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One Ring To Fool Them All

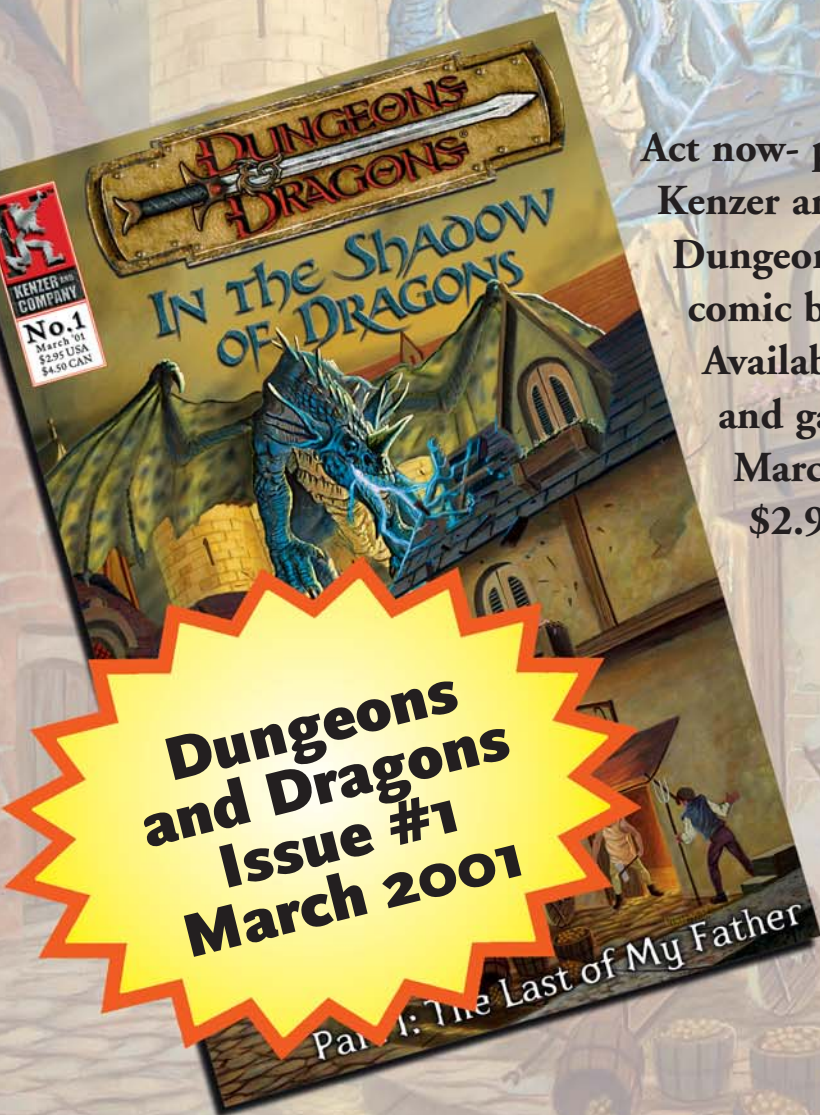
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KENZER AND COMPANY

Knights of the Dinner Table #51

ONE RING TO FOOL THEM ALL

January, 2001

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Submissions: We accept submissions for strip ideas, jokes, cartoons, etc. We are interested in running anything that other gamers and fans would enjoy. Check out our website for writer's guidelines.

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Knights of the Dinner Table™ MAGAZINE

“ONE RING TO FOOL THEM ALL”

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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KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE™ was accidentally created by Jolly R. Blackburn way back in 1990 as 'filler' for his small press magazine, SHADIS™. It was something of a 'creative burp' and Jolly really didn't give it much thought. Perhaps that's why he was just as surprised as anyone that soon KODT was overshadowing everything else he'd ever done and that the *created* was now controlling the *creator*. Fortunately, writing and drawing KODT strips isn't the lonely job it was in the past. Hundreds of fans have contributed to the beast over the years and 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. It's been a wild ride and the D-Team looks forward to seeing where the gang takes them next.



**Best Professional
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16 THINGS THE DUKE TAUGHT ME

Whenever the creative juices start to dry up or when I simply need to relax and recharge my batteries, I like to pop a movie into the VCR and veg out for a few hours. My taste in movies tend to change from week to week — depending on the mood I'm in. Lately I've been leaning toward westerns.

We've been working on HACKMASTER THE RPG here at the office in recent weeks and I suppose this has put me in the frame of mind that I'm constantly analyzing everything I see in movies or TV to figure out how I would put any given situation into game terms.

For example, last week I was watching a flick where a guy jumped through an upstairs window. He then rolled off the roof dropping 20 feet into a wagon filled with straw. Then the hero scurried across the street and leapt onto the back of a horse and galloped away making good his escape (*firing two pistols the entire time, mind you*). Now, I just couldn't help but wonder what skills would have been involved if I was trying to recreate that scene in a table-top role-playing game. Would I have to roll for damage when jumping through the window? What about hitting the wagon filled with hay? It can really drive you crazy after a while.

Anyway, I've been watching a lot of westerns lately and started compiling a list of common themes I've seen pop up again and again. If you ever find yourself playing an OLD WEST rpg based on the westerns of Hollywood, you may want to keep some of these findings in mind.

1. If you get captured by the Indians and they put you in a teepee (*with the intention of burning you alive at the stake in the morning*) you shouldn't panic. I've learned from watching westerns that Indians aren't good at tying knots and you can easily slip out of your bindings. Then you can easily slit the back side of the teepee. (*With the knife you keep hidden in your boot. Apparently Indians don't pat down their captives for hidden weapons either*). You should be able to steal a horse and escape with no problem after that. From what I've seen, Indians don't bother posting guards so no one will notice you.

2. Speaking of Indians, if you should find yourself faced with 10,000 warriors and things look bleak — Don't panic. Here's what you do. Challenge their chief to a mano-a-mano fight. From what I've seen they love this kind of stuff and will readily accept. You should propose that the loser has to leave the field of battle and the winner goes in peace. I've seen this a hundred times too and should you win, the Indians always seem to honor their end of the agreement.

3. If you're dealing with anyone who doesn't speak English, not to worry. Apparently if you speak loudly enough and slowly enough and use your hands a lot they'll understand you. It always seems to work for the Duke.

4. Watch out for rattlesnakes. This is important. They'll spook your horse every time and make them rear up and cause you to fall off. I must have seen this a thousand times. Fortunately it seems to be very easy to shoot them in the head with your pistol. In all the movies I watched no one ever seems to miss.

5. I should point out something about guns. I don't know why they call them six-shooters. It's a little misleading and you should ignore that little detail. Just keep squeezing the trigger in a gunfight. You can get thirty, fifty shots out of one of those things -- easy. File that bit of info away — It could come in handy if you



The Duke may be dead but you can STILL learn a few things from him.

get into hot water.

6. Stay away from banks, stagecoaches and trains. You're just asking for trouble if you get anywhere near one of these. They're constantly being robbed by masked bandits with lots of gunplay. Who needs that?

7. Oh, if you're a stranger in town, never ever go in a bar. There's always some guy looking to pick a fight with strangers.

8. If you are a stranger, be sure to make friends with a saloon hall girl or at least the school marm. For some reason they always intervene if someone has it out for you and tries to give you trouble.

9. Don't get attached to any sidekicks you may have. Trust me on this one. They'll either betray you somehow or end up getting killed. Again, who needs that kind of trouble?

10. If you come to a small town where all the townsfolk are shy and distant you should keep on riding. It's a safe bet they're being oppressed by some robber baron. If you linger too long you'll make friends and they'll end up asking you to save them.

11. Stay away from mineshafts. No matter how safe they look if you go into one, sure as hell, it's going to cave in on you. A mine could sit for a hundred years and NOTHING. But as soon as someone sets foot in it - BOOM! Cave in. Nuff said.

12. If a bartender says, "*I'd be careful Stranger! It's dangerous riding this country alone.*" You should heed his advice. In fact if ANYONE should warn you about ANYTHING you should listen.

14. If you send for the Cavalry learn not to expect them until the last possible minute.

15. Same thing for the Marshall. If you wire him for help don't expect to see him 'til AFTER it's hit the fan and you're already knee deep in bad guys.

16. You probably shouldn't play poker. Most every movie I've seen where this game is involved someone ends up being accused of cheating and a gunfight erupts. And it's always about some extra ACE someone tries to slip into the game.

Well, that's all I've learned so far and I was happy to share it with you. If there's anything I missed I'm sure you'll let me know.

Jolly R. Blackburn

Jolly R. Blackburn

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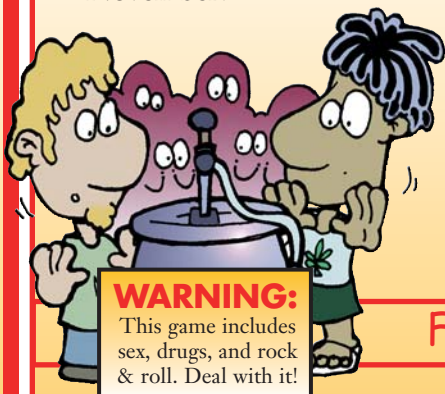
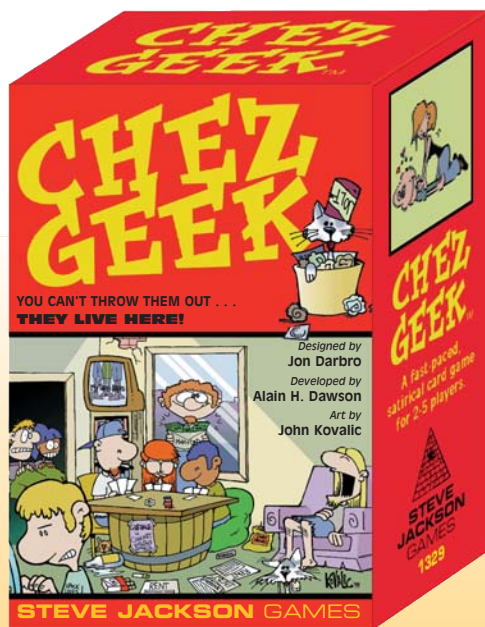
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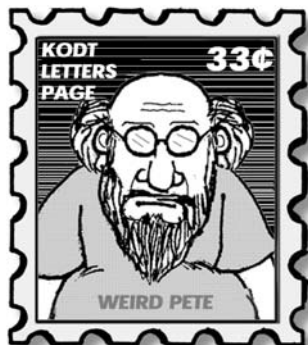


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Our Readers Talk Back!



Dear KODT,

At the risk of being a bit of a pedant, I have to disagree with Rick Kurgas' translation on one of BA's comments from issue 46. The only translation I could get from, well, I can't do the characters in ascii, the text was "banhoff", not "brothel", so I'm assuming not only do dwarves use a different alphabet, but they do so with a slight German accent, hence the interchangeable "c" and "k", the "w" and the "v"...

Anyway, not a hard code to break, but it did make me pause for about ten minutes, trying to work out the missing letters and inconsistent punctuation! Like Rick, I had no idea where to start with the dragonspeak.

Anyway, good work on the comic -- I've been reading it ever since Bob was a blond and KODT was carried only by game shops with interesting ordering pastimes!

Adam Hough
via E-mail

Aaaaah, I see that your *Decipher-Rune Skill* is very high. Good catch. Actually, it's an understandable mistake. In *Garweeze World* I believe the word "banhoff" is dwarven for brothel. No....really.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I enjoy reading KODT. When my brother first started telling me about the Knights, I used to shoo him away! Then I started listening and laughing at some of the things he would tell me the Knights were doing. Then he started showing me your panel strips from one of his *Dragon* magazines. Then you came out with your own comic book! We just got issue #48. I loved it! (BTW - I'm glad that Brian finally got his)

I don't know if this will help anyone else but this is how my brother finally got me to play D&D™. I've always felt that playing D&D was too boring -- for boys only and very childish (I'm 34 and my brother is 23).

My brother finally got our older sister to play and thereby forcing me to play (since I was sure there would be no way that she would agree, I thought I was safe).

After numerous arguments about various DM-calls, we finally purchased mon-

sters and figurines. I even purchased walls and my sister purchased landscape to make things more realistic. It works extremely well for us! Both my sister and I maintain full-time jobs and my sister has a husband, three children and house to look after. Even with all this we still want to play when we get home from work and we play until about 10 or 11 pm. Then I have to rush home, get everything ready for work the next day and try to get sleep. By this time its usually around 1 am and I get up at 6 am. But the important thing is we have FUN!

Thanks!

Willie Mae Jefferson

Dear KODT,

In issue #49 you wax eloquent about *Comedy Central's "new" show, BattleBots*. Having recently been in the UK on business, I caught an episode there of a similar show called *Robot Wars* ("the all action game show in which robotic warriors face a fight to the death!").

RoboRally with an attitude! People build "robots" (technically, they are *Waldos*, not *Robots*, but I digress) that face each other in a dangerous arena. This arena has pits, flame-geysers, and a trapdoor that attempts to flip robots over. The arena also has resident robots of its own that will finish off weakened robots.

The show is hosted by Julia Reed and Craig Charles --the latter of *Red Dwarf* fame (he plays David Lister).

I strongly suspect the UK show is based on the UK one since the latter has been running since 1997. *Robot Wars* toys are now available -- Replicas of the house robots and the more famous contestants...

For details, go to <http://www.robot-wars.co.uk/>

Daniel U. Thibault
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

Here's a picture for you. Hope you like it.

Gabriele Gentile
via E-mail



Two Bobs? What a disturbing thought. Thanks for the picture, Gabriele. It really gave us chuckle.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

Reading the feminist manifesto sort of confused me. In this area, virtually everything the author wanted in a gamestore had already happened.

There are no dark corners, and no cheesecake either. It seems that most of the manifesto has almost nothing to do with the gaming community, and more to do with society at large. While her complaints about the games themselves have some merit, I can't help but wonder why the author doesn't take a risk and enter her own game into the market place, instead of complaining to entrepreneurs who risk their own money putting out product.

Also if she thinks teenage boys are going to know the difference between "working" and "nonworking" breasts, she is living in a fantasy world. Does this mean cops should no longer arrest drunks for public urination because, dammit it's a WORKING -----?

Glen Davis
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

I must say I was stunned to discover that someone out there felt like I did.

A great big Hoody Hoo for Hilary Doda! I have attended **GenCon** for 11 years now, and have tried to make my views on the gaming industry known. In almost every instance, I was told, "well, things are so much better now."

Hello, anyone stroll through the "art" show at **GenCon**? Nude women everywhere! This is supposed to make me feel comfortable? What about the young children allowed to wander about (usually with their not-so-happy parents)? Man, that is such a good image for the parents to carry around...

Thank you Hilary Doda for expressing my feelings (and many of us "gamerchix") so well. Thank you KODT, for publishing her wonderful insights! And last, but not least, thank you **Pegasus Games** and **Capital City Comics** for allowing me to shop and collect without feeling like a freak.

Umbra
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

Interesting rant from Hilary Doda in KODT #48, but it sure makes me wonder where these neolithic guy gamers are hiding. I haven't met them and I've been gaming, fanatically and incessantly, since 1973.

I began gaming in California back

when D&D was new (*to the west coast*), so I had to be the GM and coerce people into playing if I was to get any kind of gaming 'fix'. Perhaps when a girl is a screen monkey they lose the outward sexual characteristics that make guys act badly.

Of course, part of it may be that I never had that lost *deer in the headlights* look that I've seen on neo-gamers (*male or female*) who wander around the game rooms, trying to figure out what rpgs are, or who try to get into a game, fearful of being rejected.

There are disadvantages of being a referee, of course (*mainly the gaming luggage one needs to carry around*), but when I claim a table, set out books, maps and a referee screen, I don't get mistaken for a wandering girlfriend. I'm pretty obvious setting up to game. Perhaps I have a thicker hide than some females and just haven't noticed the guys that have plagued Hilary, or it could be that California gamers are more laid back.

Barbara Johnson-Haddad
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

I am standing behind the counter of the local game store finishing reading issue #48 and a nearly brilliant idea has popped into my head. The D&D3e *Monster Manual* and the *Sword and Sorcery Creature Collection* are selling like hotcakes for our store. But neither of these fine books has *Swack Iron Dragons* or *Vent Swallers* or even *Mace Wielding Lemurs*. And I want them!!! Yes, I would be one of the many who would buy a D20 compatible creature compendium of *HackMaster*™ monsters.

Some gamers are just sick that way and I have no illusions about myself.

Please say you will do it.

Heather Barnhorst
Asst. Manager
Attactix

We can do even better than that, Heather. This year we will be releasing HackMaster the RPG™ along with the Hacklopedia of Beasts™ which contains every monster ever mentioned in the pages of KODT. (Including many others that haven't -- 1,600 creatures in all.)

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How's that grab you?

Jolly



GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write to **TableTalk**
c/o KenzerCo
25667 Hillview Ct.
Mundelein,
Illinois 60060
or E-mail:
mailbag@
kenzerco.com

Dear KODT,

I thought you should know about this one. I've been a gamer for over twenty years now. Five years ago I married a wonderful lady who's only fault was that she was a non-gamer. In fact her whole feeling about RPGs was pretty darn negative, still she let me persist in my eccentricities.

This all changed when I discovered KODT. Because I was picking up your comic every darn month and having conversations with a close friend revolving around your work my wife decided to try reading the Knights. Lo' and behold she began to laugh along, even though she knew nothing about gaming. She says that your strip isn't about gaming so much as it is about people. I thought about it and you know, she's right.

Since then reading the Knights has given her an interest in learning to game. I've started a small campaign for her in 3rd Ed D&D where she plays a dwarven ranger.

Oh the horror, oh the carnage. Who says women don't like violence in games? Of course there are little twists like when she hacked her way through a small tribe of kobolds giving no quarter. And after killing all the adults she proceeded to adopt the kobold pups. She hopes to raise them to have a good alignment. Unexpected to say the least!

As a side comment: have you noticed that when men play female characters they feel a strong need for a high charisma/ comeliness/ what-have-you stat, while women playing a female are only about as concerned with it as the average guy is in a male character's charisma. Are we all projecting our fantasies a little here?

Sam Thompson
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

Greetings! Kudos for another excellent issue of KODT. Issue #49 was an excellent read. It was nice to see the Knights working at a reduced capacity. B.A.'s helpful, positive attitude also made for a good change -- giving the Knights a "fan," supplying them with limited resurrection and a friendly troll host (*who Brian, typically, screwed over*).

It shows B.A.'s affection for Knuckles, El Ravager and Teflon Billy -- and Bob, Dave and Brian -- that he could have offered them for good but proved very helpful instead.

