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## KENZER AND COMPANY

Knights of the Dinner Table #40  
Hack in the Saddle Again  
February, 2000

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**Knights of the Dinner Table™** magazine (ISSN 1526-307X) is published monthly by Kenzer and Company, 21191 Creekside Drive, Lake Zurich, 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](mailto:jollyrb@aol.com).

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# Knights of the Dinner Table™ MAGAZINE

## "HACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN"

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

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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. 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

*“Jolly, if you have to ask what the definition of “geek” is, then my poor dear man, you most definitely ARE a geek.”*

KODT Reader

Issue 38 has only been on the streets for a few days (as of this writing) and already a dozen responses to the request in my editorial have come in. As you may recall, I had just returned from the Essen Game Fair in Germany and had reported how a group of German gamers had approached the booth to ask what the various slang terms appearing in KODT mean (terms like geek, dork, dweeb, doofus, etc). I was forced to admit that I really didn't have a good dictionary definition for any of these terms and promised I would track them down and publish them in a future issue.

It then occurred to me to just ask our readers to define the terms for me. Well, as I indicated, the results are coming in. Strangely enough it seems like many of you don't agree on your definitions.

Most of the readers who responded turn to various dictionaries for the answer and even included some notes on the origins of the various terms. Most of the responses favored the following definitions:

**doofus** *n.* Silly and incompetent.

**dork** *n.* 1. A whale's penis. 2. A dull, stupid, or fatuous person. 3. A heavy-bodied domestic fowl having five toes on each foot and raised chiefly for table use.

**dweeb** *n.* 1. Ugly and insignificant. 2. A subservient person; a flunky. 3. A despised person. 4. Something useless, detrimental, or worthless, especially an animal unfit for breeding.

**geek** *n.* 1. Skilled at technology but unpopular. 2. An odd or ridiculous person. 3. A carnival performer whose show consists of bizarre acts, such as biting the head off a live chicken. (*Oh my gawd!! Ozzy Osbourne is a geek?*)

**nerd** *n.* 1. A person regarded as stupid, inept, or unattractive. 2. A person who is single-minded or accomplished in scientific pursuits but is felt to be socially inept. (*This reader also claims that 'nerd' first appeared as a Dr. Seuss character in the book "If I Ran the Zoo".*)

Even though most of these definitions were taken from reliable sources I couldn't help but feel they weren't quite true to the spirit of the words concerned - at least not in the manner they are currently used today.

It wasn't until I received an E-mail from Beth Young that I felt I'd had truly found the definitions I was looking for.

Beth wrote; *"Here are some home-grown (as in, I just made them up) definitions. For some reason, I get the idea these terms are most often*

*applied to males and are more a state of mind or code of behavior than anything having to do with appearance. I hope that among the answers you get, you'll be able to come up with something that satisfies your German friends and enables them to use these incredibly useful (how did they ever do without them?!) words properly."*

Here are Beth's definitions which I now enter into the official lexicon of GamerSpeak.

**Doofus:** Socially inept, but there's something about him which makes you non-judgmental towards him. Maybe he has a good-natured attitude or an animal-like lack of self-consciousness (*or mental processing power*) that makes him easy to forgive. Dave is a Doofus. And maybe Newton.

**Dork:** This is a guy who consistently acts like a jerk. He is so self-involved he doesn't care what others think of him or is socially clumsy in a distasteful way. Stevil and Bob are Dorks.

**Dweeb:** The nuances of this one elude me so I hope another lexicographer will leap into the breach.

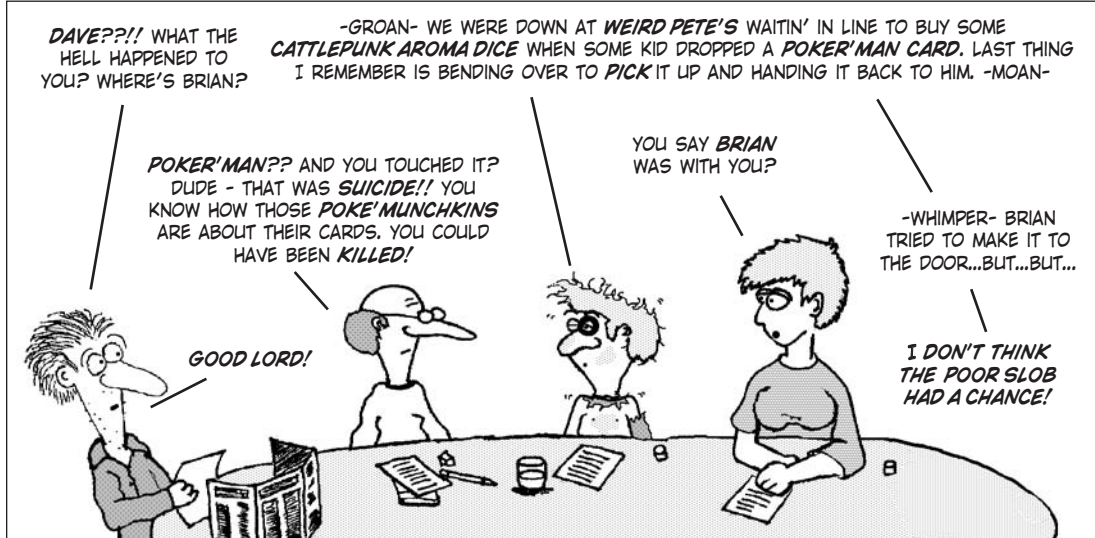
**Geek:** A guy who's an expert on [x] to a nano-level of detail, and who spends more time and money on [x] than is considered healthy. When [x] is his career, [x] takes up a significant portion of (or all of) his free time as well as his time at work. Brian is a Rules Geek.

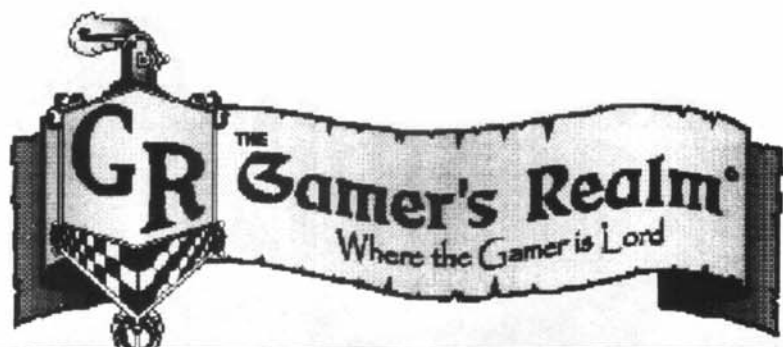
Many thanks to all of you who took the time to send in definitions. I don't think I'll ever use the word "dork" again without thinking of whales or the word "nerd" without thinking of Dr. Seuss.

*Jolly R. Blackburn*

Jolly R. Blackburn

*Still gaming after all these years*





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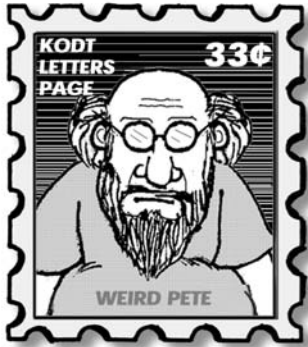
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# Our Readers Talk Back!

*Thanks for the feedback, John. We are indeed planning on providing more game reviews in the future. We're currently looking for reviewers. Anyone interested in 'trying out' for the position should send a sample review to jollyrb@aol.com or to KenzerCo, 830 W. Main Street, PMB 114, Lake Zurich, IL 60047.*

Jolly

One of the best decisions you made was to lengthen the plots in each magazine in order to really flesh out the different characters. You can bring up so much from past stories simply by mentioning one thing: for example, the *One Legged Dwarf Kits* on the Award Voucher; sure, it's funny-sounding by itself, but for long-time readers there's a lot more behind it. And the way you tied the *Black Hands* and *Knights* stories together was great.

This one goes down as my favorite.

Sincerely,

Kelly L'Roy

Reader since Shadis,  
subscriber since Issue 1

Dear KODT,

Some quick comments on your comic series which I've just discovered and have started purchasing. I publish a weekly role-playing tips e-newsletter and always appreciate honest feedback from my readers so I hope my 2 cents here help:

Issue 37

- Great storylines. I like the variety of featuring the different gaming groups in different stories with the focus being generally on *The Knights*.

- Super article on *Magic Swords*. Very useful and concise. I like articles that contain quick reference style content with many items to choose from (*i.e.* 29 different swords each with a brief overview).

- *The Shields of Bandran*: not to my taste as an insert. I'd be interested in a full issue-length story series, but not 3 or 4 pages in an issue at a time.

- *Chop Til You Drop*: I liked the article but don't play *Maul of America*. Can you include 1 page reviews/overviews of your products?

- *Rumble for the Dinner Table*: I don't game with figs so here's one reader's vote against this article subject matter.

- *Brian's Small Press Picks*: Super! Keep them coming.

- *A Look At Licenses: (Disks of Wondrous Power)* good article. I like these type of about-some-aspect-of-the-industry articles. More please.

- *Heard It On The Gamevine*: see comment above. Good stuff.

- *Back Room At The Games Pit*. I like reading other's opinions and enjoyed this section.

- *Parting Shots*. Quite humorous. I'm neutral on this type of subject matter.

Requests:

- Product Reviews of any supplements, rules, systems, materials and gaming aids for any fantasy RPG.

- Informed editorials on the gaming industry.

- RPG Computer game reviews.

- Roleplaying tips, advice, how-to info.

I hope these comments help.

Johnn Four  
via E-mail

<http://www.roleplayingtips.com>

Dear KODT,

Alright I'm a little late, but I can't figure out what the hell HBI means on the tags Brian Sarah, Bob and Dave are wearing on the cover of KODT issue #25.

Also, you guys did pretty damn good on *Elemental™* the board game. It gave me an interesting Idea for a "Battle Royal" for my AD&D™ campaign between 4 elementals. Have the players battle it out rather than the standard Attack Roll damage bull.

Anyways, thanks a lot for providing me with a comic that not only entertains me, but gives me campaign Ideas. I also like the *Scirocco's Kiss* Mini-adventure. I'll see how that will work. Anyways, Thanks again.

Gamer and friend,

Sean Easter  
via E-mail

*Elemental is a favorite here - especially at the holiday party each year. H.B.I.? uh... I'm told we're NOT allowed to divulge that information.*

Jolly

*Thanks for the letter, Kelly. I can't tell you how good it is to be sitting here working on issue 40 and to hear from so many readers that recent issues are making their "Best Issue Ever" list. More than ever, the recent issues have been a team effort with Dave, Steve and Brian. Although I've always felt we've worked good together, I think it's even more true in recent months.*

*It's amazing what each member of the team brings to the table. At a recent meeting we were working on a strip and were laughing so hard most of the ideas ended up not getting written down.*

*Hopefully we can keep this beast moving (with the help of our fans) and build on that 'history' a little bit more.*

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I'm just e-mailing you to let you know how much I enjoyed the strip by Agin Suer. His take on the characters, especially Sara, was a nice change of pace - not that I don't like your own strips, they're practically the only reason I still buy *Dragon Magazine*. Looking forward to issue 39. Keep up the good work.

May all your hits be crits.

Mike Jackson  
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

You rock! A *Son of Svengoolie* reference in issue #38?! I'm delighted!

Anyway, as usual, you are doing a fantastic job with the strip - readers care about the characters while they may not like them and the story has built very strongly and naturally on itself. It's a fantastic and funny read.

Matt  
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

I just have to write in. I just finished KODT #37, "15 Orcs on a Dead Dwarf's Chest" and it's your best comic yet. I am so thoroughly impressed and my wife (*who doesn't game but does read the comic*) thinks so too. You're a comic genius!

Your story-telling skills have really come together in the last few issues, but this was simply the best comic to date from beginning to end. From the twist with *Timmy Jackson* showing up instead of *Gary* all the way to the very last panel where you mention *Squirrley* jumping Brian, your stories are funny, delightfully intertwined and full of "history".

## OOOPS!!

IN KODT #38 WE  
ATTRIBUTED THE ARTICLE  
"SIX MAGICAL HEADGEAR  
THAT WOULD  
CHANGE YOUR MIND"  
TO JOE KUSHNER.

THE ACTUAL AUTHOR WAS  
BEVAN "B. A." THOMAS.  
WE DEEPLY APOLOGIZE  
FOR THE MIX UP.

AFTER TURNING IN AN INSURANCE CLAIM FOR *SEVEN PALLETS* OF 'WATER-DAMAGED' *SPELL-JACKED CARDS*, *WEIRD PETE* HAS TAKEN THE MONEY AND INVESTED IT IN A *VIRTUAL REALITY CENTER* WHICH HE HAS SET UP ON THE VACANT SECOND FLOOR OF THE BUILDING HE LEASES. AFTER A WEEK OF GRUELING RENOVATION THE *V.R. BATTLE DOME* IS ABOUT TO OPEN. *WEIRD PETE* ANXIOUSLY WAITS FOR HIS NEW 'MONEY MACHINE' TO START RAKING IN THE PROFITS.

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A REAM OF *CATTLEPUNK CHARACTER SHEETS* AS WELL.

WHOAH! HOLD ON THERE  
**CHIEF!** YOU ARE GOING  
TO BUY A TICKET AND RUN  
THROUGH A *V.R.*  
ADVENTURE AREN'T YOU?

SORRY, PETE.  
WASN'T PLANNING TO.

YOU GOT TO BE **JOKING!** FOR CRYING OUT  
LOUD B.A. I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS.

YOU'RE A **LEADER** IN THE  
GAMING COMMUNITY. GUYS  
LOOK UP TO YOU. WHAT ARE  
THEY GONNA THINK IF YOU  
DON'T EVEN CHECK OUT THE  
**BATTLE DOME?** HUH?

PETE, I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN THE WORLD - YOU KNOW THAT BUT I HAD A VERY **BAD** EXPERIENCE\* WITH **VIRTUAL HACKMASTER**. THERE'S **NO WAY IN HELL** I'M GOING NEAR ONE OF THOSE **BATTLE-VISORS** AGAIN.

HMMRRFFFF! AND HERE I **THOUGHT** WE WERE **FRIENDS!** DON'T YOU HAVE ANY **FAITH** IN ME? HUH? DO YOU ACTUALLY THINK I'D RUN AN **UNSAFE** OPERATION HERE?

WELL... I'M NOT EXACTLY SAYING **THAT!** I'M JUST SAYING I HAD A **BAD...**

OH **BOO HOO!!** SO YOU GOT A LITTLE **BANGED UP** AND HAD TO GET A FEW **STINKIN' STITCHES!!** AIN'T YOU NEVER HEARD OF GETTING **BACK** ON THE **HORSE** THAT **THREW YA** AND RIDING AGAIN?

DO ME A FAVOR AND **STAND OUTSIDE**. I CAN'T STAND TO LOOK AT YA. YOU YELLA **LITTLE COWARDLY ASS...**

OH FOR **PETE'S SAKE!** THERE'S NO NEED TO RESORT TO **NAME CALLING!** SHEESH! ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, GO AHEAD AND GIVE ME A **THIRTY MINUTE** TICKET.

NOW YOU'RE TALKIN. THAT'LL BE **TWENTY-FOUR BUCKS** PLUS TAX. I'LL GET YOU A **LIABILITY WAIVER** TO FILL OUT WHILE I GET YOUR EQUIPMENT.

GREAT. WHAT **ADVENTURE** ARE YOU RUNNING ANYWAY?

OH JUST A LITTLE SOMETHING CALLED **"THE SPYDER PITS OF QUEEN KRAWLER!!!"\***

**THE SPYDER PITS OF QUEEN KRAWLER!!!!**

**GOOD LORD!** PETE, PLEASE TELL ME YOU'RE RUNNING A VERSION THAT'S BEEN **PATCHED**. YOU **DID** GET AN **UPDATED** VERSION - RIGHT?

I DON'T RIGHTLY KNOW. I'M RUNNING WHATEVER THE HELL **HARD EIGHT** SAW FIT TO INCLUDE WITH MY **TURNKEY PACKAGE**. THE **CD** SAID VER 1.01 SO **SURELY** IT'S OKAY!

**PRAY PETE!** PRAY THAT THERE'S A **GOD** IN HEAVEN AND THAT HE WATCHES OVER **GAMESHOP OWNERS** WHO HAVE INVESTED **VERY BADLY!!**

\*See KODT# 10/Bundle of Trouble Volume II: The Spyder Pits of Queen Krawler [B.A. rents a Virtual HackMaster System from Weird Pete with disastrous results.]

**MEANWHILE UPSTAIRS....**

OH MAN, THIS IS SO **BOSS!** A **VIRTUAL HACKMASTER CENTER** RIGHT HERE IN **MUNCIE!** PETE'S A **GAWD** I TELL YA.

OKAY, I'M ALL EQUIPPED AND READY TO **BRAWL!** SOMEBODY PUNCH THE **READY BUTTON** AND LET 'EM KNOW WE'RE READY TO **POWER UP!**

WE'RE GONNA KICK SOME **SPYDER-BUTT!**

DAMN IT! HOLD UP! I CAN'T GET THIS PIECE OF CRAP **VISOR** TO WORK PROPERLY. I CAN'T ACCESS THE **EQUIPMENT MENUS!**

LET'S ROLL!

