the Age of Rebirth. The city of Shardmoore, bastion of the Church itself had fallen to the demon Pazuzu. They had come from the Xaonoi Archipelago to the south and driven east, taking Lythen before turning towards Ithegra. Bizhentluus had of course sent aid to their allies in the south, but the hammer fall in the south was but a diversion from Pazuzu's true goal: Shardmoore. The center of piety and purity was the greatest prize the demon could hope for, and while the Knights were away, his heretic forces staged a coup, murdering King Menclar and instituting their reign of terror and corruption. No one knew who could be trusted—who was with the demons and who was among the faithful, and so they grew fearful, panicky, and unscrupulous. It was all as Pazuzu had planned. Now Tyrolean, chief of the Solari, served as keeper of the faith and led the forces of light in their rebellion against the forces of evil and he had a task for Proditus.

“The resistance needs a force of order to counteract the chaos wrought by these vile demons. The situation calls for the swift hand of justice and the iron fist of Retribution. Their evil must not be endured, and so I give you *carte blanche* in these affairs. Your task is to seek out heretics where they hide and destroy them. This is not as it was against the pagans, where you fought face to face; these matters require secrecy, stealth, anonymity, and the sudden strike of holy fire. You will strike

without warning and make the wicked fear the wrath of God. This is your task, Proditus of the Crimson Inquisition.”

The Crimson Inquisition. The very sound of it thrilled him so. What's more Solarus Tyrolean had given him *carte blanche*. There was no limit to what he could do, no means unavailable to suit his ends. The need for secrecy unsettled him though, as he had never been a man of subtlety. Guile and ruthlessness he had to spare—a trap to lure one with, but his training had been in combat amongst knights, not stealing in the night. No matter. He would learn—pride had never been one of his faults.

With this in mind he strode out in the street. So long as he did not display his fealty he was in no more danger than underground. The streets of the Shining City glittered around him, in spite of the desecration of their new inhabitants.

They were now more dirty than before, less well kept up, and more apt to show stains of blood. He knew instinctively where he was going. He headed for the slums at city's edge. It was there he would find the secret he was searching in the gainful employment of some fugitives who could serve order for the proper price. The further from the city's nucleus he moved the dirtier and shabbier his surroundings became. Building ceased to be of stone, but became shoddy wood dwellings of the poor, sometimes even collective huts where three families slept together. Here, among the hopeless, was Pazuzu's influence the strongest, but here also was his hope the strongest, because also in the slums resided outlaws. It was convenient, as guards were rarely spent there in times of peace, and under the rule of demons no guards were spent anywhere.

Eyes followed him as he went; a furtive look from a guilty looking man, a curious, hopeful look from a pathetic beggar, and the flash of women's eyes across his figure.

A shapely figure strutted into his path and he made a move to avoid her when she placed a

delicate hand upon his arm. It was white and entrancing with red-painted nails that showed dirt underneath. The milky flesh of a forearm cascaded up over a soft shoulder flowing with thick auburn curls.

“Where are you going milord?”

“That’s none of your business, whore.”

“Well, milord, I wish you wouldn’t go so fast.”

“I have business to attend to.”

“Business? One such as you having business here? One would think you’re up to something. . .”

“Woman, stay out of my business.”

“It’s just if I could afford such nice clothes as yours and I were walking in such a place as this, well it’s not the sort of thing I’d want Lady Elera to find out.”

So that was it; the bitch was going to blackmail him. If he ignored her she could reveal him and maybe the entire resistance. He looked at her in disgust as she raised her eyes at him significantly. She strategically allowed the strap of her dress to fall off her smooth, bare shoulder and he could see the edge of a mark of some kind. It was largely obscured, but he did not need to see it: he already knew what it was. Proditus smirked; he had an idea.

“Perhaps I do have time after all.”

The woman’s room stank heavily of perfume in a way that suggested there were other smells to hide. It was upstairs of a rundown tavern and the smell of spirits wafted up through the floorboards. The featherbed was dirtied and grimy and grizzly stuffing poked up out of holes in the binding. The red-haired woman looked up at him in a mix of lust and triumphant satisfaction and he realized she

enjoyed what she did. The arrogant wench felt she could control him. He laughed inside in joyous, painful spasms at her folly.

She undid the tie of her corset, letting it fall to the ground, and reclined back onto the bed, beckoning to him. He joined her, still smirking at her foolishness as she pulled him down on top of her. His hand slid over her bosom and she shuddered under his touch. Suddenly Proditus jerked his hand upwards and brought it swiftly down, his dagger penetrating deep into her chest. The blade embedded into her heart and she tried to scream but she only choked on her own blood as it caught in her throat and gushed from the fissure in her chest. As she lashed about, gasping for life the aroma of her blood met his senses. He breathed it in, and it filled his lungs with lightness and heat. As she flailed there, he kissed her bloody mouth. She struggled feebly, but all strength had left her and her head swam in and out of consciousness as she faced her death. He could not help but kiss her for he was overcome with desire—he took a carnal pleasure in killing.

Proditus walked nonchalantly from the inferno.