Considering how long Sara's been playing with the Knights, how come she isn't part of the *Untouchable Trio*? Is it because she plays new characters, while the "untouchable" ones keep getting raised? Is it latent sexism on the parts of the Knights? (*They were more than happy to have her seduce the priest -- role-playing it to her cousin!*) Or is it just excessive camaraderie, since they were playing together long before Sara showed up? At any rate, I found it appropriately ironic that "the *Untouchable Three*" were all dead while the "plus One" was the only survivor.

I can't wait for issue #50 -- loved the pic of Bob ready to "par-day" as well! I look forward to finding out what the priest wants the *Bronze Conch* for, and I hope Brian gets appropriate payback for killing off his (*ridiculously*) helpful troll host.

After this, will the Knights go on a quest to retrieve Dave's *Hackmaster +12*? Since it's such

a rare sword, I'd imagine word of its use would make its way back to the Knights sooner or later.

In personal Gaming, it's a good time. Rereleases of custom-made *Shadowfist*™ and *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*™ (*with a Sabbat War twist*) decks are a great way to catch up with some near-forgotten CCGs. The *Hills Rise Wild*™ is a lot of fun, and I hope to have a review of it for ya soon. And the miniatures game *Mage Knight Rebellion*™ is awesome! It's relatively inexpensive (*less than \$2 per miniature*), they come pre-painted (*good for the artistically challenged, like me*), damage and reduced abilities are kept track of on the figure's base (*eliminating the need for counters or papers*), and the figures themselves are incredibly cool! (My favorite is the *Hierophant*, a two-headed dragon-human creature that's an abomination of power; fortunately with army construction, it's illegal in a 100-point army and is almost three-fourths of a 200-point army. I have a co-worker looking into this (*her first "Gaming" game*), I'll be introducing it after the RPG sessions -- very nice!

As a weird footnote, *Mage Knight Rebellion*™ has sold out nearly or completely at most of the Gaming and comic book stores near me; being in NYC, this is a lot. However, the *Wizards of the Coast* store in a big mall has tons of it! Who knew a mall would be somewhere people aren't looking for a popular Game?

Keep 'em rolling,

Jim Lynch
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

As a manager of a RPG/CCG/miniatures store in Miami, Florida, and a long time KODT reader, I have to say I really enjoy the Knights and look forward to reading them every month (*including the two spinoffs*). I have to say that Brian can be a real SOB and wonder why the others put up with him so much.

As a reader of regular comics, I know that most of them have titles for their letters' pages and was thinking that the Knights should have one too (*I know you use "Our Readers Talk Back" but I thought something tying in with the title would have a little more pizzazz*). I have come up with the following (*so far*):

Kool Observations while the Dice Tumble

This utilizes the initials K.O.D.T. and ties the letters page more into the comic. I hope you like it and use it but if you don't that's okay too.

A KoDT fan

Joel Fischer
Sunshine Roleplayers

Hey, you're not the first reader to ask why the letters' page in KODT doesn't have a kewl title, Joel. The actual title is "Table Talk" (look at the tab on page 5) but even it has been attacked by fans. ("Is that the best you can do?")

We're open to considering a new name for the letters page since it's drawn some fire. Before deciding perhaps we should throw the matter out to our readership. Any other ideas, gang?

Jolly

HackMaster GM Toolkit THIS COPY OF HACKMASTER GM KIT REGISTERED TO TAMMY S. FELTON

ADVENTURE MAKER File Edit View Insert Format Font Tools Table Window Work Help 5:47 p.m.

NPC GALLERY [Icons]

MONSTER GALLERY

PLAYER STATS

HACK STATS

DICE ANALYZER

PLOT CHECKER

RULES CHECK

Campaign Journal

DICE BAG

MAP BUILDER

WEATHER

RANDOM MONSTERS

GARWEEZE WURLD

IDEA GENERATOR

CLUB TREASURY

HARD EIGHT HOTLINE

ARCHIVES

BATTLE MASTER

★ **GAMEMASTER'S CAMPAIGN LOG: Day 237** **GAMEMASTER: B.A. Felton**

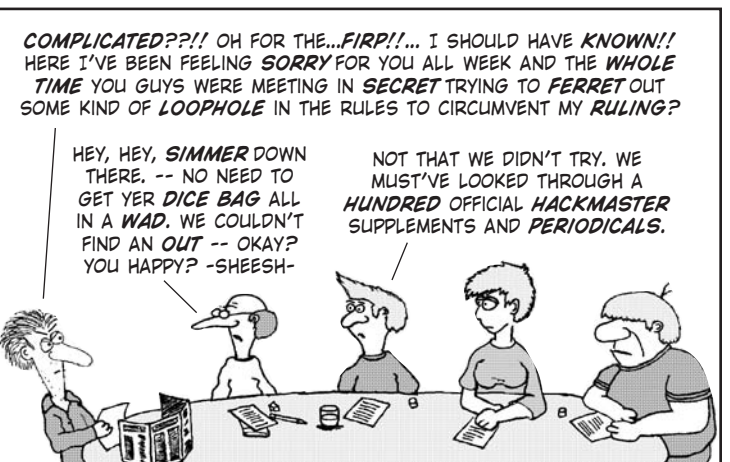
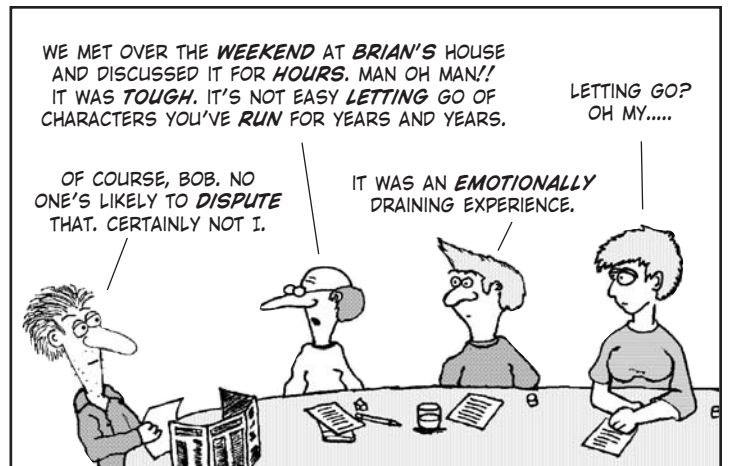
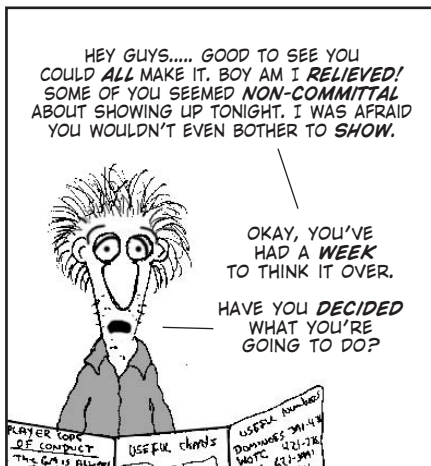
GAME SESSION SUMMARY: The unbelievable has happened. The **Untouchable Trio (plus One)** has gone down — perhaps for the last time. A dark cloud of uncertainty has settled over the table. After learning their character prodigies have reverted to NPC status, Bob, Dave and Brian are faced with the sad realization that even if they have their characters raised (*Knuckles, El Ravager and Teflon Billy*), they will only be a shadow of their former selves.

They left the table last week unsure of what they wanted to do. Have Justina raise their diminished characters? Or let them rest in peace and simply start over from scratch with new characters? Since they seemed reluctant to subject the **Untouchable Trio** to the indignation of returning to life as 'sucky low-level characters', I fear they will opt to let the dead stay buried in hopes of preserving their legacy intact. The damage was not just in hit points, it seems. Pride was a casualty, as well. While it was my plan to cut the boys down to size and bring them back into the parameters of the campaign I had originally envisioned, I honestly had no real desire to 'off' their beloved characters.

Morale is low — as low as I've seen it in years. Already, Dave is hinting he may not be able to make "the next couple of games." Bob seems unusually catatonic. It's almost as if he's in a state of shock. And Brian? Brian's been affected the worst of all — in his mind he's to blame for the deaths of his comrades and the tremendous guilt he feels is evident on his face. I've considered back-peddling but I have to believe that in the long term, things will work out for the best. With all the *point whoring* and *loophole dancing* that's been going down at the table these past few years something's been lost. The game has been diminished — reduced to a battle of wits and willpower between the Gamemaster and the Players.

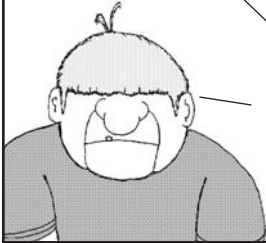
Perhaps, as painful as it may be, this is what we've needed — a fresh, new start. With those thoughts in mind and in the event the players choose not to raise their characters I close the log on this Campaign.

Campaign Ends: Five years 237 days.



ACTUALLY IT WAS 137 SUPPLEMENTS AND ALL 345 ISSUES OF *HACKJOURNAL*. OH, AND 64 ISSUES OF *LADIES HACKJOURNAL*. -- JUST IN CASE WE MISSED SOMETHING. *ELAINE BOWZER'S* BEEN KNOWN TO WRITE SOME *HEAVY-HITTING* MATERIAL IN HER "*SURVIVIN' THE KRAWL*" COLUMN.

HELL, I EVEN PULLED OUT THOSE *HUNGARIAN* VERSIONS OF *HACKMASTER* SARA GOT ME AS A *GAG GIFT* A FEW YEARS AGO.



SOME REALLY INTERESTING *LOOP-HOLES* HAVE CROPPED UP IN THOSE BOOKS AS THE RESULT OF BAD TRANSLATIONS. -- EVEN SO THEY'RE STILL CONSIDERED *OFFICIAL MATERIAL*.

SADLY IT WAS A COMPLETE *BUST!* WE FIGURED IT *EVERY WAY* FROM *SUNDAY* BUT NO *DICE*. WE COULDN'T FIND A *SINGLE THING* TO GET US OUT OF THIS *PICKLE*.

SO...YOU'RE ACTUALLY ADMITTING *DEFEAT*? SHOULD I BE *TAPING* THIS?

IF THERE WAS A *WAY*, BRIAN WOULD'VE *FOUND* IT.

TOO BAD *HACKMASTER 4TH EDITION* HASN'T BEEN *RELEASED* YET. I'D BET MY *EYE TOOTH* THAT THEY INTRODUCE A FEW MORE *LOOPHOLES* WHICH COULD HAVE HELPED US.

OH BROTHER!



BRIAN YOU'RE *PATHETIC!* ARE YOU *LISTENING* TO YOURSELF? YOU SPENT ALL WEEKEND *SEARCHING* FOR A *LOOPHOLE* TO WIGGLE AROUND THE *RULES*. DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S A *TAD* BIT SAD?

NO WAY! I LIKE TO THINK OF *LOOPHOLES* AS '*SPECIAL*' RULES FOR THOSE OF US WILLING TO *DELVE* FOR THEM.



SO, NO LAST MINUTE *RULE-DODGE* THEN? OH...MAN, THAT'S A *RELIEF*. YOU REALLY HAD ME *GOING* THERE FOR A MOMENT. OKAY, SO DON'T KEEP ME IN *SUSPENSE* -- WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE? YOU GOING TO *RAISE* YOUR *OLD* CHARACTERS OR ROLL UP *NEW* ONES?

WELL... WE THOUGHT ABOUT IT *LONG* AND *HARD* AND HERE'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO...

WE'RE GONNA *DO BOTH!*



DAMMIT DAVE!!! I THOUGHT WE *AGREED* THAT I WOULD SPEAK FOR THE *PARTY*. FOR CRYING OUT LOUD. WE WEREN'T GOING TO JUST *BLURT* IT OUT LIKE THAT. WE WERE GOING TO *EASE* INTO THIS. REMEMBER?

OH...ER...Y-Y-YEAH. SORRY, DUDE.

NOW LET *ME* HANDLE THIS.



WHAT THE... UH HUH, I *KNEW* IT. THEY *ARE* UP TO SOMETHING.



OKAY, C'MON BOB. *SPILL IT!* WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU GUYS UP TO *THIS* TIME?

WELL...BASICALLY WE'RE GOING TO *ROLL UP* NEW CHARACTERS AND START OVER FROM *SCRATCH*.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR *OLD* CHARACTERS?



WE WANT **SARA** TO GO AHEAD AND PAY THAT **PRIEST-DUDE** TO HAVE THEM **RAISED**. THEN WE'RE GOING TO **RETIRE** THEM.

Y-Y-YOU'RE GOING TO **RETIRE** THEM? ALL OF THEM?

KNUCKLES? EL RAVAGER? TEFLON BILLY? ARE YOU SURE?

YEAH... WE'RE SURE.

WE JUST DON'T HAVE THE **HEART** TO RUN THEM IN THEIR **DIMINISHED STATE**.

OKAY, WHAT'S THE **CATCH**? YOU GUYS ARE **LYING DOWN** TOO EASILY. YOU HAVE **SOMETHING** UP YOUR SLEEVE. I'M **SURE** OF IT.

THERE'S NO **MYSTERY**, SARA. WEREN'T YOU **LISTENING**? THE **WRITING** WAS ON THE WALL.

LOSING **HALF** OUR LEVELS WAS QUITE A **SETBACK**. BESIDES THE **WHACK** TO OUR **HONOR** AND **PRESTIGE** WAS **BRUTAL!***

WE'RE NOT AS **YOUNG** AS WE USED TO BE EITHER. BY THE TIME WE **CLAW** OUR WAY BACK UP THAT **E.P. LADDER** WE'D BE PUSHING INTO THE **VENERABLE** CATEGORY. WHEN **WORD** GETS OUT WE'RE NOT IN **TOP FORM** -- AND IT **WILL** -- ALL OUR **OLD ENEMIES** WILL BE BEATING A **PATH** TO OUR DOOR TO **CUT** US DOWN AND GIVE US **GRIEF**. IT WOULD BE AS THOUGH WE HAD A HUGE FRICKIN' **TARGET** ON OUR FOREHEADS.

YOU DON'T THINK THIS IS **HARD** ON US? HUH?
WHY CAN'T WE JUST **DO** THIS AND GET IT **OVER** WITH AND **FREAKIN'** MOVE ON?

WE DECIDED THE **TRIO** SHOULD JUST GO **OUT** WITH THEIR **DIGNITY** INTACT. IF WE **RETIRE** THEM, B.A. CAN'T **SCREW** WITH US.

OKAY. YOU **TALK** A **GOOD TALK** BUT I'M **STILL** NOT BUYING IT. YOU'RE **UP** TO SOMETHING.

FOR **C-C-CRYIN'** OUT **L-L-LOUD**, SARA!!

OR DO YOU WANT TO **CONTINUE** TO **KICK** A MAN WHEN HE'S **DOWN**?

-SNIFF-

HEY!! **GET OFF HIS BACK**, SARA! CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S **HURTING**? THE **BIG GUY** IS TAKIN' THIS **HARDER** THAN ANY OF US. WE HAD TO **MUSTER** A LOT OF **STRENGTH** TO SHOW UP HERE TONIGHT AND **FACE** THE MUSIC.

B-B-BRIAN...I-I-I'M SORRY. REALLY. I D-D-DIDN'T KNOW.

CAN YOU JUST GET US **RAISED???** PLEASE??!! THE **SOONER** I RETIRE **TEFLON BILLY** THE **SOONER** THE PAIN WILL **DULL!!**

YES... OF COURSE.

POOR GUY! HE REALLY IS TAKING THIS HARD.

PLAYER COPY OF CONDUCT 1. THE GM IS ALWAYS RIGHT. 2. A GM CAN BE UNFAIR!! 3. GM WILL BE	USEFUL CHITS DOMAINS: 701-49 WATS: 611-78 SERS: 611-301 ANOTHER: 711
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* Losing Experience levels (along with dying and being raised again) results in a severe hit on Individual/Group Honor and Prestige.

GUYS, LOOK, I **REALIZE** THERE'S A **GREAT** SENSE OF **LOSS** HERE. BUT ARE YOU ABSOLUTELY **SURE** YOU WANT TO **RETIRE** YOUR CHARACTERS? THAT'S A **BIG STEP!**

I'M THINKING THIS IS **NOT** A THE KIND OF DECISION YOU WANT TO MAKE WHEN YOU'RE IN SUCH AN **EMOTIONAL STATE**. MAYBE YOU SHOULD THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A....

B.A.'S RIGHT, GUYS. WHY **RUSH** INTO THIS?

SAVE YER BREATH, B.A.!! WE **RESOLVED** TO DO THIS. DON'T MAKE IT ANY **HARDER** THAN IT **ALREADY** IS.

YEAH! NO **TURNING** BACK NOW.

THE **QUICKER** WE DO THIS THE **QUICKER** WE CAN MOVE ON.

BUT....



YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, **SARA**. RUNNING THE **TRIO** IN SUCH A **SUCKY STATE** WOULD ONLY **INTENSIFY** THE **ANGUISH**. IT'S KINDA LIKE DATING SOMEBODY YOU **WORK** WITH AND **THEN** HAVING IT NOT WORK OUT. YOU MIGHT AS WELL **QUIT** ON THE SPOT AND SAVE YOURSELF THE **GRIEF** OF SEEING HER **FACE** DAY IN AND DAY OUT.

HEY, IT'S **YOUR** CALL. I'M JUST SAYING....

THEN IT'S **SETTLED**. WE **RAISE** THEM -- RETIRE THEM AND ROLL UP **NEW** CHARACTERS.



A **WEE BIT** LATER....

OKAY, I GUESS THAT DOES IT. YOUR CHARACTERS HAVE BEEN **RAISED**. I'LL **STRIKE** THEM FROM THE **ACTIVE PLAYER CHARACTER** ROSTER AND PLACE THEM INTO **RETIREMENT**. AND SINCE **SARA** HAS INDICATED SHE'LL BE **RETIRING** JUSTINA AS WELL, SHE'LL BE **JOINING** YOU.

I KNOW IT'S A **SMALL** GESTURE BUT I'M GOING TO ALLOW YOUR **CHARACTERS** TO **HEAL** TO THEIR **FULL** HIT POINTS BEFORE CHANGING THEIR **STATUS**. I WISH I COULD DO **MORE** BUT AS A **GM** MY HANDS ARE TIED.



NOW THAT THAT **UNPLEASANT** PIECE OF BUSINESS IS OUT OF THE WAY, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT **CLIMBING** BACK UP ON THAT **HORSE** AND ROLLING UP THOSE **NEW** CHARACTERS?

ACTUALLY, I'M NOT FEELING SO GOOD. I THINK I'M GONNA **TAKE OFF**.

OH.... SURE. I UNDERSTAND.

YEAH, IT DOESN'T FEEL **RIGHT** TO ROLL UP **NEW** CHARACTERS JUST YET. CAN WE PUT IT OFF TIL' **NEXT** WEEK?

ANYONE CARE TO **JOIN** ME FOR A GOOD STIFF **DRINK**?



LATER....

WADDA YA THINKING, **CUZ**?

