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**No. 48**

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# **K**nights of the **D**inner **T**able™

**M A G A Z I N E**



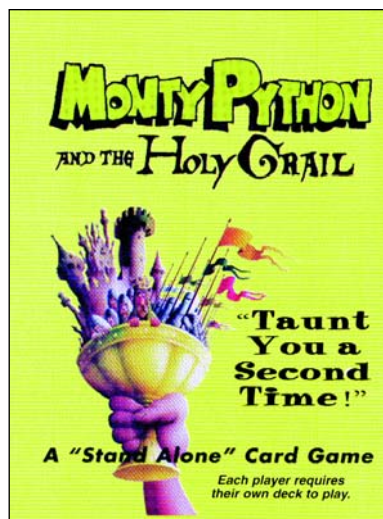
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**KENZER AND COMPANY**

**Knights of the Dinner Table #48**  
APOCALYPSE DROW  
October, 2000

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# Knights of the Dinner Table™

M A G A Z I N E

## "APOCALYPSE DROW"

**THE KODT DEVELOPMENT TEAM IS**  
JOLLY R. BLACKBURN • BRIAN JELKE • STEVE JOHANSSON • DAVID S. KENZER  
Cover Art by George and Jackie Vrbanic • Editorial Assistance: Barbara Blackburn

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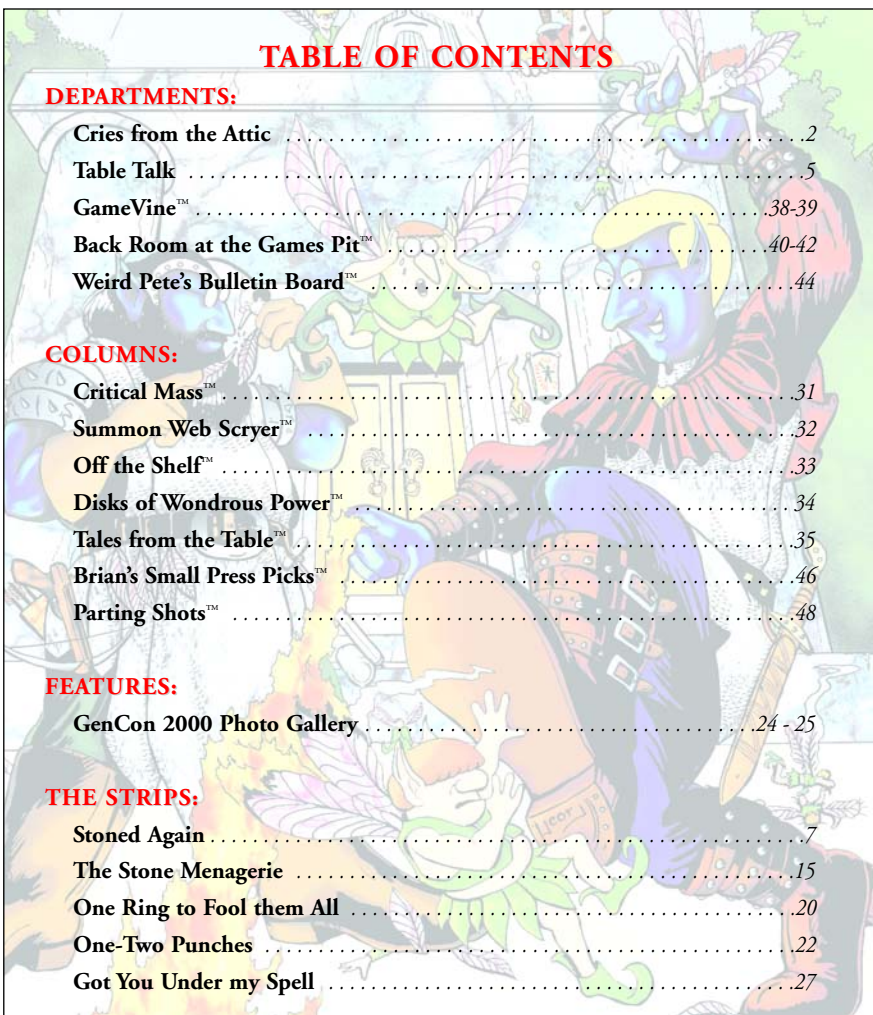
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**K**NIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE™ was accidentally created by Jolly R. Blackburn way back in 1990 as 'filler' for his small press magazine, SHADIS™. Writing and drawing KODT strips, however, isn't nearly the lonely job it was in the past. Since joining the ranks of KENZER AND COMPANY and the formation of the KODT D-TEAM, the Knights have gone far beyond anything Jolly or fellow D-team members, Steve, Dave or Brian ever imagined. We look forward to seeing where the gang takes us next.

# Editorial of a Madman™

**"I flew all the way from Italy just to sit in on the Live Reading!"**

**KODT Fan  
GenCon 2000**



*A few minutes prior to the GenCon KODT Live Reading getting under way.*

**W**ow. Hard to believe that another season of summer conventions has come and gone. The old maxim, "time flies when you're having fun" has never rung truer. As always, the week just following GenCon is a bittersweet time for me. On one hand, I'm glad it's over. (By late August all of us here at KenzerCo are a bit frazzled and the creative batteries definitely need recharging). On the other hand, I hate to see the season come to a close because I know I won't be seeing so many of our friends and readers for another eight months. (sigh)

Ah, but what a time it was. And the season ended with a magnificent bang — GenCon 2000! This year the Queen-mother of all gaming conventions served as ground zero for the one of the most anticipated game-releases in years — the official release of **Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition™**

I'm told that attendance records for the show were shattered in the first 24 hours alone. In fact it seemed like every other person who came by our booth commented that this was the first convention they'd attended in years.

Speaking of **Dungeons and Dragons™**, another highlight of GenCon for us at Kenzer and Company was the fact we were finally able to make the official announcement that we've acquired the exclusive rights to do the **Dungeons and Dragons™** comic book. [Check out GameVine this issue for more details. Oh, and before anyone panics, take comfort in the fact that I'm \*not\* going to be doing the artwork.)

Interest in KODT at GenCon was higher than ever and once again we were left shaking our heads and wondering about the 'how and why' of it all. I know, I know — I promised a few years ago to stop trying to analyze it and just enjoy the ride but I gotta tell ya — It's really starting to get a little scary. Like taking a magic carpet ride and realizing there's no way to steer it.

For example, when we walked into the room where the KODT Live Reading had been scheduled at GenCon this year I was literally floored. We specifically asked for a larger room this year (seating capacity 450) because last year's room was way too small. Even so, we weren't quite prepared for what we saw when we opened those doors — 400 pairs of eyes looking back at us (and we were a

half hour early.)

I immediately turned to Brian Jelke and suggested, "This can't be the right room. Can it? Look at all these people."

As the first tell-tale shakes of stage fright began to sweep over me, I was suddenly grateful for the bad case of laryngitis I'd been suffering from all weekend. Despite my condition, however, it didn't stop Dave Kenzer from showing a microphone in my hand and prodding me out from my hiding place and in front of the audience at the close of the event. "Get out there and thank them for coming you wuss!"

I'm fairly certain I looked like a wide-eyed deer caught in the high-beams of a Mack truck as I stammered my sincere thanks to all the readers who turned out to support us. I think I even managed to thank, Dave, Brian, and Steve before passing out. (Later, I woke up in a dumpster wearing nothing but a pair of suspenders and painter-pants — real funny guys.)

Honestly, the opportunity to meet our fans and interact with fellow gamers has always been one of the highlights of this job. Knowing that so many people seem to enjoy what we're doing is a bit overwhelming at times. And as much as we love having praise heaped upon us, nothing makes us swell with pride more than hearing, "I got back into gaming because of you!" Hoody Hoo, indeed.

Before closing, I want to thank all those readers in the Chicagoland area who, upon learning of my recent move to the area, took the time to write and invite me to join their various gaming circles. I'm truly honored that you would welcome me.

Once I'm fully settled I may grab my luggage cart and HackMaster pajamas and show up on your doorstep.

*Jolly R. Blackburn*

Jolly R. Blackburn

MY CROSSBOW LETS OUT A BEAUTIFUL TWANG AS IT RELEASES A BOLT OF HELLACIOUS PAIN INTO THE FAT CLERIC'S BELLY. CONSIDER IT AN EXCLAMATION MARK TO MY WHIMSICAL REPLY, "HERE'S YOUR FRICKIN' CHANGE!"

OH MAN. YOU WERE RIGHT BOB. PLAYIN' CHAOTIC EVIL CHARACTERS IS LIBERATING!

APPARENTLY THEY'RE UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT PLAYING AN EVIL CHARACTER SIMPLY MEANS CRANKING UP THE HACK-N-SLASH BY A FACTOR OF FIVE.

SSSSHHH!!! NOT SO LOUD. WE DON'T WANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO OURSELVES.

Y-Y-YER KILLING THE CLERIC? THE ONE WHO JUST RAISED YOU?



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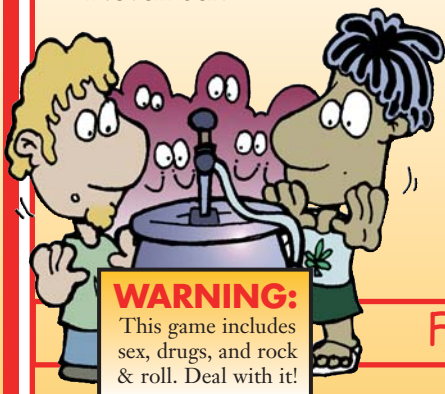
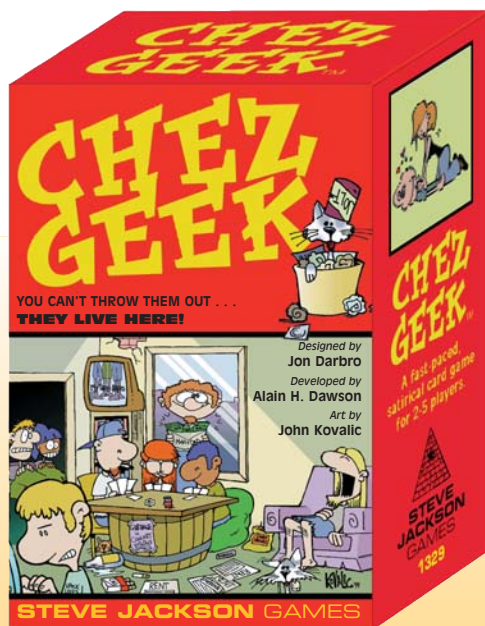
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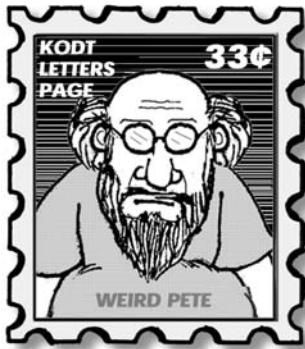


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Dear KODT,

Just got finished with issue 46 and as we say at home, your imagination is brighter than the Northern Lights on a winter night. Keep up the good work!

I am from Alaska but am currently in the Air Force and stationed in Florida. My work field is similar to that of a civilian Bomb Squad — robots, bomb suit, C-4, mine detectors and lots of other cool stuff. I can't figure for the life of me why they would let a gamer play with explosives, and pay me for it too! Life is good!

My dilemma is this: they are sending me to Kuwait for a 3 month rotation. Now, as much as I would love to pack my gaming buddies into a crate with enough chips and beer to last the trip, I'm afraid that I need all that extra space to carry my equipment. I was wondering if there is an ongoing gaming club that is present on the bases in Kuwait. If there is, I would like to join for all of my 3 months there. If not, I might get one started and see if I can't keep it going after I leave. The rotations are every 3 months, but if I can get the word out to our gamers in uniform that are coming, they might just bring their dice and keep the game alive after I leave. Could you let me know if you know of such a group, and if not, could you refer me to someone who might? It would help ease the suffering of this Alaskan-grown gamer while he is in the closest thing to hell on the face of this earth.

Travis Jones  
lizebeth14@juno.com

*I couldn't find anything as far as gaming groups in Kuwait, Travis. Knowing the military, I have no doubt such groups exist. Fortunately, over 20,000 readers will be reading about your search. I'm fairly confident at least one of them will be able to answer your question.*

*Please let us know how it works out. And be sure to take some sun-block with you.*

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I am the (un?)fortunate girlfriend of a gamercomic book reader. Therefore I am subjected to gamer rants, participation in gaming sessions, and frequent trips to the comic book store. Up to the point of discovering *Knights of the Dinner Table* I found these trips to be boring and better if

## Our Readers Talk Back!

avoided all together.

I just couldn't get into a comic that was about impossible huge breasts (*I know, I know there must be something wrong with me.*) But a few weeks ago the comic shop guy suggested *Knights of the Dinner Table Illustrated™* to me because I some times pick up copies of the original KODT.

I loved the *Illustrated* version and spent most of the next trip to the comic shop laughing hysterically with the comic shop guy about the 'Gazebo' incident. So this week I go in and he tells me I should check out this new comic, KODT: *Hackmasters of Everknight™*.

I am still laughing: the characters, the little sight gags of pop culture trivia! the whole thing was just fun! So please keep this comic coming, it makes being a good gamer girlfriend so much easier!!!!

Thanks!

P.E.M.  
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

All these years of comic book reading and this is the first book EVER to prompt me to write a letter.

I have to tell you, I LOVE your comic!!!! I'm constantly rereading them over and over and over and over again! (*I commute to work so it's a great way to pass the time.*)

No matter how many times I read your books I always find something still amusing, not only that but it's INSPIRATIONAL!

I've already adapted and made my own version of *Formula Day* and *Race for the White House!* Both ROCK!

I was going to do the same with your *Fairy Meat* till I realized it's actually coming out! (*Whew! thanks! saves me some trouble*)

But all that aside, recently something else has made your comic great, it's you guys who write and draw it.

You people have made me proud to be a gamer! For years I used to hide the fact and label myself as a role-player! Now reading all the stories outside the KODT's antics, I realize it's nothing to be ashamed of at all.

I met you all at *GenCon* last year in the dealers room when I was a newbie to KODT and hadn't realized the magnitude of the situation.

Now, I can't wait till the next con so I can do a live reading and maybe run or enter in a KODT Trivia contest!

The strip is great and I'd like to say don't change a thing but I'm sure if you do, it'll just make the comic better.

I'd love to see more cross overs between gaming groups, it's interesting to see the knights mixmatch with the Hand, I'd looove to see B.A. run for the Hand one

day! Or maybe Stevil sit in on a game with the knights.

Keep cranking out issues guys and don't ever stop!

New Jack  
via E-mail

*Thanks for the kudos, Jack. Having just returned from GenCon 2000 and spending four days rubbing elbows with fellow gamers I can definitely say there's no shame in being a gamer. Wear that badge proudly.*

*One of the reasons I love attending conventions is because I'm always reminded of the fact that gamers are just about the nicest and friendliest group of people to be found.*

Jolly

Dear KODT,

You're the best! Your comic just keeps getting better n' better! Jolly is a gawd - albeit a minor one... (*Editor's note: Perhaps you didn't hear but my minor-gawdship status was recently revoked. I haven't given up. I hope to gain martyrdom status shortly if I can figure out a way to take a bullet for one of the other developers — Jolly*) Everybody knows you guys are great...so let's just skip the usual pleasantries shall we?

I got the urge to write after picking up issue number 43. Damn funny stuff fellas! I don't know what happened...whether you guys took an extended break...or there were shipping delays...or simply my local game store didn't want to stock up until after they had done an inventory check for the Goods and Services tax (*here in Australia they're taxing my two favourite things...movies and KODT - it's insane I tell ya*).

But, in any case, for some reason they didn't have a new copy of KODT for the last two and a half months!

It was looking slightly pathetic at one stage. Day after day I would wander in and peer in vain into the "new releases" shelf, almost giving up hope of ever seeing another KODT comic in store again...! Until one day... boom!

Incredible! Not only did they have issue 43...but issues number 44, 45 AND a copy of the new *Hackmasters!* Hoody freakin' hoo!!

Like a knight at the end of the quest for the Holy Grail...I approached cautiously, fearing it would all turn out to be a cruel hoax...perhaps an optical illusion caused by my tear-blurred vision...only trusting my senses after I had each comic wrapped firmly in my hands.

Even then, it wasn't until I was home, in the comfort of my own bed, that I gave myself permission to eagerly leap into the fray, devouring every page like a college student cramming for his finals.

*(Oh yeah...here's a word of advice...if your pregnant wife wants a back rub but you tell her she will have to wait until 'after I finish*

TABLE TALK: READER MAIL

this comic"...this is NOT a good thing!")

My only regret (besides having to sleep later on the couch)...is that I had gorged myself too quickly...not only do I have to wait until the next batch of comics comes in (whenever that'll be!) but it's kinda like OD'ing on too many Star Trek videos ...it takes time to draw yourself out of the fantasy world and distinguish between what is reality and what was only your imagination ("Take out the garbage? Taragon the fighter doesn't take out the garbage!")

Anyway, about the comic...I loved the new "glossy" colour layout (e.g. the Editorials of a Madman)...is this going to be regular or are you going to return to the old black and white format?

Also, with all the new comics you have coming out (Hackmasters, Knights Illustrated, Travellers, etc) I was wondering if you could do a strip where the Knights find a similar comic in their world which also spoofs gamers - I would love to see how they react! (Would Bob be insulted by the way they portray hack n' slashers? Would Dave even realize they were making fun of gamers like him? Would Brian be critical of the comics analysis of gamers "Hey...no way would the magic user sit in the middle of the table! Everyone can see what he's doing; that's a classic strategy flaw right there!")

Well, whichever way the Knights go, I'm sure I'll be there to follow their antics - once again, thanks for making such a great quality comic...and if you get the chance, please visit us in Australia one day!

Chris Yee  
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

You wrote in your issue #44 editorial "See Ya on Games Day" that you'd searched online to see if anyone had established a National Games Day.

You might be happy to know that such a thing is alive and well in Northeast Florida. Twice a year, in the spring and the fall, gamers converge for a weekend of gaming and assorted mayhem at what my fiance Will calls, "My apartment's finest science fiction convention."

The aptly named Willcon offers two full days of role playing, board gaming, PC-playing, video-watching, and, above all, good fellowship to gamers from as far south as Tampa, and as far north as South Carolina.

Our attendance topped 30 last year, and continues to grow with each con. Of course, it's in our house, so we don't see it getting too much larger -- at least not until we move to a bigger place. Anyway, check out the website at [www.willcon.net](http://www.willcon.net) to read more about the brainchild of my beloved. And take heart in knowing that while gaming as a hobby may wax and wane, it'll never die. Especially not as long as KODT exists to bring others into the fold!

Thanks for an interesting, educational, and hilarious publication.

Candice Davis  
via E-mail

Wow! Incredible. But...say, you neglected to give us directions to your house.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I just want to say I really enjoy your mag. I was looking through some of my back issues and saw something interesting. Patty Gauzweiler appears on page 4 of issue #20 in an ad for the KODT comic. This is actually the first time she appears in KODT, more than two years before issue #45. And to answer your next question, yes I do have way too much time on my hands. Thanks again for making me laugh every month. HOODY HOO!!!!

Anonymous  
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

My continuing kudos on the KODT strips. However, on Page 16 of #45, top panel, I was distressed to find "Juno", which is a registered trademark of a national ISP, substituted for Juneau, the capital of Alaska, named for it's founder, a Mr. Juneau. BTW, Juneau isn't all that big... 30-40 thousand people or so...

It is nice, however, to see yet another group in the pages of KODT. And a group with more than one woman. (I'd thought about using the term ladies, but figured that excluded Patty and Mo.)

Wil Hostman  
via E-mail

Thanks for writing in Wil. My bad. I guess I got confused. You see, Petroff, my fifth level mage-assassin switched his patron gawd from Luvia to Juno (the wife of Jupiter and goddess of light, beginnings, birth, women and marriage) a few months ago in anger after Luvia refused to intervene on his behalf. I've got to learn not to bring my problems to the office.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I just got Issue 44 (normal procedure--a friend gives them to me after he reads them) where I read about your search for a National Games Day. I looked in The Teacher's Calendar and found National Game and Puzzle Week, which will be Nov. 19-25 this year.

"Description: To increase appreciation of games and puzzles while conserving the tradition of investing time with family and friends. Annually, the last week in November. For info: [www.patchproducts.com](http://www.patchproducts.com)."

I love this book. I discovered through it that not only is October National Popcorn Popping Month, it is also National Caramel Month; so I'm celebrating my birthday this year with homemade caramel covered popcorn.

Keep up the entertaining work on the KODT. I look forward to it every month.

Tanya Koenig  
via E-mail

Hoody Hoo! Thanks, Tanya. It's nice to know that games not only have their own 'day' but an entire week!! I guess by the time this issue hits the streets your birthday will be rolling around. From everyone at KenzerCo, "Happy B-Day!"

Jolly

Dear KODT,

My apologies for disturbing you with what will probably seem like a foolish question, but this is something I've been wondering about:

In the various Bundles Of Trouble, you have pointed out that all of the characters and situations that have appeared have been based (in part or whole) on actual events.

That being the case, what event(s) inspired the infamous Red Gurdy Pickens? He's the only KODT character (game or RL) which I've never encountered myself or had anyone else describe to me second-hand.

Keep up the good work -- I look forward to the further adventures of the Knights, and their adversaries (Gary Jackson, etc.).

Chris French  
[csadn@ix.netcom.com](mailto:csadn@ix.netcom.com)

When my friends and I first started playing D&D a running-joke developed in my campaigns where certain adversaries would miraculously return from the grave. My players loved foiling my best laid plans to 'do them in' and whenever they managed to take out one of my bad guys they loved to rub it in my face for weeks by taunting and ribbing me to no end.

Like a bad movie sequel, I would find ways to bring the villains back again and again. It got to the point where such nemeses began to transcend role-playing genres and even completely different systems in their zeal to wreak revenge on certain players.

Red Gurdy Pickens was largely inspired by those tit-for-tat antics. He was also inspired by an old Star Trek episode (Shore Leave) where Captain Kirk is forced to repeatedly fist fight a holographic version of one of his old Star Fleet Academy classmates (Ensign Finnegan -- who just happened to be Irish.)

Watching poor Kirk being pummeled over and over again by Finnegan, who never seemed to take damage, always reminded me of those early D&D adventures with my friends.