From his face none would know that it was he who set the Olde Taverne ablaze, that he had been just ten minutes ago in bed with a red haired prostitute and murdered her, that he had found upon her body a tattoo of the talons of a bird of prey gripping a bleeding eye that was the symbol of the demon Pazuzu, that he had never needed that evidence as her attempt to blackmail him in the street had given her away, that he had connected the entire establishment as haven of heretics, or that he set about to burn it to the ground by tossing a burning candle into the alcohol behind the bar. None would know this from his face for Proditus was completely at ease. It did not occur to him as a possibility that there might be innocents trapped in the fire, at least until after the deed was done, and then it did not bother him. They associated with

heretics, and if not already heretics themselves they were on their way. If they were not, even then he was justified in taking one or two innocent lives to end those of a dozen heretics. So he strode on towards his goal.

Maritus Tenable was his man. None knew for sure where he hid himself, but it was well assumed that it was somewhere in the slums.

He fashioned himself a bounty hunter, but assassin was more what he was. He was known to have carried out the murders of several important and heavily guarded officials without ever having been detected, before or after.

Rumors had risen that he had trained a bevy of underlings to act nearly so skillfully as he. If anyone could teach Proditus subtlety and help forge such an organization as he'd been charged, it was Maritus Tenable.

The inherent problem was how does one go about finding Tenable? He had never been officially located and those that went in search of him were often never heard of again. As a general rule, however, they disappeared looking for him in the art quarter of the slums of Shardmoore. It was a quiet place as business was slow here. The inhabitants of the slums as a rule could not afford the luxuries created here and profits were made only by carting out works to street faires in the richer parts of the city.

Proditus entered the gallery of one hopeless painter who seemed to suffer under the delusion that he might actually receive a customer. He was bald and wore a pair of round glasses on the end of his nose that he readjusted every now and then, giving him a friendly air. His face was lined but still possessed a youthful energy.

As he looked around at his paintings with a tragic excitement his friendly demeanor almost hinted at a deeper knowledge that could not be explained. His prices were pathetically low, a few coppers for some that looked as if the paint cost more than he was asking for the work, and desperate pleas of trading some for a loaf of

bread. The problem was that no one here could spare a loaf of bread. They were dirty paintings, mostly of the slums around them, a few of the derelict bell tower that the owner of the shop enjoyed a view of from the window. It had not been used in years, and it had been inhabited by a flock of rather loud birds. In all likelihood it was a hideout for something worse than birds, but that was not his present concern.

His concern was to find Tenable. His impulse directed him to be straightforward with this.

“I seek Maritus Tenable.”

“Many seek him and never return.”

“I know.”

“What makes you think you will be different?”

“Never mind that. Where is he?”

“No one knows where Tenable is except Tenable.”

“I hear he’s around here.”

“No doubt he hears you’re around here too, but that’s beside the point. All anyone knows of Tenable is what they hear, and most of that is just what someone made up.”

“Any information you could give me—”

“I’m afraid not. But if you’d like to purchase something—”

“You want a bribe.”

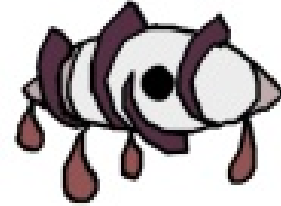
“Oh, Suns no. I just thought that since you’re already here, and no doubt not from around here, maybe you’d like to buy something.”

Proditus turned on his heels and walked briskly for the exit. When he arrived there, however, he was possessed of an unusual urge; he turned around, walked right up to the man at the

counter and placed three gold coins on the table before exiting the shop without looking back.

He did not take a painting, though he could easily have bought the whole stock for not much more than his donation. He did not even wait for the man to express his thanks. He turned the corner and walked down a side street absentmindedly. He did not know where he was going but he decided to trust to his feet to lead him to Maritus Tenable. His feet led him into a convenient seeming alley, meeting all expectations of clichéd ominous darkness, so that it came as no surprise to Proditus to notice the burlap sack that was slipped over his head, blocking his sight and obstructing his breathing before he felt a sharp crack of pain in his head and knew no more.

~Seraphine_Harmonium aka Aaron J. Fagan



A man with a mike: Hi, I'm Mike, and I'll be your host on...

Villains and Vermin!

This episode, called Hidden Hideouts, is about the dream home every villain would like! We take a look at conventional homes with me, and non-conventional ones with a secret guest star...

<Click! Background changes>

Mike: The house on the cliff! It is a good one: heroes find it tough to reach and it's pretty secluded- no one is going to come and peek into what strange noises or sights are arising from it. The only problem is, that after a long night's sleep, a villain comes walking out and "wheeee" BAM! Of course, I'm not saying that the clever ones among you will fall to your death so easily, but for the stupider ones...

<click!>

Mike: Next on our list is the dilapidated mansion. These are quite common, and handy, as long as you *maintain* it dilapidated: No strange lights, sounds, sights, gases, smells (*Come on*, it is no longer a secret that villains *love* beans), etc. You'll need to, of course, station a few guards or spells to stop people from getting in easily, but that'll be no problem.

<click!>

Mike: The tower... an all time favourite- dark and mysterious... scary... *But* easy to locate and get into. As mentioned before, it is always good to use protection!

<click!>

Mike: Evil looking Victorian Castle... good protection on their own (moats and the like), tough to get into, mysterious feel... good torture chambers and roomy rooms. However, they are easy to locate and have terrible bathrooms. Tough luck, they are otherwise

perfect.

<click!>

Mike: Now we call in our special guest star!
Drum roll, begin!