I DUNNO.... I JUST CAN'T **SHAKE** THE FEELING THAT THEY'RE **UP** TO SOMETHING.

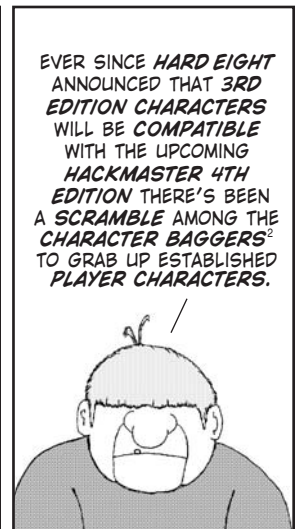
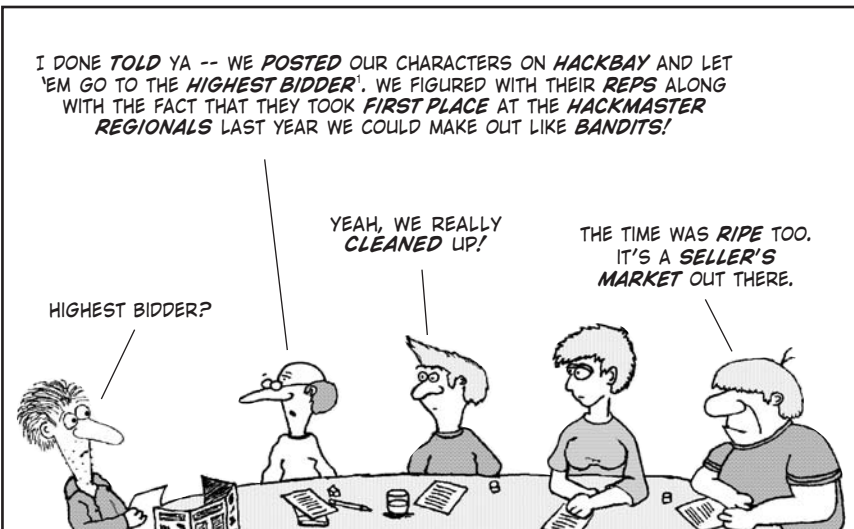
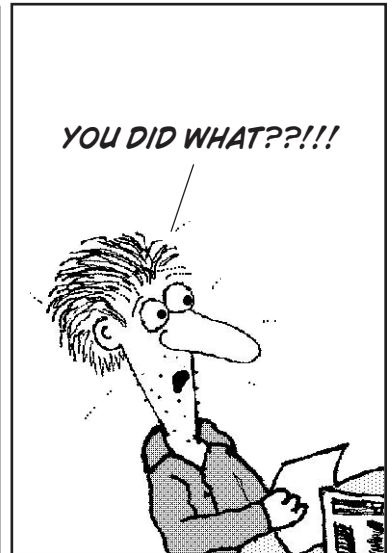
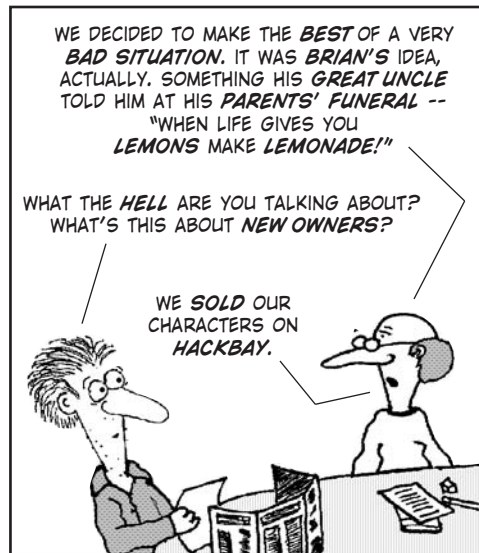
YOU KNOW, I GOT THAT **SAME** FEELING.



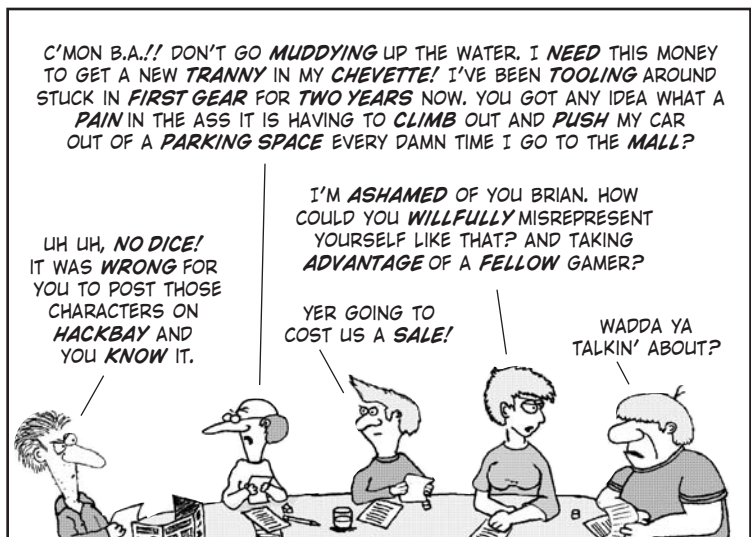
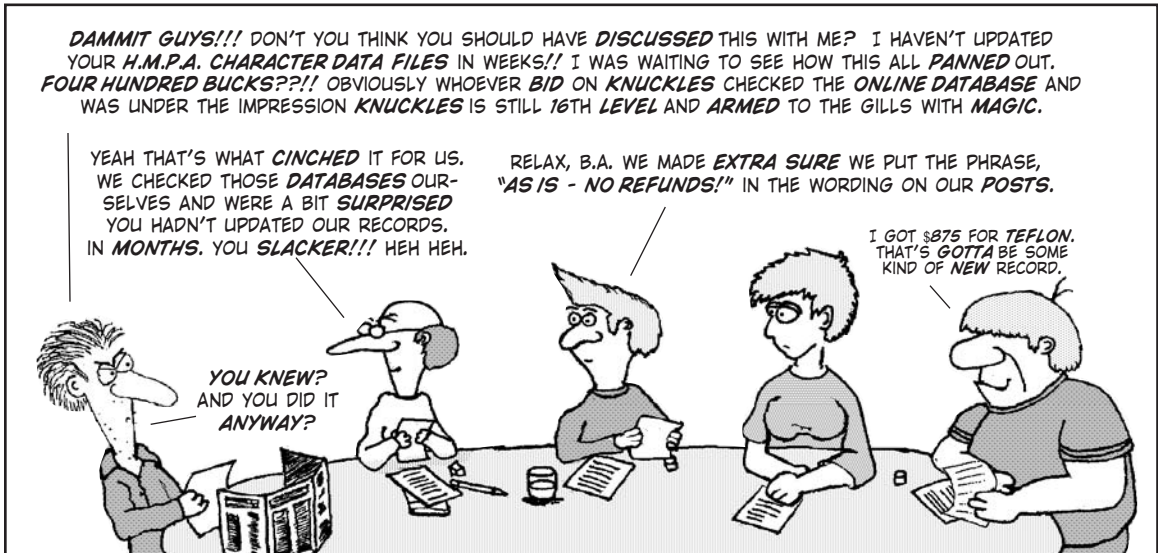
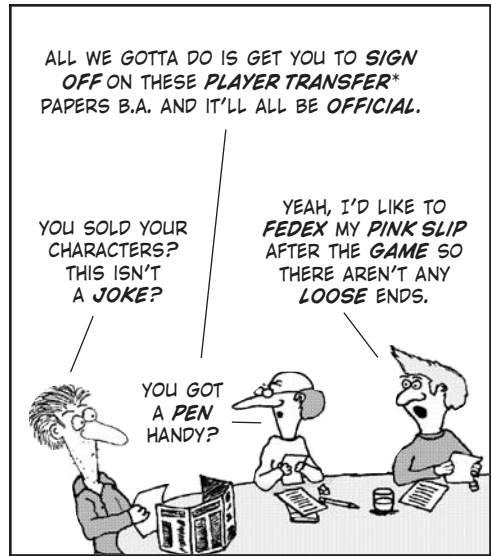
The Color of Money

BY JOLLY BLACKBURN
AND BRIAN JELKE

HEY GUYS, BEFORE YOU START ROLLING UP YOUR **NEW CHARACTERS** I WANTED TO GIVE YOU ONE **LAST CHANCE** TO **RETHINK** RETIRING YOUR **OLD CHARACTERS**. AS YOU MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW, ACCORDING THE **H.M.P.A.** GUIDELINES THERE'S A SEVEN DAY "**COOLING OFF**" PERIOD WHEN DEALING WITH A **VOLUNTARY CHANGE OF CHARACTER STATUS**. TODAY'S THE **LAST DAY**. IF YOU WANT TO **REACTIVE** THE **TRIO** SAY SO NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR **PEACE**.



1. One of the more popular areas of HackBay are the Auction Houses where players trade and sell such things as magic items, relics, virtual real estate in Garweeze Wurld and player characters.
2. **Character Baggers**: a slang term for players who buy up high-level characters only to strip them down of their magic and possessions and then slay them in order to reap experience points. Most GM's have banned the practice in their games.
(See *Tales from the Vault Volume Three*, page 10 for an example of Bob and Dave as Character Baggers.)



* The HackMaster Players' Association insists that all player characters are registered on their national database and that those records are kept current. To avoid corruption and to prevent duplicate records for any given character from popping up on the database, the H.M.P.A. insists that all transfers of ownership are validated with the proper paperwork (referred to as 'pinkslips' by most gamers). Any sign of impropriety on the part of a player or GM can result in the forfeiture of the character, loss of membership in the organization and banishment from all sanctioned HackMaster events.

WE DIDN'T *MISREPRESENT* OURSELVES. WE SIMPLY ANNOUNCED OUR *CHARACTERS* WERE UP FOR SALE, "*AS IS*".

IT'S NOT *OUR* FAULT IF NO ONE TOOK THE TIME TO *ASK* QUESTIONS AND GET THE *FACTS*.

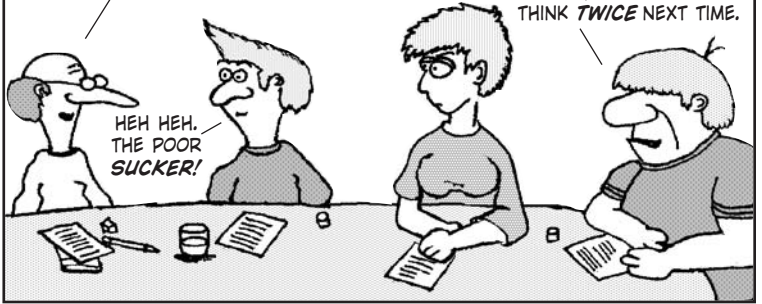
AND IT'S NOT *OUR* FAULT B.A. WAS *IRRESPONSIBLE* AND DIDN'T UPDATE OUR *RECORDS* EVERY 7 DAYS AS *MANDATED* BY THE *H.M.P.A.*



BESIDES, THOSE *IDIOTS* THOUGHT THEY WERE TAKING *ADVANTAGE* OF US. WHAT GOES AROUND *COMES* AROUND. THAT'S WHAT *I* ALWAYS SAY.

FOUR HUNDRED BUCKS FOR A *16TH* LEVEL *THIEF* WITH A *CROSSBOW OF SLAYING*, A *BOLT OF THE MONTH POUCH*, AND A *+4 DAGGER OF HINDSIGHT*? WHO ARE WE KIDDING? WHOEVER WON THAT BID WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION HE WAS PUTTING THE *SCREWS* TO ME. OTHERWISE HE WOULD HAVE BEEN A BIT MORE *INQUISITIVE* ABOUT WHAT HE WAS GETTING.

YEAH, MAYBE HE'LL THINK *TWICE* NEXT TIME.



HEH HEH. THE POOR *SUCKER!*

YOU'VE GOT IT *ALL* FIGURED OUT DON'T YOU? YOU'VE *JUSTIFIED* IT IN YOUR HEAD SO YOUR *CONSCIENCE* DOESN'T *NAG* YOU *QUITE* SO MUCH. IT'S ALL *FINE* AND *DANDY* ISN'T IT? HMMRRFFFF!

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD. IT WAS A *SIMPLE* TRANSACTION. "*CAVIAR EMPATH!*"

THAT'S CAVEAT EMPTOR YOU IDIOT!



WELL THANK GAWD THE *H.M.P.A.* SAW FIT TO INCLUDE THE *GAMEMASTER* IN THE PROCESS OF *CHARACTER TRANSFERS*. I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR *LACK OF ETHICS* BUT I SURE AS HELL CAN KEEP A COUPLE OF GAMERS *UNFORTUNATE* ENOUGH TO *CROSS* YOUR PATH FROM GETTING *SOAKED!!* WITHOUT MY *SIGNATURE* YOUR LITTLE *DEAL* IS *NULL* AND *VOID*.

YOU MAKE US SOUND *EVIL* OR SOMETHING. SHEESH -- WE WERE JUST TRYING TO MAKE A LOUSY *BUCK*.

I *KNEW* IT WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. *600* BUCKS DOWN THE DRAIN. JUST LIKE THAT.

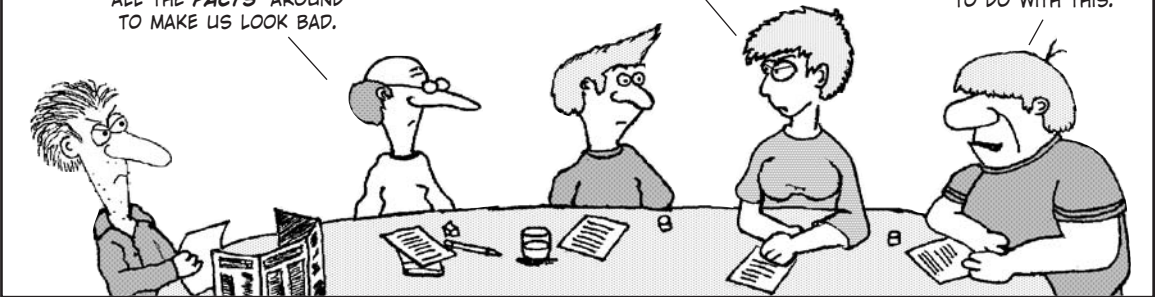


LOOK AT IT THIS WAY, GUYS. YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T WANT TO RUN THE *TRIO* ANY LONGER BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO THEM "*GO OUT WITH THEIR DIGNITY INTACT*". DO YOU *HONESTLY* WANT TO *USE* THEM *NOW* TO *BURN* SOME POOR *FELLOW GAMERS* OUT OF THEIR *HARD EARNED* CASH? IS *THAT* THE KIND OF *LEGACY* YOU WANT THEM TO BE *KNOWN* FOR?

BURN A FELLOW GAMER? NO WAY! NOW YOU'RE *TWISTING* ALL THE *FACTS* AROUND TO MAKE US LOOK BAD.

NO, *BOB*, I'M JUST SPEAKING THE *TRUTH*. YOU'RE THE ONES *TWISTING* *FACTS* IN A *VAIN* ATTEMPT TO *JUSTIFY* YOUR ACTIONS.

YOU MEAN THIS COULD REFLECT *BADLY* ON *TEFLON BILLY*? BUT HE HAD *NOTHING* TO DO WITH THIS.



OKAY, OKAY, THAT **POOR GAMER** REMARK GOT TO ME. MAYBE YOU GUYS ARE RIGHT. I GUESS I JUST LET THE PROSPECT OF ALL THAT **MONEY** GO TO MY HEAD. BUT IN MY **DEFENSE** JUST LET ME SAY THAT I **WAS** HALF-TANKED WHEN **BRIAN** TALKED ME INTO IT.

DAVE'S RIGHT. I GUESS WE DIDN'T REALLY THINK OF IT AS SCREWING OVER A FELLOW **GAMER**. THAT'S A LITTLE **TOO** CLOSE TO HOME FOR ME.

YOU'RE NOT JUST **SAYING** THAT BECAUSE **B.A.** THREW A **WRENCH** IN THE WORKS ARE YOU?

WADDA YA MEAN I TALKED YOU INTO IT? YOU GUYS PRACTICALLY DRAGGED ME INTO THIS **KICKING AND SCREAMING**.

I SHOULD'VE STUCK TO MY **PRINCIPLES**.

GOOD! IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU GUYS HAVE COME TO YOUR **SENSES**. NOW AREN'T YOU GLAD WE STOPPED THIS **NONSENSE** BEFORE IT WENT **TOO FAR**?

YEAH...I GUESS. I SURE COULD'VE USED THAT **MONEY** THOUGH. OH WELL...

SPOKEN LIKE A **TRUE** CONVERT, BRIAN.

WELL, **DESPITE** YOUR TEMPORARY **LAPSE** OF JUDGEMENT I'M REALLY **PROUD** OF YOU GUYS.

IT TAKES A LOT OF **CHARACTER** TO ADMIT WHEN YOU'RE **WRONG**.

I WAS AGAINST IT FROM THE **BEGINNING** ACTUALLY. BUT I GAVE IN TO **PEER PRESSURE**.

YEAH, ME TOO.

PEER PRESSURE?

SO I'M GUESSING A COUPLE OF **EMAILS** ARE IN ORDER. JUST **WRITE** TO WHOMEVER BOUGHT YOUR CHARACTERS AND **EXPLAIN** THE SITUATION. BE **HONEST!!** YOU'LL FIND IT GOES A **LONG** WAY. THEY'LL PROBABLY BE **GRATEFUL** THEY WEREN'T **TAKEN** AND HOPEFULLY THAT'LL BE THE **END** OF IT.

ACTUALLY **ONE** EMAIL SHOULD SUFFICE. THE SAME **SUCKER...ER**, GUY BOUGHT **ALL** OUR CHARACTERS.

HE MUST BE **RICH!** HE BLEW ALMOST **TWO GRAND** ON US.

TWO GRAND??!!

OH MAN, THAT NEW **PETROGRAD IV** LOGIC BOARD WAS THIS CLOSE TO BEING IN MY **GRASP!!**

OH MY **STARS!** AND YOU SAY IT WAS THE **SAME** PERSON? WHO IN THEIR **RIGHT MIND** SPENDS THAT KIND OF **MONEY** ON **PRE-PLAYED** CHARACTERS? THAT'S **POSITIVELY INSANE!!**

WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA! EVERYTHING GETS ROUTED THROUGH **HACKBAY** SO THEY GET THEIR **CUT** OF THE ACTION. IT'S ALL **ANONYMOUS**.

IT'S LIKE I SAID. IT'S A **SELLER'S MARKET** OUT THERE. HIGH LEVEL CHARACTERS ARE GOING FOR A **PREMIUM**.

WELL...FOR **YOUR** SAKE I HOPE THIS MYSTERIOUS **MISTER MONEYBAGS** HAS A SENSE OF **FORGIVENESS** ABOUT HIM.

