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Knights of the Dinner Table™

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IT'S A WONDERFUL AFTERLIFE

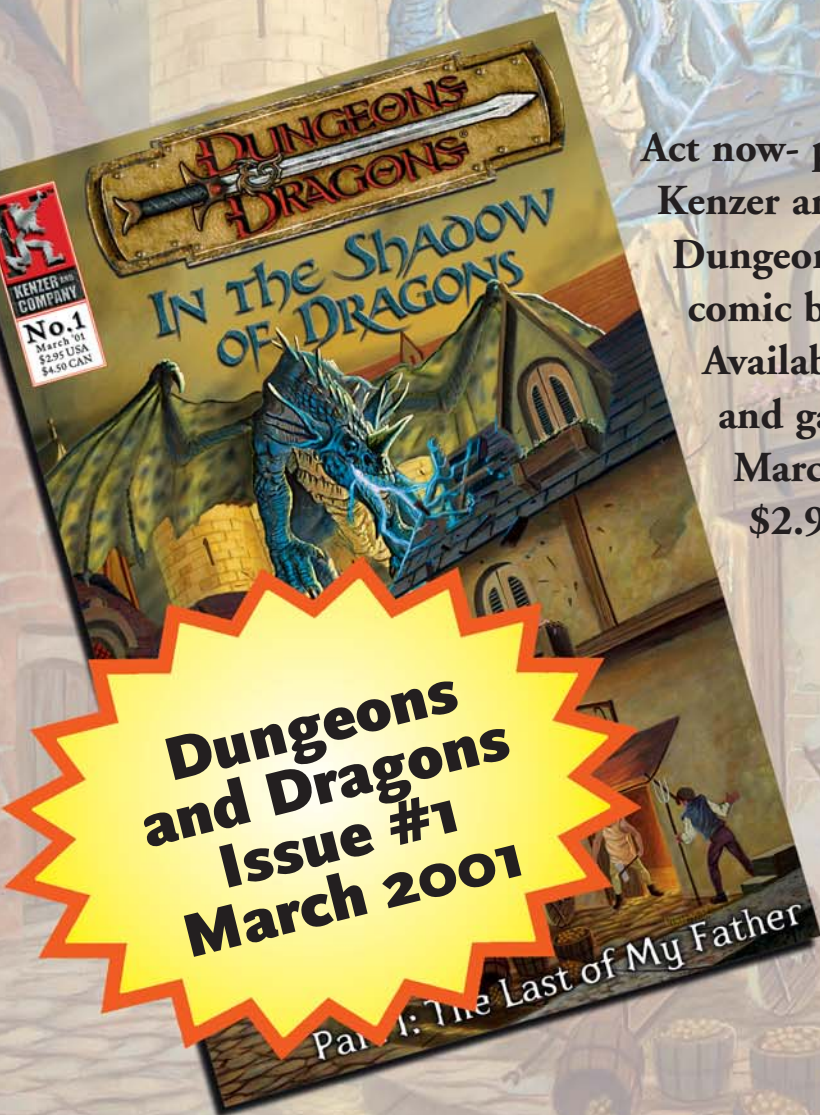
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KENZER AND COMPANY

Knights of the Dinner Table #52
It's A
WONDERFUL AFTERLIFE
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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™

M A G A Z I N E

"IT'S A WONDERFUL AFTERLIFE"

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.



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Editorial-of-a-Madman™

“WHY DID THEY MAKE A MOVIE BASED ON A GAME NOBODY HAS PLAYED IN OVER TEN YEARS? IT BOGGLES THE MIND.”

**FROM A REVIEW OF
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS**

For over twenty years there were countless rumors of a D&D™ movie being “in the works”. As far back as 1980 we were told that a movie deal was going to happen. But after one false start after another many of us gave up hope. Later, when sales of D&D books and supplements began to wane it was clear to even the most ardent D&D fan that the opportunity had been lost — a D&D movie just didn’t seem to be in the cards.

But then in 1990 a strange thing happened. A gutsy twenty year old gamer walked into the offices of TSR and announced he wanted to buy the movie rights to D&D. (*At least that’s the story I read in an interview with the director.*) Stranger still is that he was able to close the deal. It took him ten long years to make it happen but finally, on December 8th the **Dungeons and Dragons™** movie became a reality and hit theatres across the country. Every gamer I know made plans to be there when credits rolled on opening day. All of them, I’m sure, muttered a gamer’s prayer before taking their seat and settling down with their popcorn. *“Please God! Let it rock! Let this movie be an ember which will spark many more gamer-flicks to come!”*

Now I should mention that it takes about six weeks from the time I write an editorial until the time it hits the streets. So, it’s probably safe to say that most of you have already made an expedition down to your local theatre to see the movie. And by this time you’ve already decided which camp you fall in; those who think the movie missed, and those who think it hit.

As tempting as it is, I’m going to resist the urge to comment on the movie itself. For me it didn’t much matter how good or bad the movie was. It was enough that the movie was deemed an important event and that the KenzerCo staff closed the office and took a long lunch to go see it as a group. (*To be honest, debating over the good and bad points of the movie afterward was much more rewarding than the movie itself.*) Half our staff thought the movie was a disaster. The other half was a little more forgiving. They thought the movie had some major problems but felt it was entertaining enough that they didn’t feel burned. Based on the feedback I’ve gotten from other gamers this division of opinion seems to be wide spread. You either accept the movie for what it is or you hate it for what it wasn’t.

What I found most interesting (*and even a little troubling*) about this movie isn’t what took place up on the screen. It was the apparent need for movie critics who reviewed the film to take the opportunity to not only slam the movie but gamers themselves.

I mean these guys got downright ugly and personal. One reviewer wrote, *“For several decades, the universe of Dungeons & Dragons -- the fantasy role-playing game, or RPG, that pioneered an entire genre of gaming -- has been ruled by the king geeks of every UV-lit rec room and every freshman dorm. You know the guys (and sometimes gals) I’m talking about. Yes, they are often unathletic and sometimes downright troll-like in appearance. But they possess a peculiar charisma all their own. They’re masters of graph paper, 10-sided dice and bongos made from thrift-store lamps.”*

Troll-like? Bongos? I don’t remember any bongos. (*Okay, where are my +5 gauntlets of wuss-slapping?*) Another reviewer wrote, *“The real D&D was an intricate role-playing fantasy game whose popularity among the dateless set peaked in the early 1980s, before*



This adventuring party is besieged on all sides by enemies — both ‘on’ the screen and ‘off’.

computer games became sophisticated enough to kill it off. (A tiny and sad GenX cult plays on, and is taking its Internet arguments about this movie very, very seriously.)”

Then there was this comment in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* *“...the epic role-playing game that has been the obsession of millions of sun-deprived, sugar-fueled geeks.”*

One review found at rottentomatoes.com read, *“So this is the game all those pathetic geeks were playing back in high school? How sad! At least I can take comfort in the fact that I wasn’t missing anything.”*

Pathetic geeks? What’s up with that? If this movie had been about professional wrestling I wonder if these same reviewers would have felt so free to attack the movie’s target audience by describing them in terms of such stereotypes as ‘trailer park trash’, and ‘rednecked geeks’? I seriously doubt it.

Another thing about these reviews that struck me as a bit odd was the prevailing belief that D&D is no longer published — that it’s a dead game. One reviewer claimed the game was *“killed off by computer games many years ago.”* Another commented, *“It’s as dead as Pong.”* Huh?

Okay, admittedly D&D doesn’t blip on mainstream America’s radar screen as often as it used to but given the release of **Dungeons and Dragons 3E** this past summer and the major advertising campaign *WorC* launched to support it, I find it amazing that not one reviewer had a clue. (*I was recently reading an issue of the mainstream men’s magazine Maxim, and was shocked/impressed to see a two-page ad for D&D 3E right there among the other ads for Absolut vodka, cigars and high performance sports cars.*)

Hopefully, the **Lord of the Rings** movie will be out by the holidays in 2001. I’ve already muttered my gamer’s prayer for that one. Then **Mummy 2** is on the horizon, and after that... Well, let’s just say that there are plenty of gamer movies out there yet to come. I’m still hopeful that one of them will manage to knock **Excalibur** or **Gladiator** off my personal list of **“Best Gamer Movies Ever”**.

One can only hope.

Jolly R. Blackburn

Jolly R. Blackburn

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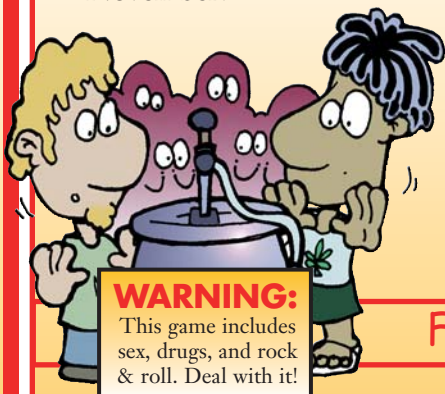
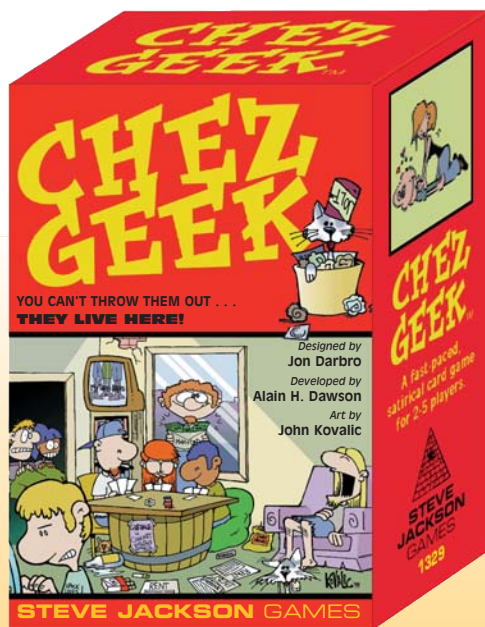
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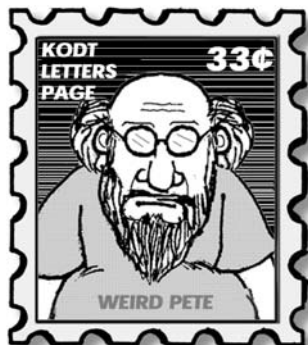


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Our Readers Talk Back!



Dear KODT,

I have been a fan of yours for two years. My first introduction to your strip came from an old issue of *Dragon* magazine. I was so pleased by your twisted take on the world of gaming, that I had to purchase every *Dragon* which had the "Untouchable Trio Plus One" in it. The next time I came in, the owner waved a *Bundle of Trouble* #1 at me and I've been a faithful reader/subscriber ever since.

My current gaming group, The *Royal Diamonds*, parallels the *Knights* a bit too closely for my serious gaming tastes (although it does make for some very interesting sessions). Whenever the current DM goes killer on us or the players are treating their PCs like six-year olds on caffeine pills, I can always turn to your magazine for a good laugh or two. I'd love to get a response from your team, but I'll be pleased if nothing else, that Jolly R. Blackburn knows he has one more fan in the world. Keep up the good work!

Alexander McKaie
Canyon Country, CA

Thanks Alexander! The entire team sends a big "Hoody Hoo!" to you and the rest of the Royal Diamonds. Always nice to hear the hard work is appreciated. Thanks for taking the time to drop us a note.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

My gaming group recently went to see "KODT: The Movie" (or at least, that's what it should have been called) I think we annoyed a lot of the people who gave the movie bad reviews. Non-gamers didn't seem to understand, and were annoyed that there was no plot, bad acting, and costuming that didn't always make sense. We had a running commentary throughout the movie, and were causing other gamers around us to fall out of their chairs when they realized that the movie was a nearly exact representation of almost every first level D&D campaign every gamer has ever seen.

You could see Ripley gaining experience and making level 2 in the maze. I've seen thieves played exactly like Snails, often giving the opportunity to put the whole party in jail and force them into an adventure.

The standard "Tavern Meeting" was

perfect, complete with bar fight. Through the entire movie I kept expecting someone to yell "I waste him with my crossbow!" but no one ever did... The scene where the party is dressed in cloaks that stand out in a crowd of nobles while they are being charged with murder and they attempt to slip undetected out of the area was classic.

I've seen countless groups attempt the same thing. It was really cool when Ripley finally got his backstab modifier, and through the course of the entire movie you could almost SEE the stat sheets. At the end, we were half expecting a scene change to a modern dinner table with everyone packing up their dice and going home... If you're not a gamer, don't bother watching it, but if you are, try to stay in your chair and not annoy the rest of the movie goers by laughing too hard...

Thank you,

Paul W. Harkins
via E-mail



Mighty GQ-looking for a guy sporting a name like Hawk the Slayer — don't you think?

Dear KODT,

I have a serious question. Several times now, there's been mention of a movie called, "Hawk the Slayer" in the KODT strips. I was fairly confident the movie didn't really exist and that the reference was just a joke. Then I read a letter from reader who thanked you for mentioning it. So now I'm not sure if it's real or not.

If it is in fact real, then I want to see it. If the *Knights* think so highly of it then it must rock. So can you please tell me if the movie is real and where I can find it?

Jesse McDonald
via E-mail

Hawk the Slayer is indeed a real movie, Jesse. It came out in 1981 and quickly became a cult classic among the gaming circles I swung dice with.

I'm not entirely sure but I think it was originally made for TV. (BBC) I also seem to recall a sequel called Hawk the Destroyer.

Anyway, I don't want to get your hopes up. The movie was bad. Very, very bad. Even

so, the movie had some redeeming features if you happened to be a gamer. Besides having dwarves, elves, magic users and all the other trappings associated with D&D, the movie dealt with a hero on a quest and a magic sword.

Like the Dungeons and Dragons movie this is a flick you should watch with a group of your gaming buddies. Doesn't matter if you end up loving it or hating it you'll have a good time talking about it.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

I moved to Nashville from Columbia, SC in late July. Ever since then I've been seeing the signs of gaming withdrawal setting in. My roommates think me weird for running around the house in my cloak whipping out my dagger at shadows and shouting "En Vax Mams".

I really can't blame them for taking away my dice...I did go a little bit overboard when I started pelting them with d20s chanting "CRITICAL HIT! DOUBLE DAMAGE!"

Seriously though, I'd love to find a good group to game with in Nashy. I've GMed before and wouldn't mind doing it here, but I'd prefer to play at least for a little while and get to know people.

You can contact me on ICQ (UIN 195127), AOL IM (nazzzyg), or by email (laban-zadok@mail.com)

nazzzyg
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

Just dropping a fan e-mail by in your direction. I'm a neophyte gamer (introduced into this marvelous world by my darling wife) who's still amazed at the concept of gaming. I've been introduced into the world of *White Wolf* and shortly, the vastness of the *7th Sea RPG*.

My wife also introduced KODT to me. At first while reading it...I wasn't gaming at all...and just mildly found the stuff humorous.

Now, it's been about 3 months since I started gaming (once a week) and I've gone back and read the issues of KODT that I bought my wife and some issues owned by friends and I must say...this is some of the funniest stuff I've read!

I'm sure you hear this from everyone...but, I can see a little bit of my friends in the *Knights* and can associate certain situations in our games with some situations in your strips.

Thanks to the world of role playing games (and my wonderful wife, Amanda) I've been introduced into a whole new world of humor with KODT.

Thank you for the laughs.

Mike E. Esquivel
Rookie Gamer

Dear KODT,

I'm sorry to hear that you have just discovered **BattleBots** ("*Cries from the Attic*", issue #49). The only reason **Comedy Central** is showing **BattleBots** is because of the good ratings **PBS** got for showing **Robot Wars**.

Robot Wars is a **BBC** show and has way more carnage than **BattleBots**.

On **BattleBots** you'll never see a *Kill-a-Bot* pick up a robot about 1/5 his size on a 3 foot spike and carry it over to another robot that has a flame thrower. And the owner of that roasted robot gets to advance, provided he can make repairs in the 2 hour time limit.

If you like **BattleBots** then I would recommend you keep your eye on the **Discovery** channel for them to rebroadcast **Junkyard Wars**. This is another great show from the **BBC**. In one show the 2 teams had 1 day to make a cannon out of what they could find in a junkyard, and then the next day they had to try to hit a target on an artillery range.

In the mean time keep on hacking.

Joseph Zarebski
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

Just wanted to let you know that **KODT** rocks ass!! Bob and Dave are gawds!! For the longest time, I've been looking for a comic that I can enjoy for I'm not really into comics. My wife got me into it and I can honestly say that I have FINALLY found a comic that I can not only enjoy, but relate to! Thank you for putting this together. You have two loyal fans in my wife and me. Hack on!!

Yours in hacking,

Robert Hammock
via E-mail

Dear KODT,

My local comic store will only order **Bundle of Trouble** if I tell them it's available. I have up to #7. Is there a schedule you could send me so I wouldn't have to wait until I spot the book elsewhere?

Maggi Perkins
via E-mail

**YOU GOT
SOMETHING
TO SAY?**

Write to **Table Talk**
c/o **KenzerCo**
25667 Hillview Ct.
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or E-mail:
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Bundles of Trouble Volume#8 will ship in February, Maggi. As far as a release schedule for future BOTs, we don't have one. The decision to print each subsequent volume is based on whether or not the relevant back issues are sold out or not.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

Not too long ago, after reading a past issue of **KODT** in which Brian mentioned "*Fresca*", I picked up a six-pack to give it a try. And it's pretty good stuff! (*I like the grapefruit*)

Food and beverage variety always struck me as one of the more interesting quirks of gaming. You can see quite an amount of different tastes and aversions at any gaming table. Gamers seem to be the class that can find obscure or even exotic things most people forget about, such as **Choc-o-Bliss**, **Jolt Cola**, etc.

But one beverage mentioned in **KODT** kind of threw me: **Faygo**. This may come as a shock to anyone who knows what it is, but I don't!

I looked up their website and saw it's a drink that dates back nearly 90 years, and yet, I've never heard of it! No one else in my region has either. I live on the west coast, so I assume that it's just not marketed here, but for awhile I wondered if it was a fictional drink!

So how does **Faygo** taste, anyway?

Adam Haase
via E-mail

You poor deprived kid! Faygo tastes great, Adam. It saddens me that you have yet to experience this tasty beverage.

*Sorry to hear it's not available in your area. From what I gather it's only available in certain parts of the U.S. Fortunately, as you may have noticed, you can order it by the case on-line at Faygo.com. (I recommend the **Red Pop** or the **Rock N' Rye**.)*

Jolly

Dear KODT,

Quite a while back I recall reading a letter in a past issue of **KODT** that described how to play **Monopoly** with a **D&D** twist. I think it went along the lines of all players roll up a first level character. Then, when two people land on the same board space they battle to the death. Winner stays and loser is resurrected and sent to jail.

Anyway, I was wondering if you could tell me which issue that appeared in. I'd like to see if there's anything more to it. Plus, it's been bugging me that I can't find it myself in my back issue collection.

Jim Nowlin
via E-mail

*It was called **Nightmare Monopoly**, Jim, and it appeared in **KODT**#33 in the column, **Game Mechanic**.*

*Speaking of **Game Mechanic** (the column presents home-brewed rules submitted by readers), we haven't run one in awhile.*

If any of you have a home-brewed rule(s) you've come up with for your favorite game, send it in and share it with the rest of us.

Jolly

Dear KODT,

Well first I wanted to congratulate you on producing comics of such exceptional quality and humor that they were the first to get me to purchase them on a regular basis (*I always kinda thought comics weren't worth the money to buy like that, but now I have to have **KODT**, **Vaults**, **KODT Illustrated**, and **Hackmasters of Everknight***).

Secondly, I was just wondering if we're ever gonna see more of the **Black Hands** or **Patty's Perps**? I know lots of people would be content to see their pages along with the ad pages, parting shots, and every square inch of material used for the barcode plastered with **Knights**, but I really enjoy the variety.

All three groups raise different issues, different humor, and illustrate different challenges of being the **GM**. I know the comics title is "**Knights of the Dinner Table**", but why start these other interesting groups just to disappear them just as fast?

Joel Phillippi
via E-mail

*Thanks for the letter Joel. Not to fear, the **Black Hands** and **Patty's Perps** will be appearing again soon. Both groups tend to drift in and out of the comic depending on what the **Knights** are going through in their current story arc.*

*I know **Nitro** is itching to get back behind the screen now that he has his **GM** credentials back.*

Jolly

Dear KODT,

First off, thanks for making **KODT**. My money couldn't be spent better. I'd like to talk about how few gamers there are down in Louisiana. Do you know of away to make new gamer friends?