THERE YOU SEE? I TOLD YOU YOUR **ASTIGMATISM** WAS GOING TO CAUSE YOU PROBLEMS.

**WHONNKK!!**  
**WHONNKK!!**  
**WHONNKK!!**

GET READY, SIR! THERE'S THE **START SIGNAL!** WATCH YER BACK. THIS ADVENTURE HAS A **FIVE HACK RATING.**

WAA.... C'MON GUYS! I WASN'T READY! I DON'T EVEN HAVE A **WEAPON!!**

**MOMENTS LATER....**

OKAY **DICE-HEADS!** LOOKS LIKE THIS IS THE **ENTRANCE TO THE SPYDER-PITS!!** KEEP A SHARP LOOK OUT AND WATCH EACH OTHER'S BACKS.

I'LL TAKE POINT. **STEVIL,** SINCE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY WEAPONS WHY DON'T YOU WAIT HERE AT THE ENTRANCE AND GUARD THE HORSES.

SHY'A RIGHT! LOOK **MR. FLOCK-OF-SEAGULLS,** I DIDN'T SHELL OUT **TWENTY-FOUR BUCKS** TO PLAY **STABLE BOY.** I'M COMING TOO.

**FINE!!** I GUESS WE COULD ALWAYS USE A **BACK-UP TORCH BEARER.** BUT TRY NOT TO GET IN THE WAY WHEN THE **FIGHTING STARTS.**

**TORCH BEARER??** NOW LOOK, I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO BUT....

YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW **ALL** ABOUT YOU. **NEWT** TOLD ME HOW HIS CHARACTER **DOWNED** YOURS WITH A **STICK!\***

HE TOLD YOU **WHAT??** IT WASN'T A **STICK!!** IT WAS **HUGE FRICKIN' LOG!!**

IT'S TRUE! AN ORDINARY STICK!

SNICKER!!

**MOMENTS LATER....**

HOW ODD! WE'RE TWENTY MINUTES INTO THIS THING AND NO SIGN OF A **SINGLE SPYDER.** I WONDER WHAT'S...

**MOTHER OF GAWD!!** BEHIND YOU!!! **SPYDER** AT SIX O'CLOCK!!

HEY STEVIL, LET'S CHECK OUT THIS **BUBBLING BROOK** AND SEE WHERE IT LEADS TO.

WHA....WHAT? HUH?

**AEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!**  
**SPYDER!!**

**SONUVABITCH!!!** IT'S HORRID!! **KILL IT!!!** KILL THE DAMN THING!!

**SPYDER??!!**  
**WHERE??!!**

HOLD ON GUYS! I'M DRAWING MY **MACE OF DEVASTATION!!**

\*See KODT# 17/Bundle of Trouble Volume VI: Carry a Big Stick [Stevil asks Newt to hit him with a 'stick' so he can approximate what level his character is. Newt ends up downing him with one blow.]

UGLY HAIRY BASTARD!! YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME??!!  
HUH?? I'LL TAKE YOU OUT RIGHT WHERE YOU STAND!!

YA-NAA NAA NAA!! DOWN BOY!  
GET AWAY FROM ME!! BRIAN??!!  
SOMEBODY TOSS ME A SWORD!!

OOWWW!! IT'S  
ATTACKING ME!  
UMMPH!!

YO!! HEADS UP  
EVERYBODY!! WE  
GOT A SNEAKY  
ONE TRYING TO  
OUTFLANK US.

I'M AFRAID I HAVE  
MY...OOWMPTT!! I'M  
AFRAID I HAVE MY HANDS  
FULL AT THE MOMENT.

NO SWEAT!! THIS  
ONE IS ALL MINE!

SHOO!!  
SHOO!!

I'M ON IT!



**DIE! DIE! DIE!**

YOU INFERNAL BEAST FROM HELL!!

AEIII!!!  
THE QUEEN  
-GAG-  
KRAWLER'S GOT  
ME!!! GUYS!! -  
ACCKK!-  
A LITTLE HELP!!



SEVERAL MINUTES LATER....

BOB!! LOOK OUT! THEY'RE EVERYWHERE! PULL  
BACK!! THEY'RE COMING OUT OF THE WALLS!!

AARRGGHH!!! DAMN  
TANGLE-WEB - CAN'T  
SEEM TO...WHAT THE...???  
THEY'RE SURROUNDING ME!!!

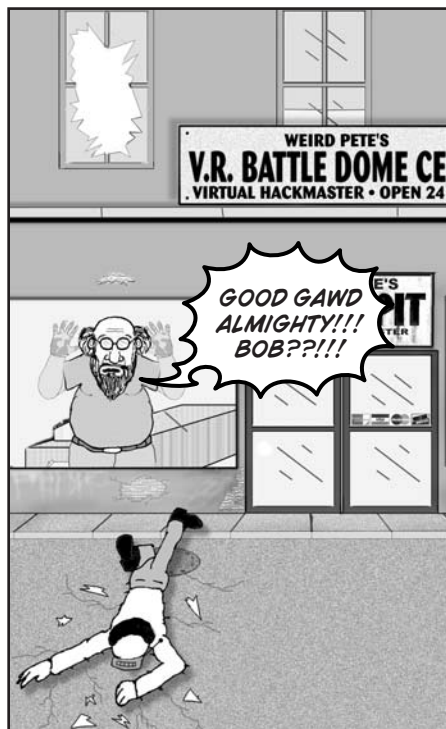
**RUN BOB!**

GET THE HELL  
OUT OF THERE!



**K  
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TWENTY MINUTES LATER....

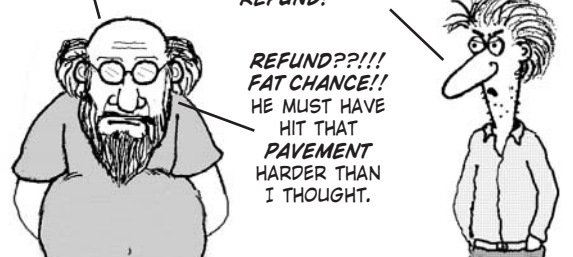
GEEZE LOUEEZE! IF THE FRICKIN' MEDIA  
VULTURES GET HOLD OF THIS I'M RUINED!!  
ALL I NEED IS SOME MORE NEGATIVE PRESS.

BOB GETS CARTED OFF ON A GURNEY AND ALL  
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT IS *BAD PRESS*??!!

OH BOB'S FINE! DIDN'T YOU SEE HIM GIVE  
ME THE BIG "THUMBS UP" BEFORE THEY  
SHOVED HIM INTO THE *AMBULANCE*?  
HE'LL BE THANKING ME WHEN THEY GET  
HIM ON THAT *MORPHINE DRIP*.

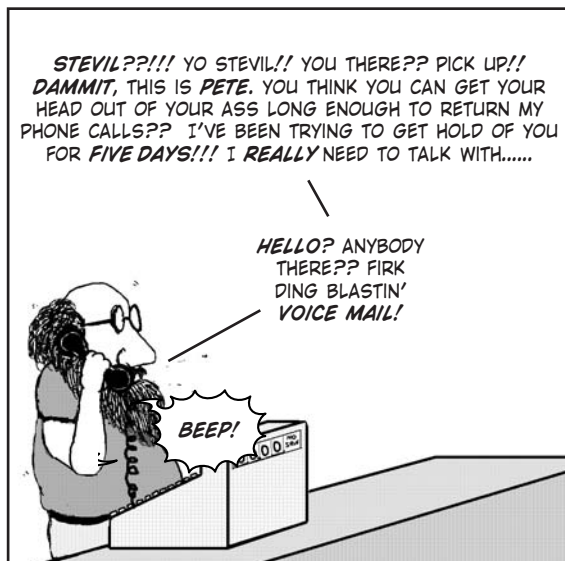
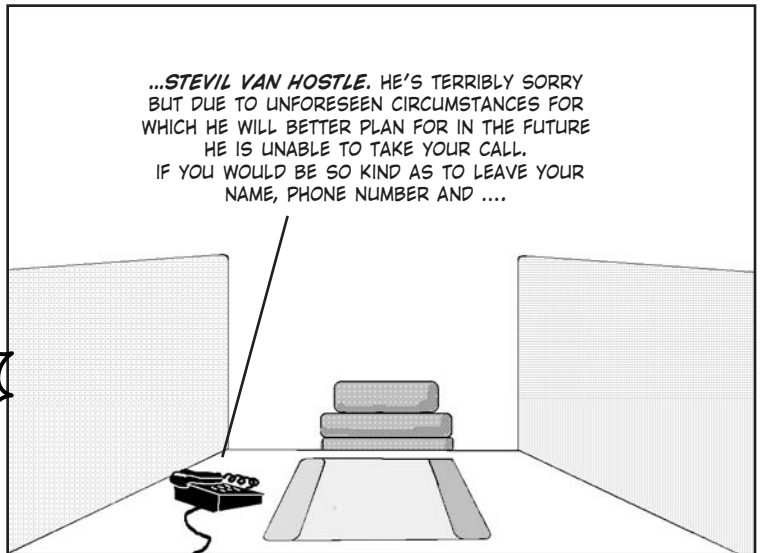
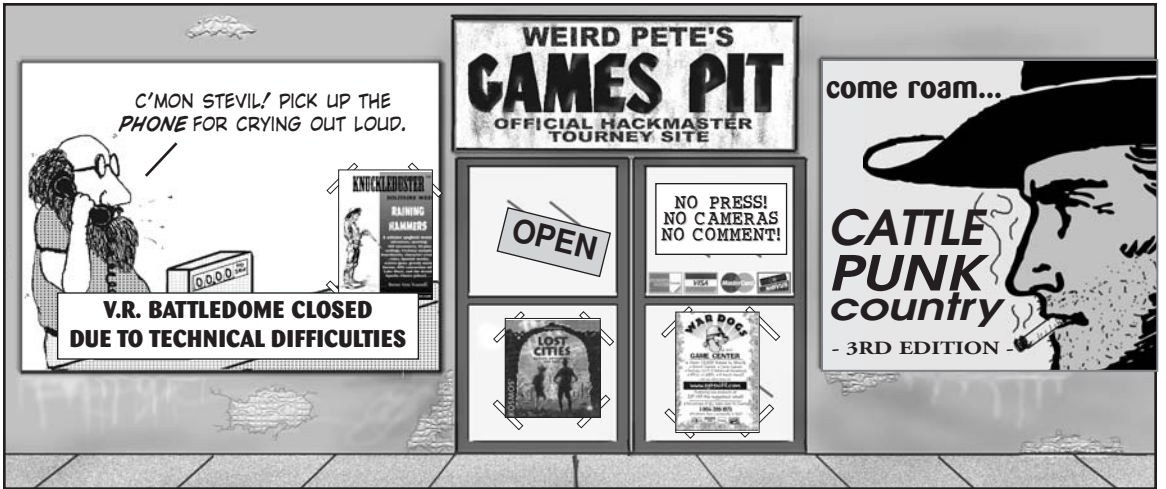
THAT WASN'T A *THUMB*!  
IT WAS HIS *TICKET STUB*!  
HE WAS TRYING TO GET A  
*REFUND*!

*REFUND*??!!  
*FAT CHANCE*!!  
HE MUST HAVE  
HIT THAT  
*PAVEMENT*  
HARDER THAN  
I THOUGHT.



# The Chosen Few

BY STEVE JOHANSSON AND DAVID S. KENZER



OH THAT. *CUSTOMERS* WERE COMPLAINING ABOUT MY *OLD ONE* SO MY *JAG-OFF BOSS* HAD ONE OF THE *FREAKIN SECRETARIES* RECORD A NEW ONE FOR ME. THEN SHE LOCKED ME OUT OF THE DAMN SYSTEM - LIKE I'M SOME KIND OF *CHILD* OR SOMETHING. I'M TELLIN YA, YOU TRY TO *LIVEN THINGS* UP AND ALL YOU GET IS *POLICY* THIS AND *PROCEDURES* THAT...



*HAR!!* THAT'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU SETTLE ON WORKING FOR *THE MAN!* THAT'S WHY I WENT INTO BUSINESS FOR MYSELF. *YEP!* THE ONLY PERSON I HAVE TO ANSWER TO IS *MYSELF!* NONE OF THAT *CORPORATE NONSENSE* FOR ME. *NO SIR!*

MATTER OF FACT, I WALKED AWAY FROM A *PROMISING* CAREER TEACHING *POLITICAL SCI...*



YEAH, YEAH, THAT'S NICE. LOOK I'M ON MY *PERSONAL CELL* PHONE SO I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO SPEND 23 CENTS A MINUTE LISTENING TO ONE OF YOUR *GRIPPING STORIES* OF *YESTERYEAR!*

SO CAN YOU JUST *CUT* TO THE *CHASE* AND TELL ME WHAT YOU WANTED?



*CELL PHONE???!* WHAT'D THEY DO? LET YOU OUT *EARLY* TONIGHT FOR *GOOD BEHAVIOR?*



*EARLY???! HELL NO!* I'M STILL SLAVING AWAY AT THIS *STINK HOLE!* "*THE MAN*" AS YOU PUT IT, RECENTLY *CRACKED* DOWN ON *PERSONAL* PHONE CALLS. I THINK THE *JERK* SIX CUBES OVER WAS CALLING HIS PARENTS IN *BANGLADESH* AGAIN

THEY'VE BECOME *PHONE-FASCISTS* ON US DOWN HERE.



LOOK I KNOW YOU'RE *SORE* ABOUT GETTING STUCK WITH A *PIXIE-BROWNIE* CHARACTER\* AND ALL, BUT I WANT YOU TO *RECONSIDER* DROPPING OUT OF THE *CAMPAIGN*. I THINK YOU'RE MAKING A *BIG MISTAKE*.

*UPSET???! I'M PISSED!!* YOU SERIOUSLY EXPECTED ME TO PLAY SOME LITTLE *MUNCHKIN ASS* CHARACTER WHO'S ONLY *FOURTEEN INCHES* TALL AND *LAWFUL GOOD* TO BOOT!?!?

THERE'S *NO WAY!*

I HAVE MY *PRIDE* YOU KNOW!



I'M *SERIOUSLY* THINKING ABOUT *QUITTING* ROLE-PLAYING ALL TOGETHER AND GETTING BACK INTO THAT *HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT* GROUP I USED TO HANG OUT WITH.

MAYBE I'LL GET A LITTLE MORE *RESPECT* FROM THEM.



\* See KODT#39: Trading Places [After assuming the position of GM from Nitro, Weird Pete has the players 'trade' character sheets. Stevil ends up with Gordo's Pixie-Brownie.]



RESPECT???! LOOK, I DON'T CARE HOW ACCURATE YOUR PORTRAYAL OF JAMES K. POLK IS - NOBODY GIVES A RAT'S ASS ABOUT THE FRENCH-INDIAN WARS!

THAT'S THE MEXICAN WAR YOU MORON!

AND I USED TO GET STANDING OVATIONS FOR MY PORTRAYAL THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

YEAH, YEAH, WHATEVER. LOOK, THE REASON I WAS CALLING IS THAT I GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL PLANNED FOR SATURDAY MORNING AND I WANT YOU TO BE INVOLVED.



SOMETHING SPECIAL? WHAT'S THAT? YOU FINALLY GOING TO CLEAN OUT SQUIRRELY'S CAGE OR SOMETHING.

IT'S A SURPRISE. I REALLY, REALLY NEED YOU TO BE INVOLVED WITH THIS. CAN I COUNT ON YOU?

OH NO! IF YOU WANT ME TO DRIVE FORTY-FIVE FREAKIN' MILES I NEED SOMETHING TO GO ON.

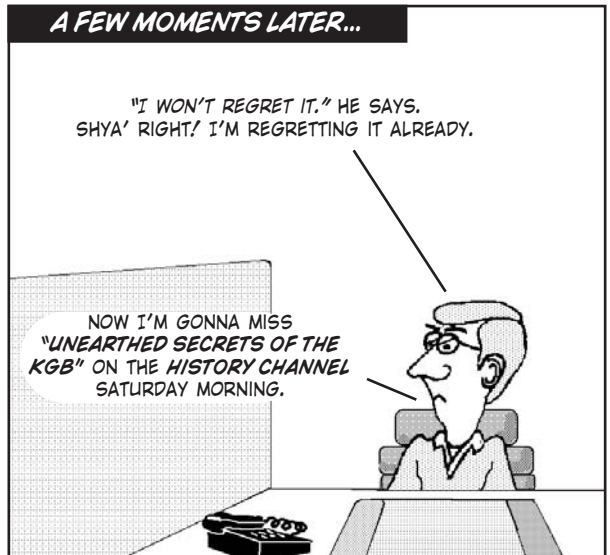
OKAY, OKAY, I NEED YOU TO PLAYTEST SOMETHING I'VE BEEN WORKING ON.



REMEMBER THAT GREL ADVENTURE\* NITRO RAN A WHILE BACK - THE ONE THAT KICKED ASS???! WELL IT INSPIRED ME TO DESIGN A SET OF MINIATURE RULES AROUND IT - BUT MY APPROACH IS TOTALLY UNIQUE. IT'S ONE-TO-ONE SCALE!! YOU'RE GONNA LOVE IT. REAL BLOODY STUFF! YOU'RE ONE OF A HAND-CHOSEN FEW I'VE PICKED TO SIT IN ON MY FIRST PLAY-TEST. SO WHADDA YA SAY?

