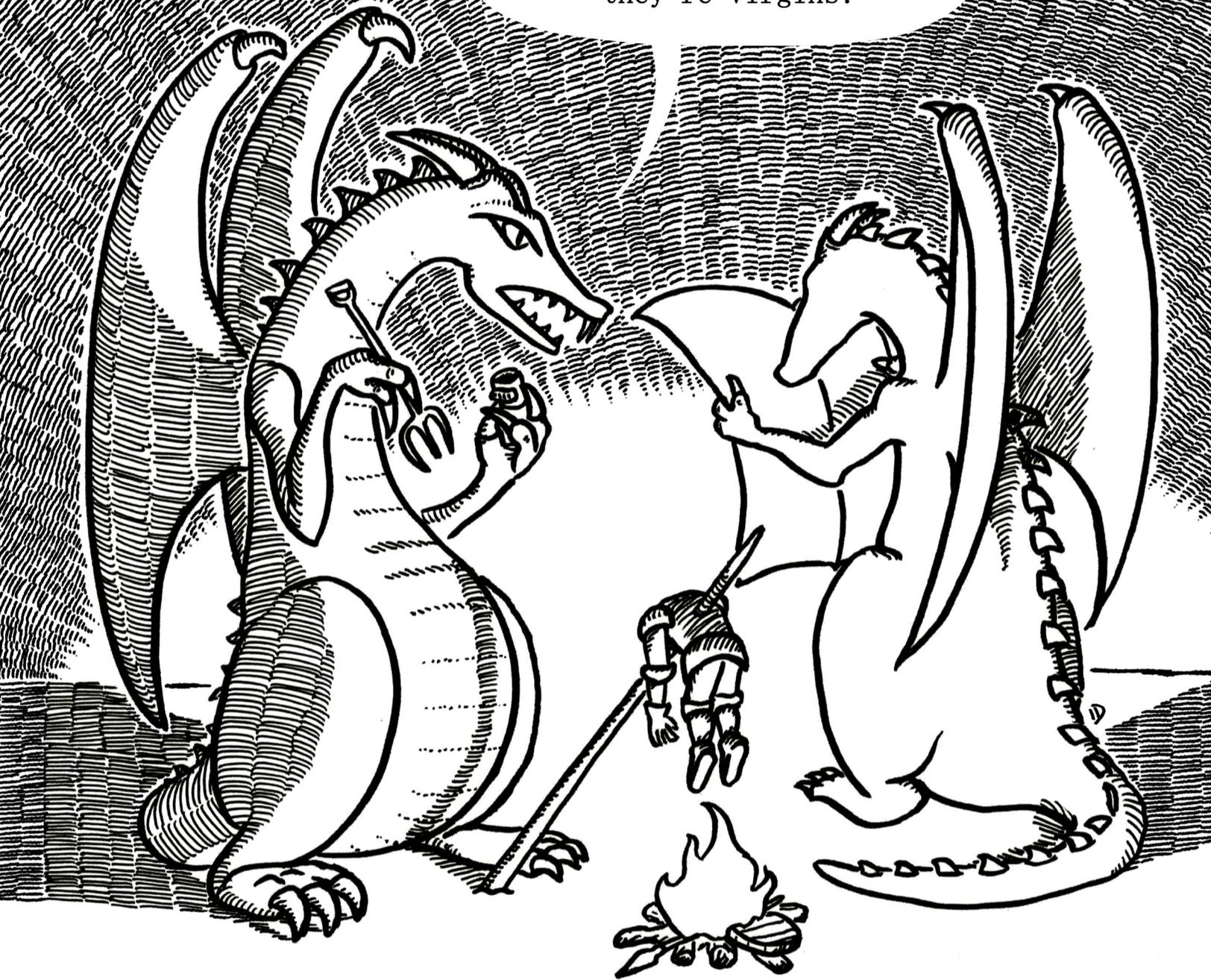


How many are in a month's supply? And how will we know they're virgins?



EVER
&
ANON

Issue #1
July 2025

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Contributor Guidelines:

Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Ever & Anon will be available to the public for free, so matters you don't want publicly known should be discussed elsewhere. Please adhere to all the normal rules of public discourse: no libel, no inciting violence, no infringement of another's copyright or trademark, and no pornography. Zines should use page dimensions of 8.5" x 11" (portrait). Maximum zine length is 16 pages. Maximum length for fiction (other than campaign reports) is 6 pages. Discussion of contemporary politics is discouraged but permitted with a maximum length for political content set at 2 pages. AI-generated artwork is allowed, but AI-generated text is not. If you want to use an AI to help you edit your zine, you may do so. All artwork must be attributed to its creator, whether human or AI, unless it is in the public domain. When you submit your zine to Ever & Anon, you are granting the APA a perpetual, non-exclusive right to publish your zine in a single issue of the APA, meaning that you retain the copyright to your work, and so you can publish it elsewhere, but you cannot force Ever & Anon to unpublish your zine once it has been published.

Contributors may submit their PDF zines via email to apa@everanon.org.

Submission deadlines and Ignorable Themes for the next several issues are as follows:

Issue #2 – July 21st: Do you stat and equip your intelligent and powerful villains who are going to defeat the inferior “heroes”? Why or why not? Does doing or not doing this influence how you run the session/campaign?

Issue #3 – August 21st: What is your playing style or what do you look for in an RPG session?

Issue #4 – September 21st: What are your favorite RPGs to play, run, or just read?

Issue #5 – October 21st: What media (novels, film, anime, etc.) have inspired you vis-à-vis RPGs?

Issue #6 – November 21st: Game conventions: the good, the bad, and the weird.

Ever & Anon emerged with the closing of [Alarums & Excursions](#), an Amateur Press Association run by Lee Gold for nearly fifty years. This community of APAers would not exist if not for her steadfast efforts.

Ever & Anon

Issue #1 – July 2025
Version #2 (Released June 29, 2025)

Table of Contents

Front Cover: “Homage”	1
Front Page	2
Table of Contents	3
What is This?	4
A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #1 – George Phillies	5
Overlord’s Annals (v4n5) – Attronarch	14
Bumblng Through Dungeons #1 (Legacy Issue #61) – Mark A. Wilson	24
Quasipseudoludognostication #1 – Patrick Riley	26
Twisting the Rope #1 – Myles Corcoran	39
Dreadsword #1 – Mitch Hyde	43
De Ludis Elficis Fictis – Pum	57
Bugbears & Ballyhoo #40 – Gabriel Roark	58
The Phoenix Nest #1 – Michael Cule	63
Engines & Emulators #1 – Heath Row	69
The Seedling #48 – Mark Nemeth	78
The Dragon’s Beard #86 – Patrick Zoch	88
Age of Menace #238 – Brian Christopher Misiaszek	94
Traveller PBEM: Plankwell, Ch 46 – Vassilakos, Collinson, and Rader	102

You can use this PDF’s bookmarks to navigate between zines.

The IgTheme for this first issue of E&A is the same as it would have been for A&E #594: *Introducing players to a new rules system, especially to new combat rules.*

Abbreviations & Acronyms You Need to Know:

A&E: Alarums & Excursions	Nextish: Next issue
APA: Amateur Press Association	(N)PC: (Non-)Player Character
BTW: By the way	PBEM: Play-by-Email
d6: a six-sided die	RAE(BNC): Read and enjoyed (but no comment)
2d6: two six-sided dice	Re: Regarding
d4: a caltrop (very dangerous)	RHCT(M): Regarding his/her comment to (me)
E&A: Ever & Anon	RPG: Role-playing game
Frex: For example	RYCT(M): Regarding your comment to (me)
FTF: Face-to-face (aka TTRPG)	RYQT(M): Regarding your question to (me)
IgTheme: Ignorable theme	TTRPG: Tabletop role-playing game (aka FTF)
IIRC: If I recall correctly	WRT: With respect to / With regard to
IM(H)O: In my (humble) opinion	YMMV: Your mileage may vary
LARP: Live Action Role Playing	Zine: A writer’s contribution

Our front cover is by “Idle Doodler” (see <https://therecouldhavebeensnakes.wordpress.com/>) and is based on A&E #1’s cover by Jack Harness (see <https://rpggeek.com/image/2732509/alarums-and-excursions-issue-1-jun-1975>).

What is This?

A Newbie's Guide to APAs

Q: What is this?

A: An APA.

Q: What's an APA?

A: An Amateur Press Association.

Q: What's that?

A: A collection of zines. It can also refer to the community of people writing the zines.

Q: What's a zine?

A: A fanzine. A small, amateur magazine usually distributed for free or at cost.

Q: So this is a collection of free fanzines written by amateurs?

A: Exactly.

Q: And each one has a separate author?

A: Right.

Q: But I see the same names appearing again and again throughout.

A: Those are comments. We comment on each others zines. When you see "Joshua Kronengold: blah-blah-blah..." that's a comment to Joshua Kronengold.

Q: And everyone is doing all this for free?

A: Yes. It's like a cocktail party, but all written out. Come join us, if you like.

Amateur Press Associations date back to the late 1800s and started to become popular among fantasy and science fiction enthusiasts during the 1930s.¹ Alarums & Excursions was the first APA formed specifically to cover roleplaying games.²

*"Each contributor would send in their zine, and then Lee would edit, collate, and distribute. Contributors would often address each other in their contributions, thus creating a community. At the time when there were no blogs nor forums, this was huge."*³

Q: But now there are blogs and various online forums, so why do APAs still exist?

A: Because one type of forum isn't necessarily any better or worse than the others. One advantage of the APA model is longevity. Because they have multiple contributors and don't rely on making money, APAs are more durable than individual blogs or traditional magazines. Also, because websites come and go, whatever is posted online will probably eventually vanish into the electronic ether. But whatever is put into a publication that can be downloaded and archived is more likely to survive due to the sheer fact that multiple copies will exist. And the back issues become an indelible record of what people used to think. They provide insight into a world that used to be.

Referring to Alarums & Excursions, Mark Rein-Hagen writes, *"Each issue was a revelation—raw theory, wild invention, fierce debates on the soul of gaming—all stitched together by the indomitable Lee Gold, whose work made that scattered fellowship feel like a living conversation."*⁴

Q: Who is Lee Gold?

A: She founded Alarums & Excursions, creating a forum, perhaps the first forum, specifically for the discussion of roleplaying games. Then she continued to run A&E for nearly fifty years. It's an extraordinary legacy, and she's the reason this community of APAers exists.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amateur_press_association

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alarums_and_Excursions

3 <https://attronarch.com/goodbye-to-alarums-and-excursions-apa>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/Reinhagen/posts/pfbid0nXr6bkZU8V28t2xMHvq5CKgpTGfLX35yU3VBAjuwTgQps8gX9CZDcbHZFc5VpYn6l>

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade

A Parade of Boasters and Braggarts
June 2025 -- Issue 1

From George Phillis
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I offer a short contribution to Ever and Anon. I finish by invitation of the collator with the cover and collation page of *A Gentle Stroll*, the other new rolegaming APA. Please do not expect the cover and collation material to repeat.

I open with a few biographical notes, followed by a discussion of Dungeons and Dragons, as interpreted locally where I was in 1974. Following my rules discussion is a piece of a roleplaying environment. You are seeing the background hidden from the players. At the end, there is a long tradition of publishing fiction in rolegaming APAs. I have summoned a piece of fiction that appeared at a very early date, something that I wrote.

My relevant background: I started on board wargaming in 1958 with Avalon Hill's Tactics II. I played my first computer game, Space War, in 1963 or so, on the original PDP-1 using what I was told was the first computer joystick. The next year I founded the MIT Strategic Games Society. A few years later, I joined the International Federation of Wargaming, with magazine IFW Monthly. It later added a quarterly magazine that published board wargames such as Vicksburg, and single-game magazines such as The Stalingrad Review and Domesday Book. The IFW collapsed in 1973, but several friends continued to publish boardgames and miniatures rules. Of particular interest here, friends Gary and Dave published a set of Variant Rules to their Chainmail rules. The variant, Dungeons and Dragons, incorporated magic and Tolkien mythology. Writing in The American Wargamer, I announced within the year that D&D was not a set of miniatures rules. It was an entirely new branch of the wargaming hobby, to rank with board wargames, miniatures, and diplomatic games. I was not generally believed, but some people would now say that I was right. You can read much more in the books by Jon Peterson, notably *Playing at the World* (second edition, MIT Press, two volumes).

The 1974 rules give a modest description of combat, lists of spells, and cursory references to the three character classes, but leave the world and the adventures to the creativity of the gamesmaster. Prepackaged world environments for less imaginative gamesmasters were in the future, and for gamesmasters with no idea of what to do there eventually appeared scenario packs in which the players were bound to march along a single path, deviations from the trail of events being forbidden.

We return to the games and rules of decades past, in particular to the first edition of Dungeons & Dragons. In my experience, most gamesmasters and players viewed the rules as something over which a game could be spread, with the understanding that rules were optional or to be interpreted as seemed most appropriate to give a good game. Thus, when an early gamesmaster I interacted with thought that it would be interesting to have combat that was basically men at arms and men on horses, with a very few low-level magicians to change things slightly. If you entered his campaign as a first level, you started with your platoon of followers, as though you were a junior son of some noble going out on an adventure. Some of the rules, for example the requirement that clerics had to be men, were viewed as a characteristic of a specific campaign.

The price list came in for early criticism. The price of a bud of garlic, five gold pieces, matched the price of standard rations for one week for one person, which possibly would include, for example, five or 8 pounds of garlic kielbasa. The re-interpretation I recall was that the price of bread for a week, this being ten or more loaves, would be perhaps a copper penny or two, the price of the cheese to go with it and the price of the small beer or poor wine to go with it would be three or five copper pieces each, and so forth. There would be an exchange rate between copper pieces and silver pieces and gold pieces, with several people having knowledge of medieval times noting that in period Central European gold and silver coins had the interesting feature that they did not contain any gold or silver. Those metals were very rare. A more familiar exchange rate might have been twenty to one or 30 to 1.

So, to launch the game, you started rolling three D6 for the six character attributes and then once again for how much money you started with. There was a presumption that a fighting man would start with a sword and at least leather armor, and would plausibly also start with a spear or standard bow. The price of arrows was extremely high in some campaigns. The redistribution rules between the three primary attributes, military ability, magical ability, and piety, however named, were perhaps incomplete. The simplification with which I was familiar was that

you could move points from one attribute to an adjoining attribute with a 2 to 1 ratio, and could move points between military ability and piety at a 3 to 1 ratio. Thus, for example, the implausible person who managed to roll natural eighteens on all three attributes could rearrange points into magical ability from the two sides. A common understanding was that you could not reduce an attribute to lower than 9, so that eighteen points being rearranged became nine additional points added to the magical ability, so you ended up with the magician with the magical ability of twenty-seven. There were a variety of other interpretations of the same rule.

At some point you collected together some number of players, and had a gamesmaster who suggested things that you could do. The simple original version was that you went down into a dungeon. The economic rationale for dungeons was not always clear, though I do recall the dungeon Hellsgate run by a friend of mine. It was said of Hellsgate that you could readily emerge from Hellsgate as a fourth level character with a dozen magic items and six thousand gold pieces, assuming you went into Hellsgate as a sixth level character with two dozen magical items, twenty thousand gold pieces, and an army of five dozen men. The dungeons were a profit operation for the monsters.

At some point along the way, and credit should be given to Greg Stafford and Runequest, it occurred to people that randomly going into unlit dungeons was not very interesting and that there should be some universe in which random dungeon delving turned into campaigns with objectives. There were people who created their own worlds. There were people who were aware of the world, borrowed a chunk of it and ran campaigns in some piece of it. Then there were the bottom feeders, the lowest of the low when the opinion of serious gamesmasters, who had absolutely no idea how to set up a campaign or even an event, so they had to read from a pamphlet that gave the players more or less no choice in what they did. The more or less no choice feature has persisted into modern times, where I have been lectured by a computer game design expert that each level was absolutely required to have precisely three serious opponents and at the and one very serious opponent. These rules took a significant part of the thought out of the game design effort.

Tactics were sometimes quite limited. I recall the friend of mine describing watching a group of players attack a reasonably well defended stronghold, and losing their entire party without managing to get through the first room beyond the gate. The friend proposed to rerun the event. He would suggest to the players what they should do at each point. The players thought this was a great idea. After somewhat less long than you would expect,

the players entirely cleaned out the entire stronghold and captured the treasure. In the process of doing so they suffered approximately no wounds, took almost no damage to their equipment, and had the gamesmaster saying "Not fair! Not fair!".

Once upon a time we did set up a historical miniatures game, using cardboard rectangles not toy soldiers, and fought out a battle using the standard English medieval miniatures rules. However, each side had three first-level magicians and three fifth-level magicians. There was no indication in the rules book as to how often the magician could throw a spell, so we assumed that once per combat round was adequate. It very soon became clear that the game most closely resembled a recreation of the battle of the Somme, except that both sides were out in the open. At the end, I had the one surviving third-level magician and the one surviving first-level magician, the other side had a superb pike formation unit of the quality that was trained to advance while in square, except they couldn't possibly get away with from my magicians, so they surrendered. I am happy to admit that my victory was dumb luck. I could perfectly well have lost instead of won.

For my slightly later fiction, I emphasized that infantry advanced with a shovel for each man, entrenchment and missile weapons were the order of the day, and a good medieval castle would've been recognized by Vauban except that the embankments were a bit thicker. Vauban was the French Marshall who was recognized as the supreme expert on the art of siege warfare. Recall, however, in fairness to Vauban, that his cannon might get off a cannonball within fifteen or 20 degrees of the aim direction, so that to pound a hole in a fortress wall you had to close to within fifty or 75 yards with the cannon, but a lightning bolt would create a 1 inch diameter (game inch, that's ten feet real world) hole with an additional depth of 10 feet, real world. Boring holes in castle walls became much easier.

A good campaign would present the players with a series of layers of mystery and challenge, with the players at first not necessarily knowing what the problem is, let alone what they are to do to solve it.

Setting the Tone

A gamesmaster setting the tone for a new campaign may well want to populate enough background that he can respond to unexpected player decisions. The tone also populates the sort of challenges that the players may encounter. Oft-times, the challenge is kept a secret from the players, something for them to find as the campaign advances.

So here we have a bit of background, opening to an unfinished novel *Small Giant Class Liberation Army*. After all, many rolegaming societies are positively medieval, in many of the less fortunate senses of that word.

“Comrade Captain,” the quiet voice came out of the early twilight, “another li ahead. I found the cave. The villager from Three Peach Trees pointed at it, then fled in terror.”

Captain Chingfei Chang paused to catch her breath. “Don’t stop,” she said to the men behind her. “Follow Wang to the cave. I will bring up the rear.” She tried not to grind her teeth. This was her first independent command, her first chance to strike a blow against the Japanese invaders in this, the Great War of the Resistance, and so far matters were doing poorly. It appeared that the local commander of the Chiang Kai-Shek clique had betrayed her, either for profit or because he was looking beyond the current war to the final struggle for control of all China. In this year 1939, both of those times seemed infinitely far off, not that she expected to live to see either of them.

“But, Comrade Captain,” Sergeant Enlai Liu began his expected protest.

“Enough! We are leaving no one behind. I will stand at the rear. The men will know they cannot straggle, or they will endanger me. But, you four, wait here. Switch off with the stretcher bearers when they bring Comrade Zhou.”

“You will wait? Then I will lead the way,” Sergeant Liu answered. “Be sure you are not captured by the Japanese running dogs. Save your last round for yourself.”

“And spare the life of some Japanese officer?” she answered, not quite angrily. “Absolutely not. Besides, I can hear their horns, far in the distance. If it becomes dark, they may lose us. It will rain soon. That will clean our trail before dawn. Now, revolutionary discipline! Go!”

A quarter hour later, Chingfei reached the mouth of the cavern. Her men were indeed all ahead of her. The cave was tall enough she could walk in, which must, she thought, have been a relief for the four men carrying the stretcher. The sun had now set; it was almost full darkness. Out from the mouth of the cave came an eerie glow, a deep violet almost impossible to see.

She stepped inside. The light was much brighter, enough that she could see her men, sitting in a circle talking quietly.

“Hush,” she said. “The Japanese could hear you. How deep is the cave?”

“Comrade Captain, I just came back from checking. It goes back a hundred yards. There is one sharp turn. The cave floor is covered with sand, good walking. Comrade Zhou is already being carried back

there. But the cave end is very strange. There is a wall of glass.”

“The rest of you follow Comrade Zhou,” Chingfei ordered. “Do we still have the sweeps?”

“Yes, Comrade Captain!” Sergeant Liu answered.

“Carefully and very thoroughly hide our tracks in the sand. The Japanese may yet decide we are not here,” Chang said. “The rest of you, be on your way.”

Chang sniffed the air. There was an odd scent, like unfamiliar out-of-season flowers, on this cold late-fall night. Behind her, screams could be heard. The Japanese must have captured the villager. It would be unfortunate if he led the Japanese to the cave, but there really had been no obvious alternative hiding place. The terrain was much too open to hide. The Japanese were fresh, while her men were exhausted; if they kept running, they would soon enough be run to ground. Besides, her orders had been to find a secure base camp location, invisible from the air. A cave surely qualified.

The cave actually twisted and turned. After the second bend her men had come to an exhausted halt. Most of them were already asleep. A few of the most alert were posted as sentries, peering between rocks at the cave entrance.

“Captain, there is an extraordinary wall,” Sergeant Liu said. “And a narrow passage deeper into the hill. I sent Wang and Li, with our lantern and stern orders not to use it, to see where it leads. It seems to lead nowhere. There is an abrupt end. But with this wall glow, you don’t need a lamp. You can easily see where you are going.” He gestured politely for her to follow.

The wall, she thought, was indeed remarkable. It was absolutely flat, with the feel of a glass window. When she pressed her face against it, there seemed to be a light on the far side. Someone was behind her.

“Comrade Captain?” Liu spoke as quietly as possible. “There are Japanese soldiers at the cave mouth. They are looking in but not entering. One of them seems to have a flashlight. He is looking carefully at the sand.”

“Let us be as quiet and still as a mouse,” she said. Liu led her back to the bend in the cave. She carefully peeked around the edge. A Japanese officer, sword drawn, was leading a dozen of his men forward. Inescapably, her men would be found.

“Comrade Sergeant,” she said, “Wake all the men. Very soon we will be fighting the Japanese.”

“I know you are there!” the Japanese officer called. “Come out and I will give you an honorable and rapid death.”

Chang pressed finger to lips. The Japanese officer shouted something to his men. Shots rang out. Objects clattered against the far cave wall. Rifle grenades! Chang threw herself at the ground. The concussion of several explosions left her dazed and half-

deafened. Must stand, and lead, she thought distantly. But what was 'stand'? Shouts had to be Sergeant Liu leading the men in a desperate counter charge. Someone was firing the machine gun. She passed out.

She awoke to find Liu sponging her face with a damp cloth. "Comrade Captain?" Sergeant Liu asked. "Are you awake?"

"I, Yes," she answered. "What happened?"

"You were knocked unconscious," Liu answered. "We killed ten Japanese, and took their weapons. But we are trapped. They have another machine gun outside. We lost three men trying to reach it. It cannot be done. They tried another charge. We slaughtered them like chickens. Now we hear them doing something, but cannot say what. Outside it is dawn. They cannot see in. I have men building entrenchments across the width of the cave. If they attack, we will kill them."

"However, if they cannot enter, we cannot leave. Is there any water to be found?" she asked.

"Unfortunately, no, Comrade Captain," Sergeant Liu answered.

"Then they will not be waiting for very long," she answered. "We shall hold out as long as we can. Perhaps something will happen to change the balance of forces. Until then, make a diligent search for other exits. Dig holes. See how deep the sand lies. Perhaps there is a hidden exit. Perhaps we can find water. The search will at least keep the men busy."

Shifting shadows from the cave mouth marked the passage of hours. Very clearly, the cave had only one exit, the one blocked by Japanese guns. Captain Chang kept searching for alternatives, but it appeared that the only choice was to charge into a machine gun nest. That could be tried in the deep of the night, as quietly as possible to avoid warning the Japanese, but even with those tactical advantages a charge into machine gun fire remained a path to certain death.

Now the Japanese outside were shouting again. What was it? A roar shook the cavern. Another shock wave knocked Chang from her feet. There came the crash of falling rock and a cloud of dust. A look toward the cave entrance revealed only darkness. The Japanese had planted explosives and closed the cave mouth. Perhaps they could dig their way out, she thought, before they asphyxiated.

"Comrade Captain Chang," Sergeant Liu called. "The explosion. It shattered the glass wall. There is light on the far side." Chang wept with relief. She had been convinced that death was certain, but at the last moment hope had returned.

"Comrade Sergeant." Chang used her command voice. "We need to be out of here quickly. Collect all the men and their equipment, be sure the wounded are all helped to move, and be ready to advance. I will take Ching and Wang, and reconnoiter the exit. If possible

we will set up outside the exit to ambush Japanese forces attempting to trap us again." Next time, she thought, I will be a little more careful about thinking of a cave as a safe hiding place. "Ching, Wang, follow me."

The glass had shattered into a million pieces. In the distance Chang could see sunlight. In between? "Ching, Wang, those are stairs, and cut stone. There must be a village ahead of us." What sort of people build paths into caves? she wondered. People who have eased the passage of your stretcher-bearers, it would appear.

The cave's exit was well up on a mountainside. Behind her was a steep stone cliff. They had emerged at one end of a tall steep spine of rock. From her vantage point, she could see three-quarters of the distant horizon. Far below were heavy forests and what appeared in the distance to be farmer's fields. A broad river edged with wide fields made its way entirely around the mountain, approaching from the southwest, looping to the east, and disappearing to the west. At several points, thin columns of smoke suggested small villages. In the far distance a white tower, stone, she thought, and remarkably tall, rose through the trees. Chang jogged her mental map. Surely there was no river that large locally? However, she could see it clearly, not to mention the paved road that ran parallel to it. She gestured for a pause and listened. She heard no sounds from Japanese soldiers, no gunfire, and certainly not an observation airplane circling overhead. "Ching," she whispered, "Go back and tell Comrade Sergeant Liu that I said to bring everyone and everything out of the cave. Comrade Peng Wang, creep forward to the edge of the hill and see if you see anything between us and the forest."

Ever so slowly, Captain Chang's men crept out of the cave into the bright air. Wang returned to report.

"Comrade Captain," Wang said, "there is a gentle slope with more stairs. I looked carefully with the big binoculars. Near the river, a distance inland from the road, there are three small villages. They are very strange. They each have stockade and fields with people working in them. The clothing is odd, all different colors. To the southwest along the road, approaching, it looks like a troop of cavalry, all wearing garish colors, not at all like Japanese or Kuomintang army uniforms."

"No one move!" Sergeant Liu shouted. "Airplane!"

Captain Chang froze, then slowly turned her head to where Liu was pointing. She had seen airplanes before, several times, but this one was completely different. There was absolutely no sound. "Binoculars," she whispered to Wang. Seen through the binoculars, the airplane was a colorful rectangle, with no signs of wings or tail. Gradually it descended. Something seemed to be moving on top of it, but it was just too far away to make out clearly. To her eyes, it appeared to be flying to the

white tower. After a few minutes it faded into the distance.

“Was it a Japanese bomber?” Liu asked. “I did not recognize it.”

“Nor did I,” Chang said. “It didn’t even look like an airplane.” She described what she had seen.

“Comrade Captain?” Corporal Chuntao Wu had waited politely for her Captain. “Over the side of the hill to the left, a hundred yards down. There is a stream coming off the mountain, and what looks to be dry wood for a fire.”

“Very good! Cooks! Go with Chuntao, and if there is enough dry wood for a smokeless fire, let us boil enough rice for a solid meal.” Captain Chang pointed, and two men joined Wu in heading down the slope. “The rest of you take the stairs down to the bottom of the hill. Comrade Sergeant Liu, Apothecary Tseng, Comrade Wang, Comrade Ching, stay here.” She waited while her men headed down slope. She was pleased to see that they remembered to put someone on point, fifty yards ahead of the rest of the group. “Comrade Tseng, how is Comrade Zhou doing?”

Tseng’s shoulders sank. “I have done everything I know how to do,” he answered. “I do not have any magic western medicines. He might do better if he were allowed to rest, not be moved, but I think it will not be more than a day or two before we must bury him.”

Chang frowned. Zhou had been a brave soldier, perhaps too brave, and had attended lectures by the great leaders of the People’s Army. He had met Comrade Mao himself. More than anyone else, he understood how to carry out their mission. “Do what you can,” she said. “There are no magicians or miracle cures. Go with your patient.” She pointed down the hill.

“Comrade Wang,” she continued, “take the small binoculars. Go to the slope overlooking the stream. Keep an eye for approaching soldiers.” He headed off. “Comrade Ching, back inside the cave. If the Japanese reopen the entrance, shoot at them to warn us.

“Comrade Sergeant?” Chang faced her second-in-command.

“Yes, Comrade Captain?” Liu snapped to attention.

“I did not say anything that would confuse our men,” Chang said. “But there is something strange here. Surely the cliff and mountains behind us are much larger than the hills we were approaching yesterday.”

“I noticed this, and said nothing. For the same reason. And over there, in the distance, surely that is snow on the top of the mountain?” He pointed.

“Yes. And that river below us is very big,” she said.

“I agree, Comrade Captain.”

“So where on earth are we? That cave was deep, but not that deep.” Her question was not rhetorical.

“Also,” Liu said, “when you let me look through the telescope at that very distant troop of cavalry. There are no such uniforms. Those men look like peacocks.”

“I considered this.” She shrugged. “Then I remembered. They look like Japanese, in samurai medieval armor. I had not realized that the Japanese are that reactionary. It is amazing.”

“Perhaps you should join our men,” Liu suggested. “They may have noticed the mountain, and are too afraid of you to speak. With the telescope, I will keep watch on the Japanese. If anything changes, I will send Wang down to tell you.”

“I agree. It is very fortunate that the people entrusted us with two binoculars, a telescope, and a Type 11 machine gun. It is even more fortunate that I have you as my first sergeant.” Chang nodded emphatically.

Liu snapped a sharp salute. “The Comrade Captain is most kind. I will do my best to serve the people and live up to your words.” Chang headed down the stairs.

Fiction

Fiction has long been a steadfast component of rolegaming APAs. I could search more vigorously, but the following is the opening section of **No Tears for a Princess**, which was at least one of the first pieces of fiction to appear in a rolegaming APA. If I recall correctly, it was sent both to *The Wild Hunt* and to *Alarums and Excursions*.

It was written sometime in the period 1974-1978, when the surprise reveal at the end was far more radical than it would be seen to be in the current epoch.

No Tears for a Princess

Strive not, good sir, 'gainst stormy wave,
Nor cry my name 'neath star-topped nave,
For Death stalks me with wand and stave
To seal my soul in stoneclogged cave.

So shed no tears for princess brave
Who knows she goes to unmarked grave
But still will ride, her land to save.

...The Ballad of Three Princes

Opening...

The river Tressin, half-a-mile broad, flowed majestically into the setting sun. Its northern bank was dotted with trees, red and yellow in the frost-touched fall air. Arburg-am-Tressin, largest city in thirty leagues, brooded on its southern shore. The city's gray walls jutted out into the water, oblivious to the rumble and groan of the currents at their base.

Two guards, looking cautiously across the river, waited on a stone parapet. They chatted nervously about nothing in particular, scarcely aware of their own words. From time to time they peered furtively over their shoulders. Behind them, to their right, rose a series of small watchtowers. To their left, the parapet ended in a granite-tiled plaza, the city's farthest projection into the river. A pair of blue-robed mages waited on the further wall, continually pausing in their conversation to look down the parapet beyond the guards.

A single figure came briskly up a distant stair. A deep hood and plain green cloak concealed body and face, but failed to hide the long stride and broad shoulders. The two guards glanced knowingly at its approach, then moved in front of their tower, out of the figure's line of sight. The magicians pretended to maintain a conversation, each struggling not to look elsewhere than the other's face.

The figure strolled along the parapet, slowly nearing the plaza. A slant of cloak suggested a stare across the river, as if the newcomer were admiring the wilderness. Finally, moving quietly, the figure passed the guard tower and stepped onto the terrace. The magicians turned away, to begin a stroll along the further parapet. One gestured with a wand; the other mouthed an incantation as though testing his memory.

As on previous evenings, the figure stopped to watch the sun set. One guard reached backwards, ever so slightly, to release the tower door. Three figures in dull black -- black slippers, black trousers, black tunics, black capes and masks -- slipped silently from the guardhouse. One held a massive cudgel; the others waved tawdry short-swords. Three figures in black stalked one in green, closing on padded, spell-silenced feet.

Cudgel-bearer swung his weapon down at the green hood. His target lurched forward at the blow. A clatter of wood on metal revealed a helm hidden under the cloth. Cudgel-bearer cursed. Reversing his weapon's swing, he smashed green across ribs and back. Green skidded over the smooth-polished stone, finally rolling to peer skywards. Black ran in pursuit. One swordsman went to each side of their prey. Black dropped his cudgel, producing in the same fluid motion a dagger. His cloak swirled raven-dark as he pounced on his victim. The knife stabbed down.

The swordsmen saw Green's long fingers snap up, taking Black's knife hand at the wrist. The cloak draped over both of them, shrouding prey and predator alike. A convulsive motion of the cloak was the knife stabbing down again and again. The movement stopped. The

swordsmen relaxed, grinning at each other. It had been a delicate job, in which their part was now accomplished.

The guardsmen stood at attention. The junior wished that he were elsewhere, no matter that he would gain a promotion for his deeds this day. He had heard the thud of a club, the ring of metal on metal, and finally a solid splash from the river below. He counted the seconds and turned, knowing he would find a vacant stone plaza.

Three black figures lay in ever-widening scarlet lakes. The mages, returned to the plaza, gestured at the senior of the guards. "Tell the Master!" one of them snapped. The junior guard peered over the wall. He thought he saw a disturbance in the water, nearly lost in the sparkle from the setting sun. He tried not to hear what happened behind him.

The senior guard scurried down the stairs, dodging temporary barricades held by his own men, to enter the city's heart. His run took him through winding streets, past tradesmen on their business, past taverns and homes. His boots pounded on the cobbled pavement, their rhythm punctuated by the wheeze of his breathing. He ignored jugglers, quarreling hobgoblins, a sorcerer's gracious arrival on flying carpet. A collision with the pushcart of a trollish street hawker sent fruit rolling in all directions; he ran on, ignoring the curses directed at his back.

Castle gates loomed before him. Barely breaking stride, the guard drew an amulet from one pocket; sentries gave way at its sight. A final sprint down carpeted hallways brought him to a double door. Four halberdiers stood at the ready, blocking all entrance. They peered momentarily at the guardsman, then stood aside. The guard knocked thrice and swung one door open.

Within waited a solitary man in black and ermine. Gold lace on his coat accented a blond van Dyke and trimly cut hair. His rigid demeanor matched the dark, deeply carved furniture and tapestried walls. Lips curled upwards when he recognized the guardsman. "Is it done, Grand-Captain?" he whispered as the door swung shut.

The runner gasped a single phrase: "Alive, M'Lord Duke."

The blond face contorted in fury. "Damnation!" he shouted. A black and gold arm threw a wine goblet in an arc. It spun through the air, crystal sides gleaming, to shatter against the farther wall. "A thousand gold crowns! Gone! Wasted!" The Duke's fist smote the table, once and again, harder and harder. "May the Curse of Al-Benzir be on that one!" He sank dejectedly into his chair. "Summon my advisors again. There must

be a way. This affront to my dignity can not be permitted to endure."

* * * * *

North of the Tressin, a green-cloaked figure stood in the shallows, still gasping for breath. A plain unpatterned cape hung soddenly around broad shoulders and narrower waist. The figure clambered up the bank, mud squishing under bare feet. Sandals lay discarded in the depths of the river.

On shore the figure stopped. Lean fingers undid a throat clasp. One arm gathered the cloak, while the other reached to the waist. The hood fell back, revealing a dented steel-lined helm with short nose guard. A single touch confirmed that the short-sword was still secure in its scabbard.

The figure looked back over the water. Arburg-am-Tressin sat placidly in the distance. The sun's rays reflected brilliantly from tower windows, leaving the river an inky blue. Birds soared and dipped above the current, their feathers tinged pink by the setting sun. A tilt of the head released the helm, which joined the still-dripping cloak over a well-muscled arm.

Her hair fell back to hang golden-brown across her neck. One hand cleared stray locks from sea-green eyes. A gleaming line of chain mail rose above her collar. Seen without the cloak, her dark green tunic clung to her armour, revealing the slight curves of her body. She looked perhaps sixteen. Her mouth pursed, reflecting not so much fear as a touch of sadness. She pushed hair clear of the nape of her neck and probed gingerly where the club had struck her helm. A further poke at her ribs evinced a grimace of pain. As the sun set, she turned from the river and disappeared into the woods.

* * * * *

A Gentle Stroll

June 2025 — Issue One



A Boat to Golden Island
by Tiffanie Gray

Collation File

Front Cover ... Boat to the Golden Isle ... Tiffanie Gray

Collation File ... The Collator Supreme ... 1

Welcome to A Gentle Stroll ... George Phillies ... 1

Ronin Engineer for Unknown Zine #1 ... Jim Eckman ... 2

Messages from the Zhalindorian Embassy ... Dr. Rich Staats ... 3

Writing Fiction Through Play-by-Email ... Jim Vassilakos ... 2

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade ... George Phillies ... 7

Our experiment: After this first issue, A Gentle Stroll subscriptions are opt-in, not opt-out. After this first issue, you must ask to be subscribed to A Gentle Stroll, though the zine will also appear on the N3F web pages, with a rare issue mailed to all members.

Subscriptions: For the first six issues, A Gentle Stroll is free. After that, unless we end the project, contributors will be charged \$6 per year and be recognized as voting members of N3F (there is no obligation to vote or participate in other N3F activities). Readers are charged nothing. Contributors and readers have to opt-in to receive A Gentle Stroll. Contributors and readers also get to choose: (1) Receive only A Gentle Stroll and a rare issue of our other zines. (2) Receive all N3F fanzines.

General rules: Publication is monthly. Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Discussions of contemporary politics and graphic pornography will be rejected. Recall that A Gentle Stroll will appear with our other zines on our web pages, so matters you would not want seen by the public should go elsewhere. Please email PDFs of your zines to the collator, George Phillies, phillies@4liberty.net, by the first day of the month. Collation and distribution will occur soon thereafter.

OVERLORD'S ANNALS

ATTRONARCH, THE EXALTED OVERLORD OF UNCONTESTED VASTLANDS

VOLUME 4 · ISSUE 5 · JULY 2025

IN THIS ISSUE

OVERLORD'S ANNALS is a monthly zine in which I share session reports from games I either run or have participated in. Sometimes I also share our house rules and other reflections too. Art is primarily from players—see attributions for details.

July issue is the first one published in the newly established *Ever & Anon APA*, the spiritual successor to long running Alarums & Excursions APA. In this issue I present three session reports from the *Conquering the Barbarian Altanis* Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

Adventurers get to know the Den intimately.

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS CAMPAIGN

I'm running a weekly online D&D B/X game focused on hexcrawling and dungeon delving in the Wilderlands of High Fantasy Barbarian Altanis—a hostile land filled with ancient riches and antediluvian evils.

You can learn more about our campaign at: <https://attronarch.com/wilderlands>

Beginners and experienced players welcome alike. Write to me at attronarch@mailbox.org if you'd like to join.

ATTRIBUTIONS

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CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 76

Adventurers

Rashomon, *elf level 2*. A dangerous looking elf.

Llyfed, *elf level 3*. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Nolmbork, *dwarf level 2*. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Orist, *elf level 1*. An elf.

Derennan, *dwarf level 3*. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Rah, *cleric level 2*. A follower of Molna, God of Travellers, whom has an opinion about everything.

Gloomfrost 4th, Fireday

"Cursed?! Of course it is cursed, the damned thing is called 'Doomed!' What else would it be?! YOU KNEW THAT AND YOU TOOK IT ANYWAY?!"

Tangay's mocking tone still rang true in Rashomon's ears. To add insult to injury, the word had spread in Hara like wildfire.

Not only has the elf become laughingstock of everyone at the Wizards' Guild, but also of commoners as well. It seemed like everyone snickered and giggled at Rashomon.