Jolly



Dear  
KODT

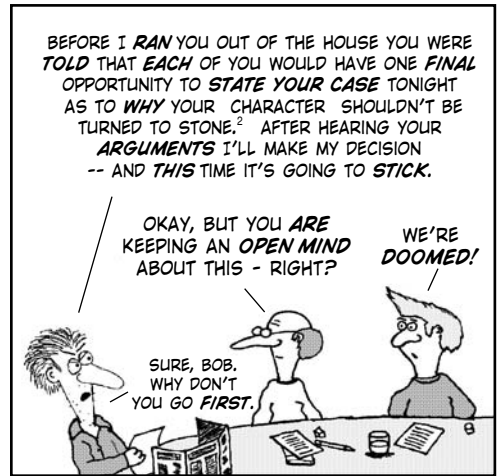
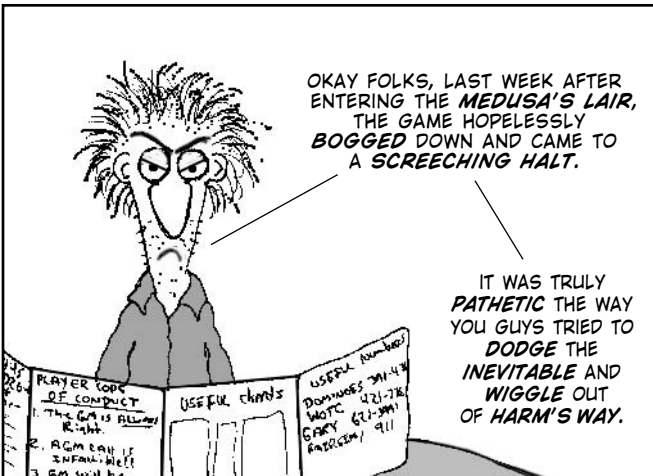
SOMETHING  
ON YOUR MIND?

SOMETHING YOU WANT  
TO TELL US OR SHARE WITH  
YOUR FELLOW READERS?

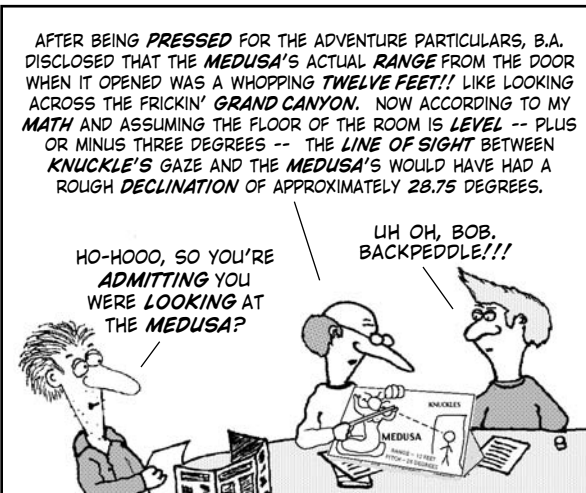
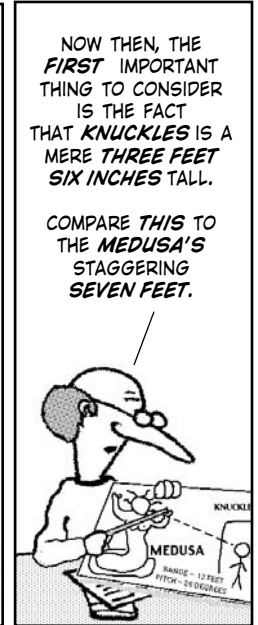
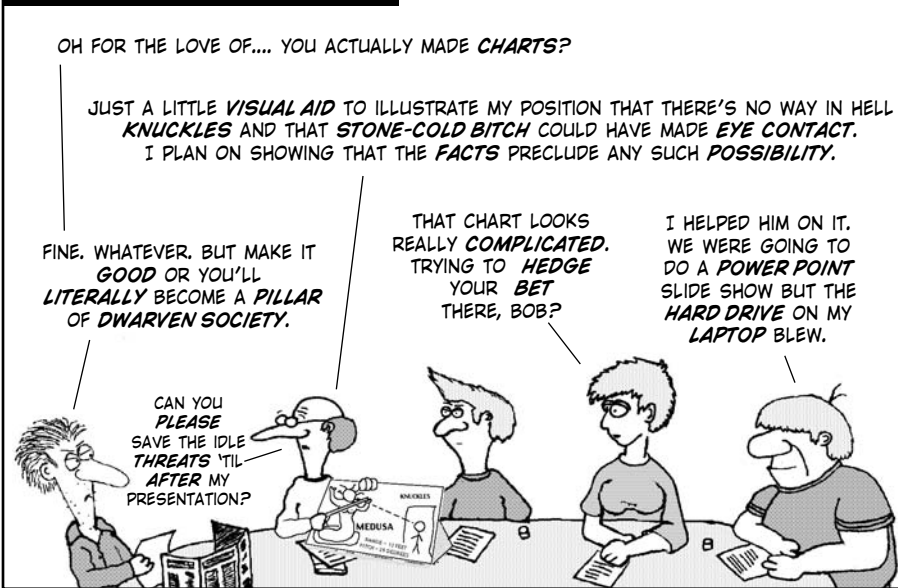
**DROP US A LETTER!!**

[e-mail mailbag@kenzerco.com](mailto:e-mail@mailbag@kenzerco.com)

or write to KODT Mailbag,  
830 W. Main Street, PMB 114  
Lake Zurich, IL 60047



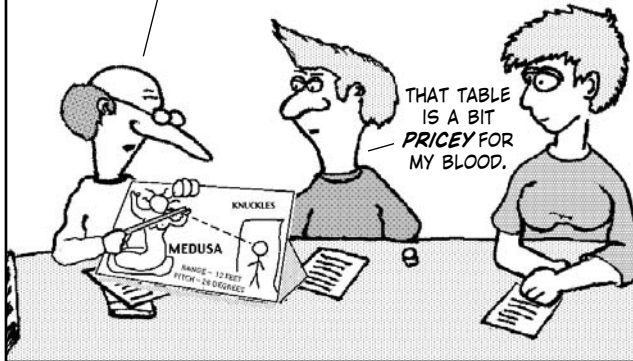
## A FEW SECONDS LATER...



<sup>1</sup> See **KODT #47**: "Made You Look"

<sup>2</sup> B.A. agreed that only **ONE** player would actually be turned to stone by the Medusa's gaze after Brian cited a famous **HMPA** case which decided "any character who sees another character petrify should be afforded an opportunity to interpret the petrification as sufficient warning that a Basilisk is visible and avert there gaze."

NOW IT'S **COMMON KNOWLEDGE** THAT **KNUCKLES** DRESSES IN THE **TRADITIONAL STYLE** OF THE **DWARVES OF PRAXTER**. I WON'T GO INTO **ALL** THE **DETAILS** BUT **ONE PART** OF HIS **ENSEMBLE** INCLUDES A **HOODED JERKIN** -- **ITEM 142** ON THE **GARMENTS, FINE, LEATHER** SUBTABLE ON THE **STANDARD PRICE LIST** FROM THE **PLAYER'S HANDBOOK**.



THAT TABLE IS A BIT **PRICEY** FOR MY **BLOOD**.

NOW **HERE** WE HAVE A **BLOW UP** OF THE COVER OF THE PAPERBACK EDITION OF **STURM PYRE'S LEGACY** -- A **HACKMASTERS OF EVERKNIGHT** NOVELLA. **OL' STURM** HERE IS WEARING A **HOODED JERKIN** OF THE TYPE I JUST DESCRIBED. YOU WILL NOTICE HOW THE **HOOD** IS PULLED **LOW** OVER THE **BROW**. THIS IS THE **ACCEPTED NORM** FOR WEARING THIS GARMENT.

OKAY, SO YOU KNOW YOUR **DWARVEN FASHION**. WHAT'S YOUR **POINT**?



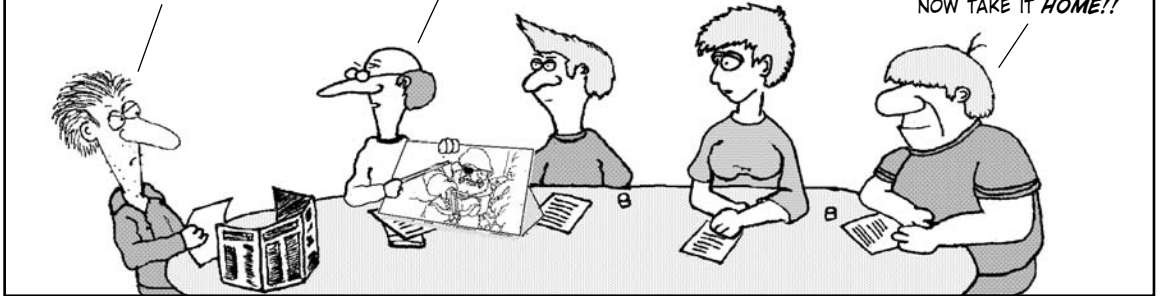
MY POINT? ISN'T IT **OBVIOUS**?

A **LINE-OF-SIGHT** DECLINATION OF **28.75 DEGREES** COMBINED WITH A **HOOD-PROTRUSION** OVER THE **BROW** OF APPROXIMATELY **THREE** AND A **QUARTER** INCHES CONSTITUTES A **VISUAL OBSTRUCTION** -- WHICH ALL ADDS UP TO ONLY **ONE** REASONABLE CONCLUSION -- **KNUCKLES** COULD **NOT** SEE THE **MEDUSA'S EYES** FROM HIS **VANTAGE POINT**.

GIMME A **BREAK**. YOU'VE GOT A **NECK** DON'T YOU? YOU DIDN'T FACTOR IN **HEAD-TILT**.

ACTUALLY I HAVE A **CHART** HERE WHICH SHOWS THAT MY **BOLT POUCH** AND **PACK FRAME** WOULD HAVE **SEVERELY LIMITED** MY RANGE OF **NECK MOTION**.....

**HAR HAR!!!** WHAT DID I **TELL** YOU BOB? I **KNEW** B.A. WOULD COUNTER WITH THAT **ARGUMENT**. YOU GOT HIM ON THE **RUN** -- NOW TAKE IT **HOME!!!**

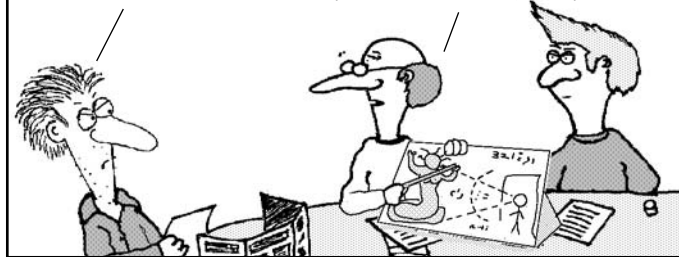


**TWENTY SIX MINUTES LATER...**

...AND WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT **KNUCKLES** WAS STANDING **DIRECTLY** IN THE **DOORWAY** -- **BACKLIT**, MIND YOU, BY THE **FLAMES** FROM THE **TORCH BEARER'S** TORCH IT SHOULD BE **OBVIOUS** THAT MY **INFRAVISION** WAS **TOTALLY** DIMINISHED. I WAS PRACTICALLY **BLIND**.

OKAY, I'VE HEARD **ENOUGH** BOB. YOU CAN STOP RIGHT THERE.

STOP? B-B-BUT I'M NOT FINISHED. I STILL HAVE SOME **CHARTS** SHOWING **KNUCKLE'S AVERAGE REACTION TIMES** TO PAST **VISUAL THREATS**.



NO NEED TO SHOW THEM TO ME. -SIGH- YOU'VE **CONVINCED** ME THAT **KNUCKLES** ISN'T THE **ONE** TO **TURN TO STONE**. I DON'T REALLY **AGREE** WITH YOUR **LOGIC** BUT NEVERTHELESS, I'M GOING TO **REWARD** YOU FOR AT LEAST TAKING THIS **SERIOUSLY** AND MAKING A WELL **THOUGHT OUT** ATTEMPT TO SAVE YOUR OWN **ASS**.

ABOUT THE CLOSEST THING I'VE SEEN RESEMBLING **REAL** **ROLE-PLAY** AROUND HERE IN MONTHS.



OH C'MON, B.A. THAT'S TOTALLY *UNFAIR!* I *POURED* MY *HEART* INTO *TEFLON BILLY'S* EULOGY AT *MADAME FANIGAN'S* WAKE. YOU EVEN GAVE ME A +5 MODIFIER ON MY *ROUSING SPEECH* ROLL WHICH INDICATED THE *CROWD* WAS MOVED TO TEARS. IF THAT'S WASN'T *GOOD ROLE-PLAY* WHAT THE *HELL* IS?

WADDA YA MEAN YOU *POURED* YOUR *HEART* INTO IT? YOU SIMPLY ANNOUNCED, "LET'S GET THIS *BITCH* IN THE GROUND" AND *TOSSED* THE DICE. I GAVE YOU THE *MODIFIER* BECAUSE *TEFLON* WAS *INEBRIATED* AND EVERYONE *LOVES* A *DRUNK* -- NOT BECAUSE I WAS *IMPRESSED* WITH YOUR *ROLE-PLAY*.

WHAT A *RIP!* YOU TRY TO GO THE *EXTRA MILE* IN THIS *CAMPAIGN* AND YOU GET *SQUAT*.



NOW THAT'S NOT *EXACTLY* TRUE, BRIAN. YOU *DID* MANAGE TO *SHAKE DOWN* *WIDOWER FANIGAN* FOR 300 GOLD PIECES FOR YOUR "*PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT*".

HEY, THE *MAN* WANTED A *SPEECH* - HE  *GOT ONE*. IT'S NOT *MY* FAULT HE DIDN'T TAKE ME *SERIOUSLY* WHEN I TOLD HIM THERE WOULD BE A *SMALL FEE*.



OKAY DAVE, YOU'RE ON DECK. TELL ME *WHY* YOUR *CHARACTER* SHOULDN'T BE TURNED TO STONE.

DAMN, BOB. YOU'RE A *TOUGH ACT* TO FOLLOW DUDE.

JUST DO IT THE WAY WE *REHEARSED*. YOU'LL BE *FINE*.

YOU GUYS *REHEARSED?* OH I CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR THIS.

DAVE, FOR *YOUR* SAKE I CERTAINLY HOPE YOU'RE NOT STILL *CLINGING* TO YOUR *STANCE* THAT YOU ALWAYS *FOCUS* ON THE END OF YOUR *SWORD* AND *NEVER* LOOK AT YOUR *OPPONENT*.\*



BECAUSE IF YOU *ARE*, YOU'LL BE *TREADING* ON SOME VERY *THIN ICE*. IF YOU *INSIST* THAT *EL RAVAGER* NEVER *LOOKS* AT HIS *OPPONENTS* WHEN ATTACKING YOU'RE LEAVING YOURSELF *WIDE OPEN* FOR B.A. TO SLAP A *PERMANENT* *NEGATIVE TO-HIT* MODIFIER ON YA. I JUST THOUGHT I'D *POINT* THAT OUT.

BUT IT'S THE *ONLY* ARGUMENT I GOT!!

BRIAN? THAT WAS CERTAINLY *TACKY*. YOU JUST *POINTED* IT OUT TO B.A. AS WELL.

OH... DID I?

SORRY. MY BAD.



AH, THE *HELL* WITH IT. I'LL BE *HONEST*, B.A. -- I'VE GOT *NOTHING*.

I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO *WASTE* YOUR TIME.



DUDE, WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU DOING? YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR YOUR *LIFE* HERE.

I'M *THROWING* MYSELF AT THE *MERCY* OF THE *GM*.

MERCY OF THE *GM*? THERE'S NO SUCH ANIMAL.

WHATEVER.



\* See *KODT #47*: "Made You Look"

DUDE, YOU WALKED **RIGHT** INTO BRIAN'S HANDS. DON'T YOU SEE? HE MADE YOU THE **PIGEON!** IF YOU GET TURNED TO **STONE** THEN THERE'S NO REASON FOR **B.A.** TO EVEN **HEAR** THE REST OF THE **ARGUMENTS**. BRIAN'S TRYING TO SAVE HIS **OWN ASS** AT **YOUR** EXPENSE. HE JUST **PLAYED** YOU LIKE A USED **ATARI 400!!**

W-H-O-A-H! DAVE? WHAT'S THIS? YOU'RE ACTUALLY **CONCEDING** TO MY **AUTHORITY?**

C'MON. BRIAN WOULDN'T **DO** ME THAT WAY.

WOULD HE?

W-W-WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT **ME** FOR? I WASN'T TRYING TO **TORPEDO**, DAVE. I SWEAR. I WAS **GENUINELY** CONCERNED FOR HIM.

REALLY? I WAS TRYING TO **HELP**.

SURE YOU WERE BRIAN.

WELL.....THIS IS CERTAINLY **REFRESHING**. I APPRECIATE YOUR **HONESTY** DAVE -- AND FOR **SPARING** ME THE **USUAL** LINE OF **B.S.** I'VE COME TO **EXPECT** FROM YOU.

IN FACT, I'M GOING TO **WITHHOLD** MY DECISION REGARDING **EL RAVAGER** UNTIL I HEAR **BRIAN** AND **SARA'S** ARGUMENTS.

YOU JUST MIGHT GET THROUGH THIS UNSCATHED.

NOW THAT I **THINK** ABOUT IT, THERE'S NO **NEED** FOR **SARA** TO PRESENT HER **CASE**. I **ALREADY** DECIDED **LAST WEEK** THAT SHE COULDN'T BE THE **ONE** TURNED TO **STONE**. SHE **CLEARLY** STATED SHE WAS **LOOKING** TOWARD THE **REAR** OF THE PARTY BECAUSE SHE SUSPECTED SOME SORT OF **AMBUSH**.

WHEW! THANK GOODNESS. WHO **KNEW** BEING **PARANOID** WOULD END UP **SAVING** MY LIFE?

HMMRRFFF! ONCE AGAIN THE '**COUSIN CARD**' COMES INTO PLAY.

IN A WAY YOU WERE **RIGHT**. IT WAS AN **AMBUSH**.

IT COMES DOWN TO YOU, **BRIAN**. AND JUST SO YOU KNOW WHERE WE **STAND**, I'M GOING TO BE **HONEST** WITH YOU. AT **THIS POINT**, I'M REALLY **LEANING** TOWARD YOU AS THE **VICTIM**.

YOU **CLEARLY** INDICATED YOU WERE BRINGING **FIREBALLS** ONLINE WHEN **BOB** OPENED THE DOOR. THEREFORE YOUR **INTENT** TO **LOCATE** A **TARGET** IS **IRREFUTABLE**.

LAYER CODE OF CONDUCT  
THE GUY IS ALLIANCE  
RE: ...

USEFUL THINGS

USEFUL NUMBERS  
DOROTHY'S 941-474  
WOTC 421-782  
GARY 671-3941  
... 911

THIS MAY **SURPRISE** YOU B.A. BUT I WHOLEHEARTEDLY **AGREE** WITH YOU. I CAME TO THE **SAME** CONCLUSION. I WAS IN **TARGET ACQUISITION MODE** AND THERE'S NO DENYING IT.

WHAT?! DUDE YOU HAD THE "I WAS READING MY **SPELLBOOK**" DEFENSE - IT WAS **GOLDEN**.

OH I SEE. YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO RIDE THE **HONESTY TICKET** 'COZ YOU SEE IT'S **WORKING** FOR **ME**. WELL STOP **MUDDYING UP** THE WATERS.

I'M JUST ADMITTING THAT B.A.'S **RIGHT**. IT'S **IRREFUTABLE**.

UH OH! NOW WHAT THE **HELL** IS HE UP TO?

FORTUNATELY I HAD AN **ACE UP** MY SLEEVE THE **WHOLE TIME** AND DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT.

OKAY BRIAN. WHAT IS IT *THIS TIME*? A *LOOP HOLE*? SOME *SHODDY RULE* YOU FOUND A WAY TO *EXPLOIT*?

NAAAA, NOTHING LIKE THAT. IN FACT I *REALLY* THOUGHT I WAS *TOAST*. I WRACKED MY BRAIN *ALL WEEK* BUT COULDN'T COME UP WITH A SINGLE *VALID* ARGUMENT TO SAVE MY *SORRY BUTT!*

THEN WHAT GIVES? YOU MENTIONED HAVING AN *ACE*.



I ONLY *STUMBLED* UPON IT *LAST NIGHT*. TALK ABOUT YER *LATE HOUR REPRIEVES*. IMAGINE MY *EMBARRASSMENT* WHEN I REALIZED MY *OVERSIGHT*. IT WAS *RECORDED* RIGHT THERE ON MY *CHARACTER SHEET* THE *WHOLE TIME*. LIKE A *BIG GOOF* I'D SIMPLY *FORGOTTEN* ALL ABOUT IT.

FORGOT ABOUT WHAT, BRIAN? IS THIS ONE OF YOUR *TRICKS*? COZ IF IT IS, I'M NOT GOING TO...

NO, IT'S NO *TRICK*, B.A. I *ASSURE* YOU THIS IS *TOTALLY LEGIT*. YOU REMEMBER ABOUT *EIGHT YEARS* AGO WHEN I WAS RUNNING *TEFLON'S* FATHER, *CRIMSON LOTUS*?\*



*CRIMSON LOTUS*? SURE I REMEMBER HIM. HE *DIED* DURING THE *THREE RIVERS ORDEAL*. BUT WHAT'S HE GOT TO DO WITH THE *HERE AND NOW*?



WELL AS YOU MAY RECALL, *CRIMSON LOTUS* AND *SCORN-DEXTER* THE *HALFLING MONK* WENT UP AGAINST A TOUGH-ASS *BURROWING BASILISK* IN THE *DARK HORDES OF DEVASTATION* ADVENTURE. WE HAD A *DEVIL* OF A TIME TRYING TO *DEFEAT* THAT *CRITTER*.

OBVIOUSLY I REMEMBER. I *WROTE* THAT ADVENTURE. WHERE YOU GOING WITH THIS?

LOOKS LIKE HE HAS AN *ACE* UP HIS SLEEVE AFTERALL. I *KNOW* THAT VOICE -- IT'S JUST *DRIPPING* WITH CONFIDENCE.

THIS SHOULD BE *GOOD*.

TO OVERCOME THAT MONSTER, *CRIMSON LOTUS* DEVISED A *NEW* MAGIC ITEM OF HIS *OWN DESIGN*.



*CRIMSON'S INVISIBLE HELM OF GAZE-AVERSION!*



*INVISIBLE HELM*? SOUNDS INTERESTING. WHAT IS IT?

IT'S AN INVISIBLE SILVER *GREAT HELM* WITH THE *VISOR* WELDED SHUT. ON THE *INSIDE* OF THE *VISOR* A *PERPETUAL ILLUSION SPELL* SHOWS THE *WEARER* WHAT HE WOULD *SEE* IF HE WEREN'T WEARING THE *HELMET*.