YOU MEAN THAT GRUNGE ELF THING? HEY THAT WAS PRETTY KEWL. REAL BLOODY STUFF, HUH? WELL... IF YOU REALLY NEED ME I SUPPOSE I COULD DROP BY OR SOMETHING.

HOT DAMN! THANKS STEVIL MY MAN. TRUST ME. YOU WON'T REGRET IT. SEE YA SATURDAY.



A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

"I WON'T REGRET IT." HE SAYS. SHYA' RIGHT! I'M REGRETTING IT ALREADY.

NOW I'M GONNA MISS "LINEARTHED SECRETS OF THE KGB" ON THE HISTORY CHANNEL SATURDAY MORNING.

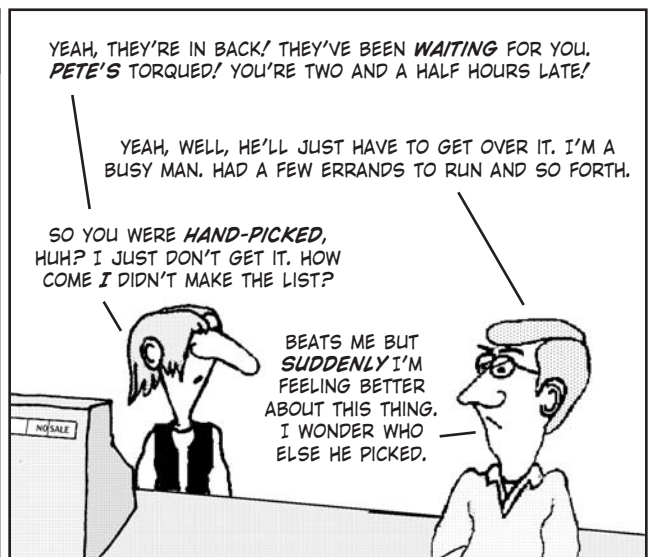


THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY AT THE "GAMES PIT"

NEWT???! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE? DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE ONE OF PETE'S "CHOSEN FEW" TOO?

NO - HE WOULDN'T HAVE ME. ACTUALLY I'M WORKIN' OFF SOME 'DEMERITS'†. IT WAS THIS OR LOSE A LEVEL.

THAT'S TOUGH. SO IS EVERYONE ELSE HERE?



YEAH, THEY'RE IN BACK! THEY'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU. PETE'S TORQUED! YOU'RE TWO AND A HALF HOURS LATE!

YEAH, WELL, HE'LL JUST HAVE TO GET OVER IT. I'M A BUSY MAN. HAD A FEW ERRANDS TO RUN AND SO FORTH.

SO YOU WERE HAND-PICKED, HUH? I JUST DON'T GET IT. HOW COME I DIDN'T MAKE THE LIST?

BEATS ME BUT SUDDENLY I'M FEELING BETTER ABOUT THIS THING. I WONDER WHO ELSE HE PICKED.

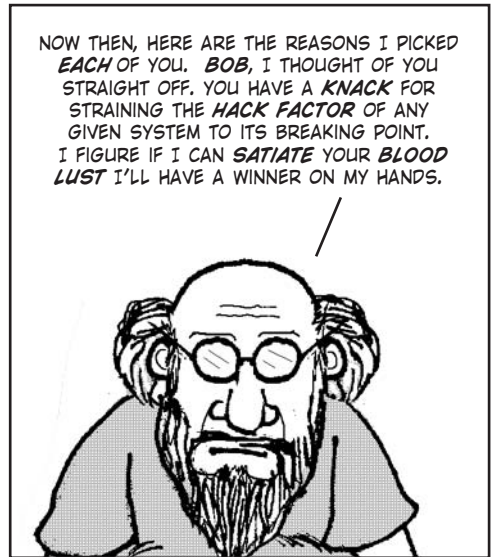
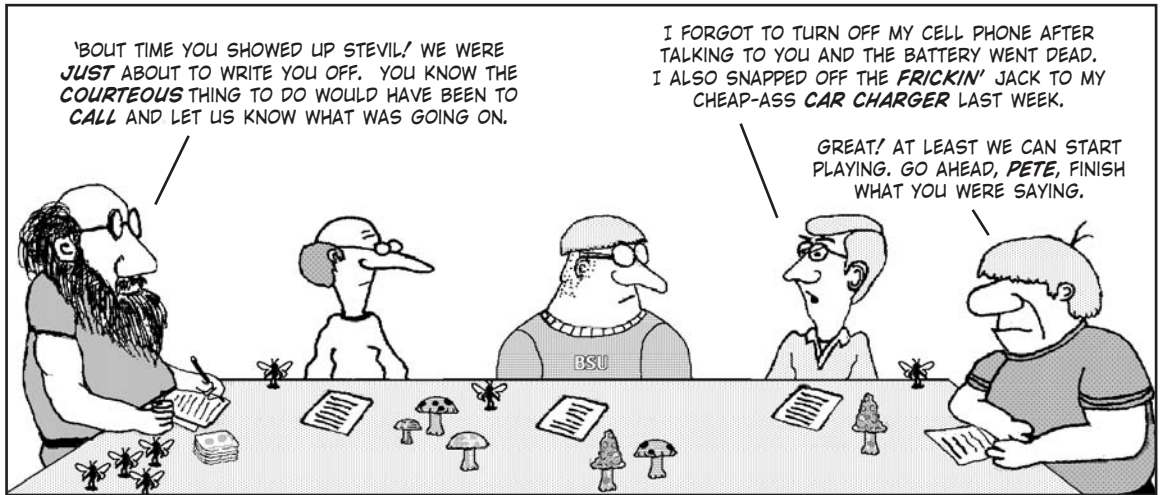
\* See KODT#31: Pleased to Meat You [Nitro runs an adventure centered around the "Pixie Meet" in which the Grunge Elves (Grels) prey on pixie-fairies culminating in a huge feast. Weird Pete and Stevil were greatly impressed.]

† See Bundle of Trouble Volume IV: DeMeritorious Conduct [Weird Pete gives out demerits during the game and offers the opportunity for players to "work them off" by tending the register in his store. Apparently Newt has racked up a considerable tally.]

# A Hard Sale

BY STEVE JOHANSSON

WITH DAVID S. KENZER, BRIAN JELKE AND JOLLY R. BLACKBURN



**A FEW MINUTES LATER...**

OKAY FOLKS, AS I STATED BEFORE, THE NAME OF THE GAME IS "FAERIE MEAT" THAT'S M-E-A-T!! THIS BABY IS ALL ABOUT BUTCHERING THE WEE-FOLK! KILL OR BE KILLED AND EATEN! VICTORY GOES TO HE WHO IS THE FITTEST AND SWIFTEST OF WING!

WA...WA...WHAT??!! BUTCHERING THE WEE-FOLK? FAERIES?? WH... WH... WHERE'S THE PRECEDENT FOR THAT? FAIRIES ARE A PEACE LOVING, GENTLE RACE. THEY'D NEVER...

AH AH AH, LET ME FINISH GORDO.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT PETE...



LAST, BUT NOT LEAST, WE COME TO YOU BRIAN. I CHOSE YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE THE BEST DAMN RULES MECHANIC I KNOW. YOUR JOB IS TO TRY TO PUNCH HOLES THROUGH MY SYSTEM. EXPLOIT THE RULES! REDLINE THE ENGINE AS IT WERE. IF MY GAME CAN STAND UP TO YOUR RIGOROUS STANDARDS THEN... WELL... THEN I'LL KNOW I TRULY HAVE A GAME WORTHY OF EVERYONE'S TIME.

NO PROBLEM! IF YOU COULD PROVIDE ME WITH A **HARDCOPY** OF YOUR RULES I'LL GET STARTED WHILE YOU CONTINUE.

YOU GOT IT!! DON'T PULL ANY PUNCHES ON IT EITHER. IF YOU CAN BREAK IT - BREAK IT.



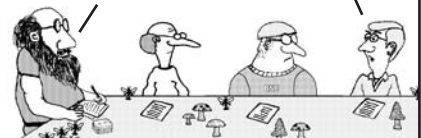
**TEN MINUTES LATER..**

YOU DESIGNED A GAME BASED ENTIRELY ON THE WHOLESALE SLAUGHTER OF FAERIES??

UH, YEAH, THAT'S THE BASIC GIST OF IT.

HOODY FRICKIN' HOO! I HOPE THERE ISN'T A BAG LIMIT BECAUSE I'M READY TO PLAY.

I KNEW YOU'D BE DOWN FOR THIS. LET ME EXPLAIN THE BASIC RULES. LISTEN UP!



...SO TO SUMMARIZE, YOUR FAERIES CAN EITHER POSE, PONCE, FROLIC, FLUTTER, WRESTLE, ATTACK OR TWINKLE. DON'T WORRY IF YOU CAN'T REMEMBER ALL THAT - A COPY OF YOUR OPTIONS ARE LISTED ON YOUR CHARACTER SHEET.

FROLIC? IS THAT SOME KIND OF MARTIAL ART MANEUVER?

GOT IT! BUT WHAT ABOUT PRANCING AND SINGING?! AND HOW ABOUT BUTTERFLY MOUNTS?

CAN WE PONCE AND FROLIC IN THE SAME TURN?



AND COULD YOU CLARIFY SOMETHING FOR ME? WHAT'S THE MAXIMUM DISTANCE A FAERIE CAN TRAVEL WHEN MAKING TWO ACTIONS? BY MY CALCULATIONS, IF I UNDERSTAND YOUR RULES CORRECTLY, A FAERIE CAN CLIMB VERTICALLY SIX INCHES, MOVE SIX INCHES Laterally AND STILL FIRE ONE WEAPON OR ATTACK. I JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE BECAUSE THE RULES DON'T SEEM TO BE REALLY CLEAR ON THIS. AND IT SEEMS TO ME THAT SEVERAL FACTORS WOULD AFFECT FAERIE-FLIGHT. WHAT ABOUT AIR CURRENTS, THERMALS, BAROMETRIC PRESSURE, WIND SHEAR, ETC.? NOT TO MENTION AERIAL WAKES AND DRAFTS CAUSED BY THE WING-BEATS OF NEARBY FLYING FAERIES.

YEAH, YEAH, RIGHT. UH... THAT WILL ALL BE IN THE ADVANCED RULES WHICH WILL BE FORTH COMING. LET'S JUST CONCENTRATE ON THE BASIC RULES FOR THE MOMENT. SHALL WE?

DO YOU HAVE A COPY OF THOSE RULES WITH YOU? I'D LIKE TO BOUNCE YOUR NUMBERS AGAINST THE APPROXIMATIONS I HAVE HERE.



WHOAH!!! STOP EVERYTHING *RIGHT THERE!* SCREW *WIND SHEAR* AND *BUTTERFLY MOUNTS* AND ALL THAT *OTHER CRAP!!!* MAYBE I MISSED IT BUT I DON'T THINK I'VE HEARD ANY *MENTION* ABOUT *GRELS!* I DON'T WANT TO GO *ANY FURTHER* UNTIL I START HEARING SOMETHING ABOUT *GRUNGE ELVES* HERE.

STEVIL I THOUGHT I MADE IT *CRYSTAL CLEAR!* THERE ARE *NO GRELS* IN THIS GAME.

NO GRELS? HOW ABOUT *DARK ELVES?* YOU HAVE ANY OF THOSE?

SORRY *STEVIL.* EVERYBODY PLAYS *FAERIES* IN THIS GAME.

PETE'S RIGHT. HE MADE THAT *VERY CLEAR.*



THIS AIN'T RIGHT *PETE* AND YOU KNOW IT! YOU LED ME HERE UNDER *FALSE PRETENSES!*

WHAT ARE YOU *BELLYACHING* ABOUT? I TOLD YOU WE WERE *PLAY TESTING* MY NEW GAME.

I CAME HERE TO PLAY A *GRUNGE ELF!* THERE'S NO WAY I'M PLAYIN' SOME FREAKIN' *FAERIE!* I DIDN'T DRIVE *FORTY-FIVE FRICKIN' MILES* FOR... FOR... *THIS!!!*

NOW WAIT A MINUTE, *STEVIL.* I THINK THERE'S BEEN SOME KIND OF *MISUNDERSTANDING.* THE *FAERIES* IN *THIS GAME* HAVE *ATTITUDE!*



I GOTTA BE HONEST *PETE.* I PRETTY MUCH FEEL THE SAME WAY. I'M NOT TOO KEEN ON PLAYING *WINGED WEE FOLK.* DOESN'T THIS GAME HAVE PROVISIONS FOR *DWARVES* OR SOMETHING? I'D EVEN SETTLE FOR A *GNOME* AT THIS POINT.

C'MON GUYS. I KNOW THIS IS A *TOUGH SELL!* JUST GIVE IT A CHANCE. WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A LOOK AT THE *SAMPLE* CHARACTERS I ASSIGNED TO YOU. CAN YOU DO *THAT MUCH?*



### A FEW QUICK GLANCES AT THE CHARACTER SHEET LATER...

*AWESOME!* MY *FAERIE* HAS A *PEA-SHOOTER CROSSBOW* AND *IMMUNITY TO PAIN.* AND HIS *STATS* DON'T LOOK TOO SHABBY EITHER.

UH....I THINK THIS MUST BE A *TYPO.* SAYS HERE MINE HAS A *HANDGUN* AND BOTH *FRAGMENTARY* AND *INCENDIARY* GRENADES. THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT- CAN IT?

MINE HAS A *HANDGUN* TOO AND SOMETHING CALLED A "*MACHETE OF REAVING*".

EEEEWWWWWWW, MINE HAS A *BLOOD THORN STILETTO* AND A *FAE-SLAYER!*

KEWL!



*HUH?* YOU GUYS HAVE *GUNS???* WELL THIS CERTAINLY *BLOWS!* ALL I GOT WAS SOME *STINKIN' CROSSBOW.* HOW THE HELL AM I SUPPOSED TO *WASTE* ANYTHING WITH THAT?

*WHOAH!* WHAT'S THIS? WE'RE ALL SUFFERING FROM *HOMICIDAL MANIA?*

THIS IS *WHACKED!* SOMETHING AIN'T *KOSHER* ABOUT THIS GAME.

HMMMMMMMM...



OKAY, OKAY, I HATE TO ADMIT THIS BUT I THINK YOU NOW *OFFICIALLY* HAVE MY INTEREST HERE *PETE.*

TELL ME MORE ABOUT MY *DEMENTED* LITTLE FRIEND HERE.



WELL NOW, *THAT'S* MORE LIKE IT! YOU'RE STARTING TO SHOW A LITTLE *SPIRIT!* I TOLD YOU THIS GAME'S *HACK FACTOR* WAS *THROUGH THE ROOF.*

THESE AREN'T THE CUTE, CUDDLY *GARDEN VARIETY FAERIES* YOUR MOMMA TOLD YOU STORIES ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE TYKES. YOU'LL BE PLAYING *FAERIES* WHO ARE NOT ONLY *HOMICIDAL* BUT THEY'RE *PSYCHOPATHS* AS WELL.

*WHAT?* NOT ONLY IS THIS *SICK* BUT IT'S *TOTALLY UNREALISTIC!* *FAERIES* CAN'T FALL VICTIM TO *MENTAL ILLNESSES!!*



GORDO'S CORRECT! ACCORDING THE *HACKLOPEDIA OF BEASTS*, MEMBERS OF THE *WEE FOLK* MAY BE CORRUPTED INTO OTHER FORMS BUT THEY MAY NEVER BE MENTALLY ALTERED WITHOUT PHYSICAL CHANGES TO MATCH. TO DO SO WOULD ACTUALLY RESULT IN THE CREATION OF A *NEW RACE*.

EXACTLY!!! WHAT HE SAID!! IN FACT, THAT'S HOW THE SUBGENUSES OF *GREMLINS*, *IMPS* AND *PIXIE FARERIES* CAME INTO BEING. YOU CAN'T HAVE *HOMICIDAL FAERIES*!! IT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN! NOT IN A MILLION YEARS!

BIG DEAL - IN MY GAME THE LITTLE BASTARDS HAVE THEIR WIRES CROSSED. THEY ATE SOME BAD 'SHROOMS OR SOMETHING. WHO KNOWS?

I GOTTA TELL YA PETE, YOUR FAILURE TO CONFORM TO *REALISM* IS GOING TO FACTOR INTO MY BETA-GRADE FOR THE GAME.

UH...SO WE'RE *CARNIVOROUS FAERIES*, EH? OKAY, I GUESS THAT COULD BE KEWL. SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE GAME? DO WE GO RABBIT HUNTING OR SOMETHING? STEAL EGGS FROM SPARROW NESTS? WHAT?

YOU'RE NOT JUST CARNIVORES BOB. YOU'RE ALSO *CANABALISTIC!*

CANNA WHO?



*CANABALISTIC!* IN THIS GAME YOUR CHARACTERS GROW MORE *POWERFUL* BY SLAYING AND DEVOURING THE FLESH OF OTHER *FAERIES!* HENCE THE NAME - *FAIRY MEAT!*

HMMMMM... I GUESS *HACKING* BY ANY OTHER NAME IS STILL *HACKING*, EH?

THAT'S ONE WAY TO LOOK AT IT.