Mavis the Magnificent, Poseidon's High Priestess, whom is capable of raising dead is most certainly capable of removing curses as well.

Prayers to the God of Sea weren't sufficient—a donation of 4 500 gp is required as well.

So here he was, back at the den, with Llyfed, Nolmbork, Orist, Derennan, and Rah, newly recruited human cleric.

They spotted a gang of dog-headed humanoids descending into the dungeon the night before.

Now it was their turn to go down.

Corpses from the entrance chamber were gone.

The party turned left, left at the junction, and then broke into the chamber they've been passing until now.

Stench of death permeated the room. Six maggot-infested goblin corpses were strewn about the chamber.

Party closed the doors and moved down the corridor, took another left turn, and through yet another doors.

"Huh?"

A twenty by twenty feet bare chamber with a plate-sized hole in the center and doors on the opposite side.

Peeking through the doors revealed four large interlinked circles carved into the north wall.

After deploying a number of safety precautions, the party traversed the room without any loss.

Now they entered into the many-doored chamber they've been to before—the one with a painting of robed man reading many books at once.

Derennan ordered the painting to be wrapped and taken for identification in Hara.

Pushing on, adventurers found themselves in yet another long corridor. Darkness to the left, darkness to the right; left one seemed more attractive.

Another t-shaped junction, splitting right and forward.

"Let's check doors to the right."

They too were stuck; nothing that these strong folk couldn't get unstuck. But not before failing once first.

"Goblins!"

With neither side surprised, and both sides charging towards each other, they clashed in the middle of the chamber.

A funny looking goblin with a green pointy hat, and amateurishly painted mail armour, stood in the center, barking some incomprehensible words and waving a rod-like object.

Nolmbork, in his great excitement to slay some goblins, had drawn the sword so quickly he nicked his own throat, nearly decapitating himself.

Weren't it for Rah, the dwarf would've most certainly died there and then.

Brutal skirmish did not last long. Rashomon had slain one, Nolmbork two after he had recovered, Llyfed one, and Derennan had beheaded the one with pointy hat. They left one alive for some interrogation.

This was a filthy chamber, with some pilled rocks in the corner pretending to be an altar to the goblins' god of hunt.

"What lies to the south, beyond the doors?!"

"To the west is our treasure room and to the south is death!"

“What do you mean?”

“There are a bunch of pools, and if you drink from any you dieeee!”

“Open the doors for us!”

“Oh, are these mighty, heavily armoured and armed adventurers so cowardly to be afraid of opening the doors for themselves?”

They executed him after he opened the doors.

Orist noticed secret doors in the northwest portion of the chamber.

Pushing them open revealed a room nearly twice as big compared to the one they were in.

Three large chests were lined by the north wall. Leftmost one was closed without obvious lock, middle one was smashed open, and the rightmost one was closed with a large padlock.

Careful inspection revealed very little. By now, the wise adventurers have learned better than to “just” open unlocked chests in the dungeon, even if they happen to be in a secret chamber.

Hence one of them fetched the rod waved by the goblin shaman, and used it to open the chest.

Oh!

It was filled to the brim with orangish coins. A small coin pouch rested on top. In it—three small, shiny gems.

Investigating the chest on the right side had triggered the padlock.

It shook and formed a mouth, which spoke with large, booming voice:

“What belongs to you, But is used more by thy friends?”

“Name!”

“Correct!” the padlock answered, laughing heartily. And then it popped open!

One of the elves gingerly opened the chest.

It was lined with plush velvet. In the center was another box, small and elegant. Inside it were four vials with silver liquid.

On each was a label with a simple drawing: an open book, a stylized shining sun, a mouse, and a muscled man.

Having plundered everything they could, the party moved further south. Short corridor terminated with another t-shaped junction.

Light was shining underneath doors to the south. Listening at the doors revealed nothing though.

Forcing the doors open did reveal a bit more though. Wide t-shaped chamber, illuminated by unknown sources, with eight small pools containing various coloured liquids.

Following brief exploration (without any licking, sipping, or drinking), the party had decided they've accumulated enough treasure to head back to Hara.

Being encumbered meant they were moving half their usual speed. Which meant it'd take them twice as long to reach Hara.

That also meant they had more time to count all their copper coins.

All 1 573 of them.

Gloomfrost 9th, Fireday

Since they've returned, the party had taken all their suspicious liquids to the alchemist for identification.

She was unhappy about their slow progress regarding the Red Dragon, but sold them her service nonetheless.

Llyfed took the goblin's steel rod to the Wizards' Guild for identification.

Now he too was the laughingstock for thinking that a steel rod is magical.

“IT IS A ROD! A STEEL ROD! HA-HAHAH—”

But Tangay's laughter was cut short as Derennan presented the recovered portrait.

“Wh-where did you find this?! Do you know who that is?! That's famous Sysgrin! You found it in a dungeon? He used to have a tower around here... Listen, listen! If you bring me his book I'll teach your friends any spell that I know!” He confirmed that Sysgrin had a penchant for riddles and traps.

Finally, Derennan checked on the gold necklace he had commissioned from the local jeweller.

It was to be a gift for the Imrael family, the wealthiest and most influential family in Hara.

Few nights ago, whilst returning from the dungeon, they were awoken to sounds of battles. Or rather, sounds of screams and agony and wolf howls. They choose to ignore them and sleep on.

Today Derennan learnt that one of Imrael's caravans hadn't arrived.



Nolmbork's accident illustration by kickmaniac.

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 77

Adventurers

Derennan, dwarf level 3. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Rah, cleric level 2. A follower of Molna, God of Travellers, whom has an opinion about everything.

Brent Goose, cleric level 5. An eccentric, but charismatic, cleric seeking the Holy Bird. White robes and black cloak conceal his tall, frail and anemic frame. His eagle-like nose is exposed for all to see.

Oberon, fighter level 3. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Nolmbork, dwarf level 2. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Rigby, thief level 2. A thief.

Rashomon, elf level 2. A dangerous looking elf.

Llyfed, elf level 3. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Gloomfrost 11th, Airday

The party of magnificent eight had arrived back at The Den just as night was about to fall.

This time they took their wagon as well, dreaming of all the treasure they will haul out.

Dungeon entrance—a hole in the ground—was wide open. Next to it were three shabby-looking banners, sporting what could be described as hyena-like head.

“Hmmm, that wasn't here before.”

The party found a safe spot away from the entrance and camped the night. No fires, no singing.

Brent was denied the opportunity to cook ham for the party.

Demihumans took turns observing the hole. Sporadic grunts could be heard.

Gloomfrost 12th, Waterday

Following two hours of planning, the adventurers decided Derennan would stay in the camp with horses and wagon while others descend into the dungeon to see what is going on.

Rashomon took the lead, while others formed a tight column behind him.

He descended carefully, step by step. Light could be seen at the foot of fifty foot descend into the Den.

The party moved downwards and strode into the entrance chamber confidently.

Seven pig-faced orcs were scrubbing up the chamber with brooms and brushes. By the time they noticed Rashomon it was too late—he had already cast Sleep on them.

Five closest to the elf fell down to the ground. Two yelled insults and drew their weapons.

Adventurers poured into the chamber. With Rah's torch it became evident there were more orcs in there than was obvious at first.

Three more were in the north-west corner, holding chains attached to ten feet tall obese monstrosity.

Rashomon and Llyfed ran west to challenge them; Nolmbork went straight to cut off the orc in the middle of the chamber; the rest went for slumbering ones.

In the chaos one orc slipped past them and ran through north-west doors.

Nolmbork was on a spree cleaving through orcs like they were butter.

Chained monster was let loose, and it immediately went for Llyfed. The more it missed the more frustrated it got.

Rigby used the opportunity to sneak behind it, and drove his long-sword deep between the creature's two folds of fat.

The monster roared, turned around, and backhanded the thief with such might that he looked like a strawberry jam spread on dungeon floor.

Oberon blinded the monster with an arrow, and Nolmbork finished what Rigby had begun.

Beast staggered backwards, and then fell on Rigby's remains, splattering what little remains of him were left.

“What should we do?”

“Maybe I should fetch Derennan?”

“No, that will take to long!”

“I loot the corpses!”

“Guys, last time we stayed behind for too long, we were jumped by another group of orcs.”

“Pass me some iron spikes so we at least block the doors.”

“What is happening here anyway?”

Pig-faced beastmen were dressed in tan leather jerkins. Most of them had garish yellow claw-mark patterns going across their armour, hands, and face.

Doors next to Rashomon and Llyfed flung open.

A column of dozen highly motivated orcs tried to force themselves into the chamber, but two elves kept them checked just long enough for everyone to form a bottleneck.

But Rashomon was no Llyfed.

Especially after taking Doomed.

“You!” a human-sized orc dressed in chain-shirt, wielding large two-handed battle-axe, and adorned with wolf-skull helmet, stepped forth and assaulted the elves.

Orcs rallied behind him and redoubled their efforts.

Alas, it was all for naught as adventurers held the line and dished out blows, stones, and arrows.

“Change me!”

“I will!”

Llyfed and Rashomon changed positions, giving the latter a chance to breathe. The former had proven himself as valuable member of this party, next only to Nolmbork, by cleaving the orc chieftains skull in half. Well, both of them actually.

“Look! Behind!”

Two hyena-headed beastmen towered over surviving orcs.

They carried nasty looking polearms.

Orcs grunted and yelped as they continued to fail to break through the adventurers' ranks.

But when their morale broke it only got nastier for the hyenas did not let them pass.

Two orcs turned on their obstacles.

One managed to slay the beastman, and ran deeper into the dungeon.

The other was much less successful, and was rended limb by limb by the monster.

The sole survivor judged it'd be no match for the adventurers, so it too fled.

“Let's chase them!”

“Are you crazy?! We are getting out!”

By now everyone had been wounded at least several times.

Rah healed whomever he could.

Brent Goose spent time hiding and crying how weak and frail he is. Kadrim still refuses to grant him his supplications.

Oberon was also unscathed, spending most of the time playing stealth archer.

Adventurers left the Den, and returned to camp where Derennan greeted them.

“Let's spend the night here and return next morning. We killed a great number of them.”

Gloomfrost 13th, Earthday

Adventurers made cold camp once again, and had demihumans rotate as dungeon entrance observers.

Rashomon spotted a dozen or so creatures pouring out of the dungeon.

He laid low and observed them from afar.

Mass of creatures split into trios and each went their way.

They moved slowly and some looked like they were sniffing the surroundings.

Rashomon retreated back to the camp and informed his friends about imminent threat.

“We should hunt them down! Ambush them before they ambush us!”

“It is night. The moment we light up torches they will know where we are!”

“What if one of them howls?”

“Then let's meet them here!”

Their camp was flanked by three ten-foot tall rocks.

Trees concealed other openings.

Derennan and Nolmbork scaled the west rocks.

Rashomon and Llyfed scaled the south wall.

Oberon climbed a tree, and Brent stood next to it.

Rah went to calm the horses that begun stomping and neighing.

Three arrows landed by his feet.

CONQUERING THE BARBARIAN ALTANIS: SESSION 78

Adventurers

Derennan, dwarf level 3. A dwarf hailing from Western Wastes.

Rah, cleric level 2. A follower of Molna, God of Travellers, whom has an opinion about everything.

Nolmbork, dwarf level 2. Portly, bald, red bearded, with an epic nose. On a mission to have a drink in every settlement in Wilderlands.

Rashomon, elf level 2. A dangerous looking elf.

Llyfed, elf level 3. Thin and balding elf whom also happens to be Rashomon's friend.

Tarkus the Promising, cleric level 2. Follower of Bachontoi, God of Red Wisdom.

Brent Goose, cleric level 5. An eccentric, but charismatic, cleric seeking the Holy Bird. White robes and black cloak conceal his tall, frail and anemic frame. His eagle-like nose is exposed for all to see.

Oberon, fighter level 3. A tall, supple hunter adorned with bones and horns of his prey.

Gloomfrost 13th, Earthday, between midnight and sunrise

Rah crouched by the horses as three arrows landed next to him.

Following their encounter with hereto unknown orc horde, and subsequent slaughter of them, the party decided to back out of the dungeon and rest in a camp nearby.

Alas, sometime during the night beastmen came out and managed to track the party down.

Rashomon spotted them in time to alert everyone.

The camp was a simple affair.

Three ten-foot tall rocks covered west and south sides, the wagon covered north side, and several trees provided cover to the east and north.

Derennan and Nolmbork were on the west rocks while Rashomon and Llyfed manned the south rock.

Oberon watched guard from one of the north trees. Brent hid underneath the wagon.

Tarkus and Rah stood by the wagon, waiting. They opted not to light up any torches and rely on their demihuman friends to neutralize any threats.

Few more arrows flew in their direction, one killing a draft horse.

Silence.

Then that sound of someone—or something—trying to imitate a wolf howl.

Rashomon had enough of this nonsense. He slid down the rock and moved eastwards.

Llyfed followed behind him.

“There!”

Lo and behold, several crouching humanoids just at the edge of elven infravision!

Few select insults later and several pig-faced orcs clashed against two heavily armed elves.

Nolmbork and Derennan remained vigilant, scanning for any new threats that might come from north, west, or south.

“Whoa!”

Rashomon stood his ground as several more orcs came charging out from southeast. He was outnumbered eight to one, but successfully parried all incoming attacks.

Most importantly, he prevented the orcs from storming the camp.

Suddenly a thunderous cacophony of howls, roars, and grunts erupted from southeast.

Derennan's vigilance paid off as he kept watch of the western flank.

Moonlight illuminated a frame of lumbering creature stepping on top of large tree stump some hundred feet away or so.

The monster raised a giant club over its head and unleashed a roar so loud that would make any normal man shit himself.

But Derennan was no man.

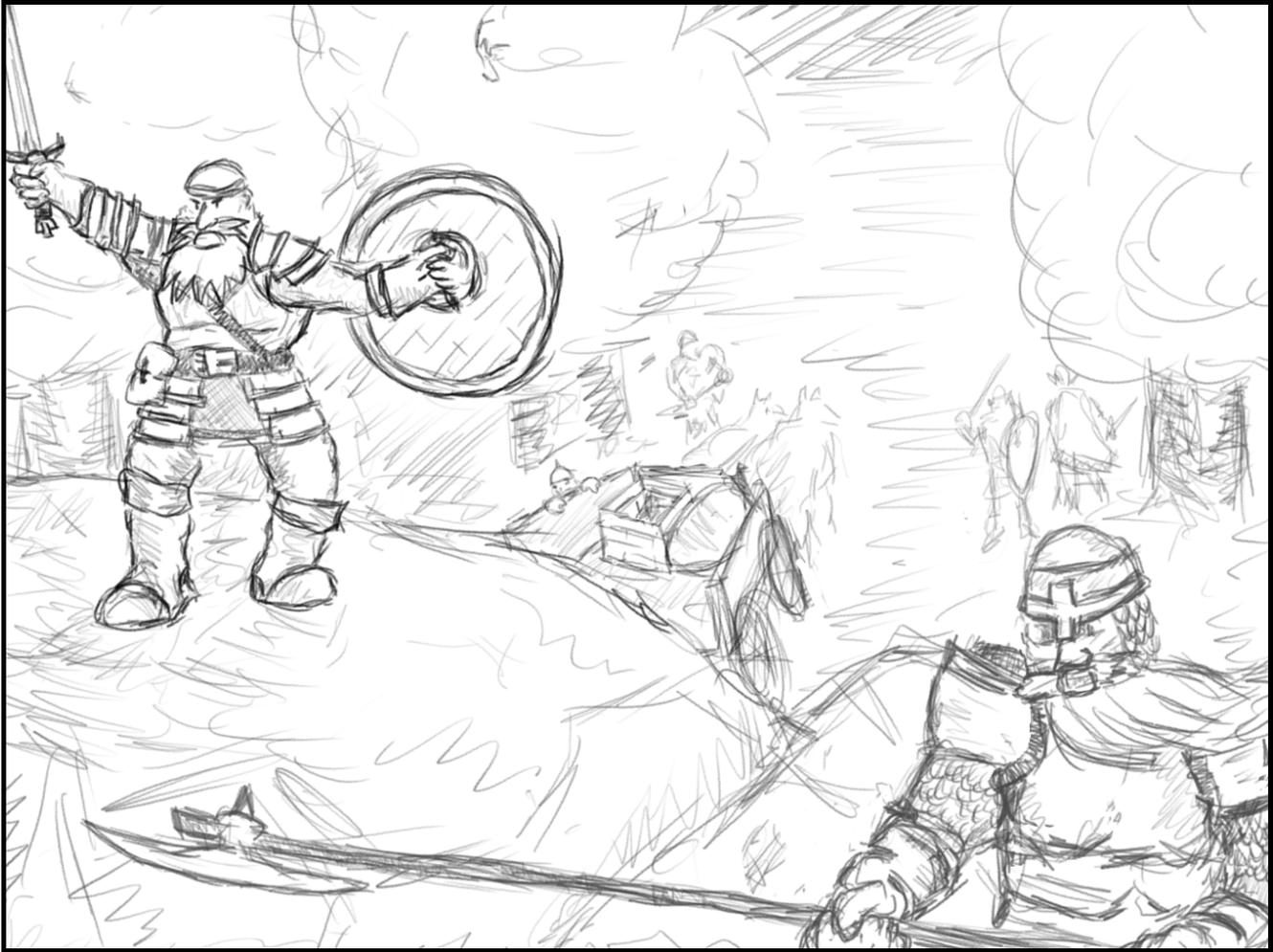
He braced himself as the monstrous hulk charged him, followed by several orcs.

“They are coming from the north as well!”

Oberon rained hell from the tree top; Nolmbork killed orcs left and right; Derennan duked it out with towering beastman; Rashomon and Llyfed held back a dozen or so orcs; Rah and Tarkus shot and hit whenever they could see something clearly enough; Brent cowered under the wagon.

But something had to give.

Something had to give eventually.



Last stand illustration by kickmaniac.

Hulking monster forced Derennan to retreat off the rock.

The dwarf jumped off, and backed up, his left side protected by another rock, while wagon protected his right side.

Hulk's belly shimmered as the monster laughed, cheered on by orcs behind it.

Derennan braced his polearm.

Rah jumped in to help the dwarf.

Rashomon swung and swung. He was landing good blows, but none did as much damage as he expected.

Llyfed shook his head at his friend and his determination to pick up a sword called "Doomed." The curse was turning eerily prophetic.

"Perk up! We will wear them down!" Tarkus yelled while crushing yet another orc.

Several more orcs charged from the darkness, followed by several large, hyena headed monsters. These ones had polearms and large flails.

Rah's remains splattered Derennan.

Cleric did not stand a chance against the hulking monster. He died a brutal, nasty death.

Oberon screamed as beastmen penetrated him with polearms. The tree wasn't tall enough.

To make things even worse, new beastmen just kept showing up.

Three tiger-faced beastmen scaled the south rock. They just stood there, towering over all.

They put down some sacks, and took out something very, very familiar to adventurers.

Oil bombs.

"No!" Llyfed's voice cracked as Rashomon twitched, impaled by several polearms and hacked to death by thousand cuts.

Tarkus squeezed his holy symbol and mace. This man of Law will go down fighting.

Derennan on the other hand, was much more interested in survival. He turned around, and made a run for it in the northeast direction.

Alas, he did not get far before running into three more tiger-faced creatures.

The hulk flipped over the wagon, and roared as Brent soiled himself.

“Parley!”

Somebody yelled.

One of the tiger-faced monsters spoke. Terms were far from favourable.

Lay down your weapons and forfeit your lives.

Llyfed tried to negotiate.

His attempts were rebuffed with an offer to set him, and his friends, on fire.

Adventurers dropped their weapons.

Victorious beastmen stripped them off their weapons and valuables.

Then they tied their hands, and dragged them back into the Den.

Orcs were forced to carry the corpses, while the hulk picked up two dead horses.

Wagon was left behind.



The captives were insulted and spat on. They remained defiant. Those that live, live to return the favour.



They were led through familiar corridors. They passed by orcs scrubbing the floors and walls.

It was obvious they were at the bottom of the food chain.

Then they were dragged into the unknown: the stairs leading down they avoided several times.

Orcs did not go below, only hyena-headed and tiger-faced beastmen did, as well as the hulk.

In the large, well lit chamber everyone went their own way.

Tiger-faced monsters dragged the adventurers through unknown corridors until they dumped them in a filthy room with four corpses.

Two humans, one male dwarf, and one female elf.

All corpses had significant signs of abuse, especially the dwarf. They were missing teeth and tongue.

Six survivors quickly took off their rope bindings.

“Well, does anyone need healing?” Tarkus offered.

“Yes, please. . .”

Scouring the room provided very little of use.

The party couldn't agree on the course of action.

Do they try to break the doors and escape?

Do they wait for someone to parley?

Something else?

So naturally, they decided to take a nap.

Tarkus prayed.



“Attention, I hear heavy footsteps incoming!”

The doors swung open.

Tiger-faced beastmen were back.

They seemed wholly unfazed—disinterest even—in adventurers having freed their hands.

They pointed at Nolmbork and waved him to come out.

Llyfed tried to parley again.

He got smacked for it. Nolmbork was escorted out, and the doors were once again locked shut.

“Where are they taking him?”

“No idea. . .”

They waited, and waited, and waited.

And waited, and waited.

And waited.



Doors swung open once more.

Nolmbork was back, with a tint of hope on his face!

He met with an apparent master of this horde of beastmen, a giant with lisp. He explained that he bartered a deal for the party to be released if they bring back a gold crown befitting such a master. The only term was to leave “the fattest one behind.” Although being the skinniest, everyone quickly agreed to leave Brent Goose behind.

“Hey, we are still Lawful, we will come back for you. By the way, maybe you finally atone to Kadrim, heh?”



Three new corpses were impaled at the dungeon entrance:

Rashomon, Rah, and Rigby.



Five survivors reached Hara on Gloomfrost 16th.

Hungry, thirsty, and dirty.

IN NEXT ISSUE

Adventurers head into unknown whilst holding hands.



BUMBLING Through DUNGEONS

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ISSUE #1 (Legacy Issue #61, E&A #1 - July '25)

Right then. Where where we?

This issue finds me writing in a hurry, prior to Origins, the large gaming Convention here in Ohio. In the last couple years I have begun taking board game design much more seriously, and Origins is somewhat akin to my Super Bowl.

I have about 16 hours of playtesting reserved through two different organizations, a designer dinner meetup and another networking mixer, several people to touch base with who are hoping to play my games. AND...exactly zero publisher meetings.

Yes, the letdown this year is that in doggedly trying to prepare several games - both the games themselves and pitch materials for them - I left no time to research and contact publishers. As colleagues on various Discord servers talk excitedly about their pitch schedule, I'll be dutifully playtesting.

Which isn't the worst outcome, particularly given current tariffs. There are a lot of "no" responses in the best of times for unproven designers, let alone when financial winds blow so unfavorably.

Still, it's the lone major annoyance in an otherwise whirlwind week. Next year, with at least seven strongly-developed games accompanied by pitch materials (sell sheet, video, etc.) publisher meetings will be top priority.

On the home front, I am moving in to a (rented) house with my girlfriend next month. My apartment is a mess of boxes at the moment, even given that I'm a bit of a minimalist. Busy month, combined with Origins. I need a break that assuredly won't come on the other side of all of this.

The Transition to E&A

I think everyone got a taste of how difficult it is to do something by committee, but I am happy we're finally resolved into something concrete. My thanks to those who did the lion's share of the work in corralling the disparate communication chains and opinions into something actionable.

I do not think I'll be contributing to Lisa's one-off zine tribute to Lee. Not because I'm not interested, but because I don't feel I know Lee well enough to make a meaningful contribution. Suffice to say, I'm grateful for A&E and my time writing for it, and the work Lee did to keep it running.

Media

The Arkadians is a young adult novel that was nevertheless quite endearing. Some of you could likely read it in a single day. I did as well, albeit during a two-night solo train ride across the country earlier this year where I had little else to do but read and think.

In that same trip was a re-reading of *The Book of Disquiet*, a staggeringly unique tome from Fernando Pessoa, or rather one of his many pseudonyms. He wrote under several in his lifetime, attributed different personalities and characteristics to each. Something of the true author must be in the work, but parsing between fictionalized disquiet and True disquiet is an impossible labyrinth. Fascinating and quotable, in any case.

Movies:

- *Baby Driver* is excellent. It's a movie with a clear vision and assured execution.
- *Flow* is stunning. I'd call it meditative if it weren't so anxiety-inducing at certain moments.
- *Wicked* is polished but overlong and not as memorable as it wants to be. The runtime and multiple false endings provided some inadvertent amusement.
- *Speed Racer* is an unexpected delight. Lots of fun!
- *Pictures of Ghosts*, a deeper cut from the Criterion Channel, is lovely, a haunting love letter to the city of Recife and how the ravages of time wash over our culture and replace it with something new. A bit overly sentimental at times, but this is excusable for a film asking us to come on an obscure little journey.
- *Digimon Adventure: Last Evolution Kizuna* is only for those who have followed Digimon since they were kids, as I have. It's a touching sendoff of sorts that allows the protagonists to mature...if not at the same pace as their audience, at least enough that the audience can see in the show a reflection of their own progression through life's transitions. The music and animation remain on point, as does the voice acting.

RPGs

As I write this, we're hitting the home stretch of a rather sprawling sandbox campaign in 5e. We continue to bat around other system ideas, but have not been able to settle on any that the whole group is good with. As such, 5e it is.

Or 5.5e at this point, I suppose. D&D's odd half-edition is seemingly not selling too well, but we've been in 5e for nearly a decade at this point. I will be happy to explore some new mechanics, even though our campaigns are long enough that there remains ample mechanical ideas I've yet to explore in 5e.

The Previous Campaign

Island-continent that had been taken over by aggressive plant life several years ago, with only bastions of civilization cut off from one another. We played as sort of a magical police force who could navigate the wilderness better than commoners. Eventually, this spiraled into an investigation into the plant takeover and the forces behind it.

Homebrew setting and campaign. Very sandbox-y. The last couple GM's we've had have let us get away with a lot of non-combat shenanigans, which can be fun at times but grates in the macro when, for instance, I might go a whole session without rolling a die. We trend away from crunchy mechanical stuff, which I don't mind at all (I certainly don't want, say, Pathfinder levels of combat optimization), but I prefer a bit more balance.

My PC is a Minnesota-accented druid with a love of tea and herbs, and who makes a bunch of puns, shares non-sequitur plant facts, and is generally quite jovial. My last couple characters were a bit less generally likable, so I wanted someone who who be more affable.

It's worked well. He integrates with the world and party easily, which is how I gauge character success. Druids have too many mechanical options for my liking, but I try to focus on 1-2 new things per level and it works.

The Next Campaign

Something called "Myriad: City of Tiers" which we don't know tons about but shouldn't be overlong and the GM is excited to run, which is good enough for me.

We vetoed *Vecna: Eve of Ruin*, an official 5e adventure that apparently is horrifically railroaded. The possible appeal(s) of the campaign were that it revisited previous campaign settings from 5e and allowed you the chance to play your old characters. Also levels 10-20, and I've never made it that high in a campaign.

My Next Campaign as GM

The Vecna campaign mentioned above doesn't sound great on its own, but as a book I could cannibalize for ideas, I'm moderately intrigued. I have a High Forest (enormous woodland setting in the Forgotten Realms) hex crawl idea that I actually think could integrate with some of the Vecna book's ideas. I may try to spin those together into a Frankenstein monster, which is how most of my campaigns come together anyway (and many others too, I'd imagine), as a mix of ideas ripped wholcloth from other sources mixed with my own overarching narrative.

Alternatively, the campaign we were originally supposed to run next (before I backed out owing to my design efforts and their demands on my time) was an urban skullduggery campaign set in the city of Waterdeep. Urban campaigns and me get along famously, and Waterdeep is a second home of sorts. This may still end up being our next campaign, though the group likes mixing things up, and so the "Myriad" campaign we're about to do may fill them up on urban adventures.

Lastly, I could jump setting again and explore a nautical campaign I've had in mind for some time, loosely inspired by *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. In a previous campaign as GM, I ran a few sessions with ship-to-ship combat as a trial run for some of what could happen in this one.

Post-Origins I'll need to start prepping these in earnest, starting with one and then expanding out.

Next Month

Gods, still too much. The game design is not slowing, I have reading I want to get to, and the aforementioned campaign prep will loom as well. And I'll be living with my girlfriend by then.

All good problems to have, of course.

Ephemera - Written on a Cross-Country Train Ride:

- I made a pact with Hemingway on a train once that, no matter what, we'd meet again one day. It was a pact made in the spirit of men who know it's unlikely to be fulfilled, but believe it will be nevertheless. Hemingway died in 1961, some 23 years before I was born. Despite this inconvenient fact, the pact remains.

I wrote this in the early morning after waking. Immediately prior in some half-dream state, the pact had been struck, and I knew I needed to record it in order that it be remembered.

Reintroduction

For the inaugural issue of *Ever & Anon*, I thought a reintroduction was in order, especially for those who joined this new endeavor after *Alarums & Excursions*.

I was a contributor to *A&E* for over 30 years. I changed my zine title several times and lost count at least once, but most recently it was *Sinister Things*, taken from the name of a campaign I was running at the time I made the change. For *E&A*, I wanted a fresh new title. My current campaign is The Adventurers Guild (a D&D 5e 2024 joint), but I didn't want to call my zine that. The fresh new ridiculous title I picked is intended to be ridiculous and it requires no explanation.

I'm a godless liberal and California native. I'm a cynical and disaffected GenXer, but I repeat myself. My degree is in physics, but I have been a product manager in tech for the past 25 years. I tell people that I'm not an engineer, but I can roleplay as one.

I have been married since 1997. Step-daughter died in 2020 at 35 due to <redacted>. We currently have 3 indoor cats and 5 or 6 trap-and-release ferals who hang out in our backyard.

I am barely active on any social platforms and proudly never had Facebook nor Twitter. You can read about my recent adventures on LinkedIn later on in this zine. I am xenongames on Boardgamegeek and sexagesimalian on discussion.tekeli.li and Discord.

I like board games and have a fairly large collection, but don't get to play them enough, and generally think of myself more as a roleplayer. I am running a D&D campaign now (June 2025) because a) no one else stepped up to the plate to run something and b) we needed more players and couldn't find any for anything besides D&D.

I attend DunDraCon and Kublacon each year where I host a game, but I rarely run the same game twice. In general, once I run something, my brain wants to move onto something else. This is also part of the reason why I do not do in-depth game write-ups. The other is that I cannot capture how the game felt in each moment and so my retellings feel flat and sterile when I try to write them.

GMing Style

For reasons I don't understand, I asked a couple of my players "How would you (briefly) describe my GM style?"

Tammy whom I've played with for 20 years(?) said,

I would say you like a fair cooperative play where both the GM and the Players can set the scene. But you won't pull punches just to please the players. You like a balance of roleplay and action, but are perfectly fine with a game session that's just filled with roleplay, unless you see the player's going down the rabbit hole, and then you'd intervene.

Rameen is a less experienced roleplayer whom I met when they joined the current campaign said,

Technical (which brings in a very particular predictability... cuz like... it's already written in the rules), fair, challenging, and I always feel like we're all on the same side as players there to have fun. Also you have a lot of experience, which in the end reveals whatever challenge as kind of just right.

I don't know if this is revelatory in any way, but I thought I'd share.

200 Words

Probably my favorite quote is from Eric Hoffer:

There is not an idea that cannot be expressed in 200 words. But the writer must know precisely what he wants to say. If you have nothing to say and want badly to say it, then all the words in all the dictionaries will not suffice.

I try to apply this notion to my writing and keep it concise. Of course, expressing an idea is not proving an idea and 200 words doesn't provide enough space to provide illustrative examples, anticipate counterarguments, or to cover every possible exception or corner case. But for conveying the basic principle and getting the idea across, 200 words is plenty. I usually find that I've exhausted everything I want to say about an idea well before I hit the 200-word mark. Like now.

Having said that, I think the great advantage of an APA/zine platform is that it encourages long-form essays and discussions. Contributions tend to be more thoughtful than your typical forum or reddit thread. I appreciate that there is no pressure to respond immediately.

Involuntary Unscheduled Vacation

I was laid off at the end of February. They had also laid off a bunch of folks at the end of 2024 as they offshored positions. Those folks got a three-month heads-up—I got three minutes. Since I knew there were shenanigans afoot, I had already removed a bunch of personal stuff from my cubicle at the beginning of January.

I had the pleasure of going in for a 7:00 a.m. meeting¹ at which I was told to leave my laptop and leave the building. This layoff was in name only because within a couple months they had opened a position with my former title with a similar salary range. I knew my new boss was a <expletive deleted> but I didn't realize exactly how much. This has nothing to do with the shenanigans in Washington D.C.

I had been working at this place for 13½ years. I had more than double the seniority of anyone in our extended team. I used to say, "I know where all the skeletons are buried, and I even buried a few myself." I managed the core product line, the operating system it ran on, the standalone management system used by all the products, and I recently took over the decryption solution when the last product manager was let go back in October. There are whole sections of the architecture and technology that only I understand (outside of a few engineers), not because I'm that smart, but because I've been managing it for over a decade and no one else had to (or cared to) know it.

I have been laid off twice before. Both times, I had been with the company for less than two years. In those instances, I was sad. In this instance, I am angry. The phrase I have been using is, "I don't want to work for a company that would be so stupid as to lay me off." Yes, it sounds arrogant, but I am allowing my ego that one indulgence.

A number of former coworkers went out of their way (not just LinkedIn) to reach out to me not only with condolences, but also affirmations and active offers to help my job search. They used words like shocked and horrified to describe their reactions to the news. This definitely helped keep my spirits up as I went through rounds of sending out resumes and not getting past

¹ I moved it up from 7:30 since I was the coordinator and ran the PowerPoint for an 8:00 meeting with the product team and the worldwide sales engineers. At 8:05, I got a text from one of my (former) teammates where I was and if I'd be running the meeting. I cannot roll my eyes hard enough.

first interviews. I also later heard that many saw my departure as a bellwether event that triggered them looking for employment elsewhere.

Two months into my search, one of these former colleagues reached out to me saying that the guy at his company who was doing the same product management stuff I was doing just retired and thus there was an opening I could potentially just walk into. This was a lower-tier competitor of my former company, so I was walking in with a ton of domain knowledge and expertise. The process took a month, but eventually they hired me at a slightly higher salary than I had been making.

It's a really good thing I landed this when I did because half way through the interviews, LinkedIn suspended my account, ostensibly for security reasons. I think it was because they kept saying I was logging in via Edge, but I wasn't,² so I reset my password a few times, and then had a series of erroneous logins because I and my browser lost track of which password was which. Maybe it was also because I sometimes use a VPN? Or their new AI-based security solution just sucks.

Because I could not log into LinkedIn, I could not file a support ticket. Nor could I reach them using other social media channels because I'm not on other social media channels. It took me a couple of weeks to finally prove my identity, but they then killed my account because (they said) I violated their community policies. The current hypothesis is that the security system doesn't like my email address (which is not even the primary email address on the account).

The last notice did provide an appeal form I could access, but when I hit submit on the page, it would say "We're sorry. There was an error creating your case. Please try again." This happened for 3 weeks by the time I just gave up. By the time you read this, I hopefully will have set up a new account with a new email address. For silly superstitious reasons, I didn't want to do this before I started my new position.

The new place is great so far. The only hiccup has been getting used to the Mac laptop (I've been a Windows guy for the past 30 years). I could have insisted on getting a Windows PC, but I figured that becoming "bilingual" was a good thing. :)

² I guess DuckDuckGo browser is mistaken for Edge?

Kublacon 2025

I “flew solo” for this convention as my usual roommate skipped this year due to the timing of his Japanese vacation. Overall, the games were underwhelming and didn’t hit the heights they could have, but lacked the “so bad that I can have fun with it” vibe that was DunDraCon.

Terraforming Mars

This was just the base game plus the Prelude expansion. One of the five players was completely new. As a general rule, I let the game host teach the rules and I don’t interrupt. To prevent myself from interjecting, I made a point of not paying attention, so I can’t say how well it was done, but this particular player seemed to pick up things very slowly (if at all) and needed the help and advice of another player throughout the game. It didn’t help that another player, who was advising on which cards to purchase and play, prevented the newbie from making newbie mistakes. Sure, they could save some cards for the end of the game and didn’t need to play them now, but let them learn that organically on their own.

For my part, I had to struggle and scrape for everything I got. For example, for those familiar with the game, I didn’t play a single blue card. For the first couple of turns, I was forced to just use standard actions to buy power plants. I was playing Mining Guild and the player who was advising the newbie felt obligated at the start to say that was the worst of the lot and that his group had banned it. I don’t particularly like it, but my other choice was Thorgate that I have a superstition against. Even so, I was able to take advantage of some fortuitous timing and my “just focus on the plan and don’t get distracted” playing style carried me to a second-place finish, only losing on the money tiebreaker by a few bucks.

Kids on Bikes

One of the difficulties I have with some scenarios with kids or teens as protagonists is that there is an inherent expectation that the PCs will create their own trouble and that’s simply not my first (or second, third...) instinct. In this particular game, my character had to get to a party (to get answers to a math test so that she could pass the test and be allowed to go to the Richard Marx concert... Very Important) and I went into my “just focus on the plan and don’t get distracted” playing style. This can make both myself and my character get very

frustrated when the other players and PCs just want to have shenanigans. In this case, it wasn’t so bad and we were able to make it to the party.

PCs have 6 stats which have values from d4 to d20 (one of each die type). Higher is better. I think I rolled a d20 five times and the highest roll I ever got was a 5, including two 1s. It’s a good thing that this session had a humorous tone so that these terrible results didn’t have any horrific consequences.

The party was busted by the cops, one of the PCs (my PC’s younger sister) was abducted and taken to the spooky private science laboratory. The second half of the game consisted of infiltrating and rescuing the other PCs and a bunch of other kids who were being subjected to some weird psychic experimentation that no one understood.

The scenario was written for 4 players: 2 kids and 2 teens. We only had 3 players, so there was only 1 kid PC which gave that player a bit of extra spotlight time after the abduction. With another kid in the PC mix, it would have split the party exactly in half and not felt quite so off-balance. Even so, it was handled well and I never felt neglected or bored.

BASH! Ultimate Edition

BASH! is a superhero game that has a bit of a Villains & Vigilantes and Marvel Superheros (FASERIP) feel. The scenario, unbeknownst to me, was based on the Super Powered series of books from Drew Hayes. I’m not familiar with these stories, but a few of the players were. In general, I avoid playing scenarios based on established stories or shows, like X-Men or Buffy the Vampire Slayer, in which the PCs are canon characters. I got into roleplaying to play my own characters and I have had bad experiences with players either playing the characters “wrong” or professing their own opinions about how I should be playing the character.

In this case, the other players were fine. Sure, one was super-annoying, but he was playing a character who is defined as super-annoying. And the player of a PC that my PC was supposedly in a relationship with never acted as if we were together. Since they knew the characters and I did not, a bit of help and cooperation in this regard would have helped me a lot.

What got to me was that the GM and in-the-know players were being delighted by various, albeit minor, moments in the game. I felt like I was missing the

joke—they were simply having more fun than I was. I don't say this in a selfish or jealous way, but it added to the sense that I was an outsider watching their game, not playing along with them.

The scenario itself was tied into the lore of the setting, but it basically boiled down to the baddies wanting to recreate the special serum that allowed those who could not control their powers to gain control and had abducted a bunch of powered teens that the PCs had to track down and rescue. This included locating a warehouse that had been converted into a makeshift youth center/shelter for powereds. The main resident of the place had power suppression powers she couldn't turn off, so it was a safe place. But it was also the nexus from which teens were being abducted (with the owner's knowledge).

After a fight with and interrogation of some baddies, this led the PCs to a secret facility in the Nevada desert. One infiltration and a show-down with a big bad, a shapeshifter who liked being a big ass dragon, and the day was saved.

Trail of Cthulhu

This scenario was *The Many Deaths of Edward Bigsby* which, unbeknownst to me, is a published scenario for Trail of Cthulhu. I do not like it when DMs run published scenarios. I find it gauche, unless it is run by the company itself. It is especially bad when it is not advertised as such. It also reduces my desire to recap the plot.

