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Hack Rogers



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Knights of the Dinner Table #38
Hack Rogers
December, 1999

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Knights of the Dinner Table™ magazine (ISSN 1526-307X) is published monthly by Kenzer and Company, 21191 Creekside Drive, Kildeer, IL 60047.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Lake Zurich, IL.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: Knights of the Dinner Table
830 W. Main Street
PMB 114
Lake Zurich, IL 60047

Subscriptions: A one year subscription (12 issues) is only \$32.00 (US \$36.00 in Canada and US \$50.00 Overseas).

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Submissions: We accept submissions for strip ideas, jokes, cartoons, etc. We are interested in running anything that other gamers and fans would enjoy. Send a S.A.S.E. for writer's guidelines to the address listed above or E-mail jollyrb@aol.com.

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Knights of the Dinner Table™

MAGAZINE

“HACK ROGERS”

The KODT Development Team is
Jolly R. Blackburn, Brian Jelke,
Steve Johansson and David S. Kenzer
Cover Art by George and Jackie Vrbanic

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEPARTMENTS:

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Cries from the Attic | 2 |
| Table Talk | 5 |
| Heard it on the GameVine™ | 66 |
| Weird Pete's Bulletin Board™ | 68 |
| Back Room at the Games Pit™ | 69 |

COLUMNS:

| | |
|--|----|
| Brian's Small Press Picks™ | 26 |
| The Game Mechanic: Homebrewed Rules™ | 28 |
| Home Brewed KODT | 33 |
| All Things Magic™ | 36 |
| Tales From the Table | 33 |
| The Game Stumper | 45 |
| Disks of Wondrous Power™ | 63 |
| Parting Shots™ | 72 |

THE STRIPS:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Let them Eat Bread | 6 |
| Overcoming Disabilities | 10 |
| Los Caballeros del Comedor | 24 |
| One Two Punches | 46 |
| The Shields of Bandran™ | 49 |
| Avelon: The Corridors | 53 |

FEATURES:

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| The Name Game | 31 |
| The World Turned Upside Down | 38 |
| Failing (And loving it) | 41 |



Although he won't admit it, Knights of the Dinner Table™ was created by Jolly R. Blackburn way back in 1990 as 'filler' for the small press magazine Shadis™ (which he was publishing out of a spare bedroom). Nine years later, he continues to draw and write strips for the monthly Knights of the Dinner Table™ magazine as well as for Dragon® magazine and The Rifter™ Sourcebook Series. Writing KODT strips isn't nearly the lonely job as it was in the past. Since joining the ranks of Kenzer and Company and the formation of the KODT Development Team, the Knights have gone far beyond anything Jolly or the other developers ever imagined. Along the way, he's made some incredible friends and considers himself truly blessed.

Editorial of a Madman

"I don't know what a Doofus is but I'm pretty sure my GameMaster IS one."

German Reader inquiring about the various slang terms used in KODT.



a dork, a geek, a dweeb and a doofus.

I just recently returned from the International Game Fair in Germany (*Spiel '99*) and was amazed at how many of our European readers inquired about the meaning of various slang terms used in the strips.

I spent much of my time explaining what the phrase, "I call DIBS!" was. (*For the benefit of our German friends who didn't make it by the booth DIBS is a shortened form of the word 'dibstone' from the game of Jacks and is used to claim ownership or rights to something. For example, "I call dibs on the last soda." In most American gaming circles 'calling dibs' is a time-honored tradition and most gamers here will recognize such a claim once made.*)

Apparently there's no corresponding German word. One fan told me when he reads the strips to his friends he translates dibs as, "*First! I call first! I called first so it's mine!*" A long way of getting, there I suppose, but it works.

When a group of fans approached the booth and asked what the terms, "Geek, Dork, Dweeb and Doofus" meant I turned to Oliver Nothers (who was helping out at the Flying Buffalo booth) and asked him what German word or phrase most closely captured the meaning of "Geek." He bluntly replied, "None!"

I then attempted to explain that the four terms were roughly the same and tried to explain what it meant. Oliver immediately jumped in, "*No, they are different.*"

He then proceeded to explain the subtle differences.

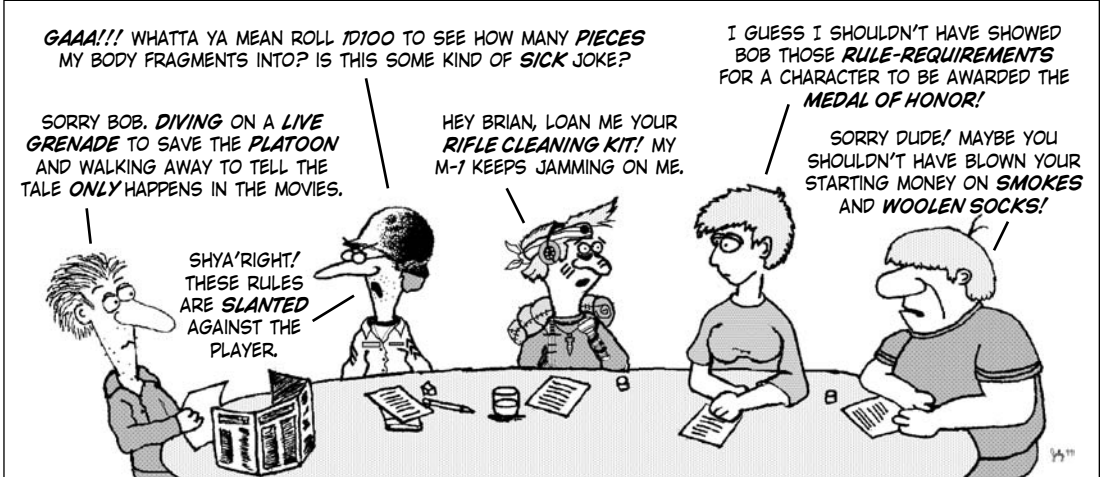
A minor debate ensued and in the end we simply had to agree that neither of us could adequately define what each term meant. Indeed, I had to confess that while I could most certainly point out a Dweeb (*and probably was one, myself*) I couldn't give a dictionary definition of what one was. The group wasn't satisfied with the answer and forced me to promise that I would find out 'exactly' what the terms meant and that I run the definitions in a future issue.

"*How can I call my friend a dweeb if I'm not sure what a dweeb is?*" one of them wondered aloud.

If any of our readers think they can do so - write it up and send it in. We'll run it in a future issue. In the meantime you can use the photos above as a visual guide. (*Be forewarned - there have been multiclassed dweeb-dork and geek-dweeb types reported.*)

Jolly R. Blackburn

Jolly R. Blackburn
A self-professed dweeb



ADVERTISER INDEX

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cabil, The |4 |
| Gamers Realm |71 |
| Holistic Design |25, Outside Back Cover |
| Heckaforge |53 |
| Imagine Role Playing |63 |
| Knuckleduster |62 |
| NBOS software |54 |
| Palladium Books |3 |

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Plan Nine Publishing |42, 43 |
| Reaper Miniatures |30 |
| Rio Grande Games |35 |
| Steve Jackson Games |47 |
| War Dogs Game Center |32 |
| War Games West |29 |
| Wizards of the Coast |49, |



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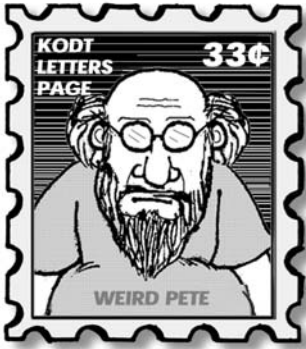
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Our Readers Talk Back!



Dear KODT,

You might wish to point the reader who was asking about Israeli gaming to members.spreec.com/education/yossig/roleplaying.htm (*in english*) and igor.corky.net/ (*in hebrew*)

Martin Heidemann
via E-mail

Thanks for the information, Martin. I'm running it here for the benefit of all.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I just received issue #37 and read Jolly's Editorial of a Madman regarding Survivor, the "Fight to the Finish", a game show of 16 people stranded on a deserted island. When I read the description I immediately recognized the show as Denmark's own **Robinson Expedition**, which is in its second season over here. Its also in its third season in Sweden, where I believe the idea for the show originated. I thought you'd like to hear a little more of how the game show actually is run.

16 people are placed on an island for 42 days. They are first divided into two teams: a north team and a south team, of 8 persons each. Each person is allowed to take with them 2 changes of clothing and one personal item of their own choice. In addition each team is given some basic supplies, water, and enough rice to last them their entire stay if they ration it.

They must build their own shelter and scavenge whatever else they can to supplement their meager diet. The teams are separated physically on the island and only come into contact with each other when they must compete.

The teams compete against each other twice every 3 days. The competitions vary in nature from intellectual to physical. The winner of the first competition, wins a prize which aids them in their stay on the island, such as extra food, fishing gear, etc. The losing team of the second competition, must vote home, via a secret ballot, one of their own team members. They may not vote on themselves or vote blank.

When the total number of players is reduced from 16 to 10. The two teams are

merged together into one team and moved to yet another island, where they must rebuild everything. From then on, each person is competing on their own, although many alliances and consequently back stabbing does go on. There are still two competitions every 3 days, as before. The individual that wins the first of the two wins something that improves their stay on the island. At the end of the three days there is a vote to send someone home, the only exception is that one person is safe. The winner of the second competition, is exempt from being voted home but still participates in the vote.

This continues until only 5 remain on the island. Then the finals begin. The finals consist of 3 competitions, mostly intellectual in nature, all run on the same day. The winner of each competition gets to choose for themself who of the others remaining gets sent home.

When only two remain, the people who have been voted home throughout the game return, and vote between the remaining two finalists, which one will be this years winner. The winner gets around \$40,000 and the other 4 who made it to the finals, get around \$4000.

This show has already become a big success, although some are calling it emotional pornography. Everyone has there favorite players and a lot of time is spent discussing who will be sent home each week. I look forward to the American version, which given the prize money of \$1000000, should really be exciting to watch.

Keep up the great work.

Christopher Jacobsen
Denmark

Dear KODT,

Just wanted to say congrats on a great mag. I'm a new and completely-satisfied subscriber. I went out and bought all the "Bundle" and "Tales" issues too because I can't get enough and I want to see how the Knights got to where they are. It probably helped that the first issue I read was #34. That was truly a classic. Just the quality of strips and the other material made it worth every penny. Along with the size that is, the thing was huge! I'd like to see you guys go bi-weekly! (*Yeah right, I'm sure ya got time for that*).

I've got a question about the Retro-KODT's. Were those the original KODT, and the strip has evolved from there? Or did those get written later, but took place earlier? I suspect the latter, but I'm not sure, I'm afraid I got into the strips too late.

Also, could I get those guidelines for submissions? I'm sure you probably get a ton of 'em, but some of the stuff my group has done would fit perfectly into a KODT

strip. I'd like to think that anyway....

Anyway, excellent work! Kudos to the whole crew!

Pat
via E-mail

You guessed correctly, Pat. The Retro KODTs were written recently and look back to the earlier adventures of KODT.

As for guidelines, I'm glad you asked. You can get a copy via E-mail by writing to BarbWryter@aol.com. If you prefer snail mail just send an SASE to KODT Guidelines, 1003 Monroe Pike, Marion IN 46953.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

You guys rock!! You've brought a whole new twist to gaming with the comic. Thanks to you, people in my area are interested in starting gaming groups. My friends and I have started one called P.O.T.H. or Players of the Hand. Just with name alone, we have people interested. Oh, and don't worry. No Vampire: The Masquerade LARPer were offended by your Blade comments. Well, got to go, is it possible for Sarah to GM more often? I liked the psych test she did.

Joshua Routhier
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

I just want to say that I enjoy your comic very much. While I haven't played fantasy RPGs in a very long time, and my interests have changed to tabletop/RPGs like **Heavy Gear™**, it really brings back memories.

Now, to the heart of the matter. B.A. could have avoided all the grief, though depriving us of a 'hilarious' story. Brian, on page 9, quotes the **Hacklopedia of Beasts** to define a *Rogue Ogre*. B.A. could argue that the ogre Brian killed was not a *Rogue Ogre*.

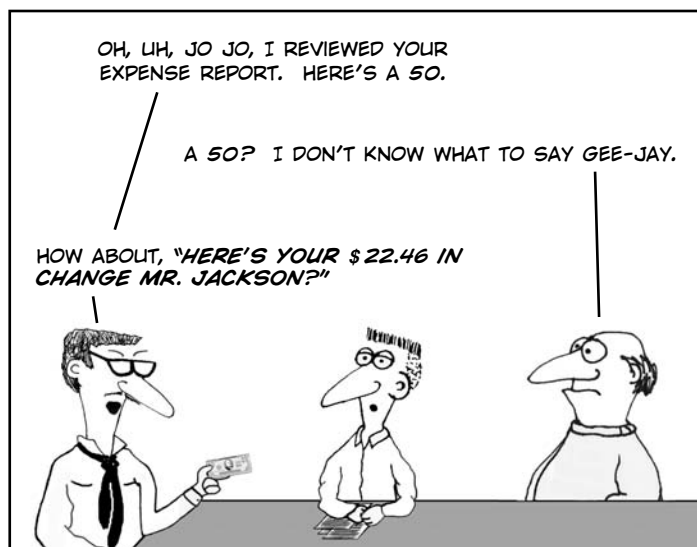
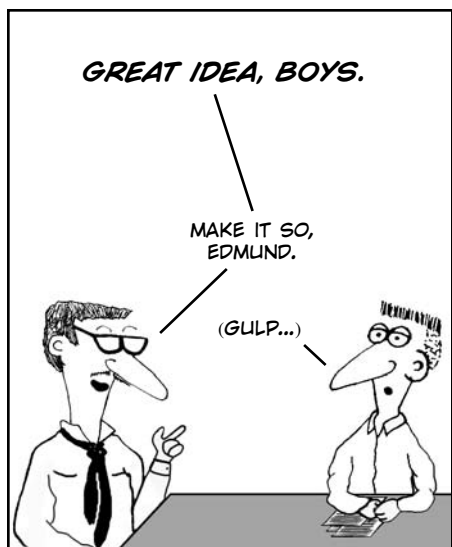
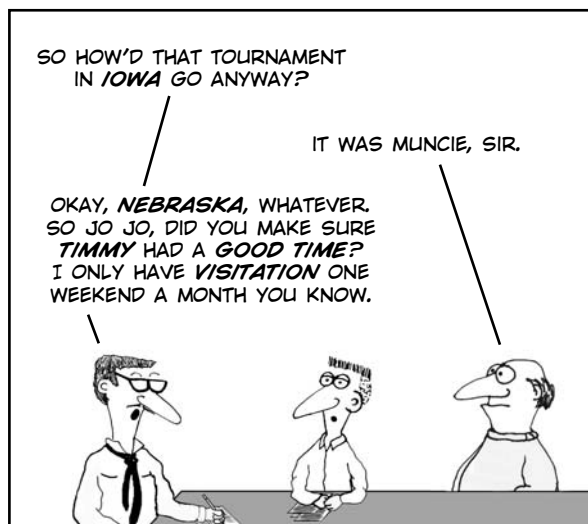
The term "rogue" is in relation to a tribe. If there is no tribe to define one's relationship with, then the "rogue" label could not apply. The term is defined by existence of the tribe; that is, a comparative, not an absolute. But then again, Brian would probably find something unique about the birch limb.

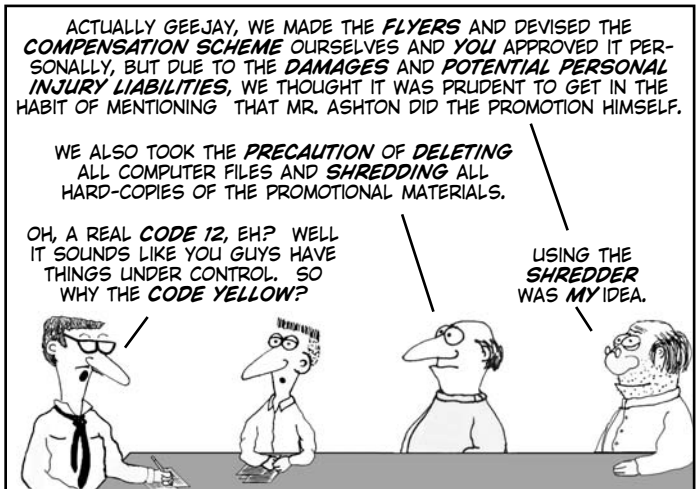
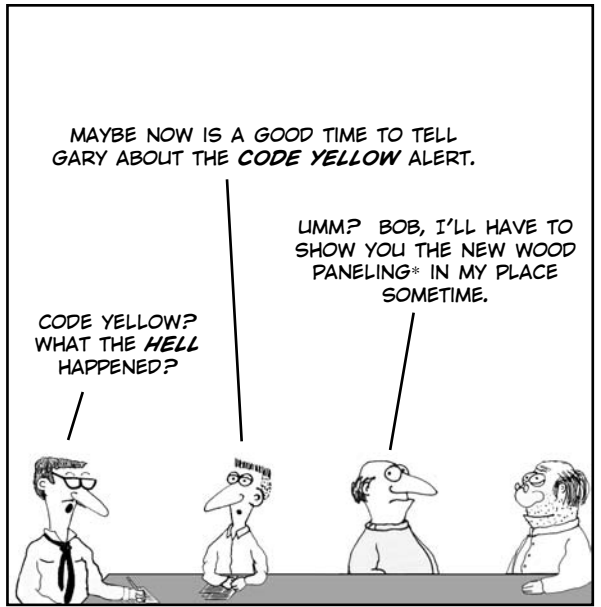
Sincerely,
Tony Kim

.....
YOU CAN WRITE TO US VIA E-MAIL AT
[JOLLYRB@AOL.COM!](mailto:JOLLYRB@AOL.COM)
OR YOU CAN SEND YOUR SNAIL
MAIL TO
KODT LETTERBOX,
1003 MONROE PIKE, MARION, IN 46953

Let them Eat Bread!

BY BRIAN JELKE, DAVID S. KENZER & STEVE JOHANSSON





*note - **wood paneling** is one of many employee advantage codes developed over the years by the Hard Eight staff. it means, "not a good time for this, change the subject fast."

****coffee burning** - another employee advantage code - this is a decoy to give another employee an opportunity to beat a hasty retreat and escape the meeting or situation.

WELL, IT SEEMS SOME OF THE *PARTICIPANTS* MEAN TO COME TO WISCONSIN TO EXACT SOME TYPE OF REVENGE ON *HARDB* OR (GULP) YOURSELF SIR.

HUH? WHAT'S THAT? REVENGE? WHY SHOULD THE LITTLE *HACK-JOCKEYS* BE ANGRY AT US?

WELL, THEY WERE EXPECTING A CASH PRIZE, AND I GUESS THEY FELT THEIR \$50 *ENTRANCE FEE* WAS A LITTLE STEEP AS YOU RECALL WE ISSUED A *STANDARD COUPON FORM 39-ALPHA* AS *PAYOUT*.

WE CHECKED OFF ON THE DWARF MINIATURE AND SPELLJACKED BOOSTERS.

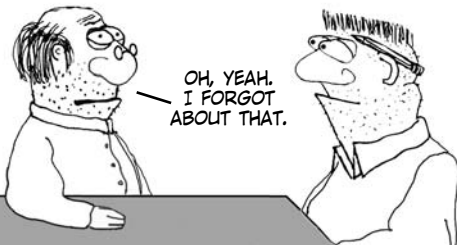
SOME NERVE! WE FORK OUT FIFTEEN HUNDRED BUCKS IN PRODUCT AND THEY WANNA *GRIPE* ABOUT IT?



DAMN, PETE! I KNEW I SHOULDN'T HAVE LISTENED TO YOU. I TOLD YOU WE SHOULD HAVE THROWN IN *ABE, BABES AND ROLLERBLADES* OR AT LEAST SOME *AROMA DICE*.

BOB, WE TRIED THE *AROMA DICE*, BUT ASHTON SAID HE DIDN'T HAVE ANY IN INVENTORY. LUCKILY HE HAD 36 CASES OF *DWARF PARTS* LEFT.

OH, YEAH. I FORGOT ABOUT THAT.



LATER

HERE'S YOUR MANHATTAN, SIR.

AHHH. JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED. YOU CAN TAKE SUNDAY OFF.

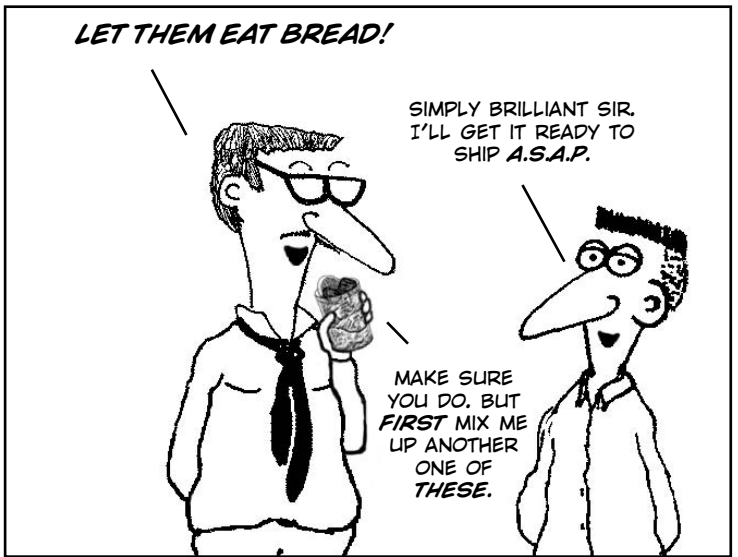
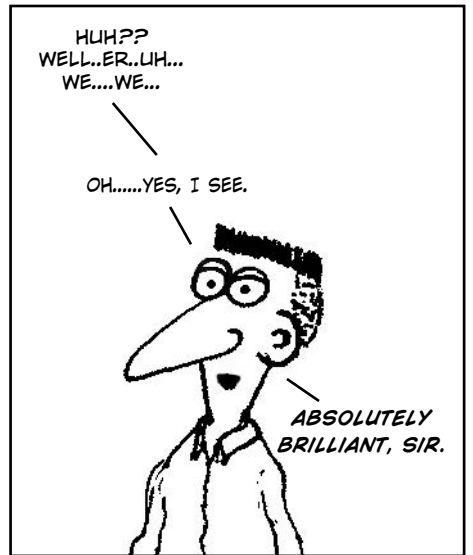
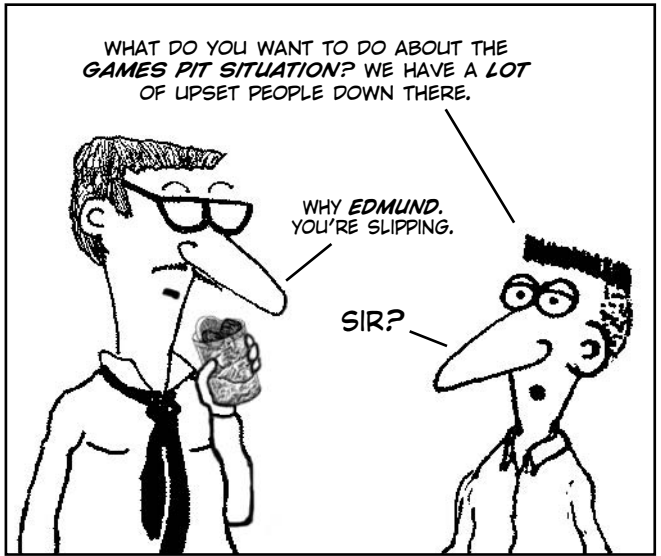
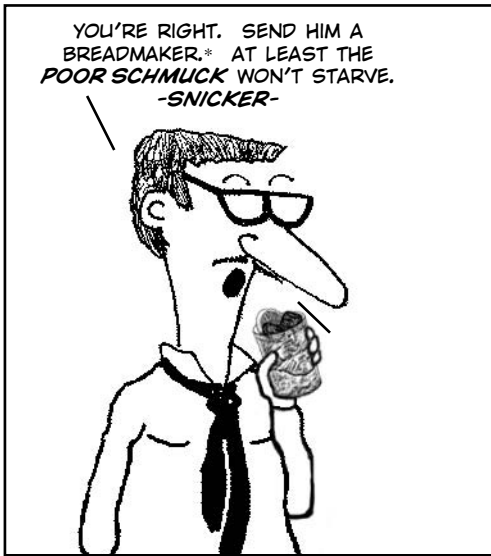


SIR, I DON'T MEAN TO RUIN YOUR *LUNCH*, BUT JO JO TOOK THAT 40% *REDUCTION* IN SALARY PRETTY HARD. \$71,000 A YEAR MIGHT BE TOUGH TO SURVIVE ON, EVEN FOR A GUY WHO LIVES DOWN IN RACINE.

HE KNOWS A 20% REDUCTION IS STANDARD FOR INSUBORDINATION AND ANOTHER 20% SEEMS FAIR TO ME FOR SCREWING UP THAT TOURNAMENT. BESIDES, THIS TYPE OF DISCIPLINE WILL BE GOOD FOR HIM.

EVEN SO, SIR, HE'S BEEN HERE 15 YEARS... HE'S ONE OF YOUR MOST *LOYAL* EMPLOYEES AND YOUR *BIGGEST* SUPPORTER.

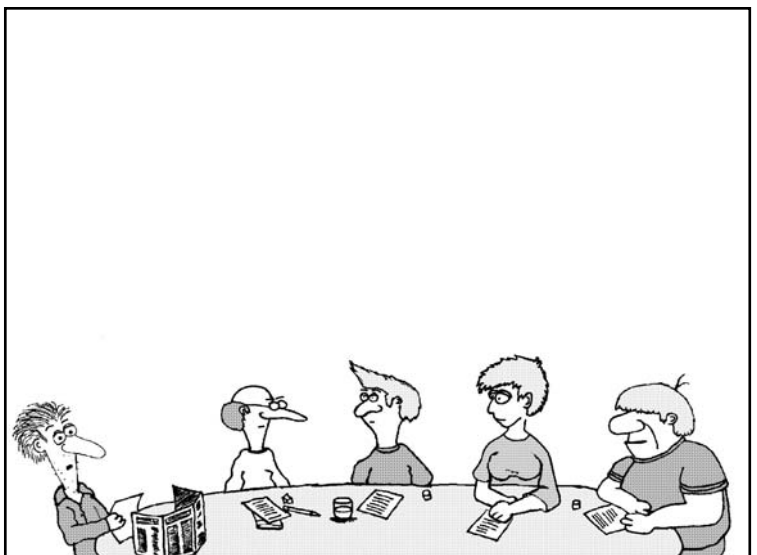
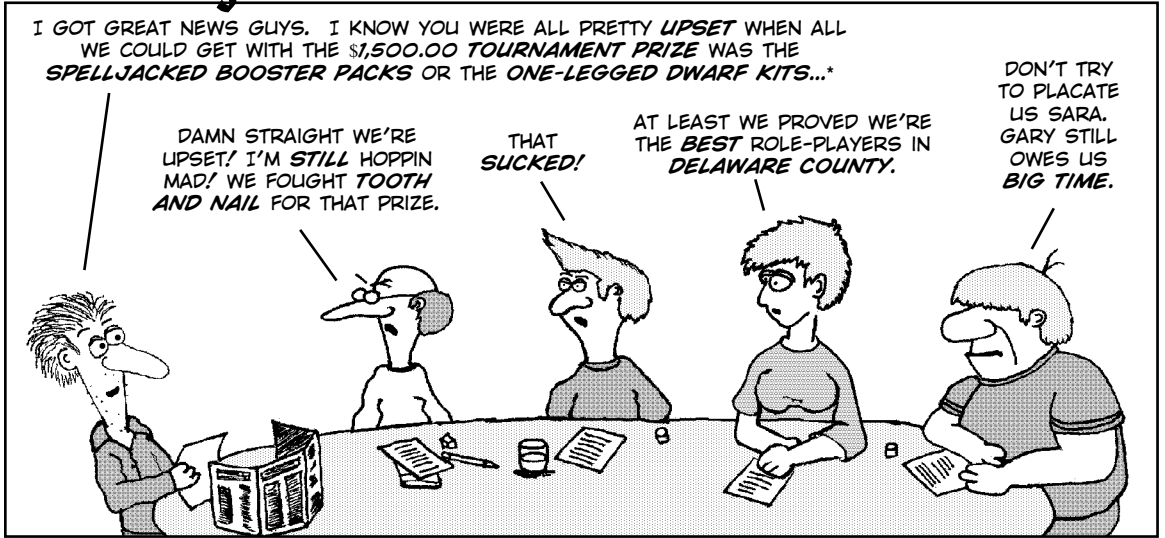




* Hard8 has several skids of breadmakers lying around in inventory from a failed attempt at diversification. Gary now doles these out as holiday gifts, promotional items and other attempts at buying good will.