OKAY, I'VE HEARD ENOUGH. SHOULD BE INTERESTING. *LET'S GAME!!* LET'S SEE, WHAT *DICE* WILL WE NEED? A COUPLE TEN SIDERS? SOME SIXERS? WHAT ABOUT *FOUR SIDERS?*

YO! GET THOSE DICE OFF THE TABLE BOB! YOU WON'T BE NEEDIN' 'EM!

WON'T BE NEEDIN' 'EM? OH.....I SEE. SO THE GAME COMES WITH *CUSTOMIZED DICE* EH? THAT'S KEWL. HOW *MANY* DO WE GET? DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OF *COLORS?*

BOB, I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND. THERE ARE *NO DICE* WHATSOEVER IN THIS GAME. COMBAT IS RESOLVED WITH A STANDARD *POKER DECK!*

*NO DICE??!! NONE??!!* YOU ACTUALLY HAD THE *GAWL* TO DESIGN A GAME WITH *NO DICE??!!*



IN THE END IT WAS A *MARKETING DECISION*. ADDING DICE WOULD'VE RAISED THE COST UP A *BUCK-FIFTY* PER UNIT. DON'T WORRY THOUGH, YOU WON'T EVEN MISS...

KA-THUMP!

-GROAN- OKAY FOLKS, TAKE A *FIVE MINUTE BREAK* WHILE I GRAB THE *SMELLIN' SALTS* AND BRING *BOB* BACK AROUND.

I'M JUST GUESSING PETE BUT I THINK DESCRIBING THIS GAME AS A "*TOUGH SELL*" MAY HAVE BEEN AN *UNDERSTATEMENT!*

I TAKE IT YOUR *BETA-GRADE* FOR THE GAME JUST TOOK A *NOSE DIVE?*

ON GAMES WITH *NO DICE* I AUTOMATICALLY MULTIPLY MY SCORE BY A FACTOR OF *0.35!!!*

SHUT UP GORDO!



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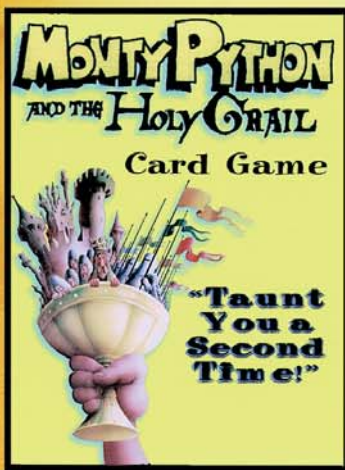
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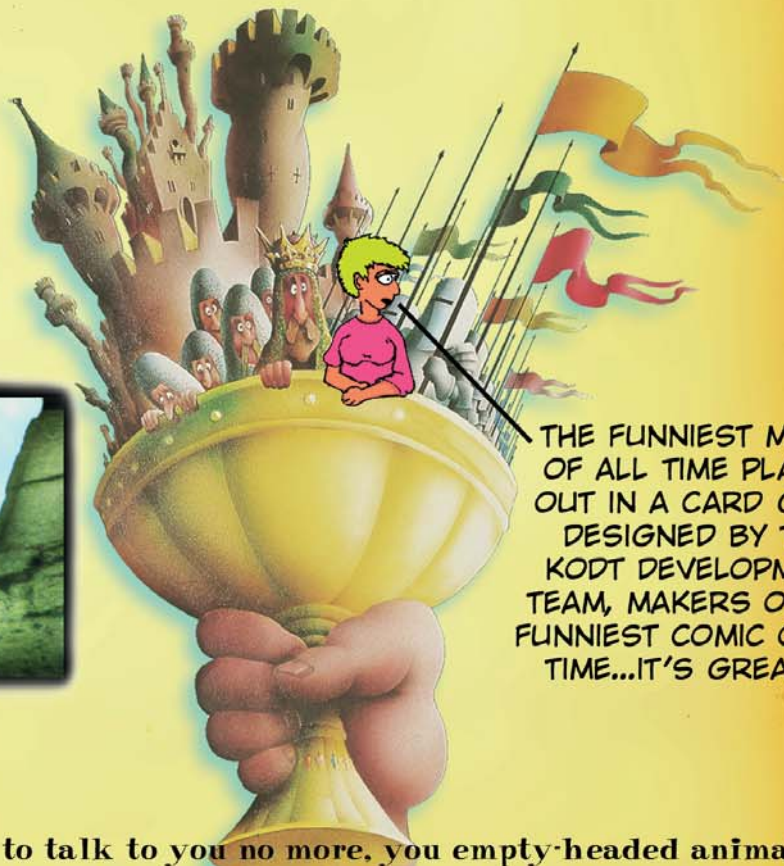


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TIME...IT'S GREAT!!!

I don't want to talk to you no more, you empty-headed animal  
food troughwiper! I fart in your general direction! Your  
mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries.

Now go and get your own deck or I shall...

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# A Pound of Flesh

BY STEVE JOHANSSON, DAVID S. KENZER,  
BRIAN JELKE AND JOLLY R. BLACKBURN

OKAY, YOU'LL NOTICE ON YOUR CHARACTER SHEETS THAT YOU HAVE **LIVE POINTS** AND **TWINKLE POINTS**. **LIVE POINTS** ARE BASICALLY **HIT POINTS**. **TWINKLE POINTS** ON THE OTHER HAND ARE USED TO **CAST SPELLS**.

I DON'T CARE IF YOU **PAY** ME. THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL YOU'LL **EVER** CATCH ME USING THE TERM, "**TWINKLE POINTS**!"

HEY PETE, THERE'S NO PLACE ON THESE SHEETS TO PUT THE **NAME** OF OUR CHARACTERS.

**SPELLS?** IS THERE A **LIST**?



**GORDO** THIS IS A **PLAYTEST**! THERE'S NO NEED TO NAME YOUR CHARACTERS. NOW BE QUIET, I'M TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE **SPELL RULES** TO EVERYONE.

I DON'T CARE! I CAN'T PROPERLY GET INTO THE **ROLE** WITHOUT A NAME. I'LL JUST CALL MY CHARACTER **GORDO LIGHTFOOT**! WILL WE HAVE SOME TIME TO WORK ON OUR **BACKGROUNDS** AND **HISTORY**?

**GORDO LIGHTFOOT**? WASN'T HE ONE OF THE **BEE GEES**?

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR **BACKGROUND** BUT I THINK I CAN **PREDICT YOUR FUTURE**! IT READS, "**BURIED HERE FOR BEING AN ASS!**"

I GUESS I'LL KEEP WITH THE **THEME** AND NAME MY CHARACTER **EDMUND FITZGERALD**!

**HAR HAR!!!**  
**EDMUND FITZGERALD!**  
THAT'S **HILARIOUS!**



WELL YOU'RE CERTAINLY **BIG ENOUGH** TO BE THE **EDMUND FITZGERALD**.  
-SNEER-

OH, I SEE WE HAVE A **FUNNY BOY** IN OUR MIDST! YOU WEREN'T MAKING **JOKES** THE OTHER DAY WHEN I PULLED THAT **SPYDER** OFF YER ASS IN THE **BATTLEDOME**! OF COURSE, I SUPPOSE YOU WERE TOO BUSY SCREAMING LIKE A **LITTLE GIRL** TO MAKE WISE ASS REMARKS.

I WASN'T SCREAMING! I WAS JUST PLAYING MY CHARACTER. THAT WAS HIS **ANGAWAA BATTLE CRY**!

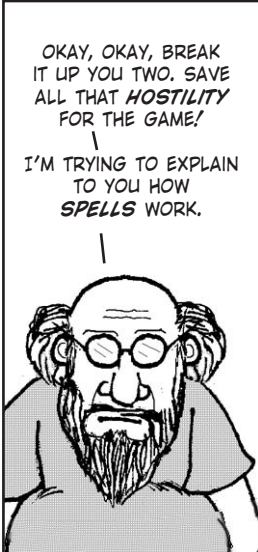
YEAH, RIGHT. YOU KNOW WHAT THE **ESKIMO** SAID TO THE **AIR CONDITIONER SALESMAN** DON'T YOU?

"**I A'INT BUYIN' IT!**"

THE ONLY THING THAT CAN KICK A MAN'S **VOCAL CORDS** UP TO THE **SHRILL** LEVEL YOU WERE HITTING IS **PANTS-WETTING FEAR!**

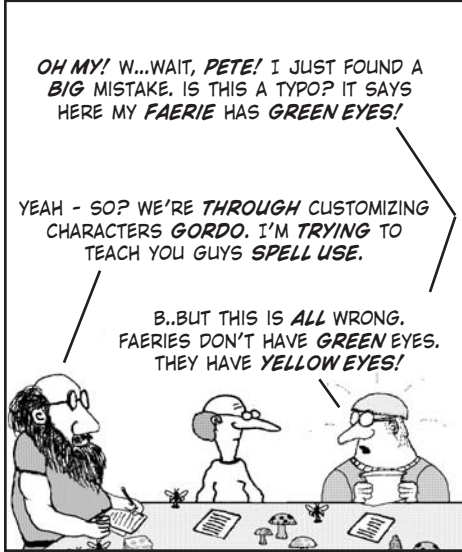
SAYS, YOU.





OKAY, OKAY, BREAK IT UP YOU TWO. SAVE ALL THAT **HOSTILITY** FOR THE GAME!

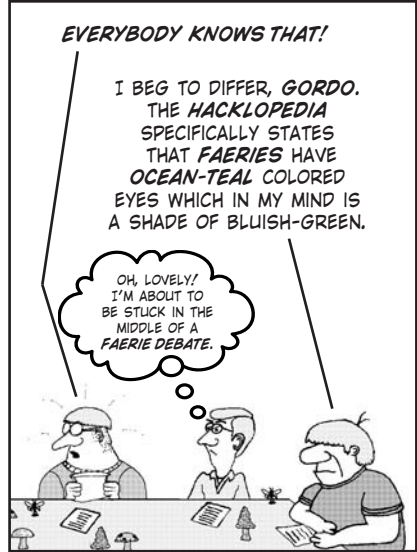
I'M TRYING TO EXPLAIN TO YOU HOW **SPELLS** WORK.



OH MY! W...WAIT, **PETE!** I JUST FOUND A **BIG MISTAKE**. IS THIS A **TYPO?** IT SAYS HERE MY **FAERIE** HAS **GREEN EYES!**

YEAH - SO? WE'RE **THROUGH** CUSTOMIZING CHARACTERS **GORDO**. I'M TRYING TO TEACH YOU GUYS **SPELL USE**.

B..BUT THIS IS **ALL WRONG**. FAERIES DON'T HAVE **GREEN EYES**. THEY HAVE **YELLOW EYES!**



**EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT!**

I BEG TO DIFFER, **GORDO**. THE **HACKLOPEDIA** SPECIFICALLY STATES THAT **FAERIES** HAVE **OCEAN-TEAL** COLORED EYES WHICH IN MY MIND IS A SHADE OF **BLUISH-GREEN**.

OH, LOVELY! I'M ABOUT TO BE STUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF A **FAERIE DEBATE**.

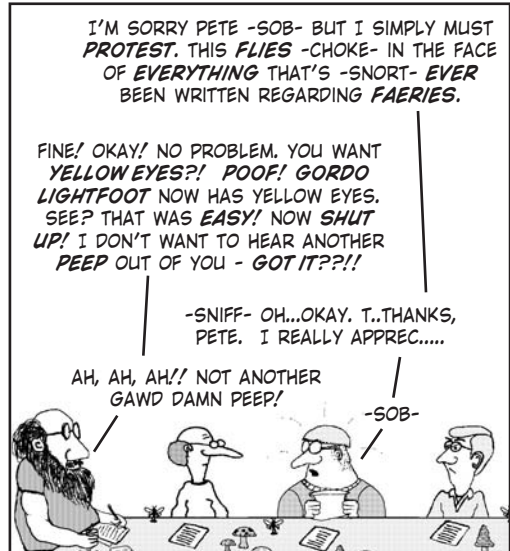
**TWENTY MINUTES LATER...**



...AND I'M TELLING YOU THAT **GARY** BASED HIS WORK ON **FLAWED RESEARCH!** PETE SAID HE WANTED TO BE **FAITHFUL** TO THE SUBJECT MATTER. IF THAT'S THE CASE WE SHOULD ALL HAVE **YELLOW EYES** NOT **GREEN!** EVEN A CURSORY LOOK AT **POE'S TO ONE IN PARADISE** OR BETTER YET, **THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS**, CLEARLY SHOWS THAT...

**POE???** SURELY YOU'RE NOT OFFERING UP THAT **OPIMUM-INDUCED** PIECE OF RUBBISH AS SOURCE MATERIAL?

**THAT'S IT!!** BACK TO YOUR CORNERS. WE ARE NOT GOING TO CONTINUE THIS PATHETIC DISPLAY OF **DORKMANSHIP!** WE CAME HERE TO PLAY SO LET **PETE** CONTINUE. **PLEASE!**



I'M SORRY PETE -SOB- BUT I SIMPLY MUST **PROTEST**. THIS **FLIES** -CHOKE- IN THE FACE OF **EVERYTHING** THAT'S -SNORT- EVER BEEN WRITTEN REGARDING **FAERIES**.

FINE! OKAY! NO PROBLEM. YOU WANT **YELLOW EYES?!** **POOF!** **GORDO LIGHTFOOT** NOW HAS **YELLOW EYES**. SEE? THAT WAS **EASY!** NOW **SHUT UP!** I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANOTHER **PEEP** OUT OF YOU - GOT IT??!

-SNIFF- OH...OKAY. T..THANKS, PETE. I REALLY APPREC....

AH, AH, AH!! NOT ANOTHER **GAWD DAMN PEEP!**

-SOB-

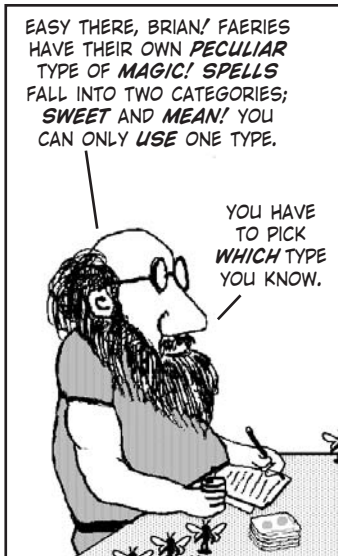


NOW THEN, YOU'LL FIND THE **SPELL LIST** CONVENIENTLY LISTED ON THE BACK OF YOUR CHARACTER SHEETS!

KEWL! HERE'S A SPELL THAT SUMMONS FORTH A **THORN** FROM A NEARBY PLANT AND PROPELS IT AT **HYPERVELOCITY** TOWARDS YOUR TARGET. SAYS HERE THE RESULTING **GAPING WOUND** CAUSED BY THESE **FLESH RENDING MISSILES** ARE **PAINFUL** IN THE **EXTREME!** THAT **ROCKS ASS!** I'M DEFINITELY GOING TO TRY THAT ONE.

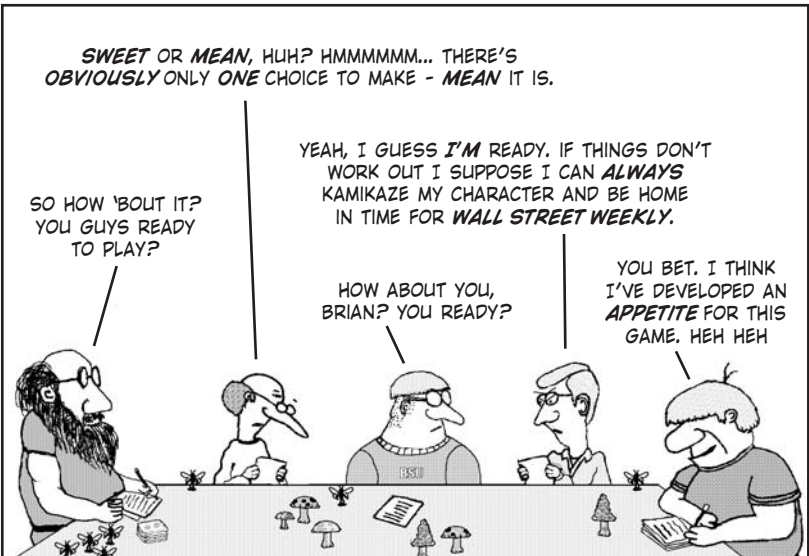
KEWL! **FIREBALLS!** COMBINED WITH MY **BLOOD THORN STILETTO** AND **FAE-SLAYER** MY **FAERIE** IS A **FLYING ARSENAL!!**

I DON'T CARE **HOW KEWL** THE SPELLS ARE. IF I GOTTA SPEND **TWINKLE POINTS** TO USE THEM I'LL **PASS!**



EASY THERE, BRIAN! FAERIES HAVE THEIR OWN PECULIAR TYPE OF MAGIC! SPELLS FALL INTO TWO CATEGORIES; SWEET AND MEAN! YOU CAN ONLY USE ONE TYPE.

YOU HAVE TO PICK WHICH TYPE YOU KNOW.



SWEET OR MEAN, HUH? HMMMMMM... THERE'S OBVIOUSLY ONLY ONE CHOICE TO MAKE - MEAN IT IS.