Suffice to say that it was a clever little mystery that didn't really wrap up satisfactorily. The PCs were a bit too cautious which helped with survivability, but prevented them from getting to the weirder—and probably more fun—ways the scenario could have turned out.

Power Grid

It is generally not a good idea to short yourself \$11 for at least one turn of production early on and fall behind the curve in both power plant purchases and expansion in a five-player game. That's what I'm blaming for my miserable fifth-place performance. I was also a bit distracted being "rules czar" since the game host (who was not playing) wasn't up to speed with the changes in the Recharged version of the rules.

Shadowdark

This is an OSR game that is on the lighter side of that spectrum, which I prefer. This was also a published

scenario, *Winter's Daughter*, converted to Shadowdark. It's half dungeon crawl, half trek to faerie.

As a system Shadowdark is fine. You only get XP from treasure—not defeating monsters or overcoming other challenges (presumably which would then reward the players with treasure). "Treasure" is an abstract counter with some carrying-capacity limits rather than specific amounts of gold, gems, and such. This has the knockon effect of wanting to avoid combat unless there is obvious treasure to be won. It also behooves PCs to pick up treasure immediately rather than waiting and coming back for it as they might be able to level up faster. We did have a chance to level up (from 1st to 2nd) in this adventure, but it reinforced how much I hate rolling randomly for hit points at each level.

World of Darkness

The PCs were parapsychology students, staff, and faculty from University of Arizona investigating a haunted house. I suspect that this scenario was supposed to be driven by PC shenanigans. There were 6 PCs, but only 4 players, so the GM was playing 2 of them. Each PC (except the professor, ironically) either had supernatural powers or unknown links to the supernatural. Many had personal agendas tied to the house. My character did not—just an athlete trying to get a passing grade—so I am not sure what I was supposed to have done in the adventure except follow along. One of the PC-turned-NPC was a mage with mind domination powers and when it tried to dominate my character, it triggered a latent "you come from a family of Aztec vampire worshippers" abilities, but that was just at the very end and I didn't get to do much with it. In the denouement, the GM described the ancient vampire in the basement, the history of gods, vampires, and werewolves in ancient Egypt coming to Mesoamerica, and so on. It was interesting, but none of it managed to come out in play. I'd say it was a wasted opportunity and may have been better except that the PCs with the most active agendas were played by the GM. Then again, that would have resulted in PvP which I generally hate.

Savage Worlds

I ran a game on the last day and hours of the con, Monday morning (Memorial Day, a national holiday). What follows is the scenario copy-and-pasted from my notes.

For Family And Home

This was my Savage Worlds game set in my City of 1000 Names setting. The PCs were goblins who were avenging the death of their cousin (all goblins are “cousins”) when they stumble upon a religious sect of kobolds who were attempting to bring back Tiamat and unite all five kobold clans (red, blue, green, white, and black) under a common banner. I ran on Monday morning and only got 4 out of the 6 players who signed up, but that was plenty.

It had been a while since I ran Savage Worlds and I could feel the rust. I found myself having to look up too many things and getting frustrated at how slow searching on a PDF can be. I also made the mistake—as I have done far too often recently—of underestimating how long scenes would take, especially the last one. It was a 6-hour game slot, but the scenario itself could easily have gone 8 hours. I think I’m just worried about making the game too basic, too trite, and overcompensate. Plus, I am very hesitant to interrupt PC roleplaying just to move a scene along (provided that the players are having fun).

In preparation, I expanded the goblin lore with the following:

Two concepts that are very confusing to outsiders is the distinction between “sha-gek” or “needful borrowing” and “mat-shu” or “malicious or greedy thievery.” City law does differentiate the two and this has resulted in giving goblins a reputation as thieves. Within goblin society, taking what one truly needs is accepted but there is an expectation that it will be repaid in kind, either directly or down the line. Stealing what someone simply wants is disapproved of and retaliation or shunning is to be expected.

Also in preparation for the game, I wrote out a lot of the flavor text ahead of time. I wanted to make sure I captured the flavor of The City and the various scenes and not miss any details in the heat of the game. Even so, I do think I missed a beat that bypassed some investigative opportunities, but that would have just made the game go longer, so it is probably for the best.

In the following, I have shaved off all of the system-specific details to make it more generic and scalable. The boxed text is scene descriptions to be read aloud to the players. Italicized text indicates specific NPC dialog.

The PCs

Neeru is an aged shaman and healer with deep roots in the community. They are kind and gentle soul who will ruthlessly destroy anyone who hurts their family. When Sesha was abandoned by their parent's Neeru took in the orc child since no one should be without family; besides, proving orcs wrong in their underestimation of the “weak” is goblin tradition. Though their prime “adventuring” days are behind them, Neeru nevertheless likes to get out and help the “youths” from time to time.

Lochan is a seasoned warrior who has been in too many battles. They were on the front lines (alongside dwarves) against the black kobold clan when the scaly bastards tried to cut off a major Undercity route under the strait. Though victorious, Lochan lost an eye. Now they avoid fights when possible, but when blood must be shed, they fight with a frightening ferocity.

Dhani & Vasi are siblings who both embody and defy the stereotype of goblins as thieves, scoundrels, and cheats. They are definitely that, but only to those who deserve it. Between Dhani’s impulsiveness and big mouth and Vasi’s curiosity and vengeful nature, they often find themselves in over their heads; fortunately, they have the skills to escape the pickles they put themselves into.

[Dhani also had the quirk that he “persistently tries to make prop bets and dares for money with anyone, anytime, about anything.” Unfortunately, the player never did any of that. I even put in an explicit opportunity for him to engage in a gambling game and he didn’t bite.]

Cleverer than most, **Bhavya** has studied the alchemical arts and uses their concoctions for both profit and in service of their family. They have developed a vaping habit (they can quit anytime they want to... they just don’t want to) and enjoy inventing new juices.

Sesha was born without a right arm and was abandoned by their parents—orc culture is very cruel and unforgiving of weakness (real or perceived). Neeru took in and named the child and raised Sesha as their own. Sesha is a teen and coming of age which is a tumultuous time in most people’s lives, but Sesha has the additional challenge of being an outsider—not fully accepted by the greater goblin community and rejected by orc society.

Getting the Thing

[This scene was just an introduction to the system and to start off with a bang, as it were.]

Your cousin Chandra runs a shop that specializes in alchemical and artificer supplies—the kinds of esoteric things that you don't ask questions about how he acquired them. It has taken you three days to hunt down a source for golden nevermind and that has brought you to an abandoned temple in the first underlayer of The City. You have a leather pouch with several gems. They have a case containing the prize, you presume. Now is time for the exchange.

Once the exchange is made and the ne'er do wells have the gems, they will surround and betray the PCs, attempting to get back the prize.

Scene of the Crime

Much later that day, you arrive at Chandra's unmarked shop—people who need to know about it know about it—to find a strange symbol painted in blood on the door. The lock on the door is busted. Inside, you find it ransacked.. Shelves have been torn down and tables overturned. Debris is scattered about the floor. There are scorch marks on the primary counter.

Chandra had a golem made of clay to protect the shop, but it now lies on the floor in multiple pieces. Just past the doorway into his laboratory-slash-workshop, you see Chandra's body lying dead on the ground in a pool of blood. This area has also been looted and destroyed. As you survey the scene, you hear a weak tapping coming from under the overturned workbench.

Under the workbench, pinned under a trap door is Rajesh, Chandra's new assistant. Rajesh has been trapped there for two days. The PCs have not met him before. Chandra's previous assistant was a green kobold called Murano.

"I was in the workshop when I heard a bunch of people come in. Chandra was at the counter and told me to stay in the back. I peeked through the door anyway. I saw a bunch of orcs and someone smaller in a purple robe. I didn't understand what they were saying 'cuz it was in orcish, but I did hear the figure say 'something something aqua draconis.' I heard garbled orcish shouting and then cousin Chandra gave the Zeebo defend command. Once things got out of hand, I hid back here."

"I heard fighting and then Chandra came through the door, but he never made it as the orcs swarmed him. I ducked into this trapdoor."

He will pause as he tears up in shame and anger. This break causes a disruption in his story. If the PCs ask Rajesh to recall more about the figure, he will say, *"I never saw its face—it never removed the hood— but I did see a red tail poke out from the robe. And the robe had a symbol on the back."* He will then draw the symbol of Tiamat.

He knows that aqua draconis is a powerful acid that dissolves anything except copper. Taking inventory of the damage, he will see that there is no sign of the copper vessel that held the aqua draconis. There were several items of value taken, but most of it was destroyed. Notably, the orcs never found the secret hiding places where most of the store's coins and gems were stored.

Follow-up

A simple networking check can identify the symbol on the door as belonging to the Bloodfang gang and where they usually hang out—a tavern called Gunther's.

Networking cannot identify the other symbol, but can turn up rumors of kobolds in purple robes (if they search for that).

- Blue kobold onboard a ship carrying the Heart of Ice from the frozen wastes.
- A jar of bottled lightning was stolen from the lab of Prof. Twiggins at the University,

Gunther's

As you approach from a side street off a main thoroughfare, you see the light coming out of the open doorway and hear raucous music from a band playing with more enthusiasm than skill.

The tables and chairs are mismatched and have undergone countless repairs. The stone floor is stained brown. The tables in the main area are well populated with a variety of peoples: mostly humans, dwarves, and orcs. A harried halfling is busily taking and delivering orders. A husky orc stands behind the long bar and is too distracted serving customers to take notice of you. The band playing on the cramped stage consists of an elf, gnoll, and gnome and a banner displays their name: The Hellmouth Trio.

At a table across from the entrance two orcs, a dwarf, and a gnoll are playing some type of game with bone tiles. The dwarf curses loudly before taking a large, swift swig from her cup.

On the far right side of the room there is a wooden target where five orcs are throwing axes at a terrified gnoll while drinking out of dented mugs. They are wearing leather armor save for one in chain shirt and greaves. Their backs are decorated with the Bloodfang symbol. They are too distracted to notice you. There are no other obvious Bloodfang members in this place.

There are open seats at the bar as well as a small table next to the stage.

Bloodfang Gang

If the PCs confront the gang, the orcs will laugh at the goblins and not consider them a threat. They will begin with intimidation and resort to violence if provoked.

If violence breaks out, the patrons will move their tables back to give the fight some room. Gunther will begin taking bets with the waitress switching from running drinks to running markers. The band will continue playing unless physically disrupted.

Their leader, Bolga, will speak for the gang and not answer any of the PC's questions. The only realistic option is to defeat the Bloodfang in a fight. If the PCs wait until the bar closes and the gang leaves, the orcs will suffer penalties due to inebriation.

If defeated, Bolga will answer their questions. She will admit to being the ones who killed their cousin and ransacked his store. They have already either fenced or spent everything they stole. They were brought in as extra muscle by Rori, a red kobold. Rori only cared about the aqua draconis and took nothing else. Rori approached them—she has no idea how to contact Rori and had no plans on meeting them again. Rori always wore the purple robe and seemed to be “some type of religious zealot” and saying prayers in kobold (that none of the Bloodfang understand or would care to pay attention to even if they did). Rori wore a medallion with a dragon symbol that they would clutch.

Game of Guts

The game being played is a betting game called Guts, similar to 3 Card Brag. They are playing with bone tiles that show the rank and suit (dagger, skull, tooth, eye). The backs of the tiles have been marked with

warmsight inks and gives an insurmountable advantage to anyone who can read and decode them.

Orcs: Tharg & Dirk. They are teaming up to cheat the other players. They take turns winning or losing pots to each other to obscure the fact that they are cheating. A successful gambling roll will reveal their tactics to the PCs.

They will counter any accusation of cheating with intimidation and violence. They would refuse to let any goblins play and would rather cease the game than have their scheme revealed. If outnumbered, they would rather run than get in a fight, but will otherwise fight to defend their honor.

Gnoll: K'ren (& Milo). K'ren met Tharg in the fighting pits and would never suspect that an orc would perform goblin-like cheating. She has been growing frustrated as the game has progressed. She is amused by the bullying of her thrall Milo but it has failed to take the edge off her temper.

If the game is interrupted by the PCs' presence, she will loudly call Milo over in gnollish, *“Toesucker! Come here. Momma needs some attention!”* Milo will obediently and obsequiously scamper over to her and take his position at her feet. She will then attach a leash to his collar.

Dwarf: Nory Feldspar. Nory's conservative play has kept her in the game longer than she might otherwise. Even so, each lost hand is followed by a stiff drink and she has become quite drunk. This has made her quite chatty and friendly and would welcome the PCs to join the game, claiming *“They might bring me luck, or at least give someone else a chance to lose for a while.”*

If the PCs expose the orcs' cheating, Nory will be grateful and offer to buy them drinks. She will ask about their business and have a friendly conversation. If the topic of kobolds comes up, she orders more drinks and explains how her brother-in-law, Ogav Kindlebrick, had gotten “jammed up” with some kobolds and was now in jail, accused of stealing a flamestone from the Everforge. The flamestone is a perpetually burning, impossibly hot rock—one of many—that powers the Everforge.

Ogav is currently in a local jail, but he will be transferred to a more secure facility “soon.” If the PCs can help him break out—and the transfer is the only realistic option—then they could learn what he knows and they

would be rewarded out of the funds the kobolds promised him.

Jailbreak

Ogav Kindlebrick was an assistant at the Everforge. He was not getting the respect he thought he was due and he would often complain about this at the local tavern. Over the course of several weeks, he developed a friendship with a blue kobold that he knew as Bektar who would give him a sympathetic ear and buy him drinks. Eventually, Bektar convinced Ogav to do a very simple thing—neglect to properly close and secure a chute used to collect scrap—for which he would be handsomely compensated to the order of one-thousand gold. Ogav imagined that Bektar might steal some valuable works and precious metals, but he never imagined that Bektar would steal a flamestone. Flamestones would burn through or melt anything used to transport it and Ogav does not know how they pulled it off (they used a simple sack lined with red dragon scales).

Ogav was supposed to rendezvous with Bektar the next day and receive his payment. Unfortunately, when Ogav reported to his shift, the theft had been discovered and Ogav was detained. Further investigation revealed the mode of entry and Ogav was formally charged and jailed. Ogav sees himself as a victim and wants his promised reward. He has not yielded to interrogation and has maintained his innocence. In the PCs, he sees a means of escape. If they break him out of jail, he will lead them to a meeting with Bektar at the rendezvous point.

The transport wagon is hauled by a stone golem. Two guards ride on top of the wagon with crossbows at the ready. One guard walks in front and one guard follows the wagon with a battle axe and shield. The wagon is made of steel reinforced wood. It has a single door with a heavy lock and four small windows with vertical steel bars.

Library

The City Library sits on the eastern side of the straight near the major civil buildings that run The City bureaucracy. It is a circular domed building three stories tall. There are no windows in the stone structure and the only entrance is a twelve-foot tall door of dark wood and steel bands. Two human guards, each armed with a glaive and crossbow, stoically stand guard on either side of the doors.

In front of the guards, there is a stone pedestal topped with an iron lock box. The box displays a symbol showing five coins. A youthful gnome stands behind the pedestal and leans with their elbows on the top of the box. They look quite bored.

The entrance fee to the library is 5 gold coins per person. The gnome—Gallifred—collects the coins and places them through a slot in the top of the box. The box is bolted to the stone. Once payment is made, Gallifred signals to the guards and one will open the door just wide enough to let someone pass through. Trespassers and thieves are deterred with lethal force if necessary.

Two more guards stand inside the grand doors, but they are too busy scanning the interior of the library to pay you notice as you enter. The library is a grand space that smells of wood, leather, and paper. The circular wall consists of two tiers of bookshelves holding countless tomes and scrolls. A narrow walkway accessed via a couple of stairs on either side of the room provides access to the upper tier. The central area is occupied by large reading tables, smaller desks, and few ornamental statues and lamps that glow without emitting flame or smoke. Two dozen or more people of many races are either reading quietly or studying the shelves. Light is provided by several skylights in the ceiling, including a huge came glass window at the apex of the dome.

To the right side of the building is a sizable, semi-circular desk with several piles of books. An aerion with spectacles perched on their beak stands behind the desk. They are pretending not to be watching you as you enter.

Hu Song, aerion librarian on duty. His job, which he takes very seriously and is very prideful of, is to help library patrons find what they are looking for. He lacks any specific knowledge on any topic—but he knows where it could be found in the library. Suggested titles:

- Dragons & Serpents: A Natural History
- Fire & Ice: Dragons in History
- Little Dragons: Kobold Clans and the Great Pentuarch
- A Field Guide to Dragons
- Dragon Cults of Antiquity

The last volume makes a reference to the cult of Tiamat and has a small image of the same symbol found at the alchemist shop. Unfortunately, the chapter is missing

from the tome. If this is brought to his attention, Hu Song is quite upset by this, angry and embarrassed in equal measure. Once he gathers himself, he will note that the author, Professor Leaffall Sylva, donated this edition to the library and there might be another copy there—perhaps even Professor Sylva themselves.

The University

The University sprawls across the southwestern district north of the docks in a maze of buildings with no clear demarcation point of what is or isn't on the campus. There is no map and difficult-to-notice plaques identifying buildings my name are sometimes the only means of navigation. Fortunately, students and even staff and faculty face the same tribulations and are happy to give directions to anyone appearing lost, confused, or just exasperated. After a few helpful directions, a couple backtracks, and a little bit of luck, you find your destination.

Professor Leaffall Sylva

Upon entering Professor Sylva's office, you are hit with the smell of age. Old wood of the bookshelves, furniture, and walls. Old books filling shelves, stacked on tables, and piled on the floor. But older than all of them, Professor Sylva, a thin willowy elf, stands next to the window, staring out into space with her back to you and makes no motion or sound indicating she knows you are there.

Professor Sylva takes no mind of the PCs. When prodded with questions, she speaks with detachment as if her mind is preoccupied with other things, always staring out the window.

"Tiamat is the mother of dragons. Dragons dreamed the world into being. So what does that make her? It is said that she was killed by her brother, but do gods really die? Perhaps she is just sleeping and dreaming of worlds unknown. Who is to know? What I do know is that if she were to rise again, it would be the end of the world. More practically, if the kobolds became united in her worship, it would be the end of The City as we know it."

She has another copy of the Cult Dragons of Antiquity buried somewhere in her office and takes no issue if the PCs want to take it. It includes a map of the temple and enough clues of the surrounding area to narrow down on its location if they get close.

Just as the PCs are about to leave...

After a quick knock, an elf walks through the door. They are trying to carry several books and scrolls in their arms and are barely managing it. *"Professor? Here are the..."* their voice trailing off as they notice your presence. A scroll case slides from their arms, hitting the floor with a thud. Professor Sylva is startled and turns her head. *"Ah, Skydan, great timing. These fine folks are looking for the lost temple of Tiamat. Be a good lad and help them find it. Consider this extra credit... which you definitely need after your last exam results."* Skydans looks at the professor and back to you lot before sighing and placing their burden on the professor's desk.

Professor Elba Twiggins

The laboratory of Professor Twiggins is in full swing with students conducting experiments that spark, hum, and crackle as blue arcs flash between brass rods and globs. The professor himself is a thin gnome wearing a leather apron and gloves and sporting goggles.

"Yes, someone stole some bottled lightning from here. You probably don't realize how difficult and risky it is to obtain. No wonder the thief chose the relatively safe route of stealing it rather than harvesting lightning on their own."

"There was a student. Black kobold. Bellok I think his name was. Always wore a purple robe, like he was hiding something, but I made him remove the hood while in class. Very inquisitive. He took copious notes during my lecture on lightning being a fundamental elemental force rather than simply being an aspect of fire. I'll prove the current consensus wrong, I'm sure of it! But losing that bottle will set my experiments back a bit. Anyway, after it was stolen, I never saw them again."

The Docks

The docks on the western side of the strait and southern end of The City are in constant motion at all times of day and night. After much searching and talking to longshoremen and sailors, you find that the ship that carried the Heart of Ice was the Stormbrace. It is currently not in port, but the first mate of that voyage, a halfling named Corbin Farthing, is currently on another vessel and you catch him on deck while he's overseeing the loading of supplies and cargo.

The PCs can start their questioning and Corbin will answer to the best of his ability.

"What was the Heart of Ice? It looked like a perfectly clear chunk of jagged ice. As big as my head. He kept it in his lockbox. He showed it to me once as we'd gotten on quite well. He said it would instantly freeze any water it touched. Said it could freeze over an entire harbor if someone were to toss it in the sea. I don't know if that was true or not, but I wasn't going to test it."

"We were sailing the icy ocean on the coast of the northern wastes and anchored at a tiny finishing village. Don't even know if it had a name. Met an odd fellow in the public house, a blue kobold. Asked for passage back to The City. We weren't really in the business of taking passengers, but he seemed harmless enough and paid with a few mighty fine gemstones, so we took him on."

"He said his name was Bilmas. Sorry, I can't do the accent. He slept in my quarters. Only thing he had with him was a pack and a lockbox. Always wore a purple robe. It had seen better days, but I could tell it was finely made. Don't know how long he was way up north. When we got to The City, he left the ship with hardly a farwell and I haven't seen him since. I also disembarked. Spent some time with the family out west. That was several weeks ago now. The seas are calling me back."

Interlude

The first part of your journey is uneventful, walking through various neighborhoods and working your way deeper under The City. As you descend, you encounter fewer and fewer people until you are on your own. Delving deeper into the Undercity requires many twists and turns through ruins, natural limestone caves, and bypass tunnels. Sometimes you end up climbing up a ladder just so you descend a stairway further somewhere else.

If they are being guided by Ogav:

Ogav gets disoriented a few times and you have to do some backtracking, but eventually he says, *"We should be under the strait, near black kobold territory. Eventually, you begin navigating through a tunnel that shows the telltale signs of kobold mining—definitely dug out by tools but lacking the precision of dwarven work. The rendezvous point should be up ahead. Let me do the talking."*

If they are being guided by Skydan:

It is clear that Skydan only has a vague notion of where they are going. They are trying to cross reference several ancient maps that reference landmarks that are

either in ruin or simply do not exist any more. Eventually, you begin navigating through a tunnel that shows the telltale signs of kobold mining—definitely dug out by tools but lacking the precision of dwarven work. "I think we're getting close to where we will know we are getting close."

Encounter

Normally, the territorial boundaries of the kobold clans are marked with the symbols of the clan and the particular family that is guarding that boundaries. As you progress through this tunnel, you can clearly make out that the black kobold clan markers have been scratched out and replaced with the symbol of Tiamat.

The pathway descends rapidly, dropping 20 feet as it winds around a vertical borehole. The kobolds are casually standing guard within sight of each other. At the first sign of trouble, they will sound the "dinner bell" and retreat to the deepest corridor. The round following the ringing of the bell, the aberration will not appear, but the round after that, it will be added to the initiative for the combat round.

Forgotten Temple

For over an hour, you descend through winding passages. The air is getting warmer and more stifling with little airflow. The passage is uneven and rocky, squeezing down to less than yard wide in some places and under four feet high through much of it.

Just as you begin to feel a faint breeze of fresh air, the passage becomes more regular. As you proceed, the air not only becomes clear, but also seems charged with an energy impossible to describe. It is almost as if the barrier between what is real and what is possible is fraying.

That is when you hear the sound of chanting, clearly kobold, but indecipherable. You then hear a growl and low roar that is clearly something else. Something powerful. Something that has touched the divine.

The 5 kobold leaders have managed to (partially) summon Tiamat. Tiamat herself could play no role in the encounter and the PCs simply have to defeat the kobold cultists. Or Tiamat could be the equivalent of a wyrmling or other minor dragon that the PCs could defeat directly.

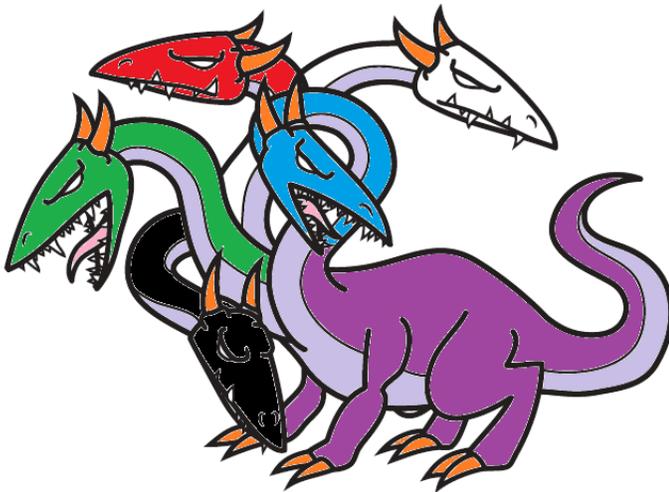
Paper Miniatures

I am a big fan of Rich Burlew's A Monster For Every Season³ paper miniatures done in the art style of his *Order of the Stick*. I took inspiration for the 5 kobold leaders from these:



I took the base kobold template, added wings, and also gave them a breath weapon. I also equipped each with weapons matching their picture.

For Tiamat, I took a 5-headed hydra and colored it in:



The purple base color was to a) be relatively neutral to the 5 heads and b) reference the purple robes of the cultists. It was only later that I realized it resembled Dino from *The Flintstones*.

I also had miniatures of the PCs, Bloodfang gang, generic kobolds, and the pit monster, taken straight from the PDF. However, I had to make one key modification for Sessa.



The player who had first dibs on character selection was really taken by Sessa and did a wonderful job playing her. The player commented something like, "I love you, I want to take care of you, and you are coming home with me." She was delighted that I took the effort to modify the figure appropriately.

³ <https://richburlew.gumroad.com/>

Comments on A&E Issue #592

Sinister Things was submitted to A&E, but in the last months there was a breakdown of email communication between Lee and myself. These comments should have appeared in the final issue. I didn't want to lose continuity of A&E comments, so here you go:

Michael Cule

Re cts to Spike re Rights, there is always ambiguity between "that which is is not explicitly disallowed is allowed" and "that which is not explicitly allowed is disallowed." People, whether they be politicians (who are mostly lawyers) or gamers (rules lawyers), will take whichever approach gives them the most benefit and/or hurts or angers their opponents the most. Such as, "owning the libs" or "sticking it to the rich."

During the drafting of the first amendments to the US Constitution (aka The Bill of Rights) there was worry that explicitly enumerating some rights would be used as an excuse to deny others. The 9th Amendment was meant to address this issue:

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

However, its vagueness means that debate continues on what is or should be a right. Unless Congress grants a right through legislative action (such as anti-discrimination laws), it is left to the courts. Perhaps most notably, there is no right to privacy in the US Constitution, but it could be inferred from other text, so courts generally agree upon it, but others can be denied, granted, or revoked based on the makeup of the Supreme Court at any given time. So long as the court shares sensibilities with the majority, it is relatively easy to remove minority rights.

Spike Y Jones

Re cts to John re PDF comic books, I have some that do show a 2-page spread that looks good when read on my computer monitor, but I often still have to zoom further to read the text. Also, the "fit to width" zoom option can mess up the single pages.

Craig Kamber

Re FoE, they can hang out at The Villain Pub.

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLimhOT0Avg-RrTX14TmLCSeB90wCK69x-&si=tbWXmWgXMYwawgug>

Mark Nemeth

Reacts to me, whereas I find being motivated by wealth boring—both in fiction and real life. Wealth is great, but what is the ultimate goal? Wanting to be rich just to be rich is dull. *Why* the character wants wealth is what *really* drives them.

I can definitely see the appeal of rolling stats and using them as inspiration. "I rolled low on STR, perhaps the PC is a halfling." But...

A) Sometimes you just want to play something specific but the dice won't let you.

B) I recoil at the unfairness that the dice bring, forcing some to play lesser characters.

Reacts to Michael re God, there are other options, of course. For example, it could be a god who deceives prophets and creates evil and who gives commands for their own curiosity and/or aggrandizement instead of the wellbeing of their creation. It could be a god whose ways are not our ways, whose motivations we cannot possibly hope to fathom and whose true character is impossible for mortals to ascertain; as such, our expectations that the outcomes of their commands will be for our benefit is only wishful thinking. It could be a creator god who set the universe in motion but does not actually issue commands or interact with their creation at all; instead, the commands come from people claiming to speak for the creator, but don't actually (self-deception is as likely as knowing deceit). Once you posit there is a god or God, there are countless interpretations and implications of what that implies.

Lisa Padol

Reacts to Craig re all the different possible combat options. It's not necessarily important that the game system have all the different possible maneuvers enumerated. What's important is that the system be able to handle whatever the PCs come up with. In a recent D&D session, a PC wanted to grab the holy symbol from around the neck of the evil priestess. This was not because "grab an object from an opponent" was listed in the rules but because that's what the player wanted their character to do.

Pum

Reacts to Jerry re gravity batteries, pumped-storage hydroelectric is already in use in the US and UK, though to a limited degree.

Jim Vassilakos

Reacts to Mark re an alien species' sense of morality, human morality is based on our evolution as a social species and our ever-changing culture.⁴ In particular, observe how we treat in-groups versus out-groups and how these definitions have shifted over the centuries. Also notice how out-groups get defined by non-biological factors such as class, religion, politics, and fandom. Interestingly, these non-biological groups may adapt physical signs (dress, language, and even body alteration) that mimic biological signals to identify members of the group (and those outside the group).

Veganism⁵ is interesting because they view the consumption of meat (and the treatment of animals in industrial farming) as immoral. Most non-vegans consider chickens as "other" ("it's just a chicken") while vegans see them as part of a greater in-group to which all animals belong and worthy of a decent life (or at a minimum worthy of not having the tortuous life of chickens in industrial farms). I know people who eschew pork because they see pigs as intelligent enough to be not-food, but are fine with eating beef.

Aliens capable of civilization-building would have some social structure that would be the foundation of their sense of morality.

We observe things like empathy, fairness, and loss in non-human animals. The biological drivers (often in the form of hormones) for these emotions also shape our morals (primarily with our in-group), but an alien species would have different biological drivers. Social insects like ants and bees have often been used as a template for alien species because they are about as far from a mammalian perspective as we can reasonably be expected to imagine and still be "realistic."

Comments on A&E Issue #593

Michael Cule

Re Lightme and Graham's character, charisma-monkeys can be a pain to deal with. Let's explore how people could behave after "being touched by an angel." They could start causing problems for the PC by becoming stalkers, putting themselves in danger trying to be helpful, and/or helping the nemesis. The nemesis could also orchestrate it so that these people come to harm.

⁴ As you might guess, I don't put any credence to the notion of objective morality.

⁵ I am not a vegan, and so apologize if I mischaracterize their moral stance; I welcome being corrected.

You don't want to punish the PC for the abilities they paid for, but you do want to keep things interesting.

Re cts to me, I believe that most convention rpg sessions in North America are 4 hours long. This is certainly true of "organized play" for D&D and Pathfinder (though 2-hour timeslots also exist). 6- and 8-hour sessions are more common locally. Sometimes you'll even see a 12-hour game and I've run one myself.

Spike Y Jones

Re cts to me, the NPC classes D&D 3.x had defined abilities listed per level, so you could make a 1st, 3rd, or 9th level Warrior if you wanted. The stat blocks of 5e offer a Warrior Infantry with 2 hit dice and a Warrior Veteran with 10 hit dice.

Your comment to Lisa about committing evil, *The Good Place* covered this fairly well. Even with the best of intentions, it is impossible to avoid "evil" consequences or implications. Did you buy your Fair Trade coffee directly from the farmer? What about the environmental effects of the farming practices, shipping, etc.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

Re Politics, yup, that about sums it up. The blatant self-dealing, corruption, and disregard for the law and the courts is further evidence for your thesis.

Mark Nemeth

Congratulations on the retirement; condolences on the circumstances and process that brought it.

Re cts to me, I run a very basic form of D&D 5e (2024) with just the PHB, so the PCs I would create for a con game could be viewed as boring. Since I design characters based on theme and vibes, they're sub-optimal. Lastly, I don't have the tactical mind to pick the "right" spells and combos. In my home campaign, none of this matters, but the thought of running it at con with players who are far more experienced and conversant in D&D than I am makes me nervous.

Lisa Padol

Re cts to Craig, this reminds me of when I ran a game with teenage mutant superheroes in a school for such students and one of the players (a mother of two kids) complained with exasperation about how the faculty was endangering children.

Heath Row

Re the player whose scimitar created arcs of lavender flower petals, this sounds like a tonal and aesthetic choice with significant anime/manga vibes. If it fits with the tone and aesthetic of the campaign, then fine, but it would not fit in a Conan-inspired campaign, for example. The choice of this one player is imposing their preferences upon the campaign and this may not be appreciated by the other players who do not share those preferences. This clash of expected and preferred tone and aesthetics is at the heart of why the art in D&D 2024 rubs some the wrong way. Lastly, if the player went into flowery description every single time their character attacked, I would get really annoyed as a player in that campaign.

Jim Vassilakos

Re cts to me, every rpg is an opportunity to "learn something." The reason why I, personally, go to conventions and participate in rpgs at a con are:

I can play something that I might not be able to play otherwise. I am the only GM in my current gaming group, so if I want to play *anything*, I have to go to a con (or join another group, but that is very unlikely to happen). I can play games that are more obscure or niche that would be easier to find at a con. I can play in games that are new to me; at Kublacon, both Kids on Bikes and Trail of Cthulhu fit this bill.

I can GM games or scenarios that I cannot with my current group (without disrupting the flow of the current campaign). It might be a different system, setting, and/or genre. At Kublacon, I ran a Savage Worlds fantasy game with goblin PCs in my City of 1000 Names setting. When I was playtesting my Wildcard Roleplaying System, I experimented with multiple genres.

Patrick Zoch

Re Igtheme, having PCs deal with NPC prisoners they capture in the middle of an adventure is a huge pain in the butt and is rarely resolved satisfactorily. This is one reason why undead and non-sapient monsters make such great enemies.

... And that's it for the inaugural issue of QPLG in *E&A*. My current plan is to do more scenario-related material taken from my Adventurers Guild campaign (similar to what I did for For Family and Home this issue) in lieu of write-ups. I look forward to your comments.

Twisting the Rope #1

Double Fantasy

“(Just Like) Starting Over”

My name is Myles Corcoran. I'm a 56-year old gamer from Cork, Ireland and I wrote regularly for Alarums & Excursions from issue 300 until issue 532. I stopped contributing when I found myself falling behind with the reading and finding each deadline more anxiety-inducing than a spur to my imagination.

When Brian Misiaszek told me about Lee Gold folding the APA and of the plan to create a successor I thought to write something and see if the muse returns.

In the years after I stopped contributing I still kept my weekly RPG group sessions going. I have been gaming with the same group of friends since 1999 and we've played a slew of different games over that quarter century or more.

IgTheme: Introducing players to a new rules system

I've been gaming with the same group now for over 25 years. We generally prefer rules-light and even then it takes a few sessions to get people to pick up new rules. In my youth I would play more complicated rule systems. Sometimes these would reward system mastery but just as often the complexity was for complexity's sake and didn't improve the game at the table. With a long-running group, I've come to know the quirks of my players well. Some rules, even the simplest, will not be retained week to week by at least one of my players so simple mechanics that I can repeat and re-explain at the table as we play are best.

Combat mechanics are often cumbersome in many games. None of my players have the patience for modern D&D combat, with all the moving parts, special abilities and so on, so I try to keep combat short and punchy.

Even then I struggle to include all the players, particularly as one of my regulars is risk adverse and tends to make characters who avoid combat. Their PCs hang back in any fray. So I have even more reason to keep fights short. To this end I prefer systems that allow player and GM improvisation, rather than more codified combat mechanics. Theater of the mind and bonuses for flair and interesting stunts suit us nicely.

Mutterings

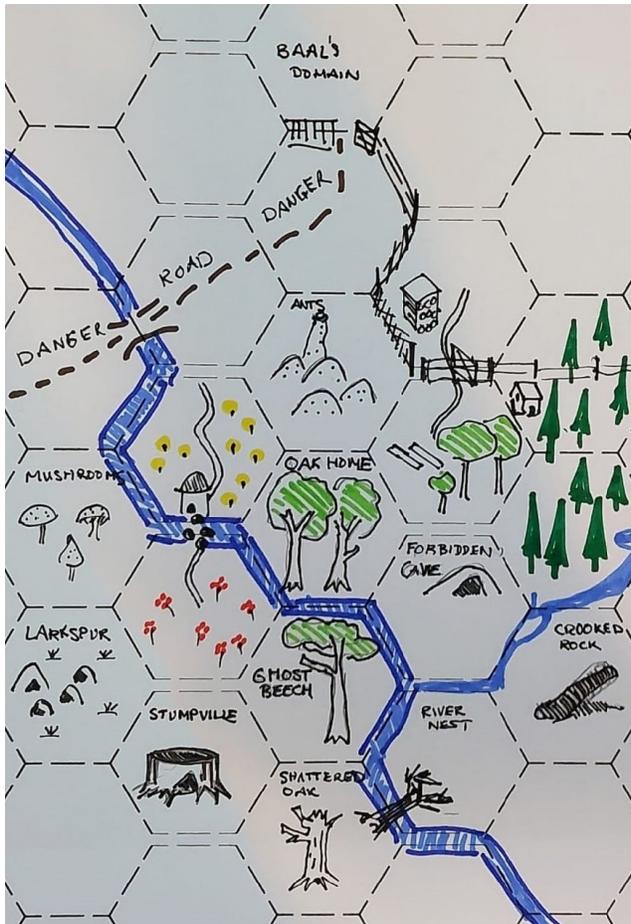
A group of work colleagues founded a staff boardgaming club in December 2019 in the university where I work. All through the COVID lockdowns we played on-line through boardgamearena.com, and since things opened up we have met face to face at least once a week.

I'm currently the chairperson of the club and looking forward to spending the grant we received from the Sports and Social Clubs Committee on more games for the club.

I've made new friends through the club and deepened existing friendships. It's no understatement to say the club has helped me through some difficult years and I am grateful for the games and the people who play them.

I can be found on boardgamearena.com under the name "deetwelve"
<https://boardgamearena.com/player?id=90948898>, if other boardgamers in the APA can swing a game in the Western Europe time zone.

A Mausritter Campaign



I have lately been running *Mausritter* (<https://mausritter.com>) for my gaming group. A band of brave mice work to defend their home, explore their world and become the heroes of Oak Home, their mouse town at the centre of the map.

The characters and their players are:

Sky, a sparrow-rider with an aerial mount, Miss Clutterbuck, played by Sam Mullaney.

Can-can, an ex-dancer and tin miner, played by Marie Lane.

Gwedolene, an ale-brewer, sometimes accompanied by Vicent, a drunken porter-mouse, played by Kate Sheehy.

Odette Snow, a foreign mouse and dam builder, played by Alex Ferguson.

Ambrose, a scrawny wireworker, singed with electrical burns, played by Peter MacHale.

I drew the map from the starting setting in the rules (see nearby picture), and took the players through the character generation and description of the setting in our first session before giving the player-mice their first mission (taken mostly from an

adventure published by Xeno and Kraft here: <https://xenokraft.itch.io/shattered-oak>).

Moira Whitetail, the mayor of Oak Home, asked the group to check on an outlying settlement of mice living in the Shattered Oak. The syrup shipments have dried up and the mice of Oak Home are missing their syrup-dipped hazelnuts.

The trip took a day and a night, herding the cargo-beetle loaned to them by Moira through fields of flowers, stopping briefly at Emerald Green's River House hostel before pressing on.

Near Stumpville the mice met Fennel, a resident of Stumpville, sick from eating unripe berries. Fennel's report of Stumpville worries the player-mice, as the cheese-making village appears to be sealed up tight. Sky reconnoitred ahead on Miss Clutterbuck, her sparrow-mount, and scouted both Stumpville and Shattered Oak. The lack of activity at

Stumpville was worrying, but more immediately threatening was the sight of a hawk perched at the top of Shattered Oak.

The group discussed whether they should investigate Stumpville or Shattered Oak and eventually decided to take a nap in the poppy field and see if sleeping on it would focus their minds. On waking they decided on Shattered Oak. The syrup-coated hazelnuts were hardly a consideration at all.

With whatever stealth they could muster, the player-mice moved closer to the old damaged tree. Ambrose, being brave, snuck closer and spied two syrup-stained wagons seemingly abandoned near the entrance to the hollowed-out oak. With no sign of the hawk from earlier, Can-can mustered up her courage and crept right up to the base of the tree, sticking to the undergrowth as best she could. Her miner's instincts brought her to a hollow space under the tree, too narrow to enter easily but doubtless leading into the root space. She beckoned for the others to approach as Ambrose kept a watchful eye on the entrance from behind one of the wagons.