IT WAS ONE OF MY *FIRST* ATTEMPTS TO USE *MAGIC* TO MIMIC *HIGH-TECH GADGETRY*. THE *HELM* WAS DESIGNED TO BE A SORT OF *MAGICAL VR HEADS-UP DISPLAY!*

THE *BEAUTY* OF THE THING IS THAT *NO ONE* KNOWS YOU'RE WEARING IT.



\* See *Tales from the Vault Volume One*: Crimson Lotus was a mage Brian ran in B.A.'s first campaign. Crimson kept a detailed journal of his adventures which (Brian maintains) was passed down from character to character until it finally fell into the hands of Black Lotus (Teflon Billy's true name) his great, great, great grandson.

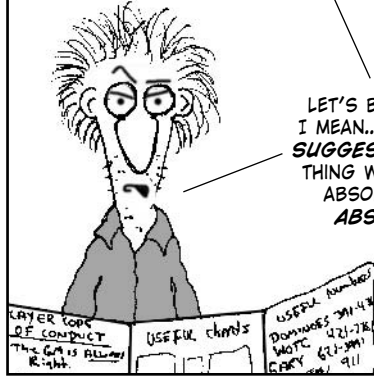
BUT THAT'S NOT *ALL*. ANOTHER *SWEET FEATURE* OF THE *HELM* IS THAT THE WEARER CAN USE A *MENTAL COMMAND* TO TEMPORARILY *TURN OFF* THE *AURA OF INVISIBILITY*. *CRIMSON LOTUS* SIMPLY WALKED UP TO THE *BASILISK* AND GOT THE CREATURE TO *GAZE* AT HIM. WHEN HE MADE THE *HELM VISIBLE* THE *BASILISK* SAW HIS *OWN GAZE* ON THE *HELM'S* REFLECTIVE SURFACE AND *TURNED TO STONE*. -SNICKER- YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE *LOOK* ON THAT *BASILISK'S* FACE -- IT WAS *COMICAL*.

THAT'S *INGENIOUS*, BRIAN. BUT I DON'T SEE HOW IT *HELPS* YOU.



SHE'S *RIGHT*, BRIAN. WHY ARE YOU WASTING OUR TIME WITH ALL THIS? IT'S NOT LIKE *TEFLON BILLY* EVEN *HAS* THE *HELMET*. AND EVEN IF HE *DID* I DON'T THINK HE'D BE WALKING AROUND *WEARING IT ALL THE TIME* ON THE *OFF CHANCE* HE MIGHT RUN INTO A *MEDUSA* OR *BASILISK*.

LET'S BE *REAL*. I MEAN...TO EVEN *SUGGEST* SUCH A THING WOULD BE *ABSOLUTELY ABSURD*.



YEAH, I SUPPOSE IT *WOULD* BE *ABSURD* IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE FACT THAT THE *HELM* WAS HANDED DOWN TO *TEFLON BILLY* ALONG WITH *CRIMSON LOTUS' JOURNAL* AND OTHER *PERSONAL EFFECTS*. IT'S CLEARLY LISTED ON *CRIMSON'S* LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT. *TEFLON* EVEN *PAWNED* IT ONCE WHEN HE WAS DOWN ON HIS LUCK.

ANYWAY, LAST NIGHT AS I WAS GOING OVER MY NOTES I NOTICED *CRIMSON'S HELM* LISTED ON MY *CHARACTER SHEET* IN REALLY *SMALL PRINT*.



AND *RIGHT THERE* BESIDE THE *ENTRY* ARE THE WORDS, "*TEFLON BILLY WEARS THE HELM AT ALL TIMES*." *HAR HAR!!* CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? I WAS *SWEATIN' BULLETS FOR NOTHING!* I'M *SO EMBARRASSED*. NOT LIKE ME TO FORGET A *DETAIL* LIKE THAT.

YOU HAVE *GOT* TO BE *KIDDING*. ARE YOU FOR *REAL*?

IT'S ALL *RIGHT* HERE ON MY *CHARACTER SHEET*. WANNA SEE?

AS A *MATTER OF FACT*, I DO.



OH YOU SHOULD BE *EMBARRASSED* ALRIGHT. WHAT A *BLATANT* ATTEMPT TO *CHEAT* YOUR WAY OUT OF A *JAM*. I THOUGHT YOU HAD MORE *RESPECT* FOR YOURSELF THAN THAT, BRIAN.

*CHEAT??!!* FIRK DING --YOU SAYIN' I'M *LYING???*

C'MON BRIAN. GET THAT *HALF-BAKED* EXCUSE OF AN *ARGUMENT* OFF THE TABLE. *NOBODY'S* GOING TO BUY SUCH A LOAD OF *NONSENSE*.

I'M REALLY DISAPPOINTED IN YOU BRIAN.

*WHOAH!* GUYS! IT'S HERE - *JUST LIKE HE SAID*.

OF COURSE IT'S THERE!



IT PROVES *NOTHING*, SARA. HE COULD HAVE *SCRAWLED* THAT *NOTATION* ON HIS SHEET AT *ANY TIME*.

PUT YOURSELF IN *MY SHOES*. HOW *PLAUSIBLE* IS YOUR STORY? WE'RE TO BELIEVE THAT *TEFLON* HAS BEEN WEARING SOME STUPID *INVISIBLE HELMET* FOR THE LAST *FIVE YEARS?*



WAIT! I CAN PROVE I'M TELLING THE TRUTH. EVERY MONTH YOU HAVE US TURN IN PHOTO COPIES OF OUR CHARACTER SHEETS FOR YOUR ARCHIVES. THE LAST SHEET I TURNED IN WAS A FULL TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE MEDUSA ENCOUNTER. I DEMAND YOU PULL YOUR COPY AND CHECK IT. YOU'LL FIND THE HELM AND THE FACT TEFLON WEARS IT AT ALL TIME ANNOTATED -- JUST LIKE I SAID.

THAT WOULD SETTLE THE MATTER ALL RIGHT. YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO WITHDRAW YOUR ARGUMENT BEFORE I CALL YOUR BLUFF?

I BELIEVE YOU BRIAN. IT SOUNDS JUST LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D DO.

THANKS DAVE. AT LEAST SOMEONE HAS A LITTLE REGARD FOR MY INTEGRITY.

ACCEPT HIS OFFER, BRIAN. NO ONE BLAMES YOU. YOU WENT TOO FAR.



**A FEW SECONDS LATER AS B.A. DIGS THROUGH HIS ARCHIVES.**

THIS IS TENSE! KINDA LIKE THE O.J. TRIAL WHEN THEY ASKED HIM TO PUT ON THE GLOVE.

HEY, YOU DON'T SUPPOSE BRIAN HAS POWERS LIKE THE AMAZING KRESKIN DO YOU? THAT GUY COULD WRITE HIS NAME ON A PLAYING CARD STILL IN A SEALED DECK.

YOU KNOW BRIAN, SOMETHING JUST OCCURRED TO ME ABOUT CRIMSON'S HELMET.

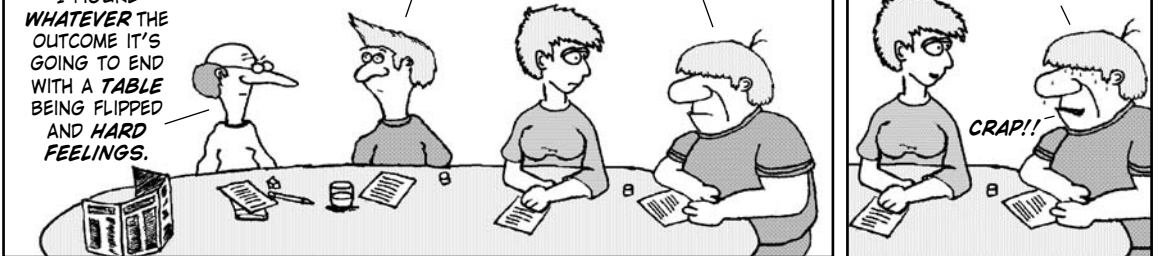
OH YEAH? WHAT'S THAT?

IF IT'S INVISIBLE WOULDN'T YOU BE ABLE TO SEE RIGHT THROUGH IT? AFTER ALL YOU SAID IT GIVES OFF AN INVISIBLE AURA SO WOULDN'T THE HEADS-UP ILLUSION BE INVISIBLE AS WELL?

UH...ER... WELL...UH...

CRAP!!

I FIGURE WHATEVER THE OUTCOME IT'S GOING TO END WITH A TABLE BEING FLIPPED AND HARD FEELINGS.



UH...ER...ACTUALLY I BELIEVE CRIMSON TOOK THAT INTO ACCOUNT WHEN HE...UH...ER...YEAH, HE FOUND A WAY TO ENGINEER A SOLUTION AND WORK AROUND THAT PROBLEM. THE...UH...ER... THE DETAILS ARE IN MY NOTES SOMEWHERE. I...UH...ER...

YOU REALLY DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL I TOLD YOU - DID YOU? IT'S WRITTEN ALL OVER YOUR FACE.

OKAY, OKAY, HOW 'BOUT A FREE SLOP-N-GO MINI PAINTING FOR EACH OF YOU FOR YOUR SILENCE?

B.A. WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO WAS GREEN. SOUNDS LIKE YOU GOOFED UP.

MAKE IT "TABLE TOP" QUALITY AND YOU HAVE A DEAL.

DEAL!



**A FEW MOMENTS LATER....**

OKAY, I LOOKED OVER MY ARCHIVE COPY OF YOUR CHARACTER SHEET, BRIAN. I EVEN WENT BACK SEVERAL YEARS. TURNS OUT YOU WERE RIGHT -- IT'S ANNOTATED JUST LIKE YOU SAID. YOU WERE BEING TRUTHFUL.

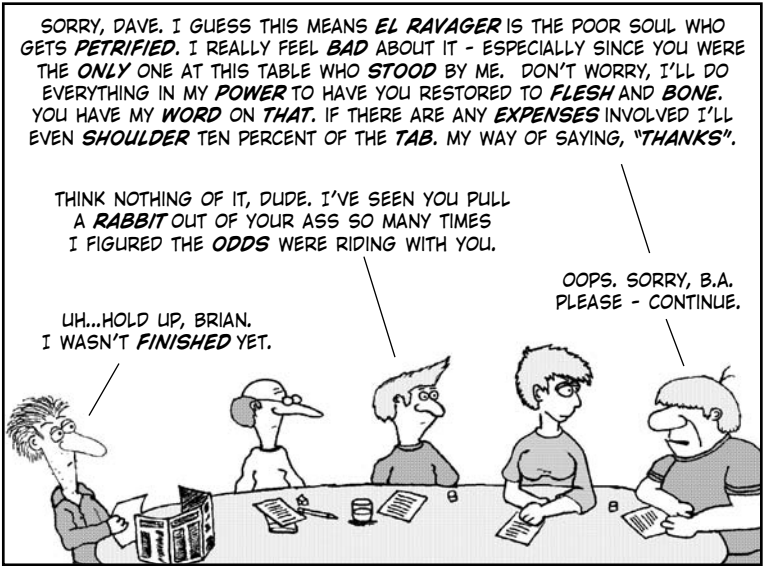
I OFFER YOU A VERY SINCERE APOLOGY, OLD FRIEND. I'M SORRY I DOUBTED YOU. I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.





WELL I'M *GLAD* TO HEAR IT. NEXT TIME MAYBE YOU WON'T BE SO *QUICK* TO RUSH TO JUDGEMENT.

THE *IMPORTANT* THING IS THAT *TEFLON BILLY* DIDN'T *BUY THE FARM* SIMPLY BECAUSE OF A *BAD GM-CALL*. *TRULY* THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A *TRAVESTY* OF JUSTICE.

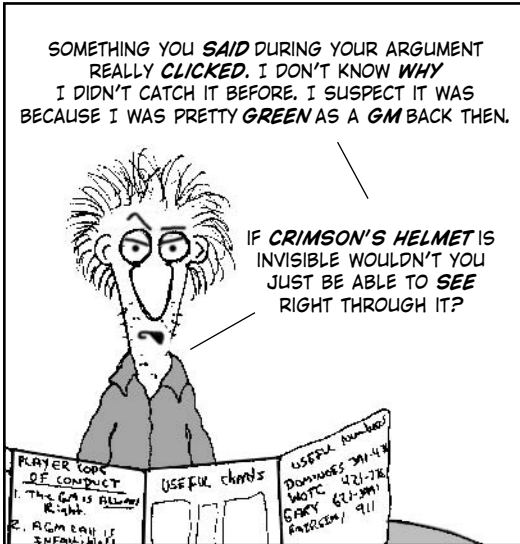


SORRY, DAVE. I GUESS THIS MEANS *EL RAVAGER* IS THE POOR SOUL WHO GETS *PETRIFIED*. I REALLY FEEL *BAD* ABOUT IT - ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU WERE THE *ONLY* ONE AT THIS TABLE WHO *STOOD* BY ME. DON'T WORRY, I'LL DO EVERYTHING IN MY *POWER* TO HAVE YOU RESTORED TO *FLESH AND BONE*. YOU HAVE MY *WORD* ON *THAT*. IF THERE ARE ANY *EXPENSES* INVOLVED I'LL EVEN *SHOULDER* TEN PERCENT OF THE *TAB*. MY WAY OF SAYING, "*THANKS*".

THINK NOTHING OF IT, DUDE. I'VE SEEN YOU PULL A *RABBIT* OUT OF YOUR ASS SO MANY TIMES I FIGURED THE *ODDS* WERE RIDING WITH YOU.

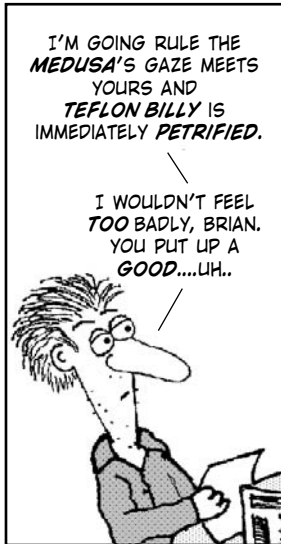
UH...HOLD UP, BRIAN. I WASN'T *FINISHED* YET.

OOPS. SORRY, B.A. PLEASE - CONTINUE.



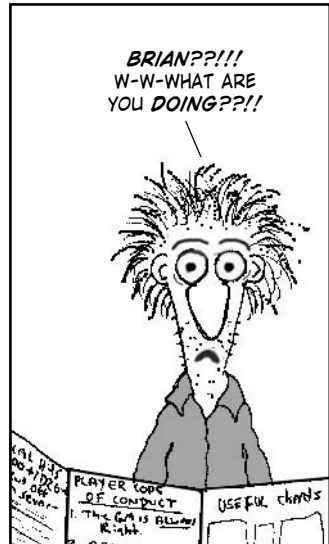
SOMETHING YOU *SAID* DURING YOUR ARGUMENT REALLY *CLICKED*. I DON'T KNOW *WHY* I DIDN'T CATCH IT BEFORE. I SUSPECT IT WAS BECAUSE I WAS PRETTY *GREEN* AS A *GM* BACK THEN.

IF *CRIMSON'S HELMET* IS INVISIBLE WOULDN'T YOU JUST BE ABLE TO *SEE* RIGHT THROUGH IT?



I'M GOING TO *RULE THE MEDUSA'S GAZE* MEETS YOURS AND *TEFLON BILLY* IS IMMEDIATELY *PETRIFIED*.

I WOULDN'T FEEL TOO BADLY, BRIAN. YOU PUT UP A *GOOD*...UH..



*BRIAN????!!*  
W-W-WHAT ARE YOU *DOING????!!*



LATER AS THE DUST SETTLES...

OKAY, GUYS. I THINK THAT'S A *GOOD POINT* TO END THE GAME TONIGHT.



HA! I CALLED IT! IT ENDED IN A *TABLE FLIP* -AND- *HARD FEELINGS*.

WE *STILL* GET THE *FREE* TABLE TOP QUALITY *MINI PAINTINGS* - RIGHT?

SHUT UP, DAVE!

KRAAAASHHHH!!!

# The Stone Menagerie

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN

**EXCELLENT SHOT, BOB! YOUR IDEA WORKED! YOUR HOMING-BOLT OF SERPENT SLAYING LOCKS ONTO THE GREATER MEDUSA'S HEAD OF SNAKE-HAIR. WITH A BONE-CRACKING THUD IT SINKS DEEPLY INTO HER SKULL DELIVERING A KILLING BLOW.**

**HER DEATH-HOWL NEARLY PIERCES YOUR EARS AS SHE COLLAPSES IN A WRITHING-TWITCHING HEAP WHERE A POOL OF POISONOUS BLOOD SPREADS OUT AROUND HER.**

PLAYER COPY OF CONDUCT  
1. THE GA IS ALLY!  
2. AGM EAH IF

USEFUL CHITS  
DAMNED 201-113  
WOTC 421-716  
GARY 671-201  
PATERSON 911

**DING DONG THE BITCH IS DEAD!**

**EXCELLENT! WAY TO GO, KNUCKLES!**

I RULE!

**SORRY ABOUT USING YOUR PETRIFIED BODY AS COVER, BRIAN. WHO KNEW? I'VE NEVER SEEN A MEDUSA ARMED WITH A WAR-MACE BEFORE. THAT BATTERING DAMAGE SHE WAS DEALING OUT WAS BRUTAL.**

**YEAH, SHE WAS HAMMERING ON YOU LIKE TIGER WOODS WITH A NINE IRON ON A FIVE PAR.**

**DON'T WORRY. JUSTINA WILL TIE SOME STRANDS OF FRAYED ROPE TO ONE OF HER ARROW SHAFTS TO IMPROVISE A BROOM. SHE'LL SWEEP UP ALL YOUR PIECES USING HER SHIELD AS A DUST PAN. I'LL BE VERY THOROUGH!**

**OKAY WHILE SARA SWEEPS UP WHAT SHE CAN OF BRIAN I'M GOING TO CLAIM "UNASSISTED KILL" RIGHTS ON THE MEDUSA AND SEARCH HER BODY.**

**I PARTICULARLY WANT TO CHECK OUT THAT WAR-MACE. IT SEEMED LIKE A VERY WICKED WEAPON.**

**THE MACE TURNS OUT TO BE QUITE ORDINARY. HOWEVER THE MEDUSA IS WEARING A NECKLACE OF EXQUISITE CRAFTSMANSHIP AND RARE BEAUTY.**

**KA-CHING! I SNAG THE SWAG. ANYTHING ELSE?**

SWEET.

**THERE REALLY DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH ELSE OF VALUE ON THE BODY.**

**OKAY, I GUESS WE'LL WAIT AROUND LONG ENOUGH FOR SARA TO FINISH SWEEPING UP BRIAN AND THEN WE'LL CONTINUE OUR SEARCH FOR A WAY OUT OF THIS STINK HOLE.**

IT'LL TAKE A TURN OR SO FOR HER TO FINISH.

**MEANWHILE, UPON SEEING THAT YOU'VE DECLINED TO TAKE A TROPHY FROM THE SLAIN MEDUSA, THE TORCHBEARER PEWTER\* DRAWS HIS DAGGER AND STEPS UP TO THE BODY.**

CRIMINAL RECORDS  
1. THE GA IS ALLY!  
2. AGM EAH IF

PLAYER COPY OF CONDUCT  
1. THE GA IS ALLY!  
2. AGM EAH IF

USEFUL CHITS  
DAMNED 201-113  
WOTC 421-716  
GARY 671-201  
PATERSON 911

**NOW JUST A DAMN MINUTE. I DON'T THINK I COTTON TO THE IDEA OF SOME LOWLY HIRELING TAKING A TROPHY OFF ONE OF MY KILLS. HE MIGHT START CLAIMING BRAGGING RIGHTS OR SOMETHING.**

**DUDE, YOU'VE GOT TO NIP THIS IN THE BUD RIGHT NOW!**

HE BEGINS TO CUT OUT THE GREATER MEDUSA'S BLACK HEART.

\* See KODT #47: The group finds a sickly Gnomling named Pewter in the dungeon who they nurse back to health. He becomes their guide and torch-bearer.

WHOAH! HOLD ON.....DID B.A. SAY HE WAS CUTTING OUT THE **MEDUSA'S** HEART? **HOLY MOLY!!!!** OF COURSE -- **THAT'S IT!!** THE **SIDEBAR** ON PAGE 146 -- I'D **FORGOTTEN**.

FORGOT **WHAT**, BIG GUY?

ACCORDING TO THE **HACKLOPEDIA OF BEASTS**, CUTTING OUT A **GREATER MEDUSA'S** HEART **INSTANTLY** BREAKS THE **EVIL ENCHANTMENT** OVER HER VICTIMS. THOSE **PETRIFIED** ARE **RESTORED TO FLESH**.

**OUTSTANDING!!** BUT...UH...YOU'RE IN A **GAZILLION PIECES**, BRIAN AND I HAVEN'T QUITE FINISHED SWEEPING YOU UP. I DON'T THINK THIS IS GOING TO BE **Pretty**.

OH MAN. I HAVE A FEELING IT'S GOING TO LOOK LIKE SOMEONE **SPEWED** CLAM CHOWDER ALL OVER THE PLACE IN ABOUT **FIVE SECONDS**.

HUH? BUT THAT SHOULDN'T MATTER, BECAUSE...UH..ER...  
-GULP- YER RIGHT. I'M **STILL HOSED**.

**YUCK!!** CAN YOU **IMAGINE** THE MESS?

YOU MAY WANT TO IMPROVISE A **MOP** INSTEAD OF A **BROOM**, SARA. AS **SOON** AS PEWTER CUTS OUT THE HEART AND HOLDS IT OVER HIS HEAD

ALL THE LITTLE **TEFLON-BITS** TURN TO **FLESH, BONE, AND MARROW** CREATING A **BLOODY COCKTAIL** ALL OVER THE **FLOOR**.

**UGH!!! GROSS!!** FORGET THE **MOP**. WE NEED A **WET-VAC**.

**CRIPES!!** AND I'M WEARING A **BRAND NEW PEG LEG**. I HOPE IT DOESN'T **STAIN**.

**A WEE BIT LATER...**

AS YOU GUYS ARE **MOPPING UP** **TEFLON BILLY** AND **SQUEEZING** OUT THE RAGS INTO SARA'S **SHIELD**, ONE OF YOU **NOTICES** THAT **BLOOD** IS DRIPPING FROM **DAVE'S BACKPACK**.

**BLOOD??!!** THAT'S **INSANE**. WHY WOULD THERE BE **BLOOD** COMING FROM THERE? **HMMMMM...** SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE SOMETHING **NASTY** IN STORE FOR US -- I'M NOT TAKING ANY CHANCES. I **AIM** MY **CROSSBOW OF SLAYING** AT **DAVE'S BACKPACK** AND **WASTE** WHATEVER'S IN IT.