SO HOW 'BOUT IT? YOU GUYS READY TO PLAY?

YEAH, I GUESS I'M READY. IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT I SUPPOSE I CAN ALWAYS KAMIKAZE MY CHARACTER AND BE HOME IN TIME FOR WALL STREET WEEKLY.

HOW ABOUT YOU, BRIAN? YOU READY?

YOU BET. I THINK I'VE DEVELOPED AN APPETITE FOR THIS GAME. HEH HEH

**TWENTY MINUTES LATER...**



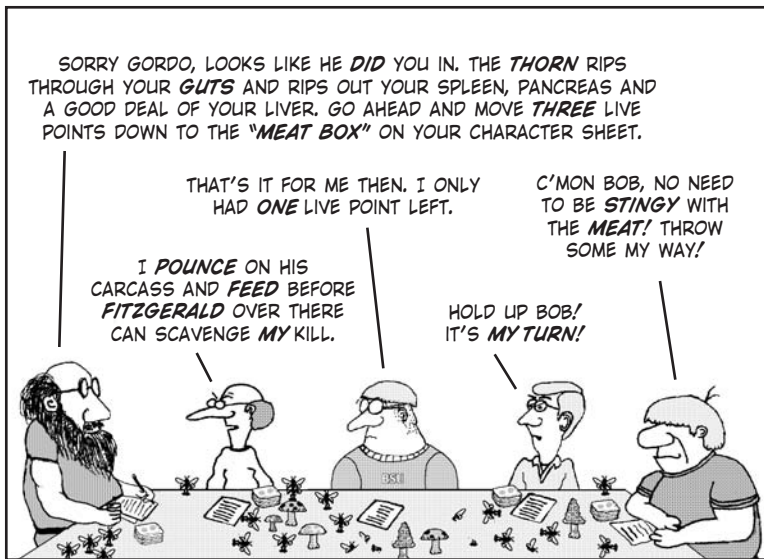
I SPEND 3 TWINKLE POINTS TO CAST A THORN-PRICK SPELL AT GORDO! IN YER FACE LIGHTFOOT! WHO'S 'SHROOM LORD' NOW? HUH??!!

EXCELLENT COUNTER-ATTACK, BOB! GOOD SPELL CHOICE!

GAAAA!!! I FLUTTER... NO WAIT I POSE, I MEAN TWINKLE! ER... UH...

HANG IT UP GORDO! YOU'RE DEAD MEAT! THAT'S WHAT YOU GET FOR POSING WHEN YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN POUNCING!

I SENSE A MEAL! I'M MOVING IN TO FEAST!



SORRY GORDO, LOOKS LIKE HE DID YOU IN. THE THORN RIPS THROUGH YOUR GUTS AND RIPS OUT YOUR SPLEEN, PANCREAS AND A GOOD DEAL OF YOUR LIVER. GO AHEAD AND MOVE THREE LIVE POINTS DOWN TO THE "MEAT BOX" ON YOUR CHARACTER SHEET.

THAT'S IT FOR ME THEN. I ONLY HAD ONE LIVE POINT LEFT.

C'MON BOB, NO NEED TO BE STINGY WITH THE MEAT! THROW SOME MY WAY!

I POUNCE ON HIS CARCASS AND FEED BEFORE FITZGERALD OVER THERE CAN SCAVENGE MY KILL.

HOLD UP BOB! IT'S MY TURN!



I TOLD YOU I WAS GOING TO GET MY "POUND OF FLESH" OUT OF YOU FOR THAT LITTLE STUNT YOU PULLED IN THE PEAT BOG!!

I'M CASTING FIVE T-POINTS AND FIRING A STRANGLE VINE SPELL AT YOU!

HEEEYYYY, I THOUGHT WE HAD A PACT?

"HAD" IS THE OPERATIVE WORD HERE.

NICE TO SEE YOU **BACK** IN THE **FRAY** STEVIL. OKAY YOU TWO - PLAY YER **CARDS!**

PETE WHILE THOSE TWO ARE **PREOCCUPIED** I'M GOING TO TRY AND GET TO **GORDO'S** CARCASS AND COLLECT THOSE **MEAT POINTS!**

**BACK OFF, JACK!** THOSE **MEAT POINTS** BELONG TO **ME!!**

C'MON, SHOW YOUR CARD BOB!  
I DON'T HAVE ALL DAY!



**HA! AN EIGHT!** TAKE THAT!

TOUGH LUCK, **VEGAN-BOY!**  
NO **MEAT** FOR YOU TODAY.  
I'M SHOWIN' A **NINE!**  
READ IT AND **BLEED!**

DON'T WORRY. I'LL HAVE-AT-YOU  
AGAIN **NEXT TURN!**



**A WEE BIT LATER...**

GET YOUR CAMERAS READY! I'M ABOUT TO MAKE A **WRECK** OF **EDMUND FITZGERALD!**  
I ER... UH... I **FROLIC** UP TO YOU AND **HACK** AT YOU WITH MY **CRYSTAL BLADE!**

FIRK DING BLAST!  
**SHOW YER CARD!**



**A FEW TURNS LATER...**

NICELY PLAYED, STEVIL. NICELY PLAYED, INDEED! YOU JUST RIPPED FITZGERALD'S ARM OFF AT THE **CLAVICLE.**

**BOB!** GET THIS **LUNATIC** OFF ME! I'M DOWN TO **ONE LIVE POINT** AND HE'S DRAWING **FACE CARDS** LEFT AND RIGHT ON ME!

DON'T WORRY BRIAN! NEXT TURN I'M GOING TO **FLUTTER** AND HEAD BACK IN **YOUR DIRECTION.** JUST **HANG ON!**

OH YEAH?  
COME **GET** SOME THEN! I'LL BE YOUR **HUCKLEBERRY!**

HANG ON?  
HMMM.....



**LATER STILL, AS THE BATTLE RAGES ON...**

**PETE!** I **GRAB** MY **SEVERED** ARM FROM WHERE IT LIES ON THE GROUND AND **EAT IT!**

**WHAT THE???! BUT...**  
YOU CAN'T EAT YOUR **OWN FLESH.** CAN HE?

ACCORDING TO THE RULES I **IMMEDIATELY** GAIN **TWO** LIVE POINTS!! YOU MIGHT WANT TO **FIX** THAT IN YOUR **NEXT** REVISION.

DAMN! HE FOUND **ANOTHER** LOOP HOLE?

AWESOME!!



AS YOU GUYS ARE **WRESTLING** OVER **FITZGERALD'S** STREWN **ENTRAILS,** A "**VISITOR**" SUDDENLY DESCENDS UPON THE **FIELD OF BATTLE!**

VISITOR? WHO IS IT?

IS IT THAT **PESKY** DRAGONFLY AGAIN? I'LL **FIX** HIM. I'M GOING TO CAST AN **ENCHANTED WEB** SPELL ON HIM.

WHILE THEY'RE PREOCCUPIED I ATTEMPT TO CRAWL AWAY!



YOU HEAR A FAINT RUSTLING OF THE UNDERGROWTH AND SUDDENLY, **THIS** APPEARS BEFORE YOU!

KEEP IN MIND THAT IT'S *IN SCALE* WITH YOUR FAERIE FIGURES!



**KERPLUNK!**

**MOTHER OF GAWD!** WHAT THE HELL IS THAT THING?



IT'S THE SAME SCALE AS US YOU SAY???? BUT... IT... IT'S FREAKIN' **HUGE!!** WE'RE TOAST!



**WHAT THE...??!! GAME OVER, MAN!** NO WAY WE CAN TAKE ON THAT THING.



WAIT A MINUTE, ISN'T THAT THE **STUFFED SQUIRREL** THAT USED TO SIT ON THE **SHELF** BEHIND THE **FRONT COUNTER**??

TO YOU AND ME MAYBE BUT TO YOUR **CHARACTERS** IT'S A **THRALL!** A WOODLAND CREATURE WHO HAS DECIDED TO... HOW SHALL WE SAY, **INTERACT** WITH YOU.

**STEVIL**, YOU'RE **FAT** AND **PERKY** WITH ALL THAT **FAERIE MEAT** YOU'VE **DEVOURED**. **FLUTTER** AROUND HIM AND TRY TO DRAW HIM AWAY FROM THE AREA. IT'S OUR **ONLY CHANCE!**

MAYBE IF WE KEEP **STILL** IT WON'T NOTICE US.

SHYA' RIGHT! **SCREW YOU BUDDY!** I'M NOT GOING **NEAR** THAT THING.



**AS THE SQUIRREL RAMPAGE UNFOLDS...**

**WHOO!** NOT SO FAST, **BOB!** AS YOU ARE PREPARING TO **POUNCE** ON THE **SQUIRREL** HE **TURNS** ON YOU AND **CHARGES!!** GO AHEAD AND **PULL A CARD** AND LET'S SEE WHAT YOU'VE GOT!

**URNS ON ME??!!** BUT I CAST **FLUTTER-SOFT** LAST TURN! I WAS FLYING **SILENTLY!**

**CRAPOLA!!** A FREAKIN' **DEUCE!** OF ALL THE **ROTTEN LUCK!**

THE **THRALL** DREW A **SEVEN!** HIS **RAZOR SHARP INCISORS** SINK INTO YOUR DELICATE FLESH! SINCE HIS CARD WAS **FIVE** OR MORE GREATER THAN YOURS, DAMAGE IS **DOUBLED!** LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE **DEAD MEAT!**

I **STILL** SAY I WAS FLYING **STEALTHFULLY** AND HE COULDN'T HEAR ME COMING!

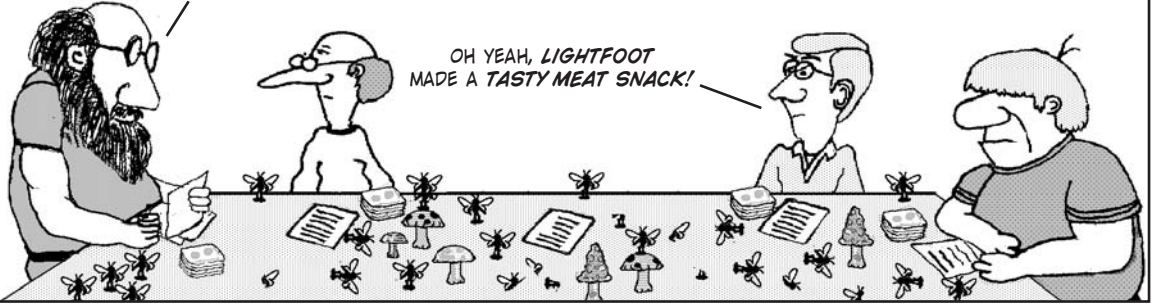
**HAR HAR!** KILLED BY A **RODENT!**

ACCORDING TO THE RULES, **BOB**, SQUIRRELS HAVE **KEEN HEARING** WHICH RATES HIGH ENOUGH TO CANCEL OUT "**SILENT**" SPELLS.



**AFTER THE GAME, PETE SUMMARIZES THE ACTION....**

...OKAY, SO THEN **STEVIL** FLED FOR THE **PEAT BOG** WITH **LIGHTFOOT'S** LOWER LEG WHERE HE HOPED TO BE ABLE TO **FEED** ON IT IN RELATIVE SAFETY. IT WAS AT **THIS POINT** **BOB** POUNCED ON HIM AND **RIPPED** HIS **WINGS** OUT BY THE **ROOTS** AND PROCEEDED TO **FLAIL** STEVIL WITH THEM IN AN INSPIRED, IF NOT **BRUTAL** FASHION. AT THE **SAME TIME**, **BRIAN** WAS FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE AFTER BEING **VICIOUSLY** MAULLED BY A **SHREW-MOUSE** WHICH **LIGHTFOOT** EVENTUALLY VANQUISHED - ALBEIT ACCIDENTALLY - BY CHUCKING A **FRAGMENTARY GRENADE** INTO THE **FRAY!** THEN AS **LIGHTFOOT** WAS RECOVERING FROM THE **SHRAPNEL BACKBLAST** OF SAID GRENADE, **BOB** DISLODGED HIM FROM THE POSITION ON "**TOP OF THE 'SHROOM**" AND DID POOR **LIGHTFOOT** IN WITH A **THORN-PRICK** SPELL. A **TUG-OF-WAR** QUICKLY CENTERED ON **LIGHTFOOT'S** REMAINS EVENTUALLY ENDING WITH **BRIAN** GETTING THE **CHOICEST MORSELS** AND...

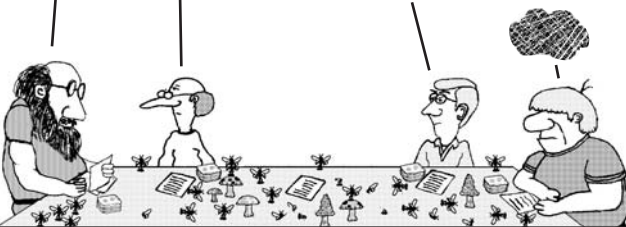


**FIVE MINUTES LATER...**

...AFTER DRAGGING **BOB'S** REMAINS UP TO HIS **LOFTY LAIR** IN THE **GRAND OAK** AND STORING IT AWAY, THE **THRALL** THEN RETURNED TO THE **PEAT BOG** WHERE-UPON **BRIAN** 'AMBUSHED' HIM BY **POUNCING** ON HIS BACK AND GIVING THE **SQUIRREL** "BOTH BARRELS!" FROM HIS **FAE-SLAYER** IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD.

HEY YOU LEFT OUT THE PART WHERE **BRIAN** ATE HIS OWN ARM!

AND WHAT ABOUT THAT **MEAT POINT** I LACED WITH **POISON IVY EXTRACT** AND **BAITED** BRIAN WITH? THAT WAS **CLASSIC!**



**DAMN!** LOOKS LIKE I STILL HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO. SOME LOOPHOLES WERE REVEALED AND I THINK SOME OF THE **WEAPONS** UNBALANCE THE GAME. I'M GOING TO GO **BACK** TO THE DRAWING BOARD AND **TWEAK** THINGS A BIT. MAYBE I CAN TALK YOU GUYS INTO PLAYING AGAIN IN A FEW MONTHS?

**TWEAK??!!** YOU'RE NOT GOING TO **CHANGE** ANYTHING ARE YOU? IT WAS **PERFECT!!** THAT **PEA-SHOOTER CROSSBOW** ROCKED!!

I THINK YOU HAVE A **WINNER** HERE, **PETE!** LET'S DRAG **GORDO** OUT OF THE **REST ROOM** AND GET **ANOTHER** GAME GOING.



**MUCH LATER...**

HEY **PETE**, I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING TOMORROW. MAYBE I COULD COME OVER AND WE COULD **COLLABORATE** ON THIS THING. IT HAS SOME MINOR **PROBLEMS** BUT...UH, I THINK I COULD **FIX** IT FOR YOU. WHATTA YA SAY?

UH... TOMMOROW? COLLABORATE? UH...GEE **BRIAN**, THAT'D BE SWELL BUT UH... I'M GOING OUT OF TOWN. MAYBE WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT WHEN I GET BACK.

NO PROBLEM. I'LL GO AHEAD AND **PUSH FORWARD** ON YOUR "**IDEA**" WHILE YOU'RE GONE THEN AND WE CAN COMPARE NOTES LATER.

UH...PUSH FORWARD??



**A FEW DAYS LATER...**



# Hack in the Saddle Again

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN

**LAST ISSUE THE BOYS DISCOVERED THEIR OLD FRIEND JOHNNY KIZINSKI WAS BACK IN TOWN. AFTER A BRIEF REUNION AT THE TABLE, JOHNNY AGREED TO COME BACK THE FOLLOWING WEEK TO PICK UP THE DICE AND PLAY ONE LAST GAME WITH HIS OLD COMRADES-OF-THE-DICE. JOHNNY IS NOW FORTY MINUTES LATE AND THE CLOCK IS TICKING...**

WHAT THE HELL'S KEEPIN' JOHNNY?? YOU DID TELL HIM TO BE HERE AT 7:00 SHARP - RIGHT? NOT LIKE HIM TO HOLD UP A GAME. WHY DON'T YOU TRY CALLIN' HIS MOM'S HOUSE AGAIN. MAYBE HE SHOWED UP BACK THERE.

BOB, I LEFT FOUR MESSAGES FOR THE GUY. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO. MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST CONTINUE ON WITHOUT HIM.

NO!!! LET'S WAIT! IF JOHNNY SAID HE'D BE HERE - HE'LL BE HERE! MAYBE HE GOT CAUGHT UP IN TRAFFIC OR SOMETHING.

I DON'T MIND WAITING FOR HIM.

FIVE MORE MINUTES, MAYBE?



LOOK GUYS, I GOTTA BE HONEST. WHEN I CALLED JOHNNY THE OTHER DAY TO REMIND HIM ABOUT THE GAME HE CAME UP WITH A DOZEN EXCUSES WHY HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO MAKE IT. IT WAS ONLY AFTER I REMINDED HIM HOW DISAPPOINTED EVERYONE WOULD BE THAT HE FINALLY TOLD ME HE'D SHOW.

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE. THE GUY WAS DICE-BIT WITH MISFORTUNE AND HE'S CARRYING SOME BAGGAGE. IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY FOR HIM TO PICK UP THOSE DICE AGAIN.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DEATH OF FOUR HIGH-LEVEL PLAYER CHARACTERS\* IS A LOT OF WEIGHT TO CARRY ON ONE'S SHOULDERS.

THAT'S RIGHT! AND JOHNNY'S BEEN CARRYING THAT WEIGHT FOR A LOT OF YEARS!

SO I SAY WE OWE IT TO HIM TO WAIT!



I GUESS I CAN TELL YOU GUYS NOW. I GOT A LITTLE SURPRISE FOR JOHNNY. SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HOLDING FOR HIM EVER SINCE THAT NIGHT.

EVER SINCE WHAT NIGHT, BIG GUY?

EVER SINCE THE NIGHT HE LEFT THE GAME. I THOUGHT HE MIGHT WANT IT BACK SOMEDAY.

WHAT IS IT BRIAN?



HIS CHARACTER SHEET FOR SPIKE 'FOUR EYES' MCCLELLAN!!

SPIKE MCCLELLAN? WHO'S THAT?

HE'S A REALLY KEWL SQUATTER TURNED FEDERAL MARSHALL JOHNNY WAS RUNNING THAT NIGHT!



\* See KODT#7/Bundle of Trouble Volume III: The Boy Could Play [One night during a power session of CATTLEPUNK, Johnny fell into an unlucky streak and fumbled five consecutive times, failed four saving throws and missed twelve to-hits. The result was the death of four high-level characters and the end of a campaign which had been running for six years. Johnny walked away from the table and never played again.]

HE RIPPED IT IN HALF BUT I GATHERED IT UP AND TAPED IT BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. BEEN HOLDIN' ON TO IT **ALL** THESE YEARS - JUST WAITIN' FOR THE MOMENT I COULD GIVE IT BACK TO HIM AGAIN.

REALLY??!! THAT'S **AWESOME**, BRIAN! THAT MAY JUST BE THE **BAND AID** TO THE SOUL HE NEEDS TO GET...

BRINGG! BRRINGG!!

HEY THE PHONE! I BET THAT'S **JOHNNY** NOW!

**MOMENTS LATER...**

**B.A.?** YEAH, IT'S ME, **JOHNNY!** LOOK..... IT'S HARD FOR ME TO SAY THIS BUT, UH, I'M GONNA HAVE TO **BAIL** ON YA.

AWWW, NO **JOHNNY**, YOU CAN'T DO THAT! THESE GUYS ARE...

I'M SORRY **B.A.** BUT I GET THE **SWEATS** JUST THINKIN' ABOUT PICKIN' UP THOSE **DICE!**

MAYBE YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT BUT IT'S JUST TOO **PAINFUL!**

TELL THE GUYS I'M SORRY.

JOHNNY, WAIT! WE'RE **FRIENDS!** WE CAN WORK THROUGH THIS. **JOHNNY?** **JOHNNY!!**

KEEP HIM ON THE LINE **B.A.!** TALK HIM THROUGH IT!

CLICK!

HE HUNG UP ON ME! -SIGH- I'M SORRY GUYS. DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE'S COMING.

PLAYER LOOK OF CONDUCT  
1. THE GUY IS ALL...  
2. RGM LAM IS INFAMOUS!!  
3. GM WILL BE...

USEFUL CHANGS

USEFUL DOMINO WOTC GARY PABRICE

**MEANWHILE...**

I NEED A DRINK.

**TEN MINUTES LATER..**

HEY **BARTENDER**, THINGS SEEM SLOW ENOUGH. YOU WANNA TAKE ME ON IN A GAME OF **POOL??** I **REALLY** NEED TO GET MY MIND OFF OF THINGS.

NAAAAAA, I DON'T PLAY ANYMORE. HAD TO GIVE IT UP WHEN I GOT THIS **STAINLESS STEEL HIP!** LEMME GUESS - YER OL' LADY LEFT YOU. **RIGHT?**

WELL... A **LADY** LEFT ME ALL RIGHT. WASN'T MY **OLD LADY** THOUGH. 'T WAS **LADY LUCK** WHO ABANDONED ME.

THE CRUEL BITCH LEFT ME HOLDING A **COLD PAIR** OF DICE.

**HAR HAR!!** NOW I UNDERSTAND.. YOU WENT AND **LOST** YER ASS IN **VEGAS** DIDN'T YA?

NAAAAA, ACTUALLY, I LOST IT ON THE "**STREETS OF DESERT GORGE**"

DESERT GORGE? NEVER HEARD OF IT. THAT ANYWHERE NEAR **RENO?**

NO, JUST A LITTLE **FLY SPECK** OF A TOWN ON A SHEET OF **GRAPH PAPER.**  
-SIGH-

HEY, BUDDY!

THAT'S IT - I'M CUTTIN' YOU OFF!

HUH? WHAT'S THAT?

I'M SORRY MAC, DIDN'T MEAN TO *EAVES DROP* ON YA BUT I OVERHEARD YOU MENTION *DESERT GORGE*. YOU'VE PLAYED IT?

THE *CATTLEPUNK* ADVENTURE PACK? SURE.... I'VE PLAYED IT. YOU'VE MEAN YOU'VE HEARD OF IT??

HAVE I HEARD OF IT?? LOST A DAMN GOOD CHARACTER THERE.

NO KIDDING? ARE YOU FOR REAL? WHAT HAPPENED?

OUR GANG GOT SHOT UP PRETTY BAD TRYING TO ROB THE *LOCO LOBO SALOON*. YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE PLACE?

*LOCO LOBO*? HELL YES I'M FAMILIAR WITH IT. I *BLEW OUT* THE BACK OF AN ORNERY *MULE SKINNER'S* HEAD RIGHT THERE AT THE BAR! HE GOT ALL *SASSY-MOUTHED* WITH ME OVER A GAME OF CARDS.

YEAH, THAT'S A PRETTY ROUGH PLACE.

HEY, YOU EVER HIT THE *PAINTED TIGER*?

YOU MEAN THAT LITTLE *HABERDASHERY* NEXT TO THE *CRICK* ON THE BACK SIDE OF TOWN?

NO, NO, THIS IS A LITTLE *HOOC DEN* RUN BY A *MORMON DROVER*. WE USED IT AS OUR BASE OF OPERATIONS - RENTED THE BACKROOM. BOY, I HAD ME SOME GOOD TIMES THERE.

IS THE BARMAID A PAUNCHY LITTLE *SENORITA*? GOES BY THE NAME OF *RITA*? PACKS A DERRINGER?

EXACTLY!!

SCOOT! SCOOT! SCOOT!

SAY, THE NAME'S *JOHNNY!* CAN I BUY YOU A DRINK?

SAAAAY, THANKS! I'LL TAKE AN *OLD GRANDAD STRAIGHT!* FOLKS CALL ME *CRUTCH!*

IMAGINE RUNNING INTO A *CATTLEPUNK PLAYER* HERE OF ALL PLACES.

YEAH, I WAS JUST SITTIN' HEAR LOOKING OVER SOME OF MY *OLD CHARACTERS*

HEY, I GOT A LITTLE *TIP* FOR YA NEXT TIME YOU'RE RUNNING A CHARACTER THROUGH *DESERT GORGE*. YOU KNOW THE *SILVER EAGLE MINE*?

DAMN STRAIGHT, I DO! ONE OF MY CHARACTERS, *JAKE MATTOCK*, BLEW HIMSELF TO *KINGDOM COME* TRYING TO PINCH SOME *NITRO GLYCERINE* FROM THE SUPPLY SHACK.

THAT SUCKS! YOU KNOW THE TRICK IS TO KEEP IT *COOL!* TRY PACKING IT IN *WET STRAW* NEXT TIME. THAT GIVES YOU A *NEGATIVE 10 MODIFIER* ON *MISHAP ROLLS* WHEN DEALING WITH *NITRO*.

WELL ANYWAY THERE'S AN *OFFSHOOT* PASSAGE IN THE MINES WHICH HAS BEEN *BOARDED UP*. APPARENTLY YEARS AGO THEY WERE CHASIN' A *VEIN OF ORE* WHICH RAN OUT. THE THING IS.....

THAT *PASSAGE* RUNS *DIRECTLY* BENEATH THE *BANK!!* ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS TUNNEL THROUGH *FIFTEEN FEET* OF STONE, CUT YOUR WAY THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS OF THE BANK AND *SHOVE* THE *SAFE* INTO THE SHAFT. *SWEET SET UP!!* YOU CAN BLOW THE *SAFE* IN THE *MINE*, GRAB THE LOOT AND MAKE YOUR GETAWAY WITHOUT *EVER* BEING SEEN.

GET THE HELL OUTTA HERE!!

GOD'S HONEST TRUTH!

ME N' MY BOYS PLAYED IT OUT *EXACTLY* THE WAY I TOLD YA. THE FUNNY THING ABOUT IT IS THAT *AFTER* THE JOB WE MOZIED BACK INTO TOWN AND HAD A DRINK AT THE BAR. *LATER* WHEN THE CALL WENT OUT THAT A *POSSE* WAS BEING FORMED - WE *VOLUNTEERED!!* *HAR HAR!!* JUST FOR KICKS!!

I'D LOVE TO HAVE SEEN THAT.

**A HOUR LATER...**

...OF COURSE BY THIS TIME I WAS GETTIN' A *MIGHTY* BIT UPSET WITH THIS GUY. I MEAN *FUN* IS *FUN* BUT *NOBODY* LIKES TO HAVE A *RATTLESNAKE* WAVED IN THEIR FACE. SO I GRABBED HIM BY HIS *NECKERCHIEF* AND SAID, "*HEY! SPUR BOY!* NIX IT WITH THE FRICKIN' SNAKE OR I'M GONNA *SHOOT* YOU IN THE *FOREHEAD!*"

SO WHAT HAPPENED?

I HAD TO *SHOOT* HIM!

-SIGH- I COULD GO ON YACKIN' WITH YA *ALL NIGHT!* YOU KNOW, I WAS ACTUALLY FEELIN' KINDA *BLUE* EARLIER. I'M *GLAD* WE RAN INTO EACH OTHER. HEY, I MEANT TO ASK - YOU BEEN PLAYIN' LONG?

ACTUALLY, I'M HAVING ONE *HELLUYA* TIME FINDING ANYONE TO *PLAY* WITH ME. I'VE ONLY PLAYED A FEW TIMES. HOW 'BOUT YOU?

AAAAAAAH, I HAVEN'T PLAYED IN *YEARS!!*

HAVEN'T PLAYED IN YEARS? WHY NOT?

WHAT CAN I SAY? HAD A COUPLE OF *BAD* GAMES AND UH... WELL, I GUESS THE *LOVE OF THE GAME* JUST LEFT ME.

WELL YOU COULD'VE FOOLED ME!

COME AGAIN? I DON'T THINK I CAUGHT YOUR DRIFT.

YOU'VE BEEN SITTIN' HERE THE BETTER PART OF AN  *HOUR* TALKIN' ABOUT "*THE GAME*" WITH YOUR EYES LIT UP LIKE THE *CON* WHO FINDS OUT HIS *COUSIN* IS ON THE *PAROLE BOARD*.

YEAH...WELL...

LOOK IT WAS *GREAT* TALKIN' WITH YA BUT I GUESS I SHOULD BE GETTIN' BACK TO THE *OLD LADY*.

SAY BUD, YOU WOULDN'T BE INTERESTED IN GETTIN' A GAME TOGETHER WOULD YA? I DON'T HAVE AN ADVENTURE PREPARED OR ANYTHING BUT WE COULD JUST *SHOOT* AT EACH OTHER OR SOMETHING. IT'D BE KINDA NICE JUST THROVIN' THE DICE AROUND AGAIN.

PLAY? WELL... NO, YOU SEE, I... UH... I KINDA HAD THIS *BAD...*

YEAH? GO ON.

-SIGH-

AWWWWH HELL! WHAT I'M *TRYIN'* TO SAY IS THAT IF WE *HURRY* I THINK I KNOW OF A *GAME* WE CAN GET IN ON *RIGHT NOW!*

YOU PULLIN' MY LEG, MAC? WELL *HELL!* WHAT ARE WE WAITIN' FOR?

WELL GRAB YER COAT AND SADDLE UP, *AMIGO!* I GOTTA MAKE A QUICK *PHONE CALL* FIRST THEN WE'LL *SADDLE UP* AND HIT THE ROAD!

I was just thinking about a friend with whom I used to game, Ronald Pugsley. Ron and I used to game together back in 1983-5. We gamed in that strange netherworld of our junior and senior years of high school. Our group managed to squeeze in an AD&D™ game per week on the weekend and once in a while on weekdays when we had wheels.

If I had to pick a KODT character that most fit Ron Pugs, I'd have to choose Dave<sup>1</sup>. Ron couldn't quote many rules like Brian, wasn't the group leader, certainly wasn't a role player like Sara, and he was not (usually) **Black Hands** material. But Ron had a quiet confidence about him and an always-sharp sense of humor.

Ron's character I remember most was Salvador (*Sal for short*), a chaotic neutral cleric of Poseidon he rolled up for my ongoing campaign. He named him after a Latino coworker at Schmeiser's Meat Market (incidentally, this is also where Brian Jelke and Adam Niepomnik<sup>2</sup> also worked after school).

I don't know if any other gamers remember gaming events through the eyes of characters like they're real memories, but I do. They come back to me like scenes from movies last watched years ago. I have two such Sal-specific memory clips burned into my memory.

The first comes from Sal's first adventure. He joined a group of about six mid-level (*4th-5th*) adventurers, so he was low-man on the totem pole. We were playing "Evil Ruins", a Mayfair Games AD&D-compatible adventure module.

Sal wore chainmail, carried a standard mace and other than his build [5 foot eight and 230 pounds] there seemed to be absolutely nothing unusual about Sal. That changed with his first adventuring encounter.

The party came upon a bridge with a crudely scrawled sign that read, "**Dis is da brijj of Woe**". While the party's guide was relating that the sign wasn't there last time he passed this way, a large troll climbed out from under the bridge and demanded a 100 gold piece toll to cross.

The brave PCs were of course scared out of their wits (*it was a troll after all*). Our heroes instructed first-level Sal to hang back and prepare some Cure Light Wounds spells then very predictably charged the beast. After the three rounds or so, two of the PCs had been hurled over the bridge and into the river and two others were retreating for cures. At this point, Woe [the troll] reiterated his request for 100 gold pieces per party member. Sal calmly walked down to the bridge to confront Woe.

"Hey, you're not planning to actually pay him are you? We'll take him out eventually," asked another character.

Sal responded just as he arrived at the bridge, "Nope. Don't have 100 gold." At which point Ron declared that Sal was attacking Woe.

An immediate chorus of, "You'll be killed! You're only first level" rang across the room. I chuckled and said, "Roll init Sal, or should I call you 'Lunch?'" Sal won initiative, rolled a 20, rolled 00 on the critical hit chart, rolled maximum damage and crushed the Troll's skull.

The party's ranger looked over at Sal and said, "I thought you said you were first level!" To which Ron shrugged, and replied "I'm actually a 10th level High Priest... as far as you know."

The legend escalated to encompass the Mace of Cuthbert when Ron's second roll to hit for Sal was also a crit.

The second major Sal-specific memory I have was when he was second level and adventuring with a first level fighter (a catch-up session) in the classic TSR adventure "In Search of the Unknown" (*faded blue-green pre-basic version*). The two characters were walking through an archway when a green slime fell on Sal. The other player at the table was laughing himself red-faced, but his character, realizing the danger, wasted no time burning the slime off of Sal. Greatly annoyed, Sal demanded the torch in case future slimes fell from above.

The laughing fighter didn't stride two steps before another slime plopped on him.

"Whoa-Ho!!! Now look who's laughing!" smirked Sal.

"Ha, ha." said the fighter sarcastically.

"I bet you want this don't ya," said Ron pointing to an imaginary torch in his fist. "Isn't this funny?"

"C'mon, quit kidding around. This stuff turns you to slime." The fighter reached for the torch (and the actual player made a reaching motion for Ron).

"Not so funny NOW, is it?" said Ron as he held his arm with the imaginary torch opposite the other player.

By now I'm dying behind the screen. The fighter's player is really agitated and clawing for this imaginary torch while Ron's holding the "torch" away from him<sup>3</sup>.

There were other stories as well like the time Sal went fishing from the seashore and commissioned a painting of himself with his catch. But I must stop my role-playing tales here for fear of boring you with any more gamer-stories.

This February, Ron would have been 33 years old, but he died of Leukemia of the blood in October, 1996 at the age of 29. He left behind a loving wife, Claire, a toddler, Ronnie, and two baby daughters, Becky and Jessie. The last time I saw Ron healthy (or at least before he knew about his cancer) was June that year when he came to ZoomFest V (*the Zoom<sup>4</sup> world championships were held that year in Elmhurst, Illinois*).

I recall mostly how happy I was to see him.

I do not know the answers to age-old spiritual questions like whether there is a heaven and where our souls go when we pass on. But I do know that people who are close to you become a part of you and they live in you as long as you remember them.

And I will never forget you Ron Pugs.

David "DK" Kenzer  
January 4, 2000

<sup>1</sup>I have to say, I've gamed with and seen more "Daves" come and go than all of the other KoDT character-types added together.

<sup>2</sup>Adam helped design both the **Kingdoms of Kalamar** and the **Monty Python and the Holy Grail CCG**.

<sup>3</sup>In case you're wondering, Sal did eventually burn off the slime but he waited three rounds and the fighter almost turned to slime.

<sup>4</sup>Zoom is the greatest drinking game ever invented. It requires strategy, quick thinking and hand-eye coordination. Like any fine strategy game, it rocks most when played solely among experts. Ron taught me to play in the fall of 1985 while visiting our buddy at the University of Iowa.



# A Look At "Asheron's Call"

(Well... Sort Of)

By Rick Moscatello

**A**sheron's Call is the latest MMOG (*Massively Multiplayer Online Game*) to clog up bandwidth on the Internet. While I've played it for an embarrassingly large amount of time, I still find myself unhappy with how little has changed in these types of games since I first started playing them a decade ago.

My first disappointment in the game comes from the problem that has killed me so many times: lag. It drives me nuts that after ten years I still find myself frantically trying to defeat the lagmonster, praying that he doesn't paralyze me yet again while the "real" beasts in the game pound me into the dirt. The lag of AC may be improved over the past, but it's still a factor. If I had a solution other than having everyone buy their own copy of the game and play solo, I'd give it.

My second problem involves overcrowding. I remember playing an online game, years ago, where there must have been 40 people in a kobold village. Every time a luckless kobold popped his head up, greedy players would shout "MINE!!!" and rush over and start abusing the poor thing. After a few seconds (*or less*), it would be a fine pulp, and we'd all sit around and yell at whoever killed it for stealing "my" kill until two minutes later when another kobold would show up.

More recently I played another game with lizardman caves in them. At two o'clock in the morning, there'd be twenty people waiting outside the lizard king's door, rabidly ready to bash the hapless monarch's head in to steal his magic ring. In *Asheron's Call* it is a bit better, with fairly plentiful monsters, although the prime areas of the dungeons still almost always have one adventurer in every square yard. Alas, there are still jerks endlessly complaining about people stealing "their" kills even though AC gives experience based on what you do (*not on making the deathblow*), and only the person who deals the most damage gets to loot the corpse. Definitely better, even if there is a mob of people outside the *Mosswort Chieftain's* door at all hours of the day.

Another problem with these types of games is PKing (*that is, Player Killing*). *Asheron's Call* took the wimp's way out: none of that stuff allowed. Yes, you can join a special server or go on a quest for it, but you'll only be able to kill other people who have also decided to be murderers. It's a solution, but you'd think *Microsoft* would have a better idea than this. The main reason PKing has been a problem with other games is the makers of the society (*the*

*computer programmers*) don't allow for anything to be done about problem players. I remember *Meridian59*, a single PK player could not be stopped...twenty players (*of higher level*) could spend the entire evening trying to kill him, and we'd die ten times for every time he did. Even when killed, he'd be back in a flash going right back into town to buy supplies (*can't stop him from doing that*). Then he'd go into the bar to rest up (*can't stop him from doing that either*) then step outside and blast everyone all over again. Complaints to the "Guides" only got us lectures on how we were letting the PKer get away with it. About the same thing happened in *UO*; I guess simply getting rid of the possibility of PKing works, but I would like to see an intelligent solution (*prisons, banning from server, anything more "realistic" that would allow me to kill a jerk if I wanted and pay a fair price for it*).

This leads to another problem with these types of games that nobody has fixed yet: the notion of character balance. In far too many of these games it seems like there is one class that is simply superior to everything else. (*EverQuest is the closest to balanced I've seen with perhaps three race/classes that are more or less equally superior*). AC, unfortunately, has this problem in a big way. *War Mages* are, to use a phrase from *Magic: The Gathering*, "BaaaROKEN!"

My first character in AC was an enchanter. They're not real good at bashing monsters but they do enchant weapons well enough and I thought he was neat. After all, I could spend 10 mana to allow a weapon to +2 damage for about two minutes. Silly me. A War Mage can spend that kind of mana and completely destroy a monster, maybe even two. Not quite in the same league and the disparity of power gets even worse at higher levels. Dungeons my 6th level enchanter could hardly survive were scoured clean by my level 2 War Mage. A pack of 10th level warriors could not defeat monsters as quickly as my 7th level mage. (*I even annoyed them by blasting every monster they ran to kill*). Unfortunately, I put a lot of time into my enchanter before realizing that the only class who can do anything are war mages. Hard to believe the game designers didn't notice this imbalance in all those months of playtesting they did.

Yet another problem with AC, all the more annoying because of how common it is, is the yutzy NPC system. All the NPCs are statues that sit there and buy/sell stuff according to arbitrary rules. One of many examples involves *Trade Notes*. Money is heavy but you can pay, say, 110 coins to a merchant,

and he'll give you a note that is worth 100. Well it's worth 100 if you bring it to him. Bring it to another merchant, no matter where he is, and it's worth only 80. Doesn't matter if the merchant is across the street or two hours' run away, the value is the same. Go to a peddler in the middle of nowhere and you can cash a note and get 5 tons of coins. Huh? Ok, I suppose I can take one piece of silliness, but what about the "collectors" in town, that have an infinite amount of magical potions and coins to give in exchange for rat tails. Where do they get their money and potions? How do they even carry that much? What do they DO with all the tails? Should there really be one such character in nearly every town? Just as the NPCs and towns are clones, the quests (*for the most part*) are also rather feeble. "Go to the bottom of the dungeon and get a widget...bring it to me for some experience points." Isn't that getting a little old? Guess I shouldn't complain much since I've spent 40 solid hours doing that sort of thing but I still find myself wishing that these online games would evolve a bit more.

Now I come to the part that I miss the most about these games: *real interaction*. Most of these games are just "chat-while-you-slay-monsters" activities, with chat that has little to do with the action or gaming at hand. In hundreds of hours of such gaming I can't recall anything that remotely resembles the antics that you see **The Knights** get involved with on any given night (*and, as we all know, those guys are so close to reality it's frightening*). I can't recall one person I've met online in this way who has become a friend "IRL" (*In Real Life*). A month after I stop playing, I'll be lucky if I even remember the names of the characters I've met online. The jury is still out on whether AC will be able to capture the "goofiness" of real role-playing but I am optimistic. AC has an allegiance system where players can swear fealty to each other. Already I've had a vassal (*someone who swore allegiance to me*) break his oath

to me and swear fealty to another (*in exchange for a pathetically small bribe*). I spoke to the new lord and got him to cut the wayward vassal loose... we'll just have to see if it leads to anything more or if these guys will just fade into dim memory in a matter of a month or so.

My final gripe involves information. I don't know what annoys me more, the fact that you can go on the net and learn pretty much every secret about this game with a few clicks or the alternative, where just the beta testers know everything and everyone else is forced to kiss up to them. Both ways suck, but all the information on the Net means there's a distinct sense of adventure that is lacking as you find the "secret" ingredients to a spell that is known by darn near every other player in the game who cares to know.

In the end, I have to call **Asheron's Call** a really good game in the same vein as "Minesweeper" or "Solitaire" and the like. I mean, I've played a lot of it but there's nothing here that I haven't seen before so you won't miss much if you've played anything like it before. Oh yeah, if anybody wants to join the most laid-back "clan" on Thistledown server, look me up. I'm "R" the Enchanter, and sometimes "T" the War Mage (*I don't play the War Mage much because he's so unkewl*). Oh, and here's a hint from a vet: for God's sake, pick a short name, it'll save anyone who wants to talk to you a whole lot of trouble. That's about the only freakin' hint you won't find on the Internet!

*[after I wrote this, I saw that GameSpot included the above hint in their new strategy guide. Oh well, I tried to add something...]* □

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: KENZER AND COMPANY WELCOMES NEWEST MEMBER

Libertyville, IL, January 16, 2000 .

After months of difficult negotiations, **Kenzer and Company** is proud to announce its newest team member, **Hannah Lacey Kenzer**. Hannah ended a nine day hold-out and tough employment negotiation at exactly 5:43 this morning. Weighing in at 7 pounds 1 ounce and 20" long, she's now the tiniest member of the team.

"Her size makes her ideal for scouting ahead and she's proven to be good at concealing herself," said a proud David Kenzer. "She's already a daughter to me."

Jennifer Kenzer, the lead negotiator and chiefly responsible (*though not solely*) for bringing Hannah on board said she is grateful for Hannah's arrival. "While it took longer than expected, she ought to be able to learn our A/P system in no time, and we're certain she'll be able to take over KoDT advertising sales before the end of the week." Jennifer is doing fine.

"She has some great potential," added Stephanie, a nurse on duty at the time. "She exhibited excellent dexterity and speed by negotiating the birth canal in under two hours, but her wisdom needs some time to develop. Being born without a doctor present showed a great eagerness on her part to join the team, but not the greatest of wisdom."

Despite the lack of a doctor, and only a nurse with one glove

available, Hannah's already shown excellent intelligence and awareness, moving her head and opening her eyes to find her parents and older sister. Her health is a tribute to her obviously above-average to high constitution.

By the time the doctor arrived, Hannah was already rolling up her first character (an enchanter with 16 con and 17 dex). The physician could do nothing, but throw down his shields and run her through the classic, *In Search of the Unknown*. "Since she'll be here for a few days, we'll integrate her into the party forming in the nursery. They're running through *Keep on the Borderlands* and they need a good mage," he said. "Yeah, the gnoll lair is murder," added a 36 hour veteran man-child running a priest of Vrykorr, the Storm Lord.

Resting from her hard day of work, and recovering from the loss of two torch bearers and 3 NPCs in the dungeon, Hannah was unavailable for comment. The doctors believe the room with the cat floating in the evaporating water may have spooked her somewhat, though she did not visibly flinch. □

# News, Rumors and Industry Buzz plucked



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



## THE DICE MAN COMETH? HELL, HE'S ALREADY BEEN HERE.

For those of you who have never seen "The Diceman", it is a unique travel and adventure series that has been running on the Discovery Channel in Europe over the past three years. Recently it has been running in the United States on the Travel Channel and winning over an army of fans who tune in each week to see... well, to see what the roll of the dice will bring.



Each week, Russell Harris and his travelling companion, Shaun Fenton, we set out to find out what life would really be like living and travelling in a totally random fashion where every decision is made not by the self but by the roll of a dice. That's right - *every decision is made by rolling a conventional six sider!*

With no means of transport, just a small amount of money and a bag of necessities, the show can really get interesting since Rus and Shaun never know where they'll end up next.

According to Russel Harris, "It is a voyage of discovery like no other - for us it is the pleasure of getting there rather than the destination that is key - it is the people, the places and the chance encounters along the way that provide the content for each show - liberation, freedom, unpredictability is what it is all about - after all, what is life but a lottery anyway!"

The show, inspired by the book, "The Dice Man" (*see below*), has racked up some 32,000 miles, across 14 different countries, travelling on foot, by bus; taxi, bicycle, ferry, private aircraft, yacht, watertaxi, airline, rickshaw, hire car, motorbike, hot-air balloon, or simply just hitchhiking - spending nearly six months on the road in total! It is estimated the dice have been tossed some 360 times resulting in some pretty bizarre things...everything from playing golf on the ice in Greenland to selling pretzels on the streets of New York!

If you're a gamer, you owe it to yourself to check this show out. It really does bring a smile to your face to see someone rolling dice to determine what he should order from the menu for lunch. □



## LIVE AND LET "DIE"?

This book by Luke Rhinehart was originally published in 1972 and has recently achieved cult status on the web. The book is about a psychol-ogist who turns his life over to the 'roll of the die.' For many readers, the book has become a bible. There are scores of websites (just do a search for 'the dice man') where some readers have adopted the book as an alternative way of life and they post a day-to-day accounting on where the 'dice' have taken them.

The problem is that this was never intended to be a handbook for living. Dr Luke Rhinehart does not even exist and it is certainly not an autobiography - it is a work of fiction! (George Cockcroft's 1971 parody of the late-sixties NY psychoanalytical "scene" follows the mis-adventures of Dr Luke Rhinehart who decides to live his life by the roll of a die.) Still, The Dice Man is a good read and makes you wonder "what if?" or "I wonder?" I'm surprised some Hollywood type hasn't written a script around the idea. The book is being reprinted and should be available through Amazon.com. □

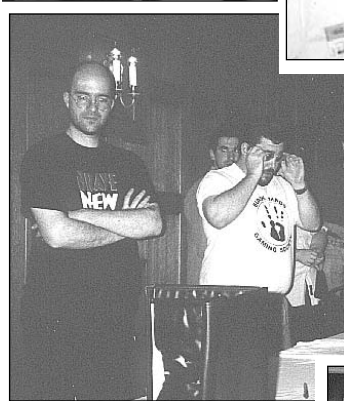
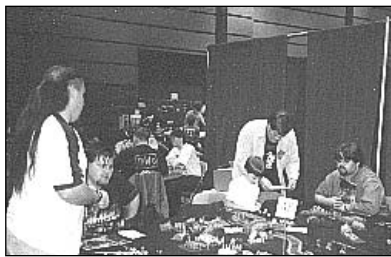
# from the vine for your reading enjoyment



The 1999 convention season was one of the best ones Kenzer and Company has ever had. We attended more cons last year than ever and look forward to what the new year will bring. Before closing the book on this past year, however, we thought it would nice to look back at all our friends (both old and newly-made) who brought us countless smiles and laughs.



## SUMMER CONS - MAKE ME FEEL FINE! -





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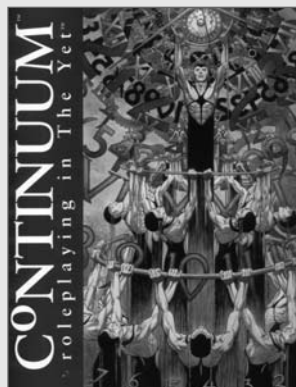
Even if I didn't want to play this game, I'd want to own the book. It is BEAUTIFUL! The first half of this 245-page book is the player's section and it is jam-packed with gorgeous color art that makes my mouth water. The last half of the book is the Narrator's Guide, and though the art in this section isn't in color, it is nonetheless stunning. Players become heroes in this game. They can choose one of the four sample characters or they can make one up themselves. Every player starts with a dice pool from which he, or she, can purchase attributes, skills, powers and other things. The book not only includes everything players and narrators will need to play the game, it has a solo adventure featuring Robin to get you warmed up. It has rules so players can use special Hero Dice, also sold by West End Games, or standard dice. The combat system allows for comic-book style action. (sigh). If you're into superheroes - check this one out.

**Brian's Rating:** Zap! Biff! Bang! This game packs a punch!

**Continuum**

**Roleplaying in the Yet**

AETHERCO  
 P.O. Box 6392, New York, NY 10128-0007  
 E-mail: [www.aetherco.com/continuum](http://www.aetherco.com/continuum) Cost: \$19.99

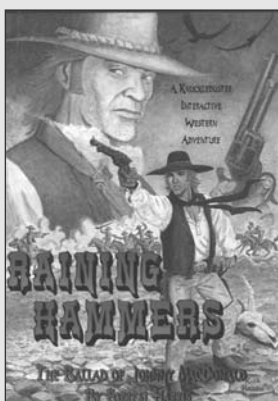


Unique. This is the one word that best describes this game of time travel, an activity called spanning in this game. It is also artful and mysterious - not a bad combination when it comes to an RPG. So what's it all about? In **Continuum**, various people, for various reasons, join a group of people, known collectively as the **Continuum**, to span time. Beginning characters come into the **Continuum** as novices and begin to learn what time travel is all about.

The first chapter of the game book begins with a brilliantly-written story describing how Cynthia Carmichael is "invited to join the dance."

In this game the time travel machine is you. You can travel through time at will if you're a spanner. You just have to be careful not to frag, which means you cause a paradox in the world. Too many frags occurring will cause the world to unravel. You also must battle Narcissists - enemies of the Continuum who use time travel for their own benefits, regardless of the consequences. You can take part in Dream Combat or Time Combat. You join one of the ten fraternities, such as the Antiquarians or the Scribes, which are part of the Continuum to help meet mutual needs. Like I said, this game is unique.

**Brian's Rating:** Sounds like a wild ride - Let's do it!



**RAINING HAMMERS: The Ballad of Johnny MacDonald**  
**Knuckleduster Publications**

P.O. Box 1024, Normal, IL 61761

**Raining Hammers** is Knuckleduster's latest interactive Western adventure, following *The Devil's Addition*. In this adventure you play Johnny MacDonald who's framed for the murders of his two brothers. You guide him as he attempts to keep from getting killed by the real murderers [Apache Indians] and tries to find out who was responsible for the deaths of his kin.

This unique adventure has the player making choices and rolling dice to succeed. The more successes MacDonald has, the more points the player gets. Failure means one thing — death.

While on the quest to clear his name and exact justice for his brothers, MacDonald finds himself exploring towns like Las Cruces, New Mexico and Cooke's Peak, and meets many interesting people including famous the madame Sadie Watson. Along the way, historical notes teach players about the realities of life in the Old West including facts about silver mining and weapons of the period. The historic notes add that extra touch of realism that makes everything more fun.

**Brian's Rating:** Draw pardner! Then mosey on down to yer local game shop to grab this game.

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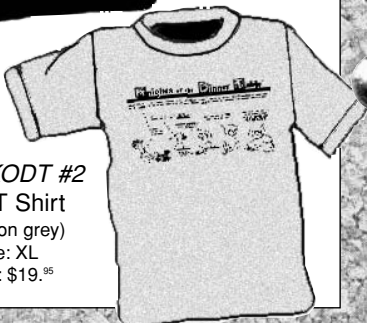
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Cameron, Dave, Greg, Martin, Paul (plus Erik & Murph):  
The Egyptian professor was the Blood Mage. Bwah ha hah.  
Mike Mitchell, Houston Texas

## GAME WANTED!

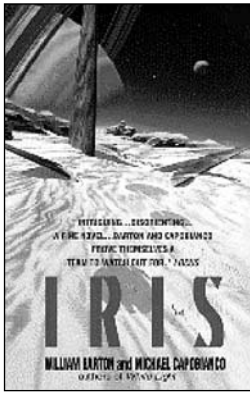
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([restin@aol.com](mailto:restin@aol.com)) or call (847) 540-1970.  
We'd love to come do some KODT Live-Readings, Demos and  
dance like monkeys for peanuts in front of an angry mob.

## WEIRD PETE'S BULLETIN BOARD

is a meeting place where readers may pass along information, barter, trade and gossip. Readers are invited to place classified ads, announce group meetings, seek out other players, etc. Subscribers of KODT may place classified ads free of charge with a limit of one ad per issue and a maximum of twenty-five words. Non-Subscribers may place ads at the rate of 50¢ per word with a limit of 25 words. Companies may place ads at the following rates: [5.5" x 2" - \$160], [2.75" x 2" - \$80], [1.5" x 1" - \$40]. Non-profit organizations (serving the gaming community) and Conventions or Seminars may place ads for free. All ads are placed on a first-come first-served basis with subscribers having priority.



**Book:** *Iris*  
**Author(s):** William Barton  
 and Michael Capobianco  
**Publisher:** Avon EOS Books  
 Published September, 1999  
 Paperback, reprint, 436 pages  
**Cover:** Chris Moore

One of the trickiest things to get right in a science fiction RPG is the setting. Let's face it, setting is tough for all types of SF: movies, novels, comics, computer games -- heck, even the *Warhammer Space Marine*<sup>™</sup> miniature line has a painfully crafted and ludicrously detailed background canon.

What's the big deal with setting? After all, when players wander a little too far south during a *Hackmaster*<sup>™</sup> session, it's not too difficult to create a convincing forest or village on the fly. But try cobbling together a believable alien planet or space station (complete with logical ecology, alien races and new technologies), the first time players accidentally crank the hyperdrive into reverse. This is why 90% of SF RPGs end up on a bastardized *Star Trek* set.

The solution, of course, is to be prepared. And the best way to be prepared is to know what motivates your players, anticipate what mad direction they'll take under pressure, and — this is the really important one — cram them into a tiny craft on a one-way mission whenever possible. Which brings us to a book like *Iris*.

Science fiction is full of tales of deep space exploration, and William Barton and Michael Capobianco have written their fair

## GAME-WORTHY READS

By John O'Neill

share. Their other novels include *Fellow Traveller*, *Alpha Centauri*, and *White Light*. *Iris* was their first novel, originally published in 1990. The premise is interesting enough: ten artists, scientists and engineers, each with a different area of expertise, come together on a privately-funded expedition to Titan in the hopes of founding a utopian colony. But before the sub-light ship *Deepstar* can reach its destination, a rogue gas giant named *Iris* wanders into the solar system, and the ship is diverted there in the hopes that it will prove a more adventurous and rewarding colony site. When one of *Iris*' moons turns out to be hiding a submerged alien craft, the tiny crew soon finds itself facing an ancient — and likely lethal —

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*"Iris is full of ideas for any GM looking for gaming ammunition."*

---

alien mystery.

This is a nearly perfect game setting, and Barton and Capobianco have packed the book with the kind of exotic technology and bizarre cosmology that will keep even the most adept players on their toes. Secrets are revealed slowly, the aliens are appropriately mysterious, and the climactic battle — set half in the real world and half in a virtual reality fantasyland used by the crew for recreation — is fairly ingenious. In fact, *Iris* is full of ideas for any GM looking for gaming ammunition.

Unfortunately, the novel doesn't reward nearly as well as a good read. Long before any payoff on plot suggestions, the most unlikable cast of characters you're ever likely to meet will poison the book. In many respects they are exactly like an unruly band of players: belligerent, destructive, and unrepentant. When they dis-

regard all rational precautions during their first expedition to the alien vessel and begin pushing buttons at random (*accidentally destroying it in the process*), it reminded me a little too much of some of the worst gaming sessions I've witnessed. Important note for all GMs: plot and setting are important, but it always comes down to character in the end.

Take from *Iris* the classic, well-executed premise of a one-way expedition into deep space, and the secret of constructing a creepily claustrophobic scenario around it. Leave the rest.

For other recent books in a similar vein, have a look at Wil McCarthy's *Bloom* (*Del Rey, paperback, September 1999, \$6.99*), in which the inner solar system — including Earth — has been overrun by out-of-control nanotechnology that devours everything it touches, and what's left of humanity clings to life on the moons of Jupiter. Also well worth reading for gamers are the books of Confluence by British author Paul J. McAuley: *Child of the River* (*Avon Eos, paperback, June 1999, \$6.99*) and *Ancients of Days* (*Avon Eos, hardcover, July 1999, \$16*), both set in the unimaginably distant future on a wholly created world peopled by aliens, androids, and stranger beings.

And lastly, I recommend Peter F. Hamilton's epic trilogy of a space empire in a deadly battle for its life against an alien horror, published in the US as *The Reality Dysfunction* (2 volumes, *Warner Aspect, paperback, July 1997, \$5.99 each*) and *The Neutronium Alchemist* (2 volumes, *Warner Aspect, paperback, May 1998, \$6.50 each*). The final volume will be published in hardcover in January as *The Naked God* (*Warner Aspect, \$26.95*).

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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.*

I wrote to you a while back complaining mostly about the excessive length of the "Sara leaves the Knights" plotline. While I still think that plot went on a bit too long, I've changed my mind a tad on the other subjects - the recent **Black Hands** plotlines were quite funny as well as the **Retro KODT** strips in **Bundle of Trouble III**. The non-strip sections have been getting more and more useful to my game (though I still don't enjoy the serious gaming articles - they feel out of place and they're almost always fantasy) - and "Brian's Small Press Picks" helped me pick the perfect Christmas present for my little brother.

Also, I'd like to congratulate you on the last few issues - I think **KODT** has got back "on form", and you seem to have stumbled across the perfect balance between ongoing plotlines and newbie accessibility. Issue 37 had me laughing out loud with every strip!

Does this mean the Knights go on to the National tournament? Or even the World Hackmaster Tournament? I'd love to see them go right to the end - culminating in a game GMed by Gary Jackson himself, at which point they give him what he deserves!

Thanks for all the laughs,

Arthur  
via E-mail

As a devoted Bob and Brian fan, as well as a loyal hack and slasher, I find it quite disturbing that almost all the letters getting written and published in **KODT** each month seem to hate Bob, worship Sara, and then whine about how "mean" the **Black Hands** are. I got a few words to say;

### IT'S A COMIC BOOK!

It's supposed to be funny. Does anyone really want to read a completely serious, down to earth, comic book? I know I don't, especially since that just ain't how most of my roleplaying groups have acted. I've never liked Sara, especially since most of my experiences with "Sara type gamers" have been anything but fun. I love acting, but I think it's important to realize the third letter in the acronym "RPG": stands for **Game**. I won't say anything more, except I wish Sara had stayed in John's group so BA and the guys could continue with old-school **KODT** style strips.

Now onto the **Black Hands**. I don't see why everyone's constantly complaining about them. Stevil and Newt don't get along, and the entire group is Chaotic Evil. How else would anyone expect them to play? I've played with groups plenty more cutthroat than the **Black Hands**, and it can really suck, but it's fun to laugh at in hindsight. Yet another reason why I love **KODT** so much; things like in **Knights** happen to my group every week.

Ben Sunde  
via E-mail

This is in response to the letter from the reader identified only by the mail address - dbhitman99@yahoo.com.

I agree that gaming is wonderful. I love the hobby. I love how close-knit we are at times. I love being able to step into a fantasy world for 5 hours or so and go on epic adventures.

But we must all admit that our hobby has its flaws. I'm afraid that a tired old Christian phrase says it best here - "Love the sinner, hate the sin."

We must remember that we have problems, and we must deal with them. Yes, I love gaming. We all do. But I hate its flaws. I work to expose those flaws and aid in their repair because I wish to make my favorite hobby better.

We can love gaming while still accepting its problems. **Knights of the Dinner Table** is a celebration of gaming, yes, and part of its charm is the

fact that everyone has a voice here. It's been some time since I've seen a non-TSR-related complaint about gaming printed in **Dragon Magazine**™; they don't even have the Current Clack column anymore!

**KODT**, on the other hand, gives us a forum to express our opinions, a forum that is widely read. Yes, **CAR-PGa** (info about which is, again, available at <http://members.aol.com/walton-wj>) works to improve gaming as well, but look at its membership list! I love the group, but its membership is pitiful; no way we can get our message heard through that forum.

I'm sorry to say it's not widely read (Though it should be. Some truly interesting writers - Ken St. Andre, Andrew Hackard of the *Kargatane*, Bill Walton of the *Escapist*, to name a few - have contributed to the site and its flagship zine.)

Perhaps if these forums were utilized by more of the gaming community (ok, ok, read: pretty please join one of my favorite clubs - membership in **CAR-PGa** is free - and visit my site which is free as well), **KODT** would be able to move on - but then again, probably not.

**Knights of the Dinner Table** is a celebration of gaming. It is a celebration of our interesting past, our fascinating present, and most of all our glorious future. We bring up these problems because we want to change things, and let that future come to pass. So in short, I do believe that complaints about the state of the gaming community have a place here. (Besides, Jolly wants *Pete's Back Room* to be a forum for debates, not a just a forum for a gaming lovefest. Save the latter for the letters column.)

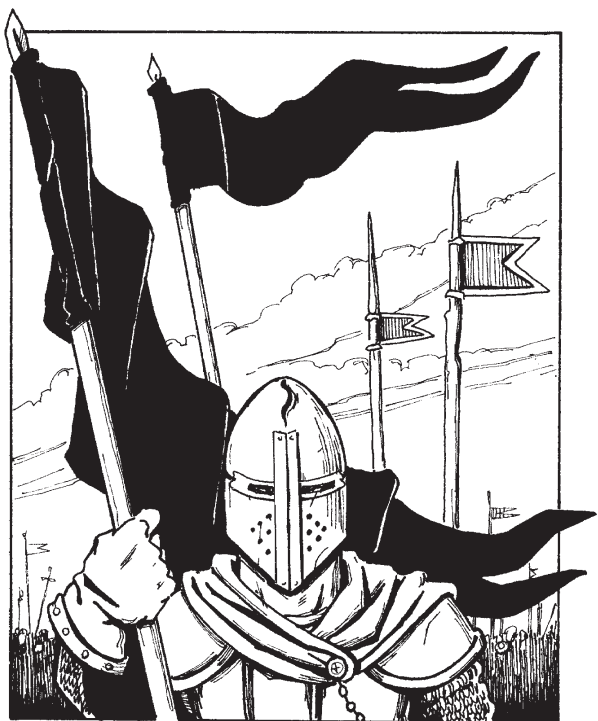
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# FORTY-SIX WAYS TO GET RID OF A BLIND DATE

1. At dinner, guard your plate with fork and steak knife so as to give the impression you'll stab anyone, including the waiter, who reaches for it. (*Growl and snap to emphasize your commitment to protecting your meal.*)
2. Collect the salt shakers from all of the tables in the restaurant and horde them. If someone asks if they can borrow a shaker, inform them you are using them.
3. Excuse yourself to use the restroom. Go back to the head waiter/hostess and ask for another table in a different part of the restaurant. Order another meal. When your date finally finds you, ask her, "What in the hell took you so long in the restroom?!"
4. Challenge the couple at the next table to a round of "breadstick fencing." Declare yourself the winner and announce that you were playing for food-rights. Then promptly take their salads.
5. Sing your order to the waiter in a Pee Wee Herman voice.
6. Tell your date her perfume reminds you of your bunk mate in county lockdown. Then touch her foot with yours under the table and smile shyly.
7. Read a newspaper or book during the meal. Ignore your date while occasionally asking him how to pronounce various simple words in the text you are reading. Stubbornly insist that you're 'quite certain' he's wrong.
8. Stare at your date's neck, while noisily sucking your teeth. Then ask her if she's had reconstructive surgery. When she says no reply, "Really?" and behave as if you don't believe her.
9. Twitch spastically. If asked about it, pretend you don't know what the hell he is talking about.
10. Stand up every five minutes, circle your table with your arms outstretched while making airplane sounds.
11. Take a black magic marker and circle all the 'cheap' items on your date's menus and inform her that her choice of selections is limited to those items. Then wink at her and say, "Of course if you care to negotiate for dessert privileges I'm willing to entertain offers."
12. Ask for crayons to color the place mat. This works very well in fancier venues that use linen tablecloths. If they refuse to provide the crayons, ask your date if you can use her mascara pen or lipstick to doodle with. (Then refuse to give them back later.)
13. Shortly after ordering inform your date that she should eat a 'light meal' so as to not to slow her down. You explain you forgot your credit card and she'll have to make a 'run for the door' when you give her the signal.
14. Recite your dating history. Improvise. Include pets.
15. Whenever your date attempts to talk about himself yawn and stare at the ceiling. Get up and walk away, lay your head on the table and otherwise look bored. Whenever he finishes a sentence roll your eyes and say, "That's nice!", "Yep!" or "Whatever."
16. Lick your food thoroughly before taking a bite. As you chew each bite moan in ecstasy and pound the table with your fist. Then bellow loudly, "Gawd Damn! This coleslaw is good."
17. When ordering, inquire whether the cow from which the steak was taken was bludgeoned, strangled or shot. If the waiter says he's not sure look disappointed and say, "I do prefer my meat strangled."
18. Without asking, eat off your date's plate. Eat more from his plate than he does. When he's not looking, pull his plate closer and closer to yours.
20. Chew with your mouth open, talk with your mouth full and spray crumbs as you recite dirty limericks.
21. Eat everything on your plate within 30 seconds of it being placed in front of you. Don't use utensils, just raise the plate to your face.
22. Throw food at the table next to you. When they look at you point to your date and say, "He did it!"
24. Ask the people at the neighboring table for food from their plates. "Hey dude, you gonna eat that pickle?"
25. Ask your date if she'll consider having your name tatoored on her butt. Keep bringing the subject up.
26. Communicate in mime the entire evening.
27. Upon entering the restaurant, ask for a seat away from the windows where you have a good view of all exits and where you can keep your back to the wall. Act nervous.
28. Fill your pockets with sugar packets, salt and pepper shakers, silverware, floral arrangements... i.e. anything on the table that isn't bolted down. When your pockets are full ask your date if you can put some of your 'dinner perks' in her purse.
29. Hold a debate. Ask your date what his position is on topics such as abortion, the ozone, politics, religion etc. As he responds, take notes while chuckling under your breath and shaking your head. Repeatedly ask him if he "really" finished high school.
30. When the waiter asks if you'll be having dessert pull out a Pez dispenser and reply, "No! I brought my own." For added effect refuse to offer your date any.
31. Slide under the table. Take your plate with you.
32. Order a baked potato for a side dish. When the waiter brings your food, hide the potato, wait a few minutes, and ask the waiter for the potato you "never got." When the waiter returns with another potato for you, have the first one back up on the plate. Repeat later in the meal.
34. Speak in pig latin throughout the meal (Or ubber-dubber language, or just nonsense).
35. Take a break and go into the restroom. When you return to the table, throw a spare pair of underwear on the back of one of the chairs. Insist that they just need airing out.
43. If they are paying, order the most expensive thing on the menu. Take one bite and then ask if you can order potato chips.
44. Take a thermos along and hide it under the table. Order coffee and fill the thermos one cup at a time - taking advantage of the free refills.
45. Insist that your date cuts your food into little pieces for you. In a similar vein, insist that she blows on each spoonful of food to cool it for you before you take a bite. Later, 'accidentally' refer to her as mommy.
46. Accuse your date of eating more breadsticks than you. Order another breadbasket and keep it on your side of the table. Build a little wall with menus, candles and whatever else is on the table to keep him from reaching the bread. Then smile proudly as you take a breadstick in each hand and chomp on them. □

from the writers of *Knights of the Dinner Table*



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FAULTY LATCH MY ASS! YOU DELIBERATELY EVACUATED ME FROM THAT AIRLOCK! MAY I ASK WHY?

SORRY DUDE, BRIAN GOT TO ME. I DECIDED TO THROW IN WITH HIS MUTINY.

THIS AIN'T OVER! NOT BY A LONG SHOT!

YOU WERE RIGHT, SARA! THESE DECKPLANS ROCK! THEY WERE INVALUABLE IN HELPING ME PLAN MY TACTICALS IN SEIZING CONTROL OF THE BRIDGE FROM "CAPTAIN BLIGH" OVER THERE.

DON'T FORGET - YOU PROMISED ME A COMMISSION IN EXCHANGE FOR MY COOPERATION.

OF COURSE! YOU AND DAVE BOTH.

POST-HUMOUSLY, THAT IS!