OR AT **LEAST** A SENSE OF **HUMOR**.

* Be sure to read this issue's installment of Disks of Wondrous Power. In an amazing coincidence, Rick Moscatello talks about how he sold his Asheron's Call character on eBay for \$600 bucks. The "Color of Money" was written before we received Rick's article and until we read it, we had no idea that people were REALLY selling characters (computer rpg characters) for big bucks online.

Gary Jackson Files: A Bid Too Far...

BY JOLLY BLACKBURN,
BRIAN JELKE AND STEVE JOHANSSON

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE HARD EIGHT OFFICES.

HEY, WHAT THE HELL'S SO FUNNY? I COULD HEAR YOU HOOTIN' AND HOLLERIN' ALL THE WAY FROM MY PARKING SPACE. SOMEBODY PASSIN' AROUND THAT "YOU KNOW YOU'RE A GAMER IF...." LIST AGAIN?

PETE WAS TELLIN' US THE FUNNIEST STORY, SIR. YOU SHOULD HEAR WHAT HE DID TO SOME CHARACTER BAGGER THE OTHER NIGHT.

YOU'RE GONNA BUST A GLUT, GARY. IT'S TOTALLY HILARIOUS.

GEE, GUYS. I DON'T THINK IT'S THAT FUNNY. I WAS JUST GIVING SOME CLOWN A HARD TIME. THAT'S ALL.

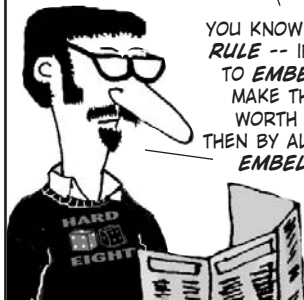
I'M IN TEARS HERE, GEE-JAY!



NOW THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO SEE. YOU GUYS HONING YOUR STORY TELLING SKILLS. THAT'S GREAT!

I COULD USE A GOOD LAUGH AFTER THE WEEKEND I HAD. WHY DON'T YOU TRY TELLING IT TO ME, PETE. I'M ALL EARS HERE.

YOU KNOW THE HOUSE RULE -- IF YOU HAVE TO EMBELLISH TO MAKE THE STORY WORTH HEARING THEN BY ALL MEANS -- EMBELLISH!!!



WELL, SIR, I WAS MONITORING BANDWIDTH USAGE ON THE SERVER FARM THE OTHER NIGHT WHEN I DECIDED TO CHECK OUT THE CHARACTER AUCTIONS ON HACKBAY.

WHOOAH! HOLD ON. YOU SAID THE OTHER NIGHT. WHAT NIGHT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

HUH? OH....IT WAS WEDNESDAY.

I SEE. PLEASE.....CONTINUE!



WELL I NOTICED SOMEONE HAD PUT A REALLY SWEET 19TH LEVEL BATTLEMAGE UP ON THE BLOCK. I MEAN THIS GUY HAD MAGIC ITEMS COMIN' OUT HIS BUSTER KEATON IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. HE WAS THAT LOADED DOWN. I JUST KNEW I HAD TO HAVE HIM. I MEAN WITH THE IN-HOUSE CAGED HACK-FIGHTS COMING UP AN' ALL....

WELL ANYWAY I PLACED A BID AND WHAT DO YOU THINK I SHOULD FIND WHILE I WAS BROWSING THE "JUST IN" FOLDER? A FRICKIN 18TH LEVEL FIGHTER JOCK WITH A +12 HACKMASTER!!! I MEAN CRIMINEY!! WHAT ARE THE ODDS TWO CHARACTERS LIKE THAT WOULD GET POSTED ON THE SAME DAY? SO NATURALLY I BID ON THAT ONE AS WELL. COURSE I KNEW THERE'D BE SOME COMPETITION BUT I FIGURED IF I COULD SLOW DOWN THE SYSTEM REPOSE TIME FOR A FEW HOURS BY RUNNING A "FEW" BOGUS DAEMONS I COULD WARD OFF SOME OF THE COMPETITION BY LETTING THEIR CONNECTIONS TIME OUT. -SNICKER-

WHAT THE??
OH NO....
NO WAY!! PETE?



SEVERAL MINUTES LATER AS THE TALE UNFOLDS...

SO ANYWAY A FEW HOURS LATER I CHECK OUT THE STATUS OF MY *BIDS* AND WOULDN'T YOU KNOW? SOME *DORK-WIPE* ON A *71 LINE* OUTBID ME. THE *SAME GUY!! BOTH CHARACTERS!!*

SO I *OUTBID* HIM. I BARELY HIT THE *RETURN* KEY WHEN THE *BOZO* OUTBIDS ME!! *AGAIN!!*



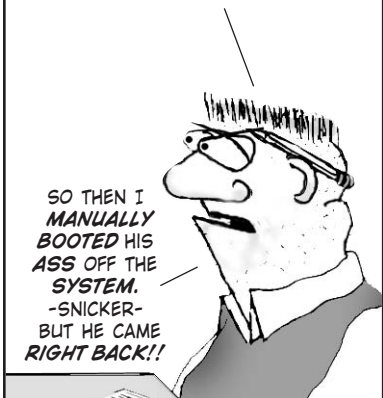
WE'RE GOING *TOE TO TOE* -- ME AND THIS *GUY*. A *REGULAR BIDDING WAR!*

I'M JUST *PISSED* THAT IT WAS ALL *ANONYMOUS*. I WISH *GARY* WOULD KICK UP MY *SECURITY CLEARANCE* ON THE *SERVERS*. I'D *LOVE* TO FIND OUT WHO THAT *GUY* WAS. I MEAN THIS WAS REALLY GETTING *PERSONAL*.

HE WAS *BIG FOOTING* MY *BIDS!* SO THEN THE *JERK* HAS THE NERVE TO SEND ME AN *INSTANT MESSAGE* TELLING ME TO "*BACK OFF!*" AND STOP *BIDDING* 'COS THERE WAS "*NO WAY IN HELL*" I WAS GOING TO *OUTBID* HIM.



SO I REPLY WITH SOMETHING LIKE, "*LOOK JERK-WAD!! HOW YOU GONNA BID WITH MY BOOT UP YER ASS??!!*"



SO THEN I *MANUALLY* *BOOITED* HIS *ASS* OFF THE *SYSTEM*. -*SNICKER*- BUT HE CAME *RIGHT BACK!!*

OH MAN, HE MUST HAVE BEEN *FROTHIN'* AT THE MOUTH COZ A *STREAM* OF *OBSCENITIES* CAME BACK LIKE I AIN'T *NEVER* SEEN BEFORE. *HOO-MAN!!* HE COULD EVEN TEACH *YOU* A FEW WORDS, *GARY*.

GET THIS -- I WROTE A LITTLE *JAVA SCRIPT* ON THE *SERVER* JUST FOR HIM. EVERY TIME THIS *JOKER* ENTERED A *BID* I HAD THE *SYSTEM* *ROUTE* HIS *EMAIL ADDRESS* TO OVER *10,000 PORN SITES*. IT ALSO PUT HIM ON EVERY *SPAM LIST* KNOWN TO MAN. -*SNICKER*- HE'LL BE *DIGGING* OUT OF HIS *EMAIL* FOR *MONTHS!*



OH...THAT'S *CLASSIC!* BEST PART OF ALL HE'LL HAVE *NO IDEA* WHY.

OH, BUT I WASN'T THROUGH WITH HIM *YET*. SO THEN I...

HAR HAR!!! THIS IS THE *HILARIOUS* PART, SIR. -*SNICKER*- PETE CREATED A BUNCH OF *FAKE ACCOUNTS* AND *FLOODED* THE AUCTION WITH *BOGUS BIDS*. -*CACKLE*-

THE *BEST* PART IS THAT THIS *IDIOT* JUST KEPT *UPPING* THE *BID* -- *AGAIN* AND *AGAIN*. -*HAR HAR HO HO*--



CAN YOU IMAGINE HOW MUCH *FRICKIN' JUNK EMAIL* THIS *GUY* IS *WADING* THROUGH?

JUST TO *RUB* IT IN I EMAILED HIM A *JPEG IMAGE* OF A CAN OF *SPAM* THIS MORNING. -*CACKLE*- MY *ONLY* *REGRET* IS NOT BEING ABLE TO *SEE* HIS FACE WHEN HE CHECKS HIS *EMAIL* EACH MORNING. -*SNICKER*- HE MESSSED WITH THE *WRONG GUY*.

OH, MAN. THAT'S JUST *TOO FUNNY*. WHAT A *BOOB!*

HE SPENT *TWO GRAND??!!!* OH THAT *HURTS!!* THOSE *CHARACTERS* WERE WORTH *850 - TOPS!!*



WE'RE *LAUGHING* AT HIM AND HE DOESN'T EVEN *KNOW* IT.

SAY, *PETE!!* SORRY TO *INTERRUPT* YOUR VERY *ENGAGING* STORY AND ALL BUT YOU SAID YOU'D LIKE TO BE ABLE TO "*SEE THE LOOK ON HIS FACE?*"

OH SURE. IT'D BE A *HOOT* TO SEE THE *EXPRESSION* ON THAT *MUG*.

THIS MAY SOUND *CRAZY* BUT I THINK I MIGHT *KNOW* HOW TO MAKE *THAT* HAPPEN.

YOU SERIOUS, GEE-JAY? YOU THINK YOU *KNOW* WHO THIS GUY IS?

AS A MATTER OF FACT, I THINK I DO....



**YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT HIM YOU IDIOT!!
YOU STILL THINK IT'S SO GAWDAMNFUNNY??!!**

Y-Y-Y-YOU?? B-B-BUTT....

I WAS ON THE NEW *T1* LINE I HAD INSTALLED AT MY *LAKE HOUSE!!* THERE *MUST* BE A GOD IN HEAVEN 'COZ I *PRAYED* HE'D *DELIVER* YOU TO ME.

G-G-GAR...GARY, I DIDN'T *KNOW*. I *S-S-SWEAR* TO YOU I DIDN'T K-K-KNOW.

I *PROMISED* MY *BOY* I'D GET THOSE *CHARACTERS* FOR HIS *FRICKIN' BIRTHDAY!!* -- COST ME A GAWDAMN FORTUNE!

GAAAA!!!

**PETE! YOU!
ME! MY
OFFICE!!**

BRING YOUR *CHECKBOOK* AND A *TWENTY SIDER!!*



TEN MINUTES LATER...

WELL...ON THE *BRIGHT* SIDE, MR. JACKSON MUST *REALLY LOVE* LITTLE *TIMMY* TO SPEND *THAT* KIND OF MONEY ON HIM. IT'S *COMFORTING* TO SEE *THAT* KIND OF *DEVOTION*. --GULP-- I HOPE *PETE'S* GONNA BE OKAY.

OH I'M SURE HE *LOVES* THE KID, *EDMUND*. MAKE NO *MISTAKE* ABOUT THAT. BUT, UH, I DON'T THINK *LOVE* HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT. FIRST OFF, GARY *NEVER* BREAKS A *PROMISE*. AND SECONDLY, HE *REALLY, REALLY HATES* TO *LOSE*.

NOT HALF AS MUCH AS HE *HATES* BEING CALLED *DORK-WIPE* AND *JERK-WAD!!*

I WONDER WHY *PETE* HAD TO TAKE A *TWENTY SIDER* WITH HIM?

THAT WOULD BE FOR THE *CORPORATE PUNISHMENT MATRIX!!* IT'S A *D20* TABLE.


OH...RIGHT. I'D FORGOTTEN.



A Path Least Traveled

BY JOLLY BLACKBURN

APPARENTLY THE **BARKEEP** DIDN'T LIKE YOUR **ATTITUDE**, BOB. HE GRABS YOUR **DWARVEN THIEF** BY THE **THROAT** AND **DUNKS** YOUR HEAD IN THE **RINSE TUB** BEHIND THE BAR.



MARK OFF FOUR POINTS OF HONOR AS THE OTHER PATRONS LAUGH AND POINT AT YOU IN A **MOCKING MANNER**.


OTHER TOPIC: F. COMPLECT
USEFUL CHARMS
USEFUL NUMBER: 301-414
DORMONES: 421-782
4053 421-782

WELL THE **JOKE'S** ON HIM!! I PULL MY **DAGGER** FROM THE **INNER POCKET** OF MY **WAIST COAT** AND STICK HIM IN THE **KIDNEY!** I'M GOING TO **TWIST** THE BLADE REAL SLOW AS I WITHDRAW THE BLADE. THAT'S A FAT **PLUS TWO** TO HIS **BLEEDING DAMAGE ROLL!**

MAYBE YOU SHOULD JUST **TAKE YOUR LUMPS** LIKE A MAN, BOB. DID YOU FORGET THE **HALFLING BOUNCERS** AT THE **DOOR?**

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE **BOUNCERS**, BOB! I'LL CHUCK A **CHAIR** OR TWO AT 'EM TO KEEP THEM AT BAY.

REMOTE GOUGE EYE CANTRIP COMING ON LINE HERE!!



AS THE SMOKE CLEARS...

THAT'S IT!! I'M **TOAST!!** THAT FRICKIN' **GNOME FRY COOK** DID A REAL **NUMBER** ON ME WITH THOSE **MEAT-TONGS!** CAN YOU HAND ME DOWN ANOTHER **CHARACTER SHEET**, BRIAN?

I'VE HAD IT ABOUT UP TO **HERE** WITH ROLLING UP **NEW CHARACTERS** EVERY FRICKIN' **FIFTEEN MINUTES!!**

GUYS, YOU'VE GOT TO STOP ACTING AS THOUGH YOU'RE **HELLFIRE WITH SPURS ON!!** WE'RE PLAYING **FIRST LEVEL CHARACTERS** HERE. IT'S GOING TO TAKE A **LONG WHILE** BEFORE YOU CAN INDISCRIMINATELY GO AROUND **THUMPING** ON EVERY **NPC** WHO CROSSES YOUR PATH.

I'M GETTING A BAD CASE OF **WRITER'S CRAMP** DOWN HERE!!



WHY SHOULD IT? WE'RE **STILL** PLAYING **HACKMASTER** AREN'T WE? WHY BACK WHEN **TEFLON BILLY** WAS **STILL** JUST A **PUP** OF A CHARACTER HE THREW THE **MAYOR OF HAGLEYTOWN** DOWN A FRICKIN' **WELL** JUST FOR **LOOKING** AT HIM THE **WRONG** WAY. I BET I DIDN'T HAVE MORE THAN A **HANDFUL** OF **E.P.S** UNDER MY BELT! 'MEMBER THAT BOB?

I SURE AS HELL DO. THEN WE DUMPED A **MANURE CART** DOWN ON **TOP** OF HIM FOR **GOOD MEASURE**.

AND WE HELD OFF THE **CITY GUARD** FOR **SEVEN TURNS** WITH NOTHING BUT A CASE OF **OIL FLASKS** AND THE **MAYOR'S WIFE** AS A **HUMAN SHIELD!**


WHERE THERE'S A **DIE** THERE'S **HOPE**, SARA. WE JUST NEED A FEW **LUCKY ROLLS** TO MAKE **SECOND LEVEL**.



LOOK, ALL I'M SAYING IS WE COULD HAVE **AVOIDED** THAT LAST CONFRONTATION AND THE DEATH OF **THREE** PLAYER CHARACTERS.

TELLING THAT **BARKEEP** YOU WERE GOING TO "CUT OFF HIS HEAD AND SPIT DOWN HIS THROAT" IF HE DIDN'T BRING YOU MORE **BEER NUTS** WAS **UNCALLED FOR**.

HE HAD A **RIGHT** TO BE **OFFENDED**.



UNCALLED FOR???! LOOK MISSY, IF I'M PAYING A FULL GOLD PIECE FOR A STINKIN' MUG OF ALE I EXPECT SOME FRICKIN' BEER NUTS, A SANDWICH OR SOMETHING! HE DIDN'T HAVE TO COP AN ATTITUDE JUST BECAUSE I WAS INSISTENT ON GETTING GOOD SERVICE!

YEAH, JUST BECAUSE WE'RE FIRST LEVEL DOESN'T MEAN HE CAN TREAT US LIKE STREET TRASH. I HAD GOOD HARD STARTING MONEY TO SPEND IN HIS ESTABLISHMENT.

NOBODY DUNKS MY HEAD IN A TUB OF RINSE WATER!! HE LEARNED THAT THE HARD WAY.

AND WHAT DID THAT LESSON ACCOMPLISH, BOB? YOUR NUDE DEAD BODY ENDED UP TIED TO THE BACK OF A WILD ASS.



LOOK GUYS, SARA'S RIGHT. WE'RE TRYING TOO HARD. WE'VE GONE THROUGH SIX CHARACTERS APIECE IN ONE WEEKEND. IT'S LOOKING PRETTY BLEAK!

WE'VE GOT THE HACKMASTER REGIONALS COMING UP IN A FEW MONTHS AND IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO ESTABLISH A PARTY EVEN WORTHY OF ENTERING - LET ALONE WINNING.

MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WE'RE NOT COMPETING THIS YEAR.



I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT UP THE HACKMASTER REGIONALS, BRIAN. I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT AND I MAY HAVE A SOLUTION TO YOUR DILEMMA. BUT..UH, THERE'S GONNA BE SOME CONDITIONS ATTACHED.

UH OH!! I SURE DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF THIS. WHEN A GM STARTS TO TALK ABOUT CONDITIONS IT'S LIKE WORKING A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL.

WHAT YOU GOT IN MIND, B.A.?

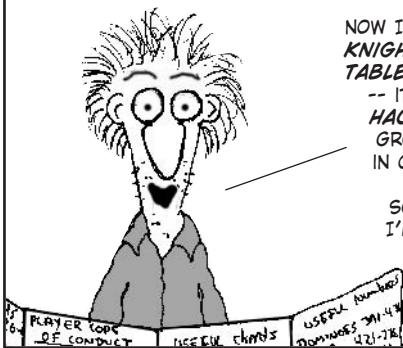
BOB! PLEASE!! LET'S HEAR WHAT HE'S GOT TO SAY.



I KNOW YOU'RE ALL BUMMED OUT ABOUT STARTING OVER FROM SCRATCH. AND AS BRIAN POINTED OUT, THE HACKMASTER REGIONALS ARE QUICKLY APPROACHING. OBVIOUSLY ANY NEW PARTY YOU FORM NOW ISN'T LIKELY TO BE IN FIGHTING SHAPE IN TIME FOR COMPETITION.

NOW I'D HATE TO SEE THE KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE NOT REPRESENTED. -- IT'D BE THE FIRST HACKTOURNEY THIS GROUP HAS MISSED IN OVER TEN YEARS.

SO HERE'S WHAT I'M PROPOSING....



I'M THINKIN' OF ALLOWING YOU TO USE THE 'THOMAS ALVA MCGURDY PROVISIONS' AND START OFF WITH 4TH LEVEL CHARACTERS!