Overcoming Disabilities

BY BRIAN JELKE, DAVID S. KENZER & STEVE JOHANSSON



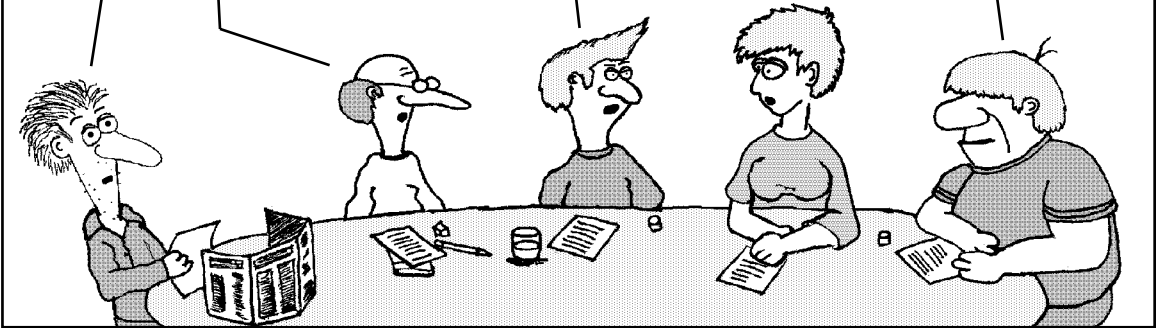
see KODT #37, "The Prize Fighters" (After winning the HackTourney Regionals, the Knights were awarded a \$1500 store credit good only towards certain Hard Eight products. B.A. chose the one legged dwarf kits for the group as no one else cared to cast a vote.)

YOU WERE RIGHT BRIAN. WE SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT IT UP AT THE TABLE. WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT LATER WHEN *DONNIE AND MARIE* AREN'T HERE TO LECTURE US.

DONNIE AND MARIE?

RELAX. WE'RE NOT STUPID. WE KNOW YOU CAN'T GET *FISSILE MATERIAL* ON THE NET THE WAY YOU USED TO. WE'RE NOT GOING TO DO ANY *PERMANENT DAMAGE*. THE ONLY THING WE'RE GOING TO *BRUISE* IS SOME *EGOS*.

JUSTICE MUST BE SWIFT SO WE'RE DRIVIN' UP THERE TOMORROW.



WE WOULD HAVE LEFT TODAY BUT *KNUCKLES* IS SO CLOSE TO GAINING A LEVEL WE DECIDED TO WAIT AND FIRE UP *THE PACER* UNTIL AFTER THE GAME TONIGHT.

WHOAH, FIRE UP THE PACER? DUDE, I'M ON THE BIG *E*. FUMES. I'M GONNA NEED *GAS MONEY*.

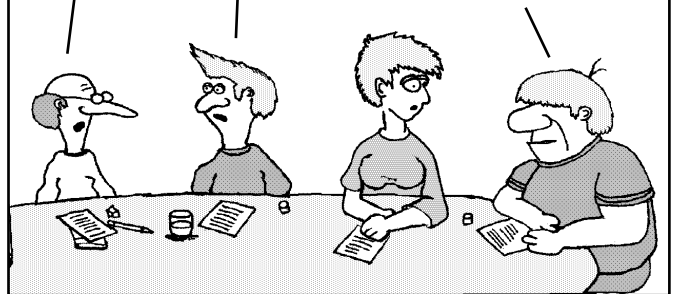
WHO DO I LOOK LIKE? *EXXON VALDEZ?*



YOU *HAVE* TO DRIVE. MY *SORRY-ASS CHEVETTE* WON'T SHIFT OUT OF FIRST GEAR. I'VE BEEN *TOOLING* AROUND AT 15 MILES PER HOUR FOR THREE WEEKS.

THEN WE SHOULD TAKE BRIAN'S VAN.

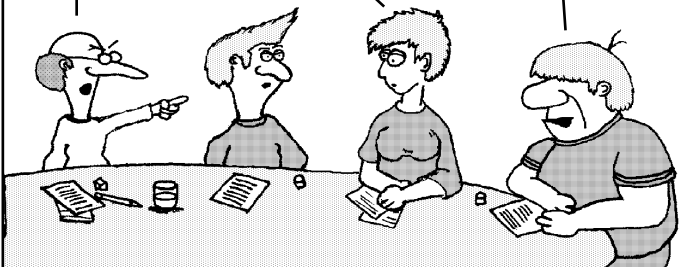
SURE! WE COULD DO THAT BUT I'LL HAVE TO *CHARGE YOU TWO 32.25 CENTS* A MILE.



BRIAN YOU CHEAP F... *THIS IS YOUR CAPER TOO!!!* WHAT HAPPENED TO THE *OATH OF SOLIDARITY* YOU TOOK LAST NIGHT?

HEY GUYS THAT'S A *GOOD RATE*. YOU KNOW WHAT A *TAXI* WOULD CHARGE US TO DRIVE ALL THE WAY TO WISCONSIN? ALMOST *THREE HUNDRED BUCKS!* I KNOW 'COS THAT'S HOW I GOT TO *GARYCON '81*.

UH GUYS. I THOUGHT WE CAME HERE TO *GAME*.



EXCUSE ME! BUT THIS IS A GAME SARA. IT'S CALLED THE *GAME OF LIFE*. AND WE'RE *PLAYING TO WIN*.

THE *GAME OF LIFE*? WIN? I THINK YOU GUYS SHOULD CHECK THE *SCORE CARD*.



YOU GUYS AREN'T LISTENING. LIKE I WAS SAYING, I WAS ABLE TO MAKE USE OF ALL THOSE **ONE-LEGGED DWARF KITS** WE WON.

WHAT? **HOW?** WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, GO TO A TOWN POPULATED BY **LAME DWARFS**? WE ALREADY DEFEATED YOUR **HACKCRUISER** FULL OF **ONE-LEGGED GAGWALLERS** AND THE SEQUEL, **RETURN TO THE PLANET OF THE ONE-LEGGED GAGWALLERS**.

THAT ADVENTURE RULED. **BODYCOUNT MAXIMUS**. WE RAN OUT OF SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES, ARTILLERY SHELLS, MORTARS, VULCAN MACHINE GUNS, HEAVY ROCKETS, LASER BATTERIES...

DON'T FORGET THE FLAME THROWERS.



OH YEAH. **THAT WAS AWESOME**. I'LL NEVER FORGET THOSE **GAGWALLER BODYPARTS** FLYING THRU THE AIR AFTER OUR **TANDEM-CLAYMORE AMBUSH!** THE **HACKMASTER THESAURUS*** CERTAINLY ENHANCED YOUR FLAVOR TEXT BA. YOU SAID SOME WORDS I'VE **NEVER HEARD BEFORE**.

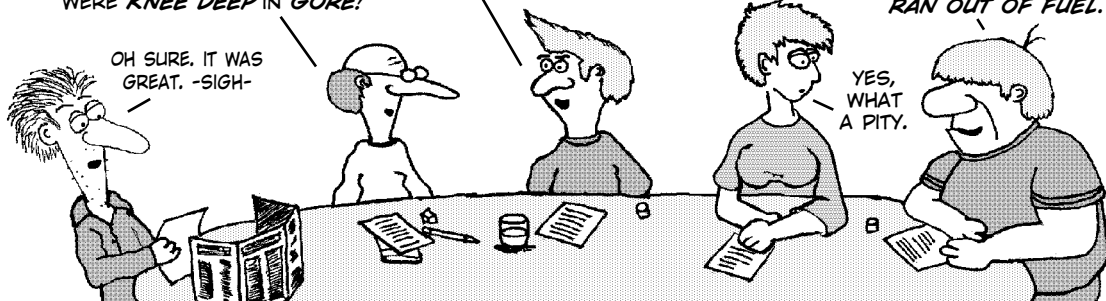
I WONDER HOW MANY OF THOSE **BAD PUPPIES** WE OFFED? WE SPENT ALL OF OUR MUNITIONS AND EVEN **DULLED** OUR PERSONAL **BAYONETTE BLADES** ON THEIR RIBCAGES. WE WERE **KNEE DEEP IN GORE!**

HAR, HAR, AND WHO KNOWS HOW MANY MORE WE WASTED **WITHOUT WEAPONS?** WITH THEIR **3" MOVEMENT RATE**, THERE'S NO WAY THE **GAGWALLERS** COULD **MOVE CLEAR** FROM THE PATH OF OUR **TRACKED VEHICLES**.

TOO BAD WE EVENTUALLY **RAN OUT OF FUEL**.

OH SURE. IT WAS GREAT. -SIGH-

YES, WHAT A PITY.



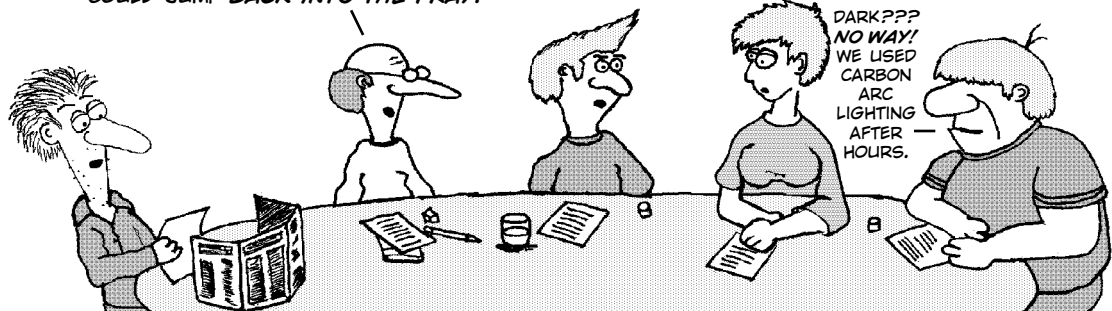
WHAT'D I TELL YAP HUH? I TOLD YOU GUYS **TRACKED VEHICLED** WERE KEWLER THAN WHEELED. **JOHNNY KAZINKI** TURNED ME ON TO THAT LITTLE TRICK.

YEAH BRIAN, **RUNNING OUT OF GAS BLEW**. HAVING TO RESORT TO **FISTICUFFS** WAS SO **DEMEANING**. MY CHARACTER **ACTUALLY** TOOK A POINT OF DAMAGE.

YOUR CHARACTER? HOW ABOUT **COMMANDER KIRK T. BLACKE** PASSING OUT FROM **HACK EXHAUSTION**. I HAD TO GET **BEAMED UP TO SICK BAY** TO REPLENISH MY **ELECTROLYTES** BEFORE I COULD **JUMP BACK INTO THE FRAY**.

AS MUCH AS I ENJOY RELIVING THE **DARKEST MOMENT** OF MY **SPACEHACK CAREER**, I THINK **BA** HAS BEEN TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING.

DARK??? **NO WAY!** WE USED **CARBON ARC LIGHTING** AFTER HOURS.



* (see KoDt #16, "The Whistling Zephyr")

The **Hackmaster Thesaurus** is Volume 18 of the HackMaster Pro Gamemaster reference library

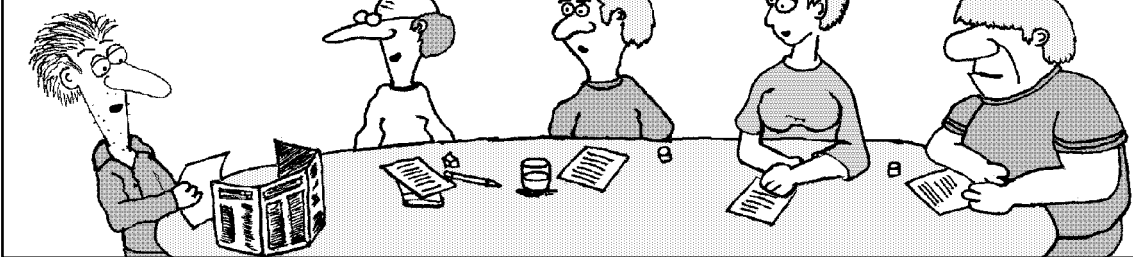
WHAT I WAS *TRYING* TO TELL YOU GUYS WAS THAT I WENT ON *EBAY* AND FOUND A *BUYER* FOR OUR MINIATURES. APPARENTLY THERE'S AN *APPLIANCE COMPANY* IN *TAIWAN* THAT *RECLAIMS* THE LEAD FOR *SOLDERING* WIRES IN THEIR BREADMAKERS. THE POSTAGE WAS A BITCH THOUGH. THE ODD THING IS THAT THEY WOULD ONLY TRADE FOR GAMING PRODUCTS. I MANAGED TO NET OUR LITTLE GROUP OVER 100 ASSORTED AND RARE *HARD 8* GAMING BOOKS AND *MODULES*.

100 BOOKS AND MODULES!
AWESOME BA. DO YOU HAVE A LIST?

YEAH, WHAT DID WE GET?

SOUNDS GREAT!

WE'LL I DON'T REALLY HAVE THEM INVENTORIED YET.



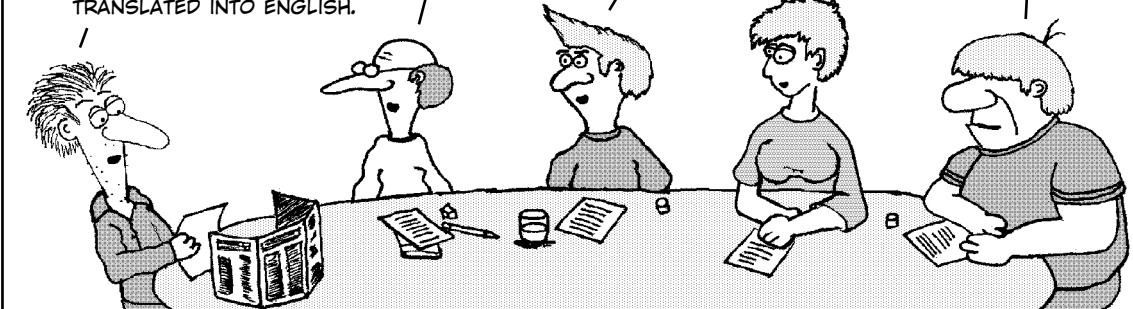
OVER 100 BOOKS!! DAMN B.A., THAT RULES!! I'M PROUD OF YOU - WHAT A COUP! I FIGURED THE *DWARF PARTS* COULD TRADE FOR MAYBE 3 *SUPPLEMENTS*, BUT 100? *OUTSTANDING!!!*

WHICH ONE WILL WE START WITH? *KNUCKLES' CROSSBOW FINGER'S* GETTIN' ITCHY WITH ALL THIS YAPPIN' AND NOT ENOUGH HACKIN'!!!

WOW! B.A. - YOU DA MAN!
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TITLES?

I'M VERY IMPRESSED B.A.
NICE JOB.

WELL, WE'LL HAVE TO START WITH THE ONE THAT'S ALREADY BEEN TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH.



WHOAH!!! HOLD ON THERE *TONTO*!! WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE *ONE* THAT'S IN *ENGLISH*? WHAT LANGUAGE ARE THE REST OF THEM WRITTEN IN?

ER UM... I'M NOT QUITE SURE. IT'S CHINESE I THINK. THEY'RE FROM *TAIWAN*. UH, SARA, AREN'T JOHN LEE'S PARENTS FROM *TAIPEI*? MAYBE THEY COULD... OH ER UH..

TAIPEI? ISN'T THAT THE CHINESE NAME FOR *HONG KONG*?

HEY BIG GUY,
DOESN'T *LEXXY* LIVE IN *HONG KONG*?
(SNICKER)



WE'LL (AHEM) LIKE I WAS SAYING, I'VE GOT THIS ONE ALREADY TRANSLATED MODULE AND IT LOOKS LIKE IT WILL BE **THE BEST ADVENTURE EVER.**

AND SINCE IT'S FROM THE FAR EAST, BRIAN CAN'T POSSIBLY HAVE READ IT BEFORE TONIGHT.

LET ME TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THOSE OTHER BOOKS BA. I MIGHT BE ABLE TO DECIPHER THEM BASED ON MY VAST COLLECTION OF **ANIME TITLES.** I'LL LET YOU KNOW NEXT SESSION. LET'S GAME.

A FEW MINUTES LATER

"YOU COME DOWN LING HELLWAY TO DORK ROOM THAT HAVE POOL OF WAITER MURKY ON MUD FLOOR. NARROW LEDGE SKIRT WALL OF ROOM. FOUL STENCH OF PIG EMANATE FROM POOL." SO WHAT DO YOU GUYS DO?

WHAT THE?!

I WASTE THE WAITER WITH MY CROSSBOW!!

A LING HELLWAY? DORK ROOM? I DON'T THINK I QUITE CAUGHT THAT LAST PART.

UM, INTERESTING FLAVOR TEXT BA. ARE YOU SURE YOU READ THAT RIGHT?

THAT ROOM DESCRIPTION READS LIKE THE MANUAL FOR MY CASIO 288LS PLUS PROGRAMMABLE CALCULATOR.



I DON'T SEE WHAT YOU GUYS DON'T UNDERSTAND? IT SEEMED TO MAKE PERFECT SENSE WHEN I READ THROUGH IT LAST NIGHT.

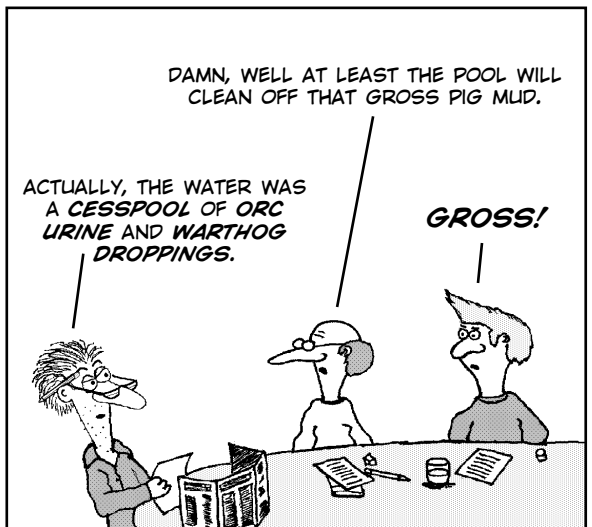
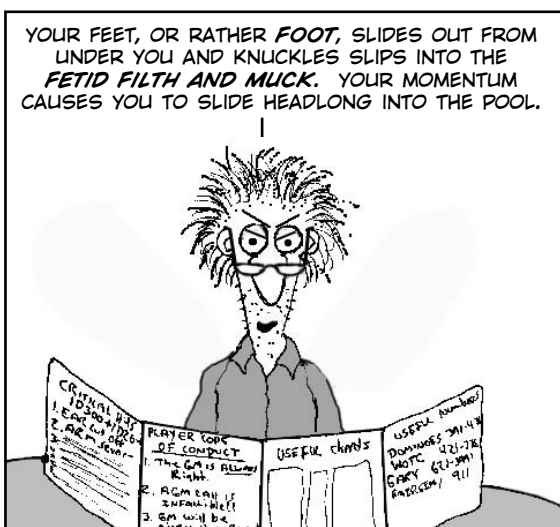
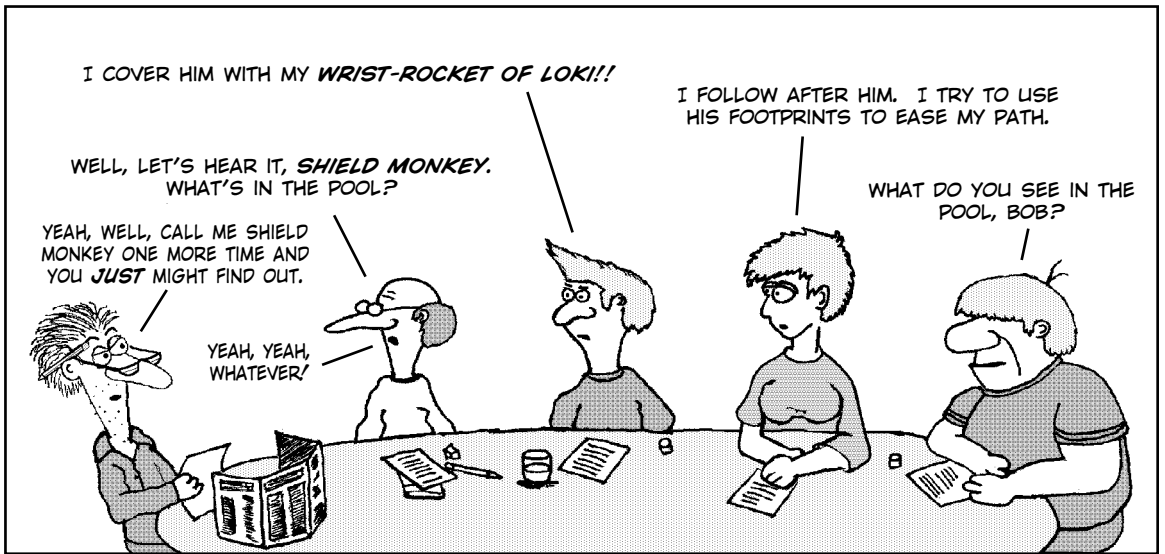
OK WISE GUY. WHY DON'T YOU EXPLAIN IT TO US IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

OH, LET'S SEE... THERE'S A ROOM WITH A POOL OF WATER. AND A MUDDY LEDGE AROUND IT.

MUDDY LEDGE? EXCELLENT! IT'S ABOUT TIME I GOT TO USE THIS STUPID CORSET OF FREE ACTION I PICKED UP IN MODULE W55: MOLE MEN OF GRUNGIDIA. I SWIFTLY RUN THROUGH THE MUD TO LOOK INTO THE POOL.

W55? THAT WAS A WUSS MODULE.





* See KoDT #36, page 12

† I [Jolly] was talking with Gary Gygax at PENTACON and he had his ORIGINAL twenty siders from the first D&D campaign he ran. One of them he had a name for (I forget what it was) but it was really worn down (almost round) and he claimed it only rolled 17 or higher. He rolled it about a dozen times and it kept coming up 17, 18, 17, 20, 17 etc. It was amazing. I asked if it was weighted and he grinned and said, "Naaaaaaa. It just rolls that way."

C'MON! YOU'RE JUST MAKING THIS STUFF UP AS YOU GO ALONG IN AN EFFORT TO **HUMILIATE** KNUCKLES. WELL HE'S **TOO PROUD** FOR THAT, YOU'RE **WASTING** YOUR TIME.

WHILE YOU'RE STANDING **PROUD** AND **TALL** ROLL TO SEE IF YOU **CONTRACT** A **DISEASE** FROM ACCIDENTALLY **SWALLOWING** SOME OF THE **FECAL** MATERIAL IN THE WATER.

I MAKE SURE I STAND UP-WIND OF KNUCKLES. HE STINKS.

I'M WITH 'RAV.

THIS ISN'T FUNNY!



I AGREE. THAT **STENCH** IS **BOUND** TO ATTRACT **WANDERING MONSTERS**. BOB, UNTIL THE SMELL GOES AWAY, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE POINT AHEAD

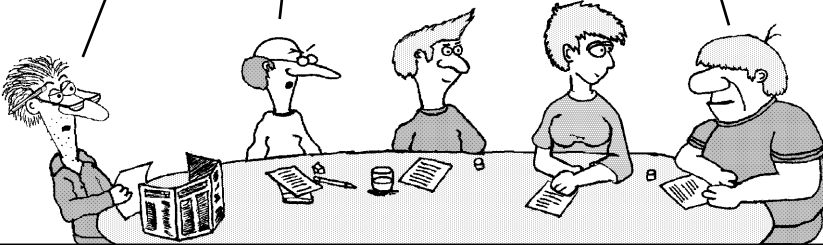
FAR AHEAD.



BY MYSELF? **NO WAY!** WHY DON'T I BRING UP THE REAR AND YOU CAN TAKE POINT AHEAD...**FAR AHEAD. FAT HEAD!**

BY THE WAY, **KNUCKLES**, YOU'RE STILL IN THE POOL. HOW DO YOU GET OUT?

WHY? 'CAUSE I DON'T STINK LIKE ORCIN FECAL MATERIAL, **CUEBALL!**



OKAY, THIS IS GETTING OLD FAST, **MISTER DETAIL MASTER**. I FREAKIN' STAND UP AND WALK OUT. SHEESH.



IT'S **TOO DEEP** FOR YOUR DWARF TO STAND. YOU'RE HEAD DOESN'T CLEAR THE SURFACE.

TOO DEEP FOR A FOUR FOOT DWARF TO STAND? **A FIVE FOOT DEEP CESSPOOL?**

YEAH, SO? IT'S FIVE FEET DEEP. SO WHAT?