OKAY, THE **BACKPACK** ABSORBS **HALF** THE DAMAGE FROM THE **BOLT--** THE **REST** GOES TO **EL RAVAGER**. MARK OFF **EIGHT HIT POINTS**, DAVE.

HEY!! WHAT THE HELL YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

OPS.

SORRY, DUDE. I WASN'T **THINKING**. **KNUCKLES** INHERITED HIS **ITCHY 'TRIGGER FINGER'** FROM HIS FATHER.

WELL **WATCH** IT WITH THAT **DAMN THING** - WILL YA?

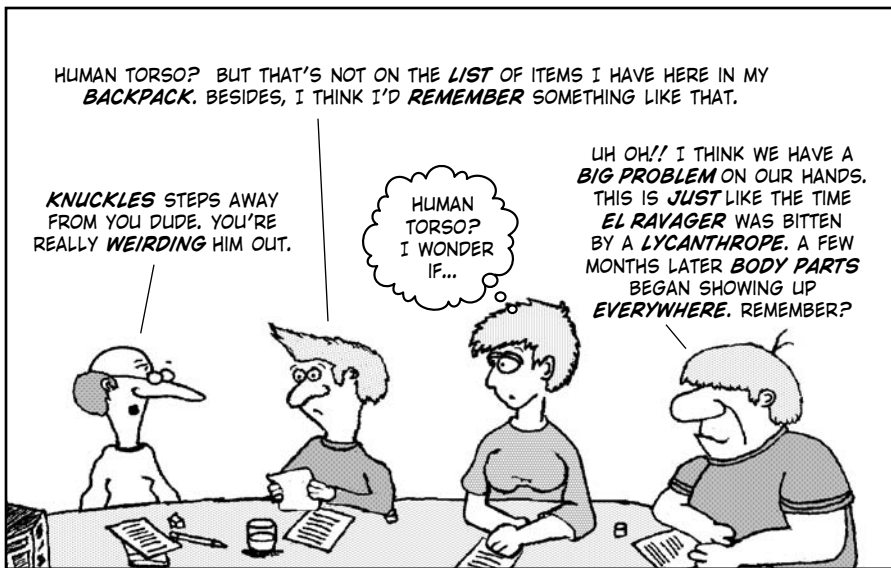
HEY, TURN AROUND AND I'LL TAKE A **PEEK** IN YOUR **BACKPACK**.

UH UH! I DON'T **TRUST** YOU. LET **SARA** DO IT.

I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I DO, B.A. I GO OVER TO **EL RAVAGER** AND CAREFULLY LOOK IN HIS **PACK**. WHAT DO I SEE?



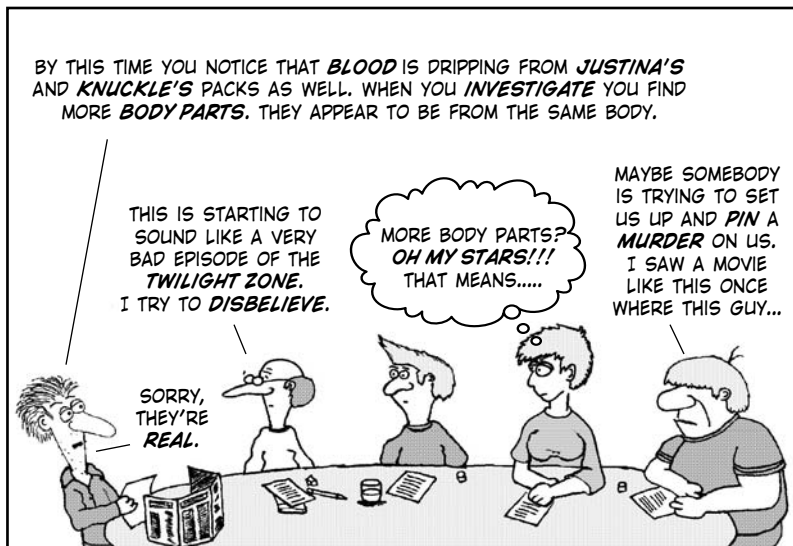
YOU SEE WHAT LOOKS TO BE A **HUMAN TORSO** OOOZING **FRESH BLOOD**.



**KNUCKLES** STEPS AWAY FROM YOU DUDE. YOU'RE REALLY **WEIRDING** HIM OUT.

HUMAN TORSO? I WONDER IF...

UH OH!! I THINK WE HAVE A **BIG PROBLEM** ON OUR HANDS. THIS IS **JUST** LIKE THE TIME **EL RAVAGER** WAS BITTEN BY A **LYCANTHROPE**. A FEW MONTHS LATER **BODY PARTS** BEGAN SHOWING UP **EVERYWHERE**. REMEMBER?



BY THIS TIME YOU NOTICE THAT **BLOOD** IS DRIPPING FROM **JUSTINA'S** AND **KNUCKLE'S** PACKS AS WELL. WHEN YOU **INVESTIGATE** YOU FIND MORE **BODY PARTS**. THEY APPEAR TO BE FROM THE SAME BODY.

THIS IS STARTING TO SOUND LIKE A VERY BAD EPISODE OF THE **TWILIGHT ZONE**. I TRY TO **DISBELIEVE**.

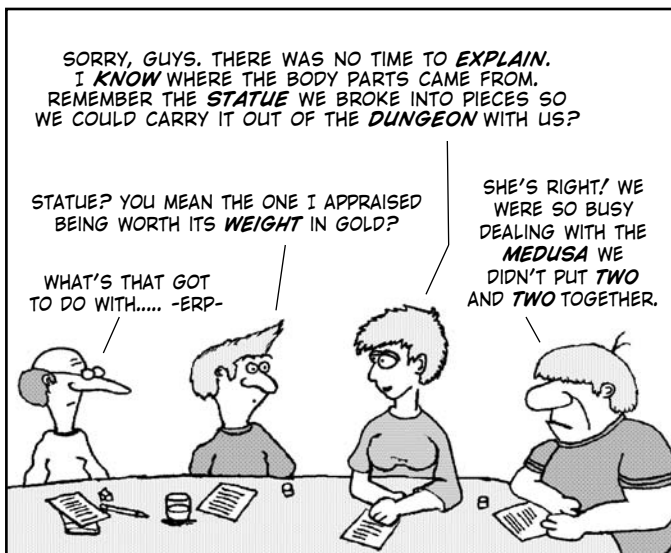
MORE BODY PARTS? **OH MY STARS!!!** THAT MEANS.....

MAYBE SOMEBODY IS TRYING TO SET US UP AND **PIN A MURDER** ON US. I SAW A MOVIE LIKE THIS ONCE WHERE THIS GUY...

SORRY, THEY'RE **REAL**.



**B.A. I SLAM THE DOOR TO THE ROOM AND SPIKE OURSELVES INSIDE!!!!**

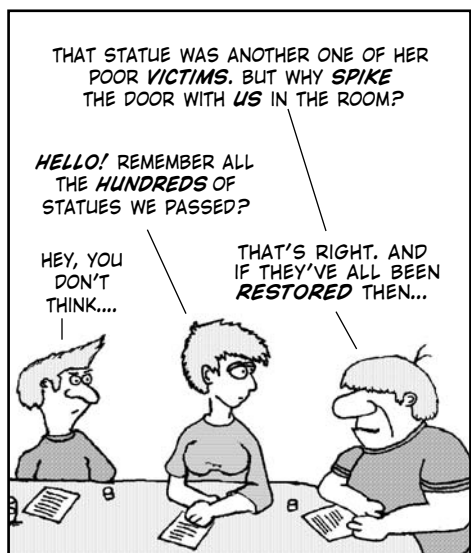


SORRY, GUYS. THERE WAS NO TIME TO **EXPLAIN**. I **KNOW** WHERE THE BODY PARTS CAME FROM. REMEMBER THE **STATUE** WE BROKE INTO PIECES SO WE COULD CARRY IT OUT OF THE **DUNGEON** WITH US?

STATUE? YOU MEAN THE ONE I APPRAISED BEING WORTH ITS **WEIGHT** IN GOLD?

WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH..... -ERP-

SHE'S RIGHT! WE WERE SO BUSY DEALING WITH THE **MEDUSA** WE DIDN'T PUT **TWO** AND **TWO** TOGETHER.



THAT STATUE WAS ANOTHER ONE OF HER POOR **VICTIMS**. BUT WHY **SPIKE** THE DOOR WITH **US** IN THE ROOM?

**HELLO!** REMEMBER ALL THE **HUNDREDS** OF STATUES WE PASSED?

HEY, YOU DON'T THINK....

THAT'S RIGHT. AND IF THEY'VE ALL BEEN **RESTORED** THEN...

THAT'S NOT THE *WORST* OF IT. MOST OF THOSE STATUES WEREN'T *HUMAN*. THERE WERE A *LOT* OF MONSTERS. REMEMBER THE *UMBER HULK* SCULPTURE I COMMENTED ON LIKING SO MUCH? AND WHAT ABOUT THAT MATCHING PAIR OF *VENT SQWALERS*?

*CRIPES!* AND THE *VAMPIRE-DUDE!* REMEMBER THE STATUE OF THE *VAMPIRE-DUDE*??

AND WASN'T THERE AN *ORC-SLAYER* A FEW LEVELS BACK?

GREAT. THERE GOES OUR *FORTUNE* IN *FINE ART*. BUT IT'S ALL STARTING TO MAKE *SENSE* NOW.



I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHY *FLATAROY* BUILT HIS *MANOR HOUSE* OVER A *DUNGEON* WITH *NO* WAY IN OR OUT. THIS ISN'T A *DUNGEON* IT'S SOME KIND OF FRICKIN' *MENAGERIE*. REMEMBER THE MAN'S *TROPHY ROOM*? HE'D ALREADY SHOWN A PROPENSITY FOR *COLLECTING* FANTASTIC CREATURES.

HE MUST HAVE BEEN *COLLECTING LIVE SPECIMENS* AND *WAREHOUSING* THEM HERE. THE *MEDUSA* MUST HAVE ESCAPED FROM HER *CAGE* AND *FOULED UP* HIS PLANS. REMEMBER THE *IRON DOOR*?



SAY, THAT'S PRETTY GOOD BRIAN. YOUR *DEDUCTION* IS ALMOST *DEAD ON*. THE TRUTH IS *FLATAROY* KEPT A FULLY *STOCKED DUNGEON* SO HE AND HIS *BATTLE LORDS* COULD *HONE* THEIR SKILLS BY SETTING UP *DUNGEON CRAWLS* WITH VARYING DEGREES OF *CHALLENGE*. REMEMBER THE *MOVEABLE* WALL SECTIONS YOU DISCOVERED? AND THE *ELEVATED ROOMS*? BY MEANS OF AN *INGENIOUS* SYSTEM OF *PULLEYS* AND *WINCHES*, *FLATAROY* COULD CONFIGURE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE *DUNGEON* TO HIS LIKING. THEN HIS MEN WOULD *HERD* A SELECTED *LINE-UP* OF MONSTERS INTO THE '*PLAYING AREA*' FOR HIS *DUNGEON FORAYS*.

WOW! LIKE HAVING YOUR OWN PERSONAL *FITNESS CENTER*.

*ON-SITE DUNGEON CRAWLS*? KEWL.

I HAVE A *WHOLE* NEW LEVEL OF *RESPECT* FOR THE GUY. THINK OF THE *EXPERIENCE* POINTS GARNERED IN THESE HALLS OVER THE YEARS.



YOU KNOW, B.A., IF YOU HAD BOTHERED TO *POINT OUT* THESE *FINER QUALITIES* OF THE MAN WE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO QUICK TO *WASTE* HIM. SOUNDS LIKE HE ENJOYED *HACK-N-SLASH* AS MUCH AS *WE* DO.

I WAS THINKING THE *SAME* THING. I DIDN'T KNOW WE HAD SO MUCH IN COMMON.

YEAH RIGHT. YOU GUYS COULD HAVE *HUNG OUT* AND *KNOCKED BACK* *MAI TAIS* AND *BURNED VILLAGES* TOGETHER.

OH MAN. THAT WOULD'VE *ROCKED!*



YOU KNOW, SOMETHING *BOTHERS* ME. IF *PEWTER* WORKED FOR *FLATAROY* WOULDN'T HE HAVE *KNOWN* ABOUT *MENAGERIE* AND THE *GREATER MEDUSA*?

GOOD POINT. ACCORDING TO THE RULES ALL *STANDARD HIRELINGS* RATE AS "*GOSSIP MONGERERS*".



SO **EVEN** IF HE WASN'T DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITH THE **OPERATION** HE WOULD MOST ASSUREDLY HAVE HEARD ABOUT IT FROM THE OTHER **MANOR STAFF**. HMMMMM.... CURIOUS.

THEN THAT WOULD MEAN HE **KNOWINGLY** LED US TO THE **MEDUSA**. I AM RIGHT - IT WAS AN **AMBUSH**.

FIRK DING BLAST! I **KNEW** IT. ANOTHER ONE OF **B.A.'S** STINKIN' **SYMPATHY TRAPS**.

THAT'S IT! **DAMMIT!** I'M **FUMING**. OUR LITTLE **GNOMLING** FRIEND HAS SOME **ANSWERING** TO DO. I GRAB HIM BY HIS **SCRAWNY** LITTLE NECK. I'M GOING TO DO **THINGS** TO HIM THAT AREN'T EVEN LISTED IN THE **RULES**.

SHYA'RIGHT! YOU BETTER GET IN **LINE** DUDE. WHEN I GET THROUGH WITH HIM THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING **LEFT**. I'M GONNA MAKE HIM SCREAM "**MAMA**" IN FOUR DIFFERENT **LANGUAGES**.

BUT GUYS... HE'S **JUST** A FRAIL LITTLE **GNOMLING**.

SAVE YER BREATH, **B.A.**

AND I'LL HOLD HIM FOR YOU.

**DAMN!** IF I WASN'T **FLOOR-GOO** I'D JOIN IN.

**A WEE BIT LATER...**

OKAY YOU HAVE **PEWTER** TRAPPED IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM. HE'S **PANTING** FOR BREATH AS HE LOOKS AT YOU AND HOLDS UP HIS HANDS. "OKAY, OKAY," HE SAYS, WITH THE SLIGHT **HINT** OF A SMILE ON HIS FACE. "I **CONFESS!** I WAS HOPING TO **LEAD** YOU TO YOUR **DEATHS**."

MY **ONLY** REGRET IS THAT I **FAILED**. BUT **NOW** YOU'LL HAVE THE **STONE MENAGERIE** TO CONTEND WITH. I MAY SEE YOU **DEAD** EVEN STILL.

I CALL THAT **BOLD TALK** FOR A **DEAD GNOMLING!** I PULL OUT MY **DAGGER OF VITAL ORGAN SEEKING** AND STEP TOWARD HIM.

**PEWTER** SMIRKS AT YOU AND MOTIONS FOR YOU TO BRING IT ON. "COME AND **GET IT - STUMP BOY!!**"

I'M GOING TO CUT THAT **SMIRK** RIGHT OFF HIS FRICKIN' **FACE**.

YEAH, JUST KEEP RUNNIN' YER MOUTH YOU **PUTZ**.

AS YOU DRAW CLOSER TO **PEWTER** HE REACHES INTO THE FOLDS OF HIS **ROBES** AND PULLS OUT A **HACKMASTER +12!!!** HE **SNICKERS MANIACALLY** AS HE DELIVERS 46 POINTS OF DAMAGE TO YOU. AS YOU DROP TO YOUR KNEES HOLDING YOUR **ENTRAILS** IN YOUR HANDS IT DAWNS ON YOU THAT THE **LAUGH** IS FAMILIAR TO YOU. IT'S THE **VERY SAME** SNICKER YOU HEARD THAT NIGHT ON THE **CELLAR STEPS** AFTER BEING **SHOVED** INTO THE **CAULDRON OF BOILING FAT**.\*

GAAAAA!!!! **HACKMASTER +12??!!!** 46 POINTS? **ENTRAILS?**

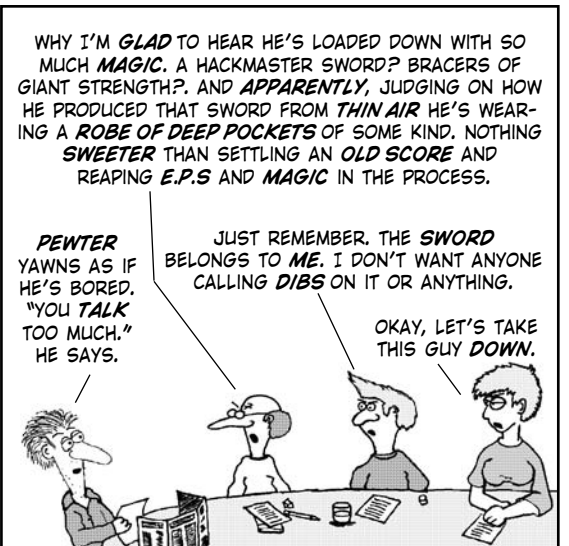
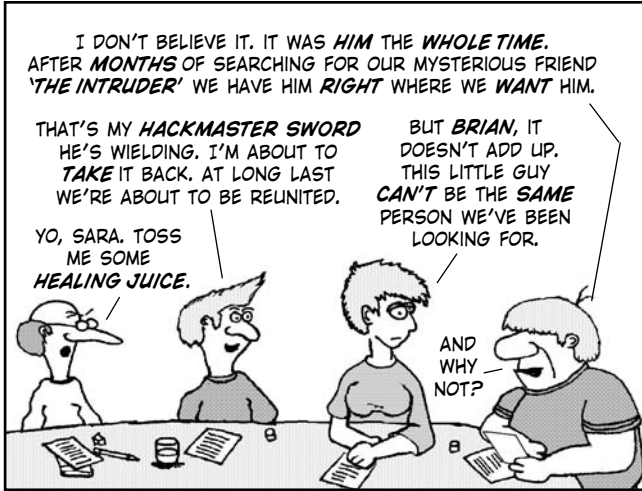
H-H-HACK-M-M-MASTER P-P-P-PLUS T-T-T-TWELVE?

IT'S HIM. **THE INTRUDER!!**

\* See **KODT #44**: "Between a Rock and a Hard Place"

# One Ring to Fool Them All

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN



## SECONDS LATER.....



\* See **KODT #44**: "Between a Rock and a Hard Place"

## SEVERAL TURNS LATER....

I HATE TO TELL YOU GUYS THIS BUT YOUR *FUTILE* ATTACKS ON THE *DUNGEON WALL* ARE GETTING YOU *NOWHERE*. BY THIS TIME *PEWTER* IS *LONG GONE*. IF I WERE YOU, I'D BE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE *GROWING ARMY* OF MONSTERS GATHERING OUTSIDE THE *SPIKED DOOR* WHO HAVE BEEN *ATTRACTED* TO THE AREA BY THE NOISE OF YOUR *PICKS* AND *SHOVELS*.

I *REFUSE* TO LEAVE THE TABLE UNTIL I'VE WREAKED *REVENGE* ON MY NUMBER ONE *SWORN ENEMY!!*

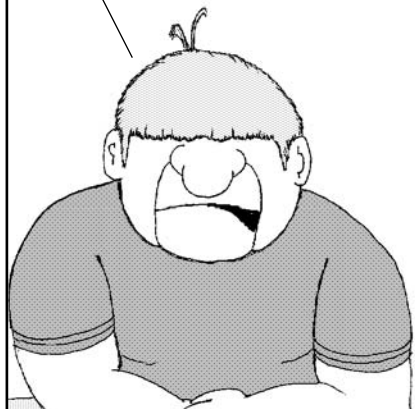
*DAMN!* I WISH I HADN'T BLOWN THAT LAST CHARGE ON MY *DAGGER OF HINDSIGHT*.

B.A.'S RIGHT, GUYS. *PEWTER* WON *THIS* ROUND. WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT *SURVIVING* TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.

*SURVIVE?* HMMRRFFF. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY CALL BEING *MOPPED UP* WITH SOME *FILTHY RAGS* AND SQUEEZED INTO A *BUCKET* BUT IT SURE AS HELL AIN'T CALLED *SURVIVING!*



## AFTER THE GAME.....

I MUST SAY, THAT WAS JUST ABOUT THE *BEST* ADVENTURE WE'VE HAD IN QUITE SOMETIME. THREE CHARACTER DEATHS IN *ONE* NIGHT? *WOW!* YOU CERTAINLY DON'T SEE *THAT* VERY OFTEN. *CHIN UP, GUYS!* IF *SARA* MANAGES TO ESCAPE THE *VENT SQUALLER* WHO IS *HOUNDING* HER SHE MAY BE ABLE TO COME BACK *LATER* TO RETRIEVE YOUR BODIES. ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE IN *HACKMASTER*.

SO.....ANYONE UP FOR A *PIZZA?* MY TREAT.

UH...GUYS?



## LATER.....

*KNOCK! KNOCK!!*

UH...SARA, IF THAT'S THE *PIZZA DUDE* WOULD YOU BE SO GOOD AS TO *PAY* HIM?

-SIGH- *CUZ*, WHEN ARE YOU *EVER* GOING TO LEARN THAT YOU *DON'T* DO THE *MOCKING-JIG* WHEN *CHARACTER DEATHS* ARE INVOLVED?



-FINIS-

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I **SPIKE** THE DOOR THEREBY TRAPPING **STEVO** ON THE OTHER SIDE WITH THE **GUT-WALLER SERPENT!** SORRY TO HAVE TO DO THAT **LITTLE BUDDY** BUT THERE WAS **NO WAY** IN HELL WE COULD HAVE TAKEN THAT **BAD BOY** OUT.

WHAT THE.....?? YOU COULDN'T HAVE GIVEN ME A **VERBAL "YO! HEADS UP!"** BEFORE SLAMMING THE **DOOR** IN MY **FACE?**

**PETE'S** TACTICALS WERE **ROCK SOLID**, **STEVL**. SHOUTING OUT A **WARNING** WOULD HAVE ALERTED THE **GUT-WALLER** TO HIS **INTENTIONS**.

ON THE **BRIGHT** SIDE, ACCORDING TO THE **BOOK**, THESE GUYS **SWALLOW** THEIR **FOOD** **WHOLE!**



THEY PUT A **MINT** ON MY **PILLOW?** REALLY? OH MAN, THIS **INN** ROCKS ASS. IT WAS **TOTALLY** WORTH THE EXTRA **THREE GOLD** PER NIGHT TO STAY HERE.

IF YOU **HURRY** YOU CAN CATCH THE **FREE** CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST IN THE **LOBBY**.

FREE BREAK-FAST? HOT DAMN! THAT'S IT -- I'M STAYIN' FOR ANOTHER **WEEK**.