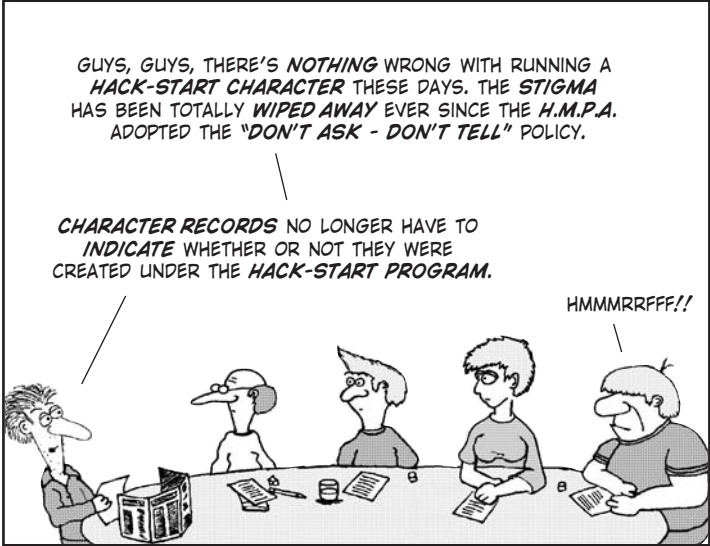
"TAMP" CHARACTERS? ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR FRICKIN' MIND??!! YOU WANT US TO RUN HACK-START* CHARACTERS?

NOW, NOW, LET ME FINISH!!

FIRP!! YOU TRYING TO MAKE US THE LAUGHING STOCKS OF HACKCON?



* Hack-Start: An optional set of character generation rules devised by former HackJournal editor, Thomas Alva McGurdy. (d. 1976). McGurdy came up with the rules as a way to raise morale in campaigns where mass player character death had taken place. Such groups often don't recover from such catastrophes and soon disband. Soon dubbed "Hack-Start" (obviously in reference to Head Start), McGurdy's system is seen by most players as a 'cheat' - something only a munchkin would use.



GUYS, GUYS, THERE'S **NOTHING** WRONG WITH RUNNING A **HACK-START CHARACTER** THESE DAYS. THE **STIGMA** HAS BEEN TOTALLY **WIPED AWAY** EVER SINCE THE **H.M.P.A.** ADOPTED THE "**DON'T ASK - DON'T TELL**" POLICY.

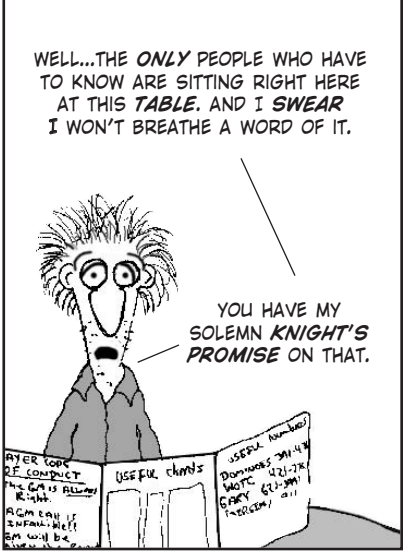
CHARACTER RECORDS NO LONGER HAVE TO **INDICATE** WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE CREATED UNDER THE **HACK-START PROGRAM**.

HMMRRRRFFF!!



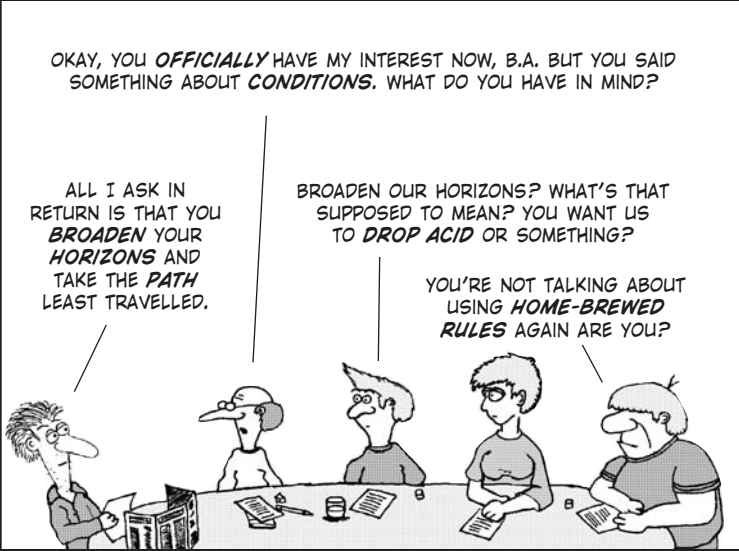
YEAH, YEAH, THAT'S ALL **WELL** AND **GOOD**, B.A. BUT YOU KNOW HOW PEOPLE ARE. THEY **TALK!** THEY **SAY** THINGS.

HOW DO WE KNOW **WORD** OF OUR **PLAYING HACK-START CHARACTERS** WON'T GET OUT?



WELL...THE **ONLY** PEOPLE WHO HAVE TO KNOW ARE SITTING RIGHT HERE AT THIS **TABLE**. AND I **SWEAR** I WON'T BREATHE A WORD OF IT.

YOU HAVE MY **SOLEMN KNIGHT'S PROMISE** ON THAT.

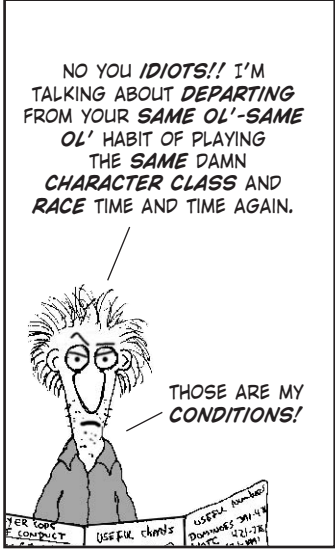


OKAY, YOU **OFFICIALLY** HAVE MY INTEREST NOW, B.A. BUT YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT **CONDITIONS**. WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?

ALL I ASK IN RETURN IS THAT YOU **BROADEN** YOUR **HORIZONS** AND TAKE THE **PATH** LEAST TRAVELLED.

BROADEN OUR **HORIZONS**? WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN? YOU WANT US TO **DROP ACID** OR SOMETHING?

YOU'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT USING **HOME-BREWED RULES** AGAIN ARE YOU?



NO YOU **IDIOTS!!** I'M TALKING ABOUT **DEPARTING** FROM YOUR **SAME OL'-SAME OL'** HABIT OF PLAYING THE **SAME DAMN CHARACTER CLASS** AND **RACE** TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

THOSE ARE MY **CONDITIONS!**



ANY **PLAYER** WHO AGREES TO RUN A **CHARACTER CLASS** AND **RACE** HE OR SHE HASN'T RUN IN AT LEAST **FIVE YEARS** CAN USE THE **HACK-START RULES** AND START OFF AT **FOURTH LEVEL!**

HUH??! YOU MEAN I CAN'T PLAY A **DWARF?** I CAN'T PLAY A **THIEF?**

FIVE YEARS??! BUT THAT'S NOT FAIR! YOU **KNOW** I SPECIALIZE IN **SPELL-LOBBERS!!!**

I CAN'T PLAY A **FIGHTER** OR A **RANGER** OR A **EVEN A BERSERKER?**

NOPE!!

SORRY GUYS, THERE WILL BE **NO** NEGOTIATING ON MY CONDITIONS. I **KNEW** THIS WAS GONNA STICK IN YOUR **CRAW** BUT I'M NOT GOING TO **BUDGE**. THINGS ARE GOING TO BE **DIFFERENT** AROUND HERE. FROM NOW ON WHENEVER YOUR **CHARACTER** DIES YOUR **NEXT** CHARACTER HAS TO BE A DIFFERENT **CLASS** AND A DIFFERENT **RACE**. I THINK YOU'LL FIND IT WILL PROMOTE MORE **ROLE-PLAY** AND A LITTLE LESS **HACK**.

OH **BRAVO**, B.A.!!! WHAT A **MARVELOUS** IDEA. I WHOLEHEARTEDLY **APPROVE!** I WELCOME THE CHANCE TO TAKE ON NEW CHALLENGES. THIS IS **GREAT!**

YOU CAN'T TELL US WHAT WE **CAN** AND CAN'T PLAY.

C'MON B.A.! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

IS THIS SOME LAME ASS **EXERCISE** YOU LEARNED AT **GAMEMASTER** CAMP?

CAN YOU?



MAYBE I DIDN'T MAKE MYSELF **CLEAR**. I'M NOT **'MAKING'** YOU DO ANYTHING. I'M SIMPLY GIVING YOU AN **OPTION**. PLAY SOMETHING **DIFFERENT** AND YOU START OFF AT **FOURTH LEVEL**. INSIST ON PLAYING THE SAME OLD **COOKIE-CUTTER** CHARACTERS YOU **ALWAYS** DO AND YOU START OFF AT **FIRST LEVEL**. THE CHOICE IS **YOURS**.

...AND IF I GOT A FEW **GOOD** ROLLS I COULD OPT FOR **PSIONICS**. OH AND IF I CHOSE TO PLAY A **PIXIE FAERIE** I'D HAVE **FULL ACCESS** TO **FAERIEKIN BATTLE MAGIC!!**

HOW ABOUT A **HALF DWARF ASSASSIN**? WOULD THAT CONSTITUTE SOMETHING **DIFFERENT**?

HMM.... I GUESS A **DRUID** OR **CLERIC** WOULDN'T BE SO BAD. ESPECIALLY IF I **MIN-MAXED** MY **WISDOM** AND **INTELLIGENCE**...

NO BOB.... IT WOULDN'T.



TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

OH NO YOU DON'T **BRIAN!** IF YOU WANT TO **HACK-START** YOUR CHARACTER I'M **FORBIDDING** YOU TO PLAY **ANYTHING** THAT INVOLVES THE USE OF **SPELLS** OR **PSIONICS!!**

WAIT!! HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT A **GNOME ACROBAT** WITH SOME **MINOR** THIEVING ABILITIES?

NO!

HOW ABOUT AN **ANTI-PALADIN**? I AIN'T NEVER PLAYED ONE OF THOSE.

A **DWARVEN MINER** DOWN ON HIS **LUCK**?

NO!!

I KNOW! I COULD PLAY A **LICHE!** NOW THAT'S **REALLY** DIFFERENT!



OKAY, I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT THIS WAY BUT IT'S **OBVIOUS** YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GO DOWN THAT **PATH** WILLINGLY. LOOKS LIKE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GIVE YOU A **SHOVE**.



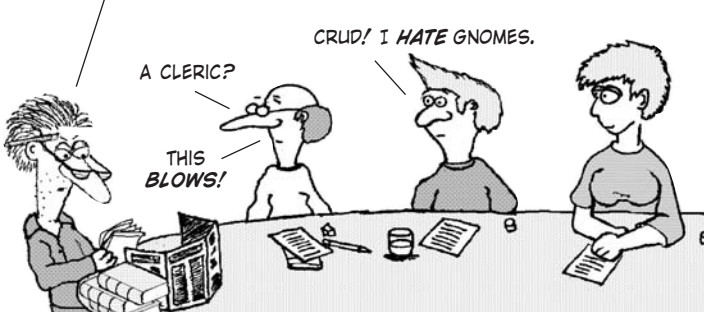
NEW **CONDITION** FOR YA -- I'M GOING TO **TELL** YOU WHAT KIND OF CHARACTER YOU HAVE TO PLAY IN ORDER TO **QUALIFY** FOR **HACK-START**.

LATER TOPIC OF COMPACT
USEFUL CHARMS
USEFUL NUMBER
DWARVES 291-49
421-784

A WEE BIT LATER...

OKAY, HERE'S WHAT I'VE COME UP WITH. **BOB**, YOU'LL BE PLAYING A **HUMAN CLERIC**. I'LL LET YOU CHOOSE WHICH **GAWD** HE SERVES.

DAVE, YOU'RE A **GNOME MAGIC USER**. YES...THAT SHOULD DO **NICELY** FOR YOU. LET'S SEE NOW...UH, SARA, I GOT YOU DOWN HERE FOR A **DWARVEN THIEF**. --BE SURE TO **CHECK** WITH ME LATER. THERE ARE A FEW **MINOR** DETAILS I NEED TO GO OVER WITH YOU. AND FOR **BRIAN**? LET'S SEE... HOW 'BOUT AN **ELVEN RANGER**!



CRUD! I **HATE** GNOMES.

A **CLERIC**?

THIS **BLOWS!**

TAKE 'EM OR LEAVE 'EM, FOLKS! IT'S **ALL** UP TO YOU. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GIVING UP SHOULD YOU **DECLINE**. I'M **CONFIDENT** HOWEVER THAT YOU WON'T **SHY AWAY** FROM A **GOOD CHALLENGE**.

CHALLENGE? **HMMRRFFF!** I COULD PLAY A **STINKIN' CLERIC** STANDING ON MY HEAD.

MAGIC USER? I WONDER IF THERE'S A **SPELL** THAT WOULD TURN ME INTO A **FIGHTER**?

I HAVEN'T PLAYED A **THIEF** IN **YEARS!** SHOULD BE FUN.

ELVEN RANGER? WHAT THE HELL, I'LL GIVE IT A TRY.

THEN **SHOW** ME, **BOB**. SHOW ME YOU CAN DO IT.

YOU'RE ON **SCREEN-GRUNT!**



HEY **BRIAN**, CAN I BORROW YOUR **"CHARACTERS OF THE CLOTH"** SUPPLEMENT? I'D LIKE TO **BONE UP** ON RUNNIN' A **CLERIC** THIS WEEKEND. **OH!!!** AND YOUR **GAWDS** AND **DEMIGAWDS** MANUAL. I NEED TO PICK A **PATRON GAWD**.

YEAH, I WOULDN'T MIND LOOKING THROUGH ANYTHING YOU HAVE ON **MAGIC-USERS**. THINK YOU COULD GIVE ME SOME **POINTERS**?

SURE, I CAN RUN YOU THROUGH MY **SPELL TACTICALS** TOO. I'VE SPENT **YEARS** REFINING THEM.

GOOD IDEA!!



OH MAN, THIS IS GOING TO BE THE **BEST** CAMPAIGN **EVER!!**



CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE:
"TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SORCERER"

Bring 'Em Back Undead or Alive*

The sequel to "Lords of Darkness" [Bundle of Trouble Vol.1]

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
& STEVE JOHANSSON

RECAP: HAVING BECOME **BLOOD THRALLS** IN THE GAME **'LORDS OF DARKNESS'**, BOB AND DAVE (NOW RESPECTIVELY KNOWN AS **BLACK PRINCE OF MUNCIE** AND **LORD OF THE HORDE**) HAVE ENTERED INTO A **'BOND OF SERVITUDE'** WITH THE BEAUTIFUL **VAMPIRESS, BRIDGET.**

ALARMED AT THE SITUATION AND CONCERNED FOR THEIR **FRIENDS**, THE REST OF THE **KNIGHTS** LURED BOB AND DAVE BACK TO THE **TABLE** TO TRY AND TALK SOME **SENSE** INTO THEM.

WHEN THAT FAILED, **B.A., BRIAN** AND **SARA'S DARKEST FEARS** WERE REALIZED - BOB AND DAVE WERE IN OVER THEIR HEADS -- THEY WOULD HAVE TO **INTERVENE!**

I CAN'T *IMAGINE* WHAT'S KEEPING SARA. ANY IDEA WHAT THIS *'EMERGENCY MEETING'* IS ABOUT?

WE HAVE A *PLAN* FOR SAVING **BOB** AND **DAVE** FROM **BRIDGET'S** EVIL *CLUTCHES*. BUT, UH... I'D PREFER TO WAIT 'TIL SHE GETS HERE BEFORE DELVING INTO THE DETAILS.

A *PLAN*? YOU GUYS HAVE A *PLAN*? AND YOU DIDN'T *INCLUDE* ME? I THOUGHT WE WERE DOING THIS *TOGETHER*.

SORRY DUDE, WE *KNEW* YOU WOULDN'T *APPROVE* SO WE KEPT IT UNDER *WRAPS* UNTIL WE WORKED OUT THE *KINKS*.

OH FOR THE LOVE OF... I SHOULD HAVE *KNOWN* YOU'D COME UP WITH SOME *HALF BAKED SCHEME*. OKAY, LET'S *HEAR* IT -- WHAT IN THE *HELL* HAVE YOU TALKED *SARA* INTO?

TALK SARA INTO... *ME*???! BOY, ARE YOU *OFF BASE*. FOR YOUR INFORMATION *'OPERATION: BRING 'EM BACK UNDEAD OR ALIVE'* WAS ORIGINALLY *SARA'S* IDEA. OF COURSE SHE WAS A LITTLE *SQUEAMISH* ABOUT SOME OF THE *'FINER'* EMBELLISHMENTS I BROUGHT TO THE PLAN BUT *EVENTUALLY* SHE CAME TO THE SAME CONCLUSION I DID -- THAT *DESPERATE TIMES* CALL FOR *DESPERATE MEASURES*.

BRING 'EM BACK UNDEAD OR....? I CERTAINLY DON'T LIKE THE *SOUND* OF THAT. MAYBE YOU SHOULD JUST *TELL* ME WHAT YOU'RE...

DON'T WORRY. YOU'LL GET A *FULL* BRIEFING AS SOON AS *SARA* GETS HERE WITH THE *DUCT TAPE* AND *STUN GUN*.

S-S-STUN GUN??! DID YOU SAY **STUN GUN??!**

YEAH, *SARA'S* GONNA *BORROW* ONE FROM ONE OF THOSE *LOSER BOYFRIENDS* SHE'S BEEN DATING. HE'S A *RENT-A-COP* OR SOMETHING. BUT DON'T WORRY -- IT'S JUST A *PRECAUTIONARY* MEASURE. ACCORDING TO *APPENDIX L* OF THE *HACKMASTER PLAYER'S HANDBOOK*, THE *BACKBONE* OF ANY SUCCESSFUL *RESCUE/EXTRACTION MISSION* IS HAVING A *BACK-UP PLAN* FOR THE *UNEXPECTED*.

EXTRACTION??!

LET'S NOT *KID* OURSELVES, *B.A.* UNTIL *BOB* AND *DAVE* ARE *FREE* OF *BRIDGET'S* CONTROL WE HAVE TO CONSIDER THEM *HOSTILES*. THEY AREN'T LIKELY TO COME WITH US *WILLINGLY*.

HOSTILES??! THAT'S IT - I'M *NOT* TALKING TO YOU ANYMORE. YOU'RE *SCARING* ME, *BRIAN!* FIRST WITH ALL THIS *SECRECY CRAP* AND THEN TALK OF *GUNPLAY??*

SURELY *SARA* ISN'T GOING ALONG WITH THIS *FOOLISHNESS*.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

AHHHH. GOOD. THAT MUST BE HER *NOW*.