<dum dum dum dum dum dum dum dum
DUM!>

Mike: Give it up, for... the beautiful Saurona!

Saurona: Oh, hello all, hello all. Mike, you do flatter me, dear! I am *so* pleased to be on this show and I wanted to acknowledge a few people: Christopher, Joanne, J. R. R., William-

Mike: Thank you! I think you were about to tell us about a few non-conventional houses for the villains out there?

Saurona: I haven't finished my acknowledgments yet! I continue, I also want to thank Jonathan, Oscar, -

Director: CUT!

Saurona: As I was saying before I was *rudely interrupted*, I was going o acknowledge-

Director: Lady, I said CU-

Saurona: *But*, now we'll start with the houses. I've thought and come up with a few lesser-known houses which are trendy, yet handy.

<click!>

Saurona: Firstly, for wizards. Explore the unexplored! Inhabit the uninhabited! Live in the un-

Mike: I *think* we get the point.

Saurona: Yes, yes. So what about going underwater, or in a volcano? A cave would be good, might be underwater? In an out of the

way desert? A flying home? Any wizard of a high caliber should be able to do this quite easily. Tough to reach, tough to locate, little to no protection needed, perfect!

Mike: And if they are *underwater*, how are they going to exit their house?

Saurona: I didn't think of that... well, villains are supposed to be clever!

<click!>

Saurona: Next, PEOPLE! Why don't you just use an inn? Everywhere you go, you will be able to have a place to live in, it'll be tough to locate you, as there'll be at least a few more inns in the same place. But if someone recognizes you, you'll become bread that has become all crunchy and brown, and its sides black.

Mike: *Toast*.

Saurona: Yes.

Mike: And, if all the inns are filled?

Saurona: I don't know? Tough luck! Another advantage is that incase of a chase, you can blast apart a wall and escape, since you wouldn't want that in your house, would you? Well, that's all from me today, bye!

<goes to the side of the podium>

Mike: Thank you, Saurona, and I've got another idea for you villains. As a last resort-

Saurona: No! Resorts are always crowded. No good.

Mike: A last resort is a last option, Saurona, not a holiday spot. Well, as I was saying, a last resort can be an ally's home. Friends will greet you with open hands. Don't stay for too long, or they might close their hands.

Mike: Well, that's all for now! See you in the next episode, Cool Camping Spots, of...

Villains and Vermin!



Sainyn is a member of plotstorming.com

Building Better Villains

by Seraphine Harmonium
(Putting the “EEE!” in Evil)

We all know of villains that we will always remember; Darth Vader, HAL 3000, The Joker, Hannibal Lector, and many more. Why do we love to hate them? Because they aren't just your standard bad guy plotting to take over the world—there's something special about them.

The writer's put a lot of thought into these villains. They have back-stories, motivations, or sometimes just that certain unique flair. A game master has the same responsibility as a story teller to weave into their tapestry of the game a convincing and interesting villain; a villain the heroes will want to stop, not because they are heroes and stopping the bad guys is what heroes do, but because they truly hate their wicked adversary. First, let's look at what makes some of our favorite villains truly villainous: goatees. (Just kidding)

Painting the Picture

Let's start with Lord Vader, shall we? Black suit, the mask, rasping breath, deep booming voice; right away these make an impression and are etched into our memories forever. It may seem superficial, but physical traits are a huge part of creating ALL characters, not just villains. As an actor, I know. Would Richard III be so memorable without his deformed “blasted sapling” of a hand and a limp? Could the Phantom of the Opera even exist without his hideous face? Now, it is true that a character can be made by other means than

outer scarring or panache, but implementing something so simple as one of the 100 Random NPC traits in the DMG can be invaluable into making your players actually care what the villains do. It doesn't make them more evil, it just makes them stand out.

So, in the formation of your villain, think about what he looks like. If he's just another wizard in black robes, no one is going to care. If he's just another tyrannous duke in sharp looking armor, well, it's been done. Tons of skull regalia don't help either. A limp or being blind in one eye is much more interesting. If you think about it, a physical trait could be a window into the villain's mindset, motives, and background, allowing you to create interesting and dynamic characters you might not even have thought of otherwise. Maybe your villain has a birthmark, proof of some ancient lineage and a destiny that he must achieve (and damned be anyone who gets in his way). Maybe he has a scar: a memento of a lost battle he seeks to set right. There are myriad possibilities, so think about it, and maybe you'll come up with something brilliant.

Villains Are People Too

Another huge part of character creation is emotion. Just because he's the bad guy doesn't mean he doesn't have feelings. Often their emotions are warped and their logic twisted, but their feelings still exist. They get mad when things don't go their way, and they often take it out on their underlings, they experience malevolent glee upon torturing the heroes,

everyone knows about these. What people often forget is that villains can have the same range of emotions as everyone else. Villains can be jovial, dancing and singing when the world is their oyster and everything is looking up. They can feel guilty about things they have done. Villains can even love.

The Phantom of the Opera is such a villain.