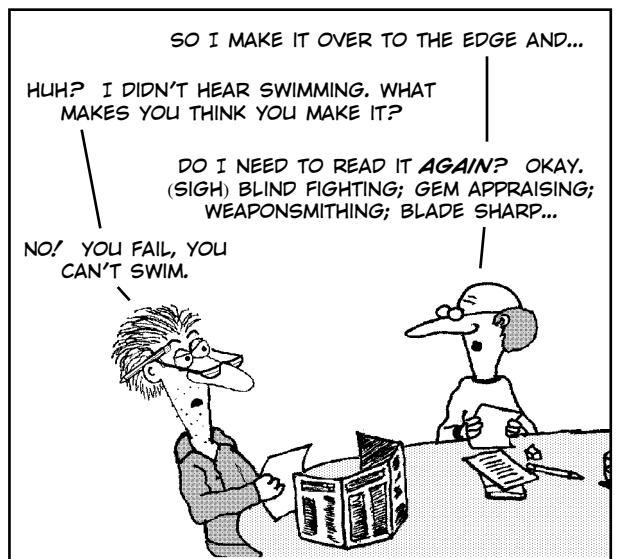
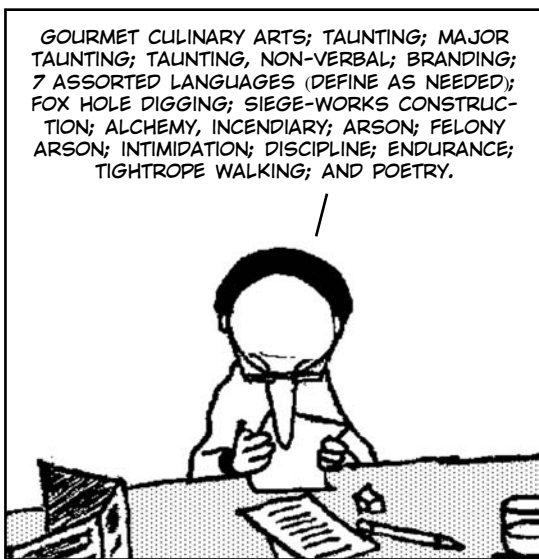
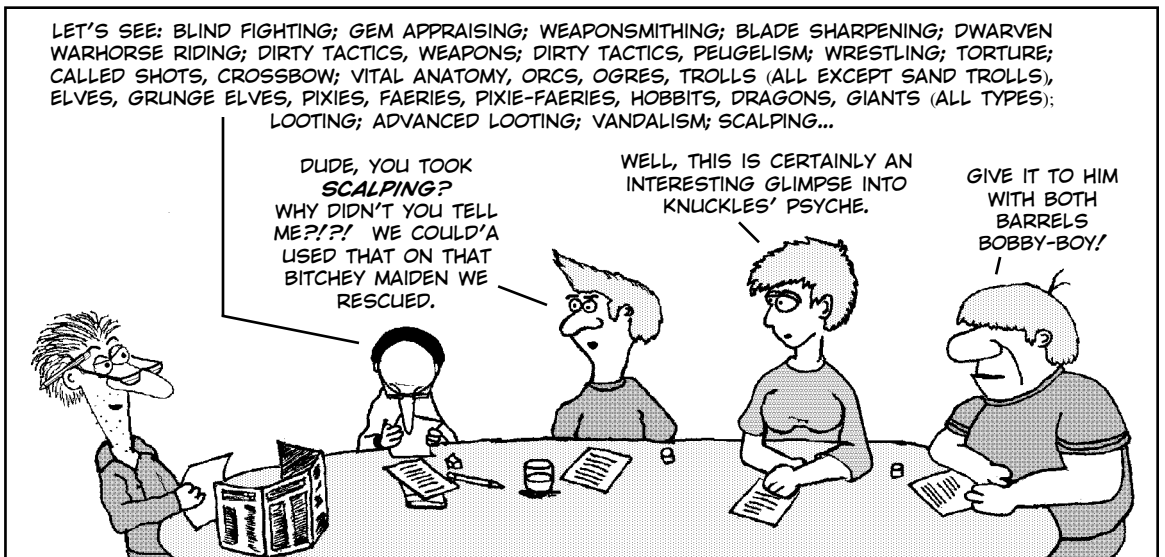
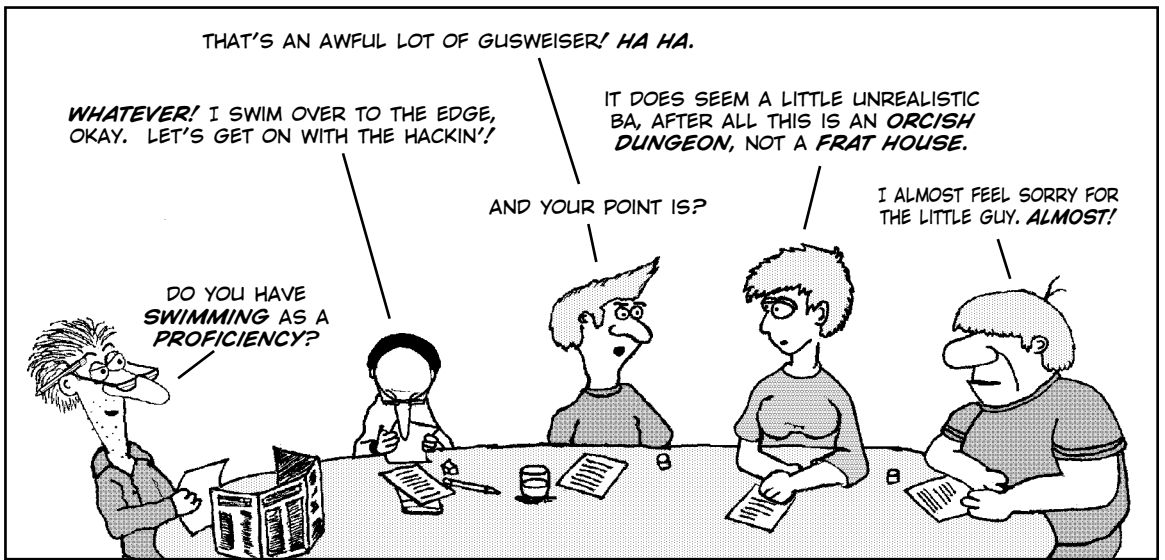
HOW CAN A CESSPOOL GET THAT DEEP?

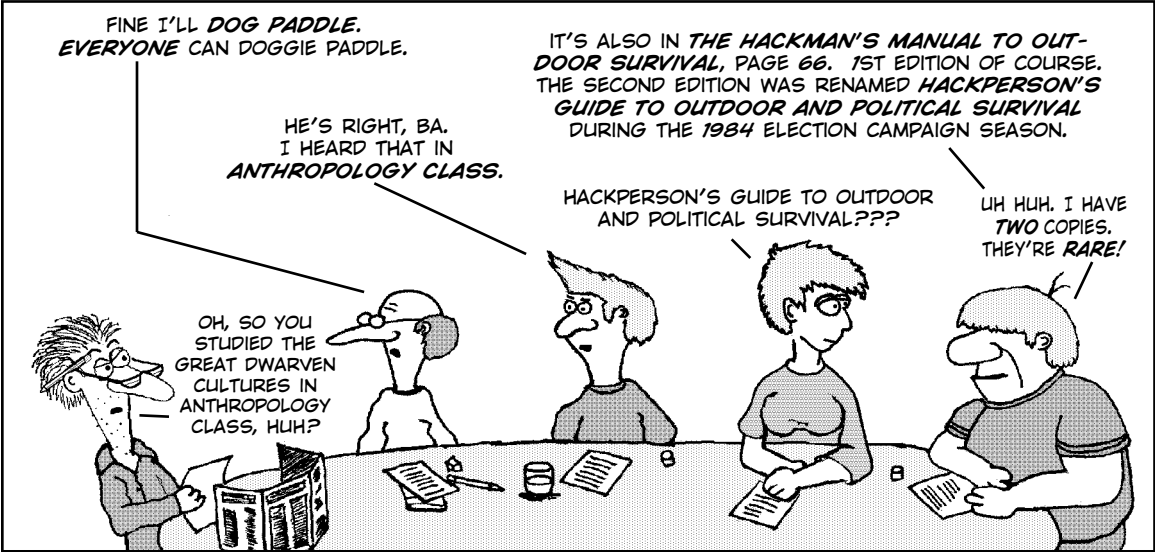
THEY'VE USED IT FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS.

WOULDN'T IT EVAPORATE?

THEY DRINK A LOT.







FINE I'LL DOG PADDLE.
EVERYONE CAN DOGGIE PADDLE.

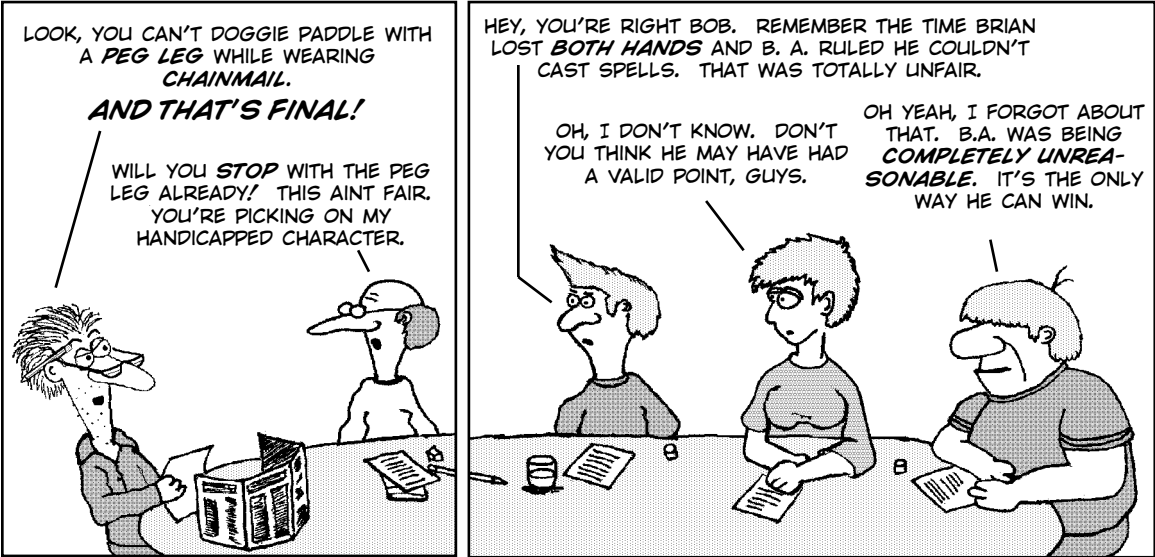
HE'S RIGHT, BA.
I HEARD THAT IN
ANTHROPOLOGY CLASS.

IT'S ALSO IN *THE HACKMAN'S MANUAL TO OUT-
DOOR SURVIVAL*, PAGE 66. 1ST EDITION OF COURSE.
THE SECOND EDITION WAS RENAMED *HACKPERSON'S
GUIDE TO OUTDOOR AND POLITICAL SURVIVAL*
DURING THE 1984 ELECTION CAMPAIGN SEASON.

HACKPERSON'S GUIDE TO OUTDOOR
AND POLITICAL SURVIVAL???

UH HUH. I HAVE
TWO COPIES.
THEY'RE RARE!

OH, SO YOU
STUDIED THE
GREAT DWARVEN
CULTURES IN
ANTHROPOLOGY
CLASS, HUH?



LOOK, YOU CAN'T DOGGIE PADDLE WITH
A PEG LEG WHILE WEARING
CHAINMAIL.

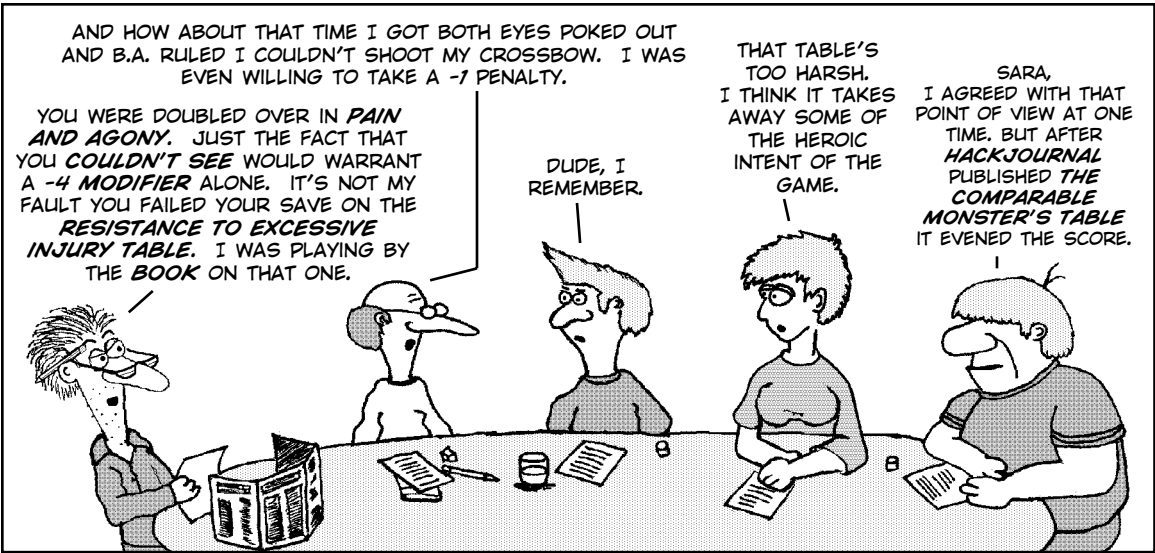
AND THAT'S FINAL!

WILL YOU STOP WITH THE PEG
LEG ALREADY! THIS AINT FAIR.
YOU'RE PICKING ON MY
HANDICAPPED CHARACTER.

HEY, YOU'RE RIGHT BOB. REMEMBER THE TIME BRIAN
LOST BOTH HANDS AND B. A. RULED HE COULDN'T
CAST SPELLS. THAT WAS TOTALLY UNFAIR.

OH, I DON'T KNOW. DON'T
YOU THINK HE MAY HAVE HAD
A VALID POINT, GUYS.

OH YEAH, I FORGOT ABOUT
THAT. B.A. WAS BEING
**COMPLETELY UNREA-
SONABLE.** IT'S THE ONLY
WAY HE CAN WIN.



AND HOW ABOUT THAT TIME I GOT BOTH EYES POKED OUT
AND B.A. RULED I COULDN'T SHOOT MY CROSSBOW. I WAS
EVEN WILLING TO TAKE A -7 PENALTY.

YOU WERE DOUBLED OVER IN PAIN
AND AGONY. JUST THE FACT THAT
YOU COULDN'T SEE WOULD WARRANT
A -4 MODIFIER ALONE. IT'S NOT MY
FAULT YOU FAILED YOUR SAVE ON THE
**RESISTANCE TO EXCESSIVE
INJURY TABLE.** I WAS PLAYING BY
THE BOOK ON THAT ONE.

DUDE, I
REMEMBER.

THAT TABLE'S
TOO HARSH.
I THINK IT TAKES
AWAY SOME OF
THE HEROIC
INTENT OF THE
GAME.

SARA,
I AGREED WITH THAT
POINT OF VIEW AT ONE
TIME. BUT AFTER
HACKJOURNAL PUBLISHED
**THE COMPARABLE
MONSTER'S TABLE**
IT EVENED THE SCORE.

WELL HOW ABOUT THE TIME YOU WOULDN'T LET ME WIELD MY **HACKMASTER +12** WHEN I HAD MY **ALL MY FINGERS** CUT OFF? I TOTALLY COULD HAVE GRABBED IT WITH MY STUMPS. IT'S EXPERTLY BALANCED. MY GRANDMOTHER COULD WIELD IT. IT'S A **MAJOR ARTIFACT** FOR CRYIN OUT LOUD.

UM, I THINK WHEN THAT SWORD WAS **FORGED** BY ODIN IN THE **FLAMES OF THE ELEMENTAL PLANES**, HE HAD SOMEONE WITH **HANDS** IN MIND TO WIELD IT.

'FRAID NOT SARA. DUNGEON MODULE **S14: INTO THE STENCH** HAD A **NINE TENTICLED CARRION WALKER** WIELDING A HACKMASTER CLASS SWORD AND THEY DON'T HAVE HANDS. AND WHAT ABOUT THE **ROPER** IN GARY'S NOVEL **THE SAGA OF CARL CRABEL**. SAME THING, BUT WITH THE +12 VARIETY, JUST LIKE 'RAV.

IT MAKES ME SO **MAD** WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT, I CAN'T **SEE** STRAIGHT.

DEAL WITH IT!



OK, OK. HOW ABOUT WHEN KNUCKLES LOST HIS LEG. YOU SAID I COULDN'T RUN. NOW MIND YOU, I STILL HAD AN **ENTIRE OTHER FULLY FUNCTIONING LEG** TO GET AROUND ON. WHY DO YOU THINK WE HAVE **TWO LEGS** IN THE FIRST PLACE?

OK BOB. WE'LL HAVE A RACE. YOU HOP AND I'LL RUN BACKWARD AND WE'LL SEE WHO WINS. THEN MAYBE I'LL GET SOME RESPECT AROUND HERE.

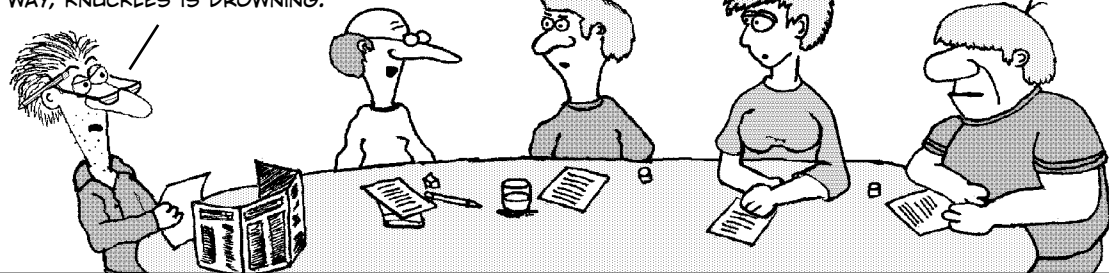
WELL B. A. AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER INSTANCES WHEN YOU'VE ALLOWED ONE LEGGED **NPCS** TO ESCAPE TORTURE AT THE HANDS OF BOB AND DAVE. I THINK IT'S JUST THE **DOUBLE STANDARD** THAT WE'RE CONCERNED ABOUT.



WELL THANK YOU **MOTHER THERESA**. YOU FINALLY SEE THINGS MY WAY FOR ONCE. I KNEW YOU'D COME AROUND. NOW SOMEBODY THROW ME A **FREAKIN' ROPE** SO I CAN GET OUT OF THIS MESS.

AND WHAT ABOUT THAT TIME SARINA LOST HET TONGUE IN THAT TORTURE CHAMBER SO YOU RULED SHE COULDN'T CAST SPELLS UNTIL WE REGENERATED IT? YET, WHEN KNUCKLES REMOVED THAT **ORCISH WITCH DOCTOR'S** TONGUE, HE SOMEHOW WAS LATER ABLE TO CAST **INVISIBILITY** AND ESCAPE.

BRIAN, THAT WAS A SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE. AND BY THE WAY, KNUCKLES IS DROWNING.

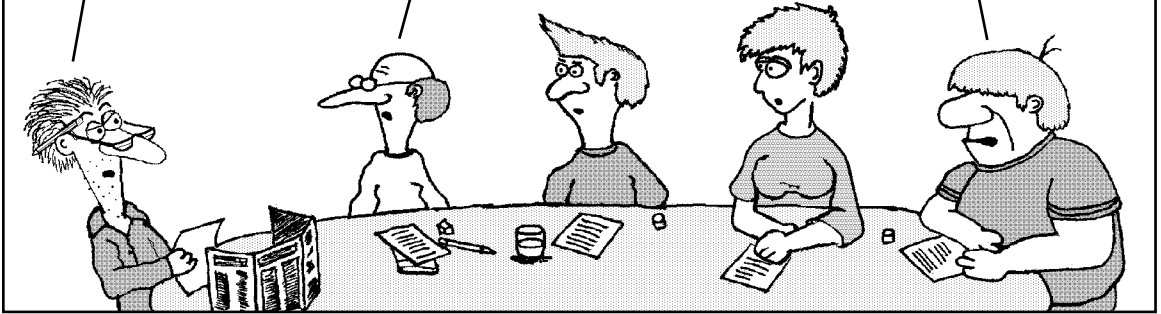


WE'LL THROW BOB A ROPE AND HOLD IT SO HE CAN CLIMB OUT.

OK YOU THROW THE ROPE BUT IT'S PRETTY MURKY IN THE POOL. KNUCKLES CAN'T SEE IT AND YOU REALLY CAN'T TELL WHERE HE IS.

I THOUGHT THIS GAME WAS CALLED HACKMASTER NOT "LET'S SEE-HOW-WE-CAN-GET-OUT-OF-A-CESPOOL MASTER".

FOR CRYIN OUT LOUD B. A.! WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM TODAY?



REALLY. WE'VE SLAIN DRAGONS. FOUGHT ENTIRE ARMIES AND BATTLED DEITIES. I DON'T THINK MESSING AROUND WITH THIS CESSPOOL IS THE BEST USE FOR OUR TIME B. A.. SAVE THE TRIVIAL DUNGEON DILEMMAS FOR THE KIDDIES WILL YA.

OK. LET ME GET THIS OVER WITH. I PUSH UP OFF THE BOTTOM OF THE POOL AND SPLASH AROUND SO THEY CAN SEE ME. THEY THROW ME THE ROPE AND I CLIMB OUT. **DON'T EVEN THINK** OF ASKING ME HOW LONG I CAN HOLD MY BREATH. WE'RE SERIOUS B. A.. YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN NOW LET'S GET ON WITH THE REAL GAME.

I FEEL LIKE I'M ON A BAD EPISODE OF BOB VILLA'S "THIS OLD DUNGEON".

"THIS OLD DUNGEON"? KEWL. WHEN'S THAT ON? WAS THAT A SON OF SVENGOOLIE EPISODE?

WHY DO YOU RESIST ME BOB?

YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T WIN.



MAYBE WE SHOULD WRITE A **CHARACTERS WITH DISABILITIES ACT** OR SOMETHING. WE CAN'T LET B. A. KEEP WALKING ALL OVER US LIKE THIS. JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE A HANDICAP YOU SHOULDN'T BE DENIED EQUAL HACKING RIGHTS. ITS JUST NOT FAIR.

BE CAREFUL GUYS. WHEN YOU SAY "**CHARACTERS**" THAT IMPLIES **EQUAL RIGHTS** FOR **MONSTERS** AND **NPC'S** TOO. I DON'T THINK ANY OF US WANT THAT. WE'LL NEED TO CALL IT **THE ADVENTURERS WITH DILIBITES ACT**.

???!
UH-OH.

THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN' ABOUT! **TAKING ACTION!**

EQUAL RIGHTS TO DIS- ABLED CHARACTERS?
WHAT A WONDERFULLY UNSELFISH IDEA DAVE. I'M VERY PROUD OF YOU.

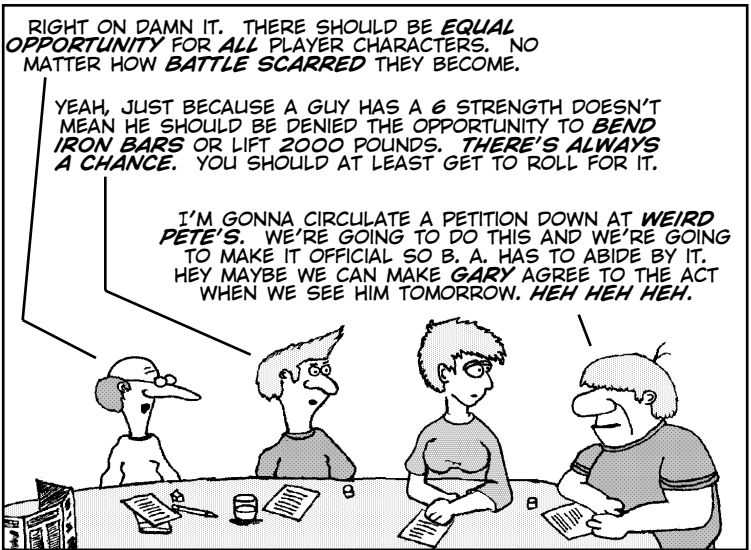
HUH?
OH
THANKS.





OR BETTER YET, THE **PLAYER CHARACTERS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**.

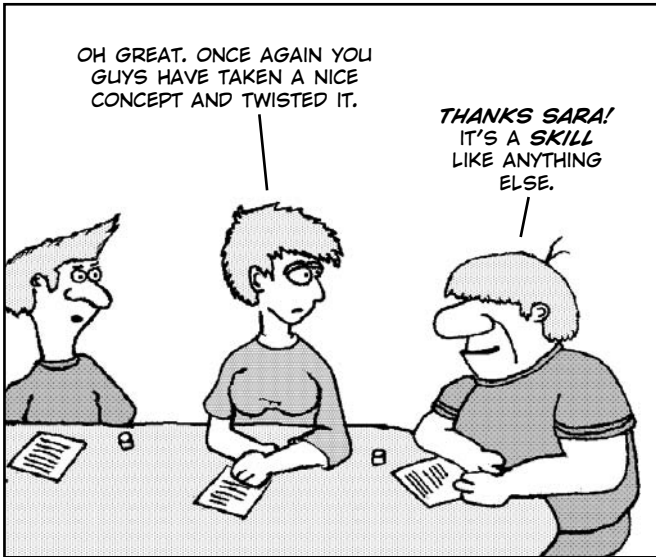
I DON'T THINK **B.A.** WILL BE ABLE TO TURN **THAT** AGAINST US.



RIGHT ON DAMN IT. THERE SHOULD BE **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY** FOR ALL PLAYER CHARACTERS. NO MATTER HOW **BATTLE SCARRED** THEY BECOME.

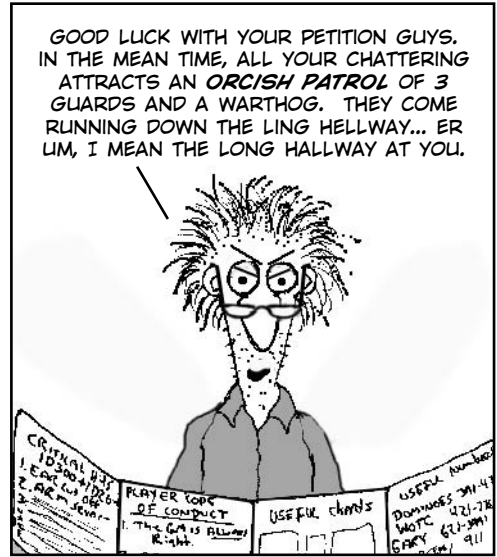
YEAH, JUST BECAUSE A GUY HAS A **6** STRENGTH DOESN'T MEAN HE SHOULD BE DENIED THE OPPORTUNITY TO **BEND IRON BARS** OR LIFT **2000 POUNDS**. **THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE**. YOU SHOULD AT LEAST GET TO ROLL FOR IT.

I'M GONNA CIRCULATE A PETITION DOWN AT **WEIRD PETE'S**. WE'RE GOING TO DO THIS AND WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT OFFICIAL SO **B. A.** HAS TO ABIDE BY IT. HEY MAYBE WE CAN MAKE **GARY** AGREE TO THE ACT WHEN WE SEE HIM TOMORROW. **HEH HEH HEH**.

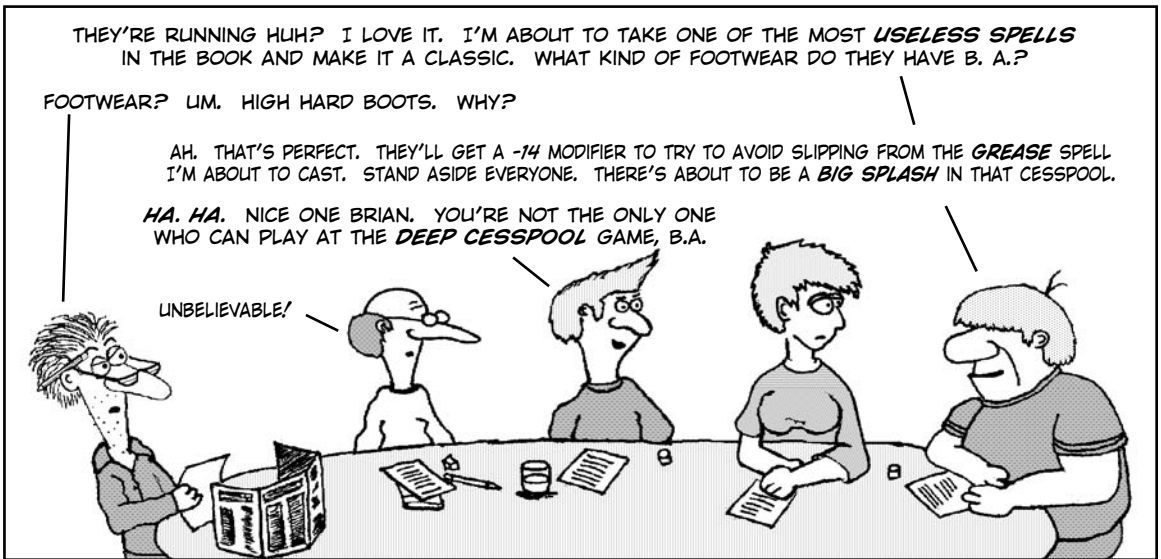


OH GREAT. ONCE AGAIN YOU GUYS HAVE TAKEN A NICE CONCEPT AND TWISTED IT.

THANKS **SARA!** IT'S A **SKILL** LIKE ANYTHING ELSE.



GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR PETITION GUYS. IN THE MEAN TIME, ALL YOUR CHATTERING ATTRACTS AN **ORCISH PATROL** OF 3 GUARDS AND A WARTHOG. THEY COME RUNNING DOWN THE LING HELLWAY... ER UM, I MEAN THE LONG HALLWAY AT YOU.