Odette picked through the surface roots and suddenly disappeared. She had fallen into a hole and found herself in a cell, surprising the cell's previous occupants, three imprisoned mice. The other player-mice shuffled down the hole and joined Odette, who introduced them to Captain Holly and her two guardmice, now prisoners of a gang of rats who invaded the oak. The player-mice quickly freed the guardsmice's bonds.

It is hard for several mice to be quiet and before long a rat arrived to investigate (*failed Dex roll no doubt*). Luckily, Can-can heard the rodent's approach and took up a hiding place behind the door, gesturing to the others to press themselves against the walls and stay out of sight. A rat stuck his head through the door and was rewarded with a sharp needle-sword in the neck. Can-can had slain her first rat.

Unsure if the dead rat was to be missed, the mice took their opportunity and spilled out of the cell into the next room. An armory as it turned out, so Captain Holly armed her guards (a spearmouse and two archers) before she distributed what weapons remained to the others. As she did, Ambrose laid tripwires to catch any unwary rats who might enter as they took up arms.

The exit from the armory led to the central space of the hollow oak, a series of wooden ladders reached up through the gnarled tree towards other rooms. The space also led to the entrance, and Odette worked the door to let Ambrose in from his lookout post outside. This reunited the player-mice but also alerted a rat on the level above, who popped out from the kitchen on the 2nd level to growl and hurl a stone at Odette. Her luck held and the stone missed, as Sky stepped up and replied with a slingstone of her own which bounced off the rat's skull with a satisfying sound. Bleeding, the rat retreated into the kitchen.

Sky followed up her attack with a spirited charge up the ladder towards the kitchen, followed swiftly by Odette, Ambrose, and Captain Holly with her spear-wielding guardsmouse. The archers remained stationed at the bottom of the ladder to pick off any opportunist rats who might break cover to attack. Gwendolene bravely took up a post under the ladder out of the way, "to ambush any passing rats."

The mice climbed rapidly and burst into the kitchen where one rat was hastily applying a bandage to the headwound of another.

Odette hurled her knife at the would-be ratty Nightingale, who yelped in pain and abandoned his patient to try to jump out the kitchen window (*a lucky Dex roll for Odette*).

Ambrose joined the fray and grappled the fleeing rat only to receive a nasty bite for his pains. The spear-wielding guardmouse defended Ambrose and received a dreadful cut from the rat's cleaver. The guard died, but not before inflicting a mortal wound on the escaping rat. (*Combat in Mausritter is simple roll-under the relevant stat. The mice were lucky, as they definitely have fewer HP than the rats. The weight of numbers helped.*)

The other injured rat put up a fight but was soon overcome by force of numbers.

Gwendolene's caution was rewarded when a flurry of rocks fell from above. The ladder saved her, but one of the archers was killed instantly by a crushing blow to the head (*the dangers of being an NPC*). From Gwendolene's viewpoint she saw rats two levels higher up, manipulating a cauldron to the edge of one of the platforms that projected out over the central space of the oak.

The remaining archer and Sky fired a volley upwards, and briefly drove the rats into cover. Gwendolene seized the momentary respite to climb up and join the others in the kitchen.

Sky spied the sticky syrup bubbling over the rim of the cauldron and was outraged. The rats not only hope to scald the mice with their attack but plan to do so with the precious syrup of Shattered Oak. "This will not stand," she cried, and she scurried up another level while the rats took shelter.

Sky ducked into the first room she could to get out of the dangerous space under the cauldron and found herself facing a large spider, apparently at home in a corner of the sleeping quarters. Struck by an idea, she negotiated with the arachnid with gestures and proffered rations, before scooping up armfuls of sticky webs and bed linens.

With webs and fabric, she built a makeshift net and threw it across the central space where it made fast against the far wall, just as the eager rats above pushed the cauldron over the precipice. They cursed in anger to see it stick quite firmly in Sky's net. Hardly a drop was spilt. (*Reward interesting ideas if the dice play nice.*)

With the net for cover the other mice climbed up to join Sky. Then, supported by missile fire, the rest charged up to the top level to engage the two remaining rats in close quarters. The smaller mice did well in the confined space at the top of the tree (*like many games now, Mausritter has a roll 2 dice and keep best or worst as advantage/disadvantage mechanic*) and dispatched the last two rats with only a few scratches received. As the mice emerged victorious at the top of the hollow oak into the bright sunlight, they saw in dismay more rats in the distance, approaching with a wagon. These rats were more heavily armoured and a huge corpulent rat sat on the wagon, barking orders. He must be Baron Oswald of the Dead Ratz clan, a villainous opponent.

Suddenly, Sky shouted an urgent warning as the hawk dived towards the platform out of the sun.

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DREADSWORD 1

Beware, for over yonder hill there be dragons. **DREADSWORD** zine contains the ramblings of a hard-core adventure gamer from the mist-swept lands of Avalon. There will be frequent references to swords, sorcery, and mighty thews. So as you read, ponder not the decadent niceties of your soft world of civilisation. Instead, open yourself up to a verifiable Dream Quest. These pages contain barbarous invocations in the forbidden black speech, being filled with play reports, lore dumps, and my own musings about the game of **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS**. So harken fast and steady thy spirit, for words will fly like the whistling steel of a steppe man. Avante!

First, the honours. I'd like to raise my mead horn in toast to Jim, for putting this all together. Oh captain of Ever & Anon, good health and luck to you! Then, with a twist of mine wrist, I pour out a libation for the progenitor of this APA, the estimable Alarums and Excursions; gone to Valhalla; never forgotten.

In this issue I cover HOW I run my game of AD&D. Then I begin the saga of WHAT has happened so far. Afterwards you will discover the first scroll of WHERE; being the map of my games's region and a description of its most north western city. Finally, some of my players have given a descriptions of their characters adventures for your entertainment.

All words and illustrations in **DREADSWORD** zine are © Mitch Hyde 2025, all rights reserved. I hear by agree to publish this zine as part of Ever & Anon under the Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

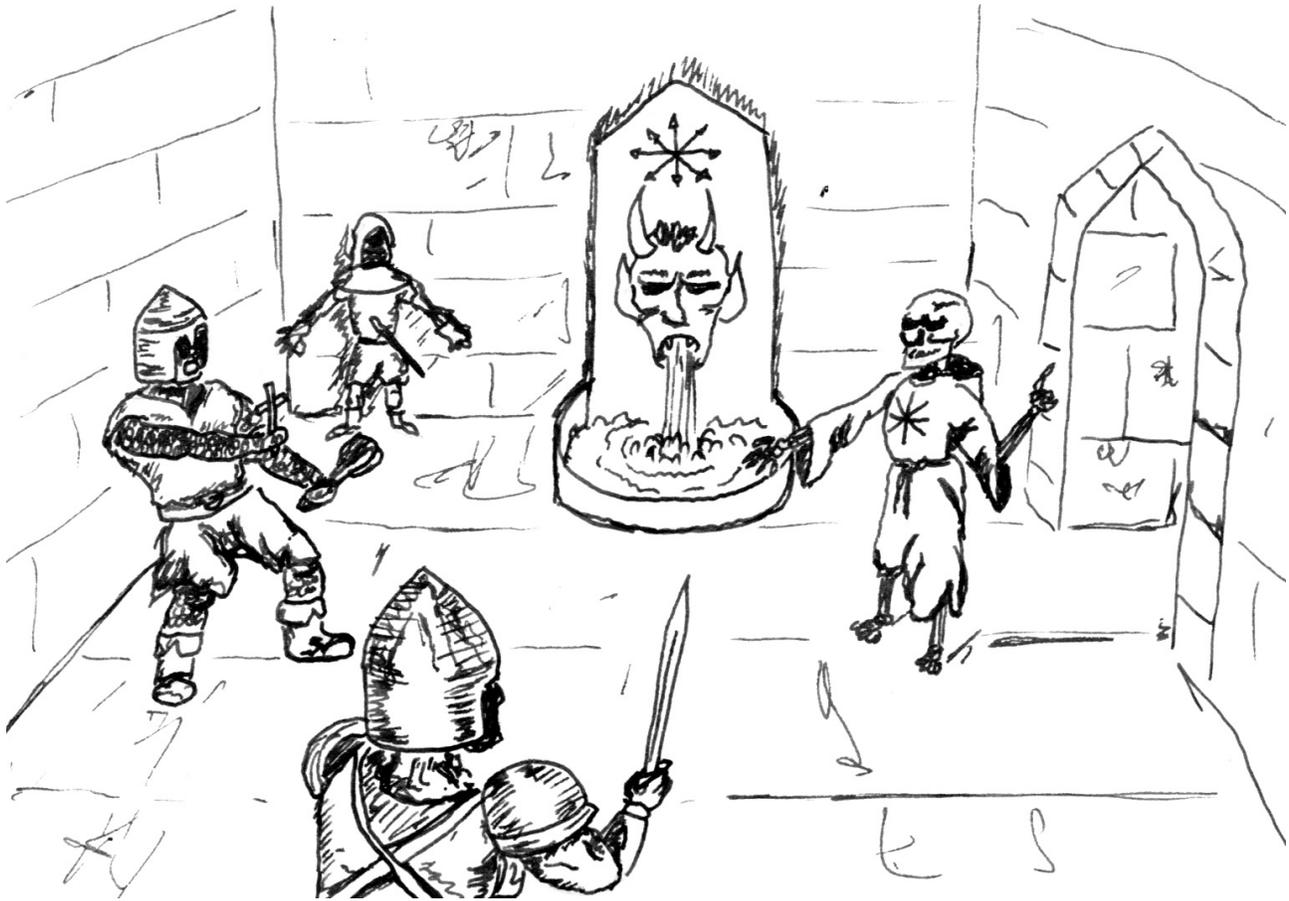
No AI heresy was used or consulted in the making of this zine. Read more of my mutterings at dreadlordgames.com



**SWORD & SORCERY
FANTASY ADVENTURE
ALL DAY EVERY DAY**



THE GAME



I run **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS** pretty much in the way its recommended to be run in the rule books. I use all the subsystems except for the weapon vs armour table, monks, and psionics. In a future issue I may write about how I facilitate some of the procedures proper, but for now I will lay out how I generally use these rules to run my campaign.

I use the rules as presented in the **PLAYERS HANDBOOK & DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE**. It's a very modular game and is intentionally abstracted in several ways, including combat resolution. This makes for an incredibly fast game, but with maximum rules depth. The main focus of the campaign is the Adventure. The goal of the adventure is the acquisition of treasure. Each gaming session comprises of one Adventure, usually some delve into a dungeon, but also travelling to its location

through the countryside. I generally run the campaign using the 1:1 time method, but sometimes I also freeze time to allow for longer adventures. I have also run two or three concurrent adventures happening in different locations but simultaneously in the game calendar.

When I set out to create the campaign I wanted to create a milieu that was composed of all the things one might expect to find when reading the rules of the game. That means there must be high priests who can resurrect party members. There must be high level Lords who rule castles. There must be sages of heraldry who can be hired to answer questions. The wilds must be littered with ruins of dead empires, and overflowing with lost treasures. When a scroll is being written, the feather of a magical beast must be procured as a quill. It

means that the majority of the civilised population is organised in a feudal form, and that bodies of armoured men are the means by which Lords rule and govern these fiefs. There must be the towers of assassin lords, druidic circles to old gods, and dark regions of the underworld ruled by sorcerous monsters of evil origin. The default Tolkienesque races must be present and be available as player options.

All this existing in the world are rules first, and each of them serves a game purpose. For example, if a Fighter wants to train, then he must find a master, and that master might have sworn oaths to a Lord in this interesting FEUDAL FANTASY SOCIETY. This is what can be called the implied setting. Arguably, the best setting to use for a First Edition campaign is Greyhawk. Greyhawk has all of these things built into it, being the world this game arose from. However, I didn't initially want to use this setting because I felt that most of the grognards I game with know the worlds lore in and out, and far better than I do in-fact. This would do little other than kill all verisimilitude in a game where exploration of the unknown plays a large part. If I were running the game for new players, Greyhawk would be the setting to use. But that wasn't the case. I also love world building in and of itself as a hobby and enjoy it.

I also take inspiration liberally from Sword & Sorcery fiction, which has always been my favourite mode of fantasy. I'm also a big reader of Weird Tales, horror, and sci fi, though arguably these things have a lesser influence on my game when its focus is FANTASY ADVENTURE.

The main difference between my world and Greyhawk is that I err towards smaller population sizes, if only to heighten the feel of human isolation, and to make the civilised areas have a more petty fief feel. This means that the population percentage of Levelled and Classed NPCs is a bit higher than the default. It also means that I can use the campaign setting for simultaneous

wargaming campaigns. In fact, there is currently one occurring in my campaign, but more on that at another time.

Players who join my campaign roll three PCs using Method I. They start in the city of Bayfry. They usually can take one PC on an adventure unless the player numbers are very low, when I will permit them to take more. Henchmen are usually present also and available owing to regular DMG odds. Once a player gets a native character to third level they may opt to roll further characters starting with 5,000 xp.

I run the game weekly online, using discord for voice chat and owl bear rodeo as a virtual table top. I'm currently aiming to use only material written by myself in this campaign. So far that has been the case.

At the start of this year I moved my game from a private server to a gaming group server. This is known as the ADDKON server. They run First Edition games with five Dungeon Masters who follow the SNAILFLAIL protocol. Basically, that means any character created in one of their games can travel into another. Running in this server means that any player can bring a PC into my game world and vice versa. Their games are based in the various cities along Greyhawk's wild coast. Ironic that I ended up in this server considering my avoidance of the setting initially, but it is what it is. They have a huge breadth of knowledge and I feel very lucky to be able to run my game there. I will leave a link to their joint campaign info [here](#). Several members of the server also run and organise the [Cauldron Convention](#), which is Europes biggest and best OSR convention, and is where I met most of them in 2024. This convention takes place over halloween weekend and hosts dozens of TSR era D&D games, Brausteins, and Chainmail battles. I really can't recommend it highly enough.

This is enough information for now on how I run my game. And I will now do my best to summarise what has occurred in my campaign up until I moved into the ADDKON server.



THE SAGA



Initially there were three players with nine Player Characters (PC hereafter). They were:

- * **Taiso** - a Human Cleric of Mielikki
- * **Zianfan** - a Human Magic User
- * **Felaern** - an Elf Thief
- * **Raikonen** - a Human Cleric of Ilmatar
- * **Findus** - an Elf Fighter / Magic user
- * **Darrien** - a Human Thief
- * **Humilki** - a Half-elf Fighter
- * **Opshur** - an Elf Assassin
- * **Bigern** - a Half-Orc Fighter / Assassin

They started in the town of Bayfry, a town in the high alps at the furthest reach of the Kingdom of Kalev. This town bestrides the Razorback Alps to the South, and the Old Stone Wilds to the North. The adventurers spent a little time exploring the town, discovering the Bergman Fighting-Man Club as the cheapest available digs. This is a sort of barrack for guards and wandering mercenaries. Its leader, Bergman, told them rumours of a local cursed dungeon called the Haunted Bordello, ten miles South West. The place was once a pleasure palace kept by a secretive Lady known as Curwin around a hundred years prior. There had been rumours of it corrupting local men and extorting them, and even more sinister rumours of a foul cult operating out of the manor. Eventually there was a crusade against it by a wandering paladin that saw the place destroyed and slighted. The area around it has been shunned ever since; once a fine pear grove and woodland, its now considered haunted. Whoever roams there hears the wailing of damed souls condemned to hell by the Bordello's evil influence.

Naturally the adventurers went to investigate after hearing that the place, though raised, was not fully explored. More rumours suggested that hidden chambers below the ruin may yet contain the coffers of the Madam Curwin.

During their first expedition they entered the wailing wood, soon discovering why it was given that moniker. They heard strange wailings echoing from the hill that held the ruin. Viewed from a distance, the place was seen to have a tower and several other dilapidated outbuildings. There was a courtyard wreathing a headless statue of a maiden.



The sneaky PCs did a bit of recon and moved up to the tower. Inside they discovered a couple of young men in scraps of armour. The players thought them to be green warriors, naught but lads really, and most likely bandits. There were also horses tethered near the tower, and those seemed pretty good booty to first level adventurers. After all, it had taken them over a day to march here on foot.

The party approached en masse. There was a rapid scuffle as a few arrows were loosed by the lads in the tower, then the party slung a sleep spell, sending them to the lands of nod. One was awoken and interrogated, but the teenager refused to give up information on who hired him, afraid of rebuttal. "You should leave sire, if you know whats good for you." He said. In the centre of the tower a hefty trap door was discovered.

Before going down into the dungeon, the party explored the ruin a little and found another roofed outbuilding. Within the shadows of this area there were wailings, and bestial grunts issuing forth. Inside they could make out the shape of some monster with a shock of white and black hair. This encounter led to one of the funnier misreadings by the players during the campaign. They assumed from my description that the beast inside must be an owl bear. I'm not sure how, but they did. It was not. But I will leave the revelation of the beasties true identity for next issue, when the PCs finally battled the occupant.

Avoiding the 'owlbear' they returned to the tower, opened the trap door, and descended. They removed a trip wire trap, and entered a musty chamber with dancing plinths and dilapidated seating. There were several ways to explore from this room, with three doors scattered throughout.

One door led into a corridor with rotten carpets. Along this corridor were doors that led into dilapidated bed chambers with large mirrors. One chamber had the withered husk of a man nailed to its ceiling. Another had a human skull spinning by some unseen force. At the end of the corridor was a wooden statue of a salacious beauty holding a copper chalice to her mouth. It was covered in a fine white mold. The party left this area and didn't want to interact with anything. Playing defensively, which is not a bad idea when you have but 3 HP.

Back into the dancing room they went, then north to find some wash rooms filled with large porcelain wash bowls embossed with satyr heads. These were filled with a putrescent black liquid. Hanging on a clothes hook they found an ancient grey robe embroidered with a black cube on its chest. They took this.

They continued on, finding a large descending staircase and a portcullis towards the East. Beyond the gate there was the wan light of a flickering torch. Shortly, they were surprised by a gaggle of six goblins. The goblins demanded they give over a password, and seemed unable to determine if the party were allies or not. The party liked their odds against such minuscule foes and decided to charge them. What proceeded was an embarrassing near TPK of the party. The goblins resolutely swung their picks and one by one sent party members into catatonia and death. After several rounds of whiffing every roll, the party was finally able to return blows, and after a couple more rounds slew enough goblins to break their morale and cause them to flee. Wounded badly, and only carrying a few silver pieces of treasure and the stolen horses, the party fled back to recover their wounds and bury their dead.

Their first expedition being a calamitous affair, they returned a week later, though this time wisely hiring four men-at-arms from Bergman to help guard them. These were armed with spears and leather armour. Now, I would like to state that my players are all experienced dungeoneers,

and that this near total defeat by goblins was really just indicative of how dicey the low levels can be in AD&D. It only takes a few bad rounds of rolling to totally wipe out. Still, I like to remind them of this horrendous early defeat regularly, despite their requests to have it buried. Sorry, not sorry!



HYDE

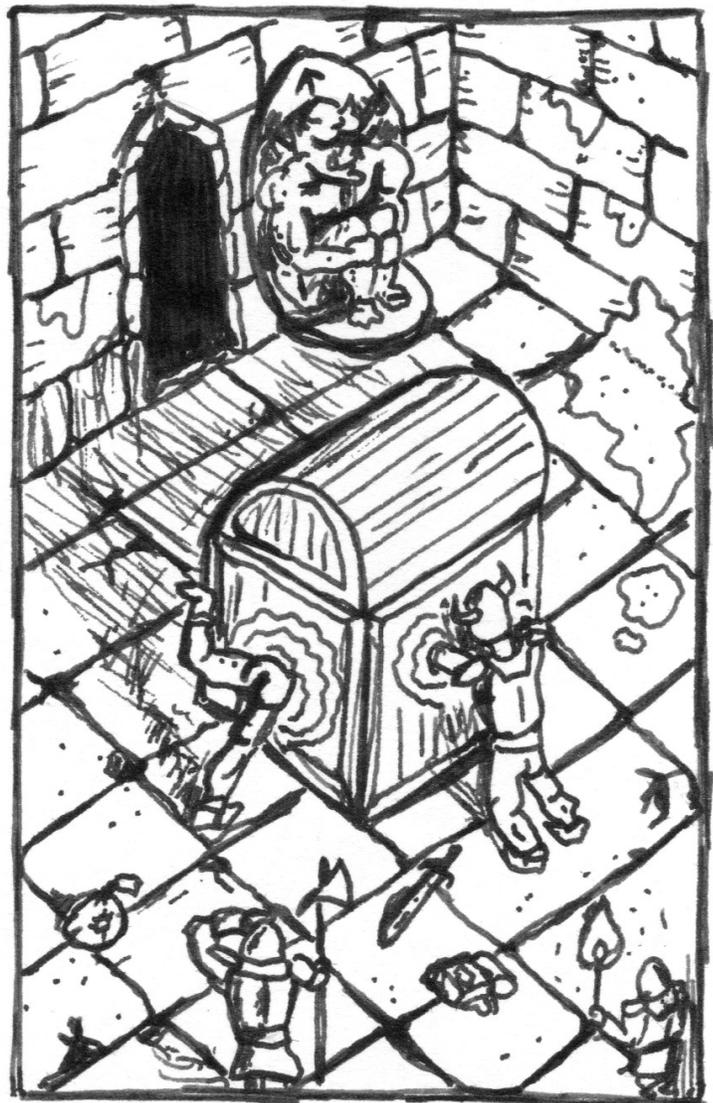
The second expedition was nearly as calamitous. After arriving at the dungeon, they quickly slew the remaining goblins, and found their lair in an eastern chamber. It contained sacks of copper pieces. There they found another portcullis blocking ingress towards the north. They discovered a chamber containing two orcs fighting over a halberd. They quickly dispatched one, and the other crumbled to begging, pleading to help the party if only they'd let him live. They agreed. In the wall of the orc room a secret door was located by the elf's extra special senses. Inside there was a hidden cache of fine wines and weapons long forgotten since the time of the bordello's power. There were also old pieces of padded armour embroidered with a black cube. They bagged the wines and took some of the armour. They explored a little more and discovered that the secret chamber was a shortcut back to the entrance chamber.

They learned from the orc he was hired by a bunch of bandits calling themselves the Rat Riders. He was hired to keep the goblins in line. The Rat Riders dwelled beyond the two portcullis, and to get through a password would need to be given to the guard beyond. These Rat Riders also had an elf with them, the orc knew.

They proceeded on, and shortly found a piece of graffiti written in a dubious brown liquid: CURWIN LIVES. There was also room with a skeleton splayed across its threshold, they didn't enter there. Instead they tried their luck with a banded door they found in the South. Upon forcing the door open they saw a giant stone chest in the centre of the room. Behind this a magic mouth on the wall cried out: INTRUDERS IN THE TREASURE ROOM! In a panic, several PCs and the orc rushed forward to open the chest before guards arrived. Upon reaching the chest they found their hands pass through it. Then they found their feet passing through the floor. They were tumbling, down, down, down. Through the illusory chest they fell, to meet a nasty end upon the tip of a rusty spike.

As if that weren't bad enough, some voices then began yelling from beyond the portcullis. There was the barking of a hound, and soon the slapping of many heavy boots. The Rats were riding forth! The party set up an ambush position at a choke point in a

corridor. The assassins hid in a side passage. A bear trap was set up on the floor. It took a while for the presumed Rat Riders to approach. The portcullis rose, bathed in torchlight, and at least fifteen men marched through, led by a baying war dog on a chain. The bear trap caught a man's foot and the assassins hoped out to stab them, but failed to surprise them. The hound was released and the men threw waves of hand axes and spears into the party as they struggled fighting the dog. The assassins retreated through the secret wine room, and then the party tried to make a fighting withdraw. It went horribly, and several party members were grievously wounded, and Darrien the thief was captured in the jaws of the dog. Tossed about like a rag doll.



HYDE

With such a tragic end some more PCs were rolled up including Bursur the Dwarven Fighter, who would go on to become a notable PC.

On their next expedition the Party decided to steer clear of the portcullis and investigated the boudoirs again. Inside they found a strange unholy symbol cast in the shape of a horned mans face with red enamel eyes. They battled two skeletons also. They did all this whilst avoiding looking into any of the mirrors, being paranoid they would be cursed.

Then the party reentered the wash rooms, and whilst investigating the clothes hooks found one to be a lever. Clunk, it was promptly pulled. A secret door opened. Beyond the door they saw a dark and cold chamber lined by glass windows. These windows were two way mirrors that overlooked the boudoirs. In the back of the room they saw a cupboard filled with gems and scrolls. The only problem was that wandering and peering from window to window was the outline of a dark shape. It appeared as an aquiline gentleman, with no features save glowing red eyes of hate. It didn't seem to react to them, only wander window to window. After a little experimentation, the party sent their cleric to one of the boudoirs, and once he entered that room, the shadow seemed to peer intensely at him through the glass and ceased moving about the room. Then the thief Felaern snuck through the chamber and pilfered the goods from the cupboard.

The next expedition they went down the stairs they'd found, and discovered a feasting hall painted with forest motifs. There were pillars carved as trees and in the North there was a huge tapestry of a unicorn behind a fine mahogany throne inlaid with ivory and silver. With careful examination they saw the tapestry would have once been very expensive, except it was infected with yellow mold. They burnt it with oil. As it smouldered away, they broke the throne away from the stone floor, but down in the gap six giant rats leapt out to ravage them. These they quickly dispatched with blade and mace. Once the tapestry had fallen away and ceased burning, they saw a concealed door in the wall behind it. They went through and were surprised by a large dog chained up in a four way chamber. The guard dog started barking a warning, but the party rushed it and silenced it forever. This was cheered as a great act of revenge by the players.

In that chamber there was a huge stone door carved with the symbol of a cube behind a crossed wand and morning star. The party thief very luckily managed to unlock it and what was inside was a very strange sight indeed. There was a narrow corridor and a cone of light shined from beyond a narrow archway. They entered, and a cool female voice called from beyond the portal.

"Come forth. Crawl before your Mistress."

The party froze. Then the voice called out again.

"Enter!"

The thieves proceeded forward, blinded by the light beyond the portal. They tried to call out, but received a nonsensical reply.

"He watches you now, from His Black Tower. Prove your love and devotion. Make your leap of faith!"

The thieves entered, their eyes adjusting to the spotlight. The chamber was lined with hundreds of skulls. At the centre there was a deep pit lined with spikes. Behind this was a statue of a gorgeous woman clad in spiked leather straps atop a plinth. She held before her voluminous bosom a crossed wand and morning star. Her hooded face was obscured, for the continuous light that had blinded them shone from within. The statue was cut from rosey marble and inlaid with gold. It looked incredibly expensive. They investigated the plinth and saw that it sat on a pressure plate. Within the skulls they also found many copper pipes. Whilst they argued about whether one of them might take a leap of faith down into the hole, they finally concluded that this was a silly plan. Afterwards, deeming the trap far too dangerous to engage with, they went onwards.

In the east they found a low vaulted chamber painted with hellish tableaux of winged demons cavorting with women in an ash clouded sky. In the north there was a passage, and on its floor was a glowing rune. This passage was lined with alcoves. Within each, hanging on hooks, were dried corpses wearing tabards decorated with a black cube. Driven into each corpse's forehead was a cube of onyx stone, etched with a glyph. One of these corpses was immediately touched by an unnamed party member (and why not!). All the corpses began to animate and rise from their

graves. A successful turn undead attempt sent them back to their torpor, however.

The party then returned to the throne, gathered up treasure and left.

By this time in the campaign the party had adventured a little in town also, they had found a few trainers in the thieves guild, and a sword academy along the market square. Burspur the Dwarf had been pick pocketed, and in the heat of the encounter had tackled the thief and knocked them out with a flurry of blows (yes I use the grappling and pummelling rules). On the thief he had found some potions and a magic dagger. All very useful. But later that night at the Inn of the Potent Paladin, he heard rumour that cutthroats were searching a man of his description.

The party had also spoken at length with the Sorcerer of the towns most prominent Tower. A long-bearded, half-blind, dithering man named Dagomon the Blissful. He was chief advisor to the Baronet, and also acted as a Sage of Histories, Folklore, and Heraldry. They paid for his services and enquired about the black cube insignia, and he informed them it was the private sigil of the Curwin Cult from over one hundred years prior. The sign of a historical private army. He told them the full history of the Paladin Gascon, who had arrived in the region at that time, investigating rumours of devilry at the Bordello. Gascon did indeed find altars and fiendish followings whilst under cover there. His crusade was meant to have slain Madam Curwin and destroyed the cult fully. The party argued that the cult must still be active, but Dagomon was not convinced, owing to the age of the attire they'd brought him.

Now we arrive at the final game before I switched the campaign over to the ADDKON server.

The party decided they would once again return to the Bordello and find real evidence of a cult there. At this point the players were convinced this must be the case. They hired a few extra hands, men-at-arms mostly, and descended again.

The ride to the dungeon takes about four hours by horse. Their usual procedure was to park up on the outskirts of the hill, leaving a few of the men-at-arms as caravan guards. Then they would climb the hill up to the ruin, being careful to avoid any contact with the wailing 'owlbear,'

which in all their expeditions so far had not given them any grief whatsoever.

This time they wanted to explore the north eastern part of the level. They had inferred from their map that they had travelled beyond the portcullis via the concealed door in the feasting hall, though they were not certain of this. Unlike many modern DMs of TSR editions of D&D, I do not use player facing dungeon maps. I mostly allow them to map themselves, and correct anything that too egregious. This is more in line with how the game is intended to be played, and the mapping mini-game is all but lost in modern circles of gamers. A real shame in my opinion, as it is a interesting player skill.

So off they went, through the feast hall doorway. They slunk past the gem studded undead in their alcoves. East. The elven thief going ahead and using their infra-vision. As an aside, this is a perfect example of how player mapping is an integral and lost part of the game. An elf using infra-vision is an excellent scout. If they are wearing leather armour they have four in six chance to surprise an enemy, slinking away undetected if successful. The balance of course is that whilst using infra-vision, this elf is not able to map, as ink does not produce heat. This adds a real balance to the ability, one that is totally absent in modern games that present maps to the players. I enforce this balance by changing my description of their position from distance declarations to simple time based exploration narration.

Beyond the vaulted chamber of undead they rounded several corridors, and came upon a door to the north and some barricades to the south. Beyond the barricades there wafted the smell of game and beast. "Not those pesky owlbears again." The party retreated immediately. Instead they approached the door in the north. Listening at the door they heard a shrill voice crying. A child, by the sound of it.

Playing the hero, the party forced open the door and found a small area obscured by many chains hanging from the ceiling.

"Help me, please. They have me tied up in here. Please." And other such statements were called out in a frail childlike voice. Hoho, how the players were sweating this scenario.



HYDE

The party were incredibly skeptical. But Lawful Good Clerics being what they are, we had at least one brave soul willing to enter. Thence goes Raikonen, Cleric of Ilmatar, crawling along the floor and avoiding contact with the dangling chains. An approach which made sense in his own mind, I'm sure.

"Yes, please, just over here, come a little closer. I can ... almost taste you."

The cleric, shuffling on his back looked upward, and saw something shuffling on the ceiling. The wasted head of an old man shrouded with tawny hair. It leered down hungrily, before flopping down atop of him. The creature might have had the head of a man, but its body was that of a greasy giant worm! It gnawed at his neck, searching for the taste of blood, but was rebuffed by the cleric's mail. The creature was quickly dispatched, and my players swore to never aid another child captive again. Do you think they stuck to this vow? Find out next issue.

After this they ventured through other passages, and came upon a room filled with crates and a sealed door. We dived for surprise and they failed. A rat rose up, watching them from the crates. Before the party could react it dashed under the door jam. Suddenly there came a crashing from beyond the door, as though someone were barricading themselves in. The party rushed forward and attempted to smash the door down.

A voice bellowed from beyond, "You should leave you ingrates, you'll soon be dead if you don't!" Such statements are great incentive to a group of Adventure Gamers. They replied by bashing the door ever harder with their axes. From below the door the rat sped away under their legs and out into the corridor to the east.

The door began to splinter and they

saw beyond a stern faced elf wearing a cravat and wide brimmed hat. The party told him to give up, but he denied them. Oil was thrown over his door and all the furniture stacked behind it. Before it could be lit however, the thieves acting as sentry in the east heard the heavy marching of boots approaching. The dirty rat hat given them away.

The party lined up into battle ranks, spears to the front set right and strong. Behind the door the elf cackled, "its too late for that you fools! Doom unto you!" His door was promptly set aflame! Smoke guttered through the chamber. Then several bandits carrying spears dashed around the corner and engaged in battle.

The following melee was an intense tactical battle that writing a play by play of won't do justice to. By the second round the party had cast sleep on the initial chargers. The elf had launched a magic missile into a party MU from the gap in the door, spoiling his spell. The party cleric on the next round cast hold person from the scroll they'd found in the boudoir, this stopped the the elf from further interference (always use your magic items when things get tough!). The thieves tried to slay the foes sleeping on the floor, but a secondary wave charged over them, led by a giant of a man draped in glittering chainmail and wielding a glowing magic longsword. The battle was intense, and several party members were downed, but not slain. Eventually the party were victorious, and having slain the bandits and their leader, they captured the elf. With him they located the barracks of the bandits, and found much treasures. Chests of gold. Two magic swords. Elfin chainmail. Bear pelts and gems. Inside the elf's chamber there was a rose marble statuette of a horned man in spiked collar, holding aloft a dreaded wand. They tied up the elf and dragged him and the treasure away.

Now came an interesting moral dilemma on the side of the party. After taking their captive back to the outskirts of Bayfry, they paid off the owner of the Silver Stallion Stable to rent his basement. The clerics were sent away, lest they ruin their honour in the eyes of their gods. And then the torturing began. They discovered that the elf was once an ally of Madam Curwin, all those years ago when the Bordello still stood. He told the party that she will be revived, that the stars were right for her to return, as was prophesied. This elf had returned to the ruin after his own magical research, and found the Rat Riders camped in the

first level. He had slowly been charming them with the intent to restart the cult, but their leader had proved unaffected. It was only by bringing them treasures from the lower levels that was he able to ally himself with them.

"The lower levels! How do you pass the undead and their rune?" The party asked. To which he replied that only one who bared the sigil of Curwin would not invoke the rune of animation. The elf showed them the tattoo on his bicep. A black cube. Good thing they had several armours and robes marked with the black cube then.

The party very kindly decided to strip the elf, so named Dindir, of all his equipment, and then told him to leave the region and never return. Even though he was a Devil worshiper, the party decided to allow him mercy. Did he keep his side of the bargain? Well, that is a story for the next play report. As the party had indeed found some cult activity in the Bordello, they set about ensuring no cult would ever rouse from the Bordello's lower levels. And of course, they would rinse the place of any treasure it held.

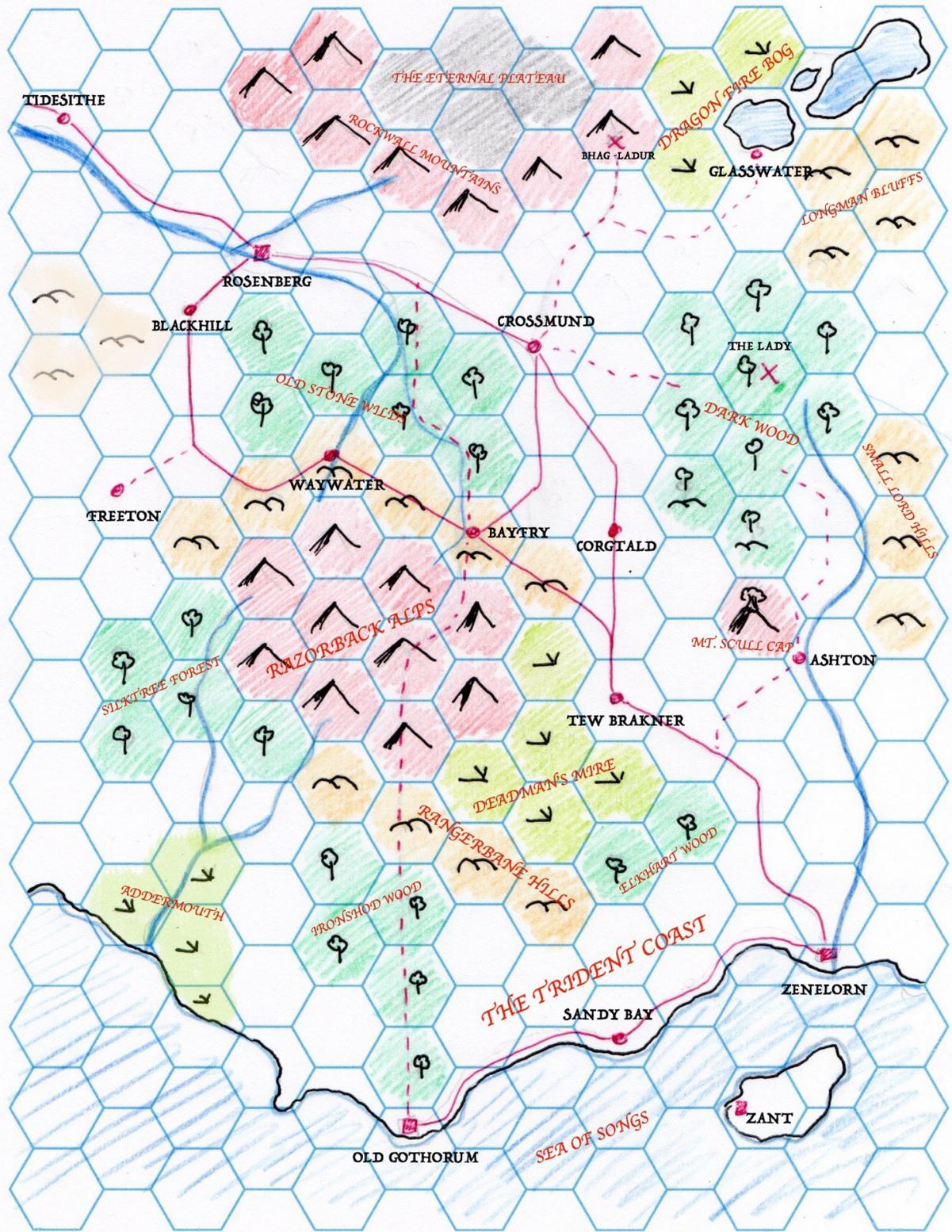




THE MAP



1 HEX = 30 MILES





THE CITY



TIDESITHE

The River Bloom filters into the Petal Estuary, where Tidesithe governs all waters. She is the naval powerhouse of Rosenberg. The Wand Meisters Guild keeps her, a collective of wizard merchants with a hand in all trade, from Bayfry to the coast, and over the Chrome Sea. King Kalev and his house despise the Wand Meisters Guild, but it since it has been entrenched in the region for over two thousand years, it is immovable. The town of Tidesithe is ruled by Baron Bak'un, an immortal wizard and head lector of the Wand Meisters Guild. Bak'un reveals himself once yearly during the winter equinox, from atop his citadel; the Thrice Spindled Keep. Bak'un is shrouded in rumour, some say he is a liche, others a cambion half-demon, others say he is not a single man but a cabal of illusionists. He wears a yellow cowl, bone crown, and emerges mounted upon a bizarre beast that flies not on membranous wings, but on fanned claws that emit a pearlescent wind. None alive nor dead have ever seen his face, nor heard his voice, which is said to cause even the Demon Lords to shudder.

Notable locations in Tidesithe are the great quay shipyard, manned by human and sea-elf shipwrights. Its Boardwalk Carnival is a mass of tents and giant pinwheels, where all manner of entertainments are said to be found. The tents are manned by rodent-faced men wearing gem studded muzzles and the sign of a black trigon. Stood prominently in the estuary is the Elder Temple. Made from queer soapstone of strange geometry it is straddled with statues of octopoid star-children. The temple is visited only by the bronze masked priesthood of the Old One. Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'l'yeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.