Yes, he murdered people, strangling them to death. Yes, he dropped a chandelier on an innocent audience. Yes, he was greedy, extorting a ridiculous “salary” from the opera house owners. Yes, he follows the rules and does everything a villain is supposed to do by the contract of villainy, all the way down to the secret underground lair. If you’re reading the book, he even has a torture chamber. The Phantom is also a musician. The Phantom is also in love. Love is Erik’s (the Phantom) driving force. He wants Christine more than anything else, and is very jealous of his competition, the Viscount Raoul de Chagny. If he hadn’t been a bit too possessive, he might have even succeeded at wooing her. Oh, and don’t forget his face. As a child he was put on display as a freak. They called him Erik: The Living Corpse. His life before haunting the Opera house, pretty well sucked. Can you blame him for being bitter?

Do not be afraid to give villains a good side. In fact, if your heroes first see the villain at his best, imagine how shocked they will be to see him at his worst. Imagine then how betrayed they will feel by said villain, and how much more loudly their offended hearts will cry out for justice. Real people have lives outside of their chosen profession, so why not villains?

Why can’t villains be in love too? Why can’t villains even be friendly with heroes? Maybe they do like the heroes, and are villains by necessity, rather than by choice. . .

Villains Don’t Choose to be Evil

As a general rule, people don’t choose to be

evil. They don’t say “I’m going to slaughter the masses today because I am a villain and that is what villains do.” Neither do they seek to dominate the world for no other reason than it is the villainous thing to do. People often don’t realize that what they are doing is wrong. In fact, it would be my guess that most of the time villains think that they are in fact in the right.

Take Inquisitor Proditus for example, the wicked protagonist of my serial *The Door* (also in this issue of the Guide). He feels no guilt at the slaughter of the pagan elves, but not because he is evil and slaughters for the sake of evil, but in truth because he feels he is doing the right thing. In his opinion, the elves had it coming. As far as he’s concerned, their slaughter is an act of holy retribution.

If the villain knew what they were doing was evil, and they would go to Ba’ator or the Abyss, or any other form of hell, do you really think they would choose to do so? Maybe. It depends on the villain. A villain who thinks “Well I’m already going to hell, what do I have to lose?” might actually be an interesting villain. But even here you have to be careful.

This can only take you so far. Such a character doesn’t care about the consequence his actions have upon his soul. It doesn’t mean they’re randomly going to become a tyrant or a mass murderer. True, they won’t care about collateral damage, but they won’t just start killing people at random. Even damned characters need to have a motive for evil.

But let’s break away from the idea of “nothing to lose,” and go back to the villain who doesn’t know he is doing evil. Imagine how such a person would feel, being called evil and a villain. Would he not be confused, and angry at those who sully his name? Would he not seek revenge? Might he not unwittingly take harsh actions that reinforce his bad reputation?

Would he not be frustrated? Would he not want to make them see as he does? Imagine if he were to capture a PC, and try to make them see what it is he is trying to do, the glories he

seeks, and the good. How do they remain set in their ways to stop him in his noble cause? Why can't they understand? Such a villain does not see his own evil, and can be very memorable in how devoutly they expound their convictions.

Maybe the heroes even sympathize, but as the heroes, still have an obligation to save the day.

There is another kind of villain. Sometimes a villain performs evil acts with the full knowledge that what they are doing is wrong, but does so out of necessity. A servant in fear for his life, forced to carry out his master's bidding. Someone who has strayed into an impossible situation, where the only path left open is the path of evil. Someone for whom the end justifies the means, but who is at odds with the rest of the world. For a villain who does evil out of necessity or desperation, let's return to good old Darth Vader. As horrendous as the prequel trilogy may be, it does provide insight as to Darth Vader's character on the whole.

Fearful of losing those he loves, and presented with a path that can seemingly save them, Anakin Skywalker gives into the temptation of the Dark Side to save the woman he loves.

Anakin knows the Dark Side is wrong and even tries to turn away, but his fear of losing Padme and his desperation lead him to betray his fellow Jedi. Alienated from his former allies as a traitor, he has no choice but to follow the one path remaining open to him: the path of evil.

Evil Is as Evil Does

Let's be sensible here: Villains are not villains because we say they are; they are villains because they do villainous things. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt says to Romeo "The love I bear thee can afford no better term than this: Thou art a villain." Tybalt calling Romeo a villain in no way makes Romeo evil. In fact he is quite the opposite. You have to do evil to be evil. So, when designing a villain for your game, and when playing said villain in your game, you have to make sure that evil is evil.

Some players might be fine with being told that a villain is evil and killing him on that principle alone, but many groups will be uneasy about killing someone who has seemingly done nothing wrong. Of course, not everyone the PCs face has to be evil, but if you make them evil, make them do evil; the more shocking the better.

In the Harry Potter series, I was not a fan of Lord Voldemort as a BBEG because in truth, he wasn't all that evil. Yes, he killed people, but he's a villain, so it's practically in the job description. (Note that I am not condoning killing for villainy's sake, in fact I am still condemning it). As a villain, he was pretty generic. His seven horcruxes made him into essentially an uber-lich, which was interesting in concept, but when did he do anything you particularly hated him for? Much viler was Bellatrix Lestrange, who took sadistic glee in torture, and had an attachment to the Dark Lord that seemed almost lustful at times.

When playing a villain, it pays to be bad. The villains we remember don't just kill, they don't just strive for world domination: they lie and cheat and betray, they are treacherous and crafty, and they will do anything it takes to get what they want. They lure the heroes into traps and force the good guys to fight on their terms.