Graham Blake
via E-mail

Do I know a way? Sure I do. Bringing gamers together is just about the easiest thing someone could ask me to do. There are lots of ways to find new gamer-buddies, Graham. One way is poke about on the internet. There are thousands of websites put up by local gaming groups all across the country. I'd also recommend seeking out any local gameshops you may have within driving distance. Most game retailers are more than glad to help and usually have some sort of bulletin board in their shop to bring people together.

*You can also place a message in **Weird Pete's Bulletin Board** here in **KODT**. With over 20,000 folks reading **KODT** each month I'm sure you'd get some response. (As a matter of fact there's a letter from a reader in **Baton Rouge, LA** in this issue's **Back Room**.)*

Jolly

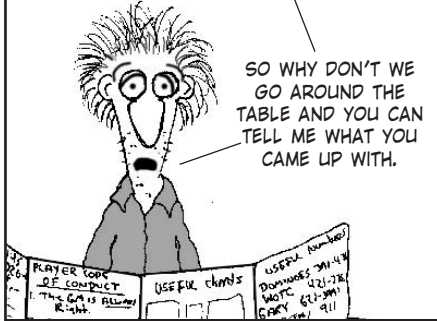
□

Temple of the Unknown Gawd

BY JOLLY BLACKBURN,
BRIAN JELKE,
AND STEVE JOHANSSON

OKAY, SO LAST WEEK I OFFERED TO LET YOU ROLL UP **NEW CHARACTERS** USING THE **HACK-START** PROVISIONS.

THAT MEANS ANYONE WHO AGREES WITH THE **CONDITIONS**¹ I SET FORTH WILL BE **ELIGIBLE** TO START OFF AT **FOURTH LEVEL**.



SO WHY DON'T WE GO AROUND THE TABLE AND YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT YOU CAME UP WITH.


HEY, WERE YOU **SERIOUS** ABOUT AWARDING UP TO A **THOUSAND EXPERIENCE POINTS** TO ANYONE WHO WROTE UP A **KICK-ASS** BACKGROUND FOR THEIR CHARACTER? COZ IF YOU WERE YOU'D BETTER GET READY TO HAND 'EM OVER -- I SPENT **HOURS** ON MINE.

SURE I WAS **SERIOUS** BOB. IT'S TOTALLY AT MY **DISCRETION** THOUGH.

IF I FEEL YOU PUT SOME REAL **THOUGHT** AND **EFFORT** INTO YOUR **BACKGROUND** I'LL CERTAINLY GIVE YOU **POINTS**.

ROCK ASS! I PUT A LOT OF WORK INTO **MINE** AS WELL. I'M GONNA BE RIDING THE **EASY E.P. GRAVY TRAIN!!** BEFORE THE NIGHT IS OVER.

YEAH. **ME TOO!**




OKAY SO YOU SAID WE'D BE STARTING OUT IN THE TOWN OF **WINKLESWORTH**? I DECIDED THAT'S WHERE MY CHARACTER WAS BORN. I TIED HIS **FAMILY** BACKGROUND INTO THE TOWN'S HISTORY. MY CHARACTER'S NAME IS **CUDGEL BANE-FORGER!!** HE COMES FROM A VERY **LONG LINE** OF **CLERICS** WHO HAVE **FAITHFULLY** SERVED THE **GAWD DRAPER**.² FOR **YEARS** IT WAS MY INTENTION TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MY **FATHER**, BUT WHILE ATTENDING **SEMINARY** AS A **YOUNG SPIT** OF A LAD, A VERY STRANGE THING HAPPENED WHICH **ALTERED** THE COURSE OF MY LIFE. MY **NIGHTLY DREAMS** BEGAN TO BE **INTERUPPTED** WITH **STRANGE VISIONS** OF A MYSTERIOUS **APPARITION**.

DRAPER? THE THIEF GAWD? THIS ISN'T SOME **SCHEME** TO LAY CLAIM TO SOME **THIEVING ABILITIES** IS IT?

I'M JUST EXPLAINING **CUDGEL'S GREAT INNER DILEMMA**.

CUDGEL BANE-FORGER? KEWL NAME, DUDE!


VISIONS? AAAAH, YOU MUST HAVE ROLLED A 17 ON YOUR **CLERICAL CALLING ROLL.**



ALTHOUGH MY **FAMILY** ALWAYS WORKED **CLOSELY** WITH THE LOCAL **THIEVES GUILD** IT WAS **SOLELY** TO ADMINISTER TO THEIR **SPIRITUAL NEEDS**.

AND EVEN THOUGH HIS **FATHER** WAS A **THIEF-CLERIC**, LIL' **CUDGEL** HIMSELF NEVER DELVED INTO THE **ARTS OF THIEVERY**.

OKAY. THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR. CONTINUE.



WELL THIS **APPARITION** KEPT HOUNDING ME WITH THE **ADMONITION** "BUILD A TEMPLE AND DEDICATE IT TO ME!" IT WAS **APPARENT** THAT I WAS BEING **CALLED** TO SERVE A DIFFERENT **GAWD** THAN THE ONE SERVED BY MY **FATHER**. THIS CAUSED ME A GREAT DEAL OF **SOUL SEARCHING** AND **ANGUISH**. AND WHAT MADE IT EVEN **WORSE** IS THAT I HAD NO IDEA WHO THIS STRANGE FIGURE WAS.

THAT'S TERRIBLE. WHAT DID YOU DO?

I **RAN AWAY!**



1. See KODT#51: "A Path Least Travelled": B.A. dictates what character class/race each player's character has to be. Bob: Cleric/Human, Dave: Gnome/Magic-User, Sara: Dwavern/Thief and Brian: Elf/Ranger.

2. See KODT#41: "The GM Wanna-Be": Draper is described by Bob as "the most low-maintenance gawd in the books — Pray and Play!" However, he also describes Draper as being vengeful toward those who disavow themselves from him. "There's no Take-Backs with that guy!"

I RAN AWAY FROM THE SEMINARY. I RAN AWAY FROM MY FRICKIN' FAMILY AND FRIENDS. -SIGH- I WAS TOO ASHAMED TO FACE THEM. I FELT I HAD LET THEM DOWN. SO I HIT THE ROAD AND FOR SEVERAL YEARS I WANDERED THE WORLD LIVING THE LIFE OF A VAGABOND.

I REALLY *SUFFERED*, TOO. SOMETIMES I ATE PIG SLOP JUST TO *SURVIVE!*

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE LIL' CUDGEL WAS ALONE AND FENDING FOR HIMSELF.



GOING AGAINST *FAMILY TRADITION* WAS THAT IMPORTANT TO HIM? I LIKE THAT. THIS ISN'T THE TYPICAL "MY FATHER WAS KILLED BY ORCS AND I WANT TO AVENGE HIM" BACKGROUND YOU NORMALLY CRANK OUT.

YEAH, YEAH, WELL ANYWAY LIL' CUDGEL COULDN'T ESCAPE HIS OWN *HEAD!!* THE *APPARITION* KEPT REVISITING HIS *DREAMS* NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

THEY *HOUNDED* MY *SANITY* LIKE *WOLVES* ON THE *SCENT* OF A *WOUNDED LAMB*.



IT WAS *HORRIBLE!!* THE *STRANGE FIGURE* KEPT ON *DEMANDING* THAT I BUILD A *TEMPLE* IN HIS NAME AND THAT I *PETITION* THE *GAWDS* TO *RECOGNIZE* HIM AS ONE OF THEIR *OWN*. HE ALSO *DEMANDED* THAT I BE HIS *VOICE* AND ATTRACT *FOLLOWERS* TO HIM.

I MEAN, *APPARENTLY* THIS DUDE WASN'T EVEN A *REAL GAWD* YET. WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO *FRICKIN'* DO? *DISAPPOINT* MY *FATHER?* *BREAK* HIS HEART? BUT THE *VISIONS* WOULDN'T ALLOW ME A *MOMENT'S PEACE*.

OH MAN! THAT'S *ROUGH!* YOU'RE *CATCHIN' HELL* AND YOU HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED *PLAYING* YET?

WHO THE HELL WAS THIS GUY?



SAY, THIS IS GETTING *GOOD*. GO ON!



THAT'S JUST IT -- I HAD *NO IDEA* WHO THIS GUY WAS. HE *REFUSED* TO TELL ME.

WAIT A MINUTE. YOU WERE BEING *CALLED* BY A *WANNA-BE GAWD* AND HE WOULDN'T EVEN TELL YOU HIS *NAME?*

CRAZY ISN'T IT? HE TOLD ME HE WOULD *REVEAL* HIS *IDENTITY* ONCE I *COMPLETED* HIS *TEMPLE*.

HMMRRRFF! YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD THIS GUY TO TAKE A *FLYING LEAP!*



ANYWAY, TO MAKE A *LONG* STORY SHORT THE GUY WOULDN'T LEAVE ME ALONE 'TIL I *AGREED* TO DO AS HE ASKED. HE SAID IF I *BUILT* HIS *TEMPLE* HE WOULD *COME*.

I *AGONIZED* OVER WHAT TO DO. THEN ONE DAY ON MY *JOURNEY*, I MET AN *OLD BLIND* MAN WHO SPAKE MY *NAME* AS I WAS PASSING BY. "*CUDGEL!*" HE CRIED OUT. "WHY DO YOU *FLEE* FROM YOUR *DESTINY?*"

MAN, I WAS *TORQUED!* I GRABBED THAT OL' *GEEZER* BY THE COLLAR AND *SHOOK* HIM LIKE A *RAG DOLL!!*

HE *KNEW* YOUR NAME? MAN, THAT'S *CREEPY*.



"LOOK HERE!" I SAID, "I DON'T KNOW WHO SENT YOU BUT YOU GO BACK AND TELL THE BASTARD THAT BEFORE HE GOES ASKIN' SOMEONE TO FOLLOW HIM -- HE DAMN SURE BETTER HAVE THE GUTS TO REVEAL HIMSELF."

SUDDENLY THE OLD MAN WAS GONE AND I FOUND MYSELF STANDING IN AN ANGRY DARK FOREST WITH A TERRIBLE GALE BLOWING IN MY TOUSLED HAIR.

TOUSLED HAIR? HEH--THAT'S FUNNY.

AND ALL AROUND ME, THE BAYING OF STURM WOLVES!

SO I RAN AND RAN AS FAST AS I COULD UNTIL I COLLAPSED AND PASSED OUT FROM EXHAUSTION.

WHEN I AWOKE I FOUND MYSELF LYING IN MY TENT BY THE ROADSIDE. EVEN THOUGH THE ENTIRE THING WAS JUST A DREAM, MY HEART FELT STRANGELY QUIET AND AT PEACE.

I KNEW WHAT I MUST DO.

I RETURNED TO THE TOWN OF WINKLESWORTH AND I CONFRONTED MY FATHER. I TOLD HIM I WAS GOING TO BUILD A TEMPLE TO AN UNKNOWN ENTITY AND THAT I WAS GOING TO PETITION THE GAWDS TO GRANT HIM GAWDHOOD! MY FATHER WAS FURIOUS. HE THREW ME OUT OF HIS HOUSE AND FORBADE ANYONE IN MY FAMILY TO SPEAK TO ME - EVER! SO I MOVED TO SQAULLERSVILLE ON THE POOR SIDE OF TOWN AND SET ABOUT TRYING TO RAISE THE NEEDED FUNDS TO BUILD THE TEMPLE. THAT'S WHAT CUDGEL HAS BEEN DOING FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS WITH VERY LITTLE SUCCESS. THE ONLY THING THAT'S KEPT HIM GOING IS THE DREAM OF COMPLETING THE TEMPLE.

ONE OF THE REASONS I'M NOW CONSIDERING TAKING UP THE LIFE OF AN ADVENTURER IS SO I CAN RAISE THE MONEY.

WOW! THAT WAS SOME BITCHIN' BACKGROUND, DUDE!

WELL DONE, BOB!

THAT WAS GREAT!

GEE, I GOTTA TELL YA BOB- I'M REALLY PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE CERTAINLY EMBRACED THE ROLE OF YOUR NEW CHARACTER AND HIS PROFESSION. THE WAY YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO IT AND ALL -- I COULD REALLY FEEL THE TORMENT YOUR CHARACTER WAS GOING THROUGH. THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING!

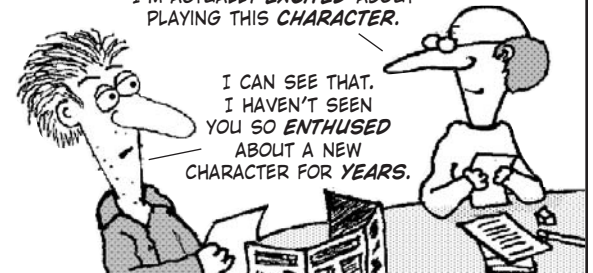
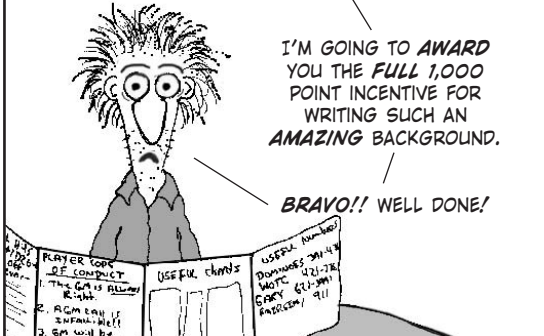
THANKS! LIKE I SAID I MUST'VE SPENT AT LEAST TEN HOURS ON THIS. I GOT THE IDEA FROM READING THAT CHARACTERS OF THE CLOTH SUPPLEMENT BRIAN LOANED ME. THERE'S A WHOLE CHAPTER ON BUILDING TEMPLES AND STARTING NEW RELIGIONS.

I'M GOING TO AWARD YOU THE FULL 1,000 POINT INCENTIVE FOR WRITING SUCH AN AMAZING BACKGROUND.

YA KNOW, I DIDN'T THINK I'D LIKE PLAYING A CLERIC BUT THAT CHAPTER REALLY GRABBED ME. I'M ACTUALLY EXCITED ABOUT PLAYING THIS CHARACTER.

BRAVO!! WELL DONE!

I CAN SEE THAT. I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SO ENTHUSED ABOUT A NEW CHARACTER FOR YEARS.



THERE'S ONLY ONE **SMALL** THING THAT'S BUGGIN' ME ABOUT **CUDGEL**.

OH? AND WHAT'S THAT?

IN ORDER FOR THIS **NEW** RELIGION TO **TAKE**, I HAVE TO **BUILD** A TEMPLE, ATTRACT A **THOUSAND FOLLOWERS** AND THEN **PETITION** THE **GAWDS**.

BEEN A WHILE SINCE I **READ** THOSE RULES BUT **YES--** I THINK THAT'S **RIGHT**.

WELL THAT PRESENTS A **PROBLEM**. I'M STARTING OUT AT **FOURTH LEVEL**. ACCORDING TO THE **RULES**, A **CLERIC** MUST CHOSE A **PATRON GAWD** OR BE **DENIED** THE **POWERS** INHERENT TO HIS **CLASS**.

THAT MEANS **CUDGEL** WON'T HAVE ANY **SPELLS** OR **HEALING** ABILITIES UNTIL I'VE **PETITIONED**. BUT THAT COULD TAKE **YEARS** OF **GAME TIME**. I'VE GOT THE **SPECS** FOR THAT **TEMPLE** ALL WORKED OUT. IT'S GOING TO COST A **FORTUNE** TO BUILD.

YEAH. I... UH, I CAN **SEE** YOUR POINT.

I **KNOW** YOU'VE PROBABLY GOT YOUR **HEART** SET ON **PLAYING** THIS OUT IN **CHARACTER** BUT, UH... IF YOU'RE NOT **OPPOSED** TO THE **IDEA** I'D BE WILLING TO **DECLARE** THAT YOUR **CHARACTER** HAS ALREADY **ACHIEVED** HIS **GOALS**.

THAT WAY YOU CAN **BEGIN** THE CAMPAIGN WITH THE TEMPLE ALREADY **FINISHED** AND YOUR **NEW RELIGION** UP AND **RUNNING**. AFTER ALL, YOU **ARE** **FOURTH LEVEL**. IT COULD **EXPLAIN** WHAT YOU **ACCOMPLISHED** BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN STARTED.

HUH? **REALLY??!!** YOU'LL **DO** THAT? AH, THAT'S **GREAT**, B.A. THAT'LL BE **SUPER!!** I WAS GOING TO **SUGGEST** SOMETHING LIKE THAT BUT I **NEVER** FIGURED YOU **GO** FOR IT.

NOW, I'M **WARNING** YOU, BOB. FLESHING OUT A **NEW RELIGION** IS A **LOT** OF **RESPONSIBILITY**. I'M GOING TO HOLD YOU TO THE **RULES** ON THIS. IF YOU SO MUCH AS **TOUCH** THE **LINE** I'LL **RECIND** MY **RULING**.

YOU GOT IT! NOT A **PROBLEM**. I'M JUST **THRILLED** YOU'VE MADE SUCH A **GENEROUS** **RULING**. YOU'RE THE **BEST**, B.A.!

OKAY, THEN! AS LONG AS WE **UNDERSTAND** EACH OTHER.

YEAH, YOU **RULE!!**



HEY, LET ME **RUN** OUT TO MY **CAR** AND **GRAB** SOMETHING.

BE RIGHT **BACK!!**

NOW **WHAT** IN THE **HELL** IS HE UP TO?

A FEW MOMENTS LATER...

WHAT'S ALL **THAT** STUFF, BOB?

JUST SOME **TEMPLE PLANS** AND A **DRAFT** OF MY **NEW RELIGION'S** **DOCTRINES** AND **RITUALS**. NO NEED TO WORRY -- I USED THE **STEP-BY-STEP** PROCESS LISTED IN THE **BOOK**.

I SURE WISH YOU'D **CONSULTED** WITH ME, FIRST. LOOKS LIKE A **LOT** OF **WORK**.

OH, IT WAS!



DON'T GET ME *WRONG*, BOB. I *APPROVE* OF YOUR "GO GET 'EM" ATTITUDE! IT'S JUST THAT CREATING NEW *GAWDS* FROM SCRATCH USUALLY FALLS UNDER THE *GM'S DOMAIN*. I'M NOT SURE I'M *COMFORTABLE* WITH YOU *TACKLING* SUCH A *JOB* ON YOUR OWN, SO I'M GOING TO HAVE TO *APPROVE* ANYTHING YOU MAY HAVE...

YEAH, YEAH, *SURE!* WHATEVER. LIKE I SAID I WENT BY THE *BOOK*.

HOLY MOLY!! THAT'S A *TEMPLE?*

MY *GAWD!* IT'S *HUGE!!* IT'S MORE *CITY* THAN *TEMPLE!*

IT MUST'VE COST A *FORTUNE!!* LOOKIT ALL THE *COLUMNS!*



DEPENDING IF IT'S *FLUTED* OR NOT, A SIMPLE *COLUMN* CAN RUN YA AS MUCH AS 2,000 *GOLD PIECES* PER.

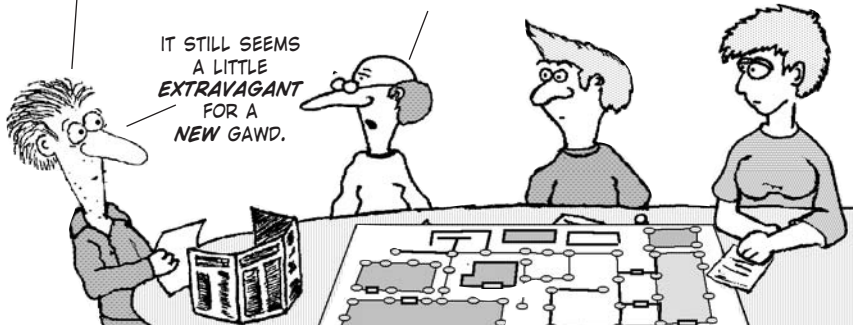
--IS THAT AN *AQUEDUCT SYSTEM* AND A *PUMP HOUSE?*



BOB, EXACTLY *HOW MUCH* DID THIS *TEMPLE* COST?

OH... SOMEWHERE IN THE *NEIGHBORHOOD* OF *FIVE MIL!* I WENT WITH *DRESSED MARBLE* FOR ALL *EXPOSED SURFACES* AND *GOLD GILDING* ON ALL THE *WOODWORK*. BUT IT'S NOT ABOUT *MONEY* OR *SHOWMANSHIP*. I'M *TOTALLY* THINKING OF THE *GOOD* OF THE *RELIGIOUS BODY* ITSELF. ACCORDING TO THE *RULES* SUCH *DETAILS* GIVES THE *TEMPLE* A *+5* *WORSHIPPER RETENTION MODIFIER*.

IT STILL SEEMS A LITTLE *EXTRAVAGANT* FOR A *NEW GAWD*.



WHAT ARE ALL THOSE *OUTER BUILDINGS?*

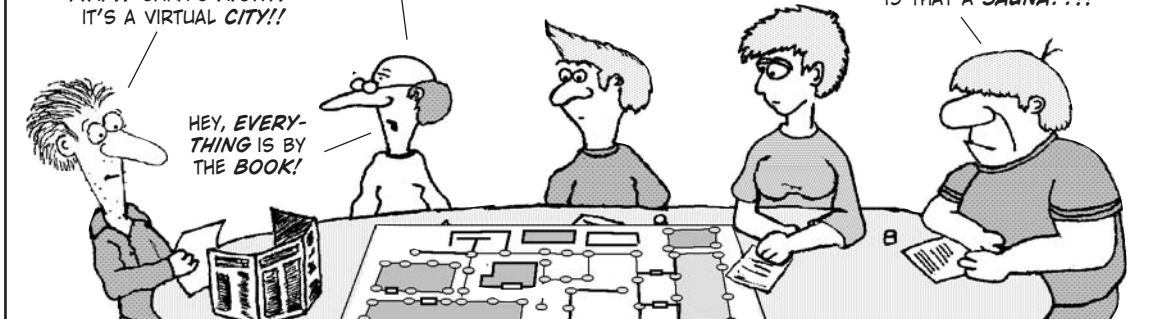
WELL, THERE'S A *BARRACKS*, *TWO STABLES*, A *MESS HALL*, AN *ARMORY*, *CISTERN*, A *GRAINARY...*

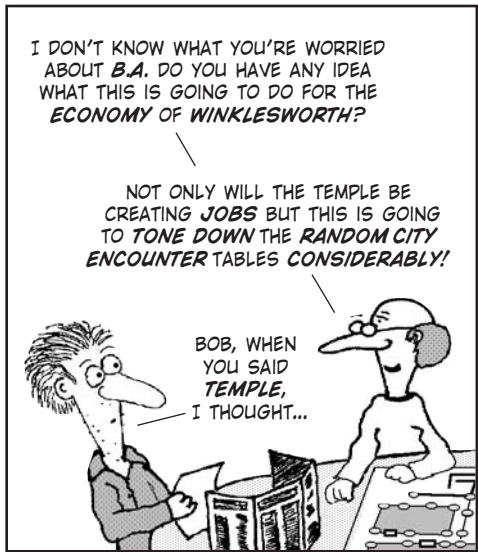
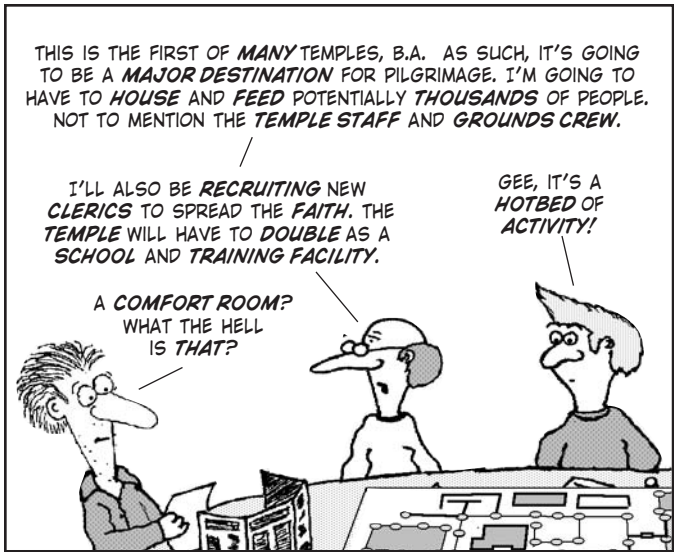
LOOKS LIKE YOU HAVE IT *ALL COVERED*, BOB.

FIRP!! SARA'S *RIGHT!* IT'S A *VIRTUAL CITY!!*

IS THAT A *SAUNA???*

HEY, *EVERYTHING* IS BY THE *BOOK!*





THIS IS THE FIRST OF *MANY* TEMPLES, B.A. AS SUCH, IT'S GOING TO BE A *MAJOR DESTINATION* FOR PILGRIMAGE. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO *HOUSE* AND *FEED* POTENTIALLY *THOUSANDS* OF PEOPLE. NOT TO MENTION THE *TEMPLE STAFF* AND *GROUNDS CREW*.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT *B.A.* DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THIS IS GOING TO DO FOR THE *ECONOMY* OF *WINKLESWORTH*?

I'LL ALSO BE *RECRUITING* NEW *CLERICS* TO SPREAD THE *FAITH*. THE *TEMPLE* WILL HAVE TO *DOUBLE* AS A *SCHOOL* AND *TRAINING FACILITY*.

GEE, IT'S A *HOTBED* OF *ACTIVITY*!

A *COMFORT ROOM*? WHAT THE HELL IS *THAT*?

NOT ONLY WILL THE TEMPLE BE *CREATING JOBS* BUT THIS IS GOING TO *TONE DOWN* THE *RANDOM CITY ENCOUNTER TABLES* *CONSIDERABLY*!

BOB, WHEN YOU SAID *TEMPLE*, I THOUGHT...



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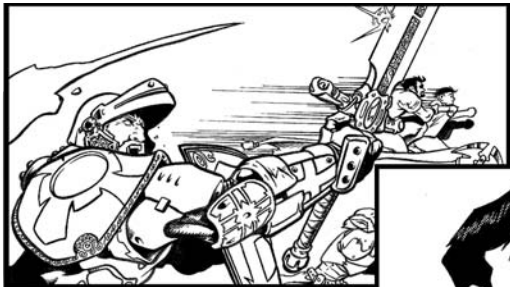


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...MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE A LOOK AT THAT BOOK OF *DOCTRINE AND RITUALS*.

SURE. HERE'S A *SPIRAL BOUND* COPY I MADE AT WORK FOR YA TO KEEP. JUST REMEMBER THAT IT'S A WORK IN PROGRESS. AS "*PRIEST PRIME OF THE FAITH*" I'LL BE *TWEAKING* THINGS AS WE GO.

PRIEST PRIME?

YEAH, ACCORDING TO THE RULES, THE *CLERIC* WHO ACTUALLY *PETITIONS* A NEW *CANDIDATE* TO *GAWDHOOD* AUTOMATICALLY BECOMES THE *HIGH PRIEST* OF THE *FAITH*. IT'S HIS JOB TO SET DOWN *CANONICAL LAW* AND *ORGANIZE* THE *TEMPLE* AND STUFF LIKE THAT.

I DUNNO, BOB. AT A *MERE* FOURTH LEVEL, *CUDGEL* IS *HIGH PRIEST* OF HIS *FAITH*? THAT *CAN'T* BE GOOD.

OH DUDE! THAT'S AWESOME!!

LET'S SEE WHAT YOU HAVE HERE...

OH MY GOODNESS. THIS IS *COMPLEX!!* *INITIATION RITES* FOR NEW *CLERICS*. *SANCTIONED SPELL LISTS*. *CODES OF CONDUCT* FOR FOLLOWERS?? AND... UH... *STIPEND* FOR *PRIEST PRIME*? WHAT THE...? IS THIS FIGURE CORRECT? 4,000 GOLD PIECES PER MONTH?

YEAH, THAT'S *PRIMARYLY* TO *OFFSET* MY *ADVENTURING EXPENSES*. I PLAN ON *SPREADING* THE *FAITH* AND *BUILDING* *NEW TEMPLES* AND STUFF. EVEN SO, I EXPECT I'LL *STILL* BE *DIPPIN'* INTO MY *OWN* POCKET TO COVER THINGS. IT'S *TOTALLY* ALLOWED UNDER THE RULES.

WHOA, BOB!! YOU *ENGINEERED* THIS? I'M *IMPRESSED!!*

FOLLOWERS HAVE TO PAY A *TWENTY PERCENT* TITHE?

ACTUALLY, IT'S A "*TWITHE*."

MY *GAWD!!* THERE MUST BE A *HUNDRED PAGES* HERE. I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO HAVE TO READ THIS MORE *CAREFULLY* OVER THE WEEKEND AND GET BACK TO YOU, BOB.

SURE! BUT DON'T WORRY. IT'S *IRON CLAD*. I MADE *EXTRA SURE* TO TOE THE *LINE* WHERE THE *RULES* WERE CONCERNED.

I'M BEGINNING TO THINK I WAS A BIT *HASTY* IN MAKING MY *CALL*...

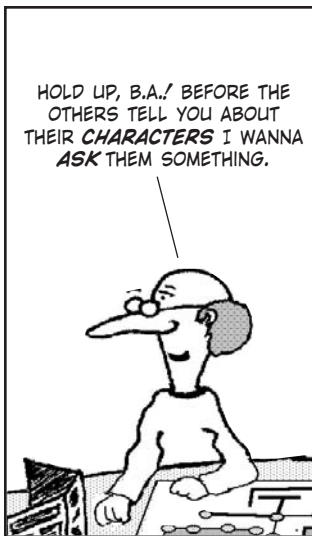
WHOAH JACK!! I HOPE YER NOT THINKING OF *BACK PEDDLING* ON ME! I PUT A *LOT* OF WORK INTO THIS.

OH... NO, NO, BOB. I WAS JUST SAYIN' I SHOULD HAVE *THOUGHT* THIS THROUGH BEFORE I...

SHOULD'VE! COULD'VE! YOU MADE YOUR *CALL*. NOW YOU'RE *HONOR BOUND* TO STICK TO IT. *NO TAKE BACKS!!*

-SIGH- OKAY, LET'S MOVE ON TO *DAVE* AND I'LL JUST LOOK THIS STUFF OVER LATER.

WELL I DON'T SEE THE *HARM*. SOUNDS LIKE BOB'S INTO SOMETHING BESIDES PLAYING A *THIEF*.



HOLD UP, B.A., BEFORE THE OTHERS TELL YOU ABOUT THEIR **CHARACTERS** I WANNA **ASK** THEM SOMETHING.

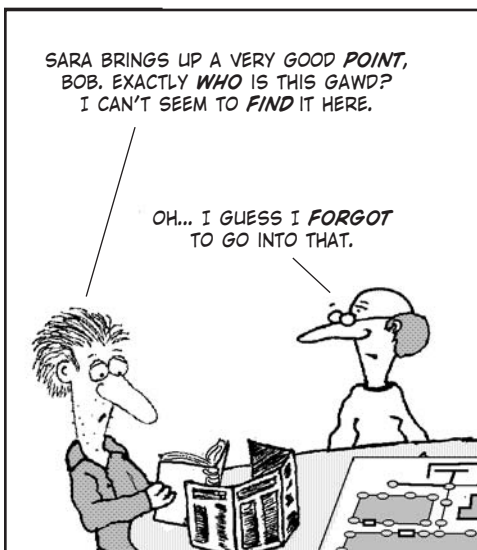


HEY GUYS, **BEFORE** YOU FULLY COMMIT TO CHOOSING A **PATRON GAWD** I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE **KEWL** IF YOU **ALL** CHOSE TO FOLLOW **MY GAWD**. THINK OF THE **CAMPAIGN OPPTS!** WE COULD GO ON **HOLY QUESTS** TOGETHER AND IT WOULD GIVE SOME **COMMON GROUND** AND HELP THE **BONDING PROCESS**. WHADDA YA SAY?

GEE, I DUNNO. I WAS **HOT** ON HAVING **SCAVEN' FAR** AS MY **PATRON GAWD**.

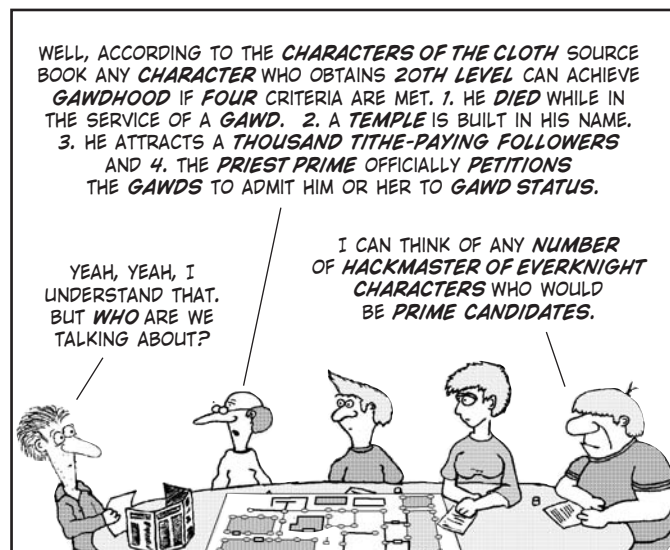
BOB, WE DON'T EVEN **KNOW** ANYTHING ABOUT YER **GAWD**. A **NAME** WOULD NICE.

I WAS **LEANING TOWARD THOR!**



SARA BRINGS UP A VERY GOOD POINT, BOB. EXACTLY **WHO** IS THIS **GAWD**? I CAN'T SEEM TO **FIND** IT HERE.

OH... I GUESS I **FORGOT** TO GO INTO THAT.



WELL, ACCORDING TO THE **CHARACTERS OF THE CLOTH** SOURCE BOOK ANY **CHARACTER** WHO OBTAINS **20TH LEVEL** CAN ACHIEVE **GAWDHOOD** IF **FOUR** CRITERIA ARE MET. 1. HE **DIED** WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF A **GAWD**. 2. A **TEMPLE** IS BUILT IN HIS NAME. 3. HE ATTRACTS A **THOUSAND TITHE-PAYING FOLLOWERS** AND 4. THE **PRIEST PRIME** OFFICIALLY **PETITIONS** THE **GAWDS** TO ADMIT HIM OR HER TO **GAWD STATUS**.

YEAH, YEAH, I UNDERSTAND THAT. BUT **WHO** ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

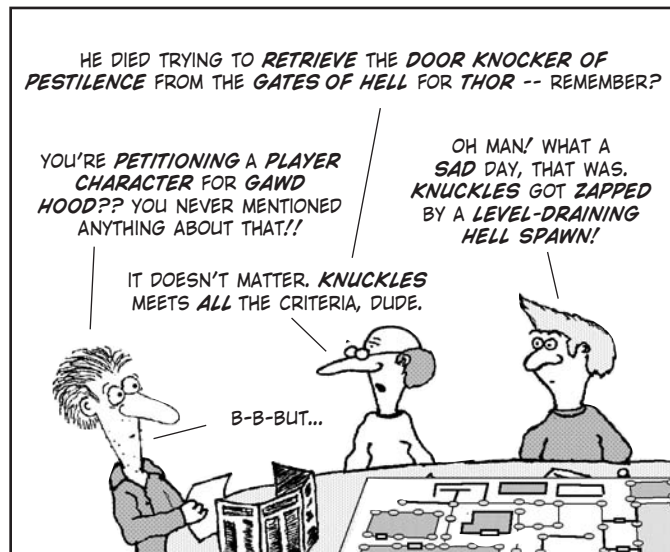
I CAN THINK OF ANY **NUMBER** OF **HACKMASTER OF EVERKNIGHT** CHARACTERS WHO WOULD BE **PRIME CANDIDATES**.



I MIGHT AS WELL JUST **BLURT** IT OUT. IT'S **KNUCKLES: KING OF THE WALL CLIMBERS!!**

KNUCKLES??!! WHAT THE **HELL** ARE YOU **TALKING** ABOUT? HE NEVER MADE IT PAST **EIGHTH LEVEL!** BESIDES, HE'S **STILL ALIVE!**

NO, NO, NOT **KNUCKLES THE SIXTH!!** I'M TALKIN' ABOUT **KNUCKLES THE THIRD!!**



HE **DIED** TRYING TO **RETRIEVE** THE **DOOR KNOCKER OF PESTILENCE** FROM THE **GATES OF HELL** FOR **THOR** -- REMEMBER?

YOU'RE **PETITIONING** A **PLAYER CHARACTER** FOR **GAWD HOOD??** YOU NEVER MENTIONED ANYTHING ABOUT THAT!!

OH MAN! WHAT A **SAD DAY!** WHAT WAS. **KNUCKLES GOT ZAPPED** BY A **LEVEL-DRAINING HELL SPAWN!**

IT DOESN'T MATTER. **KNUCKLES** MEETS **ALL** THE CRITERIA, DUDE.

B-B-BUT...



C'MON GUYS! WHAT'S THE **BIG DEAL**? ONE **PATRON GAWD** IS PRETTY MUCH LIKE THE **NEXT**. I **REALLY** THINK THIS COULD **WORK** IN OUR FAVOR.

DIDN'T I HEAR **B.A.** MENTION SOMETHING ABOUT A **TWENTY PERCENT TITHE**? THAT'S KINDA **STEEP DUDE**.

YEAH, YOU RUNNING SOME KIND OF **SCAM** HERE? **4,000 G.P.S** A MONTH GOES BACK IN YOUR POCKET?



SCAM???! HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT? I'M JUST INTERESTED IN MAKING THIS THE MOST **KICK ASS** CAMPAIGN **EVER!!** I'M TELLIN YA, SERVIN' THE **SAME GAWD** COULD HAVE SOME **REAL DIVIDENDS!**

BESIDES, I'M **PRIEST PRIME OF THE FAITH** - REMEMBER? I CAN MAKE YOU **DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH**. I GOT IT ALL **WORKED OUT**. AS **DEFENDERS** YOU'RE ONLY **OBLIGATED** TO PAY A **5 PERCENT TITHE**, AND GET THIS -- IF YOU'RE ENGAGED IN A **MISSION** FOR THE **TEMPLE** YOU CAN GET A **STIPEND** FOR UP TO **75 PERCENT** OF YOUR **OUT-OF-POCKET EXPENSES**.

DEFENDER?? OOOOOH, THAT SOUNDS NICE. WOULD WE HAVE **UNIFORMS** OR SOMETHING?

HOW BOUT **ROOM AND BOARD**? CAN WE **CRASH** IN THE **TEMPLE** BETWEEN **CRAWLS**?



WELL OF **COURSE!** WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK THOSE **OUTER BUILDINGS** ARE FOR?

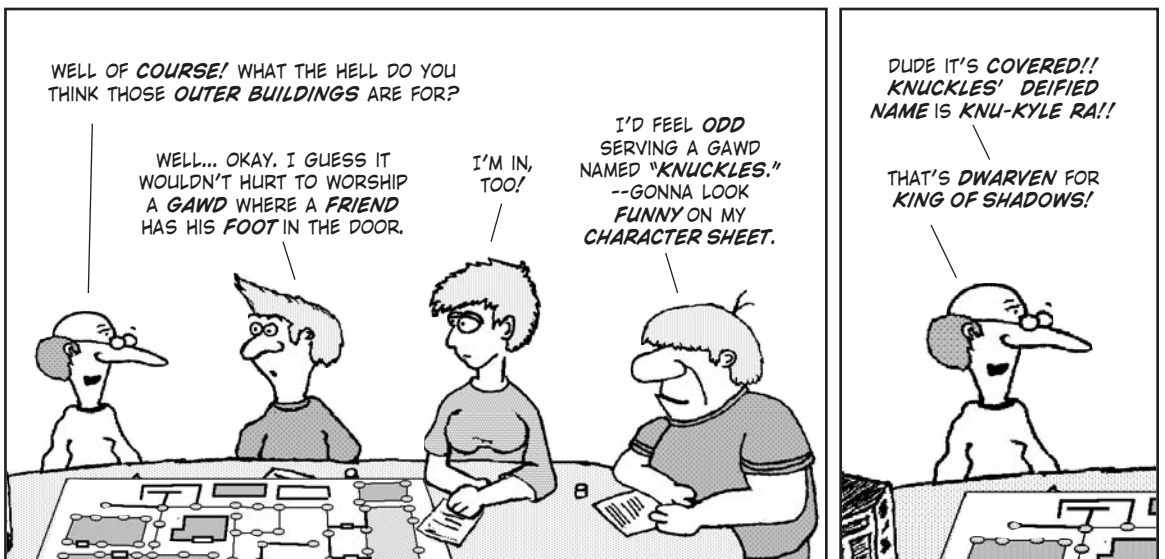
WELL... OKAY. I GUESS IT WOULDN'T HURT TO WORSHIP A **GAWD** WHERE A **FRIEND** HAS HIS **FOOT** IN THE **DOOR**.

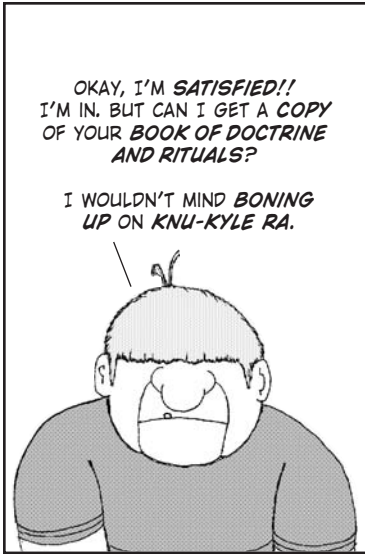
I'M IN, TOO!

I'D FEEL **ODD** SERVING A **GAWD** NAMED "**KNUCKLES**." --GONNA LOOK **FUNNY** ON MY **CHARACTER SHEET**.

DUDE IT'S **COVERED!!** **KNUCKLES'** **DEIFIED NAME** IS **KNU-KYLE RA!!**

THAT'S **DWARVEN** FOR **KING OF SHADOWS!**





OKAY, I'M **SATISFIED!!** I'M IN. BUT CAN I GET A **COPY** OF YOUR **BOOK OF DOCTRINE AND RITUALS?**

I WOULDN'T MIND **BONING UP** ON **KNU-KYLE RA.**

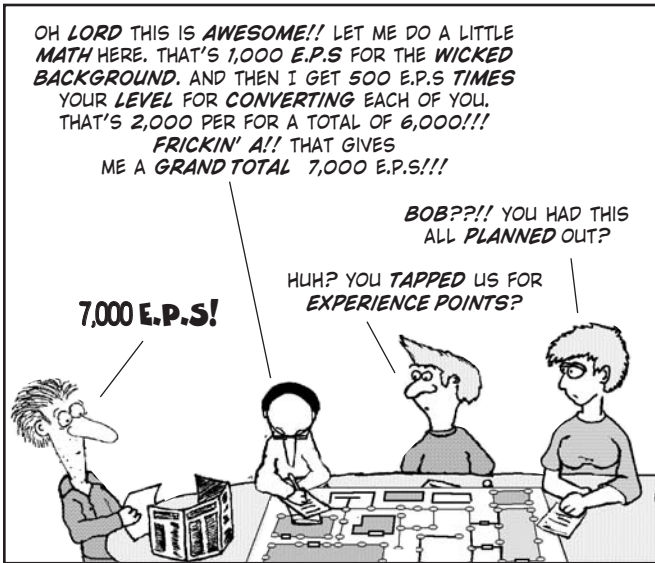


NO PROBLEM DUDE! I'LL RUN OFF ANOTHER **COPY** AT WORK ON **MONDAY.** OH MAN! THIS **ROCKS!** THIS'LL BE THE **BEST CAMPAIGN EVER!!** YOU GUYS WON'T **REGRET** THIS.

HEY CAN I DRAW AN **ADVANCE** ON MY **STIPEND?** I DIDN'T ROLL SO **HOT** ON MY **STARTING MONEY** ROLL.

I DUNNO. WE'LL SEE.

WOW! I **STILL** CAN'T BELIEVE YOU CAME UP WITH THIS ON YOUR **OWN.** THIS WOULD MAKE A GOOD **ARTICLE** FOR **HACKJOURNAL!**



OH LORD THIS IS **AWESOME!!** LET ME DO A LITTLE **MATH** HERE. THAT'S **1,000 E.P.S** FOR THE **WICKED BACKGROUND.** AND THEN I GET **500 E.P.S** TIMES YOUR **LEVEL** FOR **CONVERTING** EACH OF YOU. THAT'S **2,000** PER FOR A TOTAL OF **6,000!!!** **FRICKIN' A!!** THAT GIVES ME A **GRAND TOTAL** **7,000 E.P.S!!!**

7,000 E.P.S!

BOB??? YOU HAD THIS ALL **PLANNED** OUT?

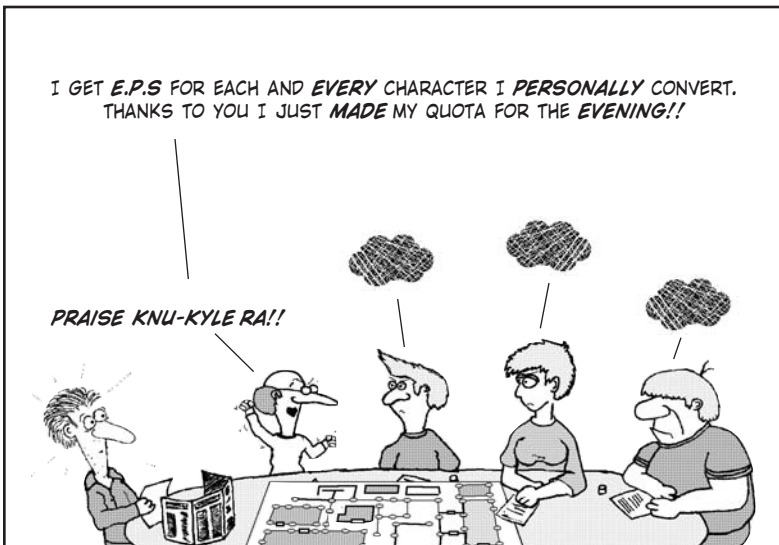
HUH? YOU **TAPPED** US FOR **EXPERIENCE** POINTS?



HOODY FRICKIN' HOO!!!

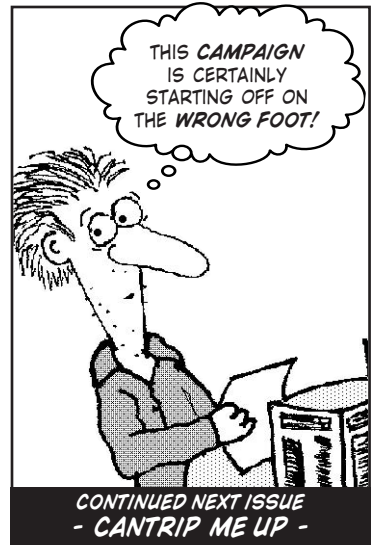
THAT'S **EXACTLY** WHAT I NEEDED TO MAKE **FIFTH LEVEL!!!**

HA HA!!! AND I HAVEN'T PICKED UP **DIE ONE** YET!!!!



I GET **E.P.S** FOR EACH AND **EVERY** CHARACTER I **PERSONALLY** CONVERT. THANKS TO YOU I JUST **MADE** MY **QUOTA** FOR THE **EVENING!!**

PRaise KNU-KYLE RA!!



THIS **CAMPAIGN** IS CERTAINLY STARTING OFF ON THE **WRONG FOOT!**

CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE - CANTRIP ME UP -

Dancing with the Devil*

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
& STEVE JOHANSSON

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

LAST ISSUE, SARA ANNOUNCED SHE WAS GOING "INTO THE NIGHT" IN ORDER TO SAVE BOB AND DAVE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF BRIDGET AND THE GAME LORDS OF DARKNESS.

ALTHOUGH B.A. AND BRIAN STRONGLY PROTESTED, SARA WAS INSISTENT ON FOLLOWING THROUGH WITH HER PLAN.

AFTER PROMISING SHE WOULD 'CHECK IN' ROUTINELY, SARA SET OFF TO ATTEND A 'VAMP RAVE' WHERE SHE HOPED TO MAKE CONTACT WITH BOB AND DAVE.

IT'S NOW WEEKS LATER AND SARA IS STILL PLAYING LORDS OF DARKNESS. B.A. AND BRIAN ARE BEGINNING TO FEAR THE WORST.

THAT'S YOUR REPORT?! YOU'RE MAKING "PROGRESS"? C'MON SARA THIS IS GETTING OLD! YOU'VE BEEN GIVING US THE SAME OL' SPIEL FOR FOUR WEEKS NOW. YOU BETTER START COMING UP WITH SOME DETAILS OR I'M GONNA PULL THE PLUG ON THIS ENTIRE OPERATION.

PULL THE PLUG? BUT YOU CAN'T DO THAT. I NEED MORE TIME. I'VE ALREADY MADE CONTACT WITH THE BOYS AND I'M THIS CLOSE TO BRINGING THEM OUT!

YOU SAID THAT TWO WEEKS AGO. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU'RE ANY CLOSER NOW?

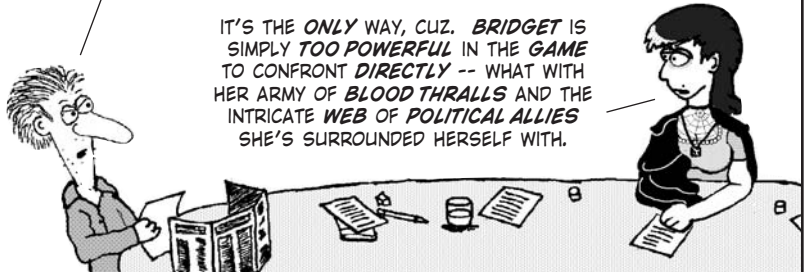


BECAUSE AFTER A LOT OF HARD WORK THINGS ARE FINALLY BEGINNING TO FALL INTO PLACE.

ALL MY EFFORTS THESE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS HAVE BEEN SPENT ON POLITICAL MANEUVERING AMONG THE CLANS. IT'S BEEN A COMPLEX DANCE WITH MANY SETBACKS BUT I'VE FINALLY MANAGED TO WORK MY WAY UP THROUGH THE RANKS AND FORM SOME VERY STRONG ALLIANCES!! I THINK I'M READY TO MAKE MY POWER PLAY AND REPATRIATE BOB AND DAVE.

POWER PLAY?!?! WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT? I DON'T RECALL THE WORDS 'POWER PLAY' ANYWHERE IN THE PLAN.

IT'S THE ONLY WAY, CUZ. BRIDGET IS SIMPLY TOO POWERFUL IN THE GAME TO CONFRONT DIRECTLY -- WHAT WITH HER ARMY OF BLOOD THRALLS AND THE INTRICATE WEB OF POLITICAL ALLIES SHE'S SURROUNDED HERSELF WITH.



IT'S ALL SET TO GO DOWN THIS WEEKEND. THERE'S A QUARTERLY GATHERING OF THE CLANS DOWN IN DECATUR ON SATURDAY.

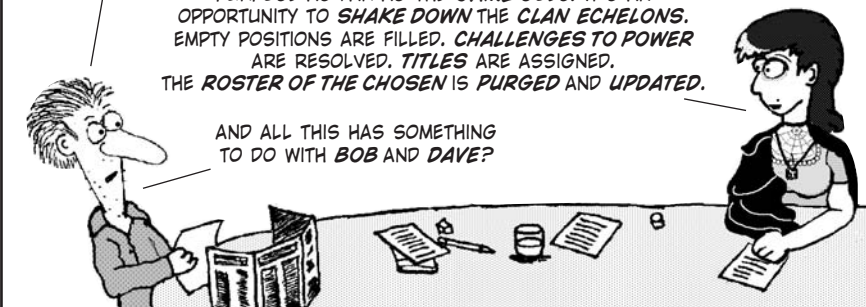
GATHERING OF THE CLANS? WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

ON THE SURFACE IT'S JUST AN EXCUSE FOR ANOTHER VAMP PARTY, BUT IT DOES SERVE A VERY IMPORTANT PURPOSE AS FAR AS THE GAME GOES. IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHAKE DOWN THE CLAN ECHELONS. EMPTY POSITIONS ARE FILLED. CHALLENGES TO POWER ARE RESOLVED. TITLES ARE ASSIGNED. THE ROSTER OF THE CHOSEN IS PURGED AND UPDATED.

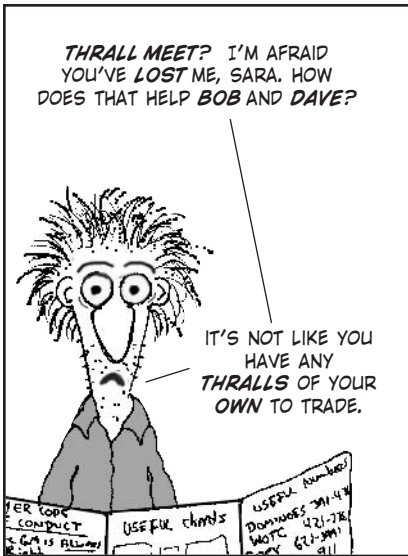
AND ALL THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH BOB AND DAVE?

INDEED IT DOES! BECAUSE AFTER THE GATHERING THERE'S AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LORDS AND MISTRESSES TO TRADE AND SWAP BLOOD THRALLS!

THEY CALL IT THRALL MEET!

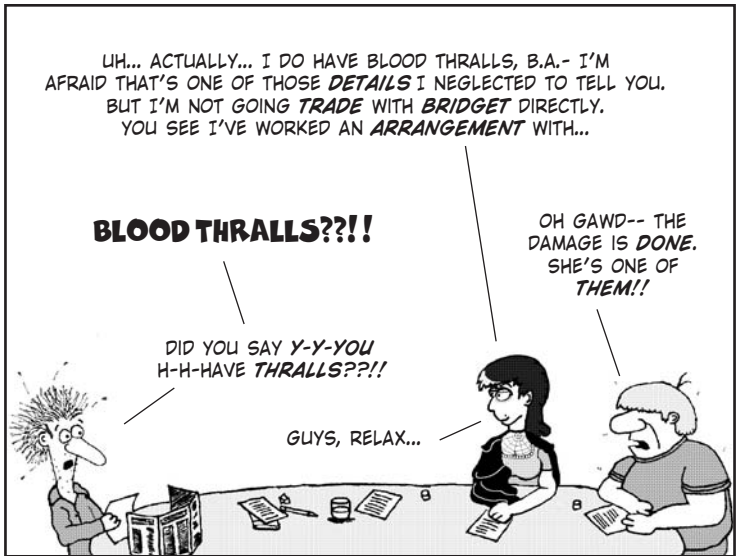


*Continued from KODT#51 "Bring 'Em Back Undead or Alive"



THRALL MEET? I'M AFRAID YOU'VE LOST ME, SARA. HOW DOES THAT HELP BOB AND DAVE?

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU HAVE ANY THRALLS OF YOUR OWN TO TRADE.



UH... ACTUALLY... I DO HAVE BLOOD THRALLS, B.A.- I'M AFRAID THAT'S ONE OF THOSE *DETAILS* I NEGLECTED TO TELL YOU. BUT I'M NOT GOING *TRADE* WITH BRIDGET DIRECTLY. YOU SEE I'VE WORKED AN *ARRANGEMENT* WITH...

BLOOD THRALLS??!!

OH GAWD-- THE DAMAGE IS *DONE*. SHE'S ONE OF *THEM!!*

DID YOU SAY Y-Y-YOU H-H-HAVE THRALLS??!!

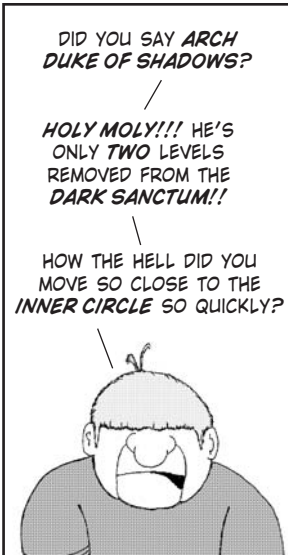
GUYS, RELAX...



I KNOW HOW IT LOOKS, BUT IT'S NOT THAT WAY. I WAS *PRESENTED* TWO THRALLS BY THE *ARCH DUKE OF SHADOWS* AT MY "*COMING THROUGH*" PARTY.

IT'S PART OF THE *GAME!* IF I HAD TURNED THEM AWAY MY *COVER* WOULD'VE BEEN BLOWN.

TURNING DOWN A *BLOOD THRALL* SIMPLY ISN'T DONE.



DID YOU SAY *ARCH DUKE OF SHADOWS*?

HOLY MOLY!!! HE'S ONLY *TWO* LEVELS REMOVED FROM THE *DARK SANCTUM!!*

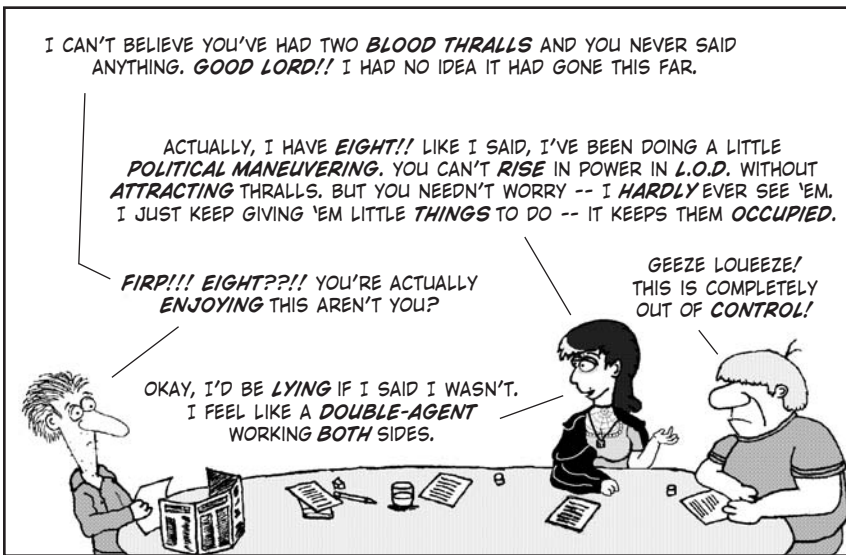
HOW THE HELL DID YOU MOVE SO CLOSE TO THE *INNER CIRCLE* SO QUICKLY?



IT WASN'T ALL THAT HARD, BRIAN. IT TURNS OUT THE "*INNER CIRCLE*" IS JUST A GROUP OF *FOURTEEN YEAR OLD BOYS* FROM *FORT WAYNE* WHO LIKE TO *SURROUND* THEMSELVES WITH *FEMALE PLAYERS*.

HUH? YOU MEAN THE INFAMOUS *DARK SANCTUM* IS NOTHING BUT A GROUP OF *PUNK-ASS KIDS??!!*

YEP!



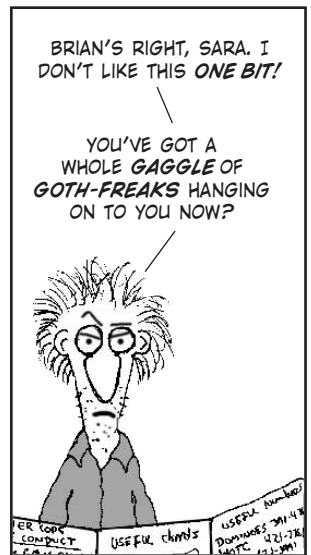
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'VE HAD TWO *BLOOD THRALLS* AND YOU NEVER SAID ANYTHING. *GOOD LORD!!* I HAD NO IDEA IT HAD GONE THIS FAR.

ACTUALLY, I HAVE *EIGHT!!* LIKE I SAID, I'VE BEEN DOING A LITTLE *POLITICAL MANEUVERING*. YOU CAN'T *RISE* IN POWER IN *L.O.D.* WITHOUT *ATTRACTING* THRALLS. BUT YOU NEEDN'T WORRY -- I *HARDLY* EVER SEE 'EM. I JUST KEEP GIVING 'EM LITTLE *THINGS* TO DO -- IT KEEPS THEM *OCCUPIED*.

FIRP!!! *EIGHT??!!* YOU'RE ACTUALLY *ENJOYING* THIS AREN'T YOU?

GEEZE LOUEEZE! THIS IS COMPLETELY OUT OF *CONTROL!*

OKAY, I'D BE *LYING* IF I SAID I WASN'T. I FEEL LIKE A *DOUBLE-AGENT* WORKING *BOTH* SIDES.



BRIAN'S RIGHT, SARA. I DON'T LIKE THIS *ONE BIT!*

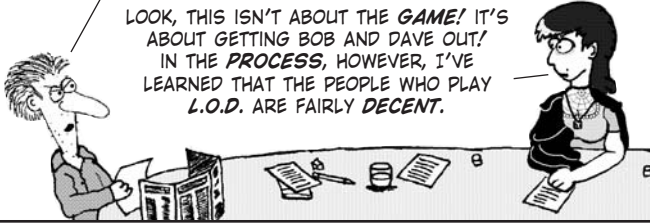
YOU'VE GOT A WHOLE *GAGGLE* OF *GOth-FREAKS* HANGING ON TO YOU NOW?

WHO THE HELL ARE THESE GUYS ANYWAY?
DO YOU EVEN KNOW *ANYTHING* ABOUT THEM?

SORRY, CUZ, WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO GIVE OUT
THE NAMES OF THOSE IN THE *FOLD* OR TO EVEN
SPEAK THEIR *REAL NAMES*.
IT'S PART OF THE *GAME CULTURE*.

WILL YOU *LISTEN* TO YOURSELF?
YOU'RE TALKING *JUST* LIKE ONE OF *THEM*, SARA.
AND *NOW* YOU'RE KEEPING *SECRETS* FROM US?

LOOK, THIS ISN'T ABOUT THE *GAME!* IT'S
ABOUT GETTING BOB AND DAVE OUT!
IN THE *PROCESS*, HOWEVER, I'VE
LEARNED THAT THE PEOPLE WHO PLAY
L.O.D. ARE FAIRLY *DECENT*.



AT THE CORE OF THE *GAME* IS THE *FOLD*, WHICH
IS MADE UP OF DOZENS OF *CLANS!* THEY'RE
LIKE ONE BIG *BIG DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY*.
LOTS OF *IN-FIGHTING* WITH HEAVY
POLITICAL MANEUVERING AS VARIOUS
PLAYERS VIE BACK AND FORTH FOR *POWER*.
OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, I'VE ENTERED
INTO ALL KINDS OF *OATHS* AND *SWORN*
ALLEGIANCES WITH OTHER PLAYERS.

THEY *TRUST ME!* I KNOW THINGS
WHICH COULD TOTALLY SEND ANY NUMBER
OF *CLANS* CRASHING DOWN IF I
DIVULGED THEM TO THE *WRONG PEOPLE*.

BUT I MADE A PROMISE
TO MYSELF THAT I
WOULDN'T *VIOLATE* THAT
TRUST UNLESS IT'S
ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY
TO THE SUCCESS
OF THE MISSION.



WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT *FAMILY* AND
ALLEGIANCE, SARA? WHAT ARE YOU? SOME KIND OF
"SQUEAKY FROMME"* NOW?

YOU CONSIDER *B.A.* AND ME *OUTSIDERS???* IS THAT IT?

NO...*NO!!!* NOT AT ALL, BRIAN.
I'M JUST TRYING TO *RESPECT*
THEIR GAME THAT'S ALL...

WHOOOPS!
MY *CELL PHONE!* EXCUSE
ME FOR A SECOND.

BEEPADA
BEEP BEEP



HULLO? UH HUH, THIS IS *SHE*. OH... YOU'RE
FINISHED? DID YOU SEPARATE THE *WHITES* FROM
THE *COLORS?* GOOD. IN *COLD WATER?* UH HUH...
THAT'S GREAT. HOW ABOUT THOSE *RUST STAINS* ON
THE *SHOWER CURTAIN?* THEY DID? OH THAT'S
WONDERFUL. NO, NO, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
JUST PUT THE *FOLDED CLOTHES* ON
THE *KITCHEN TABLE* AND CALL IT A NIGHT.
WHAT'S THAT? YES... I'LL UPDATE YOUR CHARACTER
SHEETS TOMORROW. OKAY... BU-BYE!!

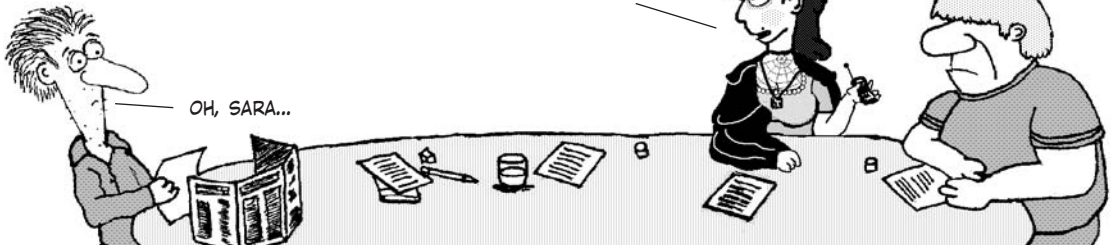


HEH HEH... -BLUSH- SPEAK OF THE DEVIL... THAT WAS, UH... THAT WAS ONE OF
MY *THRALLS* REPORTING IN. LIKE I SAID, I'VE BEEN KEEPING THEM *BUSY* SO THEY
WON'T BE *UNDER FOOT*. YOU WOULDN'T *BELIEVE* HOW *EAGER* THEY ARE TO *SERVE*.

FOR CRYING OUT LOUD. YOU GOT
THEM DOING YOUR *LAUNDRY?*

THEY'RE MY *GAME-UNDERLINGS!*
I'M *EXPECTED* TO GIVE THEM THINGS TO DO.
I HAVE TO MAINTAIN MY *COVER* YOU KNOW.

WHEN DID YOU GET A *CELL PHONE* ANYWAY?
YOU ALWAYS *DESPISED* THOSE THINGS.



OH, SARA...

* *Squeaky Fromme*: A loyal Manson Family acolyte who attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford as he left the Senator Hotel, Sacramento, Ca., September 5, 1975.



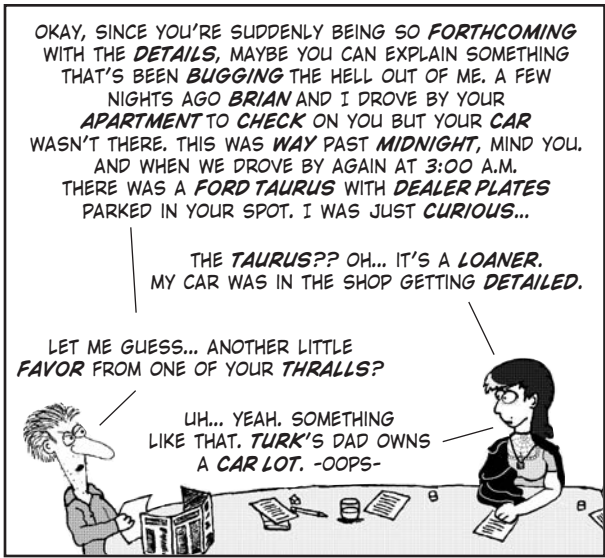
OH... UH... ACTUALLY IT WAS A *GIFT* FROM UH... FROM ONE OF MY *THRALLS*.

A *GIFT*??!?!

HE *INSISTED* I TAKE IT. I'M PLANNING ON GIVING IT *BACK*... ER... AFTER THE *MISSION*.

UH HUH... SURE.

LOOK, IT EVEN HAS *SPEED DIAL* -- SEE?

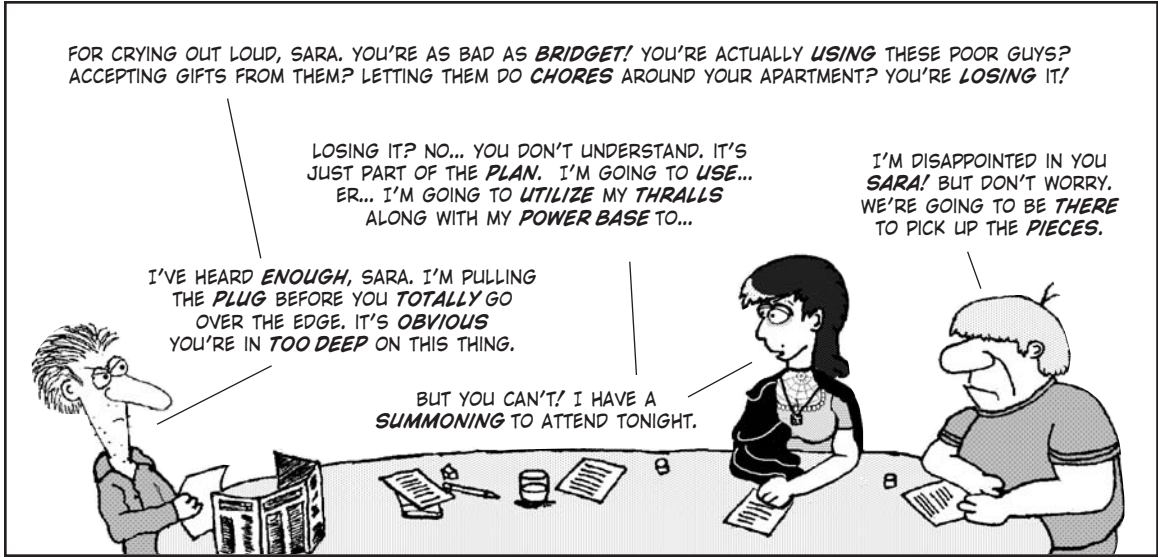


OKAY, SINCE YOU'RE SUDDENLY BEING SO *FORTHCOMING* WITH THE *DETAILS*, MAYBE YOU CAN EXPLAIN SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN *BUGGING* THE HELL OUT OF ME. A FEW NIGHTS AGO *BRIAN* AND I DROVE BY YOUR *APARTMENT* TO *CHECK* ON YOU BUT YOUR *CAR* WASN'T THERE. THIS WAS *WAY PAST MIDNIGHT*, MIND YOU. AND WHEN WE DROVE BY AGAIN AT 3:00 A.M. THERE WAS A *FORD TAURUS* WITH *DEALER PLATES* PARKED IN YOUR SPOT. I WAS JUST *CURIOUS*...

THE *TAURUS*?? OH... IT'S A *LOANER*. MY CAR WAS IN THE SHOP GETTING *DETAILED*.

LET ME GUESS... ANOTHER LITTLE *FAVOR* FROM ONE OF YOUR *THRALLS*?

UH... YEAH. SOMETHING LIKE THAT. *TURK'S* DAD OWNS A *CAR LOT*. -OOPS-



FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, SARA. YOU'RE AS BAD AS *BRIDGET*! YOU'RE ACTUALLY *USING* THESE POOR GUYS? ACCEPTING GIFTS FROM THEM? LETTING THEM DO *CHORES* AROUND YOUR *APARTMENT*? YOU'RE *LOSING* IT!

LOSING IT? NO... YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. IT'S JUST PART OF THE *PLAN*. I'M GOING TO *USE*... ER... I'M GOING TO *UTILIZE* MY *THRALLS* ALONG WITH MY *POWER BASE* TO...

I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU *SARA*! BUT DON'T WORRY. WE'RE GOING TO BE *THERE* TO PICK UP THE *PIECES*.

I'VE HEARD *ENOUGH*, SARA. I'M PULLING THE *PLUG* BEFORE YOU *TOTALLY GO* OVER THE *EDGE*. IT'S *OBVIOUS* YOU'RE IN *TOO DEEP* ON THIS THING.

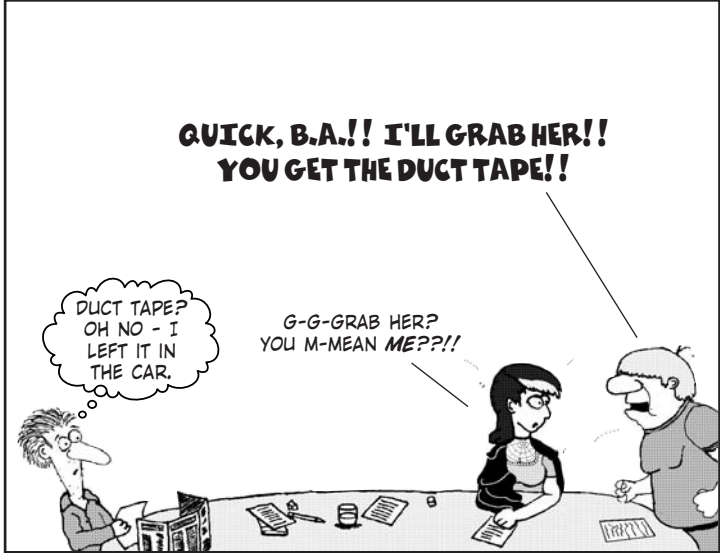
BUT YOU CAN'T! I HAVE A *SUMMONING* TO ATTEND TONIGHT.



LOOK, MAYBE WE CAN TALK ABOUT HIS *LATER*. I REALLY NEED TO BE GOING IF I WANT TO MAKE THAT...

SORRY, SARA. WE CAN'T LET YOU *GO*! YOU'RE *DANCING* WITH THE *DEVIL* AND YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW IT.

SAY WHAT?



QUICK, B.A.!! I'LL GRAB HER!! YOU GET THE DUCT TAPE!!

DUCT TAPE? OH NO - I LEFT IT IN THE CAR.

G-G-GRAB HER? YOU M-MEAN *ME*??!?

BRIAN SHE STILL SEEMS TO BE *RATIONAL*.
MAYBE WE CAN *TALK* HER DOWN WITHOUT RESORTING TO...

-GULP- SO
MUCH FOR *TALKING*.

AAAAEEEEEEEEIIIIII!!!!

CRASHH

WOOSH!!

B-BRIAN????! WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU
DOING? I'M *WARNING* YOU. DON'T MAKE ME...

IT'S FOR YER OWN GOOD SARA. I CAN'T
LET YOU GO BACK INTO-- *YOWWWLLL!!*
I CAN'T LET YOU GO *BACK* THERE.

LEGGO OF ME!!

I SAID LET GO OF
ME YOU BIG OX!

B.A.!! -ARRRRRRGGHH--
B.A, GRAB THE *DUCT*...
-UMMPPHH- GRAB
THE *DUCT* TAPE!!

KRAK! WRENCH!
FWAP!!

GAAAAA!!!! OWWWWW!
SWEET -FWIRP- JEZUS...

B.A.!!! THE *DUCT* TAPE!! GET
THE *FRICKIN'* *DUCT* TAPE!!

PLUCKA-DA!
SKA-RATCH!!
KICK!!

A WEE BIT LATER, AFTER THE DUST SETTLES...

MY GAWD!! I TOTALLY FORGOT HOW MUCH OF A *SCRAPPER* SARA IS.
SHE'S PICKED UP A FEW *NEW MOVES* OVER THE YEARS. THAT *REVERSE HEEL KICK* PUT MY *JAW* OUT
OF JOINT. I SURE WISH *AUNT NUDRA* HADN'T GOTTEN HER THAT "*TAE BO*" TAPE FOR *CHRISTMAS*.

DAMN!! TOO BAD SHE GOT AWAY. A FEW DAYS OF *DEPROGRAMMING*
IN MY *BASEMENT* AND I THINK SHE'D HAVE COME AROUND TO HER
SENSES. BY THE WAY -- YOU *ARE* GOING TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR *MOM*
WHAT WAS GOING ON WHEN SHE WALKED IN THE DOOR AREN'T YOU?

WHY SHOULD I? EVER SINCE YOU HOG-TIED
PAPPY AND THREW HIM DOWN THE
*LAUNDRY CHUTE** MY MOM'S BEEN UNDER THE
IMPRESSION YOU'RE *CLINICALLY DERANGED*.
WHY DON'T WE JUST LEAVE HER WITH THAT *IMPRESSION*?

OKAY! WORKS
FOR ME.

* See KODT# 19: "Don't Go There"

The Thrall is Gone

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

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
& STEVE JOHANSSON

ONE WEEK LATER ON GAME NIGHT...

WELL, IT'S **EIGHT-FIFTEEN**. DOESN'T LOOK LIKE SHE'S GOING TO **SHOW**, BIG GUY.

YEAH... KINDA IRONIC ISN'T IT? HERE WE ARE - JUST THE **TWO** OF US. JUST LIKE THE **OLD DAYS!!**

DO WE EVEN **BOTHER** PLAYING OR SHOULD WE JUST CALL IT A NIGHT?

MAYBE THAT WOULD BE **BEST**. I DON'T THINK EITHER ONE OF US REALLY FEELS LIKE PLAYING. MAYBE NEXT WEEK?

YEAH... NEXT WEEK'S GOOD.



I GOTTA TELL YA, BRIAN. I **MISS 'EM!!**

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I SHOULD JUST TAKE UP **LORDS OF DARKNESS** MYSELF.

AT LEAST I'D GET TO **SEE AND PLAY** WITH MY FRIENDS AGAIN.



HEY!! DON'T EVEN **JOKE** ABOUT THAT, B.A. YOU CALL **THAT** PLAYING? HELL, THEY DON'T EVEN USE **DICE!!** I'D JUST AS SOON PUT A FRICKIN' **GUN** TO MY HEAD THEN TO WADE INTO THAT KIND OF **FREE-FORM CHAOS!!**

BESIDES, WHO THE HELL'S GONNA **SAVE 'EM** FROM THAT **INFERNAL GAME** IF NOT US? WE'VE GOT TO KEEP OUR **WITS** ABOUT US AND STAY **TRUE** TO THE CAUSE.

YEAH... I SUPPOSE YER RIGHT. GOT ANY IDEAS?

WELL...



...THERE IS THAT **RESCUE-EXTRACTION CONTINGENCY PLAN** WE'VE GOT SITTING IN THE **WINGS**. WANNA PULL IT OUT?

I'VE GOT THE **MISSION PARTICULARS** IN MY **BRIEFCASE**.



OH... GEE, BRIAN. I DUNNO. MAYBE WE SHOULD **HOLD OFF** ON THAT UNTIL...

HULLO??!! ANYBODY HOME??!!

WHOAH!! SOMEBODY'S HERE. YOU EXPECTING ANYBODY?

WHAT THE...?? JUST **SARA**. BUT THAT'S NOT HER VOICE.



SECONDS LATER...

BOB??!! DAVE??!! OH MY GAWD. IT'S YOU!! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!!! IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU!!

HEY, B.A. WE STILL WELCOME AT YOUR TABLE?

WELL OF COURSE YOU ARE YOU **BIG GOOF!** HOW THE HELL ARE YOU?

OH... I'M OKAY...

...I GUESS.

THANKS, B.A. WE WERE **HOPING** YOU'D LET US **SLIDE** BACK IN.

BOBBY BOY??!! DAVE??!!

THIS IS **INCREDIBLE!** YOU GUYS LOOK **GREAT!**



WHAT A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES!! NO FANGS? NO BLACK CAPES? NO NOSE RINGS??!! DOES THIS MEAN WHAT I THINK IT DOES?

YEAH. I... UH... I GUESS IT DOES -- WE'VE **LEFT THE FOLD**, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN.

HAR!! I KNEW YOU'D **SNAP** OUT OF IT. WHAT'S WITH THE **HAIR?** YOU GUYS PLANNING ON KEEPING IT **GREASED BACK** LIKE THAT?

NAAAA, THIS **CRAP** DOESN'T EXACTLY WASH OUT WITH SOAP AND WATER.



I MUST HAVE WASHED MY **HAIR A DOZEN TIMES**. **NOTHING** SEEMS TO CUT THROUGH **VASELINE** THOUGH.

I WAS AT THE **QUICKY MART** TODAY AND SOME **JERK** CALLED ME **SQUIGGY!**

I DON'T KNOW WHAT **YOU'RE** COMPLAINING ABOUT. I LOOK LIKE **BOZO THE CLOWN ON CRACK!**



WELL I DON'T CARE **WHAT** YOU LOOK LIKE. IT'S JUST **NICE** TO HAVE YOU BACK WHERE YOU BELONG.