The city itself is a mix of shingled wood housing and older conical soapstone structures. The wretched peasantry must bow before the sign of the wand wherever it is seen. It flutters from flags from atop crenelated manors, or held aloft by masked Wizards carried on slave borne palanquins. The immortal guard march through the mud slick roads in formations of ten, they are hobgoblins dressed in chequered tabards and bull shaped great helms, their sign is a cloven hoof crushing a skull. Emaciated children play along the quay, its petal littered waters glittering, the tail of a mermaid often breaching the foam. Such are the sights of Tidesithe.

Private militias are common place. And though the Guild present themselves as a unified force, the spell slinging Wand Meisters are in constant war with each other.

CITY HERALDRY: Gold Scales on White Field

RULER HERALDRY: Yellow Wand on chequered field.

POPULATION: 6,000, 50% Human, 15% sea elves, 10% gnomes, 25% half-orcs

ALIGNMENT: Lawful Evil

CHIEF RELIGIONS: CTHULHU, AHTO (Finnish), LOVIATAR (Finnish)

HATES: religious intolerance, impoliteness.

LIKES: free trade, initiatory festivals, free love, social hierarchy

TRADE: Ships, spice, jewellery, copper.

ARMY: 200 light foot, 50 heavy horse, 50 light horse, 40 mermen, 200 hobgoblins, 5 war galley, 20 battle-mages (warlock)



DAWNSTAR AND HIS MASTER
DAGONOR THE BLISSFUL



HYDE



PLAYER CHARACTERS



Below are a some of the adventures of current player characters as described by their players.

Submitted by player James Knight:

Recently inducted into Bayfry's White Rose Assassins Guild Rin is a survivor of a dangerous adventure in The Coliseum where he narrowly escaped with his life thanks to cunning dungeoneering and the judicious use of slow poison by his adventuring companions. He is now splitting his time attempting to ingratiate himself with the Guild as well as continuing to gain wealth independently with his adventuring comrades. The most recent such expedition involved the exploration of the complex under Adder Hill - a location that lived up to its name, brimming as it was with slithering denizens! While in Bayfry on Guild business Rin has spied on both the druidic circle who frequent The Orchard of The Green One north of the city walls and the levy militia of Bayfry stationed at Castle Broadsword disguised as a recently deceased cobbler!



Submitted by player Never_plays_elves:

As Zianfan wanted to train he though it wise to first try to recruit the sage Dagomon the Blissful, which whom the party had collaborated already, for that task. Upon arriving at the tower one of the sages many acolytes, named Dawnstar lead him, through a door appearing upon pointing a wand to a wall, into a secret chamber and there the acolyte set as condition for training that Zianfan would accept to be submitted to magical screening and then have a device permanently implanted in him. Zianfan said he was willing to accept the screening, having nothing to hide, but not the implant. He would keep that conversation secret but return the next day hoping that Dawnstar would change his mind.

Dawnstar tried to play a little trick on the youngster and as Zianfan turned to leave, he saw that the position of the doors and the walls in the chamber had changed. "The path to power is laden with traps and illusions young master." chuckled the acolyte only to witness Zianfan calmly lean on the wall, and pass through it. At that point he could hear Dawnstars incantation and feel a pinch of sand thrown on him. When he woke up he was still in the tower, on a divan, listening to Dawnstar who informed him he had just passed the screening and would only be accepted as a trainee next day if he accepted the implant.

Zianfan returned to his room in the inn, and, despite the lack of any obvious trace of surgery, he cast Detect Magic on himself. Upon noticing an orb shaped emanation of magical light floating in the air close to him he climbed on a chair and the dexterous young magician would soon trap the otherwise invisible orb inside his sack and leave it behind in the inn while he set on on his quest for another trainer and soon found one. As for the orb, he was hoping that someone might be found in the future willing to offer some money for such a device related to the most prominent sage in Bayfry...

De Ludis Elficis Fictis

by Pum (AKA Paul Holman), Harrow, ENGLAND.

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June 2025

Web: <http://www.pum.org>

New APA, new title – an allusion to our predilection for pretend elf games, and blatantly copying Mr Cule's stylish previous use of a Latin title.

Lee did such an astonishing job publishing A&E for so long, and it is a great shame that she is unable to continue. I'm sure we are all immensely grateful to her in so many ways – I know I am. Even when I did not contribute, I valued and enjoyed reading A&E.

Also, many thanx to those that have made E&A a reality. My best wishes to all who sail in her!

Recently I have mostly been ...

... on holiday in Japan for 7 weeks. We visited many places across central and mid-western Japan, plus a few days in Okinawa and another few days in Nikko, north of Tokyo. Lots of castles, temples, parks, as well as some theatre, museums, and, of course, lots of sakura (cherry blossom.)

Of course, this meant I missed a great deal of role playing on Wednesday evening with the High Wycombe group of Michael Cule and co. Since I've been back we have been dungeon bashing with GURPS Dungeon Fantasy, this time run by our gracious host, Martin, on his new, super-duper, custom gaming table, which has a computer screen as the table top – very lovely.

I'm looking forward to the beginning of July, when I should be off to Stabcon in sunny Stockport for a long weekend of mostly board gaming, although there is usually a little role playing which I may dabble in.

Recently my Tuesday evening board gaming group has been playing the fairly new *SETI: Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence* board game. It is a very appealing game with a simplified moving cardboard orrery at the centre of the board, which looks rather cool and adds an interesting tactical element to the game, as the alignment of the planets changes as the game progresses. In terms of broad game play, it feels quite a lot like *Terraforming Mars*, in that you have a number of standard actions which you can perform at the cost of resources, but you also have a hand of cards which you can play to do the same or similar actions in a more cost effective or beneficial way. The artwork is very nice, as are the pieces, which are made from something the publisher, Czech Games Edition (CGE), calls RE-Wood, which they describe as an eco-friendly, biodegradable substance made from 80% shredded wood residue, which is injection molded.

IgTheme: Introducing New Rules

This is a subject that came up recently in the Wednesday evening group. Several expressed a strong reluctance to learn yet another new rule system. A significant part of the argument seemed to be that we are quite familiar and up to speed with GURPS and BRP for simulationist type games, and with PbtA Dungeon World and Forged in the Dark type games systems for more narrative games, so why learn another whole new system? So, in my recent experience, even before introducing a new system, one must ask "why do we need to learn a new system? Is it worth it?"

One potential answer to those questions that came up is "because we want to play this particular scenario or campaign that is dependent on the new system"; in our case that was NBA Dracula Dossier, which at least a few of us were keen to play. This hit another problem with new systems, that it may not suit the groups tastes – in our case we have all struggled to get into, or get along with Gumshoe type game systems.

With new or alternative versions of rules, we have hit the problem of people remembering the wrong version of the rules, such as slightly different standard GURPS rules when playing GURPS Dungeon Fantasy. So even a not so new rules system can be problematic and must be dealt with carefully.

I think clarity of the new rules, with helpful examples and good reference aids goes almost without saying. It is probably a good idea to get the players to buy into the new rules by pointing out the virtues of the new system that will appeal specifically to each player and their play style, if possible.

As far as implementing the new rules, I guess that phasing in the complexities in stages over the first few sessions may be a good idea, perhaps with some scenes or combats specifically designed to showcase new features, such as advanced rule options.

Comments

A&E593 Lisa Padol: re NBA, thanx to you and Aviatrix for the link to the Trenchcoat document. I particularly like the investigative skill question prompts for the different types of skills, and the Benefits subsystem.

—====### Everyone else, RAEBNC ###====—

BUGBEARS & BALLYHOO #40

Juneteenth 2025, for Ever & Anon #1

Gabriel Roark

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A FEW ~~WORDS~~ PARAGRAPHS ABOUT THIS ZINE & ITS CONTRIBUTOR

Bugbears & Ballyhoo (B&B) ~~is~~ *was* a 3+1 hit die (HD) discussion zine focused on roleplaying games (RPGs). It migrated from that storied labyrinth of APAs, *Alarums & Excursions* (A&E), down a HD for the wear as it pads into the pages of *Ever & Anon*. Material originating in B&B mainly concerns RPGs of the old-school variety: The Arduin Grimoire and Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (first edition). Bugbears are not shy to wade into other topics, though.

The contributor has eleven more years than the zine has issues & started playing D&D in 1983. He lives in Rancho Cordova with his wife & her mother. He currently runs AD&D's *The Temple of Elemental Evil* campaign for one group, plays in a fifth edition D&D game (2014 rules), and is stocking The Howling Tower for a future Arduin campaign.

The contributor looks forward to populating this new dungeon in concert with *compadres* from A&E. New voices will be most welcome, too. Furthermore, the contributor looks forward to ditching this third-person narrative.

IN THIS ISSUE

- Phylactery of Praise
- Ignorable Theme: Introducing players to a new rules system, especially to new combat rules
- Tabulation of PC XP Progressions
- Nextish

PHYLACTERY OF PRAISE

I first heard about A&E around 2014–2016 through an internet forum dedicated to Original D&D (OD&D). I was just getting into Arduin—which started as an OD&D variant—& read that Arduin's creator, David A. Hargrave, contributed to A&E beginning in 1977. Google fu pointed me to A&E's webpage and I emailed its editor, Lee Gold, to see whether & how I might obtain back issues. At that time, I only knew of one or two issues to which Hargrave contributed.

Lee was very helpful to me. Rather than simply send me the issue or two that I initially requested, she also sent me a partial issue-index of A&E contributors, a brief history of the APA-L (APA-Los Angeles, a sci-fi APA, which spawned A&E), and the A&E issue index at RPG Geek. I also requested a copy of the latest issue of A&E, to see whether I might want to subscribe or contribute. After reading the then-latest issue of A&E, I wrote

Lee about my interest in contributing, feeling out whether my gaming interests were likely to align with some of the readers. She replied in words to the effect of, “I think you will fit right in.” I submitted my first since in late 2016.

All of that to say that Lee encouraged me to get into regular correspondence with gamers outside my personal gaming groups & participate in DIY, not-for-profit games discussions & writing. With a typically light editorial touch, Lee provided a forum for in-depth, lively, & mostly friendly exchanges of ideas concerning RPGs. The monthly cadence fostered reflection, manifest in the quality of zines. When I became an A&E contributor, few others were playing old-school RPGs. Despite this, other contributors engaged with my zine as though worthy of their attention. In turn, they broadened my knowledge & appreciation for games unlike D&D and Arduin.

Back to Lee. In the time that I read & contributed to A&E, Lee commented on nearly every zine. Minimally, she left a “RAEBNC”, an acknowledgement of the contribution. Lee posted A&E on time every month. She obtained cover art, kept the books on contributors’ & subscribers’ fees, & inserted news of note into the APA.

Lee is well read & is a good discussant. These qualities come across in her zines & commentary on other zines. I enjoyed reading about her Icelandic campaigns because she infused the setting with verisimilitude, having acquainted herself with Norse history & mythology.

Thank you, Lee, for the crown jewel of amateur RPG discussion that is A&E.

IGTHEME: INTRODUCING PLAYERS TO A NEW RULES SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY TO NEW COMBAT RULES

This is always the dilemma when trying out a new game system, whether for a one-shot or a campaign, right? One approach to introducing players to a new rules system consists of six steps:

1. Read the rules
2. Locate interested players
3. Devise (or read) an introductory scenario
4. Convene a session zero
5. Run the introductory scenario
6. Debrief with your players

Read the Rules

This is basic. One should have enough of an understanding of the rules to give prospective players an elevator pitch about the game. A referee also needs to understand the rules system to have any credibility at the table & for the maximum enjoyment of all. Is the ref going to be comfortable running a game according to the new rules? How about prospective players? Do the rules require special equipment or incorporate something like custom dice, cards, tokens, or miniatures? Does the referee perceive any cultural or game conceits that are uncomfortable or offensive to themselves, or anticipate the same for their players?

Locate Interested Players

Locating interested players is not simply about finding people: it is also about recruitment & fit. If a referee does their homework, they should be able to provide enough information to assess interest. If the subject game has a set of quick-start rules, the ref should provide them to prospects.

Devise or Read an Introductory Scenario

Some games come with an introductory scenario & save refs some work. If the scenario does not meet the needs of a ref & their nascent troupe, or simply does not exist, the referee will have to prepare their own scenario.

A good introductory scenario should be fun, provide a precis on the most important mechanics of the game, & give much attention to conflict resolution mechanics (frequently combat).

Convene a Session Zero

This is where the referee gets together with the players, processing expectations, answering questions, & helping the players make their characters. Time permitting, the group can run some mock combats & test other game mechanics with their newly minted PCs (typically without consequence for the actual game or campaign).

Run the Introductory Scenario

I covered the desirable aspects of an introductory scenario already, so I will not repeat them. When the introductory scenario, the referee should be prepared to pause to explain rules and procedures. Believe it or not, some RPGs present rules in an atomized fashion (I am looking at you, AD&D!) that render the order or relationships among rules unclear. My suggestion is that referees pause & give a brief reminder of the rules as the

game enters different phases. For instance, an AD&D game might begin with the PCs traveling from one settlement to another or exploring a countryside to find an adventure site. Here, the referee could describe the procedures for traveling or hex-crawling: players state intentions and travel formation, referee determines & communicates weather & other conditions, ref advises the players that wandering encounters are a thing, & what other kinds of actions are reasonable to PCs during travel periods. Cheat sheets for players or players screens can be helpful. After a brief reminder, play out the activity. Repeat as the group has encounters, combats, or shifts environments to dungeon or urban community.

Debrief with your Players

This last step goes one step beyond the IgTheme but I think it is important. Try to find out what worked for your players. Which rules or procedures functioned as advertised? Which did not? I have found my players (who are, admittedly, good friends of mine) willing to speak candidly about the pros & cons of a session or clarity of rules. I do not have a recommendation as to timing, that is, immediately upon ending the session or sometime later. Each has its advantage, with immediacy probably winning out for the best input—unless your players are exhausted!

TABULATION OF PC XP PROGRESSIONS

In recent issues of B&B, I had been presenting information on the exper-

Name	Race	Class	XP Bonus	Session	Level	XP
Amelie Atugar	Half-orc	Cleric	No	9	2	1,782
				15	3	4,782
Omar Atugar	Half-orc	Fighter	Yes	9	2	2,034
				17	3	4,899
Jack Ironheart	Human	Paladin	No	15	2	2,751
John Ironheart	Human	Cleric	No	9	2	1,755
				21	3	3,001
Ttam Gnimelf	Wood Elf	R/MU	No/No	21	2/2	2,501/2,501
Ekim Gnimelf	Wood elf	Thief	Yes	9	2	2,099
				15	3	2,501
				27	4	5,001
Sonya Ravenclaw	Human	Cavalier	No	9	2	2,582
				-	-	-
Moirra Ravenclaw	Human	MU	Yes	9	2	2,549
				27	3	5,001
Gobi	Deep Gnome	I/Thief	Yes/Yes	9	1/2	1,765/1,765
				15	2/2	2,251/2,251
				21	3/3	4,501/4,501
New Moon	High Elf	Bard	No	?	2	2,001
				25	3	4,001
Fern	Human	Druid	No	?	2	2,001
				25	3	4,001
Ko To Taz	Spirit Folk	OA Monk	No	-	1	1,632

Notes & Abbreviations: I = Illusionist; MU = Magic-user; OA = Oriental Adventures; R = Ranger; XP = experience points

ience point accumulation of the PCs in an AD&D campaign that I am running. In those issues, I provided one or more session reports, a breakdown of which activities earned XP, and a tally of XP earnings by PC at that point in the campaign. I am breaking from that mode of presentation to offer one table that sums up the break points at which the PCs levelled up (see previous page). I do not have all the character sheets with me now, so some of the XP totals in the table break at the minimum needed XP to advance a level; sometimes my session notes or email correspondence contains the exact XP earned by a PC at level-up.

The project ensued from discussions that a few other A&E contributors had with me about how asymmetrical levelling requirements for different classes might affect party level advancement. The way I was tackling the problem in earlier issues of this zine was slow, albeit with the provision of much more context than this issue's table reveals. Nevertheless, a few things jump out at me & probably you, too. Here are some takeaways:

- Thieves level the fastest, even in a multiclass situation
- Clerics level the second fastest
- Cavaliers & paladins progress very slowly
- Multiclass characters also progress very slowly, unless one of the classes is thief
- The 10% XP bonus for exceptional prime requisites permits fighters to level almost as quickly as clerics
- The 10% XP bonus for exceptional prime requisites is very helpful to multiclass characters
- Despite the variability of AD&D level-breaks across classes, most

PCs in our campaign leveled in the same sessions or within a couple of sessions of each other. In our campaign, this is partially due to some PCs having insufficient money to pay a trainer, so their advancement was stymied for a session or three. I will not that Ko To Taz did not join the campaign until after Session 20, so he lags behind the others.

NEXTISH

- Comments on E&A #1
- A reading game review, such as
 - *Troika!*
 - One of many Troika adventures
- IgTheme essay
- Optionally:
 - An AD&D play report & detailed XP tally
 - Catch-up comments on A&E's Finalish
- Future project: A reading review of *Lands of Adventure*. It is a dense read, so this might be a while

IN CONCLUSION

I look forward to seeing the first issue of E&A and am grateful for everybody's work keeping our APA party together (*never* split the party!).

Question for Jim V.: I kept my zine in Bookman Old Style but wouldn't mind exploring other fonts, too. Do you have a list acceptable fonts like Lee did? Let us know, eh?

THE PHOENIX NEST



The Phoenix Nest?

What's that, you ask?

Well, since I have been using MUNDUS VULT DECIPI since the days of TROLLCRUSHER back in the 70s and 80s I felt it was about time to put away my debt to James Branch Cabell¹ and have a new title for a new era.

“The Phoenix Nest” was a supernatural McGuffin from a series of adventures set on Yrth in the year 1100 and after. The second season of the history of Wellbourne (which ran about eleven years ago) produced a

¹ THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF A&E: “James Branch Cabell/Pronounced his name to rhyme with ‘rabble’/And frequently consigned to Hell/Those who pronounced it ‘Cah-Bell’” ME: That’s Dave Langford’s clerihew, that is. THE PLAIN PEOPLE: Yes, we know.

A zine for EVER & ANON #1
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Hear me & Roger BW pontificate on RPGs and other world shaking topics:

<http://tekeli.li/podcast/>

Read my Blog why don't you?:

<https://room3b.blog/>

number of revelations about the back story of Yrth including:

The reality of reincarnation and a certain amount of continuity with the cosmos of IN NOMINE.

The fact that the Dark Elves had used some remnant Magi-Tech from before recorded history to create the Orcs by genetically twisting other Elves, prisoners from an enemy political faction.

The fact that the symbol of the ancient peace and alliance between the Dwarves and the Elves, the tree of living orichalcum that the Phoenix roosted in when it returned to Yrth every thousand years had been lost long ago when the Elf and the Dwarf guarding it had a touch of the Forbidden Loves and tried to create a hybrid between the two species.

There were ancient magical artefacts created to push the plot along, there were visitations from Archangels and Demon Princes, visions of the afterlife and lots of high magic and low comedy.

Oh and a time wandering tower containing the Elf and Dwarf team hunting for the souls of the ancient guardians in whatever incarnation they may be.

The heroes of Wellbourne eventually managed to be the first people to reach the Throne on the Mountain of Eternal Peace since before history began and restored the Phoenix Nest.

Why yes, I do have a tendency to write over complicated background but this one was fun. So I will use it as the title of my new contributions.²

The illustration is certified out of copyright by Wikipedia. It's from the Aberdeen Beastiary, a medieval book produced about 1200.

Perhaps I shall have a feast of nostalgia in this space in future where I explain my immense cleverness in the bits of background I've inserted into settings of my own creation and other people's. Next time perhaps the Deep History of Yrth or the nature of the Six Gods of Aegis.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD³

² THE PLAIN PEOPLE SEARCHING FOR AN IDENTITY: (Hauling up a freshly painted sign) And ignore the fact that it's slightly rude. ME: Yes, let us ignore that. I didn't know it was a poetic term for female genitalia when I pulled it out of my subconscious and most other people don't know or care.

³ THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF SOMEWHERE OR OTHER: Wait a mo! Are you changing the titles of the whatyoumaycallums as well? ME: Yep. This used to be DAYS IN THE LIFE. TPPoSoO: Ye mad radical wrecker you!

My experience at Eastercon was mixed. The hotel was nice but I still ached through much of the night and in the morning, longing for my own bed the whole time. The panel I moderated was... less than wonderful. One of the panellists had lots of fascinating stuff about his job writing training scenarios for the government, basically LARPS full of civil servants, police and Forces officers, facing scenarios to test their preparedness and wits. And I'm afraid I let him go on a bit, not being willing to clamp down on him and the main focus went away a bit.

And then a couple of weeks after I went to the last (I swear it, this time I mean it, definitely the last) Far Isles coronation I shall ever preside over. And if the Hilton hotel chain can't provide a bed that's comfortable for me then an educational centre in an eighteenth century mansion, with bunk beds in the rooms, definitely can't. I said goodbye, handed over the orders I was the head of and resolved to stop thinking of things like a medieval monk and philosopher would. Yeah, that habit may be harder to break.

I rejigged my will this month, to take account of the fact that the Wednesday Night Club (to whom I had left my game collection) had ceased to exist in the intervening years. I discovered that there was an Oxford University Boardgame Society as well as an RPG Society so I put them both in the will instead. And every time I contemplate my crowded flat I think about giving all my books and games to the intended beneficiaries. The thought of the effort to get it done has stopped me so far.

No great drama at home but a few domestic emergencies. In July I shall be off to Stabcon at the start and then to Convulsion

later in the month. Which reminds me: I must book places in the LARPS I fancy. (I expect the beds to be a little better than the Far Isle do was. I hope anyway.)

An increase in the number of text based cons passing through my phone: I just reported a cunning one which was trying to play on reporting of the government's semi-180 turn on Winter Fuel Payments by instructing me to link into this here site *right away* if I wanted any hope of a large sum of money. It may be the wave of the future. Myself I would prefer that to being dragged out of bed to be told that there had just been a huge payment to Amazon on my credit card and My Bank wanted a word.

CUNNING PLANS AND OVER-REACHING AMBITIONS

...is what I'm going to call the bit where I talk about my current games.

And the games that I'm planning. And my even less focussed dreams of one day...

I have started a second season of LICTORS with my Monday group, but the campaign has gone on hiatus in the middle of their first case (a little affair of possible marine insurance fraud). Stephanos the Mage had just vanished from sight down a big hole in the ground trying to stop another mage tumbling into the darkness due to a sleep spell hitting them. Stephanos resisted the spell but failed to stop the other's fall and they both tumbled down into the darkness.

And then Hartley went and got a case of COVID which he is struggling to recover completely from. We keep crossing our fingers and touching wood.

This campaign (if it ever gets restarted) is later in the same year as the first one. After the summer break, their Magistrate is now assigned to the Southern Circuit and expected to endure the heat and the cosmopolitan cuisine of the coastal cities. In the background the report one of the PCs submitted on how to reform the laws on slavery is gurgling away, being digested by the bureaucracy. There will be reactions later.

My Wednesday night group took the news that I was a bit fed up with MONSTER HUNTERS calmly enough but reacted to all my proposals to do something different after Martin's DUNGEON FANTASY game by choosing a RUNEQUEST: GLORANTHA game set in the capitol of the Lunar Empire. They are going to play soldiers from the provincial army of Lunar Tarsh sent north to be given a medal from the Red Emperor's own hands. Needless to say, things are not going to go smoothly.

During the weeks we have absences I'm going to give them a parallel campaign of BAND OF BLADES, a fantasy military game of horror and victory against terrible odds. The first week (with Alan away) was a little ropy but I remain convinced it could go well.

I'm in one regular game that I'm not GMing, Roger Bell-West's run of the BAYERN campaign for Mongoose's TRAVELLER 2300. We are on a long exploratory journey going out where no humans have gone before. We have already encountered two new species and been subject to a peculiar sabotage event which has left the entire crew wondering who amongst us is working to end the expedition early and why.

IGGY'S THEME: That's the way to do it!

This is a problem that comes up regularly in my gaming life. My players tolerate rather than enjoy my periodic attempts to find a new game system that I will really enjoy. They don't want to do this. They want me to return to GURPS or RUNEQUEST. Which require very little explanation to them: I'd just have to point out any subtle differences in the rules in this particular setting or genre and we could go from there.

But assuming that I've got a new system to teach them these are the steps I'd probably take (and I hope the publishers would support) to make the players ready to play.

- 1 Tell them about the world and the types of adventure in them. This will have been outlined at the proposal stage: you can expand and deepen their knowledge and expectations here.
- 2 Show them the sort of dice used in the game and how to read them.
- 3 Show them a character sheet and explain how it works. Which leads on to:
- 4 Generate characters together. This helps establish everything that goes before the first role-playing including connections in the characters' past history.
- 5 Run some scenes which will show them how the rules affect various sorts of activity. At least one of these should be a fight.
- 6 If possible I'd run a group combat scene against low level enemies to explore how player characters can help each other.

Overall, I would point out to them that the system is new to me to and if they think I am

getting things wrong they should call me out. This will be slow for the first session but it will be the first step to making the game flow. There's a discussion of this in my podcast for June. In it Roger proposed a method of fast introduction, most suitable for horror games. Give them pregenned characters and drop them right in the middle of something weird, dangerous and unpleasant. Then kill the character, preferably horribly

Once that was done, do the real Session Zero and allow them to create characters who become the follow up team that will discover what happened. I've never done that, but I've often been tempted.

COMMENTARIAT

Upon the Last Issue of That Which Has Gone Before A&E 593

There has to be continuity if only to provide content. I hope the people who don't join E&A get to know that they are being addressed.

LEE: RYCT Me: I don't know how I would react to Hamlet toying with the feel of sharp steel against his skin. There is a tendency nowadays to play Hamlet's madness as all a game, all a ruse, deliberately put on. But there are moments in private when we see the whirling quality of his mind and I think you could subtly introduce doubt about his mental state.

RYCT Timothy: I wish there were people as dedicated to indexing as Barry in charge at more RPG companies. **RYCT CRAIG KAMBER** I managed to bring most of the things into my flat myself, one by one. But there are so many of them. I keep getting urges to give things away and simplify my life. But then I lie down for a bit and they go away. **RYCT MARK NEMETH:** If Go is

as fussy as some people think he is, we are all in deep trouble.

JOSHUA KRONENGOLD RYCT Lee: I was just listening to IN OUR TIME which this week featured the early Scots poem THE BRUS⁴ about Robert of that ilk, Robert I of Scotland. Apparently, the author delicately balanced praising The Bruce for being a flower of Scottish chivalry and also for being a cunning and ruthless leader who is not ashamed to slaughter English garrisons while they slept. Small nations with borders to larger nations can't afford scruples apparently. // Re Atunement: I think having a suitable mechanic to describe the emergence of magical weapons and other doo-dads makes the world much realer to the players. I like the way that magical weapons gradually gain an aura of mystery and their own reputation in EARTHDAWN ("This is the axe of my great-aunt Bethesda the Berserker which she wielded at the Battle of Snowquake Pass.") And I have said before in A&E (and see no reason to not say it again here) that RQ could have a dandy means of imbuing enchanted objects with sentience by the way they use sacrificed POW to bind layer after layer of magical enhancement to the item until the item fuses it all together and forms a new soul. // **RYCT Patrick Riley:** Not just in early DnD. I recall the opening of NOT LONG BEFORE THE END by Larry Niven published in 1969, five years before DnD. "A natural antipathy exists between swordsmen and sorcerers, as between cats and small birds or rats and men." // **RYCT Me:** Oh, yes Rob died. I did mention it at the time. // I'm still having problems with the FORGED IN THE DARK system and my players tell me I don't understand it. I'm running it but I don't understand it. **RYCT: PATRICK RILEY:** Romance is almost as embarrassing as sex. At least to gamers.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Brus

CLARK B. TIMMINS: Your mention of disposing of unwanted magical amulets reminds me of THE CASE OF THE TOXIC SPELL DUMP. It also makes me think of an archaeologist finding a deep hole in which several generations of shamanic priests dumped their used 'trick bags'. Hmm, what would the effects be? // I have heard the death of DnD proclaimed many times and I too doubt it. But I think it could easily be destroyed as a product by the owner of the brand failing to understand what they have and who wants to buy it.

JIM VASSILAKOS: I know I normally deprecate the tendency of TRAVELLER to extend our current customs and assumptions into the far future but the thought of Imperial aristocrats going to schools that having fagging (in the English Public School sense) seems just perfect. **RYCT Patrick Riley:** Though as a Forever GM type I do tend to look at conventions as chances to play things I wouldn't normally (as GM or as a player) there is pure pleasure to be had as well as improving lessons. **RYCT Me:** Yes, I think that when the Governor tried to make a claim on his pirate escape route insurance he may have found himself shelling out an excessive co-pay if not being told he was out of network entirely.

TIMOTHY COLLINSON: RYCT Jim Regarding Octopoi: I believe in TRAVELLER the Hivers carelessly lay their offspring and then abandon them until they manage to grow to intelligence and speech on their own without any parenting. They are weird in other ways too.

LISA PADOL: No, no sign of the hardback . It's probably down the back of a wardrobe or bookshelf somewhere. // Oh the NDA was about a couple of other playtests: the MONSTER HUNTERS game (now

abandoned) was quite separate. // Oh yes there was someone who grabbed for the burning Imperial Edict each time. //I ran it once as a Winterval all day event for the Wednesday Night Group and once at Stabcon.

I offered to run it as a REIGN game for the Wednesday Night Group but they passed on it. // “To be or not to be” does come out of nowhere a bit but I would say it’s a chance to explore Hamlet’s inner obsession and make it clear that he isn’t just a funny crazy person.

BRIAN CHRISTOPHER MISIASZEK: Re An Age of New Menace⁵: I would say that the key to understanding the Second Trump Agony, is that he really does not want to be the King of America. He wants to be the Emperor of the World. He is not interested in America having Friends and Allies. He wants client states and conquests. The US has long had a predominance of military power but has shielded the occasional oppressive use of it with words about bringing freedom and democracy and other good stuff. Donald Trump doesn’t see the need of any of that and since he believes that all human interaction has a winner and a loser he doesn’t mind taking what people don’t want to give him. Just as with ‘fascism’, ‘imperialism’ has been used too loosely to describe unsavoury actions in the past. I was (and am) a wishy washy liberal so I have decried the usage of such words as being too extreme in the past and examples of “terminological inexactitude”. But this time I’m afraid the Snark really will turn out to be a Boojum. (Query: What happens when two or more Boojums fight? Or is Putin a Jabberwock?)

⁵ THE PLAIN PEOPLE OF SOMEWHERE OR OTHER: D’ye see what he did there?

SPIKE Y JONES: RYCT Me: Proving who you are via a video call... What? I say. What? What? All this so you can register to pay taxes? Boggle, boggle, boggle.// You should never promise an informant that action will be taken. It makes them think they’re in charge. **RYCT JOSHUA KRONENGOLD:** Is that 86 square meters per person? One would hope so.

JIM ECKMAN: Welcome back to A&E! Just in time... // Why do you say ‘but never again’ about EPT? The postmortem revelation of the Professor’s views will have reduced the chances of anyone publishing much more Tekumel material but I don’t suppose that will last forever. Might last my lifetime mind. // Re Your IgTheme: “a rutter with jump directions” Oh my! *Of course* that’s what they would be called. For some reason that chimes in my imagination with Melissa Scott’s Silence Leigh trilogy with the alchemically powered starships.

MARK NEMETH: Well, you promised us more news and you delivered. When I was waiting to hear whether my early retirement from the Department of Work & Pensions would go ahead I sometimes expressed distress about the time it took but on the whole I would prefer the glacial slowness of the British Civil Service to the insane disorganisation of the US. Mind you after a year I had to find another job and went back in, finding a temporary home in the Ministry of Defence which was a whole other burst of madness. I finally retired after a heart attack and coming into enough money to last me. What are your plans now? How old are you? How fit? It all makes a difference. I cannot see this wave of ideologically based dismissals (if “all bureaucrats are superfluous” is an ideology) ending well. I tremble to think of where the first Big Disaster will fall for which the cause will be “We fired the guy who took care of that.”

Engines & Emulators #1

June 20, 2025

Engines & Emulators is an apazine published by Blasted Heath Row, P.O. Box 259240, Madison, WI 53725; kalel@well.com; 718-755-9840 mobile; 323-916-0367 fax. It is prepared for contributors to Ever & Anon and select others. A recent copy can be requested for the Usual. A member of the Fan Writers Association (fwa). This is a Karma Lapel publication.

Save vs. Death Ray

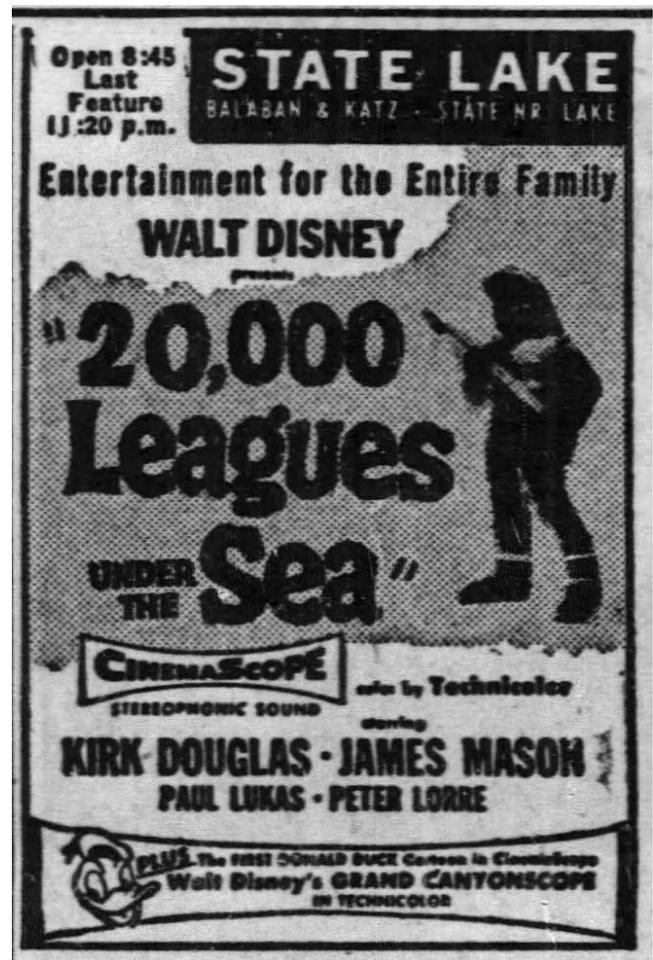
Jim Vassilakos emailed me three times to let me know he was trying to rally the forces for a new roleplaying game-related amateur press association to succeed Alarums & Excursions after its untimely end. Three times! And I saw nary an email. I received, did not see, and unfortunately ignored all of the emails he sent me on May 17 and 20 (twice on that day!)—and only learned about the efforts after Mark Rein-Hagen posted to the Facebook about Lisa Padol's tribute one-shot *Something Completely Different*. (To which I shall also contribute.)

Gabriel Roark, John Redden, and I exchanged emails in late April when Lee Gold refunded the money in our accounts and distributed A&E #593, and I corresponded briefly with Jerry Stratton in early May when he sent me that PDF distribution and an "A&E final comment." But the only A&E successor I was aware of was George Phillies's A Gentle Walk by way of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. (<https://tnfff.org>)

My reply to Rein-Hagen's post on the Facebook prompted Spike Jones to message me: "Are you also aware of Jim Vassilakos and some others efforts to create a new follow-up APA to A&E called E&A?" I was not! To my email I flew to search for Vassilakos's surname, and there were those three thankfully persistent emails. Unseen, unread. And, oh, so welcome. (A belated expression of gratitude for including me in the relaunch outreach, Jim!)

So here I am. The first edition of A Gentle Walk, dated June 2025, looks promising. It's slim, and it seems to be more of a successor to The Wild Hunt and Interregnum than A&E, so I'm curious and enthusiastic about Ever & Anon. This feels like more of a grassroots effort: A&E participants continuing our conversation under our own flag.

Rather than introduce myself, I'll merely continue as though A&E had never ended. Because our new E&A is a transposition of A&E, I'll transpose my fanzine title and restart the numbering. Fare thee well, *Emulators & Engines*. Hail and well met, *Engines & Emulators*!



Chicago Tribune, Jan. 28, 1955

Scoping Out the Game Stores

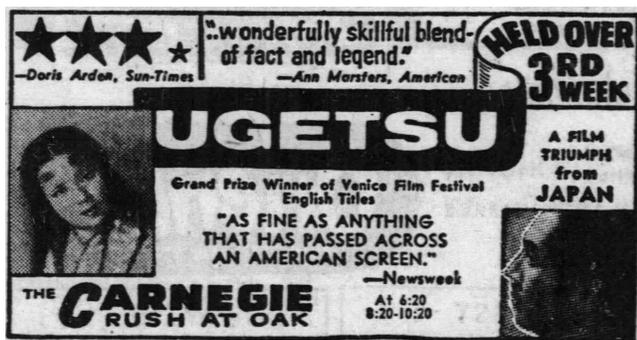
In late May and early June, my wife and I sold our house in Culver City, Calif., loaded up the car and cat, and took a week to drive from California to Wisconsin, where we'll live for a while in Madison. We arrived Saturday, June 7, and I returned to work in the Madison office that Monday. That Sunday, however, after we procured new sets of fingerprints at the UPS Store for another FBI background check, I stopped by Pegasus Games (<https://pegasusgames.com>) to procure a set of polyhedral dice. While in between homes and traveling, I've been using the RPG Simple Dice app on my mobile for my solo game endeavors (see below), and I was sorely yearning for some actual dice. I already have plenty of dice, perhaps too many, but they've been packed up and are in storage as we continue to prepare to move to Portugal later this year.

When I was growing up, Pegasus Games was the nearest game store that sold roleplaying games. I was aware of it, considered it a roleplaying game store, but hardly ever visited. Madison was 45 minutes away from my hometown, while Janesville, its mall, and its

Waldenbooks was only 30 minutes away. So almost all of my roleplaying game understanding was informed by Waldenbooks and *Dragon* magazine. (My first non-*D&D* roleplaying games were *Champions*, *James Bond 007*, *Star Frontiers*, and *DragonQuest*, which, oddly, was available at the local library. I likely picked up *Star Frontiers* at Waldenbooks because of its TSR stock; I'm not sure where I got *Champions* or *James Bond 007*.) Lake Geneva was 50 minutes away, so I never made it to the Dungeon Hobby Shop, though I was aware of it—and took pride that TSR was based in Wisconsin.

Since returning to Wisconsin and the Madison area, I've found that there are game stores galore. Along State Street, I've walked by Gamer's Library Madison (<https://www.facebook.com/GamersLibraryMadison>) several times but have yet to venture inside. There's a Warhammer store (<https://www.facebook.com/WarhammerFitchburg>) near where my sister lives. And the Valhalla of game stores, Noble Knight Games (<https://www.nobleknight.com>) is also located in Fitchburg. I visited Noble Knight almost every time I visited my parents after they moved to Fitchburg.

And that's just what I know about upon arrival. The Madison area seems to offer a healthy assortment of game stores in general. Consider this a brief, likely incomplete directory. I'll try to report on the individual stores as I visit and explore them.



Chicago Tribune, Jan. 28, 1955

Flipped Table Games, 2125 McComb Road #109, Stoughton, WI 53589; <https://flippedtablegames.crystalcommerce.com>

Game Haven, 229 S. Century Ave., Waunakee, WI 53597; <https://gamehavenstore.com>

Gamer's Library, 449 State St. #C/D, Madison, WI 53703; <https://www.facebook.com/GamersLibraryMadison>

Gemini Games, 193 W. Main St., Stoughton, WI 53589; <https://www.facebook.com/geminigamingstoughton>

Go! Toys, Games & Calendars, West Towne Mall, 15 W. Towne Mall, Space C14, Madison, WI 53719; <https://www.gotoysandgames.com>

Guildpact Games, 1308 Hamilton St., Stoughton, WI 53589; <https://guildpactgames.com>

I'm Board! Games & Family Fun, 1839 Monroe St., Madison, WI 53711; 6917 University Ave., Middleton, WI 53562; 2816 Prairie Lakes Drive, Sun Prairie, WI 53590; <https://imboardgames.com>

Isthmian Gaming Lounge, 2500 Rimrock Road, Madison, WI 53713; <https://isthmiangaming.com>

The Last Square, 3893 Garfoot Road, Mount Horeb, WI 53572; <https://www.lastsquare.com/zen-cart>

Misty Mountain Games, 4672 Cottage Grove Road, Madison, WI 53716; <https://www.mistymountaingames.com>

Mox Mania, 410 D'Onofrio Drive, Madison, WI 53719; <https://www.moxmania.com>

Noble Knight Games, 2835 Commerce Park Drive, Fitchburg, WI 53719; <https://www.nobleknight.com>

Pegasus Games, 6640 Odana Road, Madison, WI 53719; <https://pegasusgames.com>

Warhammer, 2990 Cahill Main Suite 110, Fitchburg, WI 53711; <https://www.warhammer.com>

If you know about any other shops in southern Wisconsin that I should check out, let me know. (Heck, Wisconsin in general!) The above list isn't bad for a city with a population of 280,000—and its surrounding environs.