*Continued from KODT#50 "Goth to Get Me Some"

SORRY, I'M LATE GUYS. MY MAKE OVER TOOK A LITTLE LONGER THAN I ...

FRAAAAAAPPP!!!!!!!!!!!!
S-S-SARA?? IS THAT YOU??

W-W-WHAAT? THEY GOT TO YOU? THOSE LOUSY **B-B-BASTARDS!** THOSE DAMN DIRTY GRAVE ROBBIN' GOONS!!! THEY GOT TO YOU??!!

YEP! IN ALL MY DARK-GLORY!!
I CALL MY NEW PERSONA, "**LEEZADEATH**"

THEY'LL **PAY** FOR THIS!!!

OH **GAWD!!** NO! NOT YOU TOO!!
PLEASE!!! SAY IT AIN'T SO.

SO... WHAT DO YOU **THINK?**
AM I **GO**THENTIC?



I **S-S-SWEAR** BY ALL T-T-THAT'S -WEEEEEZE- **H-H-HOLY**
-WEEZE-- THEY'LL -WEEEEEZE- **P-P-PAY** FOR THIS!! -WEEZE-

WHOAH, WHOAH!! BRIAN,
RELAX!! YOU POOR THING.
YOU'RE **HYPERVENTILATING!**

D-D-DON'T WORRY,
S-S-SARA. -WEEZE-
I'LL GET YOU OUT OF THIS
-WEEZE- S-S-SOMEHOW.



IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK, SILLY. THIS **OUTFIT**
IS JUST PART OF MY **PLAN**. I'M **FINE!** REALLY.

-WEEZE- -WEEZE- H-HUH? PART
OF YOUR -WEEZE- PLAN?

UH HUH! I'M GOING IN
UNDER COVER!

LI-LI-UNDERCOVER?



I GOT THE IDEA AFTER I TALKED TO YOU **LAST**
NIGHT -- I WAS READING SOME MORE OF
THOSE **LORDS OF DARKNESS** BOOKS I
BORROWED FROM **SHIELA** BEFORE I **TURNED** IN.

HUH? BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
WE **FINALIZED** OUR BEFORE I **HUNG**
UP THE PHONE. I DON'T REMEMBER
ANYTHING ABOUT SOME
STUPID COSTUME.

I **IMPROVISED.**

IMPROVISED? BUT WHAT
ABOUT MY **OUTLINE?**
I WAS GOING TO **BRIEF** B.A.



BRIAN, DON'T GET ME WRONG. I THINK THE **ORIGINAL**
IDEA OF **CORNERING** THE GUYS AND **FORCING** THEM TO
HEAR US OUT HAD **SOME** MERIT -- I **REALLY** DO.
IT WAS A NICE **SIMPLE** STRAIGHT-FORWARD APPROACH.

BUT FROM THERE IT **BALLOONED**
INTO SOMETHING...ER, WELL, LET'S
JUST SAY THAT **SNATCHING** THE
BOYS OFF THE **STREET** AND **SHOVING**
THEM IN THE BACK OF YOUR **VAN** MAY
NOT BE THE **BEST** APPROACH..

C'MON SARA --
HAVE YOU GONE
SOFT ON ME?
I THOUGHT WE
AGREED THAT...



BRIAN, I REALLY DON'T THINK YOU REALIZE THE **EXTENT** OF BRIDGET'S **POWER** OVER THOSE BOYS.

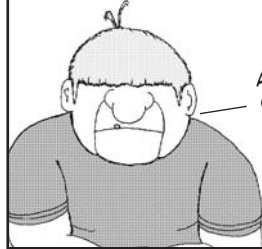
SURE I DO. I TOOK THAT INTO ACCOUNT. THAT'S WHY WE'RE GOING TO USE MY **BASEMENT** TO **CONFIN**E THEM DURING THE **DEPROGRAMMING** PHASE OF THE **OPERATION**. IT'S ALL DETAILED HERE ON **PAGE 16** OF MY **OUTLINE**.

I'M GLAD YOU BROUGHT THAT UP. WHEN I ASKED **KEVIN** IF I COULD BORROW HIS **STUN GUN** HE **FREAKED** OUT! I ENDED UP **TELLING** HIM WHY I WANTED IT. HE SAID THAT WHAT WE'RE PLANNING WAS **FELONIOUS KIDNAPPING!**



WHAT???! YOU TOLD HIM? MISTER COP-WANNABE BUYS YOU **LUNCH** AND YOU START **CHATTERING** LIKE A **FRICKIN' FURBY??** I THOUGHT WE TOOK A **VOW OF SILENCE??**

BESIDES WE'RE TALKING ABOUT MY TWO **BEST FRIENDS** HERE. I'D **TRUDGE** THROUGH **HAIL** OR **HIGH WATER** FOR THOSE GUYS.



A COUPLE OF **HARD ONES** IN **LOCK UP** IS A **RISK** I'M WILLING TO TAKE IF IT WILL **SAVE** THEM.

HALOOOO!! EXCUSE ME. HAVE YOU TWO GONE **BONKERS?** KIDNAPPING? CONFINEMENT? DEPROGRAMMING? **THIS** IS YOUR PLAN? **GEEZE LOUEEZE!** WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE? DID I GO TO **SLEEP** AND WAKE UP IN **BIZZARO WORLD?**

I GUESS I SHOULD'VE **EXPECTED** SOMETHING LIKE THIS FROM **YOU BRIAN**. BUT **SARA?** WHAT THE HELL?

OH I CAME TO MY SENSES, B.A. BUT UNDERSTAND THAT WE WERE **DESPERATE** TO FIND SOME WAY OF HELPING **BOB** AND **DAVE**. I GUESS WE WERE **CLUTCHING** AT STRAWS AND IT GOT OUT OF HAND.



WELL I'M GLAD TO HEAR YOU TALKING **RATIONAL**. BUT WHAT THE HELL IS UP WITH THAT **OUTFIT?**

IT FINALLY **OCCURRED** TO ME THAT THE **ONLY** WAY TO GET THROUGH TO **BOB** AND **DAVE** IS TO APPROACH THEM ON **COMMON GROUND**.

I'M GOING TO **GO INTO** THEIR WORLD.



GO INTO THEIR WORLD???! YOU MEAN PLAY **LORDS OF DARKNESS???**

READING THOSE BOOKS LET ME **SEE** THE SOLUTION. **LORDS OF DARKNESS** IS AN ON-GOING GAME! IT DOESN'T **END** WHEN YOU LEAVE THE TABLE. **HARDCORE L.O.D.** PLAYERS STAY IN **PERSONA 24-7!** THEY THINK OF THEMSELVES AS A **FAMILY**. THAT'S WHERE ALL THE **CLANSMANSHIP** COMES INTO PLAY.

OH NO! **UNACCEPTABLE!** I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU DO IT, **SARA**.

YOU'RE THINKING OF GOING **"INTO THE NIGHT"?** AS **ONE** OF THEM? B-B-BUT THAT'S **CRAZY TALK**.



LISTEN TO ME **BRIAN**, IT SAYS **RIGHT** IN THE **MANUAL OF DARKNESS** THAT ANYONE WHO DOESN'T ACTIVELY **PLAY** THE GAME IS TO BE CONSIDERED AN "**OUTSIDER**".

AN **OUTSIDER** IN **L.O.D** IS SOMEONE WHO IS **SUSPECT** AND WHO SHOULD BE **SHUNNED**.

YEAH, WELL I'D RATHER BE AN **OUTSIDER** THAN TO BE WAY '**OUT**' THERE.

YOU'RE NOT **LISTENING** TO ME. **BOB** AND **DAVE** ARE PLAYING BY THE **RULES**. THEY CONSIDER "**US**" TO BE **OUTSIDERS**. THEY EVEN **CALLED** US THAT LAST WEEK. **REMEMBER?** THEY'RE NOT ABOUT TO LET US COME **CLOSE** AS LONG AS THEY VIEW US AS A **THREAT** TO THEIR **IN-GAME PERSONAE**. DON'T YOU SEE? IF I CAN **CONVINCE** THEM I'M **ONE** OF THEM I JUST **MIGHT** BE ABLE TO GET **THROUGH** TO THEM.

HMMMM... I HAVE TO ADMIT. AT LEAST **THIS** PLAN SEEMS TO HAVE SOME **LOGIC** BEHIND IT.

RULES?? HMMRRFFFF, SINCE **WHEN** DID **BOB** AND **DAVE** EVER PLAY BY THE **RULES??**

I'M DOING THIS FOR **THEM**, **BRIAN**. THEY'RE **MY FRIENDS** TOO.

I EXPECTED YOU TO TRY AND TALK ME OUT OF THIS. BUT IT'S NO USE, **B.A.** I'VE MADE MY DECISION AND I'M GOING THROUGH WITH IT. I HAVE IT **ALL** FIGURED OUT. **SHIELA** USED TO PLAY AND SHE'S AGREED TO **SPONSOR** ME. SHE ASKED AROUND AND LEARNED THAT THE **MISTRESS OF THE HORDE** AND HER **BLOOD THRALLS** ARE HOSTING A **VAMP-RAVE** TONIGHT AT THE **OLD FOUNDRY**. SHE'S GOING TO TAKE ME. ONCE THE GUYS SEE THAT I'M IN "**THE FOLD**" I CAN BEGIN TO **TALK** WITH THEM WITHOUT BEING PERCEIVED AS A **THREAT**. IT'LL **WORK**. I JUST **KNOW** IT.

RAVE?? I DUNNO **SARA**. IS IT **SAFE?** I HEAR REALLY **STRANGE** THINGS GO ON AT THOSE PARTIES.

SOUNDS LIKE A BADLY **AD-LIBED** EPISODE OF **BUFFY 90120** TO ME.

DON'T WORRY **CUZ**. IT'S NOT **THAT** KIND OF **RAVE**. THIS IS **TOTALLY** ABOUT THE GAME AND MORE ABOUT SHOWING OFF YOUR **PERSONA** AND **MINGLING** WITH THE **CLAN** THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

THAT'S YOUR **PLAN?** TO GO **MINGLE** WITH THESE **PEOPLE?** MY **GAWD** **SARA**, HOW DO YOU THINK **BOB** AND **DAVE** GOT **SUCKED** IN?

OH FOR PETE'S SAKE!! THIS IS **ME** WE'RE TALKING ABOUT, **B.A.**.. WHEN HAVE YOU **EVER** KNOWN ME TO GO OFF THE **DEEP END** WHEN IT COMES TO **GAMING?**

EVEN BACK IN **GRADE SCHOOL** **BOB** GOT **SUSPENDED** AFTER **BODY SLAMMING** **LITTLE MARY MALLONEY** AFTER SHE TOUCHED HIS **SPINNER** IN **CHUTES AND LADDERS**.

I ALWAYS KEEP MY **WITS** ABOUT ME AND REMIND MYSELF IT'S **JUST** A GAME. BESIDES, **SHEILA**'S GOING WITH ME. SHE **KNOWS** THE **DANGER SIGNS**. SHE KNOWS THAT AT THE **FIRST INDICATION** OF ANY TROUBLE SHE SHOULD **PULL** ME OUT.

THEN THERE WAS THE TIME HE **PAINTED** ALL THE **METAL TOKENS** IN HIS **MONOPOLY** SET AND PUT THE **PROPERTY CARDS** IN PLASTIC PROTECTORS. **MAN** WAS **THAT WEIRD**.

THAT'S TRUE. **BOB** AND **DAVE** ALWAYS GO TO THE **EXTREME** WHEN IT COMES TO **GAMING**.

JUST A GAME NOW SHE **REALLY** IS TALKING **CRAZY**.

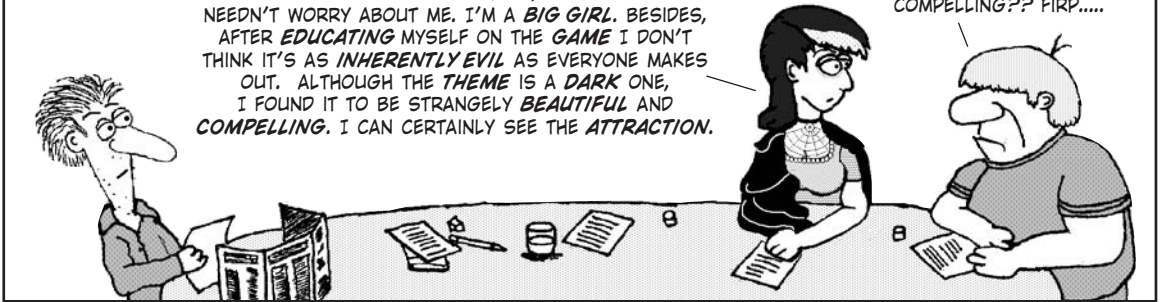
AYER TOPIC OF CONDUCT THE GA IS ALLOWED BY THE
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ACTUALLY THAT WAS *MY* MONOPOLY SET, B.A.. I SOLD IT TO *BOB* AS A FORM OF *PROTEST* WHEN THEY PULLED THE *YORKIE DOG* TOKEN FROM PRODUCTION.

BUT THAT'S *BESIDES* THE POINT. WE CAN'T ALLOW *SARA* TO DO THIS. ESPECIALLY NOT DRESSED LIKE....LIKE *THAT!!* IT'S NOT WORTH THE *RISK*. IT'D BE LIKING SENDING A *LAMB* OUT AMONGST THE *WOLVES*.

I'M TOUCHED BY YOUR *CONCERN*, BRIAN. BUT YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT ME. I'M A *BIG GIRL*. BESIDES, AFTER *EDUCATING* MYSELF ON THE *GAME* I DON'T THINK IT'S AS *INHERENTLY EVIL* AS EVERYONE MAKES OUT. ALTHOUGH THE *THEME* IS A *DARK* ONE, I FOUND IT TO BE STRANGELY *BEAUTIFUL* AND *COMPELLING*. I CAN CERTAINLY SEE THE *ATTRACTION*.

COMPELLING?? FIRP.....



THERE!!! YOU SEE???!!

IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING. THE GAME IS *PULLING* YOU IN.

YOU'VE GOT TO *STOP* THIS *MADNESS* SARA. BEFORE IT'S *TOO LATE!!*



SORRY, *BIG GUY!* I'M MEETING *SHIELA* IN 15 MINUTES. WE'RE HEADING OVER TO THE *VAMP-RAVE*. THE *LEAST* YOU CAN DO IS WISH ME *GOOD LUCK*.

YER *STUBBORN* AND *SASSY*, *SARA* -- JUST LIKE *ME*. *FINE!!* IF I CAN'T TALK YOU OUT OF IT CAN YOU AT *LEAST* KEEP ME *POSTED?* CALL ME EVERY *HOUR* ON THE *HOUR!*

SURE BRIAN. THAT'S FAIR ENOUGH I SUPPOSE. BUT YOU *REALLY* NEEDN'T WORRY. I'LL BE FINE.

IF I DON'T *HEAR* FROM YOU I'M COMING IN.



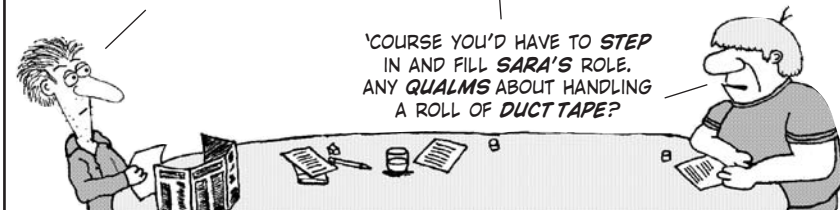
A WEE BIT LATER...

I HOPE SHE *KNOWS* WHAT SHE'S DOING. I FEEL LIKE I'M IN THAT MOVIE - *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*. IF I LOSE ANY MORE *PLAYERS* TO THE *HORDE* I MIGHT AS WELL TAKE UP *SOLITAIRE*.

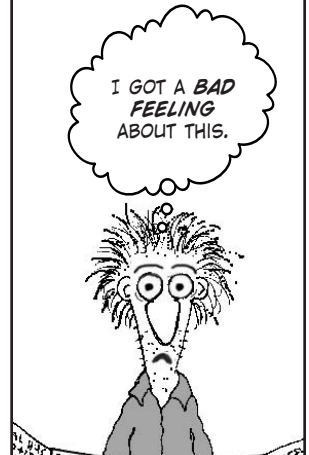
NOT TO WORRY B.A. YOU SEEM TO FORGET. I *STILL* HAVE MY *RESCUE/EXTRACTION CONTINGENCY PLAN* IN WAITING. IT'D BE A *SNAP* TO MODIFY IT FOR *THREE* EXTRACTIONS RATHER THAN *TWO*.

UH....THANKS, BRIAN. THAT'S REALLY *REASSURING*. -GULP-

'CURSE YOU'D HAVE TO *STEP* IN AND FILL *SARA'S* ROLE. ANY *QUALMS* ABOUT HANDLING A ROLL OF *DUCT TAPE?*



I GOT A *BAD FEELING* ABOUT THIS.



**CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE:
"THE THRALL IS GONE"**



Two New Old Games, & the End of an Era

By Rick Moscatello



There must have been a miracle worker around when it came time to convince the suits at *Microsoft* to let *Crimson Skies* be developed. Except for an old Amiga game called *Rocket Ranger*, there's nothing out there that compares. Here's the situation: in the early 1930s,

the United States government collapses, causing North America to fracture into a host of minor countries (*eg, the Nation of Hollywood and the Republic of Texas*), that don't get along peacefully at all. With such a situation, railroads are not viable, and massive zeppelins serve as the primary means of transporting goods and people across the continent. Alas, the zeppelins make great targets for air pirates, which likewise hunted down ruthlessly by the militias of the various sub-countries.

This is where you, the dashing Robin Hood-esque hero, comes in. You have your own merry band of pirates, although naturally with a do-good bent. You travel all through the land, foiling the plans of mustache-twirling villains, flirting with Hollywood vixens, and teaching humility to overbearing lawmen. I struggle to really classify the game, as it doesn't have a role-playing aspect to it (*beyond building your own personal aircraft, which follows the basic "bigger is better" rule*), and it certainly doesn't have the puzzle solving skill requirement of most adventure games.

What *Crimson Skies* promises is simple fun, with a solo campaign that is far and away the best I've seen in years. The variety is astounding. Yeah, there are a couple of the annoying "fight against overwhelming odds" missions, but there are also rescue, search and destroy, and stunt flying exploits that really give a heroic feel, far superior to the "go get my boots" adventures that pop up in other games. It's a nice mix, and each mission has reasonably clear objectives that you at least know what you need to do, even if it's beyond your skill.