HEY, YOU EVER WONDER WHY **EL RAVAGER** AND **THORINA** NEVER **HOOKED UP?** AFTER ALL I HAVE A **77** **CHARISMA**...WELL, AT LEAST I DID BEFORE THAT **LOOSE TILE** AND THE **VAT OF ACID** INCIDENT.

UH...ER...I DUNNO DAVE. I HATE TO SAY THIS BUT **THORINA** WAS INCREDIBLY **SHALLOW**. I WOULDN'T LET IT BOTHER YOU.

YEAH, SHE WAS KINDA **STUCK UP**.



OKAY, I'VE FINALLY FINISHED DOING THE **MATH** AND I'M AFRAID IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD. ACCORDING TO MY **CALCULATIONS**, **BRIAN'S "FIREBALL DOWN THE PRIVY"** PLOY TAKES OUT **FIVE CITY** BLOCKS AFTER IGNITING THE INCREDIBLE **VOLUME** OF **SEWER GAS** LYING IN THE **TUNNELS** BENEATH THE INN. A **CRATER** IS CREATED ALMOST TEN FEET DEEP AND A **1,000** FEET ACROSS. THE **GROUND SHOCK** IS SO GREAT THE **BELLS** OF THE **TEMPLE OF LUVIA** IN **FESTERVILLE** OVER **FIVE MILES** AWAY ACTUALLY **RING**.

OKAY, OKAY, THAT'S ALL **WELL** AND **GOOD** BUT DID WE MANAGE TO **KILL** THAT **FRICKIN' SEWER RAT** WHO'D BEEN **STEALING** FROM OUR **TREASURE STASH?**

**OOOOH! OOOHH!!** I QUICKLY DON MY **GREAT HELM** AND RAISE MY **SHIELD!!**

-GULP-



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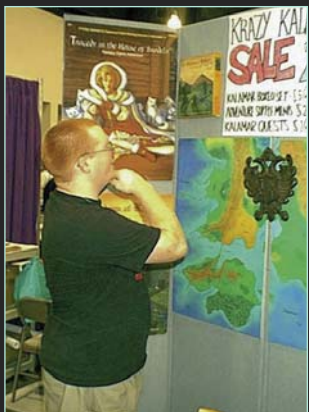
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# GENCON 2000 PHOTO GALLERY

On August 10th through 13th the KODT D-Team converged on Milwaukee to attend GenCon 2000. Here's a glimpse at just some of the fun we managed to have....

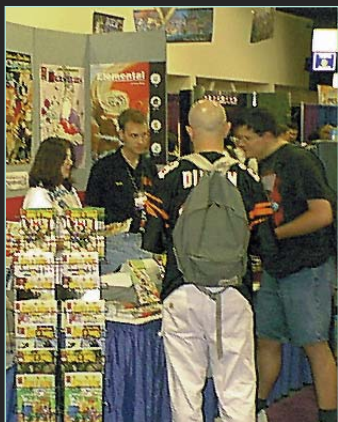


Above: Once again, Wayne Wallace ponders the eternal question -- "Do I eat or do I buy some Kalamar product?"



Above: A confused mob attempts to find the KenzerCo booth. Maybe those +5 Banners of Cloaking weren't such a good idea after all.

Left: Manny Vega bravely prepares to meet the onslaught of fans just prior to the doors opening in the Exhibitor's Hall on day 1.



Above: Jennifer Kenzer and Steve Johansson listen intently to a customer telling the story of how his 7th level thief took out Tiamut the dragon.

Right: By our count over 480 people attended the KODT Live Reading.



Above: A rare photo of KODT cover artists, George and Jackie Vrbanic



Above: Todd Weaver demoing a game of Fairy Meat. The kid with the wings never had a chance.



Left: One of several sessions from this year's Live Reading.



The release of Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition was the big event of the show. The original creators, Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax were on hand to sign copies.

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*Rich Spangle, [wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com)*

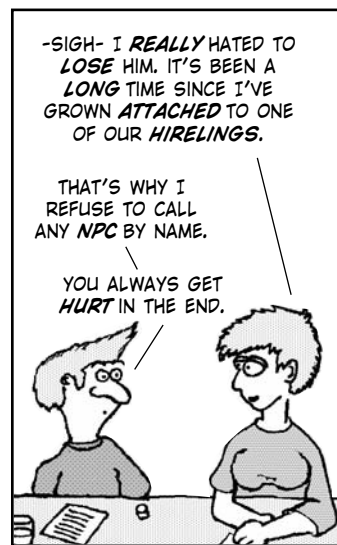
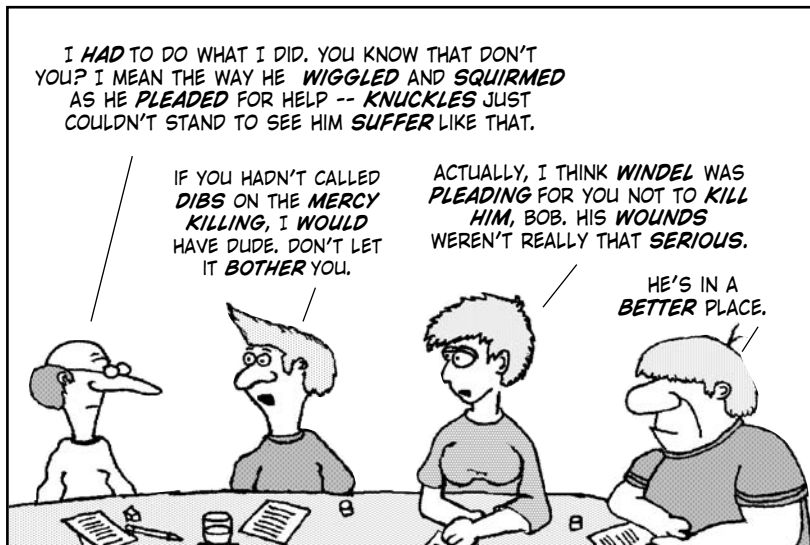
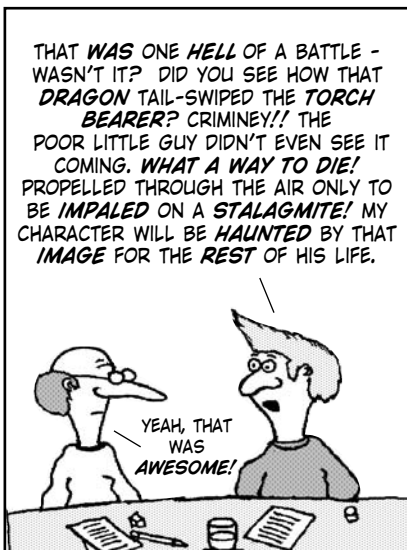
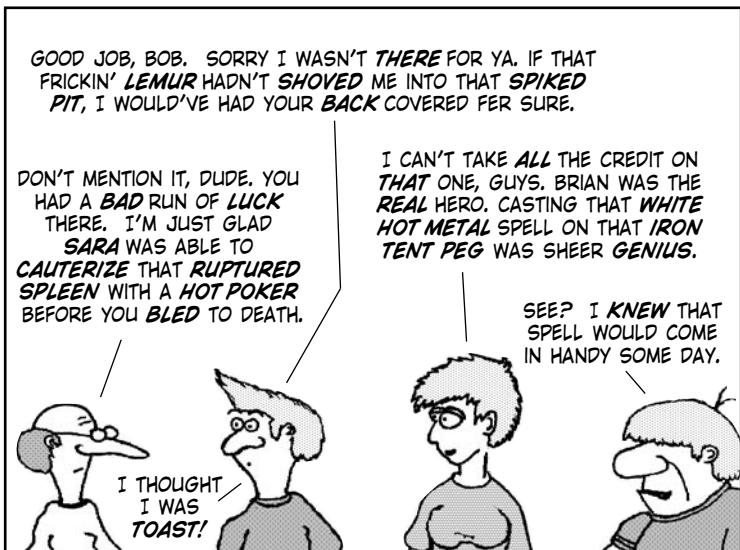
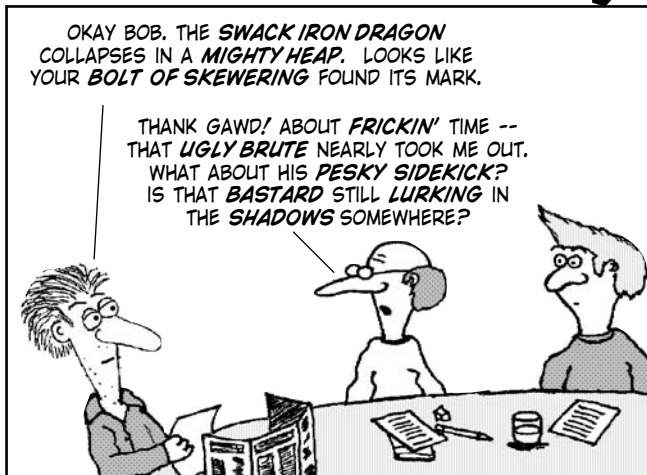
full review at [http://www.wizards.com/origins/ORG2K/Virtual\\_FM.asp](http://www.wizards.com/origins/ORG2K/Virtual_FM.asp)



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# Got You Under My Spell

BY JOLLY BLACKBURN





THAT LITTLE *TORCH BEARER* WAS *AMAZING*. WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU'VE *WITNESSED* SUCH *BRAVERY* IN A COMMON *HIRELING*?

BRAVERY? I'M AFRAID I DON'T CATCH YER *DRIFT*, SARA.

ME NEITHER. SURE, I WAS *FOND* OF THE LITTLE *TYKE* BUT THERE WAS NOTHING *STELLAR* ABOUT HIM.

H-H-HUH? HOW CAN YOU GUYS SAY THAT?



BOB, THE *KID* TOOK AN *ARROW* FOR YOU -- *TWICE!!* AND THEN HE *RISKED* HIS LIFE RUSHING INTO THE *WALL OF FIRE BREATH* TO RETRIEVE *DAVE'S SWORD*. I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT. AND LET'S NOT FORGET THAT *WINDEL* WAS ATTEMPTING TO *BACKSTAB* THE *DRAGON* WHEN HE WAS *TAIL SWIPE*D. WE OWE HIM OUR *LIVES*.

*VOLUNTARILY???!*

GET REAL, SARA.

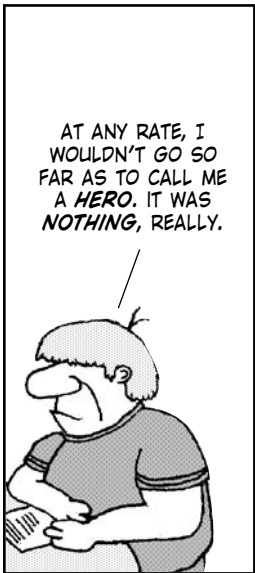


OH MAN HAVE YOU BEEN *DUPED*. YOU *TRULY* BELIEVE HE PERFORMED *ALL* THOSE *HEROICS* *VOLUNTARILY???!*

YOU HAD IT *RIGHT* THE *FIRST* TIME SARA. THE *REAL* HERO HERE IS *BRIAN*.

*GEESH!* FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD, GUYS. I *THOUGHT* WE AGREED TO KEEP THIS ON THE *Q.T.??*

BRIAN? I DON'T THINK I UNDERSTAND.



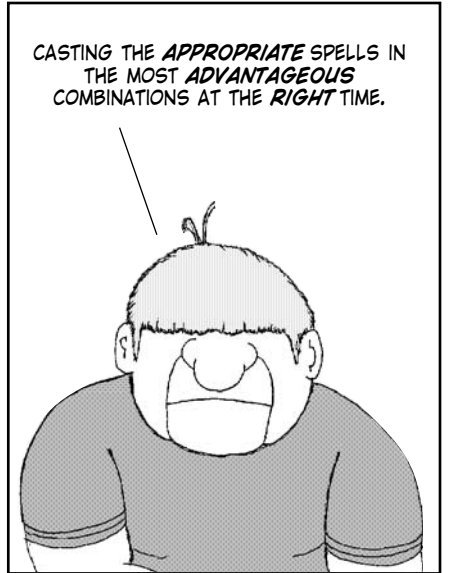
AT ANY RATE, I WOULDN'T GO SO FAR AS TO CALL ME A *HERO*. IT WAS *NOTHING*, REALLY.



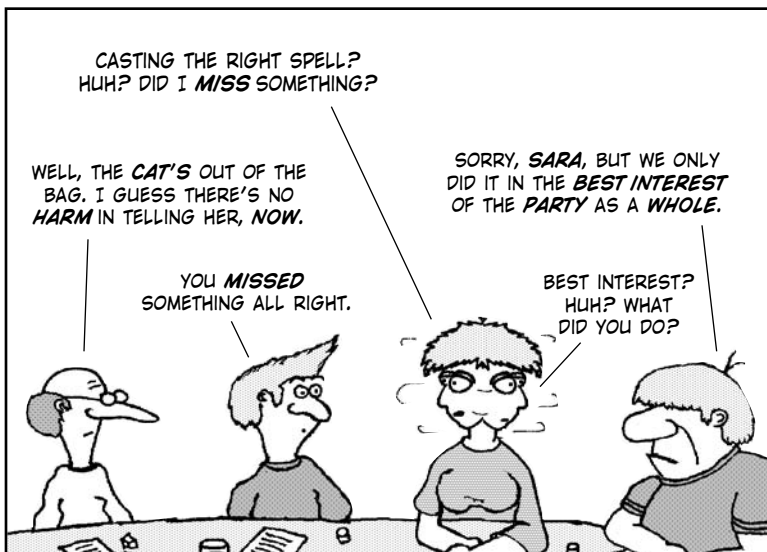
NOW, NOW, DON'T BE *MODEST*, BIG GUY. YOU NEARLY *RED LINED* THE RULES ON *MAGIC* TONIGHT. IT WAS TOUCH AND GO BUT YOU *PULLED* IT OFF.

JUST *CHALK* IT UP TO *CREATIVE SPELL CASTING*. THAT'S WHAT IT'S *ALL* ABOUT.

??



CASTING THE *APPROPRIATE* SPELLS IN THE MOST *ADVANTAGEOUS* COMBINATIONS AT THE *RIGHT* TIME.



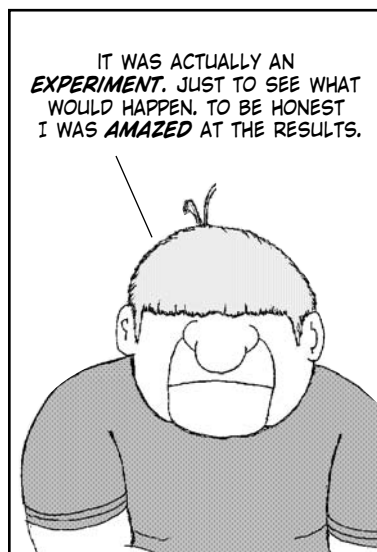
CASTING THE RIGHT SPELL?  
HUH? DID I *MISS* SOMETHING?

WELL, THE *CAT'S* OUT OF THE BAG. I GUESS THERE'S NO *HARM* IN TELLING HER, *NOW*.

YOU *MISSED* SOMETHING ALL RIGHT.

SORRY, *SARA*, BUT WE ONLY DID IT IN THE *BEST INTEREST* OF THE *PARTY* AS A *WHOLE*.

BEST INTEREST? HUH? WHAT DID YOU DO?



IT WAS ACTUALLY AN *EXPERIMENT*. JUST TO SEE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN. TO BE HONEST I WAS *AMAZED* AT THE RESULTS.



DOES THIS HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH *ALL* THOSE *SECRET NOTES* THAT WERE BEING PASSED BACK AND FORTH TO *B.A.??!!* I *KNEW* SOMETHING WAS UP.

YEP! WE FIGURED YOU'D THROW A *FIT* IF YOU *KNEW* THE TRUTH.

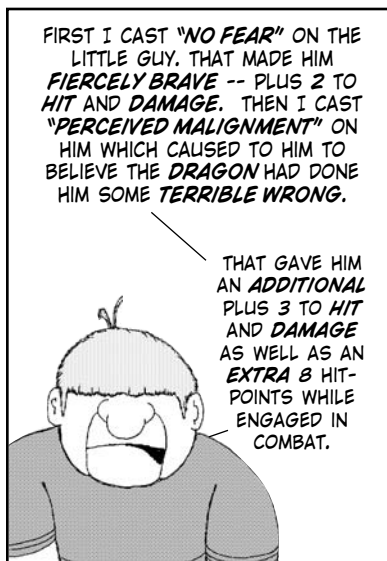
YOU *HAD* TO BE KEPT IN THE *DARK*. LIKE YOU SAID, YOU *WERE* ATTACHED TO THE *LITTLE GUY*.

EXACTLY WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?



AND DID YOU MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT AN *EXPERIMENT*?

WELL, EVER SINCE I READ ABOUT THE NEW '*TANDEM SPELL CASTING*' RULES IN *HACKJOURNAL* I'VE BEEN *ITCHING* TO TRY SOMETHING -- *JUST* TO SEE IF IT WORKED.

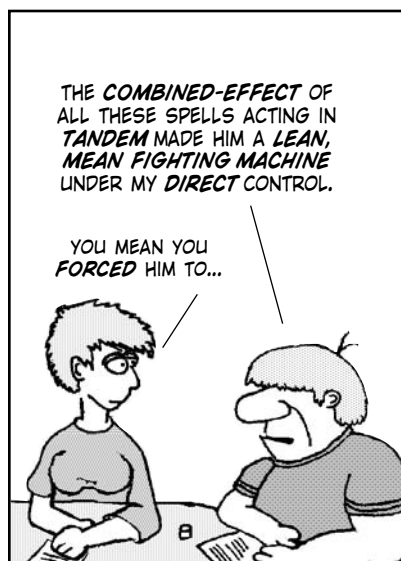


FIRST I CAST "*NO FEAR*" ON THE *LITTLE GUY*. THAT MADE HIM *FIERCELY BRAVE* -- PLUS 2 TO *HIT* AND *DAMAGE*. THEN I CAST "*PERCEIVED MALIGNMENT*" ON HIM WHICH CAUSED HIM TO BELIEVE THE *DRAGON* HAD DONE HIM SOME *TERRIBLE WRONG*.

THAT GAVE HIM AN *ADDITIONAL* PLUS 3 TO *HIT* AND *DAMAGE* AS WELL AS AN *EXTRA 8* HIT-POINTS WHILE ENGAGED IN *COMBAT*.



BUT THE REAL *ICING* ON THE CAKE WAS *CASTING* THE SPELL "*TOTAL CONTROL*" ON HIM. THIS MADE HIM *IMMUNE* TO *MORALE CHECKS* AND *SAVE-VS.-FEAR* CHECKS.



THE *COMBINED-EFFECT* OF ALL THESE SPELLS ACTING IN *TANDEM* MADE HIM A *LEAN, MEAN FIGHTING MACHINE* UNDER MY *DIRECT CONTROL*.

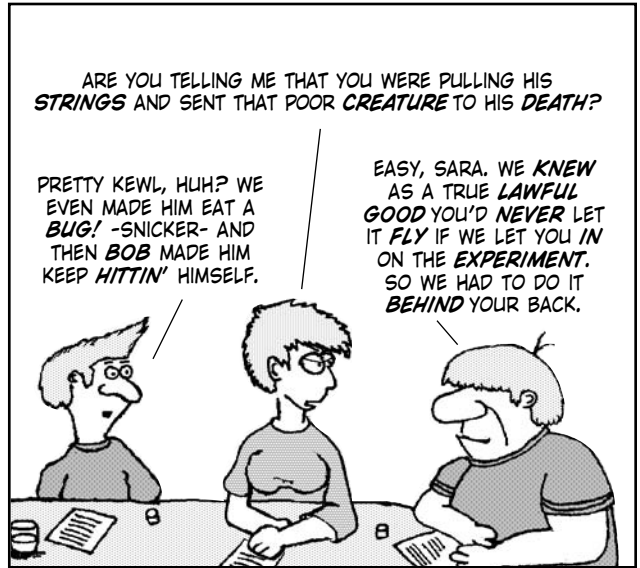
YOU MEAN YOU *FORCED* HIM TO...



THAT'S RIGHT, SARA. WE WERE PULLING HIS **STRINGS** LIKE A **PUPPET** WITH A **BAD MIGRAINE**. YOU DIDN'T THINK ALL THAT **BATTLE LUST** CAME NATURALLY DID YOU?

IT WAS AMAZING. YOU COULD TELL HIM TO HOLD HIS **HAND** OVER AN **OPEN FLAME** AND HE'D DO IT.

GASP!!



PRETTY KEWL, HUH? WE EVEN MADE HIM EAT A **BUG!** -SNICKER- AND THEN **BOB** MADE HIM KEEP **HITTIN'** HIMSELF.

EASY, SARA. WE **KNEW** AS A TRUE **LAWFUL GOOD** YOU'D **NEVER** LET IT **FLY** IF WE LET YOU **IN** ON THE **EXPERIMENT**. SO WE HAD TO DO IT **BEHIND** YOUR BACK.



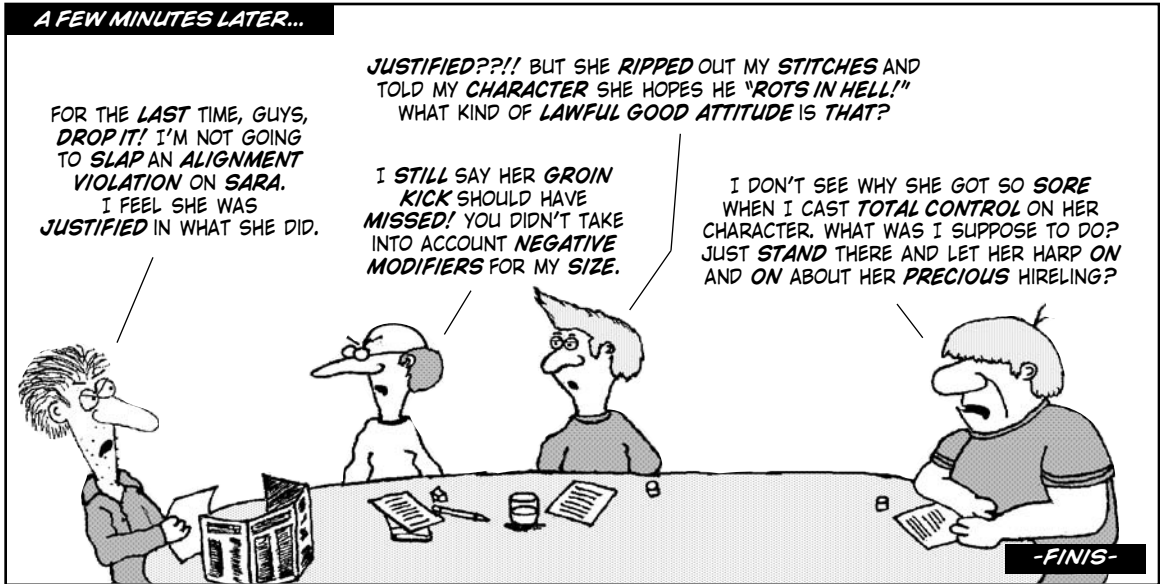
C'MON, SARA. DON'T BE SO **PISSED**. IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN **DO** ANYTHING ABOUT IT. YOU CAN'T ACT ON **KNOWLEDGE** YOUR CHARACTER DOESN'T HAVE.