Solo Game Report: *Downcrawl*

The only roleplaying game I didn't pack to ship in a container to Portugal when we immigrate later this year was *Downcrawl*, Aaron A. Reed's game of "adventures in a curious underworld." (<https://aaronareed.net/downcrawl-game>) The second edition was published earlier this year and, while the game can be played with a GM or collaboratively with other players, utilizing the "small core system" Sliver of Fate or another system, it can also be played solo.

I did so in mid-May, while living in an Airbnb until we sold our house. A party of surface dwellers fell

into a bottomless chasm on the lowest level of a dungeon while exploring the Dread Halls of the Vampire Countess. (I might have to back up a little to flesh that out!) Two of the party members died. Four survived.

The survivors include:

Fulcrux Coyle, rustic fighter. Forceful +, Flashy -. A miner, guide, and expert on miasma. He is driven to learn the truth.

Valhein Greenbottle, rough fighter. Forceful +, Flashy -. A bold and lucky thug. His wandering heart leads him.

Diesa Brownanvil, a female rogue. Forceful -, Focused +. A expert on traps, she is a merciless assassin who utilizes a dart gun and secret daggers. She seeks legendary treasure.

Alberich Ambershard, a druid. Focused +, Flashy -. An addict, the druid is waterborn. He, too, is led by a wandering heart.

After a long fall, the four find themselves in the Stinking Fields. Greenbottle thinks it smells bad and is boring. Waking first, he doesn't like spending so much time near their dead comrades. Brownanvil thinks there's got to be something valuable somewhere. Fulcrum also thinks the fields smell bad. An expert on miasma, he is concerned about the potential effects of the fumes. Ambershard is sure there's more pleasant lands beyond.

In the fall, Greenbottle was not at all injured. He was knocked unconscious but was the first to wake. (He's lucky!) He's also bold, so he explored the immediate area before checking on the others—seeking the source of the horrible odors but not wandering too far because of the muted light caused by the noxious vapors.

Brownanvil regained consciousness next. She is merciless, so she assessed the belongings of the dead. Greenbottle returns as she does so and wants in on the action. Brownanvil takes Anklos Irongull's secret daggers. The dead rogue has no use for them. Greenbottle claims Ziedinghal Hackshield's ax and small shield. They can no longer benefit the dead barbarian. (I rolled up six characters initially, and determined that two died in the fall.)

Coyle wakes next. He is fascinated by the noxious odors given his expertise. It is unclear whether they're dangerous. Tolerance is abundant, so the effect might be delayed—it smells bad but isn't immediately deadly or otherwise effective. Breathing the vapors, he finds that his vision sharpens. (They will eventually lose that sense if exposed for four hours in one day.)

The area is marked by low-lying scrub grass with small sand dunes, the source of the fumes. The gas obscures whatever light source is present, making for a hazy view, despite sharpened vision. The blades of grass look like slender daggers. It's the most clearly they've ever seen.

Finally, Ambershard comes to. The three are waiting for him. As a druid, he recognizes the type of grass, but not the gas. The grass isn't good for anything but scratching one's exposed skin.

Once all four are conscious and deciding in which direction to head, they encounter some kind of flickering, wispy flame creature (Greedy Flames). The creature is biological—and is power hungry! However, they are unable to communicate.

The party chooses not to approach the creature but can tell that it is aware of and considering them. Seeing the wispy flames engulf some dry grass, flaring larger and seemingly enervated, the group hastens their exit.

Finding a somewhat well-traveled path, they head away from the Stinking Fields (toward the Sleeping Trees). Along the way, they encounter Jagged Chasms, finding empty, crushed potion vials that still emit a foul odor. Their path is challenging, and they are forced to backtrack through the convoluted labyrinth.



Chicago Tribune, Jan. 28, 1955

I quite like *Downcrawl*'s approach to world creation and exploration. Locations are called Volumes and are detailed randomly. Once in a Volume, players Set the Scene, seek News, and undertake Ventures. Moving from Volume to Volume, it is necessary to Plan Your Journey. The game's tables for journeys, encounters, folk, volumes, ventures, and other elements seem fun and functional so far. Even though I didn't return to

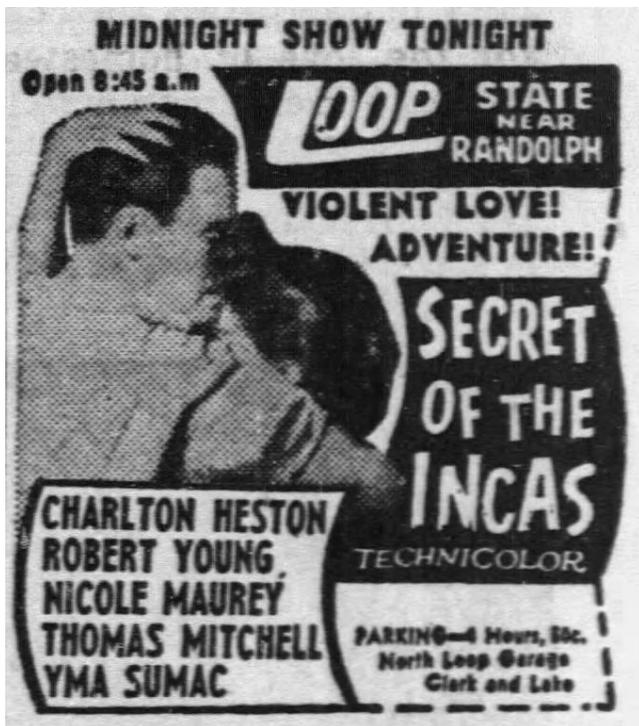
Downcrawl immediately—I was sidetracked by *Brambletrek* (below)—I’ll definitely do so.

One aspect I might change at some point is what system I use in the background. Sliver of Fate’s gently Fate-like approach (it is but a sliver, after all) has worked well so far, but I might enjoy more detailed characters.

Solo Game Report: *Brambletrek*

Just before we left on our cross-country drive from California to Wisconsin, I received *Brambletrek* (<https://crossedpaths.itch.io/brambletrek>) in the mail. A.R. Swain’s “GM-less RPG adventure” is a card-driven journaling game that reminds me thematically (not mechanically) of *Mouse Guard* or *Mausritter*.

Roleplaying a Gnawborn from a small village, you journey through the verdant lands of Akeroth, including the forests of Hyhill. In late May, with the assistance of my wife, I created Sebastian Brumble, a Storyteller. (Health 17, Morale 24, Supplies 12)



Chicago Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955

The sudden disappearance of fireflies plunged Brumble’s home into darkness. Everyone’s on edge. He decides to delve deeper into the forest to uncover the cause of their departure and hopefully bring them—and their light—back.

Our hero’s parents were part of a traveling troupe that would regale their fellow villagers with tales of distant lands and legendary heroes. As a child,

Brumble soaked in the stories and songs, dreaming of a life of adventure. Now, he wishes to gather and tell new stories of his own, to inspire others.

Possessing a number of abilities determined by his Legacy as a Storyteller (Inspiring Tale, Song of Rest, Distract, Ageless Fables, and Overcome the Odds), Brumble also owns a Trinket. It is a wooden carving of a wolf, masterfully crafted by his father. The wolf’s eyes are made of small green gems, its posture alert and regal. The Trinket symbolizes his family’s respect for the wild and its creatures. Brumble does not yet know the story behind the treasured item.

Drawing playing cards and referring to tables, players determine each day’s events. You Overcome the Odds, combat opponents, and find Loot and Rewards. Without reporting on the cards drawn and steps taken to resolve the combat event, here is the journal entry for my May 29 play session:

Inspired by the stories and songs of my parents, and concerned about the mysterious loss of the fireflies of Brambletrek, I ventured forth into the forests of Hyhill in search of adventure and a solution to our plight. Shortly after leaving the cheery confines of my home village, I met a merry group of Gnawborn who shared their fire and stories, invigorating me. One of them gave me a silk thread amulet that I will wear around my neck as a good luck charm.

Early that afternoon, there was a brief but intense thunderstorm. (Just like our drive across Kansas!) The rainbow afterward was beautiful, and I followed it for some time, wondering whether all of the old stories are true. The rainbow led me to a hidden underground stash of forgotten supplies. Among them, I found a map of hidden trails—and an entrance to the Aldwund, the caves beneath Hyhill.

As I made my way underground, silhouettes hinted at lurking threats, and I encountered a wolf, which attacked me. It was joined by a member of its pack, and I felt lucky that more didn’t join the fray. I am unused to fighting, and the battle was hard won. I was relieved to escape with my life.

Continuing on after defeating the wolves, I encountered a rabbit that had been caught in a roughly made snare. I did my best to soothe it as I worked to free it from the trap. To express its gratitude, it told me that there is a nearby underground river that flows to a secret cave. In the last few weeks, there’s been a mysterious glow in the vicinity of that cave. Does that hidden knowledge have anything to do with the fireflies? I must find out.

Before the rabbit and I parted company, I sang a Song of Rest to ease our pain and concern. Then I bedded down for the night—or what felt like night

after my day of travel and the wolves. I wasn't too far from home but had already become wiser about the underworld. I intend to head deeper into the Aldwund to find our unfortunately lost fireflies.

I found the gameplay experience relatively straightforward, though I'm sure I didn't optimize the use of my character's abilities during the combat encounter with the wolves. (Bumble's Health was halved, though his Morale and Supplies increased.) Red playing cards bring good effects, and black cards bring challenges. There are different tables for aboveground and the Aldwund, and the cards you draw eventually determine your exit to return to the world above.

Even though I haven't played many—any—journaling games before this, I'll return to *Brambletrek*. The documentation of one's game sessions sure makes writing game reports easier!

Pinball Wizardry

Since early June, I've been working out of my employer's Madison office, a 15-minute walk from our short-term furnished apartment. On the fifth floor of the building, in what is termed the Library, there is what might be one of the best employee perks I've encountered in my more than 17 years working here. While walking around the space to become acquainted with it, I spotted an unexpected pinball machine: Stern Pinball's *Dungeons & Dragons: The Tyrant's Eye*. (<https://sternpinball.com/game/dungeons-dragons>)



Released this year to recognize the 50th anniversary of *D&D*, to honor the game's original release in 1974, the Limited Edition model was limited to 740 machines around the world. We don't have the Limited Edition, but we do have the Premium model. During my second week working here, I took to playing at least one game whenever I found myself on the fifth floor. If a meeting is scheduled in a fifth floor video conference room, I finish the meeting and then stop by the Library to play pinball. I will do so every time I'm on the fifth floor, and eventually, I imagine I'll walk down the two flights of stairs just to play a game or two. Or five.

I'm not very good at pinball, so I don't really care about the score, but I've been figuring out what aspects of *D&D* are present in the game. In addition to an animatronic red dragon and a gelatinous cube, there's a disappearing playfield trap door that grants access to lower levels of the dungeon. Dungeon Crawl! In that mode, you can choose what direction you go as you explore the dungeon and encounter creatures.

A video display screen—this is where modern pinball machines lose me; I want to play pinball, not pinball and a video game, or to watch videos—lets you select which adventurer you're "playing" and what narrative paths you follow. I'm not sure how such choices affect gameplay yet.

Several well-known *Forgotten Realms* locales are invoked: Dragonspear Castle, Greenest, and Westgate. I was unfamiliar with Kobold Town, though I suspect it's populated by kobolds. Characters include a rogue, a magic user, a dwarf, and a dragonborn fighter. Fandom's *Forgotten Realms Wiki* (<https://tinyurl.com/DnD-Pinball>) details other roleplaying game-related aspects of the pinball machine.

It's a fun game, a nice parallel to the tabletop roleplaying game—some of the videos feature the turning pages of rule books!—and a welcome workday diversion. Has anyone else seen this pinball machine in the wild?

Thrift Score!

On my day off work to recognize Juneteenth, I walked around the area near our apartment and the office, northeast along E. Washington Avenue to the Yahara River and then southwest along Williamson Street, or Willy Street. Having walked right by MadCat (<https://www.facebook.com/felineunderground>), a planned stop for cat food, while returning to the pet store, I stopped in at the Willy Street St. Vincent de Paul Store location to see what books and other items were available at the thrift shop.

In addition to an aisle dedicated to used board games, I was surprised to see multiple bookshelves dedicated to new, unopened copies of two games: Rio Grande Games' *Temporum* (<https://www.riogrande.com/games/temporum>) and the game's *Alternate Realities* expansion (<https://www.riogrande.com/games/temporum-alternate-realities>). Usually selling for about \$50 and \$30 respectively, St. Vincent de Paul was selling them for \$1.20 and \$0.90.



At the checkout counter, I asked the store clerk why they had so many copies of the game. She didn't know, but she said that whoever donated them had so many that the store asked them to distribute the games to multiple locations throughout the Madison area so the Willy Street shop didn't have to handle them all. She also indicated that there are likely more games coming.



On the Facebook, I reported the find in the Wisconsin Area Tabletop Gamers group, and one participant indicated that "Rio Grande dumping their excess stock at thrift stores in SE WI and Northern IL

used to be a regular occurrence for whatever reason." Another said, "I remember when former TSR/WotC employees would unload 2e product at 1/2 price books." (My parents frequent the Half Price Books West Madison location.)

Organizers of the Phoenix Con game convention in Appleton this August (<https://www.phoenixgamecon.com>) expressed interest in obtaining copies of the games for the con's "play to win," and a couple of people—including myself—volunteered to swing by, if time was available.

Comments on *Alarums & Excursions* #593

Lee Gold didn't include me in the email distribution of A&E's ultimate issue, but Jerry Stratton hooked me up! I usually received my A&E mailings underneath Gold's doormat, and I'd stop by every month or so—sometimes every two or three months—to pick them up. As we prepared to sell our house and move away from the Los Angeles area, I switched to email distribution, but it hadn't become a habit yet. Regardless, I was pleased to receive the unexpectedly final issue.

In *Tantivy* dated March 4, 2025, **Lee Gold** announced the end of A&E—and the sale of back issue PDFs. At some point, it might behoove us to consolidate any PDFs we have on hand, so we can recreate as close to a full run as possible for future reference. I have access to A&E #1-31 and #399-593, which represents the range of time I've participated and a back issue purchase. Many of the back issues I have are folders of individual contributions, not complete issues as mailed.

Gold's mention of the poet Michael Drayton and "Nimphidia, the Court of Faery" will inspire me to explore Tudor poetry. Given that you and Barry were both born in Los Angeles, your memories and stories of the area must be wide ranging—and wonderful. At some point, I'll take you up on your offer and email you some questions. Hopefully, that invitation still stands despite the vision challenges that led to A&E's closure. (Sometimes, I have to remind myself that even though I might miss A&E, I don't have to miss you. In fact, I'm writing these comments as though you're here, too.)

Joshua Kronengold's *Random Access* #306 mentioned watching Cathy Gale-era episodes of *The Avengers*. I've never watched a single episode of *The Avengers* and need to remedy that situation. A 2021 thread in the RPGnet Forums titled "Mrs. Peel, We're Needed" features a discussion of "running a game based on old British SF shows like *The Avengers*, *Quatermass*, *The Prisoner*, and so on with more than a bit of Kim Newman's Diogenes Club stories, and the

likes of John Wyndham’s novels” using FATE or Gumshoe. People also recommended *Agents of S.W.I.N.G.*, *Savage Worlds*, and GURPS. (I kind of love how every discussion about flexible game systems usually devolves to an ardent recommendation of GURPS.)

Like you, when my friends and I played *D&D* in the 1980s, we didn’t use battlemats. We didn’t even use figures. Just graph paper. Even though I’ve used figures and mats for 3/3.5E, 4E, and 5E, Pathfinder, and other games, I much prefer hand-drawn maps and graph paper. When solo gaming, that’s the order of the day.

I appreciate your consideration of *D&D*’s Portuguese translation—or lack thereof. I haven’t seen the sales numbers either, but more than 200 million people speak Brazilian Portuguese. Almost 260 million people speak one form of Portuguese or another around the world. That’s only 3 percent of the world’s population (based on my potentially sloppy math), but Portuguese is still in the top 10 list of languages used globally, according to Berlitz. Given how active the Brazilian *Savage Worlds* community is, it seems that there’s a hunger for roleplaying games in Portuguese. Your distinction of ending licensing translation vs. in-house translation is valid, though the end result is the same.

In *QUA AE7KL* #115, **Clark B. Timmins** considered the importance and benefits of amulets and talismans—or trick bags. As I read your ish, I couldn’t help but think of magic users’... component pouches. Trick bags, indeed!

Attronarch’s *Overlord’s Annals* Vol. 4 #4 reported on two sessions of the Conquering the Barbarian Altanis *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign. I enjoyed the illustrations by IdleDoodler and kickmaniac.

I also enjoyed Part VII of *Back to Brazilian Gamebooks*, in which **Pedro Panhoca da Silva** and **Maira Zucolotto** focused on *O porão*. That the gamebook was inspired by the 1964-1985 Brazilian military dictatorship interested me. The book’s setting of the “the labyrinthine old DEOPS building in the center of São Paulo” reminded me slightly of *Castle Wolfenstein*, and I imagine a similar approach could be taken to focus on Portugal’s Carnation Revolution. I found some illustrations from the book online (<https://tinyurl.com/Oporao-illos>), as well as the article. (<https://tinyurl.com/livros-jogos-BR>) Newspaper coverage of gamebooks certainly suggests that they’re a mainstream occurrence!

Perhaps Jim Vassilakos and Timothy Collinson will also reply, but RYQT stands for “in regards to your question to.” It’s an acronym similar to RYCT as listed in “A Brief Guide to Some Abbreviations Used

in A&E” included in most issues.

Speaking of **Jim Vassilakos** and **Timothy Collinson**, their *Traveller Play-By-Email* containing the 45th chapter of their Plankwell Campaign report referenced Immanuel Kant! I ~~can~~ can’t believe it. In the comments, Vassilakos remarked that “the only good thing about convention games is that you might learn something, such as getting a feel for an unfamiliar RPG or getting some insights into the art of GMing by experiencing (from the player perspective) either good or bad GMing.” What about just enjoying the game session? I tease.



Chicago Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955

I might suggest another benefit, however: Meeting other people who might be interested in playing that game or another outside the con on an ongoing basis, or online. Or, meeting people with whom you’d play any game without hesitation. For example, I’m friends on the Facebook with someone who played at my table for an *Old School Essentials* session at the 2023 OrcCon. (*Emulators & Engines* #3) He seems to work in the game industry, often knows about smaller-scale independent game cons, and has similar tastes: largely indy games, largely OSR. I would not have met him if I hadn’t shared time and table with him at a con. If we ever run into each other again offline, I’ll be pleased mightily, and I think pretty much any game would be fun with him seated at the table.

Your comment to Spike Jones about roleplaying games and board games resonated with me. I tend to like the idea of board games more than I enjoy learning or playing board games, while I’ll give a go to pretty much any roleplaying game. Even though I have amassed a sizable RPG library or collection, I’d

hesitate to dive as deeply into board games. They take up too much room! For example, the *Temporum* and expansion discussed above can both easily fit into the *Temporum* box, with room to spare. With board games, I also enjoy playing more than I try to win—kind of like fishing without catching fish—and that doesn't always make for a fun game experience.

In *The Silent Temple* #42, **Dylan Capel** remarked on the state of the world before commenting on *Mickey 17* (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #157) and *Hundreds of Beavers* (*Faculae & Filigree* #42). If you haven't seen *Hundreds of Beavers* yet, hop to it (or, slap a tail, already!). The movie is wonderful. Did anyone else think about *Paranoia* while watching *Mickey 17*?

Your description of *The Wrenchies* is intriguing. Have you read Jay Stephens's *Dwellings*? I quite like the idea of retooling horror comic book stories from the 1950s to the 1970s for roleplaying game session ideas, perhaps using *Chill*. (Generally, I'm often tempted to retool superhero comic stories for *Mutants & Mastermind* or *Champions*. Marvel- and DC-related games are interesting but overly depend on existing characters.) *The Wrenchies* might lend itself well to *Kids on Bikes*.



Chicago Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955

Lisa Padol's *This Isn't the Zine You're Looking For* #402 reported on Intercon W. I enjoyed the alternating con report and game report matter. "He was talking with 6 of the 8 players 20 minutes after the game had ended, which meant folks enjoyed it a great deal," you wrote. Hanging out after a game session at a con is high praise!

Your comment to Michael Cule about one-shots vs. campaigns made me think about miniseries, perhaps inspired by my discussion of comic books above. One-shots are appealing, one and done, but not all storylines can be addressed in a one-shot. I've occasionally experienced what I thought would be a four-hour one-shot being better handled in six or eight hours. As a solo player, I've been looking for ways to play for 30, 60, or 90 minutes, kind of like a television viewer choosing between a cartoon or situation comedy, an hour-long drama, or a movie. Too many game sessions are four-plus hours long, which can be challenging to schedule and manage time for. I want to

be able to fit games into my day more easily, which is why I've been pursuing solo play and, in the past, asynchronous play-by-post games.

Considering comic book storylines, some issues feature a complete story (a one-shot). There are also multi-issue storylines, which might be stand-alone, self-contained miniseries or a story arc in a longer ongoing series (perhaps the traditional campaign). Ongoing campaigns can take years or decades if the characters survive and players at the table remain stable. I'm curious about the middle way: shorter campaigns intended to be resolved in a handful of game sessions rather than a longer commitment. A shorter story arc without a longer umbrella story arc.

Clearly, this is based on my own gaming experience, but I've played in more ongoing campaigns than one-shots, and very few miniseries or shorter campaigns. *D&D* Adventurers League and con play are notable exceptions. Those would qualify as either a miniseries or a one-shot, depending on the module. My friend John intended Kerzmielzorg to be a shorter campaign—expecting to finish it in June when his son would finish college for the summer—but I had to drop out because of preparing to move and our relocation.

As I explore the writing of Lois McMaster Bujold, I'll have to prioritize her Vorkosigan books. I also made note of Katherine Addison's *The Goblin Emperor*, Ellen Kushner's Riverside books (the cover art I've seen is beautiful), and Phyllis Ann Karr's *Idylls of the Queen*.

In *PumSpeak* #131, **Paul Holman** mentioned *GURPS Monster Hunters*, which might also work well to adapt horror comics. **Brian Christopher Misiaszek's** *Age of Menace* #237 reported on musical performances, 3D printing, and El Ángel Oscuro—which seems very promising. Very promising.

In the April 2025 issue of *Craig Cornered*, **Craig Kamber** commented on the health of his spouse, the closure of a local game store, and his upcoming relocation. Having recently moved, I empathize with you in all the ways.

Gabriel Roark's *Bugbears & Ballyhoo* #39 indicated that his mother would soon return home from the skilled nursing facility. I hope that transition went smoothly. With your recent court hearings, it must have been a relief when you learned you didn't have to also serve on a jury. That might have been too much of the same all at once! Melsonian Arts Council's new subscription service will tempt me sorely, but I remain resolute to use the materials I've already obtained from them before I acquire more. Their materials are absolutely beautiful.

In *Mundus Vult Decepi*, **Michael Cule** commented

on local cons and mentioned *GURPS Monster Hunters* (like Paul Holman above!). I wonder what the Mack Reynolds short story you described is! **Patrick Zoch's** *The Dragon's Beard* dated April 2025 expressed concern about the decimation of government agencies. May the rate of change you experience at work decrease and diminish! May you be affected as little as possible. Your recent spring break experience sounds glorious. Our son remained in Tokyo for his spring break, interning with a local ward office, his first internship. The summer term has now started, and he remains on track to graduate in mid-2026.

The indicia of **Spike Y Jones's** *Mermecolion at a Picnic* #463 continues to delight me. "Wouldn't be the first time that an outside article writer was confused by the multi-author concept of an APA," you wrote. I started reading Hillary Chute's book *Why Comics?* this week. One of the portions I highlighted so far states, "'Graphic novel' was coined in a 1964 newsletter circulated at the Amateur Press Association, but had never before been used in a commercial context." That made me chuckle. Fan historian Richard Kyle coined the phrase "graphic novel" in the November 1964 mailing of Capa-Alpha. I wonder if he went to the Amateur Press Association. We should all go. They circulate newsletters there!

In *Ronin Engineer*, **Jim Eckman** reintroduced himself. Welcome back! I hope you find your way to E&A, too. Your use of the phrase Cthulhu in Chief does the Great Old One a disservice. And **Mark Nemeth's** *The Seedling* #47 informed fellow apans of his retirement of sorts. I'm sorry you had to experience that period of uncertainty—and that your next phase of life brings only the best and brightest.



Chicago Tribune, Feb. 4, 1955

The Seedling

#48 The scene isn't what it's been

Welcome back to those of you who know me, and welcome aboard to anyone who's new.

Since my recent retirement, I've been playing more games. My biweekly *D&D* game, previously chronicled in *A&E*, is still going on. I've also begun a new biweekly game as a player (for which I probably won't do writeups), and a new quatriweekly game where I'm the GM, the first writeup for which appears in this issue. If I could just get all my friends to retire too, we could play in the daytime.

Early summer in Albuquerque is, as usual, hot and dry. Since the last *A&E*, I've taken a trip to Oahu, where my neighbors let Molly and I use their old house before they sell it, and another trip to Hartford, Connecticut, (for a *Magic* tournament) and Sheridan, Wyoming, to visit my father. The latter trip also included an unplanned night in Chicago, where I got stranded because of thunderstorms, finding out to my dismay that airlines don't provide hotel vouchers if an overnight delay is attributable to weather, rather than their own equipment.

With respect to my zine, I'm just going to pick up where I left off. My sincere thanks to those of you who worked to establish *E&A*.

Farewell to A&E—Welcome to E&A

It's hard to believe that the last issue of *Alarums & Excursions* was, indeed, the last issue. Lee, if you're reading this, thank you for all the years of keeping it running continuously. It's an impressive personal achievement and a great service to the community.

Participating in *A&E* always made me feel like one of the cognoscenti, despite having, in comparison to most of the contributors, somewhat retrograde taste in roleplaying games. I'm curious to see whether *Ever & Anon* continues in the same vein, nearly unchanged, or transforms into something else. Either one would be okay. Anything that gets me to write something every month is probably a good thing.

Some Wins, Some Losses

The Dullstrand Campaign | Sessions 49–52

Setting: Greyhawk—City of Dullstrand & surrounding environs

GM: James Schnedar

Game System: D&D 5E

Character	Player	Species & Class
Keolaren	Mark Nemeth	human druid
Gardai	Joe Ring	dwarf ranger
"Deuce" Durzub Mulakh	Mike Schnedar	orc barbarian
"Bova" Korst Bovasht	Polo Schnedar	lizardfolk monk

Prominent NPCs

Dudvin Hopnik	Keolaren's henchman, a human knight
Karvala	On-and-off party associate, an elven rogue
The Professor	Leader of a rival expedition in the area

Recap

With Keolaren still imprisoned somewhere distant, the party continued on its previous goal of destroying Drelzna, once a snakefolk witch, now transformed to demonic form. We eventually reached a chamber where she was imprisoned and inadvertently set her free. In the battle that ensued, she summoned various undead and demonic allies, but we eventually prevailed, though expending most of our resources and suffering extensive injuries. We found her treasure chamber and took a quick inventory.

Session 49 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

Wary of cursed items, we forbore from experimenting with anything from Drelzna's treasure chamber. With Drelzna's death, the oppressive atmosphere that has permeated the area had dissipated, and we finally felt able to get a proper rest, of which we are in sore need. The treasure chamber seemed the most defensible area, and we arranged a schedule of watches. During Deuce's watch, one of Karvala's paper birds flew past him to her. It didn't contain a meaningful message, but Karvala deduced that the Professor was using the birds to track her, since she had left a few of them in his care. At the change of watches, the party held a brief conference, deciding to try to get in a full rest, since there was nowhere we could reliably hide from the Professor's party, should he be heading this way.

During my watch, the third of the night, I heard a heavy flapping and, spotting a winged demon approaching, raised the alarm. The thing proved impervious to my ordinary weapons, and it kept out of reach of my cold-steel rapier. We eventually sent it back to its accursed plane of origin, but not before it had inflicted additional wounds we could ill afford to bear, including rendering Karvala unconscious. We stabilized her and gave her our last healing potion.

Realizing that our rest had been spoiled and that the Professor's arrival was likely imminent, we decided to seek a spot where could better set up an ambush. Starting back towards the surface, we found an area of greater irregularity in the passageway, doused all lights, and awaited whomever was coming. As the only member of the party unable to see in the dark, I felt helpless and anxious. We

didn't have to wait long, however, before the vanguard of the Professor's expedition came through, not immediately noticing us. The others chose what appeared to be an opportune moment to attack, and I finally lit a torch. The battle went initially in our favor, and we felled several of the Professor's hired goons. However, more were coming, including the Professor himself, who proved a potent spellcaster. Gardai and I fell under the onslaught, and I remembered nothing more of the encounter.

When I came to consciousness, farther along in the caverns. I learned that the Professor had offered to let the party escape in exchange for a book, lantern, and cauldron we had taken from Drelzna's chambers. The remaining party members, nearing death themselves, thought it best to accept. The Professor had kept up his end of the bargain, and Gardai and I had been stabilized and lugged partway back through the caverns. To carry us, however, much of our accumulated treasure had to be left behind. We had even resorted to activating Bova's onyx dog for use as a beast of burden.

Session 50 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

Our boat remained where we had left it, and, in addition to using it as a means of transportation, we discovered that it could be shrunk to miniature size and later restored, should the appropriate magic words be spoken. We made it out of the caverns and settled into a sorely needed rest. Soon after, however, a tremendous monsoon began, showing no sign of abating. From our knowledge of local weather, we expected frequent severe storms during the upcoming month or so. We caught a distant glimpse of yet another green dragon, but it stayed far away. We distributed our treasure, such as it was; I ended up with the folding boat, and a wisdom-raising book, which I planned to deliver to Keolaren upon our reunion. The party was so depleted that a second night of rest in the same spot was in order. A group of humanoids of unknown type passed us by, but we remained hidden.

We decided to pursue the green dragon, hoping we could locate and loot its lair. We followed the most likely-looking path toward a prominent hillside near where we had seen it. As we attempted to climb the final pitch, the dragon appeared. I must admit that I, having never seen such a fearsome beast before, was terrified at its appearance and able to do nothing more than hurl missile weapons at it from a safe distance. After a difficult battle, the dragon attempted to flee, but Gardai, an excellent archer as always, felled it with his final arrow before it would have escaped the range of his bow. Though pleased with the victory, we were disappointed to find that the dragon had only recently established its lair and had, as yet, accumulated negligible treasure.



The green dragon awaits combat on a jungle hilltop. (Illustration created with Reve)

Session 51 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

On our way back toward Krakroc, we stumbled upon the hag and her chimeralike sister. We negotiated an agreement to cooperate in attacking the Professor, which would result in the sisters getting the artifacts and us getting the Professor's personal property. Jointly, we ambushed the Professor's group as they exited a cave mouth. Though our plan was thwarted by the Professor's tactics and magical wards, we nevertheless prevailed, though the chimeralike sister was

killed or otherwise incapacitated. [I neglected to take notes on this session, and my memory of it is weak.] Accordingly, we renegotiated the deal with the hag, resulting in our getting the magical lantern.

Session 52 [as reported by Dudvin Hopnik]

The monsoon season ramped up even further, with nearly continuous heavy rain. We began trudging back toward Krakroc. Suddenly, a wyvern approached and landed, mounted by none other than Copperhead [Deuce's former gladiatorial adversary]. Copperhead greeted us warmly, then explained that he was on his way back to recruit mercenaries to attack a nearby hydra. He asked if we wanted in on the action. After some monetary negotiations, we agreed. The hydra's lair was nearby, next to an ancient temple. On the way, Copperhead explained that hydras don't usually have much treasure, but he could get paid by a lizardfolk village for each head he brought in. He also said that hydras don't generally have a breath weapon, with only rare exceptions.

We arrived at the hydra's supposed lair, still in driving rain. The hydra was not immediately evident. The temple was surrounded by a stagnant pond. There was a rope bridge over it, but the decking was missing. The best plan we came up with was for Bova to tightrope over the rope bridge, while the rest of us piled into my folding boat were towed by the wyvern, which Copperhead would ride. This ended up being the worst possible plan, as the boat ran into an underwater object, which turned out to be the hydra. Wyvern lost its grip on the rope, Copperhead got jarred off, and the commotion knocked Bova off the bridge. Those of us who couldn't swim well scrambled for dry ground.



A hydra rises from beneath the surface of the pond. (Illustration created with Reve)

The hydra, by ill chance, was one of the few with a breath weapon, spewing a cloud of poison gas over several members of the party. On top of all that, the pond was infested with venomous snakes. We made decent progress versus the snakes, but the hydra kept going underwater to avoid our attacks, periodically popping up where we least expected it. Even worse, another, even larger hydra approached from the temple area, though this one appeared not to have a breath weapon. Things were looking dire, and Karvala lost consciousness without anyone around to stabilize her. At a key moment, the Copperhead's wyvern, Laverne, delivered a poisonous sting straight to the second hydra's heart, slaying it instantly [a critical hit plus a lucky damage roll]. Everybody was still engaged with either the first hydra or the snakes, and Karvala was at the last extremity before Gardai finished off the hydra—by transporting onto its back and stabbing into its spine—and somebody could make it over there in time to pour a healing potion down her throat. I chided Copperhead for his inaccurate scouting of the hydra, and the two of us became fast friends. He paid us our cut of the hydra bounty, then, as had been agreed, he departed with the heads, leaving the temple and its potential treasures to us.

Near the temple entrance we found an inscription in the draconic language: "By coil, from death to life." We lit torches and

descended to the interior. The first room contained a table with some square tiles in the center, along with some ornate bowls at the south end, each with a square hole in the bottom. As we entered, a colorful opaque cloud approached us, sending Gardai and later Deuce into a dreamlike state. Bova and I started putting tiles in the holes in the bowls, with various confusing and inconclusive effects. The others fought the cloud, with seemed to have a solid core that was susceptible to physical damage. *[It was getting late and one of the players had an important engagement the next morning, so we stopped in the midst of the encounter.]*

Observations & Commentary

My observation and commentary on these sessions appears below.

Taking a Loss

I liked that we suffered a defeat to the Professor in session 49. At the end of the session, James remarked that he had attempted to balance the encounter so that we would have a decent chance and that it wasn't obvious to him that the remaining party members had no choice but to accept the Professor's offer. Of course, he knew more about the Professor's capabilities and the extent of potential reinforcements. I certainly didn't feel confident of victory. And I actually like that we lost. In retrospect, I realize that I had begun to feel that the encounters were a bit too finely balanced, to the point that it seemed improbable that we'd run into so many adversaries that were a difficult challenge but not beyond our abilities. I think combat is more interesting if the players often have to make a meaningful decision about whether to retreat, and this incident has somewhat restored that sense.

Peril at Every Trail and Cavern

The Eastlands Campaign | Sessions 0–1

Setting: Eastlands

GM: Mark Nemeth

Game System: D&D 5E

Player	Character	Class
Cory Thomas	Hambone	barbarian
	Rowan	ranger
Dave Schnedar	Bear	barbarian
	Eve Aurelius	cleric
	Seneca Arkana	wizard
James Schnedar	Destrian Marvane	wizard
	Karn Thorn	warlock
	Kel Rask	rogue
Joe Ring	Bristol	fighter
	Dakota Shelvin	rogue
	Shadden Tuck	cleric
Polo Schnedar	Gruber Hawkstorm	sorcerer
	Mooria Zurka	ranger
	Wrag Drukstol	rogue

Introduction

At long last, I've been able to GM a game in my Eastlands setting. (See *A&E* issues 571, 572, 573, 574, 582, 584, 590, and 591 for setting details; email me if you'd like a compiled campaign guide.) To date, I've held a couple of session 0s, since everybody wasn't available at the same time, and one regular session. One thing I'm trying that's a little different than usual is having each player create multiple characters with the expectation that they'll periodically form different groups and we can have multiple interweaving storylines. I'm not sure how well this will work, but we'll see. This may also help accommodate people who play occasionally, but not all the

Long Combats

These mid-level combats take quite a long time, which is why I have so little to write about sessions 50 and 51. I enjoyed the sessions, but it would be nice to have the ability to finish a closely matched combat in less time, and save the session-long combats for the truly epic encounters.

Now, Where Were We?

We've missed several sessions lately, owing to James's scheduled vacation, limited availability of some of the other players, and a flood in James's girlfriend's basement. For some reason that I cannot now recall, I had neglected to take notes on session 51, and it took me a few minutes to remember what had occurred. It appears that we'll resume regular sessions, soon, however.

Unexpected Uses of a Folding Boat

Even before the hydra encounter, James noted that the monsoon would prevent us from taking a full rest in our usual camping equipment. After we were beat up by the hydras, I suggested enlarging my folding boat, turning it upside-down, and using it as a shelter, since it should be watertight. We had a long discussion about the appropriateness of this use of the boat, since the idea was obviously intended to circumvent what James had meant to be a significant limitation and was a nonstandard use of the item, but it was hard to articulate any reason why it wouldn't work. We eventually noted that the boat had a mast, so we wouldn't be able to lay it flat. However, the larger version of the boat was described in the rules and having a cabin. Since we had a lake to float it on, we decided that we could get a good rest inside the cabin while the boat was afloat.

time. The plan is to hold sessions every four weeks, with the possibility of additional sessions if anyone's interested. Until these sessions, I hadn't GMed a session with multiple players since about 1994, so I was a little nervous, but I think it went reasonably well.

Session 0(a)

In the village of Norvald, a group of aspiring adventurers convenes at the single tavern, known as the Constellation because of the detailed painting of the night sky that adorns the high ceiling. The PCs—Rowan, Shadden, Karn, Grubor, and Seneca—having decided that it's time to commence their careers, discussed how to start. Rowan mentions that his older sister, Gemma, herself a moderately experienced expeditioner, has recently returned from a foray to the northeast. On her party's return, they were ambushed by an unusually large group of orcs. They killed most of the orcs and drove off the others, but three members of the party died in the engagement, including Gemma's boyfriend. In accordance with custom, the bodies were interred in bare earth, in this case in a sandbar on the bank of a creek. Upon the party's return, however, they learned of recent incidents in which recently deceased people had been appearing as zombies (which is unprecedented).

Gemma and the remainder of the party would like to prevent their former companions from becoming zombies but are loath to return to the site of unpleasant memories. They're willing to hire the PCs to travel to the gravesite and prevent the zombification of the bodies. To prove their success, the PCs must return with an anklet that was inadvertently left on the body of Gemma's boyfriend. (Customarily, jewelry and other adornments are removed from bodies prior to burial.) The party agreed to this and planned to set off on the following day.