THEY'RE RUNNING HUH? I LOVE IT. I'M ABOUT TO TAKE ONE OF THE MOST **USELESS SPELLS** IN THE BOOK AND MAKE IT A CLASSIC. WHAT KIND OF FOOTWEAR DO THEY HAVE **B. A.?**

FOOTWEAR? UM. HIGH HARD BOOTS. WHY?

AH. THAT'S PERFECT. THEY'LL GET A **-14** MODIFIER TO TRY TO AVOID SLIPPING FROM THE **GREASE** SPELL I'M ABOUT TO CAST. STAND ASIDE EVERYONE. THERE'S ABOUT TO BE A **BIG SPLASH** IN THAT CESSPOOL.

HA. HA. NICE ONE **BRIAN**. YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PLAY AT THE **DEEP CESSPOOL** GAME, **B.A.**

UNBELIEVABLE!

HMM. OK. GOOD THINKING BRIAN. THEY ALL GO STUMBLING PAST YOUR GROUP INTO THE CESSPOOL. THEY FLOUNDER FOR A BIT AND THEN QUIETLY SINK TO THE BOTTOM. AS THEY SLIDE PAST KNUCKLES NOTICES THAT ONE OF THEM HAS A **RING OF KEYS** ON HIS BELT LOOP.

DON'T THINK YOU'RE GOING TO DENY US B. A. I'VE BEEN IN THAT CESSPOOL ONCE AND I'LL GO IN IT AGAIN IF THERE'S SOME CLUE TO CRACKING THIS DUNGEON. I'LL TIE THE ROPE TO MY WAIST, ENTER THE POOL AND SEARCH AROUND FOR THE KEY RING.



HOW LONG DO YOU WANT TO SEARCH?

I'LL SEARCH AS LONG AS IT TAKES. WHAT, MAYBE A FEW ROUNDS? IT SHOULDN'T TAKE ME LONGER THAN 10 MINUTES TO FIND THOSE KEYS. I CAN HOLD MY BREATH AND JUST COME UP FOR MORE AIR IF I NEED TO.



OK YOU GROPE AROUND FOR A WHILE AND EVENTUALLY FIND THE KEYRING. BUT JUST AS YOU ARE ABOUT TO CLIMB BACK OUT ON THE ROPE YOU'RE DISMAYED TO NOTICE YOU CAN'T SEEM TO FIND IT. IT MUST HAVE SLIPPED OFF FROM THE EFFECTS OF YOUR **CORSET OF FREE ACTION**.

WHAT? **CORSET OF FREE ACTION?** WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH A ROPE SLIPPING OFF?

I'LL TIE A ROPE TO SARINA, BUT I AINT GOING IN NO ORCISH CESSPOOL.

GET ME OUT!
GET ME OUT!

I TRY TO FISH HIM OUT, I'LL JUMP IN IF I HAVE TO.

WOW! PRETTY TRICKY B.A. ACCORDING TO THE RULES FOR **FREE ACTION**, THE USER OF THAT POWER CAN'T BE RESTRAINED BY SHACKLES, BINDINGS OR ROPES OF ANY KIND. TOUGH BREAK BOB. TEFLON BILLY IS ALLERGIC TO WARTHOG URINE, ELSE HE'D BE THERE FOR YA.

MY HAT IS OFF TO YOU.



YOU'RE TOO LATE, SARA. BOB, YOU NOTICE THAT YOUR LUNGS ARE BEGINNING TO BURN FROM LACK OF OXYGEN. IN FACT YOU BEGIN TO FEEL WEAK AND PASS OUT JUST AFTER **SUCKING IN A BIG MOUTHFULL OF ORC WIZ**.

GET ME OUT AND DO CPR. YOU BASTARDS, DON'T JUST STAND THERE!

MAN BITING IT IN A BIG POOL OF ORC WIZ AND WARTHOG DUNG? WHAT COULD BE WORSE? I HOPE THE BARDS GO EASY ON YOU MY FRIEND.

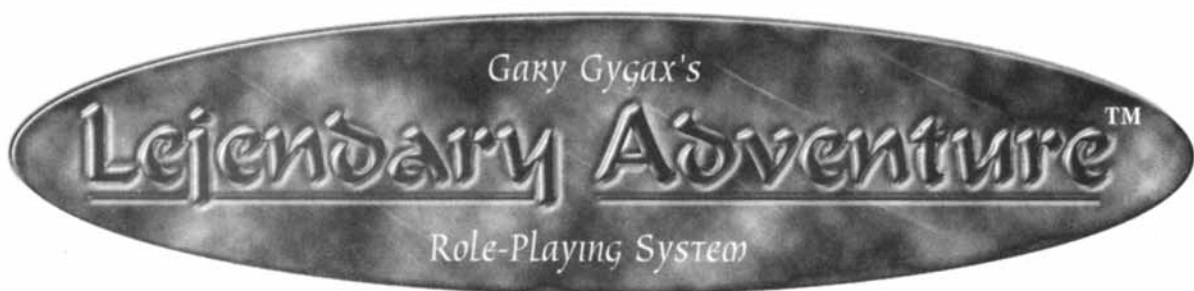
ORC WIZ? GROSS. AHH, WELL, B.A., I'LL PERFORM RESCUE CPR. YOU OWE ME BIG-TIME, KNUCKLES.

SOMETIMES DEATH CAN BE STARING YOU RIGHT IN THE FACE AND YOU NEVER EVEN SEE IT COMING. POOR KNUCKLES.

HEY, LET'S SEARCH HIS BODY IN CASE SHE CAN'T SAVE HIM!!!



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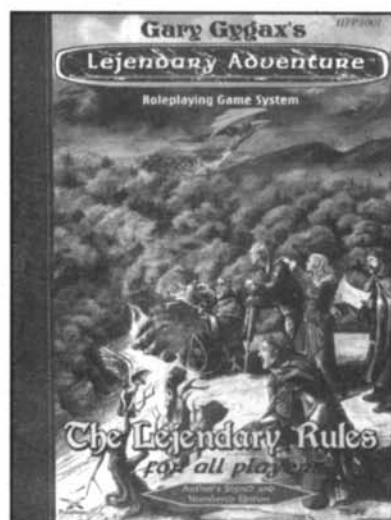


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WHADDA YOU MEAN BRIAN SIGNED MY NAME TO A SECRET ALLIANCE???? BUT I WANNA SLAUGHTER THIS **VULDROK SHIP!**

I'M IMPRESSED BRIAN. THE HAWKWOOD FLEET HAS SURRENDERED WITHOUT A SINGLE MESON CANNON BEING FIRED.

I KNEW THAT SECRET ALLIANCE I NEGOTIATED WITH THE **VULDROK RAIDERS** WOULD PROVE BENEFICIAL.



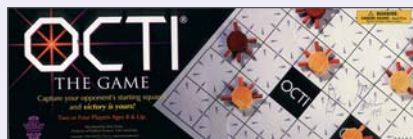


Artwork by George Vrbanic

PUBLISHERS!!

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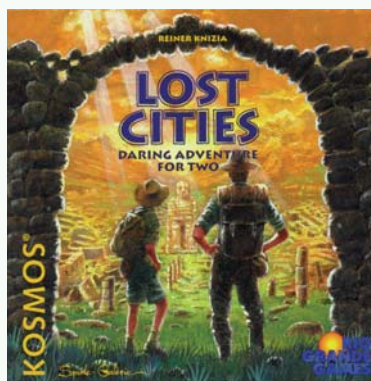


When Don Green, the developer of this game, asked me to sit down and for a demonstration I was a bit skeptical. Especially when he rolled out the vinyl silk-screened board and started separating the wooden playing pieces. “Oh....” I thought, “Another Checkers variant. How nice!” Boy was I wrong. Octi is an exciting strategy game in which players must choose between moving or strengthening their pieces. Each player receives an equal number of octagonal pieces called, “pods” and wooden pegs called “prongs” which when added to a pod allow directional movement. You can be playing this game, out of the box, in less than five minutes. But don’t be fooled — This game could take years to master. Games tend to go quickly (15 to 45 minutes) and you’ll find yourself saying, “Again!” to your opponent. This is definitely a game that won’t stay on the shelf long enough to gather dust.

Brian’s Rating: Buy it!! You’ll thank me for it.

LOST CITIES

KOSMOS/Rio Grande Games
PO Box 45715
Rio Rancho, NM 87174
Email: www.riograndegames.com



In this game, two players compete as they explore lost cities in such exotic locales as the Himalayas, ancient volcanoes and even under the ocean’s depths. Players must determine which expeditions to embark upon based upon how much money they wish to invest. The higher the investment, the greater the chance of great reward — and the greater the risk of failure.

The game comes complete with a uniquely-shaped game board and 60 cards, 45 expedition cards and 15 investment cards. Players can decide how many rounds they wish to play. Each starts with one or more expeditions and uses cards to take the expedition as far as possible. When a player begins an expedition, he can choose to increase his investment, and his risk. Backtracking is not allowed.

This is a game for the bold. Players’ expeditions are scored based on their success. The player with the most points at the end of the game wins. Simple as that. The game is highly attractive, and a great game for anyone who has ever dreamed of being the first to discover mysterious worlds.

Brian’s Rating: Pack up your gear, and set out for new territory with this game.



FADING SUNS — Science Fiction Roleplaying
Holistic Design Inc.

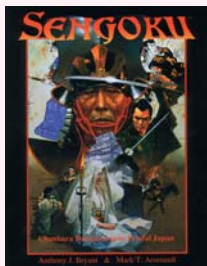
5295 Hwy 78, D-337, Stone Mountain, GA 30087
Email: www.fadingsuns.com Cost: \$34.95

A futuristic Passion Play—That’s how this 306 page (*Wow!*) roleplaying game describes itself. After drooling over its pages, I would have to agree. Set in the future, and a dark one at that, the world is painted in broad, sweeping strokes of tragedy, with slivers of light shining through. Player characters represent heroes who strive to bring more light into this shadowy existence. (*Where are my dice? I’m ready to play.*)

Although the game is set in the future, and has ample amounts of technology available, it also adds elements of fantasy, with noble houses striving for dominance and magic swirling about the cosmos, waiting for those willing to master it. Space opera might be an appropriate term to describe *Fading Suns*. Mysticism, spirituality and the occult play as big a role in this universe as spaceships and aliens. Characters can be created from templates or they can be custom made. Characteristics come in three types: body, mind and spirit. Skills are available in a number of areas such as Alchemy, Genetics and Demolitions. Occult powers allow players to channel the personality of a dead person, or dominate the minds of others. They can also use such technology as Ether Ear, allowing the character to use a radio concealed in the inner ear to receive transmissions, or plasma grenades. It is indeed a wild world.

Oh, and incidentally, if you’ve been badly burned in the past by investing in new RPGS only to see them the publisher go belly-up, along with the promise of any support or supplements, you’ll be glad to know that *Fading Suns* is one of the best supported systems on the market today. Supplements like *Hawkwood Fiefs*, *Letters of Marque*, *Noble Armada*, etc are currently available with more on the way.

Brian’s Rating: For spacefarers in search of the unique, this is the game to seek.



SENGOKU: Chanbara Roleplaying in Feudal Japan

Gold Rush Games P.O. Box 2531, Elk Grove, CA 95759 Email: GoldrushG@aol.com Cost: \$30.00

If you are a fan of chanbara (*Japanese-heroic*) style movies or comics, **Sengoku** is the answer to all your gaming prayers; if not, then **Sengoku** will introduce you to a whole new world (*or island?*) of roleplaying opportunities! It is a game that lives up to its dedication to the memories of chanbara cinema masters *Toshiro Mifune* and *Akira Kurosawa*. The **Sengoku** rulebook is jam-packed with information on the culture, history and society of Japan, focussing on the **Sengoku**, or Warring States period. Everything from gambling and warfare to birth and death is covered in detail, written with an eye toward use of the information in a roleplaying game, rather than in an academic manner. **Sengoku** uses the **Total Fuzion** game system, allowing for just about any character that a player might want to develop and also allowing for use of the information presented in

Sengoku in other **Fuzion Powered** games. Extensive campaign information is presented, including equipment lists, supernatural creatures, floorplans, a glossary and an extensive list of inspirational films and books. Conversion notes for just about every other oriental adventure game are included as well.

Brian's Rating: Ichiban desu yo! Drop whatever you are doing and go buy this game!

BIG ROBOTS, COOL STARSHIPS: A Mecha/SF Supplement for Big Eyes, Small Mouth Guardians of Order

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Guardians of Order really got my attention a few years ago with the release of **Big Eyes, Small Mouth**. Apparently I wasn't alone because I heard the book sold really well (*As did their first license, Sailor Moon the RPG*).

For fans of anime, and **Big Eyes, Small Mouth**, this supplement adds another cool dimension to one of the hottest crazes around. With this supplement, a character can create and use anything from

mecha dragons and combat cyborgs to killer motorcycles and immense space stations. (*Mecha is the term used by animators and fans to refer to the mechanical designs that appear in Japanese anime and manga*).

Some mecha-related attributes are *Cybernetic Body* and *Own A Big Robot*. The six-step mecha design process allows you to acquire a mecha, or even be one. Some of the possible concepts of mecha players can own include: *giant-piloted robots, robot companions, transforming mecha*. Players can also become mecabots, androids or cyborgs, although they can also come up with their own concepts.

To aid players in using the supplement, the writer has thoughtfully provided examples throughout the text.

Brian's Rating: If anime is your bag you'll definitely love this one.

IMAGINE: Player's Guide Imagine Role Playing, Incorporated

8725 Roswell Road, Suite O-140, Dunwoody, GA 30350
Email: <http://www.role-playing.com/>
Cost: \$29.95

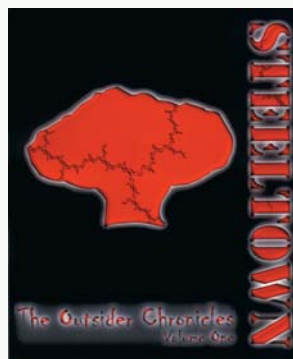


"When you think of two warriors locked in combat, do you see dice rolling? Or, do you see a war-hammer striking a shield and a sword slipping through armor?"

The **Imagine Role Playing System** was designed to allow the flow and chaos of battle to unfold around the players. Weighing in at 324 pages, this book covers everything from the introduction of 12 character attributes and 18 races to 26 character classes and more than 340 skills. It also includes more than 450 spells and invocations, more than 150 different weapons and armor and more than 500 items of equipment. It also offers character sheets in the back of the book which can be photocopied, or players can download copies of the sheets from the company's web page.

Character attributes are divided into four categories: physical, mental, personal and mystical. Character classes include everything from **Duelists** to **Bandits** to **Dark Priests**. Characters in combat can choose a wide variety of actions, including making a furious attack, moving into an opponent with a body check, and making a desperate defense. Spells such as *Magic Nose*, *Produce Fog* and *Fist of Magic* spice things up considerably.

Brian's Rating: Imagine you are playing this game. Now go buy it.



STEELTOWN: The Outsider Chronicles Volume One Heraldic Game Design

Cost: \$13.95

Time is like a tree and you are able to leap from branch to branch. That is what characters in the world of **Steeltown** will do. Characters are part of a project called *Outsider*, a crack team of specialists which explores alternate realities. The first stop is **Steeltown**, a gritty place, where corruption rules and technology has taken an unexpected turn or two. **Steeltown** is made for use with **SOL: The Omniversal Roleplaying System**. Characters must decide if they have what it takes to take on gangs, syndicates, police and corrupt politicians. Characters can be created quickly, using templates, or they can be built from the ground up. The rules are concise and clear, the concept — fascinating. It's a gritty, intriguing fusion of the Cyberpunk and Post-Nuclear genres.

Brian's Rating: Talk about true grit. This one's heavy-duty fun.

As gamers we all have one thing in common. We love climbing under the hood of a game and tinkering with the rules. The Game Mechanic is a place where rule-jockies can get together and share their home-brewed rules. Send your own favorite house-rules to:

KODT, 1003 Monroe Pike, Marion IN 469532



ORCS AT THE GATES



Artwork by George Vrbancic

COMPANY: Jolly Roger Games

TWEAK: "The Loot, More Loot Rule" MECHANIC: Franklin L. Johnson

I've been playing OAG and it's a good simple game system with unexpected subtleties. (For example, bunch up the orcs and let attack en masse - they can be more dangerous than they look.) I find that allowing unlimited looting of chests gives the game an 'unfocused' feel. Why move to the other boards unless the Southern Orc League has arrived? I suggest each chest can only be looted once. This will create an undignified scramble to see who can get to a chest first, but that's in the spirit of the game [and the comic book - editor] If this turns out to make points too light for the players, try this: "THE LOOT, MORE LOOT!" rule.

When all the chests on a map section are looted all players must exit that section as soon as possible and, driven by insensate greed, may not re-enter. When all players have left a plundered map section, all orcs must exit the map section as well. And, driven by insensate blood-lust, the orcs may not re-enter that section.

When all players and orcs have vacated the plundered map section, remove it from play, flip it over, and add it to the map, using the placement rules from set-up. A new section cannot be placed where an old section once, was, unless necessary to make the map contiguous. □

BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

GAMES: Oodles and oodles of games encrypted in strange foreign tongues.

TWEAK: The Information Highway! Mechanics: Various unsung heroes.

What's the matter Bunky? Drooling over all those kewl German games down at your local game shop? Kinda makes you wish you had paid more attention to your german teacher in high school doesn't it? Or how about that kick-ass Swedish game, KRASH? Flipping through your German-to-English dictionary — trying to sort it all out is enough to make a grown man cry. Well....pay attention Mister Gloomy-Drawers. I'm about to let you in on a secret. The information highway is swarming with English translations of games from all around the globe. There are even a few kind-hearted souls out there who are willing to answer your questions should you run into some problems.

Here's a few sites to get you started on your search;

THE CONVIVIAM FILE LIST: <http://www.cix.co.uk/~convivium/filelist.htm>

THE GAMING DUMPSTER: <http://www.neonate.org/>

RIO GRANDE GAMES: <http://www.riograndegames.com/ourgames.htm>

THE GAME CABINET: <http://www.gamecabinet.com>

FUN AGAIN GAMES: <http://kumquat.com/cgi-kumquat/funagain/home>

Of course, patience is a virtue. Keep in mind that companies like Rio Grande Games, Mayfair and Euro Games have an excellent track record of bringing the more popular European titles to us English-speaking types. □



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The Name Game

By Lloyd Brown

One of the most difficult and least-appreciated aspects of writing is the creation of interesting and appropriate names. While readers rarely rave about a writer's character names, they are quick to point out lame or inconsistent names of characters and places. GameMasters can overcome this potential stumbling point by doing a little research and observing a few guidelines.

Tools

When creating names, certain tools come in handy. You don't need all of these, but the more you have, the more ably you'll meet the challenge. An atlas is ideal for generating place names.

A dry, boring history book is good; the more long-winded and unreadable it is, the better, because those books are likely to have a thorough index, which is really why you want it in the first place.

A phone book probably delivers the best punch when searching for names. Especially here in America, you can find names from all over the world, which is not useful when trying to stick to a certain flavor or language, but it is useful for finding many names quickly or finding alternative spellings of names.

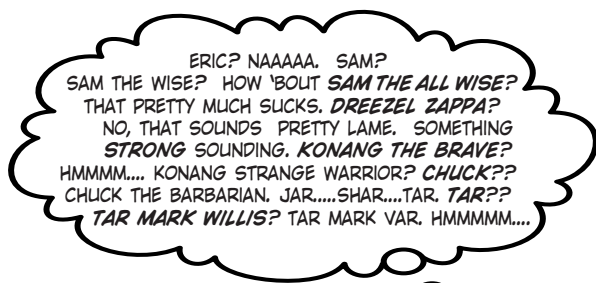
A street guide is a good place to find both personal names and place names. Many streets are named after locally famous personalities, and many streets are named after the places from the point of origin of the folk who originally settled the area.

Lastly, an English-to-foreign language dictionary gives you the foreign equivalents of common words that you'll often use when creating names.

If you're writing about a future French colony on the moon, you'll find an English-French dictionary helpful. Even if you're naming a solely fantastic place and people, you'll be able to use one or more of these books.

Establish Standards

Choose a language after which you'll model your names. Use real names, or if you must create new names for a fantasy setting, use only similar sounds that you can find in your dictionary and determine which sounds are not used at all (no letter l in Japanese, for example, and most words end in a vowel). It's far easier to use a real language than it is to create a whole new



set of rules just for your language. Try to find one similar to the flavor of your campaign or story as well. For example, many writers use a Scandinavian model for fantasy dwarven names, and Celtic sounds or rules for Elven languages.

You might want to model your dwarven language after Russian to provide some variety. If the race in question is the dominant culture in the game, you might want to use several models. You'll also need to research (or decide) whether people use one name or two (or more), and whether the family name or personal name comes first. You need to consider how adoption, marriage, taking religious orders, and other factors change names.

You'll also need a few titles to work with. Titles should include religious figures, military, civil positions, nobility, and any special considerations for the fictional world. From these rules, take common names and make slight changes for your worlds most popular names. Add or subtract surnames, nicknames, titles, and other names to create a wide variety of names. Remember that names in common use are often the shortest and also see the most variation.

Familiar or fantastic?

In general, the names of heroes or protagonists should be common or at least similar to common names. Readers or gamers can identify more easily with the characters. Similarly, the villains should have alien names, or those that evoke a strongly different culture. In any case, mix the familiar and fantastic for best effect

A look at Frank Herbert's *Dune*, for example, reveals interesting combinations like *Paul Muad'dib* and *Vladimir* and *Feyd-Rautha Harkonnen*. Tolkien makes good use of fantastic names with familiar (or at least familiar-sounding) nicknames. *Aragorn* becomes *Strider*, *Meriadoc* is called *Merry*, and *Samwise* goes by *Sam*.

Family names

In English, our most common surnames are taken from trades. A collection of names taken in England fairly accurately represents the prevalence of the trades from which those names were taken (in America, the representation is distorted). In a fictional world, these names should make up the majority of commoners' family names as well.

Traits are also commonly used to describe both the nobility and commoners. Along Charlemagne's line, for example, you can find Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, Pepin the Short, and Louis the Pious. "Charlemagne" itself is a simple translation of Charles the Great.

Among those of the lower class, these traits are occasionally ironic. The most common example is King used as a surname by a family of farmers or tradesmen. Little is also a common ironic name, given to a big man. Last names that indicate place of birth are also common, usually in the form "of" something. The person might be from a city or town or "of" a geographic feature, like a bridge, lake, or forest.

In Irish names it becomes O', the Romance languages use de or di. O'Rourke or duPont, are examples. Your fantasy names might use Ri, so, or tu' for a similar function.

Place names

Just like using personal names, you should use a blend of borrowed and fantastic names for your fantasy world when doling out place names. The small town of Broken Ridge might be only a few miles from Lake Ixilmec and the metropolitan center Coyoatlan.

Suffixes like -ville, -burg, -ton (*from town*), -ham, (*or -hampton*), -boro (*or -borough, or -bury*) can follow a person's name, indicating that the city or town was named after that person. Although these names are scattered randomly across the United States, they hail from different cultures. In their original culture, the diversity was far less. Your world atlas can show you which suffixes are common in different locations.

Overlapping place names adds a certain element of conflict within your world. One group of people lost lands and titles to another, and the group gaining in power certainly yearns for still more. Different personal names indicate different races as well. You can use this conflict to generate story seeds or adventures for your setting.

Ad-libbing names

Don't! Just make your players think you are. Take a few minutes to write down the most common names for your fictional world. You can divide them by race, sex, ethnic group, or however you wish. When the PCs stretch your naming imagination, choose or roll a name from your list and embellish it with a few of the tricks from above.

For the first few names, take them as they appear on your list. If you start running into overlap soon, don't worry. Duplication of names is nothing to fear. Many people in the real world share the same name. In 17th century Britain, for example, fully 50% of the population shared only a dozen names. Johns, Williams, Marys and Annes were everywhere.

For some variation, add a title, give somebody a nickname, or make him "from" somewhere. If you have nothing but a name to go on, and you give the character a noble title, you have developed some aspect of his character.

Now you know the character is probably socially above the heroes and might not appreciate their forward approach. A character with a nickname, especially one somewhat risqué or even downright ribald, is likely a more down-to-earth fellow who might be friendly to strangers.

Place names are even easier. Make two lists, one with features, such as Lake, River, Ridge, or Forest and another with fantastic names. Choose one from each list. Mix them up, and don't worry about whether there is actually a Throntier Lake nearby if that is what you roll. It could have dried up, or it might go by a different name now. Optionally, you could use a name from the proper name list, and then add a feature or village synonym (Mariton, meaning Mary's town).

If you're really in a bind and don't have time to put this list together, open up that atlas or history book and start digging. Take some places as they are, lifting them directly to your campaign. Make a small change here and there to others, mixing up phonetics or words to create new villages. Be warned, though: if you game with people who have traveled extensively, you might find that they have been to the place where you're stealing names from.

A few tools and notes about how names work can give you that little extra bit of authenticity to help make your fictional setting more real to your players or readers. These resources and generalities should provide ample help in this tough, unappreciated aspect of writing. Whether creating game scenarios or fiction for publication, or just throwing together something for the home campaign, you can use these suggestions to improve your own talent for naming characters and places.



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SORRY BRIAN, BUT THE GUARD'S HIT RENDERS YOU UNCONSCIOUS. OKAY BOB, IT'S UP TO YOU. YOU CAN EITHER TRY TO GRAB SARA BY THE HAND, THUS PREVENTING HER FROM FALLING OFF THE TOWER, WHICH WOULD BE CERTAIN DEATH FOR HER CHARACTER, OR YOU CAN RUN FOR DAVE'S CHARACTER, WHO IS STILL PARALYZED AND TRY TO PUSH HIM OUT OF THE WAY OF THE DOWN-RUSHING PORTCULLIS. WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

DUH! LIKE YOU EVEN HAVE TO ASK? EVERYONE KNOWS HOW TIGHT THE RAV AND KNUCKLES ARE. IT'S A NO BRAINER. RIGHT BOB?

WELL THERE'S NO WAY I CAN COMPETE WITH THAT MALE BONDING THING YOUR CHARACTERS HAVE GOING THERE. UNLESS.....HMMMMMMMM. HEY BOB, TELL YA WHAT. SAVE MY CHARACTER AND I'LL REWARD YOU WITH A KISS. A REAL KISS.

UH...ER...

SPUTTER! / A KISS?! WHAT THE HELL?



I BEG YOUR PARDON?!? THIS IS RIDICULOUS, SARA! YOU CAN'T SERIOUSLY BE OFFERING TO KISS BOB FOR AN IN-PLAY FAVOR.

ARE YOU COMPLETELY NUTS, MISSY? NO WAY BOB IS GOING TO BE MANIPULATED LIKE THA.....

HA! SHOWS WHAT YOU KNOW, DAVE. WHEN IT'S ALL SAID AND DONE - MEN ARE WEAK!

WAIT?! DON'T DO IT, SARA! WE'RE TALKING ABOUT BOB HERE! IT'S NOT WORTH IT. I STILL GOT A CHARGE IN MY RING OF CORPSE RAISING. I'LL LET YOU HAVE IT. AHEM. FOR A SMALL FEE OF COURSE.

CAN YOU?

I RESCUESARAAND FORGETABOUTDAVE!



SORRY, BRIAN, BUT I FEAR THAT WON'T BE POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE MOAT BEING FILLED WITH HUNGRY PIRANHAS AND ALL. -SIGH-

AWWWW MAN! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! YOU'RE GONNA BETRAY ME OVER SOME...SOME....GIRL??

WHY IS EVERYONE SO UPSET? WHAT'S WRONG WITH AN INNOCENT KISS BETWEEN GOOD FRIENDS?

DID YOU HEAR ME, B.A.? I GO AFTER SARA... GUDRUN... WHOEVER. SO CAN I ROLL SOME DICE NOW?

INNOCENT MY ASS, HRRMPH!



* Agin Suer handed us this home-brewed version of KODT at Spiel '99 in Essen, Germany recently.