GOOD TO **BE** BACK. ANY CHANCE WE CAN GET A LITTLE **HACKMASTER** IN TONIGHT? I NEED SOME **CLOSURE** TO THIS WHOLE **FIASCO!**

YOU **BET** WE CAN. ANYTHING SPECIAL? A **DUNGEON CRAWL?** **URBAN BRAWL?**

ANYTHING'S FINE. AS LONG AS IT'S **HEAVY** ON THE **HACK** AND **LITE** ON THE **SMACK!!**



SAAAAY, SOMEBODY'S **MISSING**. WHERE'S THE HELL'S **SARA?**

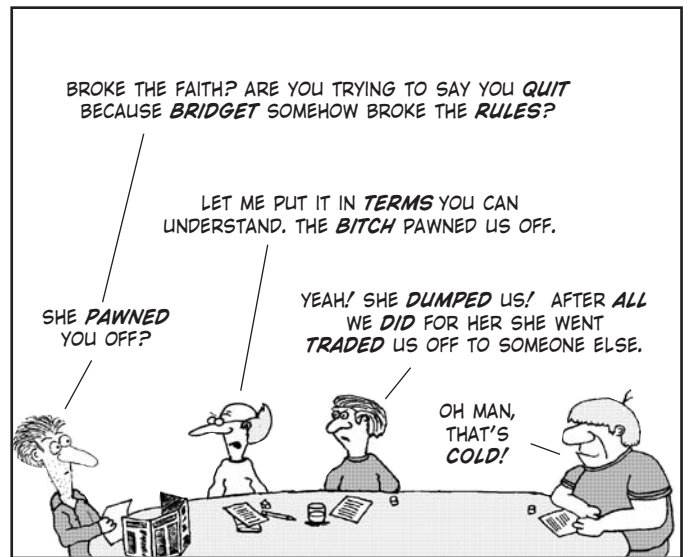
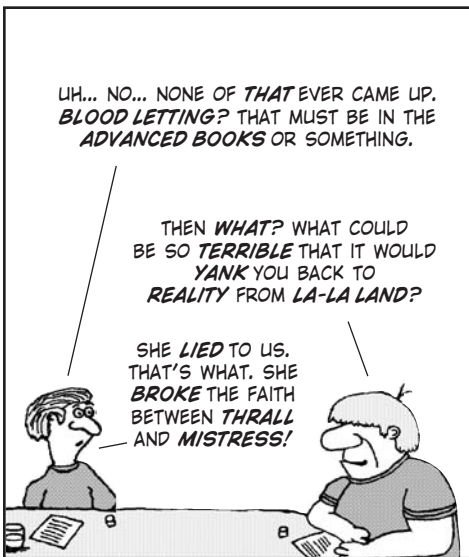
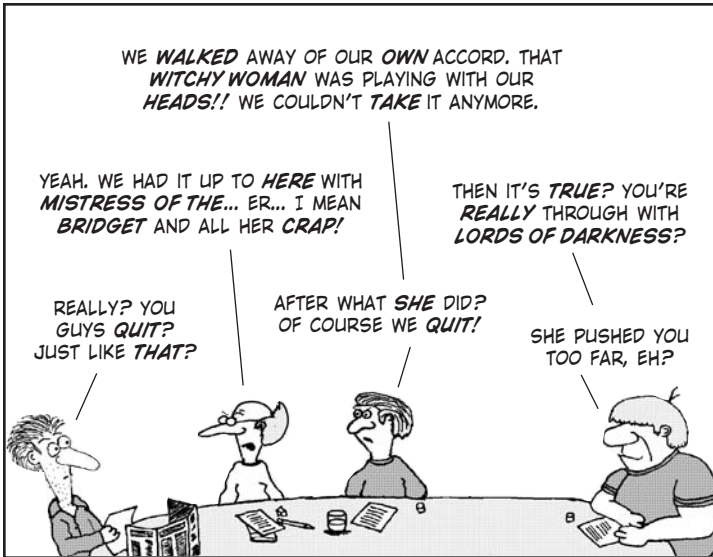
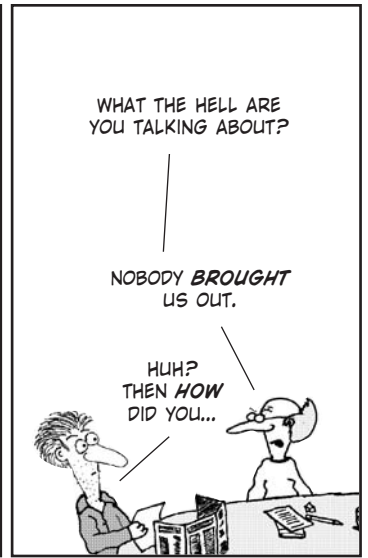
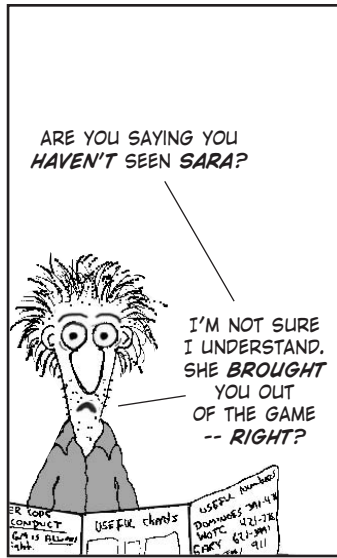
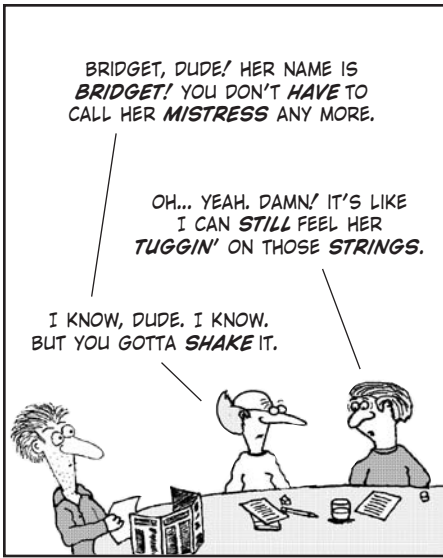
SARA? UH... ACTUALLY I WAS GOING TO ASK **YOU GUYS** THE **SAME** THING.

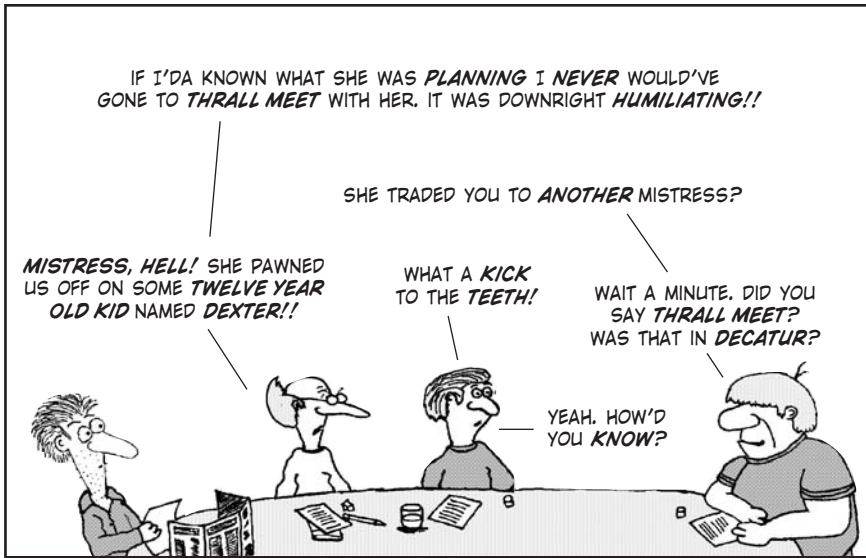
US? HOW THE HELL WOULD **WE** KNOW?

WE MINGLED IN DIFFERENT **CLANS**, DUDE.

YEAH. **MISTRESS** SAID WE SHOULDN'T AUGHT TA **MIX** OUTSIDE OUR **CLAN**.







IF I'DA KNOWN WHAT SHE WAS *PLANNING* I NEVER WOULD'VE GONE TO *THRALL MEET* WITH HER. IT WAS DOWNRIGHT *HUMILIATING!!*

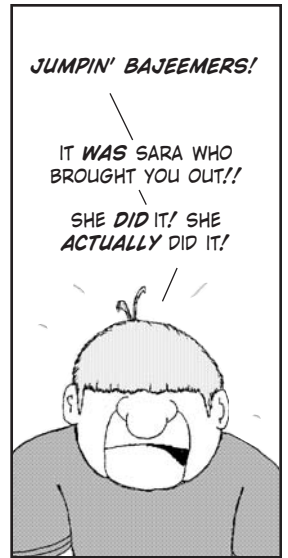
SHE TRADED YOU TO *ANOTHER* MISTRESS?

MISTRESS, HELL! SHE PAWNED US OFF ON SOME *TWELVE YEAR OLD KID* NAMED *DEXTER!!*

WHAT A *KICK* TO THE *TEETH!*

WAIT A MINUTE. DID YOU SAY *THRALL MEET*? WAS THAT IN *DECATUR*?

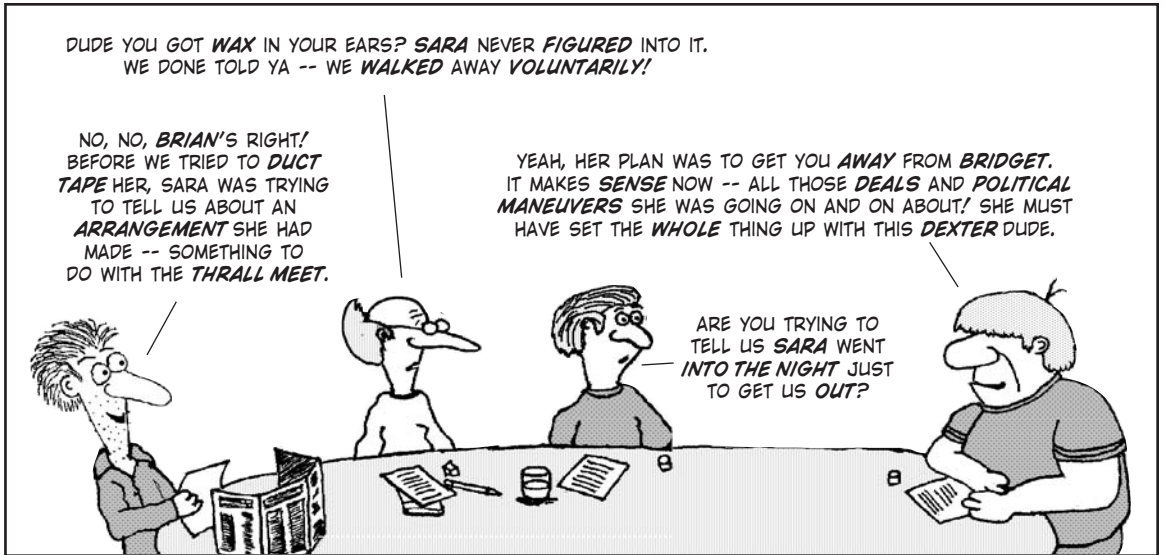
YEAH. HOW'D YOU *KNOW*?



JUMPIN' BAJEEMERS!

IT WAS *SARA* WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT!!

SHE *DID* IT! SHE *ACTUALLY* DID IT!



DUDE YOU GOT *WAX* IN YOUR EARS? *SARA* NEVER *FIGURED* INTO IT. WE DONE TOLD YA -- WE *WALKED AWAY VOLUNTARILY!*

NO, NO, *BRIAN'S* RIGHT! BEFORE WE TRIED TO *DUCT TAPE* HER, *SARA* WAS TRYING TO TELL US ABOUT AN *ARRANGEMENT* SHE HAD MADE -- SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE *THRALL MEET*.

YEAH, HER PLAN WAS TO GET YOU *AWAY* FROM *BRIDGET*. IT MAKES *SENSE* NOW -- ALL THOSE *DEALS* AND *POLITICAL MANEUVERS* SHE WAS GOING ON AND ON ABOUT! SHE MUST HAVE SET THE *WHOLE* THING UP WITH THIS *DEXTER* DUDE.

ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL US *SARA* WENT INTO THE NIGHT JUST TO GET US OUT?



THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO TELL YOU. WE WERE *WORRIED SICK* ABOUT YOU TWO.

THEN *SARA* CAME UP WITH THIS *INSANELY DANGEROUS PLAN* TO GO IN *UNDERCOVER*. WE THOUGHT SHE WAS *NUTS*. I EVEN TRIED TO *STOP* HER BUT... -SIGH-

WELL... I *NEVER* THOUGHT IT WOULD WORK.

REALLY? SHE DID THAT? FOR US?

WHOAH! THAT BLOWS MY *MIND!*

BUT *HERE* YOU ARE.



WHY THAT *CRAZY MIXED-UP...* WHO WOULD'VE *THINK*?

FOR US? WHAT WAS SHE *THINKING*?



DUDE!! SHE'S STILL IN THERE!!

GAAA!!! WE GOTTA GET 'ER OUTTA THERE!

**WE GOTTA
GET 'ER
OUTTA THERE
NOW!!**



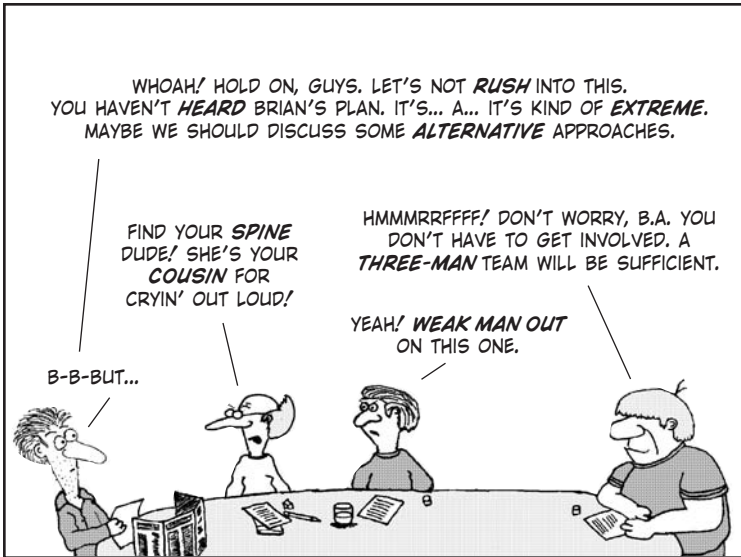
GOOD! GLAD YOU TWO FEEL THAT WAY. YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO LEARN THAT I HAVEN'T BEEN SITTING HERE TWIDDLING MY THUMBS.

IVE GOT A LITTLE RESCUE-EXTRACTION CONTINGENCY PLAN IN MY BRIEFCASE.

ALL I NEED IS A FEW GOOD MEN AND WE CAN PUT IT INTO ACTION.

YOU GOT A PLAN? TO GET SARA OUT?

I'M IN. JUST TELL ME WHAT I GOTTA DO.



WHOAH! HOLD ON, GUYS. LET'S NOT RUSH INTO THIS. YOU HAVEN'T HEARD BRIAN'S PLAN. IT'S... A... IT'S KIND OF EXTREME. MAYBE WE SHOULD DISCUSS SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES.

FIND YOUR SPINE DUDE! SHE'S YOUR COUSIN FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD!

HMMRRRFFFF! DON'T WORRY, B.A. YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET INVOLVED. A THREE-MAN TEAM WILL BE SUFFICIENT.

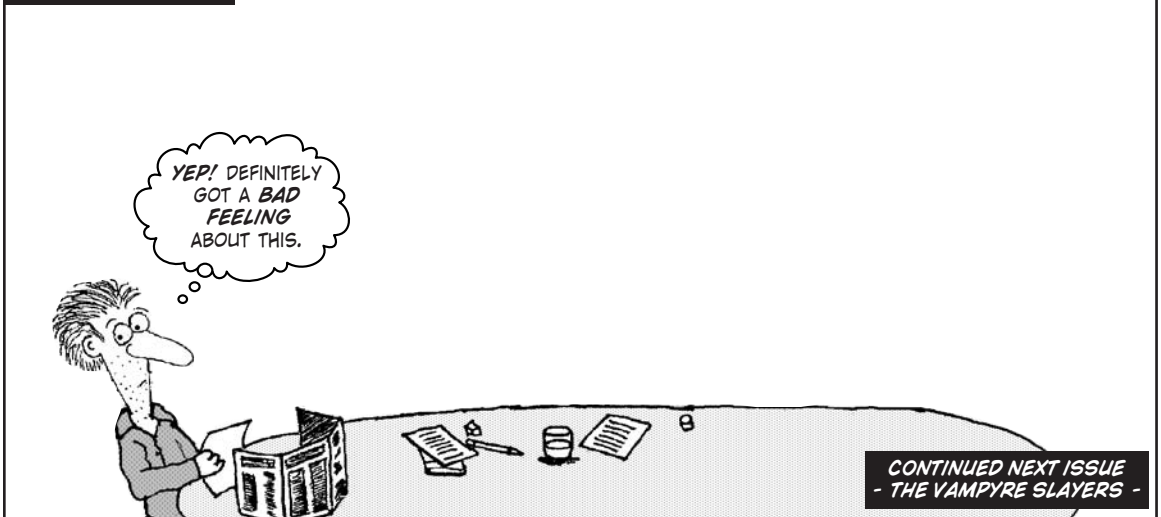
YEAH! WEAK MAN OUT ON THIS ONE.

B-B-BUT...



WHY DON'T WE GO GRAB A PIZZA AND I CAN BRING YOU UP TO SPEED ON THE MISSION PARTICULARS.

A WEE BIT LATER...



YEP! DEFINITELY GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE - THE VAMPIRE SLAYERS -

ROLLING WITH WotC's D20 SYSTEM

by Kenneth Newquist

Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition isn't just the latest version of a venerable gaming system. Its launch--along with less-hyped launches by other companies--also represents the birth of a powerful new philosophy for the RPG industry: "open gaming."

The 3rd Edition rules are based on something called the "d20" system, which Wizards is hoping will become the industry standard for role-playing games. The idea's simple: the core rules that make up d20 are considered "open", meaning that other companies--if they sign the open gaming license--can publish products based on those rules, and even expand on them. Wizards retains the rights to the **Dungeons and Dragons** lingo, but the guts of the system are there for anyone to use.

And they are using it.

THE OPEN GAMING FOUNDATION

This site advocates "open source gaming" -- which was headed up by WotC executive Ryan Dancey, but is not affiliated with RPG's 800-lb gorilla. The site looks as though it was designed by a lawyer, and at first glances seems geared more toward RPG companies than fans. The front page includes news about recent OGF converts and product releases, but the real gold can be found in the "browse works" area. There visitors can browse a list of products released for the various open source gaming systems (primarily d20) and even write reviews of them.

THE UNOFFICIAL OGF OPEN GAMING LICENSE D20 FAQ

This site makes up for its long and awkward name with plain and readable explanations of what "open source" gaming really means. It matter-of-factly explains WotC's goals with its d20 system, and tells writers what is, and what is not, covered by the open gaming licensing. It's a good read for anyone toying around with publishing d20 material, whether in print or on the web.

Those skeptical of Wizards' commitment to this idea,--and to d20 in general, should check out *Eric Noah's interview with Ryan Dancey*. This long, but readable, interview goes to the heart of the "open gaming" movement, and explains how Wizards can back it without losing their shirts.

There are those who are taking all this business theory and turning it into something real.

GREEN RONIN

This site has the distinction of being the first company to release a d20 product. The 32-page module *Death in Freeport* debuted at **GenCon 2000**, and they've followed up that release with another, *Terror in Freeport*.

It also supports the dangerous and freewheeling city through its web site with a regular "Focus on Freeport" column. The free section offers Freeport goodies like a pirate prestige class and unusual city attractions.

SWORD SORCERY STUDIOS

This "Creature Collection" of d20-compatible monsters, has a smattering of demo monsters on its web site.

These fully-detailed nasties, like the memory eater and undead ooze, should provide a few surprises for know-it-all adventurers. The site's also taking submissions for its next collection.



NEUROMANCER GAMES

d20 freebies can also be found on **Neuromancer Games' Web site**. Neuromancer is publishing games with "third edition rules, first edition feel!" They have a free d20 starter adventure called the "Wizard's Amulet" available for download in Acrobat format, pre-generated characters for the adventure, and other goodies.

D20 WORLD BUILDERS GUILD

This site brings together fan-created campaign worlds based on the d20 system. The site has about a half dozen fantasy and sci-fi-themed campaigns, as well as links to help prospective planetary architects.

Those looking to put a little metal into their d20 diet can check out **Cyberpunk d20**, a home-grown RPG dedicated to the dark future genre. It's not out yet, but the author promises the "alpha" version of the setting soon. The author promises rules for firearms, hacking, cyberware and other post-modern goodies, so keep an eye out for it.

OPEN GAMING FOUNDATION

<http://www.opengamingfoundation.org>

THE UNOFFICIAL OGF OPEN GAMING LICENSE D20 FAQ

<http://www.earth1066.com/D20FAQ.htm>

ERIC NOAH'S INTERVIEW WITH RYAN DANCEY

<http://www.rpgplanet.com/dnd3e/interview-rsd-0300.htm>

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FOUR VERY DIFFERENT GAMES

By Rick Moscatello

Ah, the Christmas season (*well, for me, as I'm writing this in December, Gawd only knows when the gods of comic distribution will have you read this*), when new games are plentiful. So many new toys, so little time.

Our first interesting game is *Rune*, a third person hackfest "steeped in the infamy of Norse mythology and Viking lore." That's what it says on the box, anyway, although I don't think Norse mythology is nearly as "infamous" as, say, Aztec mythology. Hey, Vikings are always fun to game with, but *Rune* comes from *Gathering of Developers*, who seem to have a hard time finding that elusive hit. Well, maybe not this time either. You start out well enough, in a nice Viking village packed with those oh-so-boastful (*and oh so cliché*) Viking he-men. You need to spend a bit of time finding your way to the longhouse (um, if I was born in the village, wouldn't I already know where the longhouse is?), where a priest type sends you off to kill things. While the makers have tried to include Norse mythology, it's mostly of the form "Odin this..." and "Odin that..." and The Man himself does put in a few appearances. Odin, shmOdin, when all is said and done this is just a bloodbath with people wearing pointy helmets.