The gravesite was about two day's journey northeast of Norvald. The instructions were to travel to a pond on the corner of "Old Lady Wylinga's" ranch, then proceed about six miles upstream



Old Lady Wylinga turns out not to be so old. (Illustration created with Gemini)

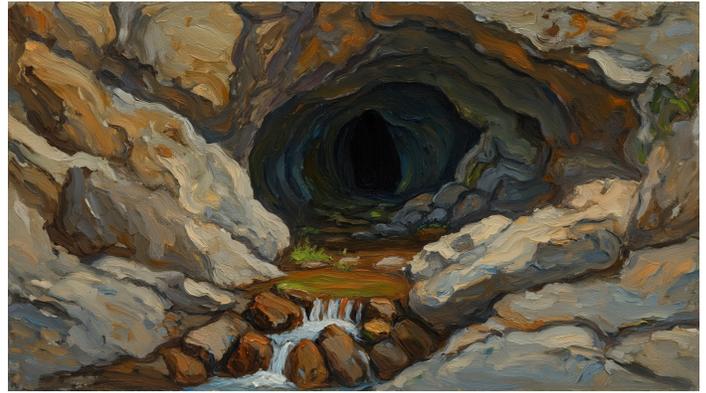
along a creek. The first day passed uneventfully. Early on the second day, they arrived at the pond, which lay at the foot of a cascade. The site was guarded by Wylinga herself, who proved to be not as old as the party had expected. She noted that one zombie had been recently seen on her property, though it escaped before a suitable hunting party could be collected. She wished the party well and offered a bit of advice about the trail ahead.

The party climbed the acclivity on the north side of the cascade. The creek flowed from the east, and the party kept as close to the streambank as possible. About three miles up, there was an outcrop on the north side of the stream, causing the faint trail to take a short detour northward. Having been informed about this site by Wylinga, the party continued onward. Near the apex of the curve away from the creek, the party was ambushed by a warg attacking from behind, simultaneously with several orcs with shortbows. Also, someone began beating a drum nearby, to the northwest. The vegetation was so thick that movement into the brush was extraordinarily slow and difficult. The warg occupied the party members at the rear, while Shadden, who was near the front, advanced to attack the orcs. The combat proved nearly fatal to the party, but they ultimately prevailed, though not without a couple of members losing consciousness. The last orc in front nearly escaped by swimming down the creek, but it was felled by a final bowshot. However, the drummer, whoever he or she was, escaped without being sighted.

Session o(b)

Moving to a different group of adventurers, Moorria, Eve, and Bristol, who had recently meet while saving a traveler from an encounter with bandits, decided to investigate a small cave from which Moorria had recently seen a few orcs returning. The cave was southeast of Norvald, about a day's journey away, just past the edge of outlying farmsteads. The journey passed uneventfully, and they arrived at the base of a cliff, finding a stream that issued from a cave, as well as another opening higher up.

They decided to enter through the cave at the base, which was where Moorria had previously seen the orcs. The cave remained narrow and followed a tortuous path for a little over 100 feet, beyond which it slightly widened, with the stream, which was otherwise quite shallow, forming a small, deep pool. Examining the pool, Bristol noted some coins at the bottom, along with several apparent boulders, one of which moved slightly. The moving boulder turned out to be a giant toad, which leapt from the pool and attacked the party, striking a severe blow on Moorria. The toad



The cavern entrance. (Illustration created with Reve)

was quickly dispatched, but not before rendering Moorria unconscious. Her companions restored her to better health, and the party proceeded into the cavern complex.

The pathway split into two larger chambers, and the party entered the one to their left, noting a faintly trodden path. Following it, they entered another cavern, filled with bones, garbage, and other debris. The air was foul with rotteness, and they also detected a fainter odor, also unpleasant, but more earthy and natural-smelling. The caverns branched again, and they again stayed to the left. Continuing, they entered a cave filled with various unprocessed, inedible goods, with containers containing items such as wool and nails. The next cave contained many weapons, all of unusually low quality. Beyond that was a small, empty cave, with a door set in relatively new masonry at its far end.

The door, though locked from the other side, proved easy to force open, and the party emerged into a corridor of worked stone, running perpendicular to the direction they had been going. They took the right-hand path, then turned right again at the next junction. Opening a door, then happened upon what appeared to be a large kitchen, with four orcs inside. Combat was immediate, with the orcs using their cleavers as hand axes. The party prevailed, though they took significant damage. They also noted that the quantity of food being prepared was enough for a score or more of orcs. Proceeding onward, they happened upon an orc guard post. One of the orcs rang a gong, and another ran away, presumably to seek reinforcements. The party killed the two who remained, then, having taken substantial damage, decided to retreat, fleeing back the way they had come. There was no immediate sign of pursuit, though there was another giant toad to be overcome at the pool. They they returned to Norvald, grateful to have all escaped with their lives.

Session 1

Returning to the group in search of the gravesite [session o(a)], the party took stock of their situation and healed themselves as best they could. Rowan decided to return to Wylinga's ranch, as did Seneca. [Neither Cory nor Dave was available for this session.] Karn, Grubor, and Shadden proceeded onward along the creek. At about the distance they had expected to find the graves, they came upon a confluence with a small tributary from the north, with large sandbars both upstream and downstream of the confluence. The nearer sandbar appeared smooth, whereas there was a pile of dirt on the farther one. Near the confluence, they heard a sound of movement and saw footprints of bare human feet.

Following the tributary, they soon came upon a clearing on its bank, where a small tent was pitched. There were also three zombies, which immediately engaged them in combat. The zombies had some initial good luck, reducing Karn nearly to death. Grubor's magic proved effective against them, however. Shortly after combat began, a pasty-faced man emerged from the tent, shouted, "No! Leave me alone!" repeatedly, then fled upstream along the bank. The party attempted to follow, but they had to pause to finish off the zombies, who proved to be a foe of nearly equal strength. They followed the man's tracks, but eventually he entered the stream and they lost the trail.



Zombies guard the tent and its unknown inhabitant. (Illustration created with Reve)

Returning to the tent, they found a couple of potions and miscellaneous mundane items. They also inspected the zombies, none of whom proved to be members of the former party of Rowan's sister, Gemma, nor anyone else they knew. Back at the sandbar, they found the grave intact, though someone had been digging near it. They exhumed the bodies of Gemma's party and retrieved the anklet from Gemma's boyfriend. With abundant driftwood around, they decided to construct a pyre, cremating the bodies at nightfall. The heat from the fire roused a giant centipede from its repose nearby, but it moved upstream along the creek, and the party decided not to pursue. The following morning they headed back to Norvald, finding a friendly but ignorant cowboy on guard duty near Wylinga's pond. Gemma and her party were thankful for the service and provided the promised reward.

In Norvald, Shadden, Karn, and Grubor were approached by a middle-aged woman named Splindrath, the magistrate from Stolt, who was in town because of recent developments in the case of a man named Urdagu, who had been convicted of manslaughter several years ago. The primary evidence against Urdagu was that he'd been heard arguing with the victim, and the killing had occurred with his dagger. Urdagu had always maintained his innocence, claiming that the dagger was a copy of his and that his



The exhumed bodies are burned on a pyre. (Illustration created with Reve)

actual dagger had subsequently been stolen. Recently, what appeared to be the genuine dagger had been found in a local millpond. The magistrate had decided to vacate the conviction and was willing to pay the party to find and inform Urdagu, whose whereabouts were known only very generally, since he had been sentenced to exile and had occasionally been seen far to the northeast of Norvald. The party initially considered taking this assignment, but the ultimately declined against it, owing to the large search area.

Instead, they opted to unite with some of their other associates—Mooria, Destrian, and Bristol—to make another expedition to the orc lair that Mooriam had first discovered [session 0(b)]. They entered the cave mouth and encountered another giant toad at the pool, dispatching it without much difficulty. Proceeding along their

previous path, they found that a masonry wall had been hastily constructed in a narrow spot in the caverns. Demolishing it seemed possible, but it would have taken a lot of time and likely attracted the attention of the orcs. Backtracking, they found a very narrow natural passage, so narrow that Bristol, the largest of the group, could only move through certain spots while fully exhaling.

They eventually emerged into a corridor of worked stone and followed it in the apparent direction of the area where they had previously encountered orcs. This time, they blundered straight into an orc barracks room, in which about a dozen orcs lounged. Some of the orcs stayed to fight, while others ran off, either to save themselves or raise the alarm. After a protracted combat, all the remaining orcs were felled, and none of the party were in condition to do anything other than retreat. They went back the way they came and returned to Norvald without further incident. Despite the short expedition and lack of treasure, most of the party accumulated enough experience to seek training to solidify the improvement of their spells [moving up to level 2].

Observations & Commentary

My observation and commentary on these sessions appears below.

Shaking off the Rust

I don't think I did too badly despite my lack of recent experience, despite a few awkward moments aside. It's nice to have a cooperative group who can help with looking up rules and navigating the intricacies of Fantasy Grounds.

Multiple Personalities

I'm not sure how well my concept of each player having multiple characters is going to work. I like the idea in the abstract, but it remains to be seen how well it will work in practice. Since we're only planning to play monthly, that may not be often enough to implement it well.

Killer DM

Each session has had at least one encounter that could have ended with a total party kill. While I did, in fact, intend to have occasional encounters from which the PCs would probably need to retreat (and the players know this), some encounters I had intended as innocuous had proved nearly deadly. While I'll probably get better at balancing encounters, I'm a little conflicted, since I do like the sense that the encounter areas exist independently of the PCs, so the players can't rely on every encounter being set up to ensure their victory. Now that several PCs are 2nd level, they won't be quite so fragile, so maybe this issue will abate somewhat.

Comments

On AGE #592 (part 2)

Paul Holman

My Eastlands monotheistic deity does not, in fact, have angel-like agents, at least not that anyone has reported seeing.

If you're sedulous about improving your vocabulary, you'll remember all the new words. Or some of them. I find that the older I get, the less likely I am to remember new words I learn.

Jim Vassilakos

I don't really understand how Karvala's paper birds work. They don't seem to require any special skill for anyone else to activate. I wouldn't be surprised if James explained this once when I wasn't paying attention, but it's also possible that he's intentionally making her a bit mysterious.

Interesting thoughts about free will. I certainly agree that the criminal justice system ought to be rehabilitative, rather than revengeful. Revenge doesn't produce any positive value; it's solely destructive, and I don't think the government ought to be in the business of doing solely destructive things, especially to its own citizens.

The ancient coins in the Eastlands have images of people, presumably rulers, on them. The contemporary ones don't, because the society is—or perhaps vainly fancies itself—free of such vanity.

I'm not sure I quite understood your comments on blue-orange morality, but they were interesting.

Agreed on your comment to Spike regarding Job.

Yes! Indexing is definitely a skill. I've read some good books with an absolutely horrendous index, with Pierre Julien's *Erosion and Sedimentation* being the poster child for this: excellent content with an index that continually amazes me with its uselessness.

Joshua Kronengold

In my campaign, druids don't get power from the One because, to be blunt, I decided I wanted it that way. But I do have what I think is a reasonable rationale. The One is not purported to be the creator of the world and is, by all accounts, external to it, so I think it makes sense for druidic magic, which is closely tied to the physical environment, to be powered by some property of the planet itself.

I do think that divination about the past isn't nearly so bad as divination about the present, but I don't think it's terribly interesting. It seems potentially useful sometimes (e.g., “where was the ancient headquarters of the Scarlet Necromancer?”), but that seems like a mundane means of facilitating gameplay, rather than something to emphasize within a session.

Craig Kamber

I love “Never buy anything you can't move.” I'd exclude it from applying to my residence itself, but otherwise it seems like decent advice. What about trees you can move when you buy them but not after they've been planted and grown?

Thanks for the car assembly update; I'm strangely invested in your progress.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

I liked the Cuban cemetery article. Your terrain looks great, too.

I didn't know about the *OD&D* cover being ripped off from *Doctor Strange*; thanks for the illustrations.

Heath Row

I was interested in your experience with the new *5E* bastion rules. I like the idea, but it's hard to know how it will work in practice.

Gabriel Roark

Regarding the idea that a dead tiefling takes a long time to cremate, I think my GM just extrapolated from the character's fire resistance while living. We didn't really talk about otherwise, but I thought it was a nice touch, too.

Only one player was keen on using my elaborate currency system. It even seemed a bit cumbersome to me after I wrote the article. We're just using the standard system in the actual campaign. I still think the idea is cool, but it may not justify the nuisance.

John Redden

I'm happy to receive grammar nitpicks. It's hard to keep all the typos out when no one else is editing my zine, but I for sure don't mind hearing about anything that demonstrates an error made in ignorance of concept.

I mostly liked *A Complete Unknown*. I'm kind of a sucker for elaborate period pieces. Having not been alive at the time, it's hard to get an accurate sense of how controversial or revolutionary Dylan's use of electric instruments in folk music was at the time. Although, come to think of it, my father was a big folk music aficionado in the early 1960s but didn't like Dylan much, though that may have been attributable to his unusual voice and overall departure from traditional folk conventions, rather than the electric instruments specifically.

Comments

On A&E #593

Seeing “The Last Issue of A&E” on the cover was quite a shock, despite knowing there was a delay and Lee was having some difficulties. I'm glad to have been there for the end of such a long-running and influential publication, even though it's a sad occasion.

Lee Gold

I'm sorry to hear of your problems with eyesight. It must be incredibly frustrating and disappointing.

I like the idea of level drain being transformed to forgetting little-used skills. Regarding our own experiences forgetting names and titles, it seems like I'll usually remember the name eventually, whether it's a few minutes or days later (except for the last name of one of my college acquaintances, which I've been trying unsuccessfully for years to recall).

Regarding a “gimmicky character who is supposed to be deep or well-rounded,” here are a few I perceive as examples: Holden Caulfield (from *The Catcher in the Rye*), the narrator of *Tropic of Cancer*, Joe Keller (from *All My Sons*), and just about everybody in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.

In addition to humanoids with animal heads, I guess I don't care for the reverse either. I've always found centaurs unappealing and vaguely disturbing. Being a little disturbing can have its thematic uses, but I'd much rather see centaurs presented as a mysterious and alien society rather than, say, a PC-playable species.

Joshua Kronengold

Was changing to a new typeface for the last issue something you did consciously? A coincidence? Something Lee/Barry did that was out of your control?

I don't care much for the concept of discrete alignments having in-game mechanics, either. In my own game, I'm not really using alignments, though I didn't make an explicit announcement about it. In the games in which I'm a player, we haven't really talked about it, either.

I don't think it's bad if it's not obvious whether characters should use a spell or a weapon attack, as long as the player doesn't take too long to decide. Anyone who wants to maximize everything can read the rules and figure it out; everybody else can just pick something and do it, even if another action would be a little better. The game doesn't suffer.

In most cases, I'd rather not have my games be either epic or satire. Neither one sounds like much fun to me unless it's an explicit goal of the campaign.

It's interesting that you commented about players being turned off by items enmeshed in history and religion. I'd never thought about it quite like that, but I've definitely been adverse to items with any sort of thematic drawback. All of my characters would have tried to destroy Stormbringer at every opportunity, and I'd have been annoyed if the GM had somehow compelled me to use it.

I follow your logic about viewpoints from which RPGs are acceptable in general but not to prisoners. I don't think any of those arguments are compelling. It sounds like you don't, either. As a tangential point, how seriously ought we to take arguments that make some logical sense but vastly over- or under-value certain considerations, as appears to be case in your examples?

For sure, using my project management principle, tripling the estimate should absolutely occur before it gets reported to anyone in a position to accept or reject it.

My elaborate audio system *was* working well, but somehow it became entirely unusable, with variable outcomes despite all the settings and inputs being unchanged. I'm not sure if Discord changed their audio processing somehow or whether something happened within my computer, which is nearly due for replacement and not running its original operating system. I've gone back to just using my phone for now.

I haven't read the *Raybearer* sequel, so I can't comment knowledgeably about it.

For mechanisms like Gumshoe Drive, how complicit is the player in choosing these hooks? I'd be annoyed to be told what my character is motivated by, and I'd be a bit less annoyed even if I could pick it myself but had to decide in advance. It seems like the key is to ensure that incentives to the characters align well with incentives to players.

Clark B. Timmins

Coincidentally, I also recently read a novel featuring indigenous people in which the concept of a medicine bag was referred to, though I suspect the reference in your novel was much more extensive than mine.

I hadn't heard of disappointing sales figures for the 2024 *D&D* books. I'm not disputing it; I just hadn't heard of it. Briefly looking it up did not provide conclusive answers. If true, it's interesting. I've noticed that less experienced players don't seem to feel compelled buy all the rulebooks, in contrast to what I recall from my youth. Of course, I quickly became an enfranchised player, as did members of my old play groups, so my experience may not be representative.

Jim Vassilakos

It's interesting that you write "the game is in service of the story, not the other way around." My view is the opposite, but I don't get a sense our play styles would be incompatible.

Timothy Collinson

My wife thinks that the way I say *pen* and *pin* is nearly indistinguishable, to the point that it sometimes cause confusion. I think they sound only slightly different whenever anyone says them, unless the speaker is deliberately emphasizing the distinction. I'm not sure if my pronunciation is typical of California, where I grew up, or is specific to me.

Lisa Padol

I'll put *Swordspoint* on my list to consider reading.

Thank you for keeping me in mind during the recent upheaval in federal employment. As you learned in #593, it all worked out quite well for me, though unfortunately not for a lot of the newer employees.

In Dullstrand, I also thought the hag and genie felt different in tone from the usual campaign. But it kind of made sense, given that the cavern complex was recently revealed by a landslide after being sealed off for centuries. I think the hag could only be freed if the genie was also freed, so that's why she wanted it to happen, despite possible retribution from the genie.

I think *D&D 3E* combat seems pretty slow, other than at low levels. I never played *3E* with a large group, so maybe it was worse and I didn't know.

Thanks for descriptive author recommendations. Of the ones you listed, I felt most motivated to check out P. Djèlí Clark.

I have read N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Books. I was conflicted about the first one, greatly liking the concept but annoyed by the narrative gimmick and some of the elements of the execution. I like the second one a little less. By the time I got to the last one, I had developed a hearty dislike, mostly because the characters seemed continuously miserable—not that they didn't have good reason to be, but it wasn't any fun to read about—and the lack of verisimilitude, in the sense that nothing ever seemed to happen anywhere in the world other than wherever the characters happened to be. I didn't like the writing style much, either. It's interesting that you compared them to *Dune*, which I hated with a fiery passion and often cite as my least favorite book.

From what I understand of *Good Society*, it makes a lot more sense for a character's motivation to be clear and mechanically discretized, as opposed to the generally more picaresque-like approach of *D&D*. Maybe that's not how everybody plays *D&D*, but I think it works best as an open-ended game without a tight plot. The more the plot is conceived in advance and important in gameplay, the more sense it makes to have more specific character motivations.

Even at my somewhat advanced age, I'm repeatedly taken aback by the boldness with which many Old Testament figures address God. In addition to the examples you cite, what sprang to mind was Habakkuk, who begins addressing God with "O Lord, how

long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (NRSV) and then goes on in the same vein for quite some time. While God does indeed seem to tolerate discourse of this sort, in these particular examples, the questioner concludes with an acceptance of the legitimacy of God's decisions. Job certainly does this. It seems that Abraham does too. Even Habakkuk concludes with a statement that even though the conditions he's complaining about remain bad, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation." In general, in the Old Testament, people who have heated interchange in good faith with God do not receive condemnation; that's reserved for those who are willfully uncooperative or deceptive.

Regarding my correspondence with Mike Phillips (whose last name I spelled incorrectly two issues ago), you have convinced me to try *The Goblin Emperor*. I doubt Mike would have liked it, as he tended to like corruption and dissipation rather than the outlandish stuff I think is fun; *On the Road*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Blood Meridian* were among his favorites. He also disliked fantasy. But I might like *The Goblin Emperor*. Mike's point was simply that psychology had changed novels, and it was more my view that it had made them worse. He and I did mean it in a Freudian sense: that the intellectual embrace of psychology-as-science was one of the things that had been important to the development of narrative fiction in the early 20th century. Everyone has various psychological (not as science) motivations. I think your Morgan Le Fay example would have made sense to people in the 18th or 19th centuries, as it does to me. So pre-psychology, we did get books like *Frankenstein*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *Anna Karenina*, but we didn't get books like *The Return of the Soldier* and *Demian*. Your example of *The Distant Past* is apt, as is *Spellbound* (which I also thought wasn't Hitchcock's best, though the dream sequence was cool). Without having read the end of your comments as I composed this, I almost used *Rebecca* (the book) as one of my examples of something that could only be post-psychology. *Rope* is a good example, too. Some of these are still high quality and enjoyable, even in my view; I liked *Rope* and *Rebecca*. But there are some ill-conceived plots that wouldn't exist without psychology, such as *The Return of the Soldier*. This concept is very interesting to me.

Paul Holman

I like your idea of putting the PCs in a position where they need to report something highly illegal to the authorities but can't do so in practice without incriminating themselves in a lesser offense.

Brian Christopher Misiaszek

It's super cool that you got to see Lauren's play. That must have been both extremely interesting and a source of parental pride.

I'm in awe of your work on the Cuban cemetery. The miniatures look great, even the one you weren't happy with. The idea of El Ángel Oscuro is delightful, and all the background and game content you developed is so, so good. It just kept going on, one great idea after another. It makes me wish I played *Call of Cthulhu*.

As you suspected, it looks like RFK Jr.'s influence is indeed bad for vaccine funding and analysis. Not a huge surprise.

I, for one, have not been concerned that your comments related to recent disputes between the United States and Canada are running afoul of the two-page politics limitation. It seems more (though perhaps not entirely) as if you're writing about international relations.

Gabriel Roark

I'm glad to hear that there appears to be at least some progress in court. My continued sympathies on the entire situation.

It's interesting that you said you liked your critical hit rule because it doesn't exceed the normal damage range. In contrast, my group uses double damage, with one roll at maxim damage and the second one random, which I like because it *does* exceed the usual damage range, which means that a character facing and adversary with a known damage roll can't be quite as secure of not getting killed if the GM has lucky rolls.

Michael Cule

Your story about the biased radio news in a cab reminded me of a recent incident where I was riding in an Uber and the driver was

listening to what at first sounded like bombastic, obnoxious political commentary. I was readying myself to voice a complaint, but instead it turned out to be opinionated discussion of some MMA-adjacent fighting sport that I was unfamiliar with. The radio guys were really, really into it.

Regarding your comments about Job to Timothy Collinson and me, it strikes me as quite unlikely that both 1) God, as depicted in Job, exists *and* 2) God's actions in Job will never be revealed to make sense. Maybe God doesn't exist, or maybe all this will be resolved far after my lifetime, but it doesn't seem at all far-fetched to conclude that, *if God exists*, God has some plan that will ultimately make complete sense. My sense that, if God exists, God should be obeyed is based more on an inference about God's expertise than on God's power. I conclude that anyone with the ability to deliberately create and run the universe would be vastly more knowledgeable than I, who have only observed a minuscule temporal portion of the history of a geographically minuscule portion of the universe. To me, it would feel like looking at only one brushstroke of a painting and disputing the content with the artist.

I fully agree that Balaam's prophetic ability is quite odd. All the non-Jewish people in the Old Testament who are described as having a relationship with God always seem mysterious to me. Were there a lot of others like them who weren't mentioned? Did, say, the Edomites have a lot of legitimate priests or prophets of God? Only a few? (Being descendants of Abraham, they might well be familiar with the Abrahamic concept of God.) Did the Israelites themselves think it was weird? If so, I can't think of any evidence for it in the text.

I tend to perceive the statements of Jonah that you paraphrase (expressing the idea that God was never really going to destroy Nineveh because God is too merciful) as being Jonah's attempt at a post facto rationalization for his actions, since he didn't say anything like that when he ran away at the beginning. I want to clearly note that I can't definitively infer that from the text. But, more to your point, why wouldn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh? It's certainly not because he didn't want the city to be destroyed. If he just thought it was a nuisance and God wasn't really going to do anything, why not remain where he was and try to forget about it, rather than running away? It would make sense if he thought it was too dangerous to go to Nineveh, or perhaps if he was afraid of the responsibility. His intent is described as "to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (RSV), which suggests to me that he was primarily afraid of God, rather than of Nineveh. I suppose it's theoretically possible that Jonah thought God might destroy him but wouldn't destroy Nineveh, which apparently was known for its wickedness, but that doesn't strike me as especially likely. Maybe he thought God would destroy Nineveh with him in it. Maybe he thought Nineveh would kill him if he went there and that God would kill him if he didn't do anything, but he could escape from God if he went somewhere else (though if he thought God had dominion over the entire earth, his logic seems weak to me).

Thank you for your sympathetic comments about the difficulties of public sector employment. I really appreciate it.

Patrick Zoch

I'm sorry about your difficulties at work. Having been a government employee until my retirement in the recent upheaval, I know how difficult it is. I hope things have calmed down a little in the last couple of months. That seems to be the case at my former agency, at least.

I liked your NPC reactions article. I think you have the right idea and have offered concrete suggestions.

Spike Y Jones

Regarding the dark page background on Green Ronin's *Testament*, I certainly would be less likely to buy a game where the rules were hard to read. They really should just use plain white; it's worked well many publications for hundreds of years.

Your idea about tying alignments makes sense. As a species, it's easy to explain why they would be, on balance, inclined to evil; as usual, PCs have greater latitude to be exceptions.

Regarding whether I'm an inherently oddball by virtue of reading books and being a gamer, I have a view that's more

nuanced, or perhaps simply more conflicted. I've never been the kind of person to feel like a member of the mainstream, in almost any context. At the same time, I'm not very noteworthy in any occupational, demographic, or cultural sense. I think I'm simultaneously perceived as both dully orthodox and thoroughly iconoclastic. I think those characteristics are mostly fixed, regardless of any specific thing I might do or attempt. What I don't think I do, and what I think people mostly ought not to do, is focus on an unusual aspect of themselves and view it as personality-defining, as in "Look at me, I'm such a weirdo—I *read books!*" Doing so seems much more like an overt attempt to fit oneself into a particular subculture than a genuine declaration of anomaly. It seems more like desperation to be accepted into a subgroup than confirmation of unorthodoxy. Almost everyone is a mix of common and unusual beliefs, opinions, preferences, and aspects of temperament. It's almost inevitable that a person will have at least one component of personality that is unusual; that doesn't make him or her a bizarre oddball, regardless of whether that person seeks or avoids the label.

The signless, blacked-out local game store I mentioned finally got a sign. Apparently they went without one for as long as they could before the landlord complained too much, then negotiated a discounted deal with a guy who works as an installer for one of the local sign companies. Anyway, now it's up, and "Tavern of Souls" is emblazoned above the dark windows. I'm not sure how informative it is, though. Recently, as I was leaving the shop at about 10:00 p.m., a woman in the parking lot asked me "Hey, what is that place?" and then seemed disappointed when I said it was a game store.

The bookless house I mentioned was clearly inhabited by middle-aged people, not younger people who might use computers and phones for all their hobby activities. (Perhaps it was inhabited by someone who was, in fact, utterly ordinary in every respect.)

Regarding counterfeiting the copper fiat currency in Eastlands, part of the point is that society, particularly in that city, is so orderly that there wouldn't be much counterfeiting, in part because it's harshly punished. Also, because outsiders tend not to accept the fiat currency, any local citizen would be wary of accepting payment in it from a foreigner. And populations are small enough that everybody knows who's local and who's not.

Jim Eckman

Welcome back! I'm glad you made it back for the last issue, and I hope to see you in *Ec&A*.

Book Reviews

To Fill the Remaining Space

The House of Exile

by Nora Waln, 1933, 8/10

The first half of this focuses on the domestic culture of a traditional Chinese family in the 1920s. The second half is a firsthand account of the extensive changes that were occurring in China during that time. Waln reports everything dispassionately, with minimal personal commentary, which is occasionally frustrating, since I'd like to know how she thinks about, say, someone's blood dripping on her head during an armed robbery or the fact that an old Chinese man was executed for selling her two melons during an anti-Western boycott. She seems utterly fearless. I don't know if she simply didn't feel fearful or took action despite being afraid. Either way, it's impressive.

Reading this, I learned a lot about China that I didn't know before. I wouldn't go so far as to say that this book clarified everything that I had previously found perplexing about Chinese culture, but it did help a little. I had no idea that the early 20th century was so disordered in China. I also gained a somewhat better understanding of the importance of family to Chinese culture. Waln was an odd and remarkable woman, and her book is interesting and informative.

by Kim Stanley Robinson. 2012, 9/10

This is the platonic ideal of a Kim Stanley Robinson novel. It touches on all his usual topics of interest: colonization of the solar system, climate change, sexual dimorphism, economic systems, wilderness sports, interplanetary politics, and landscape art. As usual, the plot is secondary to the travelogue, but it's among the more focused of Robinson's plots (though still meandering by ordinary standards). Just settle in and enjoy—it's great!

Fireweed

by Lauren Haddad, 2025, 4/10

I'll begin with a sports analogy: This is a replacement-level book. If I had forgotten a book when traveling and had to pick one at random from a shop at the airport, this is about how good I'd expect it to be. It earns a few extra points for ambition and loses a few for execution.

It's hard to meaningfully discuss this book without revealing some details of the plot. I'll try not to reveal everything, but be forewarned. On the other hand, the book's own publicity spoils some of the content, so I'll try not to do any worse than that.

At first I thought *Fireweed* was going to be like *Northanger Abbey*: a book in which the protagonist's excessive interest in fictional crime distorts her perception. Haddad foreshadows this pretty hard throughout the book, but that element kind of fades near the end, as the plot finishes inconclusively and deliberately unsatisfyingly.

Haddad's main point seems both true and obvious: Our interest in crime and its victims is often self-serving, based on entertainment value, and overly focused on lurid detail. I remember the day I had this realization. I was in ninth grade and had witnessed a gruesome and life-altering accident involving one of my classmates. This sad incident was, of course, the talk of the campus. Later that day, I realized—to my discomfort—that I had relished repeatedly telling the story. So if you're already more than 15 years old, the odds are good that you've already had the realization that Haddad is trying to impart.

Where Haddad elevates the book is in demonstrating how nonindigenous people's interest in the disproportionate number of crimes against indigenous people, especially women, is often motivated by something other than desire for justice. In the case of the protagonist, it's boredom, loneliness, and the desire to feel important. For others (such as perhaps Haddad herself), it might be desire to establish credibility in certain social circles. As I previously noted, this isn't all that revelatory, but it's certainly true, and it's a concept that's often neglected in crime fiction.

The execution of the more routine aspects of *Fireweed* is a bit weak. The writing itself is of respectable quality, but the characters often do things that don't make a lot of sense, and, more notably, they don't do things that would make sense. For example, the protagonist has difficulty convincing law enforcement that her neighbor is actually missing, despite her repeated desperate pleas. However, she somehow neglects to point out that the neighbor has left her two small children alone, which you'd think might be strong evidence that her departure was not deliberate.

I wouldn't blame the citizens of Prince George, British Columbia, for being offended at their depiction in this book. All the male characters (aside from a few with cognitive disabilities) are despicable, ranging from rapists to, at best, willfully neglectful jerks. The female characters are only slightly better. There's no one you'd actually want to be friends with. Many characters talk like avowed racists, making statements that your own racist uncle would have known better than to utter 40 years ago. (At least that's true of my racist uncle.)

All in all, though, the book wasn't *that* bad. I didn't dread reading it, and I finished it fairly quickly. Reading it will teach you a few things that you're better off knowing.

My moderate dislike of *Fireweed* pales in comparison to the opprobrium I'm about to lay upon many of the reviews—both positive and negative, professional and amateur—of this book. Something about *Fireweed* has attracted many varieties of idiotic commentary. It seems like nearly all the reviewers have reviewed something other than the book I just read, perhaps either something external to the book or maybe merely their preconceived

idea of what the book consists of.

Let's begin with the professional reviews. Jordan Snowden of the *Seattle Times* describes *Fireweed* as “a slow-burning mystery laced with keen social critique” and “Unflinching and quietly devastating.” It's only a mystery in the sense that you don't know what happened and you never find out. As for “quietly devastating,” to whom does this apply? Certainly not the reader. Not society. Not the characters. A better description might be “well-intentioned and amateurish.”

In *The Brooklyn Rail*, Sam Franzini calls this “a spiky and unnerving thriller.” I wouldn't even call it a thriller. Maybe it's a mock-thriller, using the form of a thriller to deliver literary fiction. I'm not sure what it means to call a novel “spiky.” There's no way it's “unnerving,” unless you think that a foolish character blundering around is somehow disturbing. Franzini also describes Haddad as “white,” as if she's of primarily European ancestry, whereas her publisher's author bio says she's “an Iraqi-American.” Franzini goes on to comment on the novel's “diabolical centering of white womanhood,” as if we're supposed to both know what that phrase means and applaud Haddad for being diabolical.

The amateur reviews, despite being generally opposite in tone, are no better. I'm not going to call out amateur Goodreads reviews by name, so I'll focus solely on their content, much of which consists of chastising Haddad for even attempting to write this book. We have someone who sanctimoniously proclaims, “It seems crucial that such a significant story be narrated by Native voices... There are inherent limitations to the perspective of a naive white woman who makes the story about herself.” Yeah, that's literally the point of the book. I guess it's good that the reviewer reached the right conclusion, but he or she seems completely oblivious to the fact that the author herself is saying the same thing.

Another reviewer points out that “We don't need a novel that talks about how white women try and fail and to deep dive into that. We need MORE education on the injustices and racist systems surrounding Indigenous peoples and how to force reparations to be made to them.” Who, exactly, is supposed to provide “MORE education on the injustices and racist systems”? While it obviously would be good for people to have more education of this sort, the reviewer seems to think that Haddad herself ought to have done this, while simultaneously questioning the legitimacy of her writing a novel on this subject at all.

Next we have a reviewer who prominently points out that she stopped reading after 17% of the book, definitively stating that “this was nooot [*sic*] the right book for a non-Native author to write.” This seems to be the nucleus of the sentiment from many negative reviewers. Suppose, for a moment, that you're someone who holds the opinion that a non-Native author shouldn't write a book about the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women. Many people hold such views. But if that's your opinion, *why would you read this book?* If I think a particular person's views are so ill-informed as to be of negligible value, I don't read his or her books.

Okay, here's the last review I'll quote: “I don't know what would possess an Iraqi woman to write an MMIW story, but this book should have never been published. Surely, she has stories about her own people.” Indeed, while you're at it, why not suggest that the author go back to the country she's from?

To be clear, *Fireweed* is not likely to make a big difference in improving conditions for indigenous Canadians or reducing the crimes with which they are disproportionately afflicted. But it seems obvious that it's not going to make anything worse, either. No one is going to emerge from reading this with a more bigoted opinion on the subject than he or she started with. Causing a minuscule improvement is not worse than doing nothing at all. *Fireweed* is neither the revelatory bombshell its proponents claim nor the travesty its detractors lament.

American Notes for General Circulation

by Charles Dickens, 1842, 7/10

This is Dickens's chronicle of his first trip to the United States, on which he set off with high expectations and returned with significant, though not complete, disappointment. Frankly, I think this is a good book for contemporary Americans to read—not because Dickens is completely accurate in his criticisms (he's not)—but because it may disabuse readers of some of the more absurd

ideas of American exceptionalism. Dickens depicts a nation with both virtues and flaws, as the United States no doubt had then and continues to have. Sometimes it's easier to see yourself in the mirror if someone else holds it up.

The Kings in Winter

by *Cecelia Holland, 1968, 7/10*

I've never before read a book quite like this. It's about deathly serious events, but the dialogue has some of the funniest one-liners I've read. It seems to assume that the reader will know much more Irish history and mythology than most people do, so reading it made me feel like I was wandering around with a paper bag over my head, peering out through narrow eyeholes. Unless you're already an Irish history buff, you'll learn something by reading this. If you want to read a historical novel about 11th century Ireland, this is a good choice.

The Swiss Family Robinson

by *Johann David Wyss, 1812, 7/10*

I'm not sure I've ever read a novel where so many of the Goodreads reviews were from people who clearly had not read the book and made factually incorrect statements about it. Most of the negative reviews seem to be from people who were hoping to read a different kind of book entirely. This is a book written for juveniles from an explicitly Christian perspective. Frankly, I didn't know that when I started reading it—like many of the reviewers—but it's apparent very quickly. If that's a kind of book you'd rather not read, then, fine, read something else instead. But to complain about it is like objecting to *Star Trek* because it's too focused on outer space or criticizing *General Hospital* because the plots are melodramatic and implausible. Certainly, Wyss writes a lot about his religious principles, which he obviously takes seriously and holds sincerely. I can't really justify complaining about an author because he accurately describes his genuine views.

What I can criticize, however, is the narrative structure. The majority of the book consists of agricultural and technological improvements made by the eponymous family. It's fun in small doses, but it becomes repetitive quickly. The aspects of the plot that deal with other matters are much more interesting, though the conclusion follows a predictable path common to the genre. I would have preferred more variability in the events and plot.

Dream Story

by *Arthur Schnitzler, 1926, 8/10*

Like many, I read this after having already seen *Eyes Wide Shut*. I was surprised at how faithful to the book the movie was. Schnitzler isn't a very descriptive writer, so I found myself picturing the movie visuals often. One of the things this book is about is the concept that we think many things we don't readily admit, and perhaps speaking more openly about them wouldn't be as catastrophic as we fear. It's also about unknowable uncertainty; how can we process situations about which we'll never know the full truth? Overall, it was interesting, despite being outside my usual wheelhouse.

Twelve Days on the Somme: A Memoir of the Trenches, 1916

by *Sidney Rogerson, 1933, 7/10*

This, as far as I can tell, is an unvarnished narrative of soldiers' experience near the end of the 1916 Battle of the Somme. It's about a group on the front line, but not at a point of noteworthy action. As such, it seems to give a good sense of what it might have been like to be there as an ordinary soldier. I'm glad I wasn't there.

Jack of Shadows

by *Roger Zelazny, 1972, 7/10*

I went into this thinking that it was going to be a fun-loving romp about a clever protagonist exploiting an unjust society. Instead, it's more of a moral fable about the ultimate futility of revenge, excessive ego, and power seeking. This is one of those books that it seems impossible for anyone to have ever conceived of, yet it's right in front of you, held in your hands. It's not a whole lot of fun, but it will make you pause to reflect.

Ask Me Tomorrow

by *James Gould Cozzens, 1940, 9/10*

I never would have heard of this if it hadn't been briefly mentioned in Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend*. Despite Cozzens having once been highly regarded and popular (though perhaps not both simultaneously), his books are all but disappeared today; I had to get this one through interlibrary loan. He deserves much better; this book is excellent.

Superficially, it's a novel of a disaffected American in Europe during the interwar period, so he's not breaking any new ground with the setting. The narrator is a young man who's disagreeable. How do we know that? His mother chastises him for it on the very first page. And she's right! Nevertheless, he's not entirely unlikeable; his disagreeableness comes from awkwardness and bad examples, rather than from pervasive meanness.

But here's what's interesting: Is that a genuine mitigating factor? Usually in books like this, the reader is supposed to eventually sympathize with the loser protagonist, excusing his faults and bad behavior, blaming a cold and unsupportive society instead. (I'm sneering at you, J.D. Salinger.) Here, however, the protagonist isn't a complete loser, and many of his associates, including his employer, offer him good advice and are genuinely attempting to be helpful. He's a moderately likeable guy who makes a few overtly bad decisions and occasionally acts like a sulky jerk, but sometimes tries to do the right thing, though it often doesn't work out.

So why doesn't it work out? Does he act in a way that is genuinely objectionable? Occasionally (though less often as the book progresses, and the early stuff seems worse to a contemporary reader than was likely intended at the time it was written). Is he unlucky? Maybe. Does he make decisions that don't give him much cushion in case anything goes wrong? Frequently. We've all known somebody who comes off as a jerk despite mostly trying not to; everything's just one step too annoying to make you think this is someone you want to associate with. This book is about what it's like to be that guy—the guy who does some things wrong and others right but usually gets bad results.

It's insightful. And it's important that Cozzens doesn't implicitly condone the protagonist's actions. Cozzens seems to regard him with sympathy but without giving him a free pass. This isn't one of those Modernist books that waves away accountability. It explains how someone could be like this, but it doesn't say it's okay.

The writing is engaging, and Cozzens is good at the basic functionality of fiction writing: getting the reader to picture what's going on in the book. If this is typical of Cozzens's books, he deserves a place among the prominent American mid-century novelists. This one deserves to be rediscovered by the literary establishment.

Lodore

by *Mary Shelley, 1835, 6/10*

In contrast to *Frankenstein*, *Lodore* is subdued; it's like a conventional early Victorian narrative with only a few hints of wildness. There's a duel here and an imprisonment there, but no monsters, poisonings, or shipwrecks. The plot is passably interesting, but the writing style renders the characters quite remote from the reader. The ending is good, and somewhat unexpected, in the sense that you suddenly wonder if maybe the book was a focused all along on a different character than you might have thought. Nevertheless, the journey to get there is nothing extraordinary.