"SIGH" ALL RIGHT THEN, BOB. SINCE YOU ROLLED A NATURAL 20, KNUCKLES MANAGES TO GRAB GUDRUN'S WRIST IN THE LAST INSTANCE, DRAGGING HER BACK OVER THE WALL TO SOFTLY LAND IN HIS ARMS. DAVE, YOU ARE CRUSHED BY THE PORTCULLIS. SORRY.

IT HATH BEEN MY GREATEST PLEASURE TO RESCUE YOU FROM *HARM'S WAY* MY BELOVED LADY!

DEAD? NOT AGAIN! I *DISBELIEVE* THE PORTCULLIS...

I THANK THEE KINDLY, NOBLE AND MOST VALIANT SIR KNUCKLES!

VALIANT... PAH! NOBLE... PAH!!!



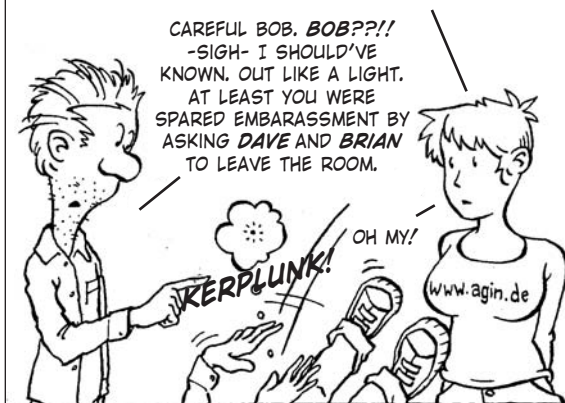
A WEE BIT LATER....

OKAY, BOB. READY FOR YOUR *KISS*??!!

CAREFUL BOB. *BOB*??!!
-SIGH- I SHOULD'VE KNOWN. OUT LIKE A LIGHT. AT LEAST YOU WERE SPARED EMBARRASSMENT BY ASKING *DAVE* AND *BRIAN* TO LEAVE THE ROOM.

OH MY!

KERPLUNK!

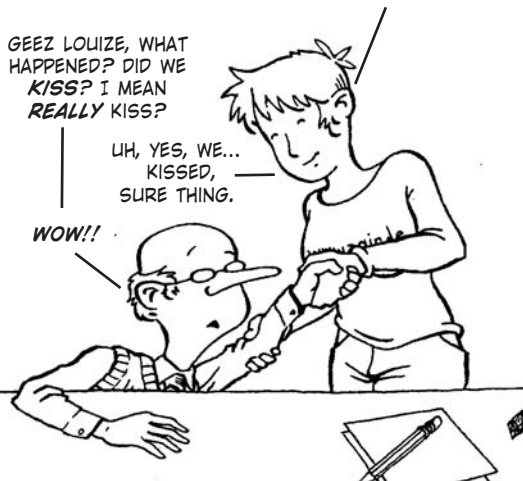


THANK YOU FOR BEING SO *PREDICTABLE*, BOB. YOU'RE A *REMARKABLE* GUY.

GEEZ LOUIZE, WHAT HAPPENED? DID WE *KISS*? I MEAN *REALLY* KISS?

UH, YES, WE... KISSED, SURE THING.

WOW!!



A LITTLE LATER...

AWH C'MON DUDE. *DETAILS!!!* GIMME *DETAILS!!* SO YOU REALLY KISSED HUH? TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT!

YOU BET I DID! IT WAS TERRIFIC! I KISSED HER SO *INTENSELY*, THE THE POOR GIRL CRUMPLED IN MY ARMS LIKE A *PAPER FLOWER!*

NO KIDDIN'? WAY TO GO, DUDE!

KEWL!



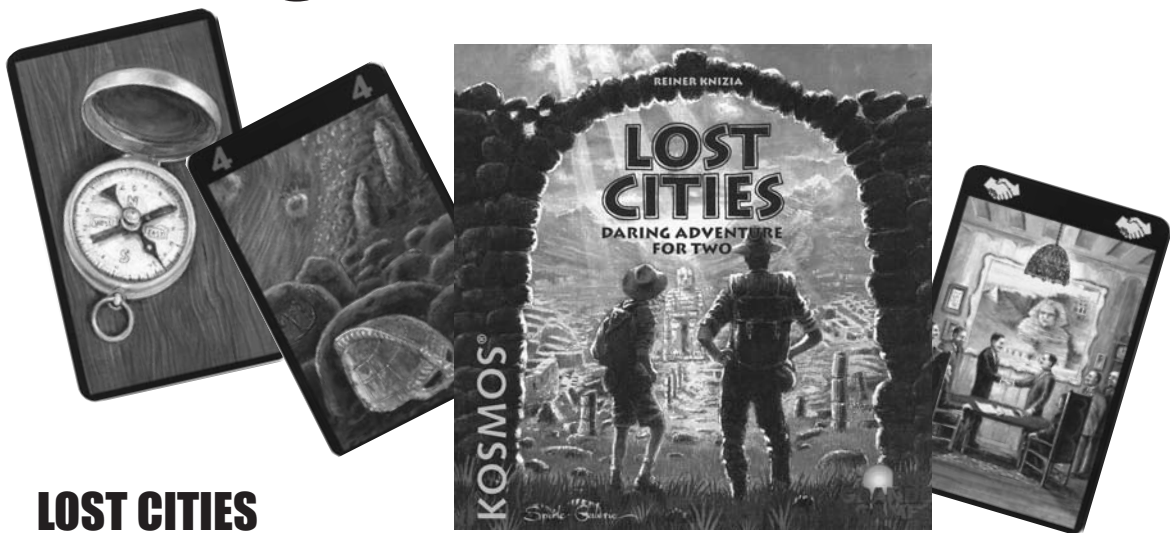
SO THE TWO OF YOU NEVER REALLY KISSED? BUT HOW COULD YOU HAVE BEEN SO SURE HE WOULD PASS OUT *BEFORE* THE KISS?

I WASN'T. BUT AS A GOOD GAMER, I CALCULATED THE *RISKS* AND DECIDED IT WAS WORTH A TRY. AFTER ALL, *GUDRUN* IS MY FIRST CHARACTER TO MAKE IT PAST 13TH LEVEL. I HAD TO PROTECT HER...

YOU REALLY ARE A WORTHY MEMBER OF THE KNIGHTS, SARA, DO YOU KNOW THAT?



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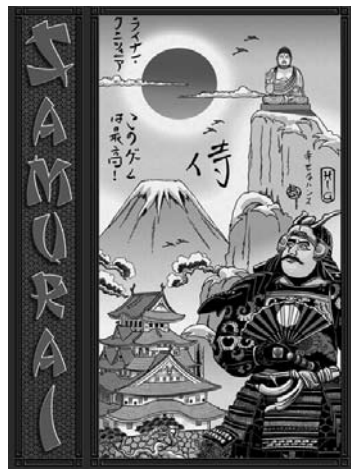
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The Cap of the Faery

LEGEND: The commoner faery folk (*brownies, leprechauns, and the like*) will frequently adorn themselves with red caps. Occasionally, these caps are given to other people as a reward for some important task that person has done for the faeries. Many faery-friends (such as Jack the Giant-Killer or Thomas the Rhymer) have accomplished great deeds and gained much fame after coming into possession of a faery cap. All faery caps worn by humans are given as gifts, for if a faery cap is taken by force, then it crumbles to dust.

DESCRIPTION: This appears to be a simple cap, like that which peasants wear on their heads. Faery Caps are always red (red and green being faery colors), and may have a white owl's feather stuck in the brim (an owl feather being a mark of importance). The cap has the simple magic of growing or shrinking to accommodate the wearer's head, and it cannot be harmed by anything besides fire, cold iron, or the attacks of a magical creature.

POWERS: The Faery Cap grants Faery Sight, an ability to recognize faeries for what they are, even if they are invisible, shape-changed, or performing some other such chicanery. Actually, the cap allows the wearer to see through the disguises of any shape-changed or invisible creatures. Additionally, the cap allows the wearer to turn invisible and move silently at will. This makes the wearer totally undetectable except by faeries and those who can see invisible people. Furthermore, the Faery Cap increases the wearer's poetic talents, granting him poetic and musical skills which function at +3 to success. Those faeries who see a mortal wearing a Faery Cap will react quite favorable towards him, for the cap proves that the wearer is a friend of the faeries.

CURSE: The wearer of a Faery Cap becomes less and less interested in the goings on of human life. He becomes more interested in gamboling around in the will country side talking with animals and faeries. The wearer starts to spend most of his time composing poetry and singing songs to nature. Additionally, he becomes more and more withdrawn, suffering a -2 penalty to his initiative, because he is simply not paying attention to what is going on.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

- *The PCs grant great aid to a group of faeries, and are given a Faery Cap in return*
- *The pcs find a Faery Cap beside the body of a faery, and they must return the cap to the faery's tribe.*

The Mask of the Red Death

LEGEND: This mysterious mask was made by followers of a weird and forgotten god of disease and vengeance, a creature who men called the Red Death. This magical object is greatly sought after by followers of dark gods of disease and death, for the mask grants great power of diseases, and over life and death itself.

DESCRIPTION: This mask resembles a theater mask of tragedy, with the eye slits and a down-turned mouth. There are two straps of scarlet to affix the mask to the back of the head. The whole thing seems to be made of ivory, and is covered in blood splotches.

POWERS AND CURSE: When placed on someone's face, the mask becomes affixed and cannot be removed, except by powerful arcane spells. This mask makes the person immune to disease of all sorts, and he becomes a carrier for the Red Death. The wearer no long heals normally, but for each person he infects with the Red Death, he gains 1d10 hit points. Additionally, he knows the location of all people suffering from diseases within five miles. The wearer of the mask can speak with all ravens and crows, and they obey any orders he gives.

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By Joe Kushner



The Red Death is a very rare and very terrible disease which is feared throughout the land. This magical disease causes red splotches to appear on the face, and the victim begins to weep blood. Each turn he suffers 1d10 hit points of damage that cannot be healed except by cure disease, or other such spells. All those within six feet of the victim have a 40% of contracting the disease, all those who touch the victim have a 70% of contracting it. This disease cannot be cured of anything short of the combined casting of a cure disease and a heal spell, or something along the lines of a wish.

ADVENTURE SEEDS:

- *A beggar in tattered clothes and with an odd mask preaches the ethos of the Red Death. All who touch him die from the disease. -one of the pcs (or a close npc friend) dons the mask, and is forced to become a pariah, cast from society.*

Coronet of the Sovereign Kings

LEGEND: Emperor Iperatentia was the legendary ruler of grand Faeridia, an empire long since crumbled to dust. He ruled over his people with an iron fist by the strength of his mind and his arcane magic. However, Iperatentia knew that even he would eventually die and Faeridia would be forgotten. To bypass this, he enchanted his emperor's coronet with arcane spells which ruled that if Iperatentia ever died, he would live again by the power of the Coronet of the Sovereign Kings....

DESCRIPTION: The coronet is a band of metal inscribed with runes. The runes are not in any identifiable language, though they glow slightly when placed on someone's head. The metal appears to be iron, but is actually made from a metal older than man's memory.

POWER: Any who places this coronet upon his head, finds that his skill at leadership and command increases a hundred-fold, granting him a Charisma of 20. Additionally, the wearer may cast mass charm once per day. People flock to him like sheep, and he can command great nations.

CURSE: The great mind of Iperatentia is in the coronet, and will begin to exert his will on the wearer. Once the victim places the coronet upon his head, he finds that he is unable to remove it!

Additionally, his mind becomes slowly taken over by the force that is Iperantia. Each month (*and each time the charm spell is cast*) the victim must save vs. magic or have his alignment slowly change to Lawful and than to Evil, one step at a time (*i.e. from CN - N, or from LN - LE*). Once the victim becomes Lawful Evil, he is utterly possessed by Iperantia. The further towards Lawful Evil the victim becomes, the more bent he is on war and conquest. This magical item is unique, and almost impossible to destroy. Only a very powerful spell (*like a high level remove curse or a wish*) could nullify the coronet long enough for it to be removed.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

- Someone has found the coronet and is starting a revolution, raising a huge army of fanatics to fight for him. The PCs must face and defeat this madman
- One of the PCs (*or a close NPC friend*) has found the coronet, and his comrades must find a cure for the curse before it consumes him.

The Crown of the King Stag

LEGEND: There is only one such crown at any one time. When a new crown must be made, it must go through a year-long ceremony where it is made and remade on the first day of each season by the Grand Druids and his or her servants. This crown is only given to the current high king of the tribes the druids favor, and then only rarely. Every year, to prove his worth, the king must run with the deer, and than he must face the greatest stag with only a bone dagger, and one of the two will die. If the king wins, than he is still worthy to wear the crown, if he dies, then he was not worthy. When the crown is worn, the king must wear no armor. He has only a cloak of deerskin, a necklace of deer bones, and tattoos painted upon his body in wode (*blue paint*).

DESCRIPTION: The Crown is two huge antlers taken from the greatest stag in all in the world. The antlers are tied at the base with holly and with mistletoe which forms a sort of a hat so that the crown can rest on a man's head.

POWERS: For as long as the king wears the crown, he gains +3 to Strength and Constitution, and has an armor class of 2. All deer and their relatives will obey any orders he gives them. Also the king may charge at twice normal movement and gore with his antlers for 2d8 damage. For as long as the king owns the crown, all followers of the Druidic faith will accept him as their one true king, and will follow his orders.

CURSE: See the section on legends. Also, the crown may only be worn for up to twelve hours of every week, and when worn the king becomes fanatically devoted to the Druidic cause. Once he commits a great betrayal against the faith, he will lose possession of the crown, and will probably be hunted down by the druids.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

- *One of the PCs is awarded Crown, and becomes the leader of the Druidic people. How does he deal with this responsibility?*
- *The wearer of the crown has betrayed his trust, and he must be hunted down and destroyed by the PCs. The crown must be regained.*

The Helmet of Law

LEGEND: The followers of the Lords of Law create many helmets which increase their effectiveness in the service of their static and sterile deities, and also to help them gain still more converts in their constant battles against their enemies, the Princes of Chaos. Those who don these helmets become fanatical followers of the Law, unwavering in their crusades against anything "mpure" (chaotic).

DESCRIPTION: This helmet is made from incredibly reflective

material. The face plate is a mirror, though a totally indestructible one. On the forehead of the helmet is a single amber arrow pointing straight up.

POWERS: If the wearer is a spell-caster, he gains +2 to all rolls (and opponents suffer -2 to all rolls) that involve Lawful magic (*spells dealing with containment, mind-control, stagnation, etc....*). He is unable to cast Chaotic magic (*spells that involve randomness, freedom, change, etc....*). The wearer gains +2 to hit and a -2 bonus to his AC when he is fighting on the side of Law. When facing him in battle, opponents see their faces reflected in the helmet, so they will feel they are fighting themselves! This is so unnerving that all people fighting the wearer of a Helmet of Law suffer a -2 to hit and have a +2 penalty to their AC unless they make a save vs. paralysis when first encountering the Helmet.

CURSE: When the helmet is placed upon someone's head, the helmet becomes attached to the person's head and cannot be removed (*though the helmet can turn invisible at will*). Each week the helmet is worn, the character must save vs. paralysis or his alignment moves one rank towards Law (*i.e. from NG-LG, or CE-NE*), until Law has been reached. After this is reached, one week later the character's alignment becomes utterly Lawful Neutral, totally unbending. The character will only associate with neutral people in order to convert them, and will loathe Chaotic people, attacking them if possible. This lasts until the helmet is removed, which is only possible through the use of a remove curse or other such spell.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

- *The forces of Law are raising an army to conquer everything. Can the PCs stop the army and his mirrored leader?*
- *One of the PCs or a NPC companion is transformed into a fanatic of Law. Will his friends join him in his crusade or try to defeat him?*

The Hood of Chaos

LEGEND: The forces of the Princes of Chaos are not without their own special items. The mysterious and ever-changing Princes have granted their followers the knowledge to create sorceress hoods that enhance magical powers and sway people to the side of Chaos.

DESCRIPTION: This hood is made from cloth that is dyed in alternating colors of red and black. On the forehead of the hood is a glowing red circle composed of arrows pointing every which way.

POWERS: If the wearer is a spell-caster, he gains a +1 to all rolls (*and opponents get a -1 to all rolls*) that involve any magic except Lawful ones, which the wearer is unable to use at all. Chaos spells are employed with +3 efficiency. Warriors and rogues may cast spells as a spell-user of half their level (*they do not gain any special bonuses for casting spell, but they are unable to use Lawful ones*).

CURSE: When the hood is placed upon someone's head, the hood transforms into a skullcap and cannot be removed. Every week the hood is worn, the character must make a save vs. paralysis or his alignment moves one rank towards Chaos until Chaos has been reached. After it has been reached, one week later the character's alignment becomes utterly Chaotic Neutral, which is insanity. The character will only associate with neutral people in order to convert them, and will loath Lawful people, attacking them if possible. This lasts until the hood is removed through the use of remove curse or a similar spell.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

- *A dark sorcerer of Chaos is causing mayhem, his power enhanced by the hood, can he be stopped by the PCs?*
- *One of the PCs (or an NPC associate) has donned this hood, and suddenly Chaos seems a little more appealing to him.... His friends probably don't share his opinion. □*



Artwork by Georgia Vrbanc



The World Turned Upside Down

By Larry Granato

The Evil Elves

The "elder" people live by three notable tenets:

1. Elves are masters; all other races are inferior
2. Never tell the truth when you can lie
3. Treachery loves company

The first rule means that all other races exist to support the elves, so they're enthusiastic slavers. There are many slaves for each elf, and they are kept in line by the expedient of practicing the most gruesome tortures on any who would resist. This is done not only for practical reasons, but because elves enjoy torture as an art form.

Most slaves toil under abominable conditions in mines, work camps, or undercities. Humans, being numerous, are the most common race enslaved. Often, orcs are used as trustees and enforcers in these hell-holes.

Elves are basically lazy, although they are great inventors of torture devices and weapons that kill from a distance. They are also fairly warlike, but prefer sneak attacks, ambushes, raids, infiltration, and so on, rather than straight forward battles. They dislike taking casualties, so they usually withdraw when the situation is unfavorable.

Elves purport to be sylvan creatures, but most actually live in magnificent cities constructed by slave labor. The woods surrounding these metropolises are used for defense; to confuse, divide, and delay enemy attacks. Below each city is a teeming undercity where slaves toil in the murk to supply the needs of their indolent masters.

Elves maintain they invented all the elements of civilization, produced the most and best magical items, fought ageless wars against dark lords, and so on. How much of this is true and how much is pure bunk is hard to tell. Elves do have the most advanced technology, but the dwarves claim that the pointy-eared ones stole their best ideas. Some people have speculated that the elves use things like plagues and assassination to keep humans from overtaking them in technology, but this is disputed. Anyway, individuals who make such remarks seem to encounter mysterious accidents.

Since elves are a small minority, they do not oppose others openly, but are clever political manipulators behind the scenes. In fact, they consider themselves the rulers of the world. They rarely pass up a chance to show humans how backward they are. Arrogance and contempt are their standard reaction to encounters with mere mortals.

Many elves carry magic items that are secretly tagged in some

J. R. R. Tolkien's matchless *Lord of the Rings* trilogy gave us a new view of faery folk: those demihuman halflings, dwarves, and elves. Since then, a mass of fantasy game world settings and mediocre novels have appeared which lean heavily on his ideas. With various modifications, these (*along with his invention, the orcs*) have remained fantasy staples through the years in various RPG's.

However, dwarves and elves get a distinctly different treatment in European folklore. They are portrayed as dangerous, tricky, and often downright nasty. A look at the old legends and at stories by writers uninfluenced by Tolkien show another, dissimilar side.

Poul Anderson's fantasy classics "*Broken Sword*" and "*Three Hearts and Three Lions*" give an alternative picture of what the denizens of the faery realm are like. Anything but virtuous, they're self-serving, deceptive, and malicious. Michael Moorcock's decadent Melnibonians in the "*Elric*" stories are elves in all but name... and are far from Tolkien's noble and sensitive elven characters. Elves in folklore and legend were much more likely to be spiteful than helpful.

Dwarves, too are portrayed in myth as cunning thieves, full of magic and greed. The Saga of Sigurd portrayed a dwarf, Fafnir, whose was so evil he became a dragon. In other medieval stories the dwarves are vicious little sneaks.

Some games have created evil alter-egos for the demihumans, but they're so few and hidden so far away and that they just become another monster encounter. What if "demihuman" races were the sinister enemies of mankind instead of his allies? Nations of dwarves, elves, and halflings would make much more formidable enemies than run-of-the-mill orcs and goblins.

Tolkien gave us majestic elves, honor-loving dwarves and heroic halflings. If you really want a fantasy campaign with a difference, how about the evil elves, the deadly dwarves, the horrible halflings, and the nasty gnomes.

undetectable way. Being found in possession of one of the items guarantees a slow death in front of the people of the nearest settlement. Most human governments are too timid to interfere in the elves' revenge.

Elven player characters (renegades) are despised by true elves and mistrusted by everyone else. Half-elves are detested by all and sundry. The elves abuse them as unfit half-breeds, and the humans see them as malicious spies.

The Deadly Dwarves

The premier underground dwellers, ancient foes of the elves, are the dwarves. They claim to rule all ground under the earth. Their three guiding principles are:

1. Greed is everything
2. Dwarves never forgive and never forget
3. Militarism and War are practiced and venerated

A dwarf lives for nothing more than to amass a fortune. He would kill his own brother if money could be gained, but other family members might not approve (see rule #2). Any bit of treasure that was made by, or passed through the hands of a dwarf, is forever dwarf property, regardless of who's got it now and how they received it.

Dwarven females are kept in a state of household-slavery, and are never seen by the outside world.

Dwarves relish revenge. Young dwarves are forced to memorize long tales about every enemy their family and clan has ever had. They spend years squatting in tunnels, plotting elaborate retribution against their antagonists and anyone who ever made a short-person joke.

All dwarven males are warriors, and they live a militaristic, almost fascist, lifestyle. War is seen as good, and the more killed the better. They are rather fatalistic, so high casualties on both sides is considered ideal. Dwarves are forever stockpiling arms. While elves prefer to kill anonymously at a distance, dwarves like to see their enemies die up close, so this has somewhat retarded their development of certain types of advanced weapons. Nevertheless, overall, dwarves are more skilled and efficient weapons makers than elves.

Their bloodlust is so strong that prisoners are rarely taken, unless a good ransom can be obtained (see principle #1). Unlike humans, who would become sickened by the butchery, dwarves will not tire of slaughtering thousands of helpless victims; men, women, children, old folks, it makes no difference to them. Dwarves will not take slaves in most cases, and prefer to open up new territories by "ethnic cleansing." They are also fond of wasting an enemy's territory and are efficient and thorough destroyers of lands and buildings.

Elves mercilessly ridicule the dwarves every chance they get, and there's nothing the two races enjoy more than killing each other. However, elves are too prudent to take on dwarves below ground and dwarves are terrified of the elven forests.

Dwarves are considerably more numerous than elves, but their aggressive tendencies tend to kill them off at a respectable rate. Some have suggested that the elves are the ones who are actually behind all the wars that the dwarves get embroiled in, but, say that to a dwarf and you're likely to end up a head shorter.

Despite the fact that all dwarves are butt-ugly, they are always trying to come on to human females. They usually end up having to pay to get what they want.

Dwarven outcasts (player-characters) have been dishonored and ejected from their clan. They are shunned by their better-bred brothers.

The Horrid Halflings

These pint-sized demihumans always have a smile on their face and a shiv up their sleeve. Their philosophy:

1. To live is to steal
2. Run away, run away, stab in the back another day
3. Get people in trouble for fun and profit

All halflings are members of a clandestine criminal society. They have their own secret signs and language. They regard the rest of the world as marks to be taken. Halflings are adept at the use of poison, sneaking, eavesdropping, and rumor-mongering. They also enjoy panhandling, picking pockets, rackets, stealing stuff, running scams, spying on people, and selling information.

In public, they affect a cringing, fainthearted demeanor. But when they get the upper hand, their wickedness knows no bounds; they like burying people alive, for instance.

Halflings do not have powerful kingdoms like the dwarves and elves; they have instead insinuated themselves into every human city and most towns. Nothing escapes their attention, and any adventurer who begins to gather a fortune will soon find that he's got to pay "protection" money, or face the consequences.

Although weak individually, the halflings should not be mistaken for easy targets. To kill one only brings a dozen more. Halflings could care less about those of their kin who associate with humans; the money will all come to them in the end, one way or another.

The Nasty Gnomes

The premier "little people" of the woods and hills, they have three rules:

1. Always hate everyone except other Gnomes
2. To scare someone is good, to scare them to death is even better
3. Inflict lifelong misery on your enemies

The gnomes are incredibly jealous of their hidden domains, and will attempt to capture or kill anyone who trespasses. Gnomes employ every known trick and trap. They often prefer to go for the cripple instead of the kill.

Gnomes are on good terms with almost all forest creatures, and have control over quite a few. This ensures that they are aware of everything that goes on in their neck of the woods. They like to extort magic items out of parties, then use their illusions to get them lost and split up before they attack.

Role Reversal

If the elves and other races are evil, then it follows that their traditional enemies might not be bad as they're cracked up to be. The same general characteristics apply, but most of their attributed malevolence is due to propaganda cooked up by the dwarves and elves. However, it's in the best interest of the "ruler" races to make humans think that the goblins, orcs, and trolls are out to get them.

The Good Goblins

Goblins are the traditional adversaries of dwarves, since they compete for the same real estate. Goblins would prefer to be left alone, but the dwarves wage an unceasing campaign of genocide against them.

Goblins have an advanced culture and society, but their best habitations are hidden deep underground. It is a little-known fact that many caverns occupied by dwarves were originally built by goblins.



Yesterday, while playing our normal campaign, my two comrades decided that they had their fill of relying on local Inns and such for lodging and announced they wanted to build their own keep.

After hours of collecting debts owed to them and selling extra magical items and spells (*I went around picking pockets to pass the time*) they found themselves 10,000 gold pieces shy of what they needed to start construction.

We decided to take on the quest of collecting any and all bounties offered in the area to come up with the balance needed. Unfortunately the town we use as home base is small and in a rural area. The bounties didn't add up to the full 10,000. Our DM suggested that we would most likely find adventure along the way and gold usually followed. We were off.

A few uneventful days later, we picked up a few rumors in a tavern that spoke of a magic well that would grant wishes under the right conditions. After giving up my *Ring of Truth*, we acquired a map leading to the well's location. (*I used the Ring of Truth to determine the authenticity of the map.*)

After a bit of searching we managed to find the well. Upon our arrival, a voice from the well asked us each for five gold, stating:

"I shall grant thee wishes, seven from ten, if five gold coins you throw within."

We tried for awhile to get the well to talk to us, but it would only repeat the same phrase. Finally, the cleric decid-

ed to look down into the well. Instead of water at the bottom, he saw nothing but gold coins. My friends instantly got out their rope and started to descend into the well.

As they released the rope to land atop the pile of gold at the bottom of the well, they fell through the 'illusion' and landed hard on the dirt that made up the well bottom. With the 'gold' now gone and the end of the dangling rope out of reach they discovered they were now trapped at the bottom of the well.

They yelled up to me, but all I saw when I looked down the well was the same gold that had lured them in in the first place. After realizing that there was no way to get them out I decided to do as the well asked and tossed in five gold pieces. (*Which I had secretly hidden away from the rest of the party.*) Instantly, I found my friends back beside me.

A creature called a 'Well Keeper' appeared and told me that my lack of greed had earned me the three wishes which the well spoke of. Unfortunately, it counted the release of my friends as a first wish and I was down to two. Now, you might think my buddies were happy to be out of the well, but they were actually mad that I had hidden gold from them. Instantly, the fighter told the Keeper that we wished for "10,000 gold pieces" and the Keeper said the wish was granted. Unfortunately, my friend forgot to ask to have the 10,000 gold in hand. We now had 10,000 gold, but had no idea where it was located.