The heroes need to be aware of the evil of the villain they are facing. This can be achieved by establishing a reputation for the villain and planting seeds in the heroes' minds from the beginning when they first set off to defeat him, or it can be achieved gradually so that as they heroes pursue their enemy, they see more and more evidence of his villainy, and their hatred builds. Of course there is no reason why a GM can't do both. Warnings and threats can work well, as can having the villain strike near to the characters. As the Green Goblin says in *Spiderman* "The cunning warrior attacks neither body nor mind . . . first you attack his heart." Striking at those close to the heroes to shake their determination will be proof to most

players that your villain is truly despicable.

Oh My God, Do You Remember . . .

So let's recap what can help create a memorable villain your players will be talking about for years to come:

1. Give them a look: This helps players visualize the enemy, makes them unique, and might even be important to why they are a villain.
2. Give them emotions: A villain with realistic emotions will seem more real, and could also play into their motives.
3. Give them specific motives: All characters want something, and it's not likely to just be killing or just be world domination, so why should villains be any different?
4. Give them justification: A villain's actions should always be justified *to the villain*. If they didn't believe in what they were doing, they wouldn't be doing it.

5. Give them a reputation: Either before the PC's start the hunt, or while it is in progress, start giving the villain a reputation for evil the heroes need to want to bring him down.

6. Give them the capacity for evil: The more evil you can make him, the more your heroes will want to defeat him, so let him be as bad as he can (and still remain in character).

Keeping these guidelines in mind all that is left is to go out there and start coming up with adventures for the gallant heroes, centered on the vile deeds of the most loathsome of enemies: whatever comes from that twisted GM's mind of yours. Happy scheming to you, and watch out for the Fiendish Iranian Commie-Nazi Zombie Ninja-Pirates with Goatees and Awesome Scars. That is some kind of evil.

~Seraphine_Harmonium aka Aaron J. Fagan



THE CAMPAIGN BUILDERS' DIARY

- Part Three -

by Ishmayl (admin@thecbg.org)

Welcome, welcome, gentle readers! We've had a major announcement in the role-playing community since the last issue – namely, that of Dungeons and Dragons 4th Edition coming out in the near future – but luckily, it has absolutely nothing to do with building campaign settings, and cannot derail us from our path. We are unstoppable! What I mean by this is, the Campaign Builders Diary will be (and hopefully, has been) talking about the aspects of building campaigns that are independent of whatever system you are using, so it will make no difference to us what edition or even what RPG system you are using.

Last issue, we went into a bit of detail on three items. First, we discussed the definitions of – as well as the pros and cons of – building a campaign from the outside-in, or from the inside-out. Next, we discussed two very important rules of Campaign Building, which I feel I must reinforce here:

- 1 - Never force yourself to create more than you must.**
- 2 - With every new area you create in your campaign, always create at least one secret related to the area.**

Finally, we went into a bit of detail on

determining headquarters (HQ) for your campaign. I went over the Large City, the Fortress or Stronghold, and the Small Town or Village templates that can be used for building desirable HQs. In the discussions we have had at the Campaign Builders' Guild, it was brought up that I left out a very important HQ template. Namely, the Small City. snakefing, one of the dedicated members of the site, wrote up an excellent addendum which I will be placing here. Call it our first errata, if you must!

Small city – The small city (2,500 – 10,000 inhabitants) is a place of lesser importance than the Really Important Cities, but to they locals it is the main center of culture and commerce. In a medieval-ish setting, *any* city is important, or it wouldn't be there. Typically such cities are located in the interior of the nation, within well-settled (or at least well-protected) lands.

Typically such a place is situated in a geographically important place, such as a river port, natural harbor, ford, bridge, valley mouth, or major cross-roads. It serves as the trade center for a large region, where the local ore, timber, and/or agricultural goods are brought and traded for manufactured goods and luxuries from the Really Important Cities. The city will be ruled by a lesser noble, whose primary goal will be to Keep the Goods Moving. To this end, he'll probably have a small force of soldiers or constables to help patrol the roads and keep the peace.

A city like this is a somewhat unusual HQ. Since it is not on a border or near unsettled territory, certain types of adventure hooks might be harder to come by. And since it is a bit of a backwater, it won't attract all the wealth and variety that a larger city might. But it can be ideal for a lower-level campaign that is primarily political or urban.

Small cities will have their own politics - petty by outside standards, perhaps, but still

important to the locals. There are enough resources present to make things interesting, but without the higher level NPC's that might otherwise dominate the scene. The characters can easily start out as the Talented Newcomers, and through the course of a few adventures become Locally Famous Heroes.

What's more, there is less work involved in creating a smaller city. Fewer major NPC's, guilds, criminal gangs, and temples means fewer maps and stats to work out. At first, you'll just need to know what the city's major trade goods and trade routes are. As characters move up in notoriety, they may want to eventually move their HQ to a more exciting place, but it can be a good place to start a career.

In future potential publications of this series, what will be inserted back into Chapter Two.

There is one last thing before we get started. A few questions have come up about the naming conventions that will be used for the campaign we are building. You'll have noticed by now (hopefully!) that I have been careful not to include many names. The reason is that names can be extremely important in a campaign, and while they very rarely “make or break” the campaign, they can cause issues. Consistency is very important in creating names, as well as having some sort of realism involved. Because names are more important than just randomly selecting off a web site, I will be devoting another article in the future to naming conventions, especially related to the campaign we're building. It will most likely be a side-bar article, but we will at that time determine definite names for our nations, NPC's, and geological features.

Okay, on to the fun stuff!

While we set up in the last article what kind of HQ we will be using, we have yet to detail it in any way. We know that the HQ is a stronghold

which is the last outpost our feudalistic nation has before encountering a stretch of land known as the Barrens. We also know that the second son of the king of this region is residing in this stronghold, and occasionally sponsors various sporting events.

Obviously we need a bit more than that to really get things moving. We will discuss three very important aspects of the home base that will have direct impact on adventuring, and then will talk about several other items that are worth thinking about. The three things we'll talk about are **local government, rumor mill, and interesting NPCs.**

Government at the Local Level

Of utmost importance is the government. Last issue, we talked about the distinction between “local government” and “national government.” The local government is what we're going to work on right now.

One common option for a local government is a **constable**. Constables tend to have some military background, and are generally appointed by the region's ruler to tend to the oh-so-important duties of “upholding the peace.”

This is pretty broad and can mean a number of things, but most likely, he has some sort of control over any military that resides there, as well as authority over merchants, travelers, peddlers, etc in the area. Most often, in this situation, there would not be a full-blown court that handles judicial situations – rather, the constable and his advisor would most likely make judgments on their own, with severe crimes warranting death (or at least public humiliation), and less severe crimes placing the perpetrator in the keep prison for a few nights.

In extremely serious situations, such as treason or assassination attempts, the criminal would be held under guard until the magistrates of the regional government could come take care of the situation.

Constables are going to have very little input on the economics of an area. Other than stopping illegal activities and malicious trading, the economics of this particular government will more often be controlled by a merchant class.

What this means, basically, is that the merchants and traders will trade their wares in a location if it is safe and profitable for them to do so. If it is dangerous, or they can't make any money, they will simply go elsewhere. It is up to the constable to make sure the merchants can successfully trade, and then it's up to him to stay out of their business!

Another suitable local government for HQs and home bases is that of the **elected official**. Now, in our case, the stronghold has too much importance for the local monarch to risk the silly, stupid, common folk (*his words, not mine!*) voting some mayor into office who may not submit dutifully to His Majestic authority.

However, there are plenty of outpost situations that could make use of an elected official.

Most often, the official would have very little control over any sort of military actions in the area. In this kind of situation, there would probably be a small police-type force, separate from the actual military, which would either report directly to the official, or would report to a sheriff of some sort, who would in turn report to the official. In the meantime, the mayor would keep tabs on the local populace, and make sure nothing illegal was happening beneath him. In criminal cases, he would most likely send the culprit(s) to the nearest city or town with an official magistrate, unless the crime was something small.

Next on the list is the **High Authority**. The regional leader would promote someone of importance to watch over things, both economically and militarily. This noble would probably have final say in just about any eventuality, and would have the full backing of the king. There is a good chance that just his presence would be enough to bring people from

all over the region to live and work in the stronghold. One reason could be charisma (maybe he's just a sexy, sexy man), but the more likely reason is security. Most people are going to realize that if the noble is important enough, then he (and the stronghold) will have the full financial and military backing of the kingdom, should any problems arise.

Since I've already decided that one of the king's sons resides here, it seems that the third option, that of High Authority, will suit us best.

Because this son is important, a small "court" of sorts has sprung up in the area, including minor nobility and successful traders and merchants. This in turn has brought about a relatively cosmopolitan array of service industries in the area to meet the needs of these nobles. In addition, I'm going to place a small iron mine due north of the stronghold, about a half day's travel through the Barrens. This essentially gives us two economies at the stronghold – the iron mine near the town employs many of the civilians, and the rest are employed in service industries catering to the whims of the nobles in the area – as well as an extremely High Authority, who has a small, professional standing army that is funded through the capital. Plus, since the prince sponsors regular hunting events out into the Barrens, there is a regular steady traffic of warriors, adventurers, hunters, and others of their ilk all throughout the area. Yes, we're looking at a pretty important area here.

However, if nothing of interest is going on in the area, it doesn't matter how important it is – it will still be *boring*.

The Rumor Mill

Adventures are the cornerstone of most role playing games, and finding good adventures to go on can sometimes be a hassle without the proper information. Some people disagree on this subject, but I'm a firm advocate of the belief that your HQ should include at least one

rumor mill. A **rumor mill** is just exactly what it sounds like – it's a place where players can get up-to-date information on the happenings in the area, as well as potentially meet new allies and informants. It's the kind of place where characters can hang out in between adventures if they don't know what to do next, and they can expect plot hooks to start coming their way.

Of course, no campaign should use the rumor mill as the *only* source of adventures and quests, but it is a good place to start sometimes.

Rumor mills don't have to be (and really *should not* be) the fantasy version of tabloid papers or blogs. They don't have to be sitting in the middle of every town or base with a bunch of “Help me Find my Baby” quests tacked to them. Rumor mills can look like anything.

Ever heard of “The Prancing Pony?” Local taverns make an excellent source for rumors.

They're where the common folks sit down at the end of the day to unwind, talk, and gossip about the weird things they've seen throughout the week. Local marketplaces also make for excellent sources of information. Merchants, traders, commoners, nobles, little playing kids... the list of the people one can find at a marketplace is endless, and all of those people most likely have something to say – whether or not it is interesting is a different story. A local “adventurer's guild” of some sort may be a great option. If your HQ is known for having many famous (or infamous) adventurers, nobles, royals, et cetera in the area, there may be some sort of “members only” club where they meet while in town. If the HQ is large enough, a library makes for a great rumor mill.

Libraries can give characters background information on events, and are usually filled to the brim with people “in the know.” Heck, if your campaign calls for it, you could even make the rumor mill a public bath house. Men (and women) love to talk while they're steaming away in big copper tubs, if for no other reason than to take away the uncomfortableness of being around a bunch of other people bathing.

There is also nothing to say that you can only use just one rumor mill. Chances are, characters will hear much different gossip in two different locations – a public bath house run by a local syndicate that is infamous as a meeting place for those who wish their business to remain on the down-low will obviously give very different kinds of plot hooks than a rowdy pub where off-duty soldiers, guards, merchants, and others gather to drink cheap ale and boast of the latest amazing sight they saw on the way into town.

The characters should have to work for the information. They shouldn't just walk into the local tavern and someone immediately runs up to them with, "My husband's been kidnapped by bandits, please HELP!" It's a little unbelievable, and a little annoying. Make the characters use those "gather information" checks they have dutifully maxed out. And keep in mind, there should always be options available. They may hear of a missing child in the village over, and at the same time, may hear about weird, moving shadows being reported out at a local farm house. Give the characters options, and make them decide. Maybe when they're done with one hook, they'll immediately check up on the other one to see how things ended.

For our stronghold, I'm thinking we only need one major rumor mill (though we may add another at a later time, when the characters have advanced a bit). Because of the tavern being so common and standard, I'm going to go with something a bit different. The "adventurer's guild" idea up above sparked something in me, and I'm going to follow the light. I'm seeing a club (not members-only, else the characters may not get in) that is focused on the weekly hunting trips the prince takes out into the Barrens. I think a pretty informal name, one related to comfort, is the way to go. I'm going to call it, "The Bear

Lodge." It will have this name for two reasons, one of which we will discuss here, and other which we will save for next issue. Out in the Barrens, one of the most common and sought-after game is the great spiny bear, a large creature with tough, bony protrusions coming from his back, along his spine, as well as the top of his head, resembling horns. This bear is known to be extremely aggressive, and has been known to hunt humans. The prince makes sport of hunting this bear, and has set up a bit of this pub-style club where fellow hunters can talk and trade stories.

The Bear Lodge is on the outskirts of our HQ, sitting up against the tall, stone walls of the stronghold. It is built of stone and wood, and has tall, glass windows. The massive oak door has delicate carvings of hunters and spiny bears all across. There are always guards stationed at the door. Inside is a cozy, sprawling room, fit with massive stone fireplaces, large chandeliers and candelabras, and long, round tables. The north end has a wall-length bar, polished to a fine shine, and the west wall has a large stage, where various musical acts play. There are several locked doors on the east wall that lead to very expensive rooms. At any time during the week, there are between ten and twenty people in the Lodge, telling tales, drinking, or organizing their own hunting trips. During the restful days at the ends of the week, there are often close to a hundred adventurers socializing here, all looking for a chance to get their name on the silver-embroidered plaque up on the wall.

Keeping in mind the second rule of campaign building, we need a secret, and I know just what it is. A long-time conspirator against the prince has been using the Lodge recently to discuss several shady dealings he is a part of.

In particular, this man is the only contact in the stronghold to a clan of creatures who reside in the Barrens, and he has recently been part of a very small, but swiftly-growing underground slave trade.

Interesting and Original NPCs

NPCs (non player characters) can be the highlight or the lowlight of a campaign. Part of what can make campaigns and adventures fun for the players is opportunity to reside with, fight alongside with, and interact with the multitude of non player characters you create.

No home base or HQ can take on a life of its own until the people living there have a life of their own. Obviously, you won't detail every single person living in the HQ, but there are certainly notable people – those who the characters are very likely to talk to – who deserve some good detail and attention. You can come up with as many as you like, but keep in mind the first rule of campaign building, and don't stretch yourself too thin. It is much more important to have good ideas for three or four NPCs than ten mediocre ideas which will be unremarkable to the characters. There will always be plenty of opportunity to add more later.

When designing your NPCs, you need to keep two things in mind – and these are the two things your players will most likely remember.

You need to physically describe the NPC (what does he look like?, how does he dress?, what kinds of facial expressions does he make?), and you need to give them memorable personalities and emotions.

There are literally tons of good physical characteristics you can give your NPCs that will make them stand out as “real people.” You can use weird facial expressions, oddly-colored clothing, or abnormally sized appendages to describe physicality, and that's just to name a few. They don't all have to have a large scar across their eye, and they don't all have to be fat, sweaty bartenders. A local merchant who has a very large nose is much more realistic, and a lady warrior from The Bear Lodge with dyed, bright red hair is going to leave a certain impression. You'll see what I mean when the players start saying, “Hey what did hatchet

nose say about this tablet again?” or, “Who was Brianna, you know - that flame-headed lady - saying we should search for?” Sure, scars on faces are memorable, but not everyone is going to have one. Clothing is a very distinguishable feature as well. If a particular man always comes into the tavern every night wearing a “faded blue cloak with silver, runic etchings along the back,” then there's a good chance the players (and in turn, the *characters!*) are going to remember that fact. However, if you never bother describing these people, then faces, names, and personalities will all run together, and you will constantly be hearing, “Let's go talk to that one dude at the Lodge who gave us that one quest. You know, *the one?*”

Memorable personalities can be a bit more challenging than physicality. By personality, I mean the way the NPC talks and acts. An important thing to do is to *break* the stereotypes. Not every town guard needs to talk with a gravelly, Scottish accent, and not every devilish rogue needs to talk with a soft, silky whisper. Not every bartender needs to constantly be wiping his fat, greasy hands on his apron, and not every lady warrior needs to have an overbearing feminazi attitude towards men. How about a thing, clean-cut, well-educated tavern owner who can get up on stage and sing with the local bards? Or a small, scrawny guard who is such an expert with his quarterstaff that other guards give him wide birth? How about a rogue who talks in a loud, bolstering voice that can be heard six tables over and wears muttonchop sideburns? Or a lithe, beautiful warrioress who actually flirts back? Of course, not all stereotypes always have to be broken. Sometimes, a particular cliché works well, and doesn't need to be completely abandoned, but it should probably at least be modified.

I've decided that we'll start with two very important NPCs, both of which can regularly be found at The Bear Lodge.

The first is a gnomish carpenter who always sits in the far back corner, right next to the bar.

When he is approached, he is usually either drunk, or on the verge of being drunk. Those who have seen him coming into or leaving the Lodge have noticed that he walks with a very discernible limp, and holds his left arm at an awkward angle. He is often surly, but for those who are paying, he will loosen up and tell his tale. Apparently, twenty years ago, he and six other gnomes went on a hunting expedition to the Barrens. After two weeks of seeing nothing, one night, their party was attacked by an unusually large spiny bear. The spiny bear made short work of the unprepared group, and only this drunk, bitter gnome lived to make it back to the stronghold. To this day, he watches as hunters bring back their trophies, hoping that *his bear* (which he has named Ripclaw) is caught and killed for its crimes. When he is very drunk, he is known to stand up on his table and shout aloud an invitation to all the hunters gathered to join him and hunt down Ripclaw.

The second NPC is one of the door guards. All of the door guards for the Lodge are elite soldiers – they have to be, since the prince often stops in. Of all the Lodge guards however, none is as infamous as one short, squat man who stands watch during the evening hours. He is known as The Hook, most likely for the large, serrated gaff hook he keeps at his belt. The Lodge guards are known not to be very amicable, but The Hook seems to have a very murky history and reputation. If rumors are to be believed, he was once the lover of an elven queen, but for reasons unknown, was forced to flee the fey country he resided in. He appeared at the stronghold seven years ago and immediately became recognized as an absolutely ferocious warrior. It is rumored that the prince himself hook the man aside and offered him the job at the Lodge. Few, if any, have ever seen him smile or laugh, and not many can claim to have actually heard his voice, except in one of the rare occasions where he has had to break up a fight or arrest a

criminal.

These two NPCs give me a good start for some adventure ideas. For instance, the gnome may very well offer the characters their first quest – perhaps a hunting expedition, or something of the like. The guard, on the other hand, provides a background for some things that can be explored further in the future. However, he has a bit more importance than that, but I feel the need to hide that secret until a later issue.

Well, that should wrap things up for this issue.

We have the beginnings of a very interesting HQ, and we're starting to get plenty of secrets and potential plot hooks lined up to take PCs on adventures. As a side note, it is becoming extremely hard to write about this stuff without having names to use. That is why, in the next issue, we will be working on some naming conventions, and we will name everything and everyone we have described up to this point.

Now, because I don't want to fill an entire Campaign Builders Diary article with naming conventions, so I will probably need a side article to accompany the next issue. I will take requests if someone thinks they have a good naming article in mind, or I may end up writing it myself. We'll see.

With that, it's on to homework! *WooHoo!* Try to think about these items and be prepared for next article. Since we talked about three pretty specific things, then that's what your assignment will be.

1 – The Local Government. Try to determine what sort of local government is going to best fit your campaign area. Do you think a sheriff-style constable will be the way to go? Maybe an elected official such as a mayor will do fine for your village HQ. Come up with a few different ideas, and list the pros and cons of using them, and try to go ahead and settle on one.

2 – The Rumor Mill. It's time to come up with

a rumor mill. Go through all the options I outlined above, as well as any others you can come up with. Determine if you only need one rumor mill, or if you may need two or three.

Figure out what the actual function of your rumor mill should be, and make it a place where the characters will actually want to frequent.

3 – A Few NPCs. Come up with at least two rough sketches for important, notable NPCs in the area. You can always come up with more, but try for at least two. One of them should be someone that your PCs can immediately come in contact with and talk to if they so desire.

That's it for now. Come back next issue when we name all our people and places, work on the local economy and common class, and start crafting our first map. Good luck!

-Ish

PS – For those of you interested, there is a thread at the Campaign Builders' Guild for discussion on these articles. The first post will also be updated with information on our campaign in development. Here is the thread: http://thecbg.org/e107_plugins/forum/forum_viewtopic.php?33507

About the Author

Ishmayl builds campaign settings for fun. He's been known to just leave his job in the middle of a work day, muttering under his breath something about “timelines, plots, and believable villains.” We don't recommend you follow the same path.



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