The Fever

by *Megan Abbott, 2014, 6/10*

This is a book about several girls at a high school falling ill with an unexplained disease. While that sounds, in principle, like an intriguing situation for a novel, it offers fewer narrative hooks than you'd think. There's really nothing for anyone to do other than run medical tests and speculate, which, while it would be of great interest to the characters, is not all that interesting to read about. The writing is pretty good, which is one redeeming feature.



THE DRAGON'S BEARD

JULY 2025

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THANK YOU. LEE GOLD

When I first got started playing Dungeons and Dragons in my pre-teen years in the late 70's, I heard about this little publication called *Alarums and Excursions*. I did not know much about it except that people talked about D&D in the APA and some interesting ideas were coming out of it. I never saw an actual copy of it, didn't know what an APA was, much less a zine, and did not have the know-how to track one down or the means to purchase one.

Almost 40 years later, I rediscover A&E. In the meantime, I have raised a family, introduced them to D&D, and ran several campaigns with them and our friends. In my conversations with the publisher of A&E, Lee Gold, I found her gracious, no-nonsense, and welcoming. She welcomed my humble contribution to the esteemed A&E and I was glad to be counted among its contributors. I've always suffered a little bit of imposter syndrome contributing my little zine alongside authors who have been contributing since the beginning and where renowned persons in the RPG community.

I am forever grateful to Lee Gold for her contributions to the RPG hobby, her tireless devotion to create, edit, publish, and distribute the collection of zines in the A&E APA, and for allowing me to be a part of it. I was saddened when A&E published its final issue, but I was glad to be a part of its history for over seven years.

I wish E&A to be a worthy successor to A&E and a homage to the legacy that Lee Gold established with A&E. Part of my contribution to honor the legacy is to continue my original zine with its current numbering as a forever linkage of E&A to A&E, where all my previous issues reside.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Jim Vassilakos for reaching to all the old A&E contributors for the creation of *Ever & Anon* to start the new APA to continue the A&E tradition.

Finally, I look forward to years of writing alongside new contributors to the new E&A and old friends from A&E.



PLAYER LOOKING FOR GAME

Desperate to find a new role playing game group, I began exploring for places to find a game and to advertise my availability as a player. I have been regular active playing role playing game on RPGG.com in the various play by forum (PbF) events. However, I wanted a live synchronous game where I could talk with other players and the GM during play. My FLGS had bulletin boards for games, but the boards were either sparse with opportunities or did not accommodate my schedule. I was reluctant to leave my personal contact info posted on the board for anyone to abuse. I surveyed a number of websites for matching players to games, even signing up for a couple of them, but no match was ever found except for a few "false positives" for in person games hundreds of miles from where I lived.

Though I had wanted a in-person game, I accepted that a virtual game may be the best I could manage. My favorite platform is Fantasy Grounds and I am a member of their Discord Community and Web Forum. The web forum player matchup did not appear very active and I opted not to participate in it. However, the Discord channel was very active. There was a dedicated channel for players looking for a game: `player_lfg`. I posted my player availability, experience, and desired game in the channel and waited.

There was no response for the first week. By the second week, I had a few inquiries. Some I had to turn down because of scheduling conflict, but I eventually found two different groups in my available times. I joined them both: one meeting Saturday night, the other meeting Sunday night.

But the invites kept coming for weeks afterwards. I did not want to overschedule myself, so I had to turn down quite a few really good sounding games. It was a remarkably different experience from my youth where trying to find a game to join was a challenging process. It was an embarrassment of riches for offers to join a game. It turned out that I had not removed or deactivated my post looking for game. I turned it off to prevent further misleading of my availability.

Both game groups are well into their campaigns but had lost a player for one reason or another and needed a replacement. While I am the new guy in the established group and unfamiliar with history of the group and the campaign, I look forward to playing again. And perhaps I will have found my next permanent group to and will be there for the start of their next game.



Next time I look for a game, I'm going to the Discord channel.

ZOCH'S BIG 5 TRAITS FOR NPCs

There is no shortage of random tables to generate personality traits for NPCs. My biggest problem with those tables is the one-dimensional outcome resulting in rather flat characters. Of course, if I wanted more complex characters, I could roll again and use both results. Some times, it works fine. Many times, it results in personalities that are incongruent with each other if not outright opposite of each other.

Frustrated with the results of random personality tables, I strove to create my own. Originally, I felt that if I created a large enough table, I would avoid generating results that were not incongruent or conflicting. This created two mistakes. First mistake was treating all the personality traits as equal. People are complex, more complex than just adding another personality trait. The traits we ascribe to people address different aspects of their personality, so when we describe someone in two or more ways, we are rarely talking about one aspect of their personality in multiple ways; instead, talking about two or more different aspects of their personality, not just one. Which leads to the second mistake: rolling a second time on a single table expecting to get depth of character trait. Rolling again on the same table always risked getting a conflicting or incongruent trait to a previous result. Multiple rolls did not result in a personality in depth; it only resulted in somewhat confusing mix of traits that still left the character incomplete.

Taking a cue from personality trait models, of which there are numerous ones available, I built several different random tables to reflect the different aspects of a character's personality. These tables are modeled loosely on the Big 5 personality traits: Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism. Both CANOE and OCEAN acronyms have been used for the Big 5 model. These are NOT scientific tables and should not be considered in any way infallible descriptions of personalities transferable to the scientific study of personalities.

The following tables provide 200 unique character traits in 5 categories, each with differing degrees between extremes. Rolling ONE trait from each table results in five different traits that form a rounded character personality for any NPC without creating inconsistent result yet allowing for some complex, rich, and interesting characters. Some traits may seem similar but there are differences, sometimes nuanced, between each trait. Not all weak traits are bad and not all strong traits are good.

Coupled with other randomizers for names, motivations, etc., a fully developed NPC can be generated in moments.

Instructions on three ways to use the tables and four example NPCs created using the table results follow after the tables.

OPENNESS

Openness describes the character's receptiveness to new ideas and experience.

d6	d20	d100	Trait
1-3 (Low)	1	1-3	Fanatical
	2	4-5	Bigoted
	3	6-8	Intolerant
	4	9-10	Philistine
	5	11-13	Hardheaded
	6	14-15	Intractable
	7	16-18	Distrustful
	8	19-20	Hidebound
	9	21-23	Staid
	10	24-25	Steadfast
	11	26-28	Conformist
	12	29-30	Circumspect
	13	31-33	Pragmatic
	14	34-35	Commonplace
	15	36-38	Predictable
	16	39-40	Settled
	17	41-43	Unimaginative
	18	44-45	Simple
	19	46-48	Shallow
	20	49-50	Narrow interests
4-6 (High)	1	51-53	Indifferent
	2	54-55	Sequacious
	3	56-58	Imaginative
	4	59-60	Unconventional
	5	61-63	Tolerant
	6	64-65	Indulgent
	7	66-68	Flexible
	8	69-70	Curious
	9	71-73	Inquisitive
	10	74-75	Wide interests
	11	76-78	Reflective
	12	78-80	Foresighted
	13	81-83	Logical
	14	84-85	Philosophical
	15	86-88	Creative
	16	89-90	Ingenious
	17	91-93	Innovative
	18	84-95	Adventurous
	19	96-98	Artistic
	20	99-100	Worldly

ZOCH'S BIG 5 TRAITS FOR NPCs

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Conscientiousness describes the character's sense of responsibility and organization and prioritization skills.

EXTRAVERSION

Extraversion describes the character's social engagement and activity.

d6	d20	d100	Trait
1-3 (Low)	1	1-3	Thoughtless
	2	4-5	Lazy
	3	6-8	Unsafe
	4	9-10	Wasteful
	5	11-13	Careless
	6	14-15	Frivolous
	7	16-18	Irresponsible
	8	19-20	Slipshod
	9	21-23	Undependable
	10	24-25	Forgetful
	11	26-28	Messy
	12	29-30	Procrastinating
	13	31-33	Dull
	14	34-35	Impractical
	15	36-38	Blunt
	16	39-40	Distractible
	17	41-43	Disorganized
	18	44-45	Inefficient
	19	46-48	Unsystematic
	20	49-50	Impulsive
4-6 (High)	1	51-53	Thoughtful
	2	54-55	Neat
	3	56-58	Attentive
	4	59-60	Keen
	5	61-63	Methodical
	6	64-65	Thrifty
	7	66-68	Practical
	8	69-70	Disciplined
	9	71-73	Prudent
	10	74-75	Fastidious
	11	76-78	Reliable
	12	78-80	Responsible
	13	81-83	Meticulous
	14	84-85	Perseverant
	15	86-88	Efficient
	16	89-90	Thorough
	17	91-93	Organized
	18	84-95	Pertinacious
	19	96-98	Punctilious
	20	99-100	Scrupulous

d6	d20	d100	Trait
1-3 (Low)	1	1-3	Timid
	2	4-5	Avoidant
	3	6-8	Shy
	4	9-10	Inhibited
	5	11-13	Diffident
	6	14-15	Withdrawn
	7	16-18	Loner
	8	19-20	Seeks quiet
	9	21-23	Bashful
	10	24-25	Quiet
	11	26-28	Secretive
	12	29-30	Reticent
	13	31-33	Retiring
	14	34-35	Reserved
	15	36-38	Unassertive
	16	39-40	Untalkative
	17	41-43	Patient
	18	44-45	Listener
	19	46-48	Restrained
	20	49-50	Concise
4-6 (High)	1	51-53	Active
	2	54-55	Talkative
	3	56-58	Energetic
	4	59-60	Sociable
	5	61-63	Gregarious
	6	64-65	Enthusiastic
	7	66-68	Enterprising
	8	69-70	Spontaneous
	9	71-73	Outgoing
	10	74-75	Noisy
	11	76-78	Uninhibited
	12	78-80	Show-off
	13	81-83	Bold
	14	84-85	Outspoken
	15	86-88	Assertive
	16	89-90	Bossy
	17	91-93	Brazen
	18	84-95	Garrulous
	19	96-98	Forceful
	20	99-100	Dominant

Zoch's Big 5 Traits for NPCs

AGREEABLENESS

Agreeableness describes the character's compassion, cooperation, and approachability.

d6	d20	d100	Trait
1-3 (Low)	1	1-3	Ruthless
	2	4-5	Pitiless
	3	6-8	Cruel
	4	9-10	Mean
	5	11-13	Insulting
	6	14-15	Harsh
	7	16-18	Quarrelsome
	8	19-20	Boorish
	9	21-23	Critical
	10	24-25	Hard-hearted
	11	26-28	Stubborn
	12	29-30	Unfriendly
	13	31-33	Uncouth
	14	34-35	Unkind
	15	36-38	Contrary
	16	39-40	Self-important
	17	41-43	Cold
	18	44-45	Unsympathetic
	19	46-48	Irreverent
	20	49-50	Thankless
4-6 (High)	1	51-53	Mild
	2	54-55	Modest
	3	56-58	Diplomatic
	4	59-60	Respectful
	5	61-63	Sympathetic
	6	64-65	Pleasant
	7	66-68	Helpful
	8	69-70	Good-Humored
	9	71-73	Gracious
	10	74-75	Friendly
	11	76-78	Appreciative
	12	78-80	Kind
	13	81-83	Considerate
	14	84-85	Cooperative
	15	86-88	Compassionate
	16	89-90	Selfless
	17	91-93	Forgiving
	18	84-95	Generous
	19	96-98	Affectionate
	20	99-100	Altruistic

NEUROTICISM

Neuroticism describes the character's emotional instability and vulnerability to stress.

d6	d20	d100	Trait
1-3 (Low)	1	1-3	Unflappable
	2	4-5	Collected
	3	6-8	Composed
	4	9-10	Optimistic
	5	11-13	Adaptable
	6	14-15	Happy
	7	16-18	Easy-going
	8	19-20	Resilient
	9	21-23	Self-confident
	10	24-25	Level-Headed
	11	26-28	Carefree
	12	29-30	Content
	13	31-33	Stable
	14	34-35	Calm
	15	36-38	Placid
	16	39-40	Mild-mannered
	17	41-43	Relaxed
	18	44-45	Undemonstrative
	19	46-48	Unemotional
	20	49-50	Unenvious
4-6 (High)	1	51-53	Self-consciousness
	2	54-55	Overanalytical
	3	56-58	Worrying
	4	59-60	Nervous
	5	61-63	Emotional
	6	64-65	Regretful
	7	66-68	Self-pitying
	8	69-70	Self-punishing
	9	71-73	Tense
	10	74-75	Fearful
	11	76-78	Moody
	12	78-80	Anxious
	13	81-83	Despondent
	14	84-85	Irritable
	15	86-88	Touchy
	16	89-90	Unstable
	17	91-93	Resentful
	18	84-95	Irascible
	19	96-98	Sad
	20	99-100	Depressed

ZOCH'S BIG 5 TRAITS FOR NPCs

HOW TO USE

Roll on the tables to determine personality traits, then build a character description with those traits.

Full Random Single Die: Roll 1D100 per table.

Full Random Two Die: Roll 1d6 and 1d20 per table. The d6 will determine if the trait is a high or low trait on the table, and d20 will specify the trait.

Half Random: Decide if you want the trait to be high or low ahead of time and roll 1d20 to select the trait in that half of the table (Forces difficult or easy NPCs for characters to interact with).

Examples



Full Random Single Die: 5d100 = O:31, C:43, E:95, A:70, N:85

Maelya is a genial and cheerful person (*good-humored*) and is prone to talk incessantly about everything (*garrulous*) hardly letting anyone get in a word edge-wise. However, she is a *pragmatic* person, seeing value in things she can use, and ignoring anything un-useful to her at the moment. Her home and shop is horrible *disorganized*, but she knows everything has a purpose. Pointing this out, interrupting her, or pressing a point she has already dismissed will earn a sharp rebuke and a goodbye (*irritable*).



Full Random Two Die: 1d6 & 1d20 x5 = O:4,13, C:2,5, E:3,6, A:3,5, N:2,7

Wyttus is not one to attend any gatherings and can be found tending his fields, delivering goods, or in his home (*withdrawn*). He rarely calls anyone by their names, opting to *insulting* nicknames instead, "Well, if it isn't the bag of beef-witted barnacles coming for a visit." Insulting retort do not seem to bother him (*easy-going*) or cause him to change his habit of insult. He is a smart and *logical* person and can reason supportable courses of action, but he is not very good at carrying them out with due care. He forget where he leaves his tools and equipment, sometimes leaving them in the field where they deteriorate to the point they have to be replaced or someplace where they might get broken or cause someone to get hurt, including himself (*careless*). Wytus takes such out-comes in stride (*easy-going*).



Half Random (All Positive): 1d20 x5 (high except Neuroticism) = O:20, C:9, E:7, A:19, N:7

Savannia is a knowledgeable woman with *worldly* experiences. She reveals in the differences in the world and is adept at performing various greetings and customs appropriate to

guests and visitors. She is well liked and calls everyone *affectionate* pet names: Dearie, Luv, Hon', and Sweet-heart are most common. She knows that she doesn't know everything and that the world is constantly changing. She readily accept that, is prepared to make honest mistakes, make apologies, and move on with the new knowledge (*easy-going*). She *prudently* chooses her words and her action carefully, balancing knowledge with wisdom. Her advice is frequently sought out, even if it does not always provide the answers one was looking for. Savannia is quick to recognize opportunities and throws herself into any endeavor she involves herself with full commitment (*enterprising*), especially if it means learning and mastering something new.



Half Random (All Negative): 1d20 x5 (Low except Neuroticism) = O:1, C:7, E:6, A:11, N:9

Alard is a *fanatical* follower of the *Seed & Soil Chronicle* describing the annual seasonal weather patterns and best planting times for select crops. Alard insists that every farmer follows the chronicle, going so far to un-seed fields of fellow farmers who did not plant according to the Chronicle. Alard does not go into the village unless necessary and does not attend any social gathering unless it is described in the Chronicle. Even then, he remains on the edge of the activity and departs as soon as has met his obligation as defined in the Chronicle. He is set in his ways (*stubborn*) and is not easily swayed unless it is cited in the Chronicle. Fortunately, the *Seed & Soil Chronicle* is an extremely reliable almanac, shown to be accurate more than 75% of the time. The other 25% of the time, Alard still follows the guidance from the Chronicle even if realities of the storm, sun, snow, and wind dictate otherwise. Other than farming, Alard can not be counted on to perform any other task — he simply does not think they are important (irresponsible). His failure to stay at his post during a militia muster resulted in his ban from the rolls. He become *tense* when discussing any shortfalls of his, becoming visible uncomfortable and uncooperative.

NPC descriptions can be as long or as short as you desire. You can simply provide yourself a list of the traits to reference on the fly, or you can flesh out a story with traits rolled. How would you describe the NPC below?



5d100 = O:97, C:3, E:47, A:54, N:69

Artistic, Thoughtless, Restrained, Modest, Self-punishing



All character art generated using [DMHeroes](http://www.dmheroes.com) at www.dmheroes.com.

For my final page, these are my comments to articles and questions in A&E 593. Next month, my comments will be for E&A 1. And I am REALLY looking forward to reading this first issue. Hopefully you enjoyed my zine also and will have comments and questions I can answer.

Lee Gold — Again, all my thanks for all that you have done. RYCTM Re: Ego personality for a sword for your dwarf Disa. I totally forgot about magic item ego. If magic items ever had a personality, ego would certainly be it. Though, I'm not sure I ever ran into a magic item with low ego. It a certain point, low ego was just not registered.

Joshua Kronengold — RYCTM Re: Not having romance in RPGs. It was not a function of me not liking romance in RPGs as much as my main game group consisted of my wife and kids. It was a bit of an ick factor that the players, and me, could not get past the meta of the game. It was hard enough being a father and GM to the kids trying to separate their angst about a character's undesired decisions from their sibling's motives. *"No, she did not refuse to heal your character because she is mad at you. Her character refused to heal your character because your character rushed into the fight when the party said to wait, Leroy Jenkins."*

I went all in on the Trickerion Kickstarter. Hopefully, I'll have someone to play it when (if) it arrives.

Jim Vassilakos — Thank you for the kind comment on my essay on NPC personalities. Hopefully, this month's zine provides you some new tools for NPC personalities usable in any game.

Lisa Padol — Re: Clothing vendor who provided a replacement closure strip for your cloak. I love that superior service to the customer that is as invested in your joy and appreciation of your purchased goods as they have in crafting it. Nothing is more disappointing that a dealer who is only concerned with the initial point of sale and not the customer satisfaction (provided it is not abused). The type of service the clothing vendor provided you is the same I have seen numerous times at the local Renaissance Fair near me. It justifies the slightly higher cost for the craftsmanship because there is often a service beyond what I would normally expect from traditional stores, especially the impersonal mega store both brick-and-mortar and virtual.

Re: Fox spirits. I love the kleptomaniac behavior of the fox spits and its endearment to the player characters. This is a perfect example of interesting NPCs that draw the players' interest and investment. It is not an NPCs utility to the group, but their personality and how they interact with the player characters and make the who experience more interesting. Re: The "Haunted" card for the character's daughter. That sounds like such an

interesting NPC opportunity I might be compelled to bring the NPC into play anyway. Re: *Good Society* and playing another player's NPC. It seems more challenging to run an NPC in *Good Society* than in *Red Markets*, but my play experience in both is limited to one play. The challenge I saw in *Good Society* NPCs was that the social engagement in *Good Society* seemed core to the entire role play experience in the game, while in *Red Markets* it was merely a mechanic to heal a character, but it did not necessarily cause a mission or goal to be derailed directly. In *Good Society*, it seemed imperative for good faith roleplay of NPCs to aid in another player's goal (or at least it seemed that way in the one scenario I saw).

Spike Y Jones — Re: Unusual Convention Pairings: Like the Players Ball and the Alumni Dinner held simultaneously in the same hotel in *Doctor Detroit*. Absolutely brilliant. I think *Doctor Detroit* is a gem of a movie and thoroughly enjoyed. Its unusual combinations of two morally opposite events in the same building is ripe for inclusion in an RPG. But which one? I must come up with something.

Jim Eckman — I'm glad you made it back into A&E for the final issue. Hopefully, you make the transition to E&A. RYTCM: NPC value to the group, "in CoC as character armor". Is that another word for *Meat Shield*?

Mark Nemeth — First, I'm enjoying your session reports from the Dullstrand Campaign. I like that it is told from the perspective of Dudvin Hopnik and not Keolaren, your character. Do you collaborate with James Schnedar or the other players for your session report to get any clarification (or does James correct you on any of the details)? The reports are very well done. Personally, I find it harder writing session reports as a player than as a GM because I feel like I am missing so much information that would explain some of the things that are happening.

RE: Pseudo-Retirement. I feel for you and regret you had that experience. We did our best to hold retirement events for our departing employees in the same circumstance. My division is fairly close knit and we would have had a meaningful retirement brunch and farewell at our favorite local diner. However, our directorate forced everyone to hold a single farewell for everyone leaving, some of whom were leaving bitterly, which soured the event for everyone. It was a very unsatisfying way to send off friends who we worked with for 10-15 years. Worst, the second round of departures did not even get that — five minutes of recognition in the corner office in front of the surviving/remaining behind. Our dark humor described the feeling of those remaining as the band playing on the Titanic as it sank.

I can be found as pdzoch at boardgamegeek.com, rpggeek.com, enworld.org, fantasygrounds.com, discord.com, and boardgamearena.com.

Feel free to say hi.

END



Issue 238

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Age of Menace

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From Our Last Episode...

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

APRIL #593
The Last Issue of A&E



Seeing the final cover of the electronic version of *Alarums & Excursions* in early May 2025 was both heart- and gut-wrenching. A brief note inside confirmed what many had suspected after an over-long delay after missing a monthly release due to illness: after nearly 50 years, editor Lee Gold was bringing the legendary RPG-focused Amateur Press Association to a close. A sudden and serious decline in her vision made it too difficult to continue. Issue #593 would be the last.

A&E began in 1975 as a spin-off from the science fiction *APA-L* where *Dungeons & Dragons* chatter

was overwhelming the usual content. Lee Gold launched *Alarums & Excursions* to give this new hobby a dedicated space—and with her husband Barry's help, she missed only a single issue in all that time until now.

The name chosen by Lee was borrowed from Elizabethan play stage directions and captures elegantly the chaos and excitement of early RPGs. And A&E quickly became a vital hub for discussion, design, and shared imagination, drawing in writers who would go on to shape the hobby.

I personally discovered A&E in the early '90s, thanks to Robin Laws and Jose Garcia, while living in Toronto. I was working at Eli Lilly and wrote my first zine, *Age of Menace*, during lunch breaks. My debut appeared in issue #212, just before I started medical school in 1993

Through long gaming droughts—undergrad, Medical School, Medical Residency & Fellowship training, the COVID-19 pandemic—A&E kept me connected. It offered a creative outlet and a circle of kindred spirits. At times I held back from sharing my gaming life online after colleagues teased me for it, but A&E was a safe haven where I could write freely and joyfully about what I loved.

My final contribution, *Age of Menace* #237, appears in the last issue of A&E. I'm glad I made it in. Still, losing this venue feels like losing a very dear friend. In its honour, I leave you with a new stage direction: *Exeunt Tableaux; They leave the stage, and the scene freezes, full of memory.*

And now there is a new APA springing from the ashes of A&E, E&A short for *Ever and Anon*. Which is where *Age of Menace* is appearing with the same numbering system used. After much online discussion, voting, interest and more discussion, here's to a successful launch and ongoing durability with all those involved in trying to carry the torch for the ideas, ideals, and community which was Lee Gold's enduring and endearing APA *Alarums and Excursions*.

Personal natter...



As you get older, happy surprises become rarer, but one day in mid April was an exception. My colleagues, led by my personal administrative assistant **Julie**, organized a surprise party at work to mark my final days as *Head of Service for Geriatrics* at Hamilton Health Sciences Centre back in April 2025. I was responsible for this role for 15 years, with the last gruelling five being an extended tenure due to the disruptions of COVID-19.



I was deeply touched by the gathering, and especially moved by a heartfelt speech from Lisa J., a nursing colleague I've had the privilege of working with for over 20 years. The event was attended by members of hospital leadership (with many others sending warm regrets), as well as my successor **Mona**—pictured next to me in the white sweater in the image above, flanked by our Clinical Manager **Allison** on the left and our Seniors' Hospital Director **Danielle** on the right. Mona will be outstanding in the role. It was wonderful to be surrounded by such a wide circle of colleagues and friends.

Julie arranged a wonderful spread, with pizza for all and desserts featuring *Grandad's Donuts*—including my favorite, the 'Ghostbuster,' a Boston Cream with whipped cream. To my delight, my former administrative assistant **Karen** (for 17 years!) who had retired in August 2023 also made a surprise appearance, bringing with her an ambrosial strawberry cheesecake, my absolute favourite.

Among the thoughtful gifts was a beautifully signed card, an emergency stockpile of snacks (perfect for late-night work!), and a striking sculpture of a fragmented face holding a finger to its lips, aptly titled *Silence* (see photo of it on my office bookshelf) It was a truly meaningful send-off, and I couldn't be more grateful.

Since I last wrote an issue of AOM, I managed to make it to a few gaming adjacent events starting with *Hot Lead* in Stratford for a few hours. This is one of Canada's largest wargaming conventions, and it's held annually over three days in Stratford Ontario at the *Best Western Plus Arden Park Hotel*. I also managed to attend the 2025 Fantastic Pulp Show & Sale in Toronto June 1st 2025. I'll save photos for that for next time.

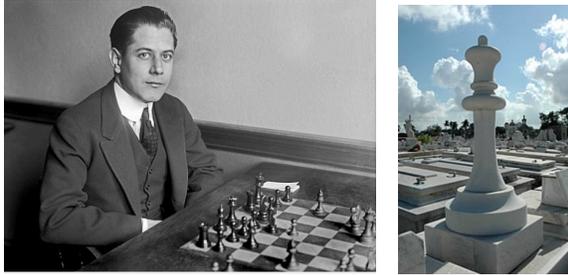
Finally, this past Monday June 16th 2025 was convocation day at McMaster University for our daughter Lauren. She graduated with a 4-year Honours Bachelor's in Arts & Science and Philosophy in McMaster's prestigious *Arts & Science* Program. Her parents today couldn't be prouder of all she's accomplished during her four years of hard work, curiosity, and growth. Congratulations to our amazing graduate



Havana Horror: Misc. Historical Dramatis Personae

I had been doing some researching some real life historical figures for a *Pulp Cthulhu* scenario I'm working on set in 1930s Havana Cuba. A few follow:

José Raúl Capablanca (19 Nov 1888 – 8 March 1942)



Famous Cuban chess player who became a national hero when he became the third world chess Champion & grandmaster from 1921 to 1927. Dubbed the ‘Chopin of Chess’, earnings from his matches allowed him to become the owner of wide array of land holdings throughout Cuba. He created a chess variant named after him that plays on an 8x10 board, and has two additional pieces, the *Chancellor* (combines moves of a rook and a knight) and the *Archbishop* (combines moves of a bishop and a knight). His tomb in the *Colon Cemetery* in Havana features an oversized marble King chess piece.

Ernestina Lecuona Casado (1882-1951)



Cuban female composer, pianist, teacher and poet active in the early twentieth century. Married at a very young age, only after her three children were grown did her public career take off. In 1936, she traveled to New York City to accompany Mexican tenor Tito Guizar and connected with singer Jessica Dragonette, who began performing works by her brother, Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona. The following year, she founded a women’s orchestra in Cuba, debuting at the *Teatro Alkazar* and later performing at the *Nacional Theatre*.

Martín Dihigo (1905-1971)



Known to his adoring fans *El Maestro*, Dihigo was a legendary Cuban baseball player whose versatility and skill earned him induction into the *Hall of Fame* in four different countries. Widely regarded as one of the greatest two-way players in baseball history, he remains relatively unknown today because he never played in the segregated white American leagues.

Dihigo began his career at just 16, pitching in the Cuban Winter League before joining the *Cuban Stars (East)* in the American Negro Leagues. Standing tall at 6’2”, charismatic, and fluent in both Spanish and English, he later became a respected manager and Cuban radio sports announcer (and even regarded highly by Fidel Castro after he took over Cuba).

Dr. Pilar Jorge de Tella (Aug 1884 –April 1967)



Dr. de Tella was first Cuban woman to graduate from a medical school in Cuba, was a leading Cuban suffragist, most active in the late 1920s to early 1930s. One of the founders of the *Feminine Club of Cuba* and the organizer of the *National Feminist Alliance*, she presented petition after petition to the Cuban legislature demanding women being allowed to vote. Once suffrage was finally obtained the year after Machado was deposed, 1934, she was denounced as an anti-communist and she left public politics (*black dress, in image above*).

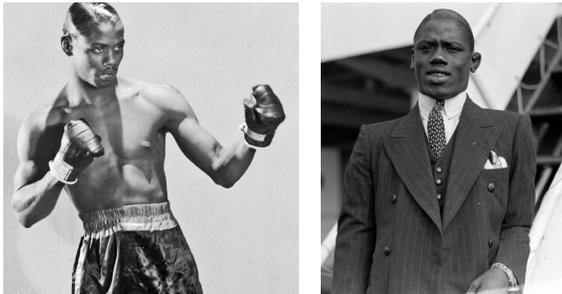
José Izquierdo (? to ?) Corrupt mayor of Havana from 1931-1933, he was a millionaire from monies skimmed of local meat, milk, omnibus & sundry other Havana rackets, and owned a large stone mansion in the Vedado district of Havana. He took over from the previous mayor, Miguel Mariano Gómez Arias (1927-1931). When President Machado was finally deposed August 13 1933 they fled together to Nassau Bahamas.

Colonel Antonio Jimenez (? - Aug 12 1933).



As the chief of President General Machoda's secret police or 'La Porra', Colonel Jimenez was one of the most loathed men in Cuba. Countless kidnappings, torture, and murder were conducted by the *Porristas* under his leadership. Little is available online of his antecedents, but his ruthless behaviour would later come back to haunt Jimenez. The day of Machado's flight from Cuba, Jimenez was gunned down by a soldier sympathetic to the revolutionaries, and while dying was stoned to death by the jubilant crowd. Another 50+ members of his sadistic *Porristas* were hunted down and killed by tomahawks or burned to death by mobs that same day in revenge for torturing and killing members of their families.

Eligio Sardiñas Montalvo (Jan 6, 1910 – Aug 8, 1988)



Widely known as *Kid Chocolate*, Montalvo was Cuba's first world champion in boxing, winning the junior lightweight belt in 1931, making him a national hero. He had great success both in the boxing ring and outside it during the 1930s.

Dr. Francisco Taquechel (1869–1955)

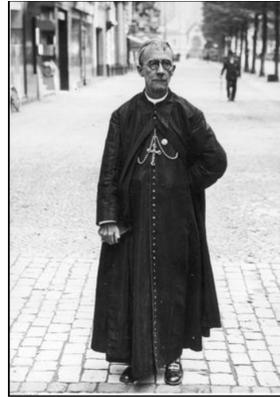
Notable Havana Cuba doctor, founder (1898) & director of the *Farmacia Taquechel*, located in Old Havana (and still standing today as a museum).

AGUSTIN PARLA (1887-1946)



Cuba's first pilot, made history in 1913 with the first Mariel-Havana flight, the longest in Cuba at the time. Though he later stepped back from regular flying, he remained active in Cuban aviation events. He represented Cuba at the 1935 Miami air races and, as Inspector General of Airports, spoke on behalf of the Cuban Senate during the 1936 Miami-Havana goodwill flight.

Monsignor José Manuel Dámaso Rúaiz y Rodríguez (1879 to 1942)



Roman Catholic clergyman who on March 30, 1925 was appointed the first Archbishop of *San Cristóbal de la Habana*, aka the Cathedral of Havana, assuming the office from *Pedro Ladislao González y Estrada* (who had resigned as the last Bishop on January 2, 1925). Mon. Rodríguez held this office until his death on January 3, 1940. Photo is from 1933 next to an image of his ecclesiastical coat of arms.

Manuel Benitez Valdés (1910-2003):



Described as "...one of the most nefarious men in the history of Cuba" (*photo above, centre without hat*) Valdés has an unusual background. Though born in Cuba, Valdés was briefly a Hollywood actor/stuntman, where despite his atrocious English, his good looks and reputation as being a 'swordsman with the ladies' of the motion picture colony earned him the nickname 'La Bonita' ('the Beautiful One'). After just four films, he returned to Cuba in the early 1930s and joined the military during the 1933 political upheaval.

Renouncing his officer's rank, he aligned himself with *Fulgencio Batista* (who himself would later become president and dictator of Cuba) he played an active role in the *Sergeants' Revolt*, and the siege of the *Hotel Nacional*. Previously Batista's *aide-de-camp*, Batista would later appoint him to head the Cuban National Police in 1942. In this role he

cemented his reputation for corruption, brutality, and repression, and took in some \$4 Million US annually in illicit gains. He fled Cuba after Batista was deposed during the 1957 Cuban Revolution and became part of the Miami colony Cuban 'government in exile'.

Fighting Fascism in the Hero Pulps

The single-character *hero pulps* frequently depicted fascist-style coups, invasions, or subversive takeovers of the U.S. government or U.S. state governments, reflecting the rising anxieties of the public during the 1930s and early 1940s.

These stories mirrored real-world fears, drawing inspiration from events such as the Feb 1939 mass Brownshirt rallies at Madison Square Garden organized by the pro-Nazi German-American Bund, the Spanish Civil War, and the notorious "Business Plot" against President Roosevelt, exposed by retired USMC General Smedley Butler. The incendiary radio broadcasts of 'The Radio Priest' Father Coughlin¹ made to his 30 million followers, Charles Lindbergh's isolationist rhetoric, and the ominous drumbeat of war in Europe further fueled the genre's paranoia. When World War II erupted in September 1939, the United States remained on the sidelines until the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Against this backdrop of global tension and domestic unrest, pulp heroes like *The Spider*, and *Operator #5*, waged fictional battles against fascist conspiracies, sinister war machines, and shadowy forces seeking to topple democracy. Likewise, *The Shadow* and *Doc Savage* occasionally confronted their own variations of authoritarian threats, blending political fears with high-stakes adventure. The following can be inspirational reading for any pulp RPG game where fighting fascism is desired.

The Spider (1933–1943)

Richard Wentworth, aka *The Spider*, as written by Norvel Page was one of the most brutal and violent of the pulp heroes. He frequently battled fascist-style takeovers, gas villains using paramilitary forces, gas attacks, and psychological terror, and using against them relentless passion and fury that brought terror to the hearts of his foes and inspiration and hope to his friends and allies.

The Black Police trilogy (1939)

This is sequence of 3 consecutive issues that were published in 1938: #60 "*The City that Paid to Die*"

¹ I'm ashamed to say that the first mass-media demagogue originally came from Hamilton Ontario.

(Sept. 1938), #61 "*The Spider at Bay*" (Oct. 1938) and #62 "*Scourge of the Black Legions*" (Nov. 1938); years later all three have been collected and reprinted in trade paperback 2009 by *Baen Books* as '*The Spider vs the Empire State*' with terrific cover by Steranko.

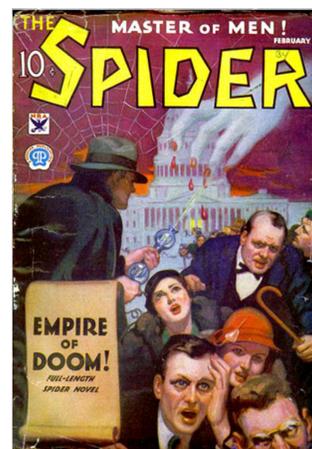
The openly Fascist "Party of Justice" (a very thinly disguised *German American Bund*) is legally voted in as the state government in New York State and immediately establishes a totalitarian regime. This is one complete with *Black Police* who stomp the lower classes, seize their property, and torture them in concentration camps.

Wentworth 'borrowing' the symbols of his alter-ego *The Spider* leads the resistance, long enough (3+ months over the three issues!) before Federal US government troops finally to move in in the 3rd & final novel (alas with the last parts of this fight rather rushed in an unsatisfying way).



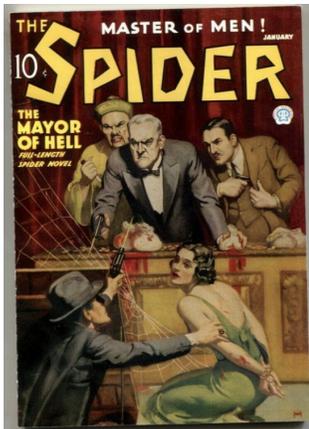
Other Notable "Fascist Coup" *Spider* stories:

1. *Empire of Doom (1934)* Wealthy industrialist Jonathan Love's rise to power is directly linked to his supposed role in stopping the deadly nerve gas plot of *The Green Hand*, a sinister group threatening Michigan.



However, once swept in power and in in the White House, the vain Love consolidates power, eliminates opposition, and establishes an authoritarian regime, forcing Richard Wentworth in his guise as *The Spider* to fight against this new dictatorship. Only in the last chapter he discovers the truth, someone is the secretly manipulating 'Jonathan the Just' by persuasively playing on his ego, and the Spider destroys them.

- **“The Mayor of Hell” (Jan 1936)** This was a real humdinger of a story and reads a little like a how-too book on guerilla warfare vs fascism.



Left for dead after a brutal pre-emptive assassination attempt by the minions of the so-called *Mayor of Hell*, Richard Wentworth spends six weeks in a coma. When he awakens, he finds himself in the apartment of a kind-hearted Irish-American criminal who along with his daughter had rescued him. But the world he knew has changed drastically; New York State has fallen under the grip of a full-blown fascist regime, with its power centered in New York City. Honest police officers have been driven out or murdered, replaced by uniformed thugs. Newspapers not willing to print propaganda are ruthlessly shut down. His friend, Governor Kirkpatrick, has been impeached and replaced with a puppet ruler. Worse still, Wentworth has been declared dead, and his wealth confiscated!

Determined to fight back, he adopts the alias *Corporal Death* and organizes a resistance movement known as the *Long Knives*. The real mayor and a U.S. senator appear to be under the control of the Mayor of Hell, but Wentworth, through masterful impersonation and subterfuge, wreaks havoc on their operations. Using ruthless guerrilla tactics, he and his small band strike terror into the heart of the regime, assassinating its enforcers and seizing their funds to fuel the rebellion.

His campaign escalates—he rallies support to reinstate Kirkpatrick as Police Commissioner and even revives a defunct New York City

newspaper—this by shooting all the quislings and guards—to allow the honest staff to spread the truth. When suppression forces it underground, he arranges for rebellious newspapers to be printed in nearby New Jersey and smuggled into the city as propaganda.

The final pages of this brutal, blood-soaked tale deliver a powerful climax when Wentworth finally uncovers the truth behind the Mayor of Hell’s rule and the other’s secret identity, this after finding the one pretending to be the Mayor of Hell is only an actor being mouthpiece for the real villain behind it all whispering their words through an earphone. Seemingly careless, Corporal Death leaves his revolver within reach of the enemy. As his gloating foe lifts up his weapon, the lightning fast Wentworth guns him down.

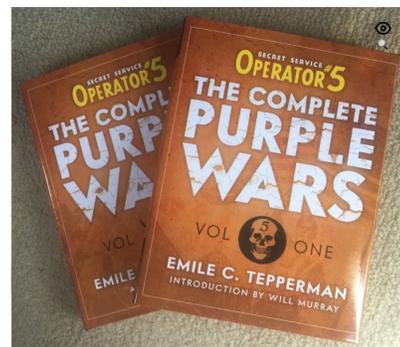
"I say, Corporal Death," Roberts said finally, "it was damned careless—leaving your gun in that coat pocket. He might have killed you."

Wentworth laughed shortly. "No, Len," he said. "Not careless—very careful. I never have been able to kill a man in cold blood."

Operator #5 (1934–1939)

From April 1934 to November 1939 US Secret Service agent Jimmy Christopher, aka *Operator #5*, pitted his brains, wits, guts, and his guns against full-scale invasions from without and fascist subjugation from elements inside of the United States. The basic plot was simple for the first year or so of the series, As Frederick C. Davis, original author of the first twenty issues of *Operator #5* