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OVEREDITOR
Epidiah Ravachol

EDITOR
Jason Keeley

PROOFREADER
Brianna Sheldon

LAYOUT
Epidiah Ravachol

COVER
Epidiah Ravachol

VIZIERS
*Meguey Baker, Vincent Baker,
Emily Care Boss, Ed Heil, Gregor Hutton,
Jason Keeley & Joshua A.C. Newman*

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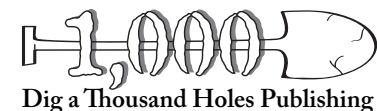
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Dig a Thousand Holes Publishing

WOLVES AT THE FORGE

Like the winter, the second issue is now upon us, which portends a glorious fate for *Worlds Without Master*. Here again you may behold not just lavishly illustrated fiction, but another comic, another game, and another miscellany. The ranks of the Patron Horde have swelled to be able to demand such tribute. And such tribute they shall receive!

There is, however, a geometric temptation to extrapolate a straight line from any two points, and we should be wary. Now is a time of wandering. We are as wolves in the winter, seeking our prey where we may find it. We are strong and undeterred by the cold, but we still have many long, dark nights between us and the bounty that follows the thaw.

Much of the future of *Worlds Without Master* is yet to be forged. There is ample opportunity for you to apply your own sure hammer strikes to its form.

Consider the Realms policy found at the end of this issue. Then consider that the miscellanies in both this issue and the last belong to the Free & Chaotic Realms. Roll upon those tables. Are the results not unlike sparks from a hot iron? Do they ignite a tale, a game, an illustration, a comic, or even another miscellany within you? Strike now and you may shape the destiny of *Worlds Without Master*.

Your Companion,
Epidiah Ravachol
Epidiah Ravachol



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ONE WINTER'S DUE

A tale by Epidiah Ravachol

Illustrated by Rachel Kahn

Steam still rose from Ondir's crimson throat when his wife awoke next to his cooling body. No one doubted that it was Baethorn who stole into the lodge, settled a debt, and fled into the sleet-haunted night. It was the latest exchange in a century-long feud.

Many, however, marveled at Baethorn's courage. Slaying a man in his sleep was no honorable deed. Nor was killing him while his wife slept beside him. Nor dripping his blood on his children where they slept, nestled in sheepskins by his hearth. But to slay Ondir—whose raven-haired sisters, Vanya and Ondrea, were known to have traveled beyond the very boundaries of the world and there vanquished foul and abhorrent beasts of legend—was an act of frightful bravery.

Ondir's wife did not scream. She crept over his body to her children where she woke their eldest, with a hand over his mouth. This was his eleventh winter and it would not be kind to him. His father's blood fresh on his forehead, he helped his mother wrap the corpse and carry it into the root cellar so that his siblings did not have to see it. There would be time enough for weeping later.

A storm of snow and ice that battered the farmstead hid well Baethorn and his party's tracks. And the caution with which Ondir's wife and his eldest hid the body from the rest of the children gave the slayers lead enough. For now, nothing could be done but to appease the restless spirit of Ondir with the appointed wailing.

It was Ondir's wife who—not wishing to doom her sons and daughter to a continued fate of

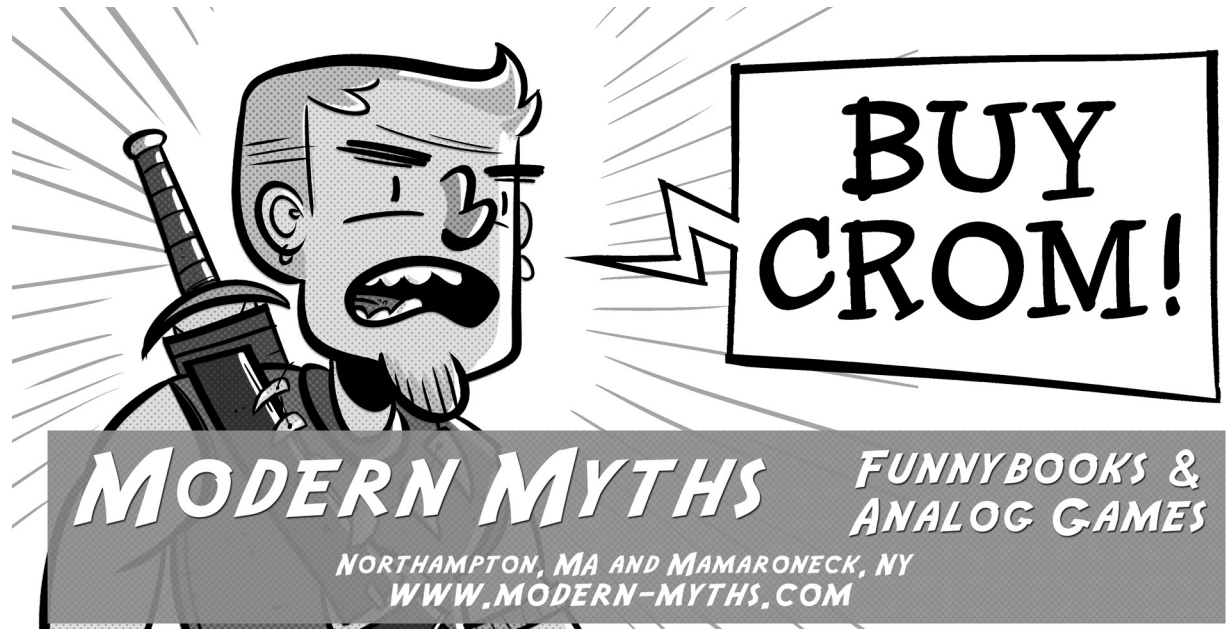


cyclical, bloody vengeance—called upon Vanya the following night and there, in the chill air and dancing light of seven mourn-fires, made her swear that Baethorn would not perish from his newly acquired blood debt. It was not an oath Vanya took to easily, and for a while, even the professional mourners could not be heard above the shouting women. But Vanya abated when Ondir's wife, who was not unpracticed as a storyteller, told a true tale of the destiny of Vanya's beloved niece and nephews with the horrid debt collected back and forth between grim families for another generation.

It was Ondir's eldest who—not wishing to doom his brothers and sister to a fate of shame and unquenched vengeance—called upon Ondrea the day after the mourn-fires were allowed to extinguish and there, where ashes mixed with snow on the wind, made her swear that Baethorn would not live to see the moon wax again. It was an oath that Ondrea did not take to lightly. But when Ondir's eldest made clear his intentions to seek retribution regardless, Ondrea acquiesced.

Thus the sisters found themselves, as they had many times before, at oath-odds. Being of an age too weary to take each other to the sword for it, they decided a cleverer solution should be sought. So they gathered their skis along with their sword-companions Awlani Half-Mountain and Bluetuck, and took Ondir's eldest to seek the old man in the pines.

The five left when the farmstead was still in the long, blue shadows of dawn. By noon, nearly blinded by a half-day of sun reflected on the featureless snow, they came upon a line of trees that wended its withered way along the south face of Granstooth. There, high in a fallow pine, clothed in crude hides



and sap-stuck needles, the old man spit at them, enraging Ondir's eldest who was not prepared for such indignities. This, in turn, delighted the old man and Awlani Half-Mountain, whose laughter only served to infuriate Ondir's eldest even further.

Ondrea, both impatient and sympathetic to her nephew, bounded out of her skis and up the tree. In a prodigious and unexpected leap, the old man traced an arcing shower of brown needles across the sky and landed in another pine nearly twenty feet up the mountain, startling two ravens to flight.

The spectacle swapped the rage of Ondir's eldest with awe and redoubled Awlani Half-Mountain's mirth.

The sisters were hunting now. So while Half-Mountain laughed, Ondrea held the old man's attention by slinging curses upon him, his pines, and his tree-littered beard. Fleet Vanya and wiry

Bluetuck quietly prowled upwards through the snow, until they found themselves wide of the old man's tree and a fair way above it. With a rope strung between them, they skied down the slope. Bluetuck cut first to a snowy halt short of the tree. The old man ceased his laughter, but before he could gather his senses Vanya carved hard around his pine, whipping the rope high and across his chest. As her momentum shot her back up the hill, the rope pinned the old man to the pine.

The old man began cursing now as Ondrea, ax in hand, jumped down from her tree and trudged up to his pine. It was known that, above all else, the old man loathed to touch the ground. His curses became shrill with the first thwack of the ax against the soft wood. They then became dark with the second, and oathful after the third.

And so another oath was extracted to circumvent the first two that brought them to the pines. The old

man was crafty and knew of secret places where the sisters might find a thorny path to the satisfaction of both their oaths. He promised to lead them there on the condition that Ondir's eldest lay a trail of pine boughs before him the whole way.

By twilight, their wanderings brought them to a cobalt-blue hot spring hidden by icy rock and lush evergreens. The steamy waters were of such a deep color that they almost radiated into the growing night.

The old man pointed to a large, ice-covered stone that stood before the spring. He commanded that Ondir's eldest shatter the stone's frozen shell. The boy—exhausted from the journey he had made

several times over in the work of retrieving and replacing boughs for the old man—could only chip at it. Impatiently, Ondrea turned the flat of her ax to it and cleared the stone in two swift strikes. Beneath the ice, the stone was deeply grooved with thick, unfamiliar geometric patterns.

The old man bid them to stand their swords in the snowy mound before stone, but to be warned that they had only until their weapons fell to satisfy the oaths and return to the spring. So the sisters half buried their blades of dark, aurora-shimmering steel in the snow, and the others followed, with Ondrea aiding the fatigued boy.

Awlani Half-Mountain leaned over the old man and warned him to leave the swords unmolested. Swearing his second oath of the day, the old man promised that he would have nothing to do with them. Now they were to undress and plunge into the spring. So they bundled their skins and gear in their furs and buried the lot in the snow beneath a nearby tree, careful to rake out their tracks with pine branches.

Naked in the freezing wind, standing on the edge of that blue pool was the first time Bluetuck objected. He called their attention to the weathered bodies of all but Ondir's eldest and to the scars across Vanya's face, born from battles with things wrought by weird sorceries. He did not know how to untie the oath-knot before them, but he knew well the horrors that hid within strange wonders. He would plunge with them if they went, but this was the precipice, their moment to turn back.

Vanya, oldest amongst them save for the ageless old man, was also tired. But she had not yet learned to turn her back and saw no way through but through, and said as much as she slipped her travel-weary body into the warm waters. The others followed.

Embraced by heat, Vanya's flesh prickled at first, but quickly soothed. It was as if she melted as she submerged, losing the skin as boundary between her and the pool. She expanded, radiated into the blue as a liquid light. Each physical bit of her floating off in painless, limpid streams. And then, when she felt she was no more, her mind began to slough off and her thoughts turned the same endless shade of blue.

Deep within the echoes of her waning consciousness, a singular instinct held its ground. A self-preservation that had served her so well in



the face of so many distant perils. A beacon of fiery red panic and rage, lighting the way for the rest of her to find its way back home. A feral beast that tore her from the eternal blue, and reminded her of the ceaseless pounding of her own heart.

She was drowning.

Pushing against the water with all four limbs, she shot to the surface, and broke into a bright night, alive with new sounds and crisp scents.

The pack emerged from the spring and shook their coats dry. Steam and a new musk rose from their fur. The world came into them by alien pathways—strange and distant sounds, keen scents, awareness and recognition at once bosom companions. Without looking, they knew the deer that chased through the forest miles south, the bear that had passed this way days before, the pair of ravens that circled overhead, the old man hiding in the pines, and his fear.

There was a jubilant energy writhing beneath their fur. The pack trotted out into the twilight snow and circled each other.

Wolves, to a one.

Bluetuck, dark and gray; Awlani Half-Mountain the largest, sinking further into the snow than the others; Ondrea white as the moon; Vanya's snout crisscrossed with pink scars; and Ondir's eldest yet a pup.

There in the stillness of the night, each felt their wolfhearts pounding in their chest, tasted the scents of prey and companions on the air, heard the living sounds that carried on the icy wind, and saw now the way between the oaths.

Baethorn could die by fang and claw, a natural death that would break forever the chain of blood debt owed between the two families.

Ondrea felt laughter well up within her and explode in an exuberant howl. The pup skittered off, hopped, and twisted in the air to face the others, landing with his head low and haunches high. Awlani barked and set to chasing him. Then the whole pack was at play, nipping, charging, wrestling and yelping.

Eventually, they bounded off for Ondir's farmstead, leaving the old man in the pines to find his own way to flee this unnatural site without touching foot to ground. When all was still by the spring, the two ravens alit upon the crossbars of two swords, causing them to shift in the snow.

At dawn, when the wolves came within sight of the farmstead, a scent drew their attention. South, miles south, there was a fire in the forest. A small one. One not meant to be seen, but to cook by and perhaps to find some warmth on a winter morn.

Vanya changed their course, and the pack loped south. But the scents unlocked memories of fuller stomachs and soon the pack began to lag behind her, taking time to test the air for any sign of prey. With a nod to Ondrea, whose white coat was growing rosier with the rising sun, the sisters circled back, snapping at the rest and driving their minds back to the oaths.

South they went, breaking through drifts of snow as the sun shrunk away the morning shade. The crepuscular sharpness fading from their minds, none noted they were being hunted from above. From out of the north, where the beasts grow in

proportion to trolls and giants, an ancient and massive owl swept across the plain, ever careful to keep its mountainous shadow far to the west of the pack.

They had not rested since setting out on their skis the day before, and Ondir's eldest, unpracticed as he was at such adventures, began to lag. Twice Bluetuck fell back to nudge him forward, ever mindful of the deadline the old man in the pines had given them. When he turned a third time to encourage the pup, he witnessed the magnificent stoop of the owl, almost mistaking it for a coming storm.

Silently, gnarled claws snatched the pup from the snow with eerie grace. Giant wings beat against the terrifying inertia, attempting to lift bird and prey back aloft. Bluetuck leapt and caught the owl's shoulder in his snarling jaws. The others turned and were blind in the snow raised by the beating wings.

Following her nose and the whimpers of Ondir's eldest, ivory-furred Ondrea bolted through the snow to seize one of the owl's legs. All was white and red, and the owl swiftly made a decision it rarely had to make—this prey was not worth it. It screeched, released the pup, and took to the air as best it could with Bluetuck and Ondrea still latched on.

Bluetuck's grip on the wing was made slick by blood and he was quickly shaken loose, but Ondrea had to be slammed into a nearby tree before she fell.

Drizzling blood across the snow, the owl rose higher and higher into the blue north.



Having not fallen far, Bluetuck was reeling, but uninjured. However, the owl's grip had broken several of the pup's ribs and Ondrea was limping badly. Catching Vanya's eyes, Bluetuck cast his head several times over his shoulder, indicating the way back to the hot spring and their swords. Vanya growled and turned away from his stare.

The pack sought shelter in a copse to ward against the owl's return. Soon, Awlani Half-Mountain and Bluetuck cautiously ranged out in search of prey. Vanya remained behind with her kin, grooming them, licking clean their wounds. By sundown, Half-Mountain had slain a deer, they had filled their bellies, and the pack set out again under the waning crescent of the moon.

They moved slower now, but no less sure. Ahead of them, the rich smell of a campfire drew them through the night until the pack crept up on three figures on a hillock huddled about a small fire and shivering in their furs.

It was their prey: young Baethorn, who had seen perhaps three more winters than Ondir's eldest; his uncle, a rover of many years; and his cousin, only a few years older than Baethorn himself.

The wolves crouched in the darkness. Vanya could smell more men in the woods. Three of them. Keeping watch perhaps. As she observed Baethorn's uncle in the firelight leaning on his spear, a sensation gripped her heart. This was no natural way to be, to plunge into the den of men such as these with nothing to be gained. Her belly was full, was it not? Why risk that spiteful spear? Why not pass on into the darkness and live to worry hares and run down deer? This was madness.

The weight of the blood debt seized the pup beside her, and he shot out, snarling towards the campfire.

No!

Vanya caught the back of the pup's neck in her jaw, but before she could wrestle him to the ground, Ondrea dragged her off him. Frantically, the sisters fought each other in the snow. Ondrea striving to join her nephew's charge and Vanya struggling to drag her pack safely from danger. Awlani Half-Mountain and Bluetuck snapped at the fray, trying to separate the sisters, but received claw and slavering jaw in return.

Then came the yelp from atop the hillock.

Silhouetted in an amber glow, Baethorn's uncle hunched over the spear he had just driven into the pup. The keen wolf ears heard the gurgle in the pup's throat, his last half-growl ended in a sickening whimper as Baethorn's uncle gave the spear a twisting thrust.

The pack was still.

Baethorn's uncle drew a knife from his belt and knelt by pup. Men came running and shouting to the fire. The pack fled into the darkness.

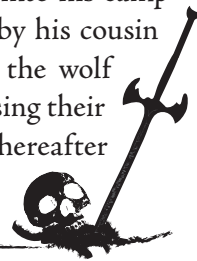
Safe in the bosom of the woods, Awlani Half-Mountain slumped to the ground, Bluetuck began pacing, and the sisters faced each other. There in silence it was agreed. Each damned the other.

And so Ondrea turned from her sister and limped back the way they had come. Bluetuck chased back and forth between the sisters until Vanya snapped at him.

Awlani began a mournful howl, Bluetuck and Vanya joined in chorus, and Ondrea's white fur melted into the night.

In the darkest of that winter, Ondir's wife lit twenty-one more mourn fires for her son and sisters-in-law who never returned. Come the thaw, in a place held secret by the old man in the pines, five swords wallowed in the blossoming understory before a stone deeply grooved with thick, unfamiliar geometric patterns.

It was thereafter known that Baethorn, slayer of Ondir, had died when a ghost wolf, white as the moon, flashed from the darkness into his camp and tore his throat, as witnessed by his cousin and his uncle, who in turn slew the wolf and made a mantle of its hide, cursing their family and their livestock to be thereafter haunted by three strange wolves.



HISTORIA IMPERIO—PART I

A tale by Keith Senkowski

Illustrated by Delfino Falciani

Map by Keith Senkowski

FORWARD

In the year of our Lord 1204, the eight hundred and eighty-seventh year of this, the Third Era, my father, Don Jerónimo Sánchez de Carranza died at the siege of Cidiero. He was a renowned soldier, famed for his swordsmanship, his keen intellect, and for capturing the heart of Maria de Falkia, daughter of Felipe el Aumentador and most importantly to you, my mother. He was the very figure from which all other men were measured and he died gloriously for his God, for his Lord, and for his family. Yet, that legacy, for which he is most well-known is not why you hold this manuscript in your hands.

On the 57th anniversary of my birth, I was fortunate enough to be counted among those who regained what was lost with my father's death, the most holy city of Cidiero, ushering in a new age of peace in the

Empire. Amongst the wreckage and ruin that was my family's ancient estate, which dated to the time of Luis Argyros de Carranza, who founded our line while serving the Empire with distinction in the wars to eradicate the Pablician heresy, I found what you hold currently within your hands, my father's true legacy.

My mother has told me that swordsmanship, soldiery, and statesmanship were never the true calling of Don Jerónimo. Rather his love of scholarship, second only to his love of my blessed mother, and the works that sprang from that love, were what made his soul sing. These incomplete, burnt, and tattered manuscripts outlining the very history of this, the Third Era, is what he wished the world to remember him for. Where there are gaps, I have sought to fill them in my own meager way, and little justice do I do my sire, but taken with



his writing, maps and illustrations, I can only hope to have filled his soul, be it in heaven or hell, with some measure of pride.

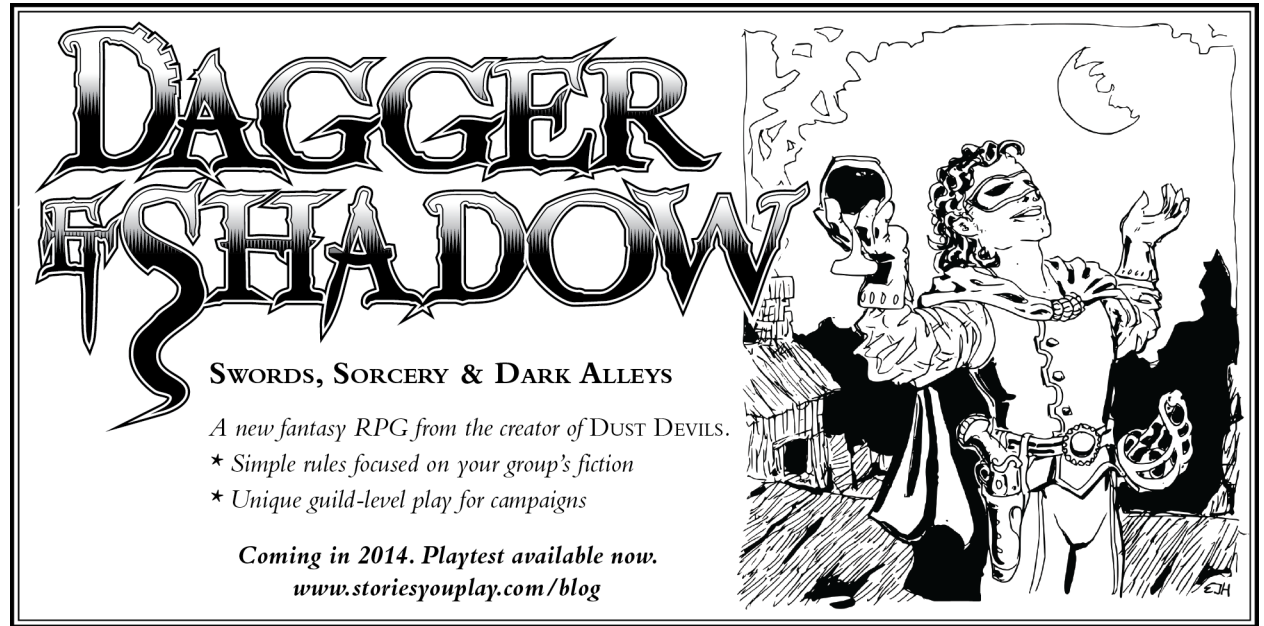
—Don Felipe Jerónimo de Carranza

PREFACE

I know not if the task I have undertaken to mark the history of this Era from the founding of the Empire will reward me in any way for the work I have done, and neither do I care. What I do here, what I invest my labor in, is of greater importance than any vindication or praise I might receive. Moreover, the subject is one that demands a seriousness of intent as it goes back 1,200 years, from the gestation of a singular idea to an immense tapestry of different ideas, both virtuous and damned.

I have very little doubt that for the majority of my readers the earliest days of foundation will possess little worthy of attention and they will hurry forward to these modern days so that they might glean some meaning concerning our current state. I pray that they will come to understand that a modern state of being only shows its true value through the lens of its evolution through time.

The traditions of what happened prior to the accession of the Campeador or the founding of his great city are more fitted to pour like honey from the lips of poets and playwrights than live within the records of this history. The lives and doings of that earlier age are at best difficult to unravel, and at worst incomprehensible. This much I will say about our forebears, their mingling of the divine with the actions of us mere mortals certainly has conferred a more august dignity to all they enjoyed.



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However one may view these deeds and their originators, I view them with little regard. They fall short of the subject I would turn my reader to pay most close attention to: the life and morality of the communities in which we will explore. Observe the quality, the passion, the moral decay, and moments of pious humility. It is these base actions that separate us from the divine, these low motivations that make us who we are, both then and now.

I pray you stay with me gentle reader, at least a little while.

UNITY

Unity. It was the word he used throughout his reign, from the first days when his father's soldiers raised him on their shields in the distant provinces of Novia, to the last moments on his deathbed where he gasped out his dying demands to his daughters and the Patriarch. The day he marched

at the head of his armies through the Aguilca Gate—that fateful autumn day in which this very era was birthed in blood and steel—his Legato, the good Martin Antolinez, swore that is what the great Campeador whispered through gritted teeth.

Though not yet known by that exulted name—for only years later would men honor him so, after he took the head of Lino, Duque Primero of the East—he was received like the Emperodars by the senate, with streets crowded with paid onlookers. He was a shrewd man and such partisan plays were well within his sight, and so he marched his men under arms to the senate house, once the sacred home of republican virtues, now a whore, legs spread to all who have the coin to mount her. Though he was an energetic forty years of age, his arms were lead from the butchery of the last two days, making the mounting of the great stairs into the whore's bosom a task as physically difficult as it was distasteful.

It was at the top of the steps, surrounded by his most loyal soldiers who knew the errand they were on and understood the danger that lay within that temple to corruption, he turned back to the sea of soldiers and civilians below him. There he paused, his eyes closed, soaking in the dying rays of the sun, caressing the lion-headed pommel of his father's sword. Then raising his other hand, called for silence. Vidas, his loyal boyhood companion, future Patriarcha of the yet to be built capital of Cidiero, knew that the Campeador was filled with anger and would unleash it with words now, on those steps before entering the dangerous den where no emotional mistake could be made. He pulled out his stylus and parchment, taking a seat at his master's



feet—a heavy book his table—and looked up in anticipation.

The silence was long, and not a man, woman, or child stirred the Campeador from his sightless thoughts. Slowly, as if waking from a deep sleep and realizing that the days before had not been horrific dreams but the true events of his life, he lowered his head from the sun and opened his eyes to hold the crowd in their crystal blue depths. The anticipation of his coming words had reached an orgasmic pitch that he could practically taste, so he savored it a moment before speaking.

“Citizens. My countrymen. I come before you now to seek your wise counsel. Two days past, outside the gates of this eternal city of Corriento, with sword in hand, I led my soldiers against Maximiano Aurelio de Valentia, your leader, your Duque, who—though my enemy—was a man of honor. For two days we fought before and on the Muerlenta Bridge, watering the ground with the blood of too many men, turning the river black, and darkening the skies with flies.

“For the first time in years I found myself on the front lines, shielding my brother soldier and being shielded in return. My arm, like so many of the soldiers you see before you today, swung endlessly, bringing death and destruction upon anyone who stood before me, be it a man or young boy conscripted into service. This was the path I chose, and it was only fitting that I share the burden with the men who chose to follow me here.

“Was my enemy, whose head dear Martin here took with his own sword, a good man or an evil man? It is said that the evil of a man’s life lives on while the good drains away to the soil like the blood from

a sacrificed bull. So it shall be with Maximiano, a man I have known and honored for the many years prior to this time of violence, and for many years hence.

“The noble Bajardo, leader of the venerable institution I stand before, has preached in recent days that my enemy was ambitious, with designs on my patrimony. This is the word he sent me at my garrisons in distant Novia, that my enemy was ambitious, and he, Bajardo is an honorable man. They are all honorable men in this house of republican virtue behind me. Each one driven by a singular sense of honor.

“The honor of these men is not the reason which I speak with you now, but to answer a question of pressing import. I am at a crossroads, like the great Julio before me, standing before the unthinkable path across the uncrossable river. On the other side of that river stands a path shrouded in darkness and drenched in the blood of my countrymen.

“Julio, who once stood at this very spot before meeting his death in this very house, crossed that sacred border because he believed that he must, that it was right, and that the blood he must wade through would lead his country to greatness. In time, despite his ultimate betrayal, he was proved right. But...

“Do I dare? Do I dare take this next step? Do I dare cross the sacred border, for if I do, there will be a red sea of violence that washes over our great country and I will be its origin. If I do, I will allow no man, woman, or child to bar my path, and that... that is a terrible price to pay.

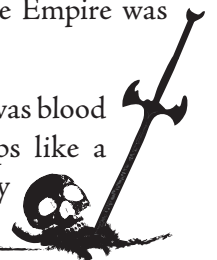
“So I ask you my countrymen. Do I cross this threshold behind me and unleash the deluge?”

For several minutes the crowd stared back in a murky silence, neither giving assent nor demanding he turn back from the course of action that brought him there. They knew the truth, for they had gone about their daily lives, laboring, eating, fornicating, and dying under a constant cacophony of stories told by the honorable senate about the man before them. It was that this man before them was the ambitious monster from the wild and savage north, come south to end the Empire and enslave its people for his own carnal delights.

And then, like the slow rise of a distant noise, the word was given. At first it was just a few old men who had been living with the corruption of the house behind the Campeador for decades, who simply, silently took to their knees. Then it was the craftsmen who had suffered under grueling taxes, followed by the whores and orphans who knew of no justice, even there in the light of the world.

Like that, the crowd kneeled and the word was given. A simple nod was all he returned, no smile marring his stoic face, no light in his eyes, for he knew what work lay ahead. He turned and walked into building before him without even a word to his companions and for some time silence reigned over the great forum, blanketing the people as they looked up from their knees to the great stone monument to the very virtues the Empire was founded on.

Then there was screaming. There was blood running down those marble steps like a river. The first steps towards unity were taken.



WOLFSPELL

*An role-playing game for 3-6 players by Epidiah Ravachol
Illustrated by Andrew DeFelice*

GATHER TO YOU . . .






. . . two six-sided dice that you can tell apart, some paper and writing implements. Choose now which of these dice is your Wolf Die and which is your Blood Die.

You will also need one player to take on the mantle of Winter. The rest of the players are the wolf players. Winter presents a world of horrors and prey for the wolves, and the wolf players act as stalwart adventurers who have been transmogrified into wolves in order to complete a geas or grim task set before them.

WOLF & BLOOD

You are wolves of human blood. When asked to roll, you will always roll both the Blood Die and the Wolf Die. Note which is higher. This will tell you

whether your wolf is guided by human knowledge and experience or by bestial instinct. The Blood Die represents the capabilities of human thought: from shaping the world around you as a farmer plows the field or a smithy forges a sword, to throwing yourself heedlessly into your task as an explorer sails past the sight of shore or a rover charges into the fray. The Wolf Die represents the advantages of lupine instincts, knowing where and how to hunt prey, and the safety of the pack.

To discern the extent to which either die dominates the situation, subtract the lower result from the higher one. So if  was your Wolf Die and  was your Blood Die, your result would be  Wolf. Whenever the result is zero, you must choose either a  Wolf result or a  Blood result.



If you have a Feral score, always add that to your Wolf Die before noting which die is higher and which is to be subtracted from the other. Feral scores may never fall below zero. Some may begin the game with a bonus that can be added to your Blood Die. This bonus is optional—roll first and then decide if you wish to add it.

THE PACK

Decide among the wolf players who is best described by each of the following:

- ◆ *Many have tested my sword-arm and now wait to mete vengeance upon me in the afterlife.* When performing tasks of gore or hatred you may add +3 to your Blood Die after you have rolled.
- ◆ *I am witness to stranger worlds than most. The arcane and preternatural are to me as wolves and weather are to the farmer.* When faced with the supernatural you may add +3 to your Blood Die after you have rolled.
- ◆ *I am at home when I sleep roofless and hunt my fare far from civilization.* You start the game with 2 Feral.
- ◆ *I am most alive in the houses, halls, and alleyways of humanity.* When you must know the minds of people, even your own human mind, you may add +3 to your Blood Die after you have rolled.
- ◆ *No one ever truly knows where I stand and who I keep at dagger point.* In matters of deception and trickery, you may add +3 to your Blood Die after you have rolled.



If you're like me, then reading all of this fantastic fiction has set your mind spinning. For me, the best part of *Sword and Sorcery* is the feeling of wonder and adventure that comes from a world that is vast and full of mysteries, and the casual hubris of those that try to make their way in the midst of it all.

I'm so captivated by this feeling that it led me to write a game. It's a card-based RPG that is centered around helping you and your friends create an emergent world that is as full of mysteries as the worlds in this magazine.

It's currently in an open beta, and I'm giving away free copies of the physical cards to people who are willing to give it a try. I hope you'll be one of them!

<http://www.unsungtales.com>

Each wolf player should record their associated bonus or bonuses. Unless told otherwise, your Feral is zero. Record that as well.

Ask each other leading questions about who you were before falling under the spell. Everyone should answer at least three questions.

THE SPELL

Choose the spell that has befallen your adventurers and reshaped them.

- ◆ *From generations long past this curse has been upon you and your kin. This very night you shall lope out as children of Fenris and drive a rival clan from the vale.* Roll at morning's light and add +1 to your Blood Die for each enemy of your clan that you have personally slain this night.

- ◆ *The task before you is not one suited for the civilized, so you turn to dark magicks and shift your flesh into a form more suitable.* Roll once your task is complete or abandoned and you add +3 to your Blood Die if the task was complete.
- ◆ *The augurs dictate that only fang and claw will rend your destiny. You will be reborn as beast to fulfill the prophecy.* Roll once the prophecy is fulfilled and add +3 to your Blood Die.
- ◆ *Relics of an ancient cult plundered from an old queen's tomb carry with them a savage curse that can only be cleansed in distant holy fires.* Roll when your wolves have found the holy fires and plunged into their everburning flames. Add +2 to your Blood Die for every limb you lose to the fire.



When the spell is lifted, roll...

• Wolf—You remain a wolf who desires to be human, forever shunning the pack and shunned by civilization as a pest and predator.

•-• Wolf—You remain a wolf who will howl each moon to recall a time when you were not so.

•+ Wolf—You are of wolf mind and form, forevermore.

• Blood—You return to your true form and find it unfitting, forever shunning civilization and human companionship for the simple comforts of the wild.

•+ Blood—You return to your human form in waking life, but run with the pack in your dreams.

THE SHIFTING

Winter may ask any of the following questions of specific wolf players. For their part, the wolf players may, at any point during this phase, ask Winter any question about how the transformation feels, smells, tastes, sounds and appears.

- ◆ How does the shifting warp your consciousness?
- ◆ What is most painful about the shifting?
- ◆ What is most familiar about the shifting?
- ◆ What dread seeps into your soul during the shifting?

THE WOLVES

You are now wolves. Describe your coat, your size, your scent and your voice.

Communication

Though the wolves cannot engage in dialogue as you or I would, they are able to communicate with each other with similar clarity, particularly on topics leading to immediate action. Wolf players are encouraged to describe how their wolves communicate, but should also make sure that the other players know what their wolf is trying to say and that their wolves comprehend it.

Scent Marking

Like the written word, wolves can leave scents on the terrain for other wolves and similar animals to interpret. These markings establish the wolf's

territory, how long ago the wolf has been by, and the likelihood of good prey in the area. Any wolf beholding the world that listens to their nose will discern these things from nearby scent markings.

Howling

A wolf's howl may be an expression of affection, loss or simply excitement. One wolf howling is likely to cause any wolf who can hear it to howl as well. Thus, howling can also reveal the location and size of any nearby packs. Any wolf with a Feral score of one or more must roll a Blood result to resist joining in a howl. When you howl, you must tell your fellow players what you are saying.

Wrestling

Wolves also communicate through play. Wolves eager to play face the other wolves with their head down and haunches raised.

Each wolf playing must roll...

■ Wolf—Describe how you play too roughly. Winter chooses a wolf at play, which may be you. They suffer Winter's Wrath.

■-■ Wolf—Describe your play with the other wolves and gain 1 Feral.

■+ Wolf—Describe your play with the other wolves.

□ Blood—You are unable to negotiate the play and feel isolated. Choose two from the list below.

□+ Blood—You are unable to negotiate the play and feel isolated. Choose one from the list below.

- ◆ You are not separated from the group.
- ◆ You do not suffer Winter's Wrath.
- ◆ You do not lose 1 Feral, minimum zero.

Grooming

Grooming is an important part of pack health and communication. When wolves groom one another, they clean each other's fur, teeth, and any wounds they may have suffered. They also reestablish their relationships. Grooming can only happen during quiet moments when the pack is at rest.

When you casually groom with a wolf that has more Feral than you, you may choose to gain 1 Feral. In addition, being groomed by the entire pack will eliminate the effects of Winter's Wrath.



In the Thrall of the Chaos Lords

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INTO THE WILDS

As wolf players, you play the game by asking Winter what is going on around you and telling everyone what your wolf is doing. To get used to their new forms, your wolves will probably want to wrestle with each other. Try it. It may not go so well at first, but your wolves will soon get the hang of it.

But soon you must turn to your grim task. Behold the world and then tell everyone how you venture out into it.

Keep to the pack whenever you can. They can provide support and step in when you most need it. When in doubt, try:

- ♦ grooming,
- ♦ wrestling,
- ♦ hunting,
- ♦ or *beholding the world*.

Hunting

Wolves are coursing hunters, which means they run their prey down, often taking bites out of them where they can. Hungry wolves can find prey by *beholding the world* and run prey down by *sating a hunger*. If the prey is particularly dangerous or unnatural, the wolves should *face the perilous* instead.

ROLLING

You are wolves with wolfish instincts, but somewhere deep inside are your memories and experiences as a human. Here are the three primary ways such creatures interact with the world at large.

If you are taking a sniff around or trying to assess your situation, you should *behold the world*. If you are fleeing from danger or charging into it, you must *face the perilous*. If you are seizing what you desire or enacting a scheme, you can *sate a hunger* or *bend the world to your will*. If you don't know what to do, *behold the world* first. Then, if you are in for a hunt, *sate a hunger*; if you are in for a fight, *face the perilous*; and if you are enacting a plan of human engineering, *bend the world to your will*. The wisest of wolves do whatever they can to avoid *facing the perilous*.

To Behold the World

When the pack pauses to attend to the scents, sights, and sounds, Winter should describe the world about you in loving detail, taking care to impress upon you an appropriate sense of safety or danger. You may each then decide to roll individually.

When your wolf drinks in their senses, roll...

• Wolf—Winter may tell you what scent, sound or sight confuses and scares you.

•-• Wolf—Choose two questions from the list below and Winter must answer both.

•+ Wolf—Choose three questions from the list below that Winter must answer correctly and unambiguously.

- ♦ *What do my eyes tell me?* A wolf's eyes are keen and true, able to detect slight movements ahead of them, even by moonlight. If it moves, the wolf can see it.
- ♦ *What do my ears tell me?* A wolf's ears can hear much higher frequencies than we can and,

depending on conditions, can detect sounds as far as ten miles away. If it makes a noise, the wolf can hear it and know where it is.

- ♦ *What does my nose tell me?* Depending on the wind and weather, a wolf can detect and locate scents from over a mile away. If it has a scent, the wolf can identify it, and know where it is. For familiar scents, a wolf can also tell its emotional and physical state.

- ♦ *What do my instincts tell me?* The true instincts of a wolf will know what is a threat to be avoided, what is prey that is vulnerable, and who can be cajoled into playing. If your wolf acts on this knowledge, and you get a Wolf result of • or less, add 1 to your Feral.

□ Blood—Winter will tell you what you should have noticed, had the environment not conspired against your senses.

□-□ Blood—Choose one of the questions from the list below and Winter must answer it correctly.

□+ Blood—Choose three of the questions from the list below and Winter must answer them unambiguously and elaborate on those answers.

- ♦ What should I be afraid of?
- ♦ Who is vulnerable?
- ♦ What do they want from me?
- ♦ Where am I most advantaged?
- ♦ Who is in control here?
- ♦ What is most valuable here?

To Face the Perilous

When danger has befallen the pack, Winter should ask them which among them is most vulnerable. Those wolves and any wolf suffering from Winter's Wrath must roll unless another wolf is able and willing to roll in their stead.

When your wolf's life and limb are at risk, roll...

■ Wolf—Choose whichever is appropriate:

- ◆ You suffer harm as the peril persists.
- ◆ You sacrifice yourself for the good of the pack.

■-■ Wolf—Choose one:

- ◆ You suffer harm and retreat to safety.
- ◆ You are yet unharmed, but the peril has the better of you, perhaps making more of the pack vulnerable.

■+ Wolf—Choose one:

- ◆ You suffer harm, but you chase off or slay the source of peril (Winter's choice). If you are with the pack, you do not suffer harm unless the threat was supernatural.
- ◆ You retreat to safety, unharmed.

□ Blood—You may suffer harm and push on heedless of the danger.

□-□ Blood—Choose one from the list below.

□+ Blood—Choose three from the list below.

- ◆ The rest of the pack is not put in peril.
- ◆ You do not suffer harm.

- ◆ The peril is vanquished.
- ◆ No one is separated or given Winter's Wrath.

If your Feral is 2 or less, include this option:

- ◆ Winter does not have to teach you a harsh lesson and give you 1 Feral.

To Sate a Hunger or Bend the World to Your Will

When the pack wishes to sate a hunger, seize what they desire, or accomplish something unnatural for a wolf, have the wolf with the highest Feral roll. If more than one wolf ties for the highest Feral, the wolf players may choose which among the tied wolves must roll.

When you attempt to seize what you desire or set in motion a plan of human engineering, roll...

■ Wolf—Winter should describe how the path before you is fraught with peril and you describe how you retreat to safety.

■-■ Wolf—Choose two from the list below.

■+ Wolf—Choose three from the list below.

- ◆ You get what you want or sate your hunger.
- ◆ No one else must go without.
- ◆ None are put in peril.
- ◆ You may lose Winter's Wrath.

□ Blood—There is peril to be faced before you reach the end of this path.

□-□ Blood—Choose two from the list below or one from the above Wolf list.

□+ Blood—Choose three appropriate results from the list below. If you are acting on the Blood result of a behold the world roll, you may choose four.

- ◆ You may modify your environment to your advantage.
- ◆ No one is in peril.
- ◆ You do not earn Winter's Wrath.
- ◆ You seize upon your advantage turn it into success.
- ◆ You may lose 1 Feral, minimum zero.

How can you tell if you have an advantage to turn into a success? A Blood result will allow you to modify your environment to your advantage. You may even modify your environment and take advantage of that in the same roll. Did you behold the world and learn where to place yourself at advantage? Did you act on that knowledge? If you are still unsure, ask Winter if you have advantage.

Suffering Harm & Winter's Wrath

When you suffer harm, choose one of the following options.

- ◆ *Each scar is a lesson learned.* Describe how your wolf is permanently marred and then either gain 2 Feral or lose 1 Feral, minimum zero. Once you have suffered this harm, you may not suffer it again.
- ◆ *The toll of a careless life.* Describe how your wolf has lost either an eye or a limb. Once you have suffered this harm, you may not suffer it again.
- ◆ *Meat and bone.* Describe how your wolf has suffered a fatal blow and passes.

Whenever you suffer harm, you gain Winter's Wrath. A wolf suffering from this is isolated, sick, injured, or otherwise made vulnerable by their condition or behavior. When the pack *faces the perilous*, Winter should describe how the wolves suffering Winter's Wrath are put in harm's way, and then make them roll along with all the other vulnerable wolves. You can only lose Winter's Wrath by being groomed by the rest of the pack.

WINTERING

As Winter, your job is to present the world as the wolves smell, hear and see it. As they lope toward their goal, present them with threats and obstacles to overcome. Answer their questions if you can, and have them *behold the world* if you cannot think of an immediate answer.

Whenever the wolf players have to choose options from a list as the result of a roll, all other options left on the list are fair game. For if they do not choose that "no one else must go without" and you can think of a way for the other wolves to go without, then they must make do without.

Whenever you cannot think of something to do, you may:

- ◆ Separate a wolf so that the pack can no longer smell or hear them.
- ◆ Capture one of the wolves by human or supernatural means.
- ◆ Take the story forward to by hours, days or a season.
- ◆ Foreshadow a threat you have not thought up yet.

- ◆ Remind the wolves of their hunger.
- ◆ Howl.
- ◆ Hunt the wolves.
- ◆ Threaten an ally or ward.
- ◆ Twist something with sorcery when the wolves least expect it.

You may never threaten the wolves immediately following wrestling or grooming.

Natural Threats

The cold never puts wolves at risk. Their fur keeps them well insulated even in the darkest winters. A snowstorm may slow a pack down and blind their senses, but it will not put them in peril. There are, however, many natural predators to contend with. Bears will attack wolves if there is a fight over a carcass or if they perceive the wolves as a threat to themselves or their cubs. Mountain lions will prey on wolves they see as vulnerable or who are separated from the pack. Such animals will cause the wolves to *face the perilous* but will not fight to the death if they can help it.

Other natural threats can include environmental dangers such as forest fires, avalanches, floods, or treacherous terrain that must be crossed.

Lupine Threats

The wolves may encounter other wolves. They may be lone wolves, desperate and hungry. They may be seeking a suitable mate. They may be another pack. Packs of wolves can vary greatly in size. The more there are, the more of the player wolves that will be vulnerable should they be put in peril.

What happens between the players' pack and a strange pack will depend greatly upon the strange pack's disposition. If the player wolves are on the new pack's territory, there will be a dispute. The player wolves will be able to tell, through scent markings and warning howls, that this is the case. Or the new pack may be hurt, fresh from a horrible encounter, and willing to find a tense peace with the player wolves. However, injured wolves can also be volatile.

Other wolves do not roll for things, but if it comes up, assume they have a Feral score of 5.

Civilized Threats

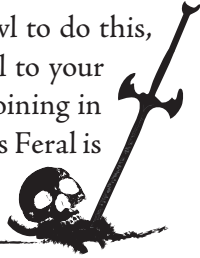
Humans and other civilizations are a growing threat to wolves. Civilized threats act irrationally. They will, on occasion, fight to the death. They almost always lead to larger, more prepared threats as people react to their own being preyed upon by a rogue wolf pack. Wolves able to roll well into their Blood when beholding the world or bending the world to their will can easily maintain the advantage when dealing with humans.

Supernatural Threats

Most sorceries are unknown to wolves and can only be observed, not understood, by Wolf results while *beholding the world*. In general, Blood results fair better than Wolf results when dealing with beings and spells of alien origins.

There is an older, wilder wizardry that is well-suited for the minds and voices of wolves. Should the wolf players discover this secret knowledge, they may learn to shape spells within their howls. When you use a mystical howl to *bend the world to your will*, you may add some of your Feral score to your Blood Die

instead of your Wolf Die. You must decide to do this before you roll. You must howl to do this, and you may not apply more Feral to your Blood Die than there are wolves joining in the howl, including yourself. Excess Feral is still added to your Wolf Die.



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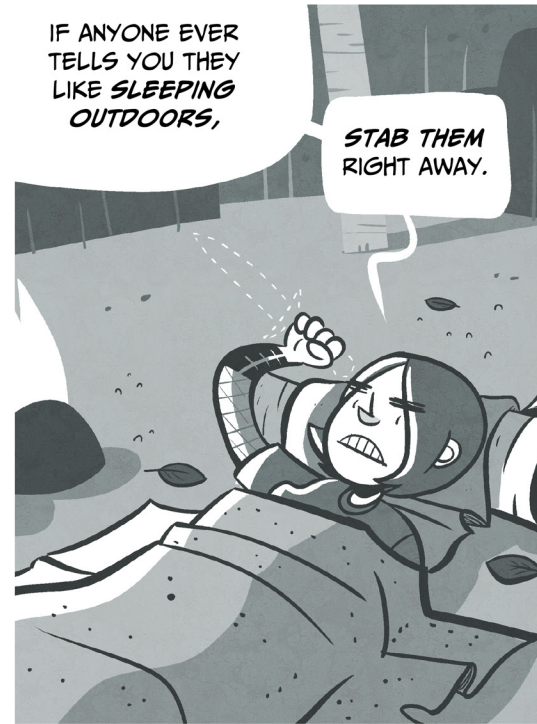
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Oh, The Beating Drum!

by Bryant Paul Johnson.





* SEE OH, THE BEATING DRUM #218 --ED.



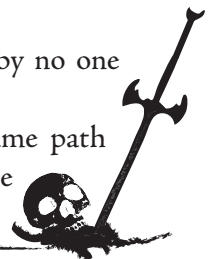
THREE DOZEN ILL OMENS

A miscellany by Epidiah Ravachol

- ◻—A distant tower whose shadow grows to impossible lengths in the morning sun.
- ◻—Grave-stench that rises generations later from undisturbed tombs.
- ◻—An unknown sorceress clothed in scarlet entering the imperial court only to leave before the proper rites could be satisfied.
- ◻—The thirteenth silver earned at the end of a miraculous day in the markets.
- ◻—A birth in a wolf's wedding.
- ◻—A bountiful harvest half a season too soon.
- ◻—A comet whose tail crosses both the celestial plow and the jeweled skull of the first bull.
- ◻—Serpents that writhe aimlessly instead of striking swiftly.
- ◻—A tide of red that leaves no stain upon the shore.
- ◻—Battle wounds that refuse to ache as they should.
- ◻—A rooster that caws as a crow.

- ◻•◻—A rainbow made of solely violet, orange, and green.
- ◻◻—That sweet and fragrant rain known as the tears of the Fates.
- ◻◻—A tiger birthing bear cubs.
- ◻◻—An echo that will not answer when a song of your youth is sung.
- ◻◻—The dogs of the village laying as dead in an unbroken circle.
- ◻◻—The toppling of standing stones on a still, gray day.
- ◻◻—Sighting the ever-runners, those six fleet-footed women doomed to chase ceaselessly across the plains.
- ◻◻—Sweet wine made sour between mouthfuls.
- ◻◻—Springs that well up in the night and belch forth a wretched miasma.
- ◻◻—Three ships from distant shores carrying pale and starving men.

- ◻◻—The chosen oracles of the gods suddenly without the tongue for their prophetic babbling.
- ◻◻—Game that runs to the hunter instead of fleeing.
- ◻◻—The fishers' nets unraveling in a turbulent sea.
- ◻◻—A fortnight of evenings in which you are visited by the specters of your slain foes offering you their pitiful forgiveness.
- ◻◻—A black dagger with five rubies in its pommel thrust into the door of the great hall.
- ◻◻—Feverish dreams of odd-eyed toads and wailing lovers.
- ◻◻—A bitter meal before a battle, wedding, or birth.
- ◻◻—A pendulum that ceases suddenly and refuses to swing up again.
- ◻◻—Lavish gladiatorial games that fail to raise the blood of the crowd.
- ◻◻—A moon resting on the eastern horizon for the entire night.
- ◻◻—A frost that traces alien and malignant script over the window pane.
- ◻◻—Palua, the Night Gem, refusing to rise with its constellation.
- ◻◻—Funeral pyres that speak in the clear voice of the dead.
- ◻◻—A melancholy song sung by no one and heard by all.
- ◻◻—Lightning scarring the same path into a darkened sky three times in a row.



THE CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew DeFelice is a freelance illustrator from the humble county of Queens, New York. His art has appeared in products by Frog God Games, Mystical Throne Entertainment, and Pantheon Press and he is currently working towards his Masters Degree in Illustration. <http://andrewdefelice.deviantart.com/gallery/>

Little is known about the mysterious Delfino Falciani. <http://www.equinoxartstudios.com/>

Bryant Paul Johnson is a cartoonist, illustrator and essayist who hails from Northampton, Massachusetts. His works include *Teaching Baby Paranoia*, *Dropped Frames* and *Equip Shield: The Role of Semipermeable Cultural Isolation in the History of Games and Comics*. <http://bryantpauljohnson.com>

Rachel Kahn is an illustrator and cartoonist who hails from Toronto, Canada. Her works include illustration for Pelgrane, Chaosium and Onyx Path publishing, and self-published comics about the life advice she receives from her spirit guide, Conan the Barbarian. <http://www.portablecity.net>

Keith Senkowski is a artist, author, and a slayer who knows what Haka is and hails from Wauconda, home of the Black Panther. His works include *untitled*, *Conspiracy of Shadows*, three kids (his boys can swim). <http://conspiracyofshadows.com>

THE REALMS

You do not take up sword and spell to tag along with someone else's adventure. You do it to change the course of your destiny. To mold the world to your wants and desires.

Listed below are the stories, games, articles, and miscellanies in this issue that represent worlds available for you to craft your own adventures in. If you should so desire, you may take the characters, settings, and situations from any of these, create something new, and submit it to *Worlds Without Master*.

By default, any submission to *Worlds Without Master* is not part of any shared world. Creators have the usual controls over their creative properties. The following options exist only for creators who expressly want to take part in this endeavor.

Additionally, the following agreements exist solely between the creators and *Worlds Without Master*, and do not govern the creators' rights in regards to any other publication.

The Free & Chaotic Realms

Anyone may submit material using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work as if it were their own as long as they also agree to make their work part of this Free & Chaotic Realm. This is as open as it gets, with the only curation being the *Worlds Without Master* submission process.

The Curated Realms

Material submitted using the characters, settings, situations and any other part of this body of work will be sent to the original creator or the creator's designated curator for approval before being accepted by *Worlds*

Without Master. If accepted, this new material is bound to that particular curated realm.

Other Shared Realms

Groups of creators who wish to find their own agreement on how to share their worlds are welcome to do so however they wish.

Edicts

Creators are welcome to make up a list of rules other creators must follow while using their works. These rules are set in stone. *Worlds Without Master* will not accept any work that appears to violate an applicable edict that is not also created by the original creator.

More about the realms policy can be found at: www.Dig1000Holes.com/words/realms

"Three Dozen Ill Omens" belongs to the Free & Chaotic Realms.

"One Winter's Due" and *Wolfspell* belong to the realms curated by Epidiah Ravachol. Their edicts may be found at: www.Dig1000holes.com/words/edicts