The fighting is certainly gory. Even the slightest hit will cause buckets of blood to gush across the screen. Gee whiz, gore is good (*if I may paraphrase Michael Douglas a bit abusively*), but the amount of blood spilled should have some correlation to the level of injury. You also can hack off bits of your opponents—who, for the most part, aren't so concerned about anything but decapitation—and use the severed bits as throwing weapons. Alas, the combat system is all too easily mastered. Run left and hack, run right and hack, and you've got it made. You can get rune weapons (*can't have a decent Viking game without runes, after all*), but it's all the same. There are no ranged weapons to speak of, so it all boils down to hacking. It's odd that the Unreal engine that I enjoy so much comes off as so clunky here, but oh well.

The levels, at least, are huge, with a level of artistry that gets ever more impressive the further you go in the game—it almost seems as though the design crew was learning their ins and outs of the Unreal engine as they were designing the game. The early levels have mediocre artwork and minimal puzzles, but by mid game you can't help but be impressed with the look of the place, even as you begin to tire of pulling your umpteenth lever.

Rune does have some spiffy graphics, and if you're into Vikings you can get something out of this, I guess, but this pseudo-historical game just doesn't cut it for me...it's no great loss if you don't add this to your gaming collection.

If you're in the mood for something less pseudo-his-

torical, *First Strike* may very well be for you. This is the first real time strategy (RTS) game in a long time that is based on The Mother of All Sources For Good Wargames—World War II.

The first thing that strikes you when you load up this game is how amazing the graphics are. Holy stretch pants, you can almost make out the belt buckles on the soldiers if you squint hard enough, and the tank graphics are the best I've seen yet. Factor in the explosions, the fully interactive battlefield (*i.e., everything can get blown up real good*), the wonderful landscaping, and overall attention to detail, and you've got more than enough eye candy to justify the "hot new game" sticker price.

Since this game is based on World War II, there's none of the tedious and unrealistic "build up your base and collect resources" crud that is the focal point of other RTS games, such as *StarCraft* and my current total favorite, *Age of Empires*. This means you get into the action very, very quickly. Considering that you can start with up to 500 units, a beginning player can easily get overwhelmed. It just gets worse once you realize just how many different unit types there are—if you don't instinctively know the difference in usefulness between a *StugIII*A and a *PnzII*IG, you're gonna be in a load of trouble once it's time to fight off an assault. Since you don't have a base to crank out units, the game will give you reinforcements from time to time.

While combat is beautiful to behold, I do have a few issues. First, units are very nearsighted. You generally can't see something that's (scale) 200 yards away, even if you've got troops in a guard tower with binoculars, and the general myopia of your units will frustrate you time and again. Land mines are very quick and simple to lay, and most infantry carry a few. Any unit which steps on a mine is instantly destroyed, which is a bit unbalancing (*a popular online strategy is to infiltrate the enemy reinforcement zone, and cover it in mines*). Units don't move in formation, so if you grab tanks and a repair team—did I mention the level of detail in the game?—and order them to advance, the quicker moving (*and unarmed*) repair team will invariably get there first, which can be a bad thing in an assault.

Even though I have a lot of quibbles, I don't regret the time I've spent playing this game. Check it out if you can, there is A LOT going on in *First Strike*, although it can be a bit rough on a beginner.

"Budgetware" refers to computer games that are designed to sell for \$20 or less. They're roughly comparable to "straight to video" movies, in that they're usually so bad that there's no point in having them compete with the "big boys."

"Licenseware" refers to games that are based on some other easily identified property, such as "Conan" or

Continued on page 31...

HORROR OF THE 20TH CENTURY

A Book Review by John O'Neil

OFF THE SHELF

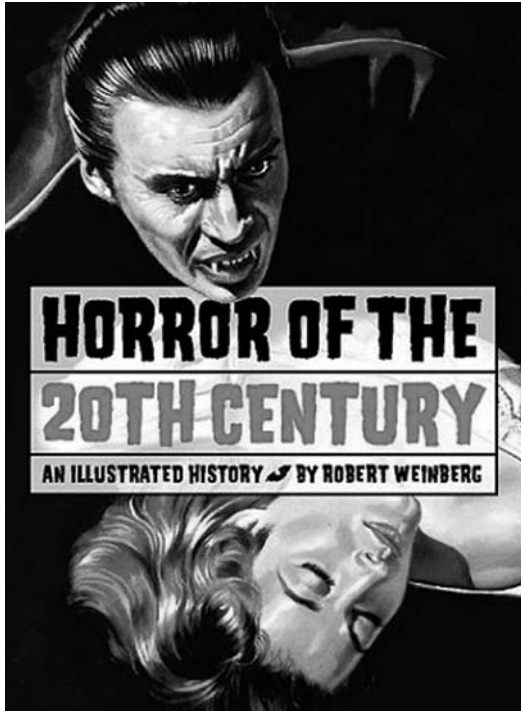
HORROR OF THE 20TH CENTURY

An Illustrated History

by Robert Weinberg

The Collector's Press

Hardcover, 256 pages, \$60



The fall and winter months see a large number of gift books roll out, for obvious reasons. Some of the best are done by the small press, for whom this isn't an annual money grab but rather a true labor of love. One of the best is *The Collector's Press*, which produced one of the finest books of last year, Frank M. Robinson's Hugo Award-winning *Science Fiction of the 20th Century*. This year CP follows up with the equally splendid *Horror of the 20th Century*, by Bob Weinberg – a book which both complements the earlier volume and corrects some of its deficiencies.

Like Robinson, Weinberg is a noted author in his own right. His works include one of the popular *White Wolf* trilogy *Masquerade of the Red Death*, the most successful of the *World of Darkness* books. In fact, Weinberg and Robinson have a lot in common, not the least of which is that they're both world class collectors. While both have written over a hundred pages of text to accompany the artwork – over 450 full color reproductions from a century of books, magazines, and movie posters – one way to look at these books is as little more than an expensive showcase for their personal collections. That's enough for me – I bought both as soon as they hit the shelves.

Assuming your interests are a little broader than mine (or at least that you're not as easily hypnotized by pretty pictures), you may also want to hear about the text. *Horror of the 20th Century* is broken down into chapters spanning the century's major horror and dark fantasy genres, in roughly chronological order – starting with the late gothic era at the close of the 19th Century, to the first silent films, through the golden age of the great horror pulps (*Most prominently Weird Tales and Horror Stories*), the Hollywood horror boom of the 40's, the great horror comics of the 1950's, and on into the new generation of writers such as King, Barker and Koontz who emerged in the 70's, 80's and 90's to recreate the genre.

The later chapters are some of the most intriguing, as Weinberg tracks the major boom and bust cycles of the last three decades. While publishing in general is a very cyclical industry, the swings in the horror field have been extreme, with major authors, imprints, and publishing efforts debuting and vanishing from the scene with often breathtaking swiftness. The horror market has been pronounced stone cold dead more than a few times down through the decades, and the irony of this has not escaped Weinberg.

The book isn't perfect. At times the coverage is fairly superficial, especially in the area of modern film and comics, and there's not much attention paid to short fiction at all. Also, work outside the US and the UK is slighted, although I doubt most readers will notice.

The most enjoyable aspect of reading reviews for me is discovering an overlooked treasure. *Horror of the 20th Century* is a 256-page museum of treasures, curated by one of the great experts in the field. Weinberg presents the most rewarding and original movies, authors, comics, magazines and horror novels of the last 100 years, and if you're any fan of the genre at all this book will point you towards a lifetime of reading and collecting. In this era of video libraries and eBay, a book like this serves as more than just a fine historical retrospective -- it's a thick catalog of the best work of a neglected field, and a wonderful guidebook for collectors of all kinds.

Collector's Press can be found at www.collectorspress.com. They have a lot of pretty pictures from the interior of their books. Drop by and buy something.

+++++

*John O'Neill is the publisher and editor of Black Gate magazine (www.blackgate.com). His favorite horror flick is *Alien*, his favorite horror novel is *Salem's Lot*, and his favorite comic monsters are the rat creatures in *Bone*. Shudder.*

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LIZARD, I DON'T SEE WHY THEY MADE YOUR INTELLIGENCE STAT TWICE AS HIGH AS MINE!

HMPH! UNCLE LUCIUS HAS THE MOST LIFE POINTS OF ANY OF US!



LESSEE... IF I WANTED TO USE MY FIRE-BREATHING ABILITY ON YOU, BOSS, I'D ROLL MY 8-SIDED DIE, LIKE SO.



CURSE IT, TWIT! YOU COST ME 3 LIFE POINTS!

OOPS! ACCORDING TO THIS ROLL, I ALSO SET FIRE TO THE CURTAIN BEHIND YOU!

DON'T WORRY FIONA! MY REACTION ROLL SAYS I PUT OUT THE FIRE!



Read Bruno the Bandit daily at www.brunothebandit.com

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Disks of Wondrous Power: Continued from page 28

"*Pokemon*" (hey, how long until we see licensed PC games based on those?). Licenseware is usually pretty heinous, too, since the makers are relying on the license, instead of the quality of the game, to pull in sales.

The Blair Witch Project: Rustin Parr is the strangest of creatures: license budgetware. Even more strange, it's pretty good.

The game takes place in 1940, so it doesn't have the wimpy college students (or *shaky camera work*) of the movie. You take control of "Doc" Holiday (hardcore gamers might recognize her from *Nocturne*), in a reverse sequel to the movie. They've done a wonderful job of keeping things creepy, and I dare say this jaded gamer actually jumped once or twice during play (I recommend using headphones for the best shock value). There's a bit too much combat--hordes of bad guys just don't seem to fit in with *Blair Witch* subtleties, and the puzzles are a bit too arbitrarily time-consuming. Most of the game involves tracking down people and browbeating information out of them, and the town is well populated with characters with sufficient dialogue.

This game won't set major sales records, but is far better than the "*Snipe Hunter 3D*" and "*Who Wants to Beat Up a Millionaire*" titles that also sit on the "budget title" shelf with it. If you liked the movie, or even if you didn't, this game will be worth your while. Of course, there are sequels to the game planned, so do beware--a sequel is seldom as good as the original.

Our last game to squint at is **Hit Man: Code Name 47**, a game based on the most overrated profession: the assassin. Actually, you figure out early on that you aren't the typical assassin--the bar code on your head is a giveaway (anybody watching that TV show?). Despite the fact that you're essentially a tool built for a specific purpose, you'll need to go forth into the world and kill people to earn enough money to buy better equipment to kill more people. You'll start by strangling a guy while he's taking a whizz, and work your way up (like there's any other way to go after doing that).

While one might hope for something a bit more "open ended" like *Deus Ex*, you'll generally have only one way to snuff your target. While one might hope for something more subtle like *Thief*, all too often the game turns into a major slaughterfest as you carry a platoon's worth of weapons while slaying two platoons' worth of goons. Realism drops off rather quickly, which is a shame since one would like to have a better taste of all the glory of being a "real" assassin...at least, that would be the premise of the game.

There's a reasonable selection of weapons, and you'll get to fight in a number of locales and do a number of very Hit Manly things, like drag away bodies of dead guards, and assume very convincing disguises at the drop of a hat. Then

comes the gaming equivalent of getting punched in the 'nads by an angry chimpanzee: you can't save your game. Yep, in a game where one false move or arbitrary "mistake" can instantly cost you your life, you don't have the option to save the game during a mission. Yuck. If I want this kind of head-popping frustration, I'll get a real job, thank you very much. Doubtless, the "no save" idea is to prolong the fun/agonies of the game, as once you finish a mission, you'll never want to do it again, annihilating any replay value.

If you're really looking for a slightly different shooter, I suppose you can get something out of this, but I found this to be one annoying game. Maybe in a few months they'll have a patch that'll allow you to save mid-mission, which would upgrade my opinion of the game to a "moderately recommend. As it is, this one is pretty avoidable. □

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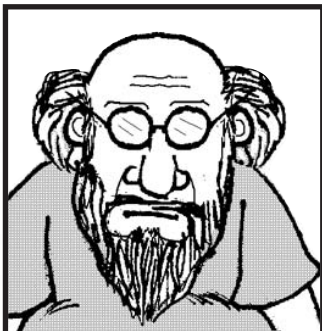
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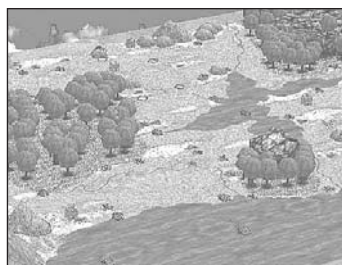
**HACKMASTER
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Thought Guild Inc has released *Realm Overseer™ 3D*. The software allows the user to view, manipulate and travel fantasy worlds, towns and dungeons. It works in synergy with widely popular world editing *Campaign Cartographer™ 2* packages and *Forgotten Realms™ Interactive Atlas* from *Profantasy Software Ltd.* *Realm Overseer™ 3D* allows real-time dynamic map overview/manipulation. This means you can travel across the world surface in first person view! It also has multiple weather settings, dynamic illumination from Sun and Moon and many other features. The program also allows for either 3D conversion of old 2D maps from *Campaign Cartographer™ 2* and *Forgotten Realms™ Interactive Atlas*, or the creation of full 3D maps with *Campaign Cartographer™ 2*.

Sounds like a GameMaster's dream come true, eh? Well you can acquire this gem simply by visiting <http://www.overseer3d.com/> and downloading the demo version. □



The proof is in the pudding. On the left is a 'before' shot of a CC2 map. On the right is an 'after' shot after Realm Overseer™ 3D has done its magic.

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TRANSLATION??
CRIPES!! NOW
I WISH I HADN'T
DUCKED OUT OF
FRENCH 101 IN
HIGH SCHOOL.



Kenzer & Company and Yéti Entertainment are proud to announce the signing of the French translation license for the *Knights of the Dinner Table (KODT)*. Yéti Entertainment, creators of the *Zoondo* universe and co-publishers of the *Metabarons Role Playing Game (with WEG)*, will be launching the French adaptation of *KODT* across the planet at the beginning of the year 2001. The French translation of *Kenzer & Company's* popular comic strip will be published in *Graphic Novel* format, in hard-cover. Antoine Pinchot, author of the popular *Weekend d'Enfer* children's books and one of the co-authors of the *Quasar* choose-your-own-ending series, will be heading up the translation. The Yéti team, all avid role-players, will be assisting.

"We had to ask Kenzer for more copies of the first *Bundle of Trouble* book in order to start the translation. They are so popular at Yéti that they keep getting permanently borrowed. Even with HUGE notes on them saying **DO NOT BORROW!**" quoted a member of the Yéti direction staff who wishes to remain ANONYMOUS.

This is one of the first foreign language contracts for *KODT*. Kenzer & Company, as always, seem surprised that the humble strip has gained such world-wide popularity. At the *Essen Game Fair* in Germany, where the contract with Yéti was signed, people from such places as Russia, Italy and beyond had read the strip and were buying up the latest issues and related merchandise.

"If things keep up like this, we'll soon see *KODT* on the moon," said Brian Jelke, Vice President of Kenzer & Company. "However, the right to publish *KODT* in the fourth and fifth dimensions are still currently available to interested parties."

Other *Knights of the Dinner Table* related products sold by Kenzer & Company in English include the *Knights of the Dinner Table Illustrated* comic, the *HackMasters of EverKnight* comic, the *Fairy Meat* miniature combat game, *KODT* and *Blackhands* pewter miniatures and *KODT* shirts, buttons and hats. □

plucked from the vine for your reading enjoyment

• CBS ORDERS ALEXANDER'S 'E.S.PERS'

CBS has ordered an hour-long sci-fi series entitled *E.S.PERS*, which Jason Alexander (*Seinfeld*) and Ira Steven Behr (*Star Trek: DS9*) will executive produce. The series, about an ex-cop detective who leads a team of psychics in investigating paranormal activities, has no connection to James Hudnall's old comic series of the same name.

• CARDELLINI AS 'SCOOBY'S VELMA'

Linda Cardellini (*Freaks & Geeks*) is in negotiations to play Velma in Raja Gosnell's live-action *SCOOBY-DOO*. As reported last issue *SCOOBY* is set to star Freddie Prinze Jr., as Fred, Sarah Michelle Gellar as Daphne, and Matthew Lillard as Shaggy.



• JOVOVICH CAST IN 'RESIDENT EVIL'

Milla Jovovich (*The Fifth Element*, *Dazed and Confused*) has signed on to play Alice the Zombie Killer in Paul Anderson's adaptation of the video game *RESIDENT EVIL*.

• FORREST WHITAKER IN 'PHONE BOOTH'

Forrest Whitaker (*The Crying Game*) is in final negotiations to star in Joel Schumacher's *PHONE BOOTH*. Whitaker will play a New York cop trying to help a media consultant (*Colin Farrell*) told he'll be shot dead by a sniper serial killer if he hangs up a phone. Maybe he should have dialed 1-800-COLLECT.

• REDFORD NEARING 'CASTLE' DEAL

Robert Redford is in final negotiations to play a five-star general convicted of a capitol crime and sent to the military's only maximum security prison in the thriller *THE CASTLE*.

• SCI FI ORDERS RIVERWORLD SERIES

The *SCI FI Channel* has ordered a pilot for a series based on Philip Jose Farmer's *RIVERWORLD* series of novels. *RIVERWORLD*, explores a land between life and death where dead people from across time are reborn.

• MO' 'SPIDER-MAN' NEWS

Willem Dafoe (*Platoon*) has signed on to play the lead villain, Norman Osborne, aka *The Green Goblin*, in Sam Raimi's *SPIDER-MAN* feature film. J.K. Simmons (*OZ's Vernon Schilling*) is also rumored to have signed on to play newspaper publisher J. Jonah Jameson.

• 'CHARLIE'S ANGELS' SEQUEL

COLUMBIA Pictures is reportedly in the early stages of developing a *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* sequel. Director McG and primary screenwriter John August (Go) are both expected to return.



• SINGER ENTERS 'X-MEN 2' NEGOTIATIONS

Bryan Singer is in early negotiations to direct an *X-MEN* sequel for FOX. Singer is basically the only one from the first film not signed to returning for the sequel. □

WHO CARES WHO'S PLAYING VELMA?! I WANNA KNOW WHO'S PLAYING SCOOBY DAMMIT!

I WONDER IF SCRAPPY IS GONNA BE IN IT?

SCRAPPY? GAWD I HOPE NOT. I HATE THAT MUTT!



THE GAMER'S EYE ON THE MOVIES/TV

KODT CONVENTION CALENDAR

FLORIDA

3/2/01 – 3/4/01
MEGA CON
Orlando, FL
Comic Books, Gaming, Sci/Fi, and Anime
Visit our website:
www.megaconvention.com

NEVADA

5/25/01 – 5/28/01
Con 2001
Reno, NV
Guests of Honor include: Larry Elmore
Visit our website:
<http://icon2001.home.att.net>

NORTH CAROLINA

3/16/01 – 3/18/01
STELLARCON 25
Greensboro, NC
Visit our website:
<http://www.uncg.edu/student.groups/sf3/stellarcon.htm>

OHIO

2/18/01 & 2/19/01
Topa Con 2001
Dayton, OH
KODT Live reading, RPGs, Miniatures, Anime
Visit our website:
www.geocities.com/bayoubrigh/TopaCon2001.html

SOUTH DAKOTA

5/25/01 – 5/28/01
Mage Con North – 7
Sioux Falls, SD
Guests of Honor include: Jolly Blackburn
Visit our website:
www.mage-page.com

TEXAS

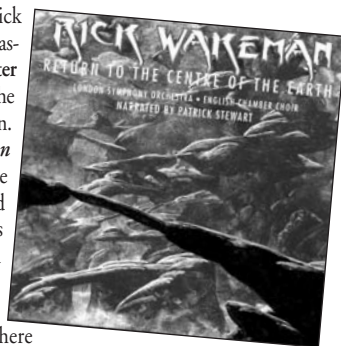
6/1/01 – 6/3/01
PROJECT A:KON XII
Dallas, TX
E-mail us for more info at:
Info@a-kon.com

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.

MUSIC TO GAME BY

In January, 1974 Rick Wakeman recorded his classic, "Journey to the Center of the Earth" album live at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Accompanied by the *London Symphony Orchestra* and the *English Chamber Choir* and narrated by David Hemings the listener was taken on a fantastic journey underground.



GameMasters everywhere quickly discovered the album was perfect for setting the mood at the gaming table. (*I still have fond memories of charging bands of Orcs along with my fellow adventurers at Ball State with track 2 of this album [The Battle] blaring in the background.*)

So why am I mentioning a 26 year old album? Well...until a fan clued us in me a few weeks ago, I wasn't aware that Rick Wakeman had released a follow-up album in 1999. And after asking around I've learned that I wasn't the only one to miss it. I know a lot of fans of the original album and not ONE of them knew of the new one.