OH, I THOUGHT WE WERE TALKING **IN CHARACTER** ALL THIS TIME.

HUH?



YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LET SOME **PUKE-HIRELING** COME BETWEEN US. ARE YOU?



**A FEW MINUTES LATER...**

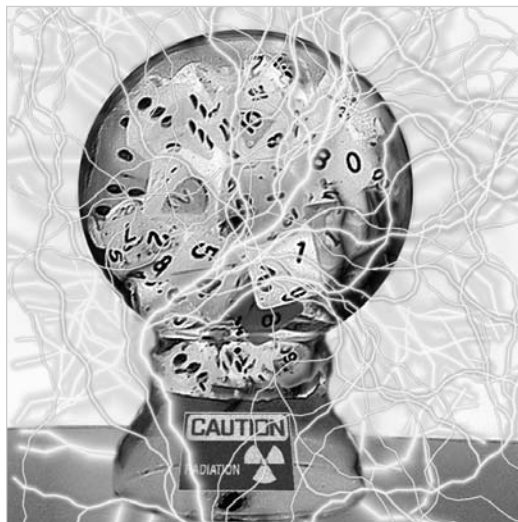
FOR THE **LAST** TIME, GUYS, **DROP IT!** I'M NOT GOING TO **SLAP** AN **ALIGNMENT VIOLATION** ON **SARA**. I FEEL SHE WAS **JUSTIFIED** IN WHAT SHE DID.

**JUSTIFIED??!!** BUT SHE **RIPPED** OUT MY **STITCHES** AND TOLD MY **CHARACTER** SHE HOPES HE "**ROTS IN HELL!**" WHAT KIND OF **LAWFUL GOOD** ATTITUDE IS THAT?

I **STILL** SAY HER **GROIN KICK** SHOULD HAVE **MISSED!** YOU DIDN'T TAKE INTO ACCOUNT **NEGATIVE MODIFIERS** FOR MY **SIZE**.

I DON'T SEE WHY SHE GOT SO **SORE** WHEN I CAST **TOTAL CONTROL** ON HER CHARACTER. WHAT WAS I SUPPOSE TO DO? JUST **STAND** THERE AND LET HER **HARP** ON AND ON ABOUT HER **PRECIOUS** HIRELING?

**-FINIS-**



**COMMENTS:** L5R *Diskwars* is the latest production of AEG, this time in close cooperation with *Fantasy Flight Games*, producer of the popular *Diskwars™* wargame. It's an ingenious idea - players looking for new ways to experience L5R's rich setting can now go to war - with far less cost than investing in a miniatures game like *Clan War™*. The fact that this set is fully compatible with previous *Diskwars* sets will also attract those players looking for new armies, tactics and players.

Unfortunately, it's annoyingly obvious from the rules sheet someone tried to edit a basic *Diskwars* rulesheet by changing some titles and botched the job. There's a reference to "swashbuckling" (*which I don't see samurai doing*), that probably should have read 'Daisho' - a skill that does the same thing. There are two or three problems like this in the spell list, and another spell that apparently changed names at the last instant.

Further, there is no artwork for the wound indicator on a disk (*how many times it can suffer its toughness in damage*). Fortunately this is relatively easy to figure out. Failure to explain what the *Ambush* and *Double Chi* skills did complicate things significantly. It's a shame they've already had to publish an errata supplement to their rulebook.

None of this detracts from the core facts though. *Diskwars* is FUN. Where else can you spend ten dollars and have a small, yet fully functional and diverse army at your command? Unlike miniature wargames where a half hour per turn isn't unreasonable for large battles, experienced players should be able to easily cycle through a turn in ten minutes. One can get a better feel for that cavalry charge developing on their flank and the desperate effort to close the gap.

Each army fights differently based on their outlook. The proud, fierce, honorable Lion Clan has high attack values and is best used aggressively. The civilized, courtly Crane are better at defending and challenging you to duels. This allows you to customize your army around your personal fighting style.

*Diskwars* is heavily supported by *Fantasy Flight Games*, with multiple expansions and a nation-wide league. It's an excellent game to introduce one to wargaming and serves as a nice bridge from the CCG industry. However, newcomers are well advised to either obtain the full rules from their fantasy set, or download the FAQ from [www.diskwars.com](http://www.diskwars.com). □

*Do you agree with this review? Disagree?  
We want to hear what you think.*

*E-mail [jolly@kenzerco.com](mailto:jolly@kenzerco.com)*

*Review n: a critical evaluation.*

*Reviewer n: a writer of critical reviews.*

*Critic: n: one who expresses a reasoned opinion on a matter involving a judgement of its value while exercising careful judgement or judicious evaluation.*

**R**esponse to the the *Critical Mass* preview in Issue 45 has been tremendous. Reviews have been pouring in and, so far, our readers seem to have no qualms about rating the games they've been playing.

We expect *Critical Mass* to be in full swing by Issue 50. Meanwhile, be sure to keep sending in your reviews/ratings. (*You can find the form in KODT#45 or #46 as well as on our website [www.kenzerco.com] in Adobe Acrobat format.*)

We'd also like to remind our readers that the views or opinions expressed in this column are not necessarily those of the editor or KenzerCo. Reviews/Ratings are run exactly as submitted. If you feel a game has gotten a bad rap, we encourage you to share your own views. *Critical Mass* is meant to be an open forum. Ultimately it's success will depend on reader involvement and interaction.

Jolly



**TITLE:** Legend of the Five Rings: *DiskWars*

**PUBLISHER:** AEG

**RETAIL PRICE:** Start Boxes: \$9.95 Boosters: \$4.95

**CATEGORY:** Miniatures Rules

**Recommend to a friend?:** Yes

**Recommend for a Brian Award?:** No

**PRODUCTION VALUE**

**Writing:** 2

**Art & Illustration:** 3

**Overall Production:** 4

**PLAY VALUE**

**Rules Presentation:** 2

**System/Playability:** 4

**Replay Value:** 5

**Entertainment Value:** 4

**TOTAL:** 11

**OVERALL RATING :** 3.42 (3.5)

**REVIEWED BY:** CatNight

# CONQUERING ONLINE UNIVERSES

by Kenneth Newquist

As a committed (*some would say insanely so*) shield monkey, I'd like to say that I'll stop playing table-top role-playing games when they pry the dice from my cold, dead hands. And yet, sometimes when I'm at the computer store and I stop and pick up an *EverQuest™* or *Ultima Online™* box ... I'm sorely tempted. I think, "hmmm, I could run my campaign and play EQ. After all, do I really need sleep?" And then my megalomaniac instincts kick in, I put down the box and go home to plot my next session of impending doom for my table-top players.

*Ultima Online* was the first big -- and by big I mean immense -- graphical online RPG to tempt me. Although it drew upon the rich background of the *Ultima* computer games, being the first big graphical RPG meant its designers and players had to endure a special kind of hell while figuring out what worked and what didn't. A few years after its launch, *UO* seems to have worked out many of its bugs.

## ULTIMA HAVEN

Fans with an obsessive need-to-know-everything-about-the-*UO* world should check out *Ultima Online Stratics*. The front page of this massive site loads with more than a dozen stories from the various *Ultima Online* "shards" (*each shard represents a regional version of the game*). The amount of information could be overwhelming but the web crew here carefully marks each story with a code denoting it as hot, recent or old news. Very nice. The site also includes overviews of armor and weapons, houses and ships, items, magical spells, maps -- you name it, it's here. The site's not very newbie-friendly, and most of its features will probably make a heck of a lot more sense if you're actually playing the game.

## BRITANNIA NEWS NETWORK

The *Britannia News Network* provides a constant stream of official updates about news and happenings in *UO*. While most of the fan sites link to stories here, this is a good place to go if you want to cut through the net clutter and find out the latest from the land of Lord British. It includes stories about the realm's people, important quests, fierce battles and even audio reports.

## EVERLORE

One of the biggest, and from what I've heard, probably the best online RPG is *EverQuest*. And the best site for *EverQuest* has to be *Everlore*. It's an attractive and easy to navigate site that's newbie-friendly. Beginners will appreciate a link to news, crafts, classes, and geography sections which provide short overviews of important *EverQuest* concepts and links to more detailed information. Daily news briefs appear in the front page and range in content from system errors reports to announcements of online wars.

There are also online polls, a guide to beasts roaming the land, and the all-important "server status" report.

## EVERQUEST VAULT

*EverQuest Vault's* presentation is far more jumbled than *Everlore's*, but a quick scroll down the page reveals some nice gems. There are online auctions for those who absolutely must have a *Langseax Of The Wolves* or a *Sarnak Hide Mask*. There's a smattering of current events, as well as news gleaned from the official boards.

## ASHERON'S CALL HEAVEN

*Asheron's Call's* following isn't as extensive as *UO* or *EQ*, but it has its avid adherents. As with the sites for other games, *Asheron's Call Heaven* gives a broad overview of



the *AC* world with news and guides. The daily updates aren't as extensive as the other sites but gamers should still be able to get an ample fix of *Call* updates.

## ASHERON'S CALL TRADING POST

Folks who want to buy or unload goods can ride on over to the *Asheron's Call Trading Post*, which offers players the means to broker deals, sell goods, and get the low-down on what's happening in the realm. All in all, it's a nice little commerce site.

## A LAND FAR AND AWAY

If there's one game that could pull me online, it's *Bioware's* upcoming *Neverwinter Nights*. It's different from its cousins in that it is not, by default, part of a massive role-playing world. But it does allow you to game online, and it's supposed to include lots of cool game master tools. It sounds perfect for me, a gm with campaign members who want to play but can't make it down every Friday for gaming and pizza.

Although the game won't be out until May 2001, it already has its slavish devotees. A *Land Far and Away* is dedicated to re-creating the *Forgotten Realms* online. The *Realms* fans here are obsessed with their Herculean task and are busy setting up servers and GMs to handle various regions of the *Realms*. Anyone who enjoys the setting should check out the frenzy.

### ULTIMA HAVEN

<http://www.ultimahaven.com/>

### BRITANNIA NEWS NETWORK

<http://town.uo.com/bnn/>

### EVERLORE

<http://www.everlore.com/>

### EVERQUEST VAULT

<http://eqvault.ign.com/>

### ASHERON'S CALL HEAVEN

<http://ac.heavengames.com/>

### ASHERON'S CALL TRADING POST

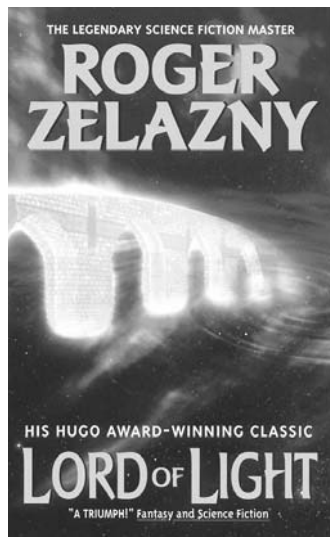
<http://www.actradepost.com/>

### A LAND FAR AND AWAY

<http://www.alandfaraway.net/>

# LORD OF LIGHT

by John O'Neill



## LORD OF LIGHT

Written by: Roger Zelazny  
Published by: Avon Eos

Reprint Edition, 288 pages

Published: March 2000

Originally Published in 1967

When I ran the SF Site, a popular review site for science fiction and fantasy fans (*at www.sfsite.com -- go ahead, check it out, I'm not making this up*), we did an annual round-up of the best books of the year. Everyone would send in votes, we'd spend a few weeks counting, and then we'd do a fat **Top Ten** list packed with the best novels and collections of the last twelve months.

We weren't very rigid about it (*plus, we feared controversy*), so there were usually anywhere from fifteen to thirty books on the final list, just to be on the safe side. But nobody ever complained. In fact, tens of thousands of fans would drop by to check out the tally, and we got a lot of positive mail.

I sometimes toyed with the idea of a "**Top Ten of All Time**" list – the kind of thing that appeared in magazines in great quantity as the Millennium churned over – but never did.

For one thing, I wasn't sure of the point. We could promote a lot of under-appreciated titles with an annual Top Ten list, but with a *Best of All Time* list you just get a lot of fanboys passionately arguing that *Conan the Destroyer* shouldn't come after *Harry Potter*.

But just for fun, I used to make up my own list (*come on, admit it – you've done the same thing. And you never even ran a fantasy site*). I'd sometimes share the list with the other editors, and get into heated debates over why the hell they had **Robert Jordan** ahead of **Watership Down**.

The list would change from time to time. Epic trilogies would scale the heights and then fall back under their own weight. But the title at the summit never changed. The book at the top of my list was **Lord of Light**, by Roger Zelazny, and it's still there today.

**Lord of Light** is one of the most brilliant and original novels in the genre. It is complete in its own right, not part of a sequence or trilogy or duology or anything funky. When it appeared in 1967 no one had ever seen anything like it, and it won Zelazny his second **Hugo Award** (*the first was for And Call Me Conrad, which tied with Dune two years earlier*).

In **Lord of Light**, Earth is long since dead. On a remote colony world, many generations after a the landing of a single starship, humans are ruled by the capricious gods of the Hindu pantheon... gods who crush any sign of emerging technology, even the printing press. A small group of dissidents gathers in secret to summon the banished Siddhartha back from Nirvana, to lead the struggle against the gods.

Siddhartha, like his fellow deities, is human. He is, in fact,

one of the original colonists, men and women who hoarded technology and set up an elite society to rule the world. With the help of cloning tanks and mind-transfer they have developed enormous powers and are effectively immortal. Secret technologies, finely-tuned over the centuries, has given them an even greater edge.

And so the stage is set for an epic and extremely one-side battle, as Siddhartha sets out to topple the reign of his one-time crewmates in the Celestial City. To do so he allies himself with demons -- the planet's original natives – and introduces Buddhism to the people to subvert Hindu dogma. In so doing he shirks off the adopted identity of Siddhartha and gradually becomes Mahasamatman: the Binder of Demons, Lord of Light.

This book is packed to the brim with lush invention, diabolical villains, explosive battles – and a hero who is a true underdog. It is science fantasy of a sort that has never been done before (or since). Be warned: it is the kind of book that will ruin paper-thin backgrounds and cardboard settings – in short, the stuff of most fantasy novels – for you for life.

But you'll be happy about it. Believe me.

+++++

*John O'Neill is the founder of the SF Site (www.sfsite.com) and Black Gate magazine. His favorite Hindu deity is Krishna. He can be reached at john@black-gate.com.*

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# Off to the Dale Then to the Deus

By Rick Moscatello

I have a confession to make: I, personally, did not think *Baldur's Gate* was the best D&D computer game ever. All my friends thought it was awesome...I was "out of the loop" for a few weeks, while they all discussed all the nooks and crannies rediscovered as they replayed it several times. By the time I realized that it was going to be a popular game, it was too late for me to start playing and have any hope of catching up in time to say anything relevant.

So, when the time came for me to open up *Icewind Dale*™, I had no choice but to sit and force myself to play, even though I could tell at a glance that it had the same problem that crippled *Baldur's Gate* for me: real time.

Now I completely respect the accomplishment of the designers in taking the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*™ rules (or whatever they call pre-3rd edition nowadays) and making a real time computer game out of them. The old table top rules were meant to be used by a handful of geeks [Hey! I'm standing right here!! - Editor] sitting around a table, each keeping track of several pages of information while a *Dungeon Master* adjudicates the trillions of details that weren't covered in the half dozen hard-bound rulebooks. Still, they're working from a flawed system (from a computer programmer's view), and as faithful as they are to the rules, those flaws can't help but surface.

The biggest flaw drives me the most nuts: real time. AD&D™ isn't a real time game. One guy, sitting at a computer, really can't control a half dozen characters with anything like the control (and lack thereof) of a collection of players. Try to walk your party through the dungeon, and you get slaughtered when you meet monsters. Try to cast a fireball, and look on with horror as the rest of the party rushes to get to ground zero before you finish casting. Try to maneuver when you get attacked, and your characters are still trying to follow their "go to" orders while the monsters are well into following their "eat adventurer" orders. The only strategy you can use is to set up the party in a nice formation, then send a lone adventurer (it's easy to control one adventurer, of course) out as bait, to tick off monsters and make them follow the bait back to the rest of the group. Granted, the typical orc war party will fall for that, but try that with a real DM and eventually the monsters will get smart enough to realize what's up. Not so in *Icewind Dale* where this strategy, which you learn from necessity early on, will carry you through the game. You just CAN'T control a half

dozen characters in real time without slapping the spacebar (which pauses the game) every second or two. The only strategy here beyond the "one über character" trick is to kill the leader. There are several occasions (including the *Big Fight*) where all the bad guys just sorta keel when the leader dies.

Once you've swallowed the biggie, the rest of the problems are as much with AD&D as with *Icewind Dale*. The AD&D experience system was nuts--only the most obsessively compulsive anal retentive DM actually stuck to the actual experience point rules, for good reasons. Not only were the calculations ridiculously complex if you were dealing with more than a handful of different monsters, but the average mage would need to singlehandedly slaughter about 12,000 orcs before reaching the not-so-lofty (nowadays) level of 11. Seriously folks, that's a lot of piggie noses to bash in. Dale clearly chucks those rules for something more generous, and your characters can hit 11th level in perhaps eight hours of play. A good thing, but unsettling for those of us used to maybe being halfway through level 2 in that amount of time.

The harsh rules for getting killed (i.e. loss of constitution) or getting smacked by level draining monsters are likewise chucked for a more generous system. It's just as well, of course, since if they stuck to those rules players would just reload from a last saved game. This generosity spills out into other areas too; the option to just give all the characters maximum hit points per level is darned convenient, and the ability to make your stats whatever you'd like is also one not easily overlooked. Magic items are plentiful, and your fighters' armor classes will be in the negatives before their levels are in double digits even if they don't have an 18 dexterity.

All these little quibbles are just that: quibbles. The now officially outdated AD&D rules system just serves as a backdrop for what is a great story, loaded with tons of little side quests for your characters and a humongous hack-factor as well. While I don't think this game has quite the replay value of *Baldur's Gate* (like I even know what I'm talking about, I could barely stand to play BG through once...), it's a worthy story, and your characters will visit (and destroy) a wide variety of interesting locations filled with interesting monsters to destroy as well. Once you've forced yourself through the first chapter, *Icewind Dale* develops into a fascinating tale as worthy as any good fantasy novel. Nevertheless, I miss the old games, where you could

Continued on 37....

# A DIE'S DEMISE

by Tim Snider

It was the mid-'80s when I was knee-deep in my D&D days. I had this one clear plastic 20-sider that was honest-to-God cursed. The thing never rolled higher than a 12 and it would start rolling 1's during combat. I would garner groans from the party every time I brought this beast out because they knew the fumbles were about to begin. However, because the clear-glass-like orb looked so cool, I kept it in my dice pouch. I just assumed that it HAD to start rolling good at some point. During one overnight session at our DM's house, I waded into combat wielding the clear die. The clear die didn't let me down. It rolled three straight 1's. My character dodged left and right, trying to avoid being hit by the sword-wielding orcs. I took a blow to the shoulder and the DM announced that I had to roll a saving throw vs. poison...anything lower than a 10 would be successful. FINALLY, the clear die was gonna do some good! I rolled it.

It was the first natural 20 that dice had ever produced. I failed my throw and my character kacked. Screaming with rage, I scooped up the dice, walked over to the refrigerator (*we were gaming at the kitchen table*) and I hurled the dice into the freezer. I'm not sure what my rationale was other than to "teach it a lesson" I guess.

We went on with the game and I forgot all about the cursed clear die. Flash forward one week. We joined up at my DM's house for our weekly session. The DM turned to me and asked if I remembered my little dice-in-the-freezer tirade from last week. Apologizing for my outburst, I asked if he had come across the dice.

Chuckling, my DM said that when I tossed the dice into the freezer, it had coincidentally landed in a recently-filled ice cube tray, where it froze within a cube of ice. A clear die within an ice cube was nearly invisible. At dinner that night, my DM explained, they had iced tea with their meal.

Throughout dinner, his mother remarked how unusual it was that one of her ice cubes had melted into a nearly-spherical shape. Yup, it was the 20-sider. Still, no one noticed the "ice cube's" true origin.

After dinner, the dishes were placed in the sink and the garbage disposal activated.

"The loudest God-awful noise you ever heard came from the disposal," my DM said as my eyes widened in horror. "Here's your damn dice." My DM tossed me my ground-up, chipped and pitted 20-sider. After that, any die that I was about to roll was held up to the destroyed 20 sider. "You see this?" I would ask the dice in my hands. "This is what happens to lousy-rolling dice."

Strangely enough, my rolls improved from that time on.

# SAME OLD STICK

by Craig Judy

Early in my gaming career I had the distinct pleasure of playing AD&D every Saturday morning for nearly 5 years with a great group of guys. One of those things you hope never ends but life just isn't that fair. Anyhow... early on I was playing a Elven fighter/mage/thief.

About a year into the campaign my character found a famous mage's **Staff of Retributive Strike**, a real kewl find... and for the next two years, whenever the group got into really deep kimchi, my character would threaten to break the staff, unleashing a horrid wave of flaming death on our enemies while leaving our group with a 50% chance of being gated elsewhere...but at least a chance of survival when the odds seemed really against us. Anyhow, sometimes the threat worked, sometimes it didn't (*and we always scrambled for another answer*). Well, eventually we ran into the famous mage (*unknowingly*) and after being cornered, my character naturally used his greatest threat...only to have the mage gesture and make the staff teleport to his own hands. He promptly broke the staff over his knee (*freaking our characters out as we all dove for cover*) and said "this old thing?...I think not!"

The mage turned out to be friendly (*eventually*) but the other guys in the group never let me live down the embarrassment of spending such a long time threatening with a worthless stick. I kept telling them "at least it worked a coupla times".

# RASPBERRY JAM

by J. Hinton

I had just lost a much beloved character and therefore needed a replacement. Our GM had been harping on us for some time about how we had gotten into ruts and should try something new when making characters so I decided why not? Rather than my usual ranger/fighter type, I'd make a Mage.

The resulting character was... interesting. He couldn't pick his nose without a spell. Fortunately, he did have some good spells, as long as the magic lasted... We then proceeded to the "Introducing Your New Character" stage of play.

With no towns within 200 miles, we couldn't do the traditional "You meet in a bar" intro. Instead, the established PCs, walking down a beach, encounter my new character tending a fire and acting absolutely unconcerned about either the group of strangers approaching, the fact he is 200 miles into a forest of ill repute, or the fact night is nigh. He simply invited the group to share his fire.

Much bemused, the other PCs accept and go about setting up camp. Soon the age-old argument about who has what watch comes up, and my new PC pipes up with "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of watch."

"Which shift?" One of the fellows asks.

I give him my best "English-was-your-second-language,-wasn't-it?" look as I say, "All of them, of course."

The PCs look at me like I'm nuts (*Which is arguably true...*). I then begin to cast a spell, my first indication to them of what my PC is. The spell in question normally summons a predator to loyally guard the caster for 12 hours. The size of the predator is determined by how successful the casting roll is. I roll as good as it gets. Pleased, I sit back and wait for the wolf or bear I expect such a good roll to bring.

I was soon surprised when a Black Troll entered the camp. The other PCs freaked (*to put it mildly*) until I calmed them by explaining. After some voiced concerns dismissed cavalierly, the party settled down for the night.

There was one big issue they hadn't mentioned that nevertheless concerned me greatly. After the spell wears off in 12 hours, then what? I spent the night racking my brain and finally come up with a solution shortly before dawn.

Another of my spells allowed me to freeze liquids in a 1 cubic foot area. No problem. In the 11th hour, I simply froze the cubic foot containing the Trolls head.

Experienced magic users might see what came next. When I cast the spell to freeze the trolls brain, the hostile nature of the spell contradicted the friendly nature of the previous one, thus freeing the Troll to his original state. That state was Hungry, surrounded by food, and suffering from the ultimate icecream headache.

Enraged, his bellows awakened the other PCs, who immediately grabbed weapons. Trolls may be stupid, but they understand weapons, so he immediately moved to counter the weapons with something of his own to wield. It just so happens I was the closest 'something'.

Suspended in the air being used as a club tends to ruin one's ability to concentrate on casting spells. Needless to say, I didn't participate much of my own volition, but in the struggle, I did have one moment of dubious greatness.

One of the PCs is of a particularly low scale and sense of humor. She snuck up behind the troll, whipped out her knife, and, rather than stab it in the back of its rapidly cooling brain, hamstringed it. The troll immediately fell. Unfortunately, rather than fall on her, it landed on me.

The following conversation then unfolded...

GM: *Ok, you are pinned under 600 pounds of Troll. Owing to the beating you have been receiving, you are unable to cast anything. What do you do?*

Me: Can I reach my knife?

GM: *No, it's pinned beneath you.*

Me: Can I push the troll off of me.

GM: *It's 600 lbs to your 120. No.*

Me: Well, then, I..... I blow a raspberry on the Trolls stomach!

GM: *You what.....?!!*

After requiring me to make a roll to avoid vomiting from the stench, I succeeded in blowing the raspberry on the Troll's stomach. The troll is so angered by this, he actually stands back up sans hamstrings, and proceeds to jump up and down on my body until he keels over dead from frostbite to the brain. I then reach over for another character sheet...

To this day, our group (*the Golden Anvil Gamers, G.A.G.*) uses the phrase, "I blow a raspberry on the Trolls stomach" to indicate, "Don't do it! It's terminally stupid, Bozo!"

TALES FROM THE TABLE



**02344**  
**CATHERINE MANNON**

# REAPER

## MINIATURES

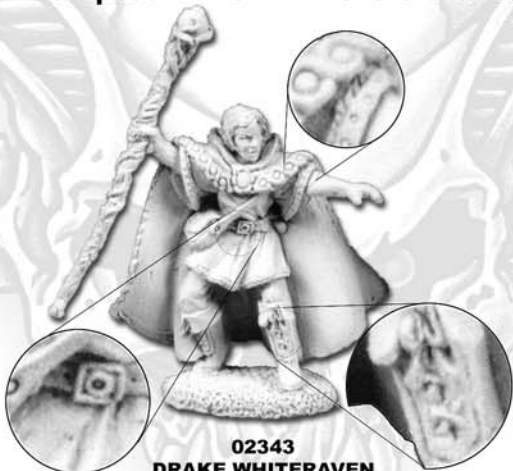
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think about what you were doing and plan actual strategies for defeating the hordes.

Another RPG worth your while is *Deus Ex*. It too suffers from the real time syndrome, although it's much less annoying since you only control one character. *Deus* really hits all the bases in the "first person shooter" genre. It has a measure of the massive bloodbath stuff of *Quake-like* games, and it also has the quiet puzzle solving features of the *Thief/Tomb Raider* like games. Finally, it adds a healthy dose of RPG fun, as you get to develop your character in many different ways by installing various cybernetic components. You also accrue experience points, which you can eventually spend to learn skills.

What gives this game much more replayability than the usual story driven first person shooter is all the variety you have, in the weapons you can use, in the possible evolution/modification of your character and, most importantly, in how you solve the various problems. While I personally favor the "kill everything and move on" approach that makes backtracking through a level convenient (*sorry, I play so many games that memorizing levels is no longer in my ability, so I like to be very clean about things*), you can just as easily sneak, negotiate, or manipulate your way past any given problem. A security

door might only be opened with a certain key, but even if you can't slay the guardian of the key, there's an air vent somewhere, or perhaps you can tear down the door with a crowbar instead. This great variety of solutions means the frustration factor isn't as high as it usually is in adventure type games, and learning all the possible solutions to a given puzzle is a game unto itself.

As seems to be usual of late, the inventory is too small for my taste. My fundamental rule for adventure games has always been "take everything that isn't nailed down, and if it IS nailed down, take it anyway, then take the nails."

Another issue is the difficulty level is once again a little confusing. What they call "easy", I call "expect one solid kick square in the nuts for every 5 minutes of exploration". The problem is aggravated by somewhat ponderous loading and saving times, but thank Gawd you can save whenever you wish to put up with the delay.

Still, for those far too many of you who didn't play *Thief* because you didn't want to spend your precious gaming dollar on a "sneaking around" game, *Deus Ex* is perfect. You can get your money's worth by playing it through one time as a psychotic mass murderer, then on your second try give yourself a taste of a more subtle way of play (hey, you might even like it). Just try it, this game has "classic" slathered all over it. □



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## HACK-FASHION

**Pegasus Publishing  
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to produce  
KNIGHTS OF THE  
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apparel and more!!**



**P**egasus Publishing is pleased to announce that Kenzer & Company has licensed merchandising rights for silk-screened and embroidered Shirts, Bumper Stickers, Buttons, Mugs and other glassware items to Pegasus Publishing. Negotiations for the special edition HackMaster™ pajamas (with feet), and Hoody-Hoo™ boxer shorts are still underway.

Pegasus Publishing announced this addition to their lineup of licensed and fantasy oriented merchandise, and there was much rejoicing.

"We're very excited about this addition to our line" commented Scott Merritt, owner of Pegasus Publishing. "It strengthens our position in the gaming market and broadens our appeal to comics buyers. Knights of the Dinner Table™ magazine's circulation is rapidly expanding and tie-in items will only help to increase their exposure."

Kenzer & Company's Vice President, Jolly R. Blackburn had this to say, "Increase exposure? The T-shirts will actually **DECREASE** our exposure significantly. If only someone would make pants as well I'd be able to walk outside again...hmmm, a few well placed bumper stickers..."

"This deal couldn't have come at a better time, there's only so many times you can reuse a plastic cup," commented Steve Johansson, Vice President of Kenzer & Company, "a KODT mug is like a dream come true. I'm just worried people will start laughing hysterically while they're drinking, we all know what caffeine does to your nasal passages."

Pegasus Publishing, a small company based in Sherman, Texas, was founded in 1982. Long known for its extensive lines of buttons and bumper stickers, Pegasus branched out in 1995 into the apparel market. In addition to the Knights of the Dinner Table™ license Pegasus also produces Cthulhu merchandise, Steve Jackson Games shirts, David M. Weber's Honor Harrington merchandise, Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan merchandise, and an extensive line of original sf/fantasy and Celtic merchandise.

Kenzer and Company are the publishers of Knights of the Dinner Table magazine (KODT), winner of the Origins Award for Best Professional Games Magazine of 1997, 1998 and 1999; KODT's first three years of eligibility. Kenzer and Company also produces the hilarious Monty Python and the Holy Grail card game and Kingdoms of Kalamar line of role-playing products. For more information on Kenzer and Company's products, visit our web page at [www.kenzerco.com](http://www.kenzerco.com)

Questions about this press release or any of the licensed products mentioned within can be directed to Pegasus Publishing at 903.893.4999; or E-mailed to [sales@pegasuspublishing.com](mailto:sales@pegasuspublishing.com).

### Manager, Comics Category

This new position includes responsibility and management over all traditional comic book and graphic novel freelance scripting, writing and artwork. The position is located in Kildeer, Illinois with a starting date on or before January 1, 2001. Job experience in the comic book industry is not necessary but the successful applicant must have a strong knowledge and understanding of the comic industry. Must be able to manage a budget, individuals, multiple tasks and be very organized.

**Internships Available:** We are looking for part-time interns to perform a wide variety of duties. Must be willing to perform manual labor. Computer literacy and own transportation a must.

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# plucked from the vine for your reading enjoyment

## • A-TEAM FEATURE NOW AT TOP COW

Top Cow Productions has acquired the feature film rights to The A-Team from Universal. Top Cow will team with creator Stephen J. Cannell to produce the modernized FOX action-comedy. <http://www.topcow.com> <http://www.foxmovies.com>

## • DAVID HAYTER TO WORK ON HULK MOVIE

The Hollywood Reporter has reported that David Hayter (*X-Men*) will re-write Universal's *The Hulk*, which is based on the MARVEL Comics series. [http://www.universalstudios.com/universal\\_pictures](http://www.universalstudios.com/universal_pictures)

## • LIVE-ACTION 'BATMAN BEYOND'

Boaz Yakin (*Remember The Titans, A Price Above Rubies*) has signed on to direct a live-action *Batman Beyond* feature film for Warner Brothers. Yakin will co-write the film with the creators of the animated series it's based on; Paul Dini and Alan Burnett. <http://www.warnerbros.com>

## • CROCODILE DUNDEE 3 CASTINGS

Paul Rodriguez, Jere Burns (*Something So Right*), Jonathan Banks (*Wiseguy*), and Tiriell Mora (*Farscape's Salis*) have been cast in *Crocodile Dundee 3* to be filmed in Los Angeles.

## • JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS

Seth Green, Breckin Meyer, Donald Faison (*Clueless*), and Alexander Martin (*Can't Hardly Wait*) will appear as a boy band in the live-action *Josie and the PussyCats* feature film. Rachael Leigh Cook, Tara Reid, Rosario Dawson, and Parker (sigh) Posey also star.

## • GALAXY QUEST DIRECTOR TO TAKE ON SCARED GUYS

Director Dean Parisot is in negotiations to helm the Columbia Pictures comedy *The Scared Guys*. The film involves two brothers, one a paranoid agoraphobe and the other an obsessive-compulsive, who uncover a major police conspiracy forcing them to venture outside of their apartment.

## • DAVID SPADE TO PLAY 'PUKA PETE'

David Spade will star in *Puka Pete*, a comedy he co-wrote about a '60s hippie who returns to society after being shipwrecked on an island.

## • SARAH PARLEY'S WITH MONSTER

Sarah Polley (*Go, The Sweet Hereafter*) will play a journalist who forges an unlikely relationship with a mythical Icelandic creature in the Hal Hartley film *MONSTER*. Julie Christie, Helen Mirren, and John Burke will also star.

## • JACKIE CHAN TO STAR IN 'BELL BOY' REMAKE

MGM is developing a remake of the 1960 Jerry Lewis flick, *The Bell Boy* with an eye on Jackie Chan to star. Bradley Allenstein (*Juwanna Mann*) is currently in final negotiations to write the script.

## • DAVID DUCHOVNY TO STAR IN EVOLUTION

It's rumored that David Duchovny (*X-Files*) is in early talks to star in the Ivan Reitman sci-fi comedy *Evolution*. The ensemble piece involves a fast-evolving one-celled organism which crash lands on Earth.

## KENZER & COMPANY INKS EXCLUSIVE LICENSE TO DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™ COMIC BOOK

**K**enzer & Company is pleased to announce that it has acquired an exclusive worldwide license from *Wizards of the Coast* to produce, market and sell official **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS™** comic books. *Kenzer & Company's* experience in the crossover market between games and comics is spearheaded by its award-winning periodical, *Knights of the Dinner Table*. Although, *KODT* is produced in comic book format, it has won the **ORIGINS** Award for *best professional games magazine* for three years running and shows no signs of slowing down.

"We started *Kenzer & Company* in 1993 with strictly role-playing products in mind. With our success in the comics' arena, we felt doing the *Dungeons & Dragons* comic would be a natural extension of our existing product line," said Brian Jelke, Vice-President of *Kenzer & Company*.

"We're very excited to be working with *Kenzer & Company*. This partnership will help get the *Dungeons & Dragons* comic line into as many fans' hands as possible," said Ryan Dancey, Vice President of *Dungeons & Dragons & RPGs* at *Wizards of the Coast*.

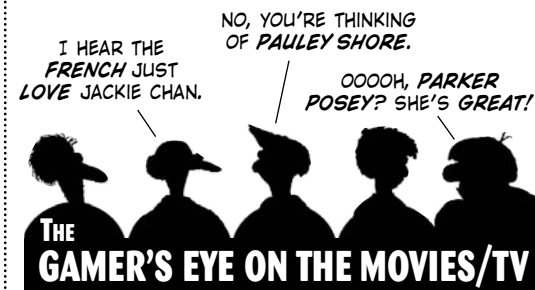
Cindi Rice, *Dungeons & Dragons* and RPG Licensing Manager, said simply, "'Kenzer who?'"

The new **D&D** title fits well with *Kenzer & Company's* efforts to expand both the gaming industry and the comics industry. As with *KODT* and its spin-offs, *HackMasters of EverNight* and *Knights of the Dinner Table: Illustrated*, the new **D&D** comic book will expose game industry consumers to another excellent comic book and comic industry consumers to the most popular tabletop role-playing game in history. The new **D&D** book will contain stories in the tradition of the great novels in the medieval fantasy genre.

"We anticipate our new *Dungeons and Dragons* comics will be huge," said Kenzer. "We're thinking of going with about nine foot by eleven foot format. It just might be the biggest comic ever released."

The planned release date for the first issue of the *Dungeons and Dragons* comic is early spring 2001. Fans should then expect 24-32 pages of intriguing stories and fantastic art every other month. The expected cover price is \$2.95.

Founded in 1993, *Kenzer & Company* has produced dozens of outstanding products, including *Knights of the Dinner Table*, *KODT: Illustrated*, *HackMasters of EverNight*, *The Travelers* and *Avelon* comic books, the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* line of fantasy products, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* card game, *Fairy Meat* miniatures' game and more. For updates on new releases for all of *Kenzer & Company's* product lines, check out our website at [www.kenzerco.com](http://www.kenzerco.com) For information on wholesale ordering, subscriptions or becoming an advertiser, E-mail [Sales@KenzerCo.com](mailto:Sales@KenzerCo.com) or call (847) 540-0029.





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.*

*We recently received the following 'manifesto' from Hilary Doda from Dream Pod 9. Hilary had a lot to say about women and gaming — Weird Pete's Back Room seemed like the perfect place to run it.*

### A GAMERGRRL'S MANIFESTO

by Hilary Doda

#### PART THE FIRST: *Ranting and Raving*

I am a gamergrl. I am a girl gamer. I am a person of the female gender who spends an inordinate amount of her free time engaging in the social phenomenon known as role-playing. Heck, I'm a professional game designer over at **Dream Pod 9**. I am also, apparently, in an unreachable minority, representing a gender who, for some distant, unknowable reason, just isn't interested in 'boy's games.' Manufacturers, fans, clubs and retailers spend dozens of hours and thousands of dollars trying to find some way to tap the untouched market potential of a demographic which includes over half of the world's population. Drawing on my umpteen years of experience as a gamergrl, I offer the following suggestions:

#### FOR MANUFACTURERS:

We get it. Girls look good. You like the way women look in skimpy bits of nothing. That doesn't mean that all women everywhere in every time period wear little more than a postage stamp or two, whether they be sword-slinger, superhero or cyber-hacker. A brass bikini's not going to do much in the way of protection, so why does the single, solitary female fighter illustrated in your handbook wear about two square inches of clothing? It looks even stupider when she's standing next to a guy in full plate mail.

Fine, you say. No brass bikinis. Look at us — we have our female fighter in full pro-

tection armor! Wow. You're enlightened. Now tell me why you don't have one female character who does anything besides scream? Yes, you. I look through your book and see dozens of pictures of men in battle. I read fiction pieces from the guy's point of view. I see your sample characters, and one out of ten is female.

#### REPEAT AFTER ME: Token Is Not Enough.

What do women want? We don't want books with pink covers. We don't want collectable card games to find our 'perfect date.' Once you hit the age of about — say — 13, that stuff doesn't really appeal except for kitsch value. We want a game where women are represented as being just as capable as men. We want a game where women appear as often as men. We want a game that is not obviously, painfully, gratuitously and desperately appealing to the hormone-crazed, drooling fourteen year-old boys who currently populate the hobby. We want to open a book and see pictures of both female and male characters and say — wow. He looks cool. /She/ looks cool. I want to play this.

#### FOR CLUBS AND CONVENTIONS:

Yeah, we know. You don't get girls often. Girls are something of a mystery to a lot of you, or so says the stereotype. Girls aren't into gaming, and girls aren't into gaming guys. Funny, that. If girls aren't into gaming, why are there Quake Clans made up of only women? Why has my gaming club been run by a woman for over two years now? Why are 40% of European gamers women, as opposed to our pitiful 20% in North America? Maybe because we're not actually an alien species. Maybe we're there because we want to play, and want to find people to play with.

It would help if you'd treat us like human beings. I cannot count the number of times I've walked into the game room of a convention and gotten nothing but blank or lewd stares. My name is not 'hotty', by the way. Nor am I 'cutey', 'darlin'', or 'wench'. I'm a woman, yes, but I'm certainly no supermodel. So why are you staring at me like that?

#### NO, MY BREASTS DON'T TALK.

I am not interested in playing the NPC bar wench in your **D&D** game. I'm not going to play the sexaroid in **BESM**. I'm not even going to take you up on that oh-so-generous offer to toodle around with one orc in the trenches in your **Warhammer**

demo. And no, the 'widdle woman' is not interested in 'learning to play with the big boys.' I'm here to play some games that I love, and if you would only offer me the same courtesy you show every male at this table, I just might have something fun and interesting to contribute.

Of course, you could always ignore me. I'm sure that, me being a girl and all, nothing I have to say would interest you in the slightest. I've only been gaming for longer than some of you little punks have been alive, but that doesn't matter in the slightest. I'm a girl, after all, and can't possibly understand the depth and passion of the material.

On second thought, I'd rather you ignore me than assault me. I am not here as a plaything. I am not here for your pleasure. In point of fact, I am not here for you at all! If you grope me, I will hit you. If you verbally assault me, I will call convention security down on your head. Would you talk to your mother that way? No, the fact that I am in your LARP does not mean that I want you. The fact that I signed up for your game does not mean that I plan to sleep with you. You try to bite me, fang-boy, and you'll be picking those fake teeth out of your tongue for a month.

#### FOR RETAILERS:

I realize that the boy market is your biggest market. I realize that you have to tailor your environments and staff to supply the demand these kids have for their favorite games and books. I understand that the needs of the few — the perilously few, from what I understand — female gamers aren't high on your priority list. But they should be. We have a lot of money to spend, and your store is where we want to spend it. Why, then, are you dead-set against allowing us to do so?

I have no qualms in saying that I have a blacklist. There is a list of stores in the major cities in Canada that I will never return to, and will never spend money in as long as I can help it. I may even stop buying gaming products entirely before I spend money in those stores. And I'm not a person who holds grudges, or gets insulted easily. Not usually.

You may never have seen me in your store before. I may look like just another one of those girls from the mall who wanders through and giggles and doesn't buy anything. Fine. You have paying customers to attend to, and I fully understand. But when I am standing at your cash register with a pile of books in hand, and when I

am first in line and you look straight through me and serve the skater punks waiting behind me who want to buy two dice? Yes, I'm going to get angry. And don't be surprised when I leave without buying that \$150 worth of material that I'd been looking for. And don't shrug and say something about 'hormones' loud enough so that I can hear you as I leave. That will only ensure that I never come back.

You may be a new staff member. Fine. I can appreciate that there's a learning curve. You may be on your first day on the shop floor, and be a little clueless. We've all worked retail in the past, and I know it can be hell. But don't blatantly ignore me when I walk in, especially if you look right at me, acknowledge that I need help, and then wander off to the counter to talk to your best friend for an hour.

You may have only ever seen boys in your tournaments. You may have a 99% male consumer base in your store. Sure, I understand. It's a guy's market. But when I walk in with my army case under my arm to enter in your tournament, and when I spend half an hour trying to pick out all the materials I need to build my next regiment, don't you dare walk up to me and ask me if I'm waiting for my brother or my boyfriend. How can you possibly be so blind as to not see that I've been playing this for years, especially when I've just been asking you questions that must – at the very least – betray the fact that I have at least basic knowledge of the game system? And have a massive number of my own figures here? And nothing in my speech or manner has ever suggested that I was there for any purpose but to spend obscene amounts of money and play in your tournament?

On the plus side, my army fetched a decent amount on eBay after a series of encounters with people just like you convinced me to give up the game entirely.

The fact that I am in your store does not make me your property. The fact that I have asked you a question in no way gives you the right to touch me. You brush up against me 'accidentally' like that again and I'll organize a boycott. Yes, I look a little nervous when you're around. I'm sure you're just trying to be friendly. I know that it seems absolutely inexplicable to you, but given the cultural climate, women don't like being gawked, gaped, leered or stared at. We find it uncomfortable when you stare at our bodies, lick your lips or try to get close to us during conversations. My body is mine to do with as I choose. It is not on display for you, nor do you have permission to do anything to me beyond interact as you would with any male customer.

I know you love your posters, but those pictures of Lady Death, Vampirella and BattleChasers plastered all over your walls do nothing to make me feel comfortable in your fine establishment. You could, at the very least, add some beefcake... after all, even if you only get men in, 10% of your customers are guaranteed to be interested...

#### **THE END'S IN SIGHT (FINALLY!):**

So, all told, what do women want?

We want to be treated like human beings. We want the same courtesy and professional attitude you extend to male customers. We want games that reflect our 'reality' and our worlds. (That doesn't mean Barbie RPGs, either.) We want games that acknowledge that we exist and can contribute. We want groups that don't assume that women are incapable or uninterested. We want to feel safe and welcome in stores and clubs. We want what everybody else wants: to feel somehow included in a hobby that purports to welcome everybody.

#### **PART THE SECOND: SUGGESTIONS**

But Hilary, you cry, what on earth can I do about all these problems you've mentioned? I'm just a single publisher/fan/retailer, and these issues are so widespread! I can't possibly effect societal change all by myself! No, unfortunately, you can't. The woman's movement has been active for over 20 years now, and has barely begun to make the changes that are needed. What you can do is change the way you act.

Think about it. If 20% of North American gamers are female, while 52% of the total population is female, that means there's an untapped feminine market equivalent to a full 60% of the current total gaming market. If you can make your game/club/con/store female-friendly, you have an opportunity to grab more market share than anyone has to date.

#### **HOW TO MAKE GAMES GIRL-FRIENDLY:**

The most vital thing is the first impression. If I walk into a game store and pick up a new game, the first thing I see is the cover. If I see a massively-breasted woman with impossible proportions – and, importantly, it's not a Macho Women With Guns style parody – I'm going to put it back without ever reading it. I have no interest in financially supporting companies that have no interest in appealing to anything except hormones. I know sex sells. I know that you know that sex sells. I want games that have more to offer than breasts. I have my own, thanks.

The way that things are phrased is vital. I'm not going to tell you to use him/her/it for everything; that's just silly. A brief note that you purposely chose to use one over the other would be a good idea, however. Using female gamers and characters in your examples would also be a nice touch. Really, how hard would it be to change "Gary, Mike and Joe decide to play a Role Playing Game" to "Gary, Mike and Joanne decide to play a Role Playing Game"? It doesn't have to change anything else except the name, and it's an acknowledgment that girl-gamers really do exist.

Female representation in the game world itself is another thing. If you're going to have a medieval world, great. Games set in the middle ages can be a real blast to play, but they can be horrendously grating when writers and designers fall back on age-old stereotypes instead of doing some extra research. No, women didn't hold high office in the middle ages, but they weren't all just screaming and swooning princesses waiting to be rescued, either. Boadecia led a rebellion against the Roman armies. Queen Mathilde waged civil war on her

husband for years. Jeanne d'Arc crusaded with armies at her beck and call. Anne Boelyn almost single-handedly brought about the separation of England from the Church of Rome. The suspected presence of a 'Pope Joan' changed the entire selection process for the new pope. Women had an immense impact on the middle ages, as scholars, as fighters, as religious and political leaders, whether they were officially sanctioned or not. If your game is a fantasy or science-fiction world, you've got even less of an excuse for ignoring women. If it's non-historical, you change whatever you want to change about it, earthly status of women be damned.

Damsels in distress are highly overrated as a game concept. Let women be people, not just chattel or prizes. Women can be heroes, villains and helpers, political powers and assassins, spies, scientists and construction workers – anything that one gender can do (beyond reproduction or writing your name in the snow, unless you're doing far-out sci-fi) should not be restricted to that gender alone without good, in-game reasons. It can be explained as a prejudice within the game world – DP9's Tribe 8 has a matriarchy with ruling priestesses, because the Fatimas (avatars of the Goddess) are all female, but not all the men in Tribe 8 take that lying down... Explore this arena for conflict, don't just mandate sexism because it doesn't occur to you to change it.

Interior art is the other prime opportunity for change. Take a look at your last published book. What percentage of the archetypes/classes/monsters/non-gender-specific NPCs are illustrated as female? Why? How about your scene art? Your splash pages? Count the instances of active, powerful female characters you've pictured in the scenes. Count the males. Now count how many females are portrayed in positions of weakness, of powerlessness, of passivity. Now count the males in the same situations. Is there a marked difference? Why? Is that difference necessary? Why?

As for the stories and campaigns themselves, how many of your NPCs are female? Is it necessary for them to be male or female in order to do what they do in the story? Why? What about your introductory fiction or your chapter fiction? Who is the main character, and who is the supporting character? Is that gender relationship always the same in your fiction? Why?

Take the time to think about the issues involved. Changing a game to make it inclusive can be as easy and as simple as ensuring that it's not exclusive.

#### **HOW TO MAKE CONS AND CLUBS GIRL-FRIENDLY:**

Repeat this mantra after me:

Girls are not aliens. Girls are not freaks. Girls do not like being stared at. Just because she talks to me, doesn't mean she wants to sleep with me. Breasts don't hold conversations.

I know you're an enlightened man. You see girls wander into your club or game room every once in a while, but they never seem to stay. It must be that girls just aren't cut out for gaming. They don't have the interest, or the mindset, or

the math skills. It has to be that – it can't be the fact that we treat them differently. After all – they're girls!

Let me set one thing straight right away. There is no mental or psychological reason that would make girls any less capable of gaming than boys. Companies like **White Wolf** have managed to introduce a huge number of women to gaming, and they don't seem to feel inadequate at all. So why don't more girls play? Why don't they stick around after wandering into clubs and conventions? Because of the treatment they receive when they do dare to set foot in this forbidden fortress of masculine identity.

Let girls play. If a girl comes to your club, don't try to scare her off. She may well be really interested! Why would she seek you out if she didn't want to play, or at least learn about gaming, in the first place? Talk to her. Answer her questions. Treat her exactly the same way you would a guy who comes knocking at your door. If a girl signs up for your game at a con, don't harass her. Don't stick her with the female PC if she wants to play someone else. Don't force her to make a female PC if she doesn't want to. Treat her exactly the same way you treat the rest of your players. And please, don't comment on her physical attributes. Do you feel the need to make passes or snide remarks if one of your guy players is really buff? No? Then don't tell a girl that she's *'stacked'*. Chances are, she already knows.

Don't try to save her. Girls were not put on the earth for the express purpose of being rescued from danger by big, buff, boys. If she's having trouble with the game rules, explain them. Don't try to dumb them down for her. Don't tell her to go play somewhere else. Need I reiterate? Treat a girl playing in your game exactly the same way you would treat a guy in the same situation.

Staring and pointing is just rude. When a girl walks into the game room, chances are she's looking to play or learn. You staring at her like she's the first woman you've ever seen – or like she's a demon from the underdark – isn't going to help her find what she's looking for. Don't be a jerk.

#### HOW TO MAKE STORES GIRL-FRIENDLY:

The game store is often the center of a stable gaming community. It's the place where we meet and greet, where we make new discoveries and new friends. It can be a hangout and a clubhouse, a focal point for ideas and conversation. It is often the first place someone will go when they want to learn about gaming, and can very well be the thing that turns them off the hobby entirely. The way a store looks and feels can be the thing that convinces a new gamer that this is the hobby for them – or that they are obviously not wanted at all.

Have a clear view of the store from your counter, and/or ensure that everything is open and well-lit. One of the most terrifying experiences a girl can have is to be backed into a dark corner and either be harassed, intimidated or assaulted. Making the store open, lit and visible is the best way to ensure that the possibility is removed (it's also, as an added bonus, the

best way to reduce product shrinkage). Even if nothing like that has ever happened in your store, or even in your neighborhood, you can bet that girls are aware of the possibility. We can't even walk down the main streets without being harassed nowadays – we want our hangouts to feel safe.

Make a policy that verbal harassment and obvious sexism are not going to be tolerated, among customers and employees, and then enforce it. What girl is going to want to come back if she's told that 'girls can't play', or that she's a 'bitch' for asking questions?

Ensure that your employees are aware that harassment is a crime, and that obvious lewdness is inappropriate. You would feel very uncomfortable if you were forced to deal with someone who constantly talked to your crotch; women are made to feel cheap, used and violated by someone whose eyes never move above their chests, or who tries to touch them in an inappropriate manner.

If you plan to serve women between the ages of 10 and 60, and if you have a bathroom which is accessible to the public, you should have a way to dispose of the unfortunate by-products of female sanitary practices. A specialized sanitary-napkin disposal unit, either a wall-mounted or stand-alone bin, is preferable, but a garbage can in the bathroom itself is perfectly serviceable. Women coming to your store for tournaments and games will be there for a while, and a few will need to avail themselves of the facilities. It is the utmost in humiliation and inconvenience to have to walk out into the store or tourney area with a conspicuously wrapped bundle and ask the service desk for a garbage.

Lose the obvious and blatant cheesecake. Not even counting the business you'll lose from Poke-parents who get disturbed by the soft-porn posters that are so popular nowadays, walking into a store and seeing walls full of breasts (and often not just breasts, but amazingly disproportionate and humanly impossible BREASTS) can be disconcerting, to say the least. It says that you don't really care about the content of the books, or the artistry... whether or not it's true, the overpowering presence of cheesecake gives the impression that you're only interested in the bodies of the female characters. I'm in no way saying that porn is bad, nor am I advocating censorship. I'm saying that, if you must have some boobage on your walls, put up some beefcake too. Or some of the incredible posters for things like Lord of the Rings, which don't exploit the human body at all.

On the other hand, if you run tournaments or game nights for adults, be aware that you may eventually get a breast-feeding mother. Those are not sex-breasts, those are working breasts. If they bother you, look away. If your customers complain, please tell them just to look away as well. Please don't force a mother to go into the bathroom to feed. It's humiliating, can remove a woman from the game or tourney for an unconscionable length of time – it make take upwards of half an hour for a baby to eat – and is revoltingly unsanitary. A baby cannot use discretion; it only knows that it is

hungry, and must eat now. A screaming, panicking baby will be more disturbing to customers than any flash of nipple could possibly be. Especially if you've got Vampirella posters on your walls.

Use inclusive language in advertising. I know we all hate silliness like him/her/it; that's why we at **DP9** use the masculine in our **Heavy Gear** and **Jovian Chronicles** books and the feminine in **Tribe 8**, along with the appropriate disclaimers in our mastheads. But when you put up posters or hand out flyers advertising your tournaments or sales, think about the language you're using. Don't say something like *"Hey Boys – Check out our Pokemon League!"*. Use something more along the lines of *"Announcing our new Pokemon League! Everyone Welcome!"* An inane example, yes, but one that gets the point across.

Carry girl toys. I don't mean pink things like **Barbie** or **EZ-Bake** ovens. I mean the female character figures from comic books and movies. I wandered into a local toy store a couple of weeks ago, and the action figure section was crammed full of guys. *Cyclops*, *Wolverine* and *Prof.X*, but no *Jean Grey*, *Storm* or *Rogue*. *Anakin* and *Obi-Wan*, but no *Amidala*.

*Woody* and *Buzz Lightyear*, the *Prospector* and even the horse, but no *Jessie*. Heck, when I was younger I remember searching for a *Lady J* or *Scarlett GI Joe* figure, and never found one. Same for *Mainframe* or *Mirage* out of C.O.P.S. Where are all the action figures of women? *Xena* is great, but stock from one show does not an equal balance make.

I'm not saying that you should completely remodel your store on the off chance that one or two girls might feel more comfortable, but keep these suggestions – and suggestions from your female customers and staff – in mind. Even just one or two changes could make a huge difference in how you and your store are perceived.

#### ARE YOU DONE YET?:

So, you say, now that I've made all these changes, the girls will just come piling in? Unfortunately, you probably won't see a massive influx right away. The past three decades of gaming have laid down some very unfortunate stereotypes about games and gamers that aren't going to go away by cutting down on gratuitous boobage in books and stores. We still have massive amounts of outreach and education to do, and all of us need to make the effort to change our own prejudices and patterns.

The fact is, women are starting to come to gaming in a way that they never have previously. New editions of games are coming out that showcase a real awareness of the issues of gender parity, and games such as **BESM**, **World of Darkness** and **Tribe 8** can be lauded for appealing to women in a way that the industry has never managed to accomplish before.

My question to everyone is, are you doing everything that you can to ensure that women and girls feel welcome in this hobby? If not, what are you going to change?



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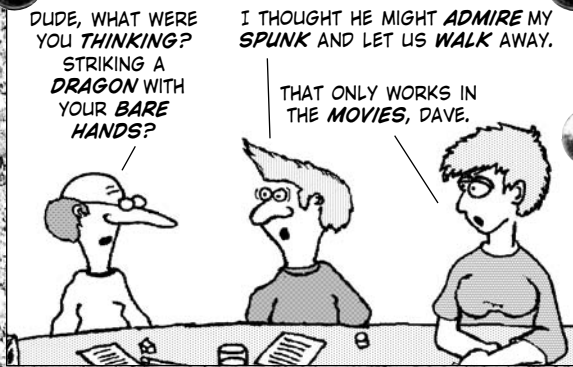
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**SKETCH**

Corsair Publishing • [www.corsairpub.com](http://www.corsairpub.com)

Here's an innovative new role-playing game for ya. Players 'sketch' their characters to create their new identities. Then, the character's attributes are derived from the drawing itself. Determining what attributes are warranted is handled democratically. The other players pass around your sketch and assign a number between one and ten for each attribute based on how your character appears in the drawing. Once they've finished, the numbers are added up and divided by the number of players who voted.



The rules point out that 'hopefully' you'll be playing with friends who are willing to cut you some slack and award points on effort rather than artistic skill. At any rate, Sketch is fun, simple game with a twist. A good game to have around when you're players are bored and looking for something off the beaten path.

Game by Seth Johnson and Brian Schomburg

And at \$6.95 it's a bargain. Brian's Rating: Brian's Rating: Guaranteed Fun!

**RASC: REAL ACTION STOCKCAR CHAMPIONSHIP**

Real Action Games • [www.realaction.com](http://www.realaction.com)

When I stumbled across a demo of this game at GenCon I found myself staring over the shoulders of those playing and literally drooling. It didn't take me long to reach for my wallet and snag a copy. Being a huge fan of Euro Games' Formula De', my interest in racing games has been piqued in recent months. So I thought I'd give RASC a try. As I shoved my copy of RASC under my arm and made my way through the thronging crowd, I mumbled a simple gamer's prayer. "Please, Lord! Let it be worthy of my gaming dollars!"



Somebody must have been listening because it didn't take me long to discover my prayer had been answered. RASC plays fast and furiously with plenty of dice-play to boot. Up to twenty cars race at a time. (Don't worry if you can't round up more than a handful of players - the game has rules for non-human controlled cars) At the core of the game are the four Min-Max movement dice. All cars move around the track using these dice which are marked MIN, +1, +2, MAX or TI. Drivers are allowed to roll 1 to 4 movement dice to simulate how hard they are pushing their cars to win. After rolling, the driver is allowed to pick the die with the best result. However, the more dice you roll the greater the chance of a Track Incident (TI). Can you say "crash" or "spin out"? If the dice come up with two or more TIs then your car has had a mishap and you must roll 2d6 on the Track Incident table to determine the outcome.

Another kewl feature of the game is the "Challenge". You are not allowed to pass other cars in this game without challenging them. As the rules point out, "Catching a car is one thing, but passing them is a different game." Challenge dice (1d10) are rolled with the highest roller taking the lead. Each car's roll is modified according to which lane it occupies. A result of zero indicates a Track Incident. Drafting rules allow cars to slingshot (if they win the challenge) around lead cars. And since races can last from 10 to 500 laps you'll need to make Pit Stops to refuel. (Depending on the type of race, a car's fuel can last anywhere from 10 to 60 laps.)

The rules do an excellent job of simulating NASCAR racing without bogging down speed of play or game excitement. With up to twenty cars on the track that's an amazing accomplishment. The game even includes log sheets and rules to run your own Season Championships. I've already played a dozen games of RASC and it looks like it's going on my 'classic game' list. Say no more.

Brian's Rating: Start your engines!

**DWARVEN FORGE: Medieval Furniture Set (MM013) and Dungeon Accessories Set (MM012)**

Dwarven Forge • 306 E. 51st Street • New York, NY 10022 • E-mail: [dwarvenforge@cs.com](mailto:dwarvenforge@cs.com)



Kewl! That's the only way to describe these hand-painted dungeon trappings from Dwarven Forge. These high-quality pieces come bundled in sets and are designed for use with the Master Maze dungeon building sets. (See the rave review in Brian's Picks, KODT#34). The detail on these truly have to be seen to be believed. It's amazing that they are hand-painted. I'd be hardpressed to match the level of quality and I'm left scratching my head as to how Dwarven Forge accomplished this feat without making the sets cost prohibitive. I suspect some strange form of magic must be involved here. In fact, if you were to go out and buy unpainted metal figures of comparable quality I suspect it would cost you about the same if not more. (And yes Dwarven Forge has released hand-painted miniatures as well. Hoody Hoo!

The Medieval Furniture set includes 14 pieces (torch stands, chairs, benches and tables.) The Dungeons Accessories set includes 15 pieces (barrels, beds, sacks of grain, crates, earthen pots, etc.)

Brian's Rating: Got get 'em all!

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IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO SURRENDER.



OK, I'LL INFORM DUTCHESS DE SUTEK OF YOUR UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER AND ASK HER TO BRING THE FRIGATES LOBO AND TIGRE INTO POSITION TO FINISH OFF DAVE'S MEAGER FORCES!

SHE MUST BE STOPPED.



I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. SARA WIPED ME OFF THE MAP!



## REPORT ON POOR WORK CONDITIONS IN DWARVEN MINES

Compiled February 12, 1999 by OSHA inspector D. Mandrake

\* \* \* DRAFT \* \* \*

**SYNOPSIS:** A joint team of OSHA and EPA inspectors, following up an anonymous tip, conducted a surprise inspection of mine workings and foundries belonging to "the Mithril Throne" [unsure at this time whether this is a corporation or some weird kind of co-op]. It was found that up to 3,000 dwarves are working in extremely unsafe conditions similar to those found in mines during the middle ages. These conditions include:

- Inadequate lighting (typically provided by non-electric torch, oil-filled lamp, luminescent mosses and fungi, or a variety of proprietary sources referred to as "magic")
- Poor ventilation
- Lack of dust filtration leading to high particulate count in the air
- No natural gas detection or warning systems
- All digging, loading, transport, and unloading of ore is done with purely manual labor
- Inadequate foot and ankle protection (no safety shoes, for example)
- Sporadic or nonstandard head protection (some helmets had spikes or horns on them)
- High incidence of undead (zombies, ghosts, skeletons, etc)
- No provisions for ergonomic work stations

Most of these infractions are self-explanatory, but here are additional comments from the inspection team:

- While the dwarves do not use any mechanical systems for the detection of natural gas, they do have small birds stationed along the mine shafts at regular intervals, and a dwarf is assigned to watch the bird in the event a lack of oxygen causes the bird to pass out. It should be noted, however, that the stultifying nature of this duty results in a high incidence of sleeping dwarves. Also, the EPA is investigating this matter further, to ensure no endangered species are being mistreated.

- The mines owned by the **Mithril Throne** are poorly sited. The dwarves do have the proper number of vertical ventilation shafts (see OSHA regulation 65.13.88-9, paragraph 12) but they use no continuously active ventilation system. Periodically the foreman will instruct a pair of dwarves to "go run the bellows" which forces some fresh air into the mine, but the airflow is far less than mandated by regulation 65.13.93-7, paragraph 3, and thus constitutes a safety violation.

- Also a factor in poor siting is the location near several underground cities, including one formerly occupied by **Drow Elves**, from which the **Force of Evil** emanates (see also OSHA document 44-919-2122a, "Underdark Contamination of Underground Work Spaces"). The evil contamination is scheduled for cleanup beginning sometime in 2011, as part of the EPA Superfund project, but in the meantime it occasionally results in minor infestation of various mine workings with several varieties of undead. In general, the undead population is confined primarily to the walking dead, such as skeletons and zombies, but some ghosts and even a vampire have been spotted, and several lives were lost (this is the incident which prompted this investigation). OSHA has closed these mine workings, as of the close of the investigation, until such time as the undead problem can be solved to the satisfaction of the Review Board.

- The inspectors find it surprising that there are not far more injuries and deaths in the mines, especially considering the lack of visible light in most places. The dwarven complaint that they can see by infrared is, of course, ludicrous; and even if true, they have not requested a waiver for regulation 65.11.9-2, paragraph 1, which clearly states that all work spaces must be adequately lit with to the value of at least 100 lux (see OSHA Standards and Measures, Volume 47, page 1124, for a definition of "lux"). The manager of the Mithril Throne, Thorgrim Stonebender, requested an emergency waiver, which was of course denied owing to the other safety violations prevalent in the mines.

We must also add that upon being informed of this, Mr. Stonebender became quite irate and said "...get out of here before I feed you your own skull..." which led to several other legal complaints against him personally, especially considering that at the time he was waving a double-edged axe as big as himself.

The inspectors also found such hazardous working conditions as:

- asbestos contamination;
- inadequate/nonexistent shoring of all subterranean passages and chambers (this practice was defended by various miners, who cited, "...ye don't need to 'shore up' the very bones of the world, ye great pill-lock!");
- proximity to encampments/villages of hostile humanoids, such as orcs, goblins, gnomes, trolls, and others that may invade or commit acts of terrorism or war without warning;
- lack of proper fire extinguishing equipment (including sprinkler systems and hand-held fire fighting equipment);
- lack of proper safety railings near hearths, furnaces, forges, and other heating appliances;
- no finger or thumb guards on equipment used to handle or shape heated metals;
- lack of proper eye protection for blacksmiths and their assistants; and
- workers with long facial hair working with heated or molten metals, coal-fired furnaces and forges, without proper safety ties.

Any or all of these infractions carry up to one year of jail time for each infraction, up to a possible maximum of 30 years, in addition to any and all fines levied.

In addition to the above, it was discovered by the EPA team that the dwarves post armed guards every fifteen yards when working close to the abandoned Drow city. While the team was on-site, a herd of walking dead attempted to enter the site and were brutally killed by the guards. It was determined that the undead were **Drow zombies** which, in the words of one of the guards, "ain't too common, then, anymore." The **Mithril Throne** was immediately put on notice that the mine was being evaluated as a potential "critical habitat" for an endangered species. If Drow zombies are found to be endangered—and so far the investigation team has managed to find no one who has even seen one such example in the past hundred years—then the mine will be closed and further development prohibited, in accordance with the **Endangered Species Act**.

by Ed Hering

Pete:

Due to the egregious violations and lack of regard for worker safety I felt it best to send you a preliminary copy of my report to get it into the pipeline.

Note: I have to find a better term for these people; "dwarf" could offend someone. Since they haven't figured out how to get onto fewer than 839 CO-ROMS, I was hoping you could have someone look that up for me. While they're at it, have them also see what "undead", and "Drow".

Thanks-

Dan



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