After spending a few minutes laughing at this turn of events, I was pressured to wish that the 10,000 gold was laying at our feet. Listening to my two friends' plead for me to use my wish so they could have a new keep, annoyed me so I said, *"You want gold so bad? Fine. Let's give this a try: I wish that everytime I kicked Golun in the ass, gold pieces would fly forth from his mouth."*

Seeing a lesson would be learned (or so he said), the Keeper granted my wish. Now everytime I kick Golun in the ass, he coughs up 1d4 gold pieces.

by Ken Albery □

The World Upside Down Continued....

Goblins display a certain antipathy toward all surface dwellers, mainly because of their cultural perspective and past experiences.

The 'Onorable Orcs

Orcs are a fighting race who maintain their traditional values. Most see them as backward and stupid; the orcs claim that genetic warfare by elves in a bygone age left them deprived of their full potential (the elves neither confirm or deny this).

Although orcs are usually portrayed as despicable cretins, changing them to noble savages shouldn't be too hard. Just recall the transformation that took place from the heel-clicking Klingon warmongers of the original *Star Trek* series to the honorable warriors in *The Next Generation*.

Orcs are a freedom-loving people who enjoy nature. They hate living underground, but have no choice, and can only come out at night. Elves have magical flying machines which they use to strafe and bomb any orcs caught outside in daylight hours. They especially like to kill orc women and children.

Thus the orcs are forced to take up arms in their own defense. But the elves make devious enemies, and often trick the orcs into fighting nearby humans instead.

The Trustworthy Trolls

Probably the most misunderstood race in existence, the Trolls are a sluggish, brooding people, who enjoy art and beauty despite the ugliness of themselves and their miserable lives. They are slow but steady craftsmen who can create wonderful items while wallowing in muck.

Trolls are blessed (or cursed) with a digestive system that can handle just about anything and an appetite to match. Prejudice and lack of opportunity often mean that some Trolls end up eating something (or someone) they shouldn't. Naturally, this puts a lot of humans off, although the Trolls don't quite see it that way.

A Troll's word is his bond. However, they've gotten burned many times in the past by making promises to unreliable people who had no intention of holding their end of the agreement. Nowadays, it's hard to get a Troll to commit to anything, but if he does, he'll be sure to keep his word.

There you have it: a novel kind of fantasy campaign where the traditional roles are reversed to provide a new setting and new perspective for the PCs. It's a world of difference, with a real difference. □



Failing (and Loving it!)

By Anthony J. Gallela

seduced and used — his own *modus operandi* used against him! What player would put up with that?! But still, with all that failure, we continue to see Bond as a super spy. Why?

His failures are appropriate to his character's make-up; and his failures propel the story. It's that simple, and it's worth repeating. His failures are appropriate to his character's makeup; and his failures propel the story.

People are used to this: **Han Solo's** hyper-drive, **Xena's** impulsiveness (*ignoring Gabriel's sound advice*), **Indiana Jones'** empty holster; failure is a common story telling tool. How do you use this tool in your games? By knowing your players and their characters, and turning failures into opportunity for characterization, for story advancement and for a bit of fun.

Know Thy Characters

In order for a referee to make failures appropriate to a player's character, she must know the character. This goal can't be accomplished, however, unless the players themselves know their characters. Their characters have to mean more than a series of numbers on a sheet of paper.

Try asking a player, "*What's up with this character? How does she feel about the world?*" A good starting place is to ask the player to write up a background on how his character got all his or her (*or its*) skills. The easiest way to make up a character history is by deciding the history of the character's skills first, and then taking that information and fleshing out a complete history.

Armed with a character history, the referee can better understand the make-up of a character. This will help the referee down the road to tailor failure for that character.

Continued on page 44



Artwork by George Vrbancic

A character failing at any given action is an all too common occurrence in RPGs. This can be frustrating for the player — especially when it seems as though his character should succeed. Likewise, a character succeeding at any given action is also a common occurrence in RPGs. This can be frustrating for the referee — especially when her story, plot device, or main nemesis is in danger of being eliminated too early. When faced with a situation where a referee must let a character succeed when it means the downfall of her story, she may find herself having to let things develop and see where the story goes, or she may find herself having to re-attune her story on the fly. Or ... she could just make; the character fail — even when it appears they should be successful. I know what you're thinking.

"What? How can you make a character fail when they should have succeeded? My players will revolt!"

Strange as it may sound, players don't always mind their characters failing at something. In fact, they can even enjoy it. "*No way,*" you say? Well, let's take **James Bond** as an example. He's a super spy; some might say he's 'THE' super spy. If this is the case, why is he constantly failing? He gets captured, beat up, duped, even

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If the experienced thief is unable to pick a simple lock, there must be a reason. Simply blurting out, *“Hey, if you pick that lock, you’ll find the secrete passageway before I’m ready for you to. That will mean hours of careful work on the plot will go down the drain!”* isn’t going to sit well with your players.

With the character’s history among your notes you can be a little more creative. Perhaps you notice that the thief’s father was slain by an evil Noble. You could tell the player that he recognizes the lock as the same distinct type of lock the Noble used on his tax collection boxes. The character’s hands begin to sweat and he is unable to hold his tools properly as he is confronted with this clear reminder of his father’s killer.

After a few minutes of this, his hands begin to tremble and thoughts of the loss of his father begin to compromise his concentration.

“I’m sorry, but with the trauma of your father’s death plaguing you in this stressful situation, you just can’t pick the lock.”

Describing the failure in this way is much less likely to draw a complaint from a player. The incident could even be a stepping stone in the search for the evil Noble (or *innumerable other storylines*).

When you allow the characters to find the secret passageway later in the story, they’ll likely appreciate why you held off, and possibly have some good roleplay around the thief’s second attempt at the lock.

Building Trust

Propelling the story with character failures can be a difficult trust issue early on, but as you play more, your players will have an easier time trusting you — as long as you do a couple of things.

1. You must show your players that there is direction and planning in your adventures;

2. You must show them the positive-story-advancing result of their failures.

In our 1930s style campaigns, we have a character called **The Colonel**. He’s got 30s style cybernetics and kind of a **Darth Vader** demeanor. Additionally, this guy cannot die. This was frustrating to players at first until they saw how The Colonel’s character was essential to moving the plot along, and they saw how eliminating him became a personal mission of each individual character. He would show up at the worst possible times and foil the players’ plans. Of course, The Colonel was also good for the players by doing things like allowing them to know the seriousness of a given activity by how much interest he paid to it.

I also made The Colonel’s interference personal to

the characters, by either involving some relative of a given character, or by manipulating a particular character flaw. Doing this involved the players much more deeply in the story and made their lust for the death of The Colonel that much more interesting in the context of roleplay.

One thing I was careful about was to never really screw up a player’s character as a result of The Colonel’s meddling. Another thing I did was make sure the players could see the negative impact they were having on his plans.

I pulled these things off by always having a plan for my adventures, being flexible when my players did the unexpected and having direction — read *“an ending in mind.”* Having a direction in mind makes it much easier for you to know when you really need to make a character fail (or *when you can go ahead and let the character pick that lock*), and makes it much easier to show the players the reason for the necessity of said failure later in the game.

Still Stuck?

What if your are still stuck? What if you can’t come up with a good reason based on the character’s history or make-up to justify making him fail to your players? What if your players just won’t buy it? They insist that they must pick that lock regardless of any opportunity for roleplay or character development you’ve presented them. If you can’t figure a way out, fall back on these five words, *“Tell me why you fail.”*

If you let a player make up the reason her character failed, she feels empowered. Don’t kid yourself, players know there can be story needs that necessitate their characters failing. Who better to make in-character mistakes than the players themselves? I’ve been amazed at how well this tool works; players have screwed themselves over far worse than I ever would, and they’re happy about it because they did it to themselves in a way they felt was appropriate to their characters!

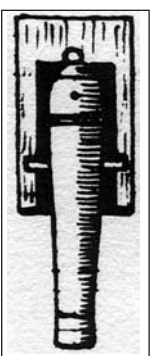
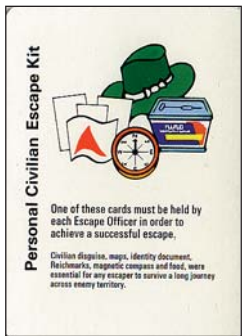
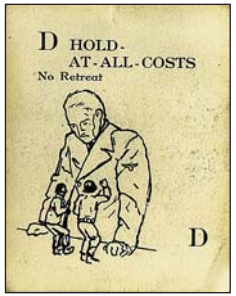
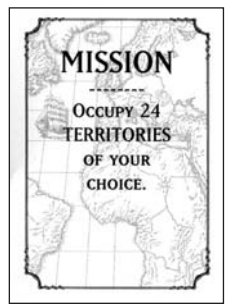
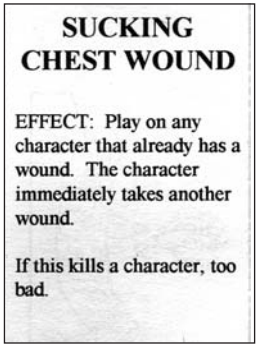
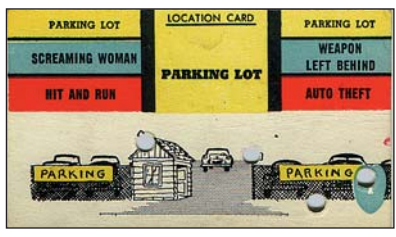
In short, all I’ve said here boils down to two things, you’ll find that players really don’t mind their characters failing as long as:

1. They feel you have a story plan and their failure wasn’t pointless,

2. The failure is executed in a manor appropriate to their character.

Have fun causing failure! ☐

Special thanks to James Teal and Sky; and to Travis Eneix for creating The Colonel.

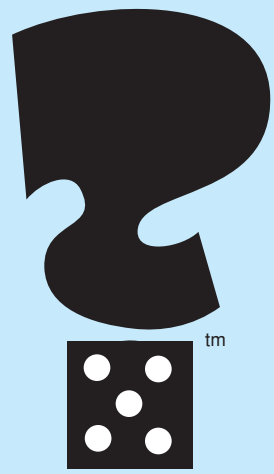


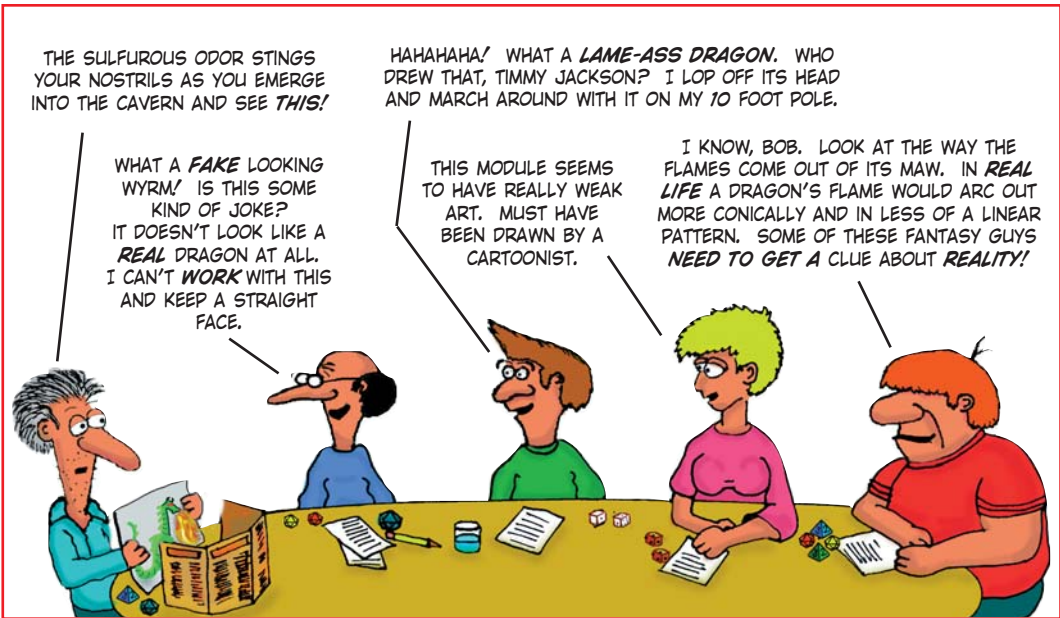
Not only did readers respond enthusiastically to “The Game Stumper Challenge” in issue #36 but many of them decided to send in ‘stumper’ of their own.

Think you know your games? Well, okay Tex. Let’s see how many games you can correctly identify simply by looking at their components.

Once you’ve thrown your hands up in despair and are ready to cry, “Uncle!” you can flip to page the 66 for the answers.

Got a ‘stumper’ of your own? Email them to jollyrb@aol.com. (Be sure to include the company name and the year it was published.) □





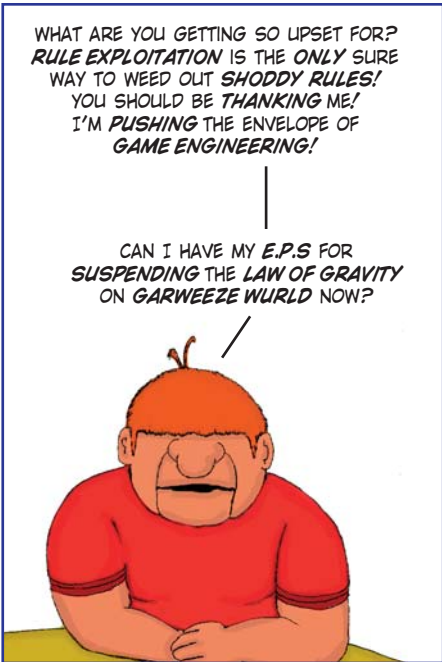
THE SULFUROUS ODOR STINGS YOUR NOSTRILS AS YOU EMERGE INTO THE CAVERN AND SEE **THIS!**

HAHAHAHA! WHAT A **LAME-ASS DRAGON**. WHO DREW THAT, TIMMY JACKSON? I LOP OFF ITS HEAD AND MARCH AROUND WITH IT ON MY 10 FOOT POLE.

WHAT A **FAKE** LOOKING WYRM! IS THIS SOME KIND OF JOKE? IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A **REAL** DRAGON AT ALL. I CAN'T **WORK** WITH THIS AND KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE.

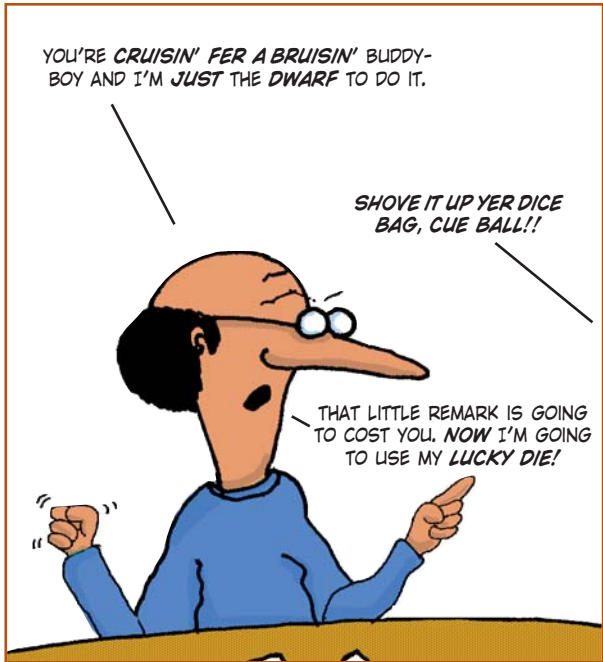
THIS MODULE SEEMS TO HAVE REALLY WEAK ART. MUST HAVE BEEN DRAWN BY A CARTOONIST.

I KNOW, BOB. LOOK AT THE WAY THE FLAMES COME OUT OF ITS MAW. IN **REAL LIFE** A DRAGON'S FLAME WOULD ARC OUT MORE CONICALLY AND IN LESS OF A LINEAR PATTERN. SOME OF THESE FANTASY GUYS **NEED TO GET A CLUE ABOUT REALITY!**



WHAT ARE YOU GETTING SO UPSET FOR? **RULE EXPLOITATION** IS THE ONLY SURE WAY TO WEED OUT **SHODDY RULES!** YOU SHOULD BE **THANKING ME!** I'M **PUSHING THE ENVELOPE OF GAME ENGINEERING!**

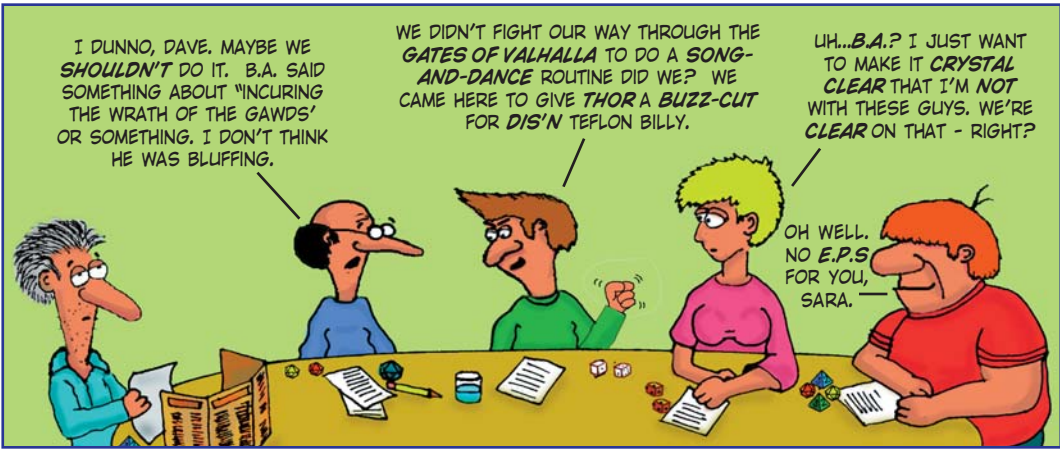
CAN I HAVE MY **E.P.S** FOR **SUSPENDING THE LAW OF GRAVITY** ON **GARWEEZE WURLD** NOW?



YOU'RE **CRUISIN' FER A BRUISIN'** BUDDY-BOY AND I'M **JUST THE DWARF** TO DO IT.

SHOVE IT UP YER DICE BAG, CUE BALL!!

THAT LITTLE REMARK IS GOING TO COST YOU. **NOW I'M GOING TO USE MY LUCKY DIE!**



I DUNNO, DAVE. MAYBE WE **SHOULDN'T** DO IT. **B.A.** SAID SOMETHING ABOUT 'INCLINING THE WRATH OF THE GAWDS' OR SOMETHING. I DON'T THINK HE WAS **BLUFFING**.

WE DIDN'T FIGHT OUR WAY THROUGH THE **GATES OF VALHALLA** TO DO A **SONG-AND-DANCE** ROUTINE DID WE? WE CAME HERE TO GIVE **THOR** A **BUZZ-CUT** FOR **DIS'N** TEFLON BILLY.

UH...**B.A.**? I JUST WANT TO MAKE IT **CRYSTAL CLEAR** THAT I'M **NOT** WITH THESE GUYS. WE'RE **CLEAR** ON THAT - RIGHT?

OH WELL. NO **E.P.S** FOR YOU, **SARA**.

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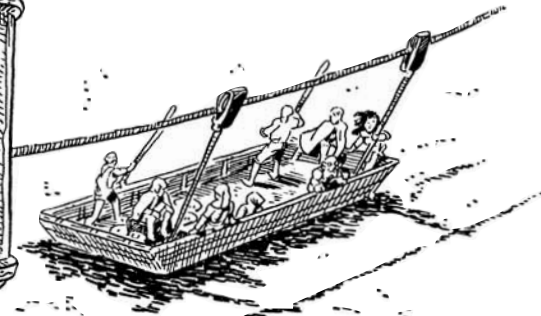
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The Shields of Bandran

OUR THREE VILNA GUARDS BELIEVE THAT IF THEY PLACE THE RIVER BANADER BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE GOBLIN HORDE, THEY WILL HAVE MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TIME TO SAFELY COMPLETE THEIR MISSION.

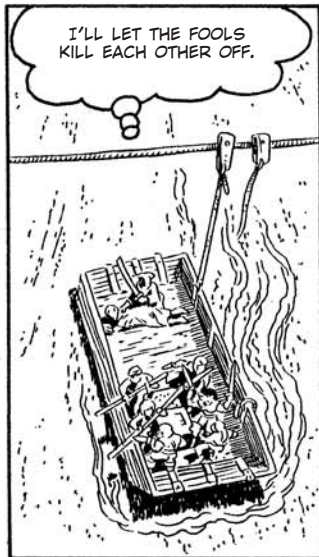


THIS FRESH AIR AND RELAXING FERRY RIDE ARE CERTAINLY CLEARING THE COBWEBS OUT OF MY HEAD.

THAT'S GREAT LORALE BUT I FOR ONE WILL FEEL MUCH BETTER ONCE WE'RE ON THE FAR SHORE AND AGAIN HEADED TOWARD P'BAPAR.

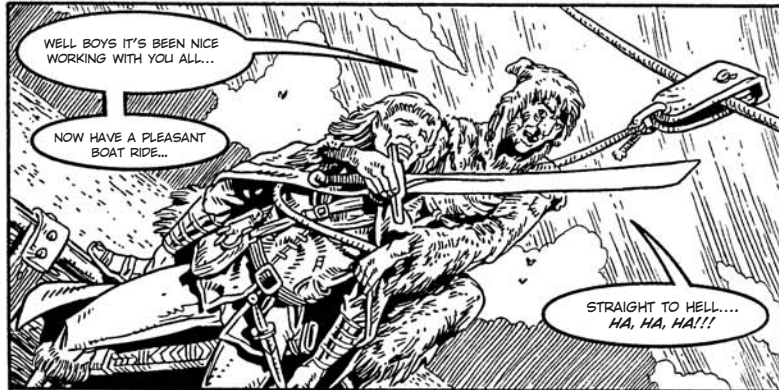


WE'VE COME FAR ENOUGH LADS, LETS HAVE AT THEM!





THIS ONE'S GOT A VILNA SWORD OF COMMAND... HE MUST HAVE WHAT THE HOBGOBLIN WANTS AND LIKE MY DEAD PAPPY ALWAYS TOLD ME 'IT'S BETTER TO HAVE 1/3 OF THE REWARD THAN NONE AT ALL.'



WELL BOYS IT'S BEEN NICE WORKING WITH YOU ALL...

NOW HAVE A PLEASANT BOAT RIDE...

STRAIGHT TO HELL.... HA, HA, HA!!!



FRINTA! THE BASTARD HAS SET US ADrift... WE'RE HEADED TOWARD THE FALLS...



TOSS YOUR WEAPON AND ANYTHING ELSE THAT MIGHT WEIGH YOU DOWN.



WHEN THE FRONT GOES OVER, THE BACK WILL SHOOT UP AND OUT...

THROW YOURSELF AS FAR OUT AS POSSIBLE AND LET'S PRAY TO RIGEL THE BOTTOM'S DEEP!

I CAN'T SWIM!

WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE!

CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE

The Shields of Bandran Character



Garen is light hearted, free spirited and a man of many trades; it's been rumored that he's been a thief, an assassin, a travelling minstrel, of noble blood, a dealer in stolen goods, a ladies man and ravisher of wenches, a stonemason, and an apprentice to the Sorcerer Halderon. Garen will neither confirm nor deny any of these accusations but with a twinkle in his eye he has been known to remark, "A well-lived past can provide a far-reaching future."



Posen is a middle-aged [148-year-old] cave dwarf. He spent his childhood in the mines learning the techniques of mining and smelting ore. Desiring to seek adventure, he joined the Vilna Guards at the 'tender' age of 76. Posen was raised a majority of his life in caves giving him an uncanny sense of direction; day or night, with or without the navigational stars, sun or compass, he always knows which direction which to go. Posen has a crusty edge but underneath beats a heart of gold.

She is proficient in the use of all weaponry, has an extensive knowledge of historical and contemporary battle tactics and is well versed in military engineering.

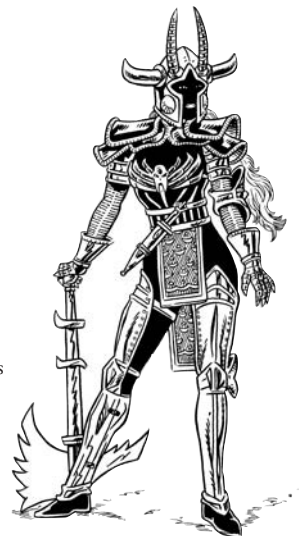
Despite her youth and gender, Lorele has risen rapidly through the ranks of the Vilna Guards. Her regard for the duty of the Guards is exceptional and would willfully choose a glorious death in battle to showcase her courage if not for the need to have an offspring to keep the family bloodline alive for future Vilna Guard splendor.



Tubar is the older half-brother to Prince Kirasi. Tubar's mother was a concubine who fell out of favor of the court for dabbling in the Dark Arts. She taught Tubar all of her secrets and when he reached the age of twelve sent him to her brother's castle for further training. Tubar murdered his uncle and thereafter claimed those lands and his extensive library of magic for himself. Tubar's hideous appearance has been caused by his continual overusage of the Dark Forces. Tubar's desire for kingly riches and power has encouraged his thirst for conquest.



Nestra is Tubar's general. Lady Nestra was exiled from her home country for atrocities too numerous to record. She has allied herself with Tubar for the succession of Bandran to gather power and riches with plans for future conquest. Nestra and Tubar communicate via the Mists of Dallow.





Avelon

the CORRIDORS

written by
blaine loyd

illustrated by
manny vega

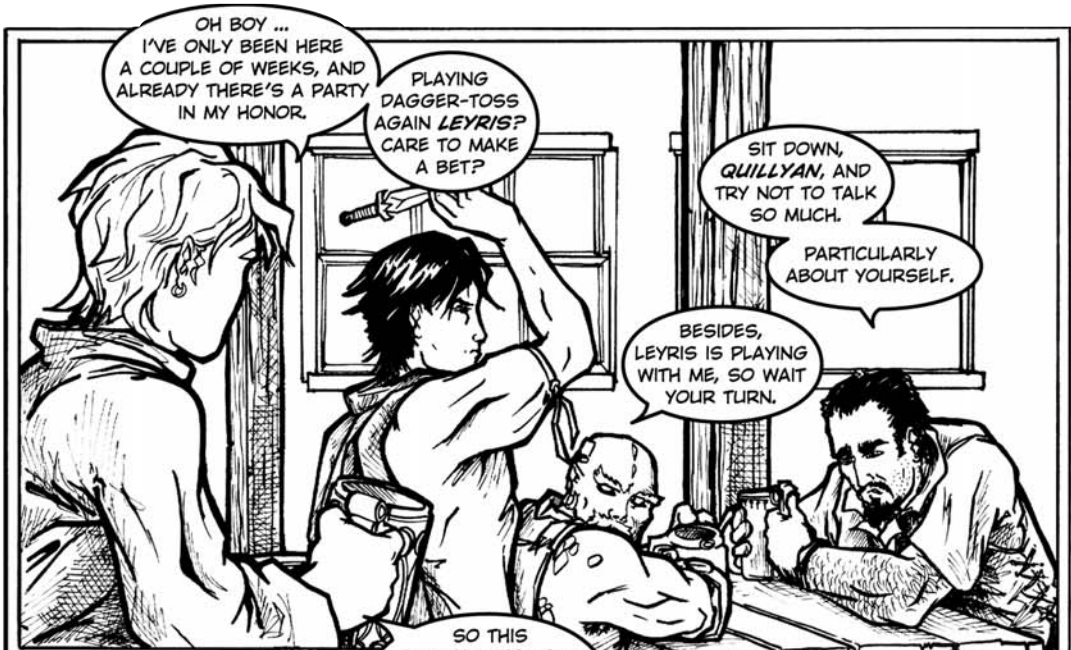
lettered by
jeff s. janovetz

Deep below the city of Kestleton, amongst the sewers and waterways, there exists an open challenge to all thieves who would dare test their abilities to win the legendary lost treasure of Galad. Every year, thieves and adventurers bravely venture forth, only to disappear forever in the dark tunnels, never to be heard from again. Being one of Avelon's largest cities, Kestleton has developed a reputation for being the stomping ground of some of the world's most dangerous thieves, yet even these hardened souls speak in hushed tones about the place underneath the city that they have come to call the Corridors.

Unknown to all, however, is that the Corridors is merely a test for something greater. Those who

manage to survive it's traps and perils are not gifted with any lost treasures, instead they find themselves part of an elite guild of master thieves. This guild is dedicated to maintaining a secret presence in the underworld of Avelon, stealing what no common burglar would ever dare... magic.

Yet even in the most powerful societies, there will be rivalries amongst the youngest and the most brash. Perhaps the cockiest thief to ever survive the Corridors, young Quillyan has created quite a stir by nearly dying only to emerge with a grin. Now we will see what precious few in all Avelon has ever witnessed: What dangers lurk in the Corridors and how does anyone survive?



OH BOY ...
I'VE ONLY BEEN HERE
A COUPLE OF WEEKS, AND
ALREADY THERE'S A PARTY
IN MY HONOR.

PLAYING
DAGGER-TOSS
AGAIN LEYRIS?
CARE TO MAKE
A BET?

SIT DOWN,
QUILLYAN, AND
TRY NOT TO TALK
SO MUCH.

PARTICULARLY
ABOUT YOURSELF.

BESIDES,
LEYRIS IS PLAYING
WITH ME, SO WAIT
YOUR TURN.

SO THIS
IS WHAT THE BEST
THIEVES' GUILD IN
AVELON DOES DURING
ITS TIME OFF.



WE COULD
ALWAYS GO OUT
BACK AND PRACTICE
SWORDPLAY ...

AS FUN
AS THAT SOUNDS,
WELLIM, I DON'T THINK
I'VE HEALED UP ENOUGH
FROM THE TRIAL IN THE
CORRIDORS.

BUT RENA
HAS BEEN TAKING
GOOD CARE OF
ME ...



HMMMMPH.
THAT'S WHAT I
HEAR.

SHUT
YOUR MOUTH,
ONAM!

WHAT
COULD SHE SEE
IN A WEAKLING
LIKE QUILLYAN?
THE CORRIDORS
WEREN'T SO
TOUGH.

WHAT!?!
I ALMOST DIED
MAKING IT
THROUGH THE
CORRIDORS
IN ORDER TO
JOIN THE
GUILD WAS
THE HARDEST
THING I'VE
EVER DONE.





IT WAS THE FIRE PITS THAT NEARLY KILLED ME ...

WHEN I ARRIVED, I LET OUT A BIG SIGH OF RELIEF ... THERE WERE RUNES EVERYWHERE.



MY UNCLE PELARTHIO WANTED ME TO BE A MAGE, BUT I NEVER HAD THE GIFT.



THE ONLY GOOD THAT CAME OF IT WAS THAT I COULD READ RUNES.



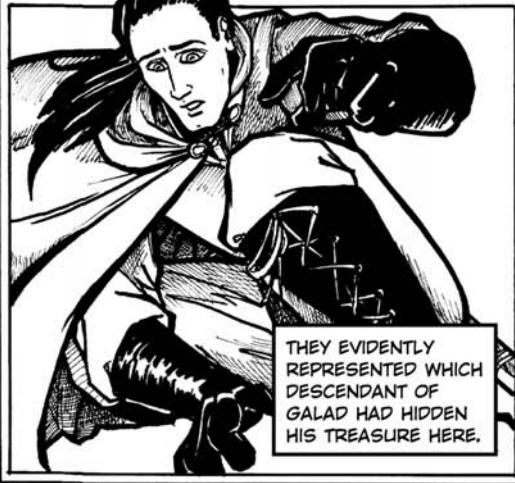
A QUICK SCAN OF THE FLOORS INDICATED AN ALPHABET OF RUNES, AND IT DIDN'T TAKE MUCH LONGER TO REALIZE THAT THE ONLY WAY TO CROSS WAS TO FOLLOW A SEQUENCE OF SIX FLOOR BLOCKS - SIX LETTERS.

AND WHO'S TREASURE WAS I TRYING TO STEAL?

GALAD.



THERE WERE THREE RUNES AVAILABLE - NUMBERS.



THEY EVIDENTLY REPRESENTED WHICH DESCENDANT OF GALAD HAD HIDDEN HIS TREASURE HERE.



I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE, BUT I KNEW IT WAS EITHER THE FIRST OR THE THIRD - I PICKED THE FIRST.

I WAS WRONG AND THAT NEARLY COST ME MY LEG - IF NOT MY LIFE.



I GOT LUCKY AND PULLED BACK JUST IN TIME TO SEE THE OTHER PROBLEM WITH THE PITS ...

... THE TURTLE.



THE THING WAS IMPOSSIBLY FAST, AND I KNEW I HAD ONLY ONE CHANCE TO STOP IT.

EVEN IF I PICKED THE RIGHT ONE, THE BEAST WOULD CATCH ME.



CRACK

SO I PICKED THE SECOND FLOOR STONE - AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I WAS HOPING THAT I WOULDN'T BE LUCKY.

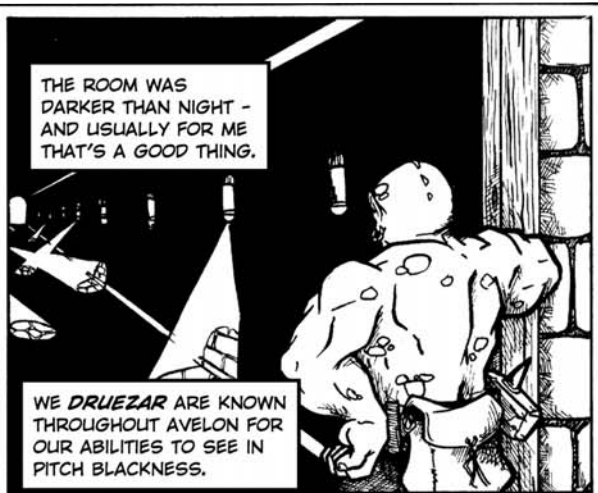


I WASN'T.



I JUST
KILLED THE TURTLE
AND GUESSED MY WAY
THROUGH IT.

WHAT NEARLY
GOT ME WAS THE
DAGGERWALL.



THE ROOM WAS
DARKER THAN NIGHT -
AND USUALLY FOR ME
THAT'S A GOOD THING.

WE *DRUEZAR* ARE KNOWN
THROUGHOUT AVELON FOR
OUR ABILITIES TO SEE IN
PITCH BLACKNESS.



UNFORTUNATELY, THE
ONLY WAY TO SURVIVE
THE TRAP WAS TO
STAY IN THE LIGHT.



DAGGERS FLEW FROM THE WALLS
THE MOMENT MY FOOT PASSED INTO
SHADOW. IF I HAD BEEN THINKING
LIKE A THIEF - WHICH I WASN'T - I
WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CAREFUL.

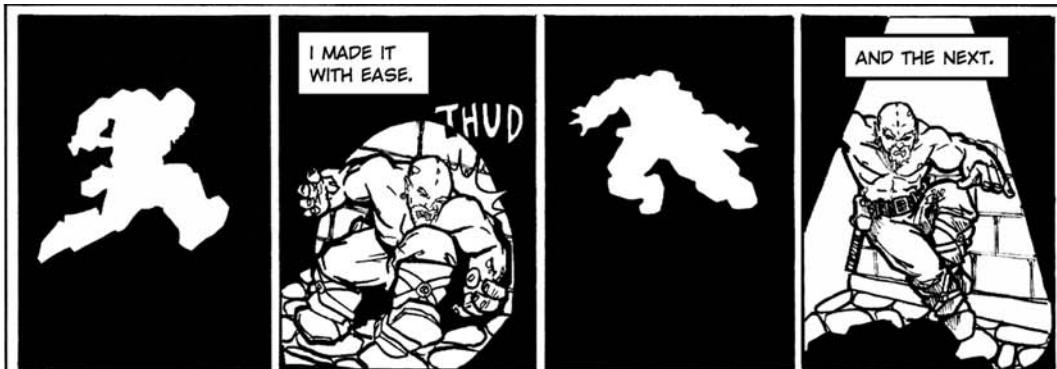
EITHER WAY, I WAS LUCKY I
DIDN'T DIE ON MY FIRST STEP.



INSTEAD, I
ONLY GOT HIT
IN THE LEG.

THE DAGGER
DISAPPEARED
AFTER IT HIT
ME, WHICH
MEANT IT WAS
MAGICAL -
NOW I HAD TO
WORRY ABOUT
TURNING INTO
A FROG AS
WELL AS
BLEEDING TO
DEATH.

AFTER I TOOK A
MOMENT TO
FIGURE OUT
WHAT WAS
HAPPENING, I
DECIDED TO
MAKE FOR THE
SPOT OF LIGHT
CLOSEST TO
THE ENTRANCE.



I MADE IT WITH EASE.

THUD

AND THE NEXT.



MY LEG WAS KILLING ME - THERE WASN'T ANY WAY I WAS GOING TO MAKE THE NEXT LIGHT SPOT.

THAT'S WHEN I SAW THE BODY.

THERE WERE OTHER BODIES, BUT THIS ONE HAD SOMETHING I NEEDED - A SHIELD.



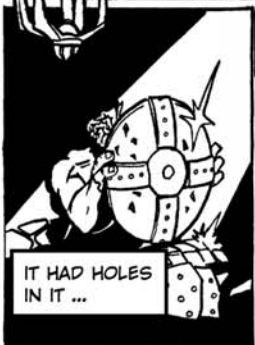
SO I HOOKED HIS FOOT WITH MY ROPE ...



... AND REELED HIM IN.



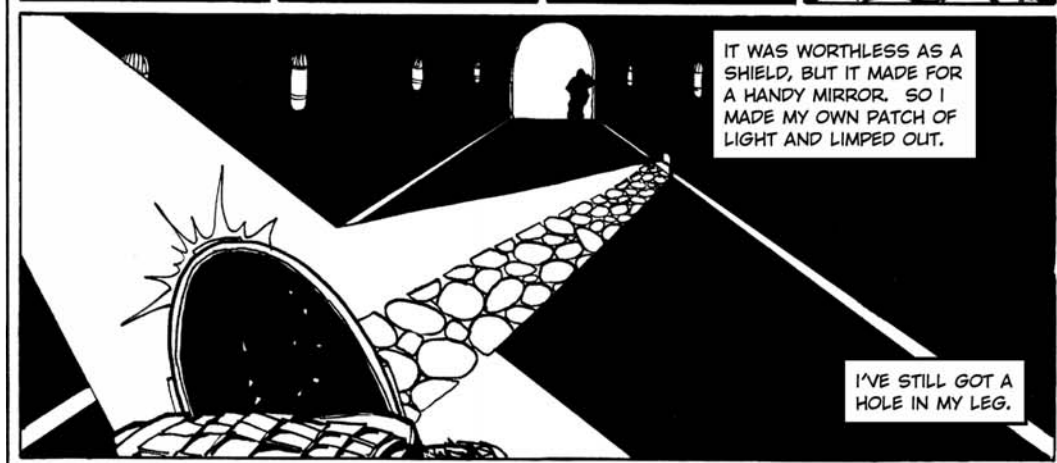
I EXAMINED THE SHIELD AND NOTICED TWO THINGS ...



IT HAD HOLES IN IT ...



BUT IT WAS SILVER.



IT WAS WORTHLESS AS A SHIELD, BUT IT MADE FOR A HANDY MIRROR. SO I MADE MY OWN PATCH OF LIGHT AND LIMPED OUT.

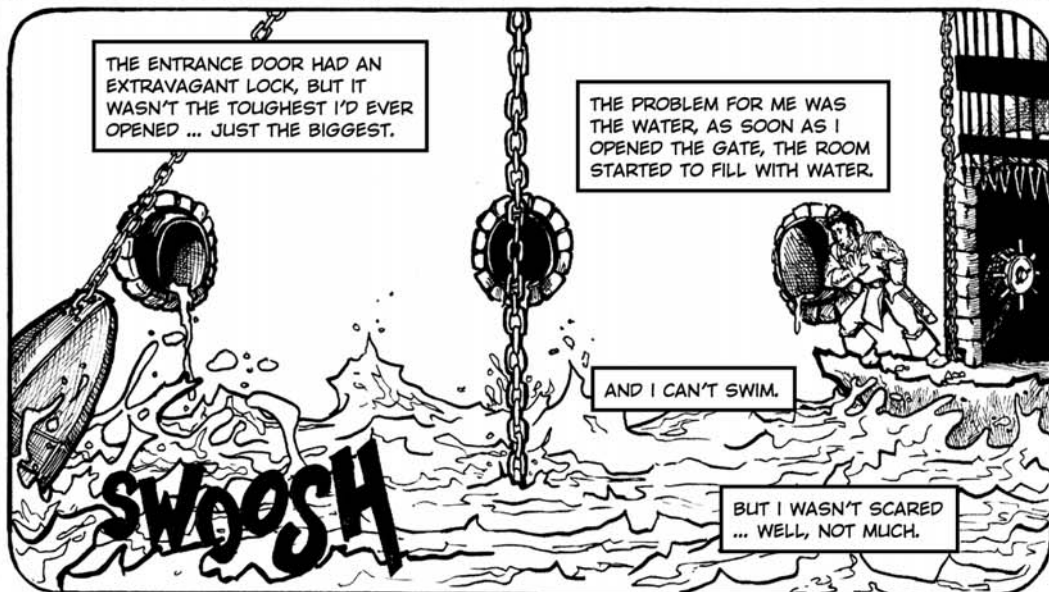
I'VE STILL GOT A HOLE IN MY LEG.



THE DAGGERWALL WAS TOUGH, BUT IF YOU TIMED YOUR JUMPS RIGHT, YOU COULD MAKE IT.



THE TOUGHEST ONE BY FAR, WAS THE WHIRLPOOL.



THE ENTRANCE DOOR HAD AN EXTRAVAGANT LOCK, BUT IT WASN'T THE TOUGHEST I'D EVER OPENED ... JUST THE BIGGEST.

THE PROBLEM FOR ME WAS THE WATER, AS SOON AS I OPENED THE GATE, THE ROOM STARTED TO FILL WITH WATER.

AND I CAN'T SWIM.

BUT I WASN'T SCARED ... WELL, NOT MUCH.

SWOOSH



I MADE MY WAY ACROSS THE ROOM, BUT THE ROOM WAS FILLING TOO FAST. I HAD TO TURN BACK.



I FIGURED IF I CLOSED THE GATE THE ROOM WOULD EMPTY OUT AGAIN ... THANK OSIS I WAS RIGHT.

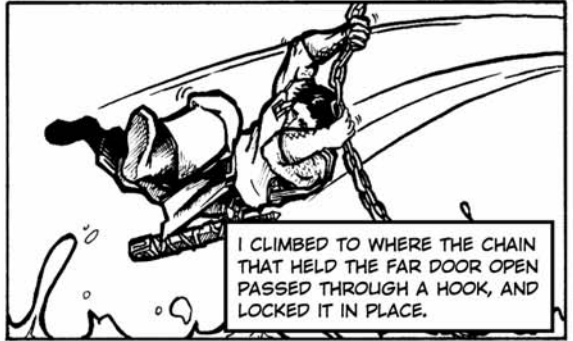


I NOTICED THAT THE CHAINS THAT OPENED THE GATE WERE CONNECTED TO EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE ROOM. WHEN I TURNED THE CRANK, THE FAR DOOR WOULD OPEN AND RELEASE A FLOOD OF WATER.

THEN I REALIZED WHY
THE LOCK WAS SO BIG.



I OPENED THE
PORTCULLIS AGAIN,
AND QUICKLY LEFT
FOR THE CHAINS.

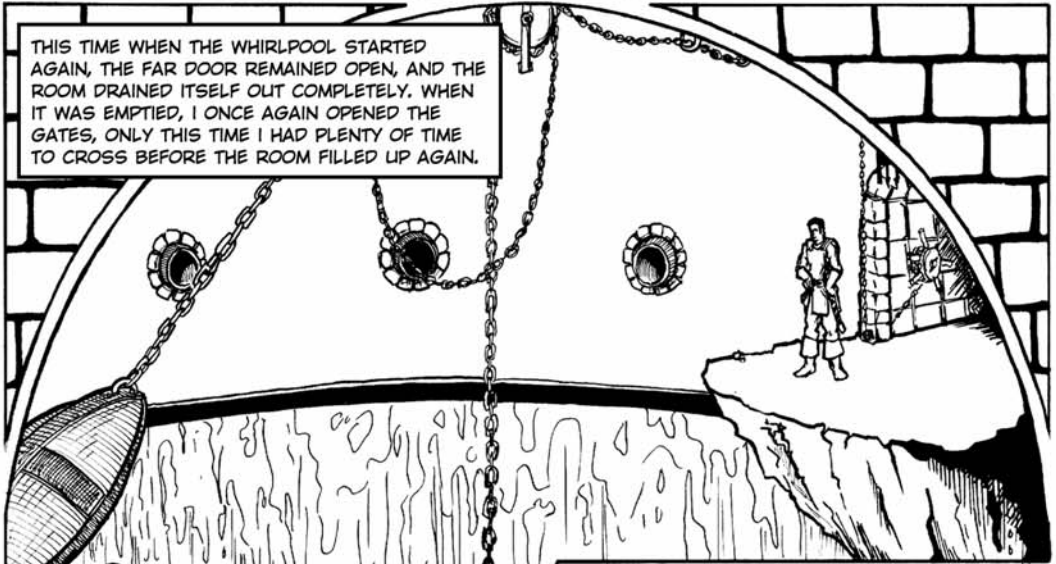


I CLIMBED TO WHERE THE CHAIN
THAT HELD THE FAR DOOR OPEN
PASSED THROUGH A HOOK, AND
LOCKED IT IN PLACE.

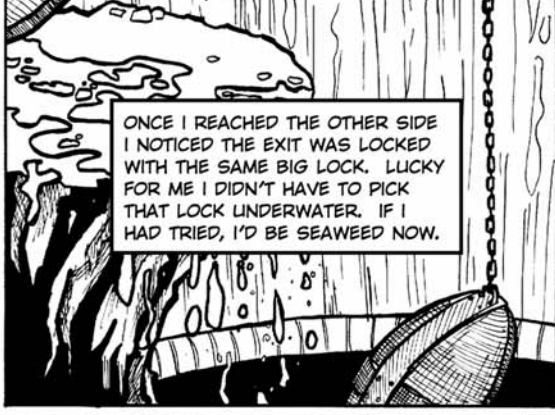


THEN I WENT BACK AND
CLOSED THE GATE AGAIN.

THIS TIME WHEN THE WHIRLPOOL STARTED
AGAIN, THE FAR DOOR REMAINED OPEN, AND THE
ROOM DRAINED ITSELF OUT COMPLETELY. WHEN
IT WAS EMPTIED, I ONCE AGAIN OPENED THE
GATES, ONLY THIS TIME I HAD PLENTY OF TIME
TO CROSS BEFORE THE ROOM FILLED UP AGAIN.



ONCE I REACHED THE OTHER SIDE
I NOTICED THE EXIT WAS LOCKED
WITH THE SAME BIG LOCK. LUCKY
FOR ME I DIDN'T HAVE TO PICK
THAT LOCK UNDERWATER. IF I
HAD TRIED, I'D BE SEAWEED NOW.



WHAT A
SHAME THAT
WOULD HAVE
BEEN.

TO THINK,
A BIG GUY LIKE
YOU, AFRAID OF
WATER.

HOW ABOUT
WE MAKE OUR
NEXT CHALLENGE
A SWIMMING
COMPETITION?



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System requirements: Pentium class PC with 32 meg of ram and 15 meg free hard disk space running Microsoft Windows 95/98/NT/2000. True Color (24bit) graphics highly recommended for 3d-terrain.

NBOS software ★ www.nbos.com

The Fractal Mapper and The Fractal World Explorer are Trademarks of NBOS software.



A look at some civilizations and a good Diablo clone

By Rick Moscatello

Last time around I told you about a few license titles, but didn't mention the most hotly contested license in computer gaming: **Civilization**. *Microprose* and *Activision* slugged it out for years in the courts over who had the actual rights to make a "Civilization" named sequel, while Sid Meier decided it wasn't the name that made the game great, it was the engine, and so went off to publish his own sequel.

Sid Meier's **Alpha Centauri** was essentially the same game, on a new world. It mostly worked, but missed greatness for a number of reasons, one I didn't mention the last time was the new world, **Planet** (*jeez, couldn't they come up with a better name?*), was dull and without any history for a player to get involved with. I mean, conquering the Earth as the Romans is cool, but conquering Planet as the Morganites? Just doesn't have the same ring to it.

Activision's version, **Civilization: Call To Power**, came out next. They kept the basic idea of "start as a primitive civilization and advance through time," but they tinkered with the play balance and engine. It's also an adequate game, but they made some serious mistakes in play balance with respect to alternate forms of "war". It's silly and overexpensive to use military forces to conquer a country when you can do the same thing with a handful of "lawyers", and you can't use your military to just kill enemy lawyers! Like lawyers could seriously stop tanks—lawyers are nasty, but not THAT nasty. Just ask the Chinese.

Finally, *Microprose* just came out with **Civilization II: The Test of Time (ToT)**, and they played it very safe. **ToT** includes a copy of the original **Civ II**, so, no matter what, you're guaranteed a great (but dated) game. They then tried some tweaks, and the tweaks prove that the original was a great game, and there's just no improving it.

First, they upgraded the graphics. The units are in much higher detail, and the terrain has little bits of animation like geysers and spouting whales and stuff. Unfortunately, they succumbed to the mysterious "dark" graphics that have ruined many a game. Much like **UnReal** (*and several other games*), everything is in perpetual shadow, and only by turning the brightness on your monitor to maximum (*and setting gamma correction up a notch or two*) can looking at the screen become tolerable. For what it's worth, I finally discovered why some games do this—if you run the game on a 19" monitor (*instead of the typical 14" monitor*), everything looks okay. Now I know what size monitor professional pro-

grammers/computer artists use! You can easily turn off the animations, but screwing up the color just to play the game is a bit of a drag.

Their second modification was to change the displays for the city and world. The original display was flawless, and veterans of the game can't help but get confused looking at new layouts that don't seem to display the information as clearly. Mercifully, they put in an option so you can go to the "old" display (*even using the old artwork!*), so this isn't so bad.

Their final change is a biggie, and shows just how careful you need to be when you mess with a great design. Instead of just having the world, you can also have "parallel" worlds above and below you (*eg, a space platform or below the sea*). On the one hand, this seems to be a great idea, first used by **Master of Magic** (*gee, I sure wish they'd redo THAT game, fixing all the bugs and design flaws...*). This seems like it would add a lot to the game—multiple worlds to conquer!—but, it doesn't. About the only flaw in the original version was the "end game." It takes a certain amount of time to reach the end, where you have all the technologies. You typically had the computer totally thrashed, but still had to endure another hour or so to finish him off (*or build the spacecraft*). You reach that point just as quickly with multiple worlds, but now, it takes an extra 20 hours to finish exploring/conquering all the new terrain, and that's a massive dragging end to what is otherwise a fun game. *Microprose* also includes some scenarios exploiting the multiple worlds idea, the best of which is a fantasy **Midgard** scenario that is quite awesome (*except the worlds are just too freakin' BIG*). There's also an "enhanced" version of the classic game, with the "extra world" being **Alpha Centauri**. Not only do you have to colonize Alpha C, you have to reach Transcendence too (talk about giving Sid Meier's **Alpha Centauri** a slap in the face AND a kick in the dice bag...could this trigger another lawsuit?).

Whether you have **CivII** or not, you should wait until **ToT** hits the discount racks before buying; there just isn't anything new here, other than a classic, great, game, modified against its will. The enhanced version is still very playable, but the \$50 price tag is a bit unwarranted for a game that is several years old, even when it comes in a new box.

Another fun title, which also seems dated, even with decent graphics, is **Darkstone**, from *Gathering of Developers*. The game just begs to be compared with **Diablo**. When **Diablo** came out, young gamers considered it like nothing they'd ever seen, even as

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old gamers (*that is, 30 or more years old*) recognized it as a massively upgraded version of NetHack. Either way, **Diablo** was a groundbreaking game. The bloodshed was so fast and furious that people didn't really care that the quests were very simplistic, and the roleplaying element involved nothing more than deciding whether to slay the monsters with archery, fireballs, or hacking.

Every great computer game begets a brood of clones. While clones are usually mediocre at best, **Darkstone** does a fine job of cloning **Diablo**, and then taking it to a new level. First, the cloned parts:

- 1) The town is totally generic and has about the same characters in it (*at least the blacksmith doesn't have a Scottish accent, and you don't have to listen to "I sense a soul in search of answers" every time you want to buy a potion.*)
- 2) Your character has four stats, and you get to distribute 6 (instead of 5 in **Diablo**—does this count as an improvement?) points to the stats when you go up a level.
- 3) You gotta go kill some bad dude whose name starts with a "D".
- 4) The sub-quests are semi-lame, almost all consisting of "go fetch something and bring it to me" type stuff, with otherwise useless peasants coughing up loot just because you handed them the *Holy Widget*. Shame you can't skip the "errand boy" crap and just snuff the peasant for his cash.
- 5) If you use your character skills to maintain weapons or recharge items, you'll slowly grind them into uselessness, but the drones in the city can do the job without any drawbacks.

It wouldn't be hard to list another twenty similarities,

but you get the idea: this sucker is inspired by **Diablo** all the way through.

So what makes it better? The big difference is adventuring is no longer a solo effort, you get to bring two characters into the dungeon instead of one. Even better, the character you're not controlling has reasonable AI, capable of getting the job done.

Heck, considering how fast combat is, it might even be a bit superior, as the computer-controlled warrior is more than capable of shredding an army while I'm fumbling with my wizard trying to get off a fireball.

Another cool improvement is the addition of a countryside, which lets you do a bit of monster bashing in the great outdoors. While the four countryside areas, like the town, are a touch lame, it's still a marked improvement over endless dungeon crawling.

The most convenient new idea is a location system. Want your character to go to the nearest stairs? Just click on the relevant buttons, and he'll run over to them, no problem. This is so much better than clicking as you walk every ten paces or so, and is really useful on those outdoor maps.