Alas, nothing is perfect, and *Crimson Skies* does have a glass jar's worth of bugs in it. The graphics engine seems to have a hard time when you fly near certain objects--inevitably things you need to fly near, like in stunt flying missions. The game has no problem at all just up and crashing. Your wingmen are boneheads, crashing into you for no good reason. As seems to always be the case, multiplayer is nearly unplayable thanks to crashes (*although the strong point of the game is the solo campaign, so it's no great loss*). Luckily, if you fail a mission enough times, you'll get an option to just skip it without penalty. This is a nice way to get around the more devastating bugs, as well as let the less



joystick-inclined gamer still get the full enjoyment of the game. By the time you read this, a patch will be out that is sure to fix the bulk of the problems (*there already is a patch for the major issues, like multiplayer*)

Crimson Skies is a very good game, more so because of its uniqueness. Any big time gamer, feeling a bit of ennui at the thought of yet another real time strategy/first person shooter/same old same old game, should definitely check it out, as well as any fans of the old radio serials (*um, are there any such fans left?*).

Panzer General III: Scorched Earth, is also a worthy game, except for one detail: I've done this already.

Scorched Earth takes place in frigid Eastern front, with a variety of scenarios that will take you rampaging through all those destined to become Communist Bloc countries. It's good stuff, I guess, as major tank battles are always cool, especially if German tanks are involved. The game itself is nearly unchanged from before, with only a fistful of new units being added to what was already a very respectable collection of forces. Graphics are certainly upgraded, with gorgeous 3D renderings and pseudo-digitized black and white pho-



Continued on page 31...

HOUSE OF SCHLOCK

A Book Review by John O'Neil

CREATURE FEATURES:

The Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Movie Guide
by John Stanley
Berkeley Publishing Group
Trade paperback, 596 pages, \$12

"How come you don't review movies?" I am often asked.

"Because I'm a book reviewer," I say. Patiently.

"Yeah, but you should talk about movies too. Like, there was this one I seen --"

And maybe that's the reason I don't review movies right there. Everybody talks about movies, good and bad. If you want an opinion on the latest dopey sci-fi flick, you won't have to look much farther than your local paper or the lunch-room water cooler. Talk about a saturated market.

But try getting an opinion on the third volume of that paperback fantasy series you're considering. Reviewing may not be the most richly rewarding career in the world, but stick with books -- especially fantasy and science fiction books -- and at least you'll have the satisfaction of providing a rare service ("rare" is not equivalent to "appreciated," but that's a subject for another column.)

Of course, even the snobbiest of reviewers (*excuse me -- literary critics*) can't resist yakking about movies from time to time, and I personally believe that's the chief reason books about movies were invented. Books like this month's pick: **Creature Features: The Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Movie Guide**, written and compiled by John Stanley.

John Stanley inherited Bob Wilkins's famous Bay Area television series "Creature Features," and was its host for six years. Stanley has also covered the SF, fantasy and horror scene for over three decades for the **San Francisco Chronicle**, and is exactly the kind of guy you'd want riding shotgun on a Friday night video excursion.

This is the fifth edition of Stanley's guide, and his research shows. Not only does it pack an enormous catalog of back reviews -- from the classics (*Star Trek*, *The Exorcist*, *Psycho*) to the cheesy (*Slumber Party Massacre I-III*, *The House on Sorority Row*, *The Return of Jafar*) -- it also has lengthy entries on flicks just hitting video, such as *Sleepy Hollow*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *The Sixth Sense*. While it's dangerous to label anything like this truly comprehensive -- there's always an obscure flick or three missing

-- every film I could think to look for had an entry (although I often had to search under several titles).

Stanley does a good job of providing a lot of interesting and relevant info in each of the entries, too -- including notable first appearances of actors and directors, amusing anecdotes, and production details. One thing the book does lack is a comprehensive index of actors, directors and such, but there are plenty of those available -- on the Internet and elsewhere -- and the space is better used with lengthy entries on a huge host of films.

And let's face it, the real reason one picks up a book like this isn't to look up obscure films and production details anyway... it's to hear an objective,

expert opinion on our own goofy personal favorites. Like **Return of the Living Dead** (★★★★), **Mystery Men** (★★) or **Tremors** (★★★★).

Nobody ever made a movie guide popular avoiding controversy, and Stanley is obviously aware of this. How else can you explain a system that ranks John Boorman's classic *Excalibur* below *The Ewok Adventure*? Or the torrid B-horror flick *Re-Animator* above *Brazil*? Or equates *Blade Runner* with *Starship Troopers*, and *Star Trek: First Contact* with (*shudder*) *Batman and Robin*?

Well, so much for objectivity. Stanley clearly has a soft spot for schlock, but it's an endearing trait in a way. He's quite eloquent, for example, when describing the "marauding mollusks" of *Slugs: The Movie* (1988), or the "tadpole babies" of *Return of the Alien's Deadly Spawn* (1983). Frankly, I'm not likely to ever rent these movies, but it's oddly entertaining to read about them.

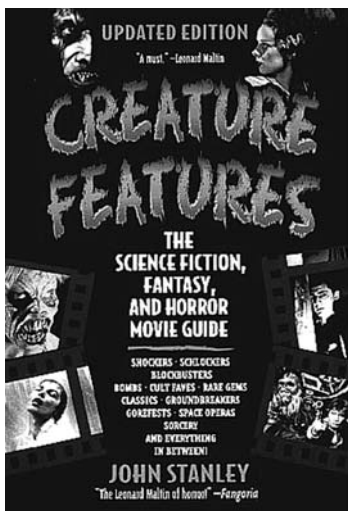
Creature Features is the kind of book one buys to set beside the VCR as a late night reference, but like the best reference books it thoroughly rewards casual reading. Even if you don't agree with Stanley's scoring system (*and it's not completely clear that you should*), you'll find plenty to keep you amused on the sofa on Friday night. Who knows -- you might find it so entertaining that you skip the movie altogether.

Another victory for reading, and that much more job satisfaction for the lonely book reviewer.

+++++

John O'Neil is the publisher and editor of Black Gate magazine (www.blackgate.com). His favorite film is Gandbi, which isn't covered in Creature Features, but he also has a weakness for creepy sci-fi such as Alien, Forbidden Planet, and Spice World.

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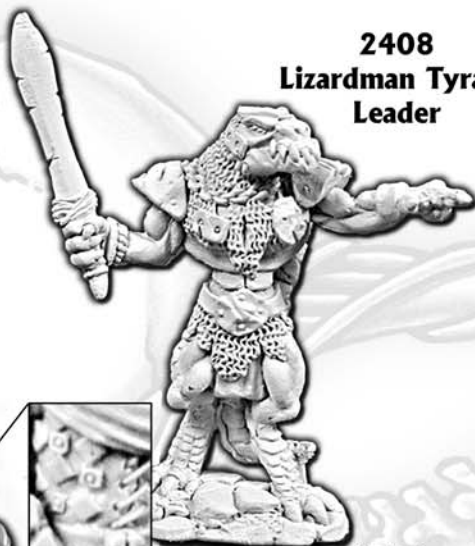
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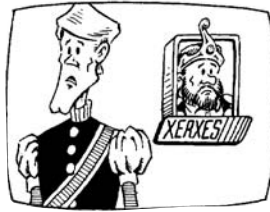
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BRUNO THE BANDIT

By IAN McDONALD



"...AND SO, ON THE ADVICE OF HIS DOCTORS, OUR BELOVED KING RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO END HIS HUNGER STRIKE, SOME 3½ HOURS INTO IT..."



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PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Disks of Wondrous Power: Continued from page 28

tos omnipresent to keep you in the World War II mood. Even though everything is done right, I still can't handle the game...it really seems like I've already played through *Panzer General* on an Eastern Front campaign several times before. Playing it again under the same set of rules, on maps that are disturbingly familiar, just doesn't make sense for a "new" game, even if "the suits" think that's the best way to make money.

The (*Whatever*) General series is a great collection of games, from the original *Panzer General*, to the fascinating *Fantasy General*, to all the other variants (*including World War III and Warhammer 40k*). It's time to let it die. There's nothing really wrong with the latest incarnation, but if you're interested in this, you're better off buying the much cheaper and just as good older versions. If you already have the older versions, don't bother...conquering Poland for the umpteenth time with graphics that are maybe 20% better than before just isn't worth another \$60.

Speaking of letting stuff die, it's finally over. Last November, I started playing *Asheron's Call*, the massively multiplayer online game through *Microsoft*. My character, R, soared to high levels, and I founded the *Cult of R*, peaking at over 200 cultists. Alas, after nearly a year's play, I'd pretty much done everything within reason, but a funny thing happened to AC: over the course of a year, it no longer was the game I learned how to play.

The same thing happened to me in *Magic: The Gathering*...they changed the rules in that game so much, that I no longer had a clue how to play, making the three years I spend mastering the old rules completely wasted. In "old" *Asheron's Call*, my character was pretty cool, although he had a rough, rough, time starting out. He specialized Healing (*even though specialization was worthless*), he had all the magic skills but War (*a boring skill that was only good for doing damage*), and he had a high Focus, making identifying stuff easy. Alas, they changed the rules to make melee much more powerful...suddenly R's spell skills were half as valuable. Then they made specialization much more useful...so much for R's efficient training of skills (*although I was the 3rd best healer in the land, with the #1 and #2 slots held by characters of much higher level*). The economy system more or less collapsed, and many good quest items were introduced, making R's ID skills, so useful in the first four months, completely worthless. With the new melee rules, "extreme" character types that could not possibly survive before were now common, with hyper min/maxed abilities which R couldn't hope to match. In short, my character was obsolete, and my year's development of my character was nearly as wasted as the years I spent mastering the rules of *Magic*. Follow this up with a series of major bugs cropping

up in the game, such as "in the know" players that were duplicating their precious items into frightening numbers, and godlike equipment was getting permanently enchanted. The time for me to blow AC for greener pastures had come.

Nearly all my friends stopped playing, and many of them sold their characters on E-bay. So, with my enjoyment of the game gone, I figured selling off on E-bay would be the ideal closure to the whole thing. I put R up, and within a few days, had a private offer of \$600. I accepted and closed the auction, although I'll forever afterward wonder how much he would have been worth on the open market. Still, it's *darn* weird to get real money for a character...I half expected to be paid in *Monopoly* money or something. Anyway, so much for *Asheron's Call*. I can't wait for The Next Big Thing. □

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WAR CHEST

WarChest is the customizable miniatures game from the folks at Lance and Laser that is played on a standard Chess/Checker board. Two opponents command their warriors, sorcerers, monsters and other fantastic creatures in an attempt to capture the each other's war chest.

Each starter set comes with a paper board, a set of rules, 6 figures, a war chest and a card tailored specifically for each figure which lists its special abilities and advantages.

Because you build your army using points, no two games are the same and you'll find your opponent's choice of figures will provide a fresh new challenge. As you acquire more WarChest figures, your own army will grow, offering you a wider range of tactical options.

The nice thing about this game is that the folks at Lance and Laser have posted the rules on their website (www.lanceandlaser.com) so you can look it over before you buy it. □



**"YOU GONNA SKIN THAT HAWG OR
JUST STAND THERE AND BLEED??!"**

KURT RUSSELL AS WYATT EARP
TOMBSTONE

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We've come to expect good things from Knuckleduster Publications. Forrest Harris' solitaire adventures, 'The Devil's Addition' and 'Raining Hammers: The Ballad of Johnny MacDonald' were a breath of fresh air.

Harris' latest work, *The Knuckleduster Firearms Shop* is a bit of a departure from his earlier works. *Firearms Shop* is a compendium of weapons for Western role-playing games. The stats listed are generic in nature but there are conversion notes in the back to adapt the ratings to *Deadlands*.

Rather than simply list a broad range of weapons this book goes a bit further. The book tries to educate Joe Gamer about the nature of true gun-fighting as well as enhance the reader's understanding of how guns work.



For more info check out
www.knuckleduster.com



MAGE KNIGHT REBELLION

Find a Hero. Build an Army. Create an Empire.

Mage Knight is a new collectable miniatures game (CMG) in which every 3D figurine contains all of the information needed for gameplay. Every game statistic, from attack strength to magical abilities to record keeping, is incorporated right into the base of the character. Pretty kewl, huh? The designer (Jordan Weisman) claims this innovation frees the players from the cumbersome rule books, scraps of paper and need for erasers, which usually bog down a miniatures game. We're inclined to agree.

Eight factions in the *Mage Knight* world compete for dominance of the human kingdoms using technology, magic and elemental power. The *Mage Knight Starter Set* gives players ten fully assembled, painted miniatures of heroes, mages and monsters, each with an innovative base that contains all the stats needed for play. *Booster Packs* will contain five randomly inserted, fully assembled, painted miniatures. *Mage Knight* is available wherever fantasy games are sold. □



plucked from the vine for your reading enjoyment

• STAR TREK BACK ON NBC?

It's been reported that NBC has expressed interest to Paramount TV in developing the 'next' *Star Trek* television series.

• PATRICK STEWART TO STAR IN 10TH STAR TREK MOVIE

The film is still in the early stages of pre-production but Patrick Stewart is slated to reprise his role as Captain of the Enterprise in the tenth *Star Trek* movie. Delays are expected because of the actor/writer strikes slated for next summer.

• MO' STAR TREK NEWS

Look for *Star Trek* reruns (*All four series*) to pop up on various cable stations next year. Sci Fi Channel, TNN, TNT, Fox Family and Odyssey are all said to be interested in acquiring rerun rights.

• SCOOBY DOO LIVE ACTION MOVIE CASTING

At press time we were told Freddie Prinze Jr. being considered for the role of Fred in the *Scooby Doo* movie. (Zoinks!) Sarah Michelle Gellar is interested in the role of Daphne. There's also rumors of Christina Ricci in the role of Velma.

• SAY IT AIN'T SO —INSPECTOR CLOUSEAU?

MGM is trying to get Michael Myers to play Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther* remake. I guess Adam Sandler was busy that weekend. Sheesh — Sorry, but some movies are best left alone. Why mess with a classic?

• FREAKY LINKS GETS THE AXE!!

Thank god they gave this series a quick and merciful death. The biggest mystery about THIS series is how it got on the air in the first place. Good riddance!!

• ELECTRA WOMAN REMAKE??

Guess it was bound to happen. Look for *Electra Woman* and *Dyna Girl* to pop back up on the tube next summer.

• BALL AND CHAIN COMING TO TV

Scott Lobdell's *Homage Comics* miniseries, *Ball and Chain* is to be made into a live-action tv series by FOX. B&C is described as "Moonlighting meets *The Vampire Slayer*" -- a story of a divorcing couple who gain super powers that only work when they are together.

• DUNE MESSIAH TO AIR ON SCI-FI CHANNEL

Writer-director John Harrison is to follow up his six-hour *DUNE* miniseries in December with *Dune Messiah* on Sci-Fi.

• SECRET ADVENTURES OF JULES VERNE

Sci-Fi Channel has ordered 22 episodes of *Jules Verne* - to be shot in high-definition, wide angle format. The series will blend sci-fi with romance, horror, drama and a dash of espionage.

The premise of the show is a twist on Verne's books — that Jules Verne experienced all the fantastic things he wrote about first hand.

• JACK AND THE BEAN STOCK

Speaking of 'twists' on the classics, Brian Henson is slated to direct *Jack and the Beanstalk* for CBS. The story involves a modern descendant of Jack who is put on trial. The Giant, who testifies tells much of the story from his point of view.

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Conventions listed in italics are shows that Kenzer and Company will be attending.

To get your convention listed here for free, please e-mail todd@kenzerco.com with the following information: Show dates, City and State, brief highlight of your show, and contact information and/or a web page for your show.

CREATIVE TEAM FOR DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS® COMIC SERIES ANNOUNCED

Kenzer & Company is pleased to announce that it has finalized the creative team for their first *Dungeons and Dragons* comic book. *Jay Donovan* has signed on to script the first eight issues, *Tyler Walpole* will be the lead interior illustrator and *Hung Mac* will provide his outstanding painting talent for the covers.

Chicagoan Jay Donovan's previous works include writer and creator of the sci-Fi drama *MAVENS* for *Starving Artist Studios*. Tyler Walpole is an up-and-coming artist hailing from Des Moines, IA. His past works include numerous projects for *JD Quest*, *Lange Games*, and *Tactical Command Games*. His more recent works can be found in current products from *Palladium Books*, and in the *Disk Wars* game from *Fantasy Flight Games*.

The planned release date for the first issue of *Kenzer's Dungeons and Dragons: In the Shadow of Dragons* comic is March 2001. Fans should then expect 24-32 pages every other month of intriguing stories and fantastic full color art. This title will be an eight-issue mini-series.

Expected cover price is \$2.95. Further plans for additional D&D mini-series lines are in the works. □

THE BUFFY-CHICK AS DAPHNE? DAMN! I WAS HOPING FOR CHRISTINA APPLIGATE.

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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.

Last issue we ran Hillary Doda's *GamerGrrl's Manifesto*. The response has been overwhelming. Readers wrote in with some very strong opinions from both sides of the fence.

First off, your comic rocks. I know you've heard it a million times, so make this a million and one. KODT never fails to make me laugh my a** off, every single time. Every issue is great. Congrats on the great work and keep it comin'!

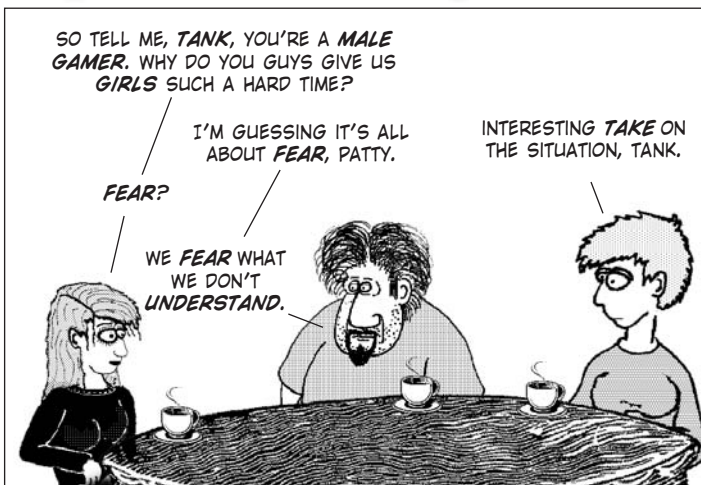
Now, the real reason for this note: Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU for publishing the *GamerGrrl's Manifesto* in issue 48. I'd read this online before, but I'm very happy to see a respected and well-known book like yours go out of their way to actually publish it for a wider audience.

Hilary Doda has finally put into writing what many (*if not all*) female gamers have felt at one time or another.

As a female who's into gaming, it seems few in the gaming world even attempt to make us feel at home. Yeah, I got into gaming because of my boyfriend--and believe me, it was an arduous process, thanks to the negative attitude gaming systems, gamers and store-owners have towards us. (*Thank heavens for White Wolf and their female-friendly set-up!*)

Yeah, at first I was just the girlfriend who came along to the store or gaming sessions with her boyfriend, but now I initiate the visits as often as he does. Sadly, little has changed, and the hormone-crazed punks and the lonely adult males, who seem to think I'm from another planet, still permeate every corner of gaming.

I am glad to see some systems attempting to make changes--I know it's hard to change decades-old stereotypes, but if everyone is just content to sit back



and say "oh well, there's nothing I can do," then nothing will ever change. Change always starts small. You sneak it in when folks aren't looking and then let it grow as it will.

I still shy away from playing at cons or in groups outside my circle, mostly because as one of the few (*or at times the only*) women involved, I feel cornered and like the oddball. I also still have a lot to learn, and unfortunately many of these groups are like an "Old Boys Club," ready to ostracize a woman if she isn't a rules-whiz, or doesn't want to play the stereotypical half-naked sex kitten who has few attributes aside from her cleavage.

I hope that by books like yours publishing articles like the *GamerGrrl's Manifesto*, and by including intelligent female gamer characters, things will start to change. Thanks for remembering we're out here. (*And thanks to the enlightened and sensitive gamer guys out there--keep doing what you're doing!*)

Keep up the great work! I look forward to many many more hysterical issues of KODT.

Sincerely,
Yvette Perez

Let me begin by saying that KODT is great! Not an issue goes by that I don't laugh out loud or am reminded of something "from the old days." I always mean to write and tell you how much I enjoy the comic. What finally got me to the keyboard was to write in response to Hilary Doda's letter in issue #48.

As a female gamer I was pleased to see the time, attention and seriousness which

you accorded Hillary's letter. Somewhere around the third paragraph the quirky bass line from No Doubt's "I'm Just A Girl" cranked up in the back of my mind and stayed with me through the entire article. She raises a number of valid and vital points of which all gamers, shop owners, and game designers need to be aware. However, I do feel that a word or two does need to be said on behalf of the "boyeez".

Up front, let me say that in the twenty-three years that I have been part of the gaming community, I've seen my share of rude, thoughtless, stupid behavior. Some of this was indeed aimed in my direction--condescension, assumption, exclusion, underestimation and just sheer bad manners lay the foundation for a number of "No joke -- *he really said/did this*" stories.

Most of those who made such errors learned not to do so again, at least not to me.

On the other hand, 99% of the guys that I have played with and stayed with act like human beings and treat me as I wish to be treated. Most of my friends are male gamers and I have even been married to one for over six years. The "boyeez" that are the majority of the game community I deal with are over the age of 18, are gainfully employed at jobs that denote at least a bit of sense and responsibility, know how to act towards the opposite sex and belch the alphabet only on special occasions.

Most certainly, there are still prejudiced and rude males (*and they have their female counterparts as well*) running loose in the population. There are without doubt those who have no sense, tact or

manners. Even so, on behalf of the good guys -- *They* are, in my experience, the rule rather than the exception. The majority of guys whom I have met at clubs and cons are some of the nicest and friendliest people that I have ever met.

Also, it is with great affection and pride that I can point any gamers in my area, male or female, to the shop that is at the center of our growing game community -- **Medieval Starship**, in O'Fallon, Il. The owners, Jay and Barb LaRose, have made a welcoming and pleasant environment where it is a joy to game and shop. Female gamers and GMs have just as much place at the table whether the game is **Traveller**, **Mechwarrior**, or **Shadowrun**.

Their money is just as green and just as cheerful accepted.

Much of what Hilary said was positive and I applaud and endorse it as such.

Further, I'd like to add a few positive suggestions of my own.

First and foremost, if you are aware of bigoted or rude behavior towards *anyone* take the initiative and let that person know its not acceptable. If this is coming from someone in your group with social power and standing, and you don't think that you can win as a lone ranger, get backing from the other good guys/girls in your group.

Behavior endorsed by silence is assumed to be acceptable. One good shot of "*Dude, we don't do that in our tribe*" can go a long way.

Also in defense of the boyceez, I offer the following advice: First, do your homework as soon as you can. Sure, we all stumble across new things at cons and shops that we have not studied in detail. No one is expected to know it all right away, but if you are making a commitment to a game then learn the rules, know which dice are used for what, keep your attention on the game -- heck, that goes for everybody, not just girls.

Second, don't fall into the trap of letting your boyfriend/husband/whatever "*pet and spoil*" you in the games he runs. I am just as disgusted by GM girlfriends who have "*+5 Holy Avenging Vorpal Swords of Wounding*" (*not making this one up, folks*) as the next gamerboy. To be painfully honest, I've never seen a female GM fall into this, so guys -- if your sweetie is playing, don't treat her any differently. In the long run, it just contributes to stereotypes on both sides of the table.

Third, as Hilary mentioned, there are a number of shops that do not deserve to be patronized. Voting with your dollars can have a tremendous impact. However, before you march away, make sure that they know what they did wrong.

If you just never come back, the effect is only a faint echo of what it could have been. If a clerk treats you in a rude or condescending fashion, its a good tactic to just point out to them what they did. The clerk who overlooked Hillary's stack of books to wait on the dice buyer might not have been

aware of what he did, and may have gotten a valuable lesson in good customer/human relations, if he'd had a chance. And maybe he was just a jerk -- but you won't know if you just walk away, slink off or storm out with out telling them why you now feel inspired to shop at the competition.

Once such behavior is pointed out, if its clear that they don't care, then you are perfectly justified in taking the following steps: One, go over their heads. Unless they are the owner (*and most owners are not afraid of getting cooties from the money of a female*) they are probably not going to make the boss happy with such behavior. Two, if you spend a good deal on gaming material, make sure that the owner realizes the amount of income this may cost him today and in the future (*We spend shamelessly at game shops*). Third, let him know that you have no qualms in making sure that the attitude and behavior he refuses to correct will be made known to the gaming community. The other good guys can vote with dollars as well.

In any arena where men and women come into contact, there are some basic things that need to be realized. Men and women communicate in different styles. It's a fact of life. Duhh. Girls, check out a volume called "*The Male Mind at Work*". Its a good overview of how males in our culture see themselves, competition, women, and what constitutes good team playing.

Guys, look into the "*Men are from Mars*" series. No kidding. Its useful info for the game table and out in the real world. If you treat a female like "*one of the boys*", make sure she knows that's what it is, and not anything else. What may seem like a hazing, harassing attitude is often a guy's way of treating you like "*one of the boys*". Moreover, if you show up at cons in wonderbras and spandex minis, don't be shocked if you are looked at closely and not taken seriously. Nobody in the real world is gonna take you seriously in that outfit either.

So, how do we open more doors to female gamers? As was suggested, there's a lot of ground that male gamers, shop owners, and designers can cover. There are also many things that females can do as well. If you are a female gamer with some experience and expertise, consider mentoring other female gamers, especially younger ones. Your GM's girl friend may simply need an alternative set of social cues. Work with your local game shop and offer to run sessions of RPGs or even those mech/tech/math usin' games to girls.

One of my proudest moments of the last year was when a 13 year old girl, new to our game group, and I learned to play **Full Thrust**. We took on the guys and won. "*Beat you like a school girl*" has a new meaning in our circle. We stepped up to the plate, took a swing, and gained the respect for it. Our guys cheered us on and were nothing but supportive.

Above all, lets be polite to each other and not tolerate those who are over the line. And

lest anyone mistake **my** stance, let me say that I do agree with Hilary that trying to solve things with silly "*/s/he*" solutions won't wash.

Political correctness is no substitute for thought and some decent manners. If you would not tolerate rude, crass people in other portions of your life, why on Earth do so in your gaming?

To the good guys out there, many thanks -- you are part of why I game and you are appreciated. To my sister gamers, don't give up-- the decent guys outnumber the crass and the unthinking can hopefully learn better. The only way you can change someone is to give them a reality that show them otherwise. We can create that reality. This arena is ours as well. Roll your dice proudly.

Ruth Moody
St. Louis, Mo.

I'm writing this partly as a response to Hilary Doda's "**GamerGrrls Manifesto**" and partly to extol my local game shop, **Borderlands**.

First of all, I am deeply sorry that Hilary has suffered from so much prejudice and pain. I am disgusted that there is still so much of this going on in the world. I agree that one should treat a female gamer the same way one treats a male gamer. And it appalls me that she has encountered so much prejudice in her gaming career. I consider myself relatively enlightened. A little under half of group is female, and they are treated the same as everyone else. They are not picked on or treated as sex objects, nor do we "*go easy*" on them because they are female. They are part of the game, same as every one else. Thus, I do not believe your comments are directed at me. I believe that Ms. Doda may be overgeneralizing.

As a note on games, I am getting a little sick of the cheesecake too. In the race section of the new 3E player's handbook, every female character has some sort of adapted fantasy-bra on. On the other hand, the coolest pic in the book is Lidda, a fully-clothed *<gasp>* female rogue. The picture of her wasting an ogre with a crossbow bolt to the face is truly cool.

Finally, I want to put in a good word for my local gamestore, **Borderlands**.

If you are ever in Salem, Oregon, check this store out. It stocks a wide variety of games and movies, and has an area in the back where you can just plop down and play. About half the staff is female, and I've never seen any sort of prejudice there. I hope Ms. Doda knows that there are good gameshops as well as bad.

Marc Carpenter
vamberry@teleport.com

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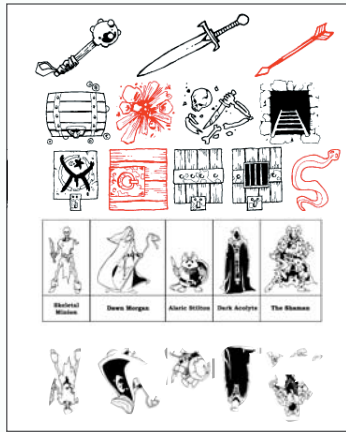
Here's a kewl little game utility you might find useful. Sparks is a new way of making paper miniatures with your computer — in the form of a TrueType font!

Simply install this font and your keyboard is transformed into a fantasy army generator. In the Dungeoneer set (There are more sets on the way according to the designers) there are 26 characters presented in front/back view which can be scaled to the desired size, printed out on paper and then cut and folded to make stand-up miniatures for use in your table-top RPG campaign or miniature battles.

Best of all, you don't have to worry about them being ruined by a spilled soda or the rigors of play. They're disposable. Just throw out the old and print up new ones.

If you have to have photoshop you could even colorize your armies to drive fear into the heart of your enemies.

A simple, fun utility. What more could you ask for? Just visit the website listed above.



Brian's Rating: Use 'em! and Abuse 'em!

MASTER MAZE: CAVERN SET

Dwarven Forge • E-mail: dwarvenforge@cs.com

What can I say? Dwarven Forge continues to put out quality product and once again they've made Brian's Picks with this latest addition to their modular dungeon design series. The Cavern Set allows you to create damp, twisty cavern passageways and rooms. Photos just won't do justice to the level of beautiful detail of these hand painted sections.

The set includes 4 curved wall sections, 3 straight wall sections, 2 complex corner sections, 2 dead end sections, 3 floor sections, 1 corner conversion section (allowing you to connect the caverns with the dungeons sections from the other Master Maze sets), 1 twisted conversion section, 2 stalagmites (I like to think of them as Piercers who missed their target) 1 medium flat rock, 2 small flat rocks, 2 small water 'tubs' and fifty 'bow-tie' connectors. Each section even has a felt bottom to protect your playing surfaces (mom's dining room table).

I highly recommend this one. It's surprisingly affordable and the durable resin should stand up to rigors of play for years and years. I can hardly wait to see what these guys come up with next.



Brian's Rating: Highest Recommendation!

CHRONONAUTS • www.wunderland.com



Ever wonder what you would do with your own personal time machine? In Looney Labs new card game Chrononauts, you get a chance to find out. At the beginning of the game you lay out the timeline. This is a 36 card grid, which has highlights of our past history. The timeline is composed of two types of cards: *Linchpins* and *Ripplepoints*. Linchpins are points in the timeline that you can change as a time traveler. And the ripplepoints are other areas of history that might have been effected by your changing of the linchpins. For example: the very first card in the timeline is 1865 Lincoln Assassinated. This card is a linchpin. Now lets say that you play the Prevent Assassination card on the year 1865. You would flip the 1865 card over and it now reads "1865 Lincoln Wounded". The backside of the linchpins also shows what ripplepoints in the timeline would have been effected by this sudden change in our history. Back to our example: the second card of the timeline is a ripplepoint, it reads:

"1868 Andrew Johnson Impeached". As most of you know: if Lincoln had not been assassinated, then Johnson would not have been the president, and therefore he could not have been impeached. This creates what is known as a Paradox. There are patch cards that can be played on the paradox cards to fix the paradox. This works kind of like a band-aid on time. The patch for 1868 reads: "Abraham Lincoln Impeached". We all know that that did not happen, but who is to say, that it might not have happened had Lincoln not been shot. There are three ways to win the game; each player is randomly given a player identification card, and also a mission card. The player ID will list your "home" timeline. If you can manipulate the timeline, by way of playing the time inverter cards and patch cards, then you have found your home timeline and you win. The mission cards give you a little background story and list 3 Artifacts that you must find in the timeline. The final way to win is to fix the time paradoxes. As a reward for playing a patch, you get to draw a bonus card. If you can grow your hand from the starting size of 3 cards to a total of 10 cards you are awarded a victory for your good deeds of fixing the time paradoxes. The game rules also have two other games that come with this product. Artifax, is a lighter version of the game, that would be great for younger players, and Solonauts is a solitaire version of the game. So the next time you're sitting around, wondering what could have been, grab Chrononauts and you just might find out.

Brian's Rating: Definitely my kind of game.



Grey Ghost Press, Inc.

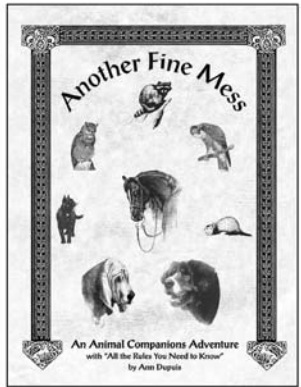
<http://www.fudgerpg.com>

Another Fine Mess

Your master has gotten himself into yet another fine mess, captured by an evil sorcerer! What can you – his animals – do about it? Shadow the cat knows where the Master was captured. Reek the ferret is a contortionist. Penny the falcon is fearless; while Midnight, the Master's steed, has strength and speed aplenty. Isabelle the bloodhound can track a scent anywhere. Barney is a strong, loyal mutt for whom most obstacles prove mere annoyances. Bandit the 'coon is clever with his paws. And Anaxagoras the owl is in training to be a wizard!

This *Animal Companions* adventure is for 3-8 characters. It's ready to run with "All the Rules You Need to Know" and pre-generated characters. (Recommended but not included: percentile dice or **Fudge** dice.) By Ann Dupuis, 32 pages, GGG2001, \$8.95.

Also Available: *Fudge Expanded Edition* Customizable Roleplaying Game. GGG1010, \$19.95.



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25 INDICATORS THAT THE GAME YOU JUST BOUGHT IS A DAWG

1. The random number generator which came in the box is a spinner, coin or a set of numbered chits.
2. You have to dig through five pages of errata sheets to get to the rule book.
3. When you call the **Customer Support** number printed on the side of the box it's perpetually busy.
4. The manufacturer's address contains the word "Apartment" in it. (*Or any other similar indication that the game came out of somebody's garage or basement such as suite, PB, etc.*)
5. The credits on the title page looks like the author's family tree.
6. There's no address or contact info for the manufacturer listed anywhere on the product.
7. You look at the credit page and apparently no one wanted to take credit for it.
8. The cover price has been scratched out with a marker and new, lower price has been penned in.
9. The game is a license of a popular movie, book or TV show.
10. The blurb "The next D&D" or "Destined to be a classic" appears on the back cover.
11. The words "Diceless", "Generic" or "Fun for the whole family" appears anywhere on the product.
12. There's more errata than core rules.
13. Manufacturer's website contains the words "personal", "AOL" or "Yahoo".
14. Opening the box is effectively the same as opening a bag of potato chips. There's a whoosh of air and you suddenly realize there's been considerable 'settling' during the shipping process as you stare into an half empty box.
15. The pad of character sheets which came in the box is thicker than the rulebook.
16. The game came in an envelope, ziploc bag or any other packaging available at your local grocery store.
17. There's more whitespace per page than the movie **Fargo**.
18. The so called 'decorative border' on each page takes up 35% or more of the page. (*Which is clearly the designer's attempt to spread his 32 page book over a 120 page hardback edition.*)
19. Where the 'Art Director' is normally listed on the title page the words, "Clipart provided by..." appear.
20. The copyright notice is a list of sequential numbers. (*example: ©1976, 1982,1987,1996, 2000*)
21. There's any hint of future expansions on the back of the box. Also the words "collectible" and "customizable" could (*but not always*) be indicators as well.
22. The rules read like a VCR manual.
23. The **Customer Support Line** listed in the rules is a 1-900 number.
24. The designer hails from Idaho. Nothing good (*as far as games are concerned*) ever came from Idaho.
25. You attempt to return the product and the clerk who sold it to you pretends not to know or remember you.

OH MAN, THAT WAS AWESOME! AND TO THINK I ALMOST WENT TO MY SISTER'S WEDDING!!! I WOULD'VE COMPLETELY MISSED THE E.P.S FOR THAT KILL..



Overheard at the Table

"That dude's a freakin' coward! Let's slit his throat while he's asleep"

"I pretend like I'm listening to what he's saying and then I punch him in the face when he isn't looking."

"Ten gold pieces? Is that all he had on him? Damn, he was hardly worth rolling the dice for."



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SPICE UP YOUR

MEAT



Hardcore Fairy



Hunter Fairy



Wild Fairy



Miniatures

Beautiful yet designed for rugged gameplay, the five piece Fairy Meat Miniatures Set is available now for a mere \$12.50.



Glitter Fairy

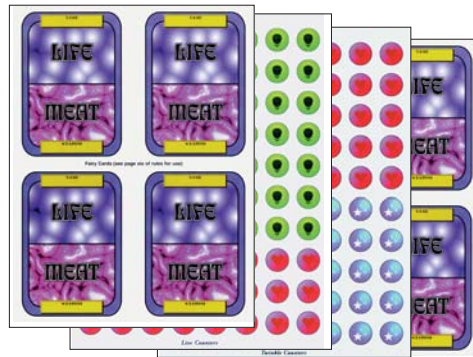


Seasoned Fairy

Fairy Meat is a bold adventure in miniature gaming for two or more players. You get to play cute and cuddly little fairies-- the twist is, they've been warped by evil and now the only thing they care about is **whom** their next meal is going to be.



Components Pack



Need more counters for those giant battles you're staging?

The Fairy Meat Components Pack is the answer! It is also available now for \$9.95.

If you get a chance to play or demo this game, do it. Trust me -- you'll be hooked.

Rich Spangle, wizards.com

full review at http://www.wizards.com/origins/ORG2K/Virtual_FM.asp

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