In *Return to the Center of the Earth*, we once again follow the adventures of a group of explorers, but this time via an alternate route from the original. Patrick Stewart (*of Star Trek fame*) steps in as narrator joined by the vocal talents of Ozzy Osbourne, Justin Hayward (*Moody Blues*), Trevor Robin, Bonnie Tyler, Tony Mitchell and Katrina Leskanrich.

Lightning definitely struck twice on this one! The sequel is every bit as good as the original, if not better. And the two mesh together very well stylistically. It's like having an old friend unexpectedly drop in. Your players will hack with added zeal with this inspiring music helping to spur them on. Both the original and the sequel are available on CD, though you may have to special order them. □



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

An Opinion Arena and Open Forum

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

I want to thank you for the GammerGrrl's Minfesto by Hilary Doda. I am a female gamer and have faced the same biases from others. I think that more girls would game if more guys recognized that we aren't there to ogle. I have even had to drop groups because of the compromising positions that they would put my female characters in. To know that some guys may get a clue from her manifesto is comforting.

I am now in a group with some friends who see my femininity as an asset rather than a liability or oddity. I can hack with the best of them, and when it comes to the actual role-playing aspect I have yet to be out classed.

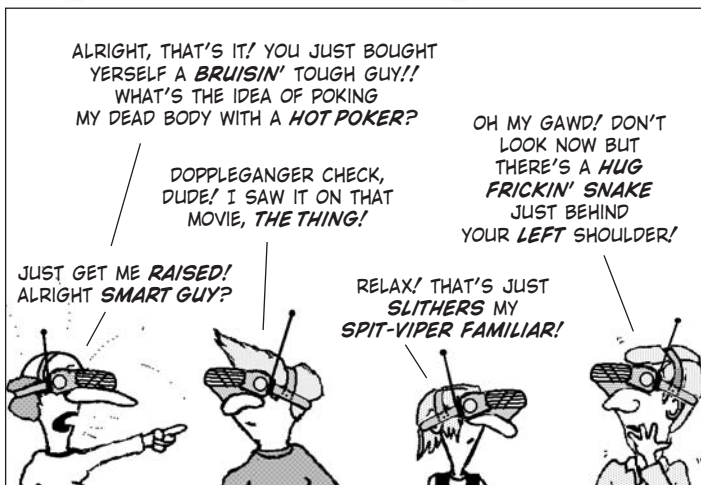
I have had to argue on occasion why amazons don't wear chain mail bikinis, and why they won't sleep with every PC or NPC that turns her head. I have also had to game with women who felt that they can't game with guys unless they behave like idiots. These are the most difficult to turn because the guys are so supportive of slutty female characters.

Stand your ground women! We can kick some tail yet! If any guys think that my characters can't kick theirs around the block a couple of times, then bring it on lil boy and I will show you what a real gamergrrl can do, and bring some healing potions, you'll be needing 'em.

Hack on!

Judith Patrick
Baton Rouge, LA

As, I must fall in line and administer the chiding which you (Jolly) foretold, but did not avert in your editorial to KODT No. 47. I refer, of course, to your needlessly cruel and sniggering recollection of the time you



and your Army buddy near Fort Bliss so boldly invaded an abandoned mine-shaft and then felt it necessary to kill its occupant, a large (*this means he was old enough to have deserved a better fate*) and presumably very surprised rattlesnake. Don't you know what bad karma this is? The snake is held to be a highly sacred animal in many cultures older and arguably wiser than our own. I can understand striking out in self-defense or desperation, but honestly: first you and your pal go out 'looking' for trouble; and then when you find some, you run away faster than you can say "Brave Sir Robin"; and then, the real heart of the matter, you were not content to accept this outcome but just HAD to demonstrate some supposed superiority by killing the unfortunate tunnel-dweller. By lobbing rocks at it from a safe distance, of course. Very noble. Would your reaction have been the same if it had been a pig, a deer, a dog, a cat, a raccoon? Or is it only make-believe dragons that bring out the bullying half-orc in people?

I expect better of you than this, and better of KODT than to promote such an irresponsible outlook toward the environment and the creatures who share this planet with us. I live in a neighborhood in Austin with more than its share of snakes -- in fact, one of our cats only just survived a rattlesnake bite this past month -- but I do not go out of my way to pick fights with them, nor do I advocate extermination as a solution, and I believe your attitude demonstrates the worst sort of medievalism. There is enough cruel-

ty toward animals in this world, and it invariably breeds a culture that condones cruelty toward humans as well. Please consider more carefully what you choose to print in the future, and the sort of "cute stories" that you play for laughs. I doubt the snake you so savagely killed thought your "adventure" was very funny.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hendryx
via E-mail

Great letter, Kevin. I happen to agree with you on almost every point. However, I'm afraid you missed the point of my editorial. I was looking back some fifteen years to a much younger version of myself. To a guy just out of bootcamp, feeling on top of the world and looking for the next adrenaline rush. Perhaps it didn't come through, but I was actually berating myself (and my friend) for pretty much the same reasons you pointed out. At any rate, I wasn't 'promoting' such behavior but shedding light on it. If it appeared otherwise, I apologize.

[I replied to Kevin's email basically relaying the above and he replied in kind. I thought it appropriate to share that reply with our readers.]

Jolly

Kevin's reply:

Hey Jolly,

Thanks for your reply -- I hope my critique hasn't given offense or seemed unfairly harsh. But animal rights are a cause I feel strongly about, and here in the land of "Rattlesnake Round-Ups" (torture in the name of sport and

fundraising) and constant Bubbaism, I seem to find cause to stand up for the poor unloved snakes on a regular basis.

My wife and I have worked as wildlife rehabilitators, and one thing that impresses you in that experience is how fragile and irreplaceable life is; how hard to nurture, how impossible to restore when lost. It gives you a different perspective, perhaps. But I try not to be a pedant about it. Perhaps I misinterpreted your tone a bit, but there IS a dead snake and a barbaric picture; if this was meant to be tongue-in-cheek, it didn't register as such with me.

I appreciate that you are willing to invite criticism; now, having administered my buffet, like Bagheera to Mowgli, I shall speak no more of it. Let us all learn from our follies!

Kevin Hendryx
via E-mail

I just read KODT#49 and was little disappointed to read Jolly's apology to the reader who took offense to his "Snake Slayer" editorial (KODT#48). You really should have stood your ground, Jolly. You had absolutely nothing to be sorry for.

The reader (Sheryl) was totally off base. Did she even read the same editorial I did? It was quite obvious to me that you were totally poking fun at yourself in that piece even to the point of berating your behavior. (You called it 'Beavis and Butthead' behavior if I recall correctly). Anyway, I can't see how anyone could have read that piece and actually come away thinking it was a 'call to arms' advocating the mass-slaughter of rattlesnakes.

You were basically saying that in your youth you did a pretty stupid thing. Partly out of fear, but mostly out of ignorance. Besides, anyone who can admit to 'screaming like a school girl' has both my admiration and my pity.

Sorry but I just had to write in to admonish you for that apology.

Mark Foote
Goshen, Indiana

Doh!! And here I just apologized again! Thanks for the letter Mark. You weren't alone. Several readers wrote in to say they took the editorial for what it was. However, I'm not going to fault anyone who took offense to the piece. Apparently there are a lot of people who feel passionately about snakes and I'm more than willing to take my lumps if my words were taken the wrong way. (I've been promised that I'll get an opportunity to meet several snakes at conventions next summer.)

Jolly

I was very pleased to see the (very long) letter from Hilary Doda. I want to thank her for saying a lot of things that go unnoticed by the opposite gender when it comes to gaming. I am a long time gamer and have

since become a wife and mother. I have never, nor do I ever, intend to give up gaming! There was a lot of Hilary's letter that I agreed with...

Like Hilary, I have had a lot of difficulty finding clothed female figures of any class. Reaper has become my favorite producer of minis because they are one of the few companies with a wide selection of what *I'm* looking for. I remember looking for *Scarlett* and *Lady J. G.I. Joe* figures, without luck, too. I can only find *Xena* figures in the toy store among the Barbies, which I find insulting.

I agree with Hilary that a little more gender balance would be appropriate in the flesh-showy posters. I also have to say that switching the gender pronoun every other paragraph drives me nuts! A polite note in the intro. would be fine; we all understand that the masculine pronoun works fine for a general audience. Females won't be slighted by the proper use of grammar.

What I am slighted by is when I walk into a gaming store, clerks either ignore me completely, or they pounce on me to ask if I need help, implying by look and tone that I must be lost. When I walk in with any other male gamer, the clerks speak to him, even if I ask the question! The insinuation that I don't matter because I am female is very insulting.

To potential fellow gamers, I want to say that women are not fragile.

They do not need to be protected and are totally capable of standing up for themselves. When I first joined one gaming group in particular, the guys all started to cut off foul language or refrain from all rude jokes when I was present. My ears are not in danger of burning off from a few swear words and I will not be offended by generalized rude jokes. I will probably appreciate them, knowing that a familiar comfort level has been established. I am not afraid to speak up, and I will let everyone know when the joking gets out of hand. The guys also started wearing cologne. Since I am allergic to it, the joke was on them, since I wound up sitting far away from those gamers. When I come to game, I don't dress-up and I'm not looking for a date. I come to have a good time playing the game.

If you are looking for females to join your gaming group, especially if said females are not familiar with the game, please remember what it's like to be new. The rules can be overwhelming. Guys who know the system inside and out can be very patronizing to others who those who don't. The key is to be helpful without taking over. Provide a dice-rolling cheat sheet and give the new person time to identify the dice, choose it, and roll. Don't just grab the die, plunk it front of her and tell her to roll it; it won't hold any meaning other than a pointless command.

I am very fortunate to work with a group of role players who are interested in plots, and character goals, and interaction between players and NPC's. This is the type of play that females want to participate in. We are

not just interested in rolling the dice, hacking and slashing, raiding and looting. This can be fun some of the time, but gets really pointless after a while.

On a final note, Hilary's comment about a trash can in the bathroom at the gaming store is a good idea. However, I think that asking the gamers to ignore breastfeeding is going too far. When I was breastfeeding, I either arranged for my daughter to be with her grandparents, or I pumped a bottle for her. I know first-hand how uncomfortable some people get around breastfeeding babies. It isn't anything to be ashamed of, but we can make it easier on them.

Thank you for publishing Hilary's letter to let others know how female gamers feel and make them aware of how we are often treated. Thank you for publishing a comic that both sees and shows our point of view through Sara! I love KODT.

Aja Legatz
via E-mail

Thank you for putting out a wonderful magazine. I've noticed there are a lot of imitators popping up out there (and some are blatantly ripping you off!) With the success of KODT I guess that's to be expected but between you are me, they pale in comparison.

The real reason I'm writing is to thank you for Hillary's manifesto. I'm a GM (male) and I'm afraid I'm one of those guys Hillary was talking about. Until one of my players shoved her letter in front of my face and said, "READ!" I had no idea how badly I was making the two female players in my group feel.

I've been allowing my the male players in our campaign to bully the girls by ignoring their suggestions, making calls for their characters, making sexist remarks (in character and out of character) and other wise allowing my table to be a hostile environment (or at the very least an uncomfortable one.)

KODT is just such a great magazine all around but I really hadn't expected it to have a positive impact on my group.

Thanks Hillary!

Troy Hirschfeld



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Price: \$19.⁹⁵



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-- nudge nudge --
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Prices are \$10 for one day. \$15 for the weekend. Free
admission for GM's.

For more info and to register as a GM goto www.wmagg.org
and look for Marmalade Dog Six.

If you have any other questions contact us at;
aris_redwing@yahoo.com

Winter War 28

February 2 - 4, 2001 • Clarion Hotel, Champaign, IL

We had 330 attendees in 2000, and while that was down
slightly from 1999, there were a LOT more people playing
in events - which means even more gamers had fun, and
Winter War was a bigger success than ever!

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Date: February 24-25, 2001

Special Guest: Jolly Blackburn

Location: *University Center, University of North
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Focus: *Roleplaying games, miniatures, trading card
games, and board games*

Registration Fees: \$20 the day of, \$16 pre-registered

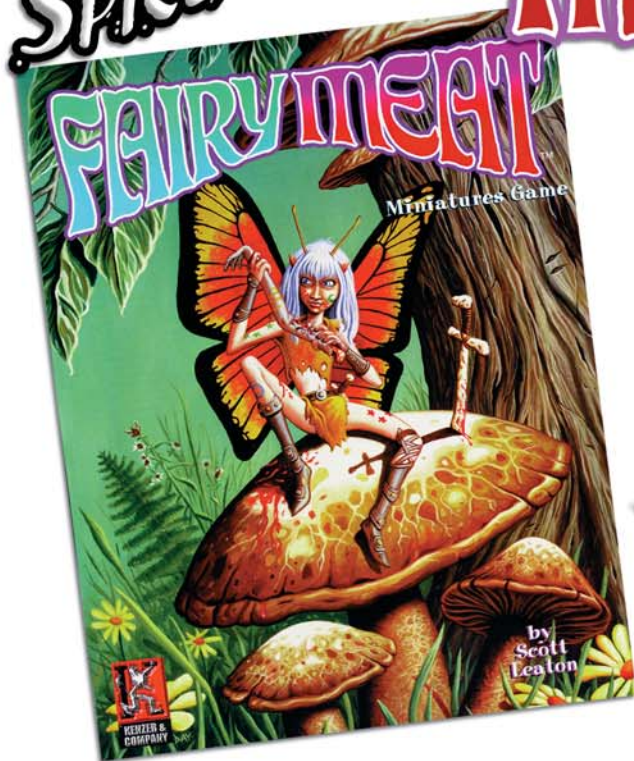
Contact E-mail: info@gameinvasion.net

Web site: www.gameinvasion.net

WEIRD PETE'S BULLETIN BOARD

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

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Miniatures

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Figures come unpainted-- some assembly required

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 huge battles you're staging? The Fairy Meat Components Pack is the answer! Available now for \$9.95.

I thought I had about seen it all. Then I discovered Fairy Meat by Kenzer & Company... 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



**PUBLISHERS!
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REVIEW COPIES TO:**

KODT: BRIAN'S PICKS
Kenzer and Company
25667 Hillview Court
Mundelein, IL 60060

AGE OF EMPIRES II COLLECTIBLE CARD GAME

Journeyman Press • www.journeymanpress.com

Hey listen up all you computer junkies. Journeyman Press has taken Microsoft's smash hit Age of Empires II and turned it into a very entertaining collectible card game. Each player begins the game with a village and three villagers, and a few resources. Then as game play begins you use your villagers to do your bidding. They can be assigned to farm the farm, or work the stone mine, lumber camp, or perhaps the gold mine. They can also be assigned to build your village into a global might. The first age of the game is the *Dark Age*. During the *Dark Age*, your building selection is very poor and your armies are very weak. However, as you establish your village, you can research into the *Feudal Age*. In the *Feudal Age* the game takes on a military strategy feel. Your military units get better, and you have more units to choose from. Also you can research new technologies to make your villagers and military units more productive. The third age of the game is the *Castle Age*. In this age, you can obviously build a castle, and after you build a castle, that will open up some new technologies. Also at this stage of the game siege weapons take on an important role in the destruction of your opponents' village. The final age of the game is the *Imperial Age*. In this age your technologies and units can still improve some, but the cards from this age make minor rule changes to the game. For example, you are able to open a *Bank*, or use *Alchemist* to change your stone into gold, or my



personal game-closing favorite: declare a *Holy War* against your opponent.

The first set comes with five different starting races. They are sold as the five different starter decks. Each race has special race specific abilities. The starter decks are 100 cards each and all the cards are fixed. Also each starter has one booster pack inside. You get a total of 112 cards in a starter box, and the price on these is one of the best in the industry.

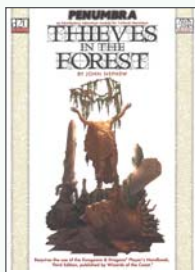
If you liked the computer game, and you like card games, this is a match made in heaven. The game has great balance, and is a very enjoyable game. It is also very playable for someone who has never seen the computer game. Add in the fact that you won't need a second job to pick up all five starters and you have a real winner here.

Brian's Rating: Got to get them all!

PENUMBRA: THIEVES IN THE FOREST

An introductory d20 System adventure • Atlas Games • www.atlas-games.com

This module is yet another released under the "open game license" for Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition. Good stuff! Atlas Games has certainly raised the bar when it comes to quality and bang-for-the-buck. This 24-page adventure was written by John Nephew and is designed for 1st level characters. It includes a glossy double-sided map and is beautifully laid out and illustrated. A bonus is that the maps were created using Profantasy Software's, Campaign Cartographer 2. You can download the maps themselves from Atlas Game's workshop and manipulate the maps to tailor them to fit your own campaign world. Nice touch! We won't spoil any particulars of the adventure. Suffice it to say that this one is definitely worth the cover price.



Brian's Rating: Tally Ho!

COMBAT MISSION • Big Time Software • www.battlefront.com



Above: A T10 Tank Destroyer outflanks a German Panther!



Above: A Tiger and a Panther pass by a flaming T10 unfortunate enough to have gotten in their way. The road to victory is now open.

In the past I've made it a habit of not presenting kewl computer games as part of Brian's Picks. That sort of thing is usually better left to Rick and his Disks of Wondrous Power column. This month, however, I'm going to make an exception for an exceptional game. A few months ago a reader turned me on to the website Battlefront.com where a free demo of their WWII small unit tactics game, *Combat Mission: Operation Overlord* could be downloaded.

"Do yourself a favor," I was told, "Go download this game NOW! You won't be sorry."

Well I did — And I wasn't. This game ROCKS. I can't emphasize that enough -- it ROCKS!! If the heart of a wargamer beats within you this is the game you've been waiting for. Stop what you are doing and download it now! On second thought, don't even bother downloading the demo. Just order the full version. You won't be sorry. (*The game can only be ordered online -- For some reason Big Time Games has decided not to release this game in stores.*)

Basically *Combat Mission* is a small unit tactical game much like the board game *Squad Leader*™ but crammed onto a CD. The 3d game is an amazing breakthrough— a glimpse of the future and of what computer wargaming will become.

Set in the post D-Day Invasion world of Western Europe the game allows you and your opponent (human or computer) to through men, armor and ordinance at each other in a quest to win victory on the battlefield. I really wish I had more space to go into why this game is getting rave reviews and generating so much excitement. Trust me on this one -- check it out. Even if you're not into wargames this game is likely to give you an adrenaline rush.

Brian's Rating: Find it! Grab it!



Grey Ghost Press, Inc.

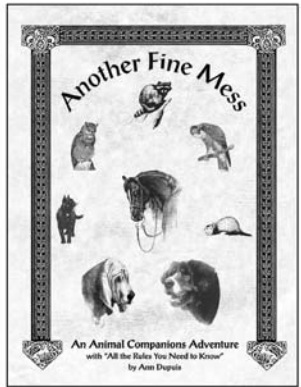
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Another Fine Mess

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- ...after hearing the GM describe the **Ancient Red Dragon** which is blocking your way out of the dungeon you respond with, "I tell him to get his scaly red ass out of my way or I'll kick it from noon to Sunday!"
- ... against the advice of your fellow party members your thief decides to 'sneak up' behind a **Beholder** and backstab it.
- ... you interrupt the GM's introductory flavor text to the adventure he just spent three days preparing and ask, "Can we just skip ahead to the good stuff? I wanna get out of here early to catch the **Buffy** season finale."
- ... you respond to the **demiliche's** demand that you drop your weapons and surrender with, "*Oh yeah? Do you wanna MAKE me, Mister Demi-Bitch??!!*"
- ... after witnessing two of your fellow party members drop dead after taste-testing a vial of potion you grab it and announce, "*Lemme try! I have a 9 Constitution!*"
- ... after carefully considering the twenty-foot wide **River of Fire** which blocks your path, you announce, "*What the hell! If I take off my armor and get a good running start I'm sure I can make it.*"

Overheard at the Table

"I'm going to act like I'm a much higher level than I really am."

"Hold up, guys. Maybe if we play dead they'll turn their attack toward the torchbearer."

"What's the problem?. Rolling a four-sider and a six-sider is the same thing as rolling a ten-sider. Where did you learn to do math, anyway?"

"My armor class is so good I can't even hit myself!"



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got a parting shots of your own?
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Mark Ogilvie sent us this very hack-worthy photo of a gameshop storefront (**Pandemonium**) in Cambridge, MA. The 3D mural was designed/painted by Naomi Kahn of "Sign of the Times". Makes you want to just step right into the action doesn't? If you're in the area go check it out.

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