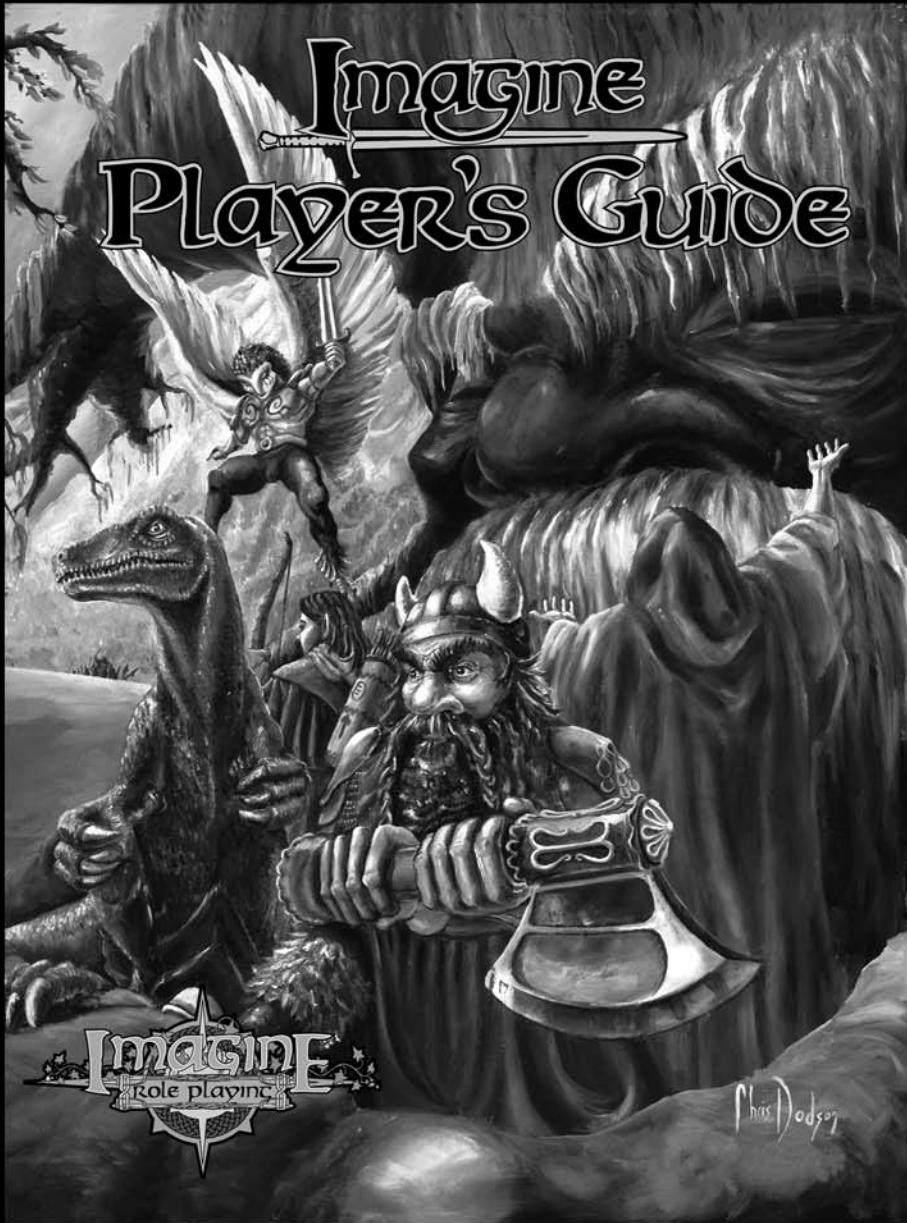
Each of the four character classes gets a special mix of skills you can pay to improve (*there's a villager/statue who can train anyone in anything to any level...did I mention the town was a bit lame?*).

Anyway, the skills are quite cool, from the copycat "repair" skills, to Meditation (*gives a short term boost to mana*), to Orientation (*gives a brief glimpse of the entire map*), to Concentration (*massive boost to strength and dexterity*), and to a half dozen other skills (*and another dozen dubious ones*). It's definitely a nice touch, although **Diablo II** will probably have an even more involved skill system.

Oh yeah, **Diablo II**, wonder when that one will see daylight? It looked good in 1998 at E3 (*Electronics Entertainment Expo, where all the new games are shown off, and wild lies about release dates are told more often than orcs get hacked*). Heck, it looked even better in 1999 at E3. Maybe it'll be out by the time you read this, maybe not. That's the real value of **Darkstone**: it's here. It's a darn cool game, it's out, and it's better than **Diablo**. If you just can't stand waiting for **Diablo II**, you really should check it out. It's an excellent way to satisfy those mindless "adventuring" (or rather, "monster slaughtering") urges. Even better, when you beat the big D in **Darkstone**, you won't end with the totally bogus "let's drill the crystal into my skull" ending of **Diablo** (*I don't want to give it away, but it's the kind of ending that the Knights would love!*).

□

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'The Travelers' move to KenzerCo!



KILDEER, IL: Kenzer & Company, publishers of the *Knights of the Dinner Table* comic book, have announced a deal with comic book creator, Tony DiGerolamo, to publish his fantasy/comedy comic book, *The Travelers*!

The *Travelers* centers around the antics of a group of hapless adventurers and has been described as "*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*" meets "*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* only taller."

"*Kenzer is my kind of people,*" says DiGerolamo, who also created the acclaimed *Jersey Devil* comic book. "*They are gamers, like myself and this comic book is fantasy, with the fantasy gamer and Joe Q. Public in mind. No unpronounceable names, no mystical journeys-- This book is all about swords, wizards, goblins, demons, barbarians-- It's like D&D meets The Three Stooges.*"

The *Travelers* features pencils by Brian Dawson, inks by Brian & Brendon Fraim and color covers by CCG illustrator, Kevin Daily. Issues 1-3, originally published by DiGerolamo's imprint *South Jersey Rebellion Productions*, will be solicited through gaming distributors in March, April and May. The first *Kenzer* issue, issue #4 "*Locust in Love*", will solicit through all distributors for June and will then be bimonthly.

"*We have a core group of adventurers,*" says DiGerolamo. "But each issue is one whole story. Then we throw something new at them each issue. Issue #4 has ninjas. Issue #5 has big golem guys called "Amoroids". Issue #6 is all thieves! We also bring in historical figures like William of Occam and Marco Polo. It's fantasy adventure with attitude!"

Look for a preview of *The Travelers* in upcoming issues of *Knights of the Dinner Table Magazine*. **HOODY HOO!**

ANSWERS TO "THE GAME STUMPER"

[from page 45]



1. Barnabas Collins: *Dark Shadows Game*™ (*Milton Bradley* 1972)
2. *Dragnet*™ (*Transogram Games* 1954)
3. *Groo: The Game*™ (*Archangel Entertainment* 1997)
4. *Orcs at the Gates*™ (*Jolly Roger Games* 1999)
5. *Risk: Fortieth Anniversary Edition*™ (*Parker Brothers* 1999)
6. *Crimson Skies*™ (*FASA* 1998)
7. *Blood Bowl*™ (*Games Workshop* 1998)
8. *Carrier Strike*™ (*Milton Bradley* 1978)
9. *Kriegspiel*™ (*Avalon Hill* 1970)
10. *Escape from Colditz*™ (*H.P. Gibson & Sons LTD*)
11. *Skulls and Crossbones*™ (*Fantasy Games Unlimited* 1980)
12. *Tri-Ominos*™ (*Pressman* 1985)
13. *GangBusters*™ (*TSR* 1982)
14. *Twitch!*™ (*Wizards of the Coast* 1998)



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HOMEBREWED KODT WEB SITES

<http://www.hoodyhoo.com> — Here, you'll find some kewl animated KODT cartoons.

<http://pages.infnit.net/kodt/kodt.htm> — A KODT web site with lot of stuff to see

http://members.tripod.com/~mythical_ventures/kodt — A Dedicated Weird Pete Fan Page

<http://www.clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/knightsofthedinnertable> — KODT Fan Club

<http://www.kodt.fsnet.co.uk/> — Richard Bartle's KODT page



BETTER THAN AN ALL-DAY LOLLIPOP!

That's right. Contributing to KODT is better than candy. (and it doesn't promote tooth decay). Got ideas for things like cartoons, articles on gaming, adventures, industry news, reviews, etc.? Well, quit playing with those dice and drop an e-mail for our guidelines to: KenzerCo@aol.com.



FIELD REPORT: SPIEL '99 October 21 - 25 Essen, Germany

When the opportunity came around to go to Spiel '99 I eagerly accepted. Partly because I once lived in Germany (near Stuttgart for almost three years during my stint in the military) and have been aching to return. This seemed like a good excuse to do so. I've been hearing great things about this five-day international game show for years but was never able to attend due to our tight publishing schedule. Now that I've experienced this event, I'm already pulling strings to be 'the dude' who gets to go next year. (I'm sure the Sixth Knight and I will have to compete in some nasty contest-of-arms or something in order to win the honor of going — My fencing lessons start next week.)



look for back issues, buy KODT miniatures and posters, or to simply say "Hello!" Uh.....Did I say I was expecting something like GENCON?

Well, GENCON could have been held in just one, (maybe two) of the exhibition halls at Messe Essen. What makes this show unique is that you'll also find areas dedicated to comics, historical re-enactment, costumes, comics, fandom etc. I roamed the halls several times and I still didn't see everything. There was even a live heavy-metal band giving a concert in our hall — how kewl is that? One of my favorite halls was the one set aside for children. There were dozens of activity centers set up including a live-action Foosball court (A life-sized Foosball table with long plastic poles running across it. The players had to grab onto the poles and kick at the ball while remaining in position on the pole as their team members on the outside of the court pulled the pole back and forth to maneuver them toward the ball.) There was also a huge castle filled with plastic balls, slides and other obstacles. (I tried to get in on that foosball action but was abruptly turned away.)

Before ending this report I have to say one thing — I love German rolls (and German food in general for that matter). In last year's report Brian 'the sixth knight' Jelke complained about the 'hard rolls' and suggested our German friends look into something called the 'hotdog bun'. One of the first people to stop by the booth was looking for Brian and seemed quite upset. Turned out she wanted to flame him for complaining about the rolls. I want to be there when she finally gets hold of him — should be entertaining.

Oh, and to all you small press publishers out there. Do yourself a favor. Get together and pool your resources and send someone to this show to represent your product. From what I could see EVERYONE sold through most of their product at the show. People attend this show to BUY and to seek out the NEW and the UNCOMMON. It's also a great place to network with European publishers and distributors.

I'd like to thank Rick Loomis (Flying Buffalo) and Oliver Nothers for all their help and the good fellowship. You guys rule! ☐



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 Help me, please. That radiation hit me pretty bad; I feel funny. Like I'm changing... (Dark?) Druid"

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**Looking for a copy of TSR's DIVINE RIGHT
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 (black on grey)
 Size: XL
 Price: \$19.⁹⁵



Style KODT #1
 KODT Shirt
 (white on black)
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Style KODT #2
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GAME WANTED!

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YOU'VE GOT SLUMPIN'
ON YER MIND, BOY?
BESS' SAY IT AND
JES' GET ON WID IT!

An Opinion Arena and Open Forum

As the subheading indicates, this is a sounding board where gamers can give their two-cents' worth on whatever seems to rile them. So pull back the curtain and come on in the Back Room. You can leave that thin-skin at the door but be sure to bring your opinions with you.

After narrowly averting a huge debate on the evils of smoking, it looks like the subject has drifted into even more treacherous waters —Politics! Almost as touchy a subject as newbie-bashing or the treatment of Sara's character at the hands of Bob and Dave several issues back.

Let me state, for the record, that no one at KenzerCo is currently a card holding member of the communist party.

The following letter is in response to John Bowen's letter in Issue #36's Backroom at the Games Pit.

Jolly

John, chill out dude. Capitalism is a fact of life and I don't have anything against it in moderation. True, the KODT crew is under no obligation to make a good comic. True, no one's forcing us to buy the comic. But KODT shouldn't 'lose' quality, either. And really, it hasn't — the format of the stories have simply changed. (There's more movement — Brian standing up and banging the table, the suitcase (which Sara was looking into in #36, what was she thinking?), and the fact each story builds on the last, that kind of thing.)

There's no more seeing all the characters die in one strip, then seeing them alive and well in the next one, with no explanation given. But this isn't exactly a bad thing. It took a little getting used to, but that's it. Now I can't wait to see the HackMaster Tournament, etc...

Anyway. I don't believe I said anything about the quality of the comic,

except that I was afraid it'd go down. The whole 'capitalism' thing is fine. I can live with it. But can you possibly mean that capitalism is all good? No way!

I don't believe it was capitalism that gave us better working hours, either. That was unions. Organized strikes gave us better working conditions, higher paychecks, etc.

Capitalism has crushed idealism. You can't produce anything simply because it's good — it has to be enjoyed by a large mass of people, or the right people.

And honestly, capitalism has always existed. There was no pre-capitalism, simply because everyone has always wanted capital. What can I say? Karl Marx rules.

“What can I say? Karl Marx Rules.”

As for roleplaying not being able to exist in a medieval society? Come on! Everyone roleplays. Everyone! It's just that RPG's define the roleplaying with rules, characters etc. If you want true-to-the-heart roleplaying, go online and try any of the hundreds of Free Form RolePlaying sites.

Or sign up for a theater school. Or go to high-school. Or write a book. Anywhere where you act differently than who you really are, you are by definition roleplaying. That is, playing a role.

Role Playing Games, like we know them, aren't that old. During the medieval years, very few people could write, anyway — and so I doubt there were any versions of AD&D™ back then. If you want any kind of roleplaying, go back to the roots of it all. FFRPG. Free Form RolePlaying Games, or what we call “daydreaming.” RPG's simply limit those day-

dreams with rules, to make it a game. True, FFRPG has rules as well, but these are rules of conduct, not reality.

However, what you said is true. Without capitalism, there could be no gaming “industry.” Without roleplayers, however, there could be no game. You don't need capitalism to run a game, you need imagination. You need more idealism than dollar-signs. And so the Gaming Industry is a deal with the devil. The gaming industry is a combination of two things that are very much opposite, and so it has to balance very carefully. On one side lies its roots, idealism. But with it lies dying, for without money, there would be no industry. On the other side lies capitalism with the means of survival and father of the industry. But if it embraces it totally, it will lose touch with the idealism that spawned it, and in so doing will lose the joy it was built on.

No, I don't agree with you on everything. I agree that the KODT crew deserve their money, and more, but I don't agree that they should try to squeeze as much cash as possible out of a great product, because the product will lose some of its quality in doing so. In my opinion, capitalism isn't the solution, it's the path to a solution. (*Which reminds me of B5 with the search for god speech that G'Kar gives...*)

I too am proud of what I am. I'm a capitalist too, that much is true. You can't live in this age without being one. But the idealist in me is strong.

Call me a romantic, and it'd be true. But I believe in something, and it's called the game. Not the gaming industry, the game.

And dude that Pre-Capitalism-Capitalism thingy? I don't even want to get into that... the world isn't perfect because of capitalism. The world isn't perfect, period. It never has, never will be. I have little doubt that there was time for roleplaying then, as

there is now. I have little doubt that there are people who live terrible lives now, as there were then. But though the scales have changed, don't think for a minute that everyone has the time to play RPGs, or that everyone can choose to eat at restaurants. Or that no one lived good lives then, or that they never played role-playing games then. Or that they didn't use the four-post beds for other uses as well. Roleplaying is more like the yellow brick road than the career ladder.

Emanuel
via E-mail

I was fortunate enough to press flesh with you and the staff at **GenCon 98** and was even more fortunate to play Bitter Stevil at the live reading.

The letters in issue #36 harshing on Stevil disturbed me. Every gamer reads **KODT** and identifies with one player or another. You've heard it before. For me, that character is Stevil. I think many of the readers are unable to see into the depths of his character.

He is a jaded gamer, one who drives over an hour to play (*as do I*). At one point my guess is that he was a top-notch player, but getting stuck with a group of misfits like the **Black Hands** certainly hasn't helped matters much. He is a classic example of a gamer who has been pushed too far by fellow gamers. Why does he play evil? Nitro lets him.

Sure, he plots diabolical machinations against his party (*and to David Rak who claimed that he preyed on the weak, I say this: Newt has dished out his own fair share of retribution. I'd hardly call him weak*). Stevil likes to have his character involved.

The best way to do this? Come up with plots of his own. I think many readers latch too easily onto the **Knights** as a party of "good". Brian is a power-gamer, one who brings many headaches to B.A.

Dave and Bob are twinkies, ready to kill anything that moves, even the last member of a race protected by Luvia. Are they the types one would want to play with?

I wouldn't. As gamers, we all have flaws, but before this anti-Stevil propaganda gets out of hand, I thought I would throw in my two cents.

To compare the two groups is not really fair, as they are both playing in different styles of campaigns. The **Knights** are playing in a very high-powered campaign, one where they regularly burn down villages and thumb their noses at good Gawds. Nitro's game is grittier, more concerned with character interac-

tions and plot.

In summation. Is Stevil malicious? Perhaps. But if he truly hated everyone, would he go through the effort of driving so far? I don't think so. In no way am I meaning to say that there is anything wrong with the **Knights**, and if I were putting together a group for the Hackmaster Tournament, I'd want Sara and Brian as well as Stevil and either Newt or Gordo (there is something to be said for role-playing, no matter how annoying or creepy). When my fellow gamers refer to me as Stevil, I smile with pride. And just so everyone knows, the folks I play with are most like Dave, Brian and Sara, and our GM is definitively Nitro. A shout out to the Seven of Steel.

Thanks for your time,
Barak Blackburn (no relation)
via E-mail

"He [Stevil] is a classic example of a gamer who has been pushed too far by fellow gamers."

Just wanted to write in defense of the format that **KODT** is heading towards. As a comic, **KODT** draws all of us gamers to it, like moths seeing a distant beacon. However, experimentation in any gaming related product should be encouraged, not immediately complained about. Just as

Dragon™ used to run adventures (*modules as we old timers call 'em*) and then split into another publication, who can say what strange new article in **KODT** could spark a new and popular idea that deserves even more (*dare we say it?*) coverage than the parent.

Not that I believe that could occur...I, for one, admire the creativity of the **Shardar** strip, but the **Knights**, and, to a lesser extent, the **Black Hands**, will always occupy a special place in my heart.

The next item on my agenda has to do with Alan Miller's letter in the back room.

I must defend the **Black Hands**; of course, I agree with one point first: I too, would never, ever want to game with any of the **Black Hands**.

Having said that, I know that I HAVE gamed with people almost exactly like them. Isn't that what **KODT** is about? Recreating, reminiscing, and realizing the strange situations that can occur in gam-

ing, and perhaps recognizing a bit of, if not yourself, one of your gaming buds in these characters? The **Black Hands** serve as a contrast to the **Knights**; while neither group is exactly the "perfect" rpg group (*and please, define perfect too; I always thought that if everybody is having FUN, it was a perfect game*), they complement each other's deficiencies in stressing certain styles of gaming — the "evil" party, and the "power" party.

Thanks for everything, and **LONG LIVE THE KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE!**

Emperor Dave,
via E-mail

The letter by Mike in **KODT** #36 rubbed me the wrong way. I've seen letters similar to this before, but I'm tired of seeing it and want to spout off. <Rant mode on.>

What in the world makes you, or anybody else, think that **KODT** has to include a representative from every classification of people who might play rpgs? **KODT** has limited space, and doesn't have room to have a representative married player, a representative black, a representative Hispanic, a representative Native American and Jew, a representative Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim, not to mention Hindu, Wiccan, Jehovah's Witness, homosexual, transsexual, Nazi, Chinese spy, air traffic controller, **NAMBLA** member, rock star, political correctness extremist and time traveling Viking.

And if I left anybody out (and I'm sure I did), sorry, but I don't have time to type the names of every group you all might belong to, and **KODT** doesn't have room to include characters from them all.

KODT isn't a social commentary—it's a freakin' comic book! If you don't feel you're being represented, get over it.

I'm not being represented either, but I think **KODT** is the funniest thing around and I'm not going to let some delusion that they're supposed to represent me ruin my enjoyment of it. <Rant mode off.>

Jeffrey Kreider
via E-mail

□



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The KODT RULES of SELF DEFENSE

Let a character be accused of being too violent or aggressive, it is necessary to follow certain rules before initiating combat. The right of self-defense is a dearly cherished one for characters, and rightly so. It is the only thing standing between them and horrible death at the hands of their enemies. Below are six useful guidelines in each of the categories of attacking, accepting surrenders, and dealing with prisoners that have been thoroughly game-tested by the *Knights of the Dinner Table™*.

ATTACKING IN SELF DEFENSE

"The best defense is a good offense" — Brian van Hoose

1. If you encounter someone brandishing a weapon, you can attack them. If obviously self-defense.
2. If you encounter someone who is armed but does not have a weapon in their hands, you can attack them. This is merely the good tactical move *"drawing before they do"*.
3. If you encounter someone who you cannot determine if they are armed or not (*no visible weapons*), you can attack them. They could have concealed weapons. Once they are subdued or killed, you can find out if they were *"carrying"*.
4. If you encounter someone who is clearly unarmed, you can attack them. They could be martial arts experts, spell-casters, have invisible weapons, or weapons implanted in their bodies, or be serving as a decoy. Once again, after they are subdued or killed, you can find out about their true intentions.
5. If you encounter someone who is not only clearly unarmed but otherwise appears to be an *"innocent civilian"*, you must treat the situation with extreme caution. Feeble old people, minors, cripples, etc. could very well be enemies in disguise, they could be using illusions, etc. Any act such as waving or talking (*i.e., casting spells*) can be interpreted as hostile, and then you can attack them in self-defense.
6. Anyone who avoids, runs away, or attempts to evade the party is guilty of something, so they can be attacked in self-defense.

SURRENDER

On some occasions, enemies may attempt to *"surrender"* before or during combat. A few notes on this subject are well-advised.

1. White flags must always be regarded with suspicion. A white flag may be a battle banner, a signal flag, an attack warning, a trick, etc. A flag by itself means little.
2. There must be clear verbal acknowledgment of surrender. If your enemies are screaming hysterically or babbling in some foreign language, this does not count as a surrender, regardless of what else they are doing.

3. Throwing down of weapons is a requirement for surrender. Note that if the weapons are close enough to grab up again or there is a possibility of hidden weapons, the condition is not fulfilled. Ideally, opponents can be required to strip to the point where it can be verified that they are not armed. Still, caution is advised (*see #4 above*).

4. Fleeing is an obvious attempt to flank the party, so retreating enemies can be attacked in the back. Remember the old adage: *"Kill them before they run away, so they won't come back to fight another day"*.

5. Any hesitation on the part of those supposedly surrendering, including asking for conditions, begging for mercy without permission, falling down from wounds, trying to stop bleeding, etc., is merely a trick, and does not constitute a valid surrender.

6. Even when someone actually surrenders, you get one last swing in, because your arm was in motion from the last one (*same applies to trigger fingers*).

PRISONERS

At times it may be unavoidable that a surrender leads to the taking of prisoners. Great care is needed because of the tricks prisoners are known to play.

1. If your enemies are known to take no prisoners (*or you have heard rumors to that effect, or you have suspicions that it might be so*), then you do not have to grant them quarter.
2. If prisoners become an inconvenience, you can tie them up and leave them in the wilderness or dungeon. The laws of nature will resolve the situation.
3. Prisoners are responsible for their own upkeep, including the costs of restraining them. How the characters get their money back is a personal choice.
4. Prisoners can be required to do menial work for the party. If the level of work sustained does not kill the prisoners, then it is not too much.

5. Strict measures are needed to keep prisoners in line. Any method that does not deliberately kill captives is appropriate. Note that accidental killings are acceptable.

6. In the case of exceptionally dangerous or troublesome prisoners, it is OK to kill a few as examples to the rest.

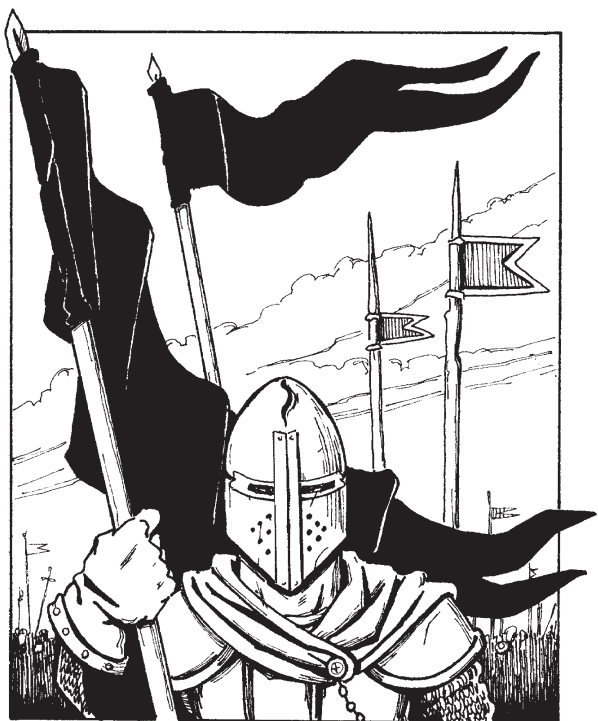
With the above principles in mind, it is hoped that your characters can have a secure, profitable, and respectable adventuring career.

by Larry Granato

[Note: The *Knights* fondly refer to these 'rules' as the *"Hack makes Right Convention"* — Jolly]



from the writers of *Knights of the Dinner Table*



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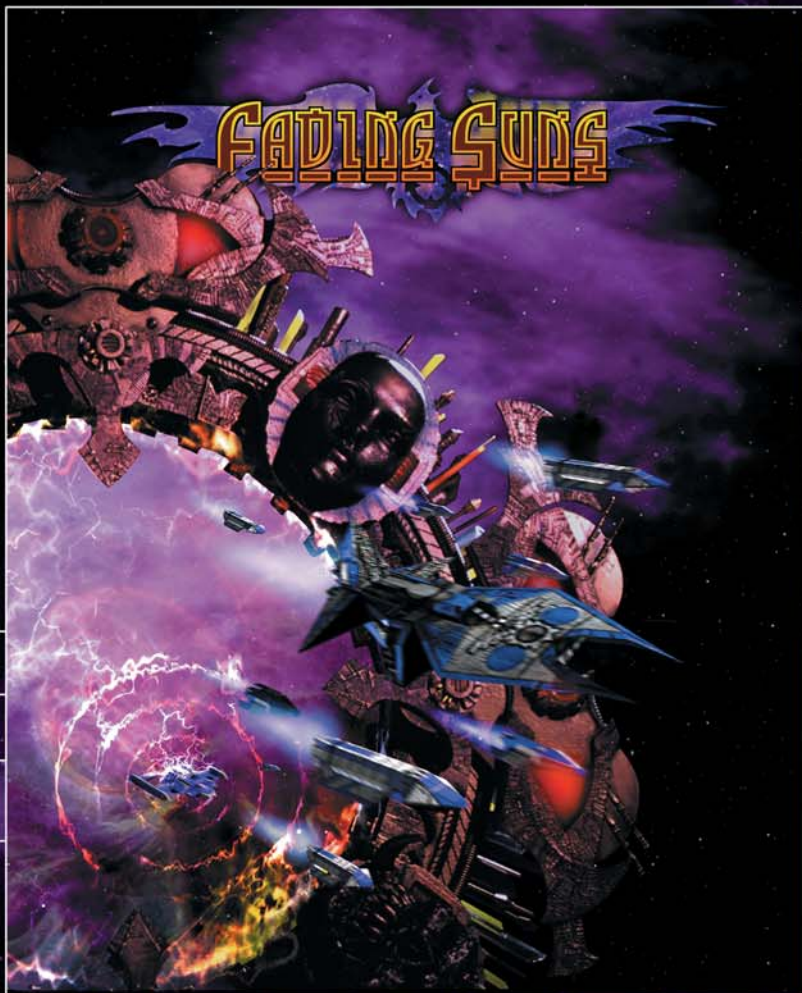
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THANKS FOR HOLDING ALL THAT *FADING SUNS* STUFF FOR ME PETE. I'LL PICK IT UP NEXT WEEK WHEN MY CHRISTMAS MONEY CD MATURES. I'M REALLY GLAD MY MOM TALKED ME INTO SAVING SOME MONEY TO BUY PRESENTS WITH THIS YEAR.

I TOLD MY DAD ABOUT MY *GANNOCK BROTHER BATTLE* CHARACTER AND HOW TOUGH HE WAS. 'COURSE HE WAS READIN' THE PAPER BUT STILL HE SAID, "HEY THAT'S GREAT DAVE." SO I'M GONNA SURPRISE HIM THIS YEAR BY ROLLIN' HIM UP HIS OWN CHARACTER.

THAT IS A GREAT IDEA DAVE. IT BEATS GETTING HIM MORE TIES, SOCKS AND UNDERWEAR.

YEAH, DAVE HAD SUCH A GREAT IDEA, I DECIDED I'M GONNA FILL UP ON MY *FADING SUNS* STUFF WHILE I GOT THE MONEY TOO. 'COURSE MY DAD WOULDN'T APPRECIATE HIS OWN CHARACTER AS MUCH AS DAVE'S WILL. SO I'LL HAVE TO COME UP WITH SOMETHING ELSE FOR HIM.

GOD BLESS THE KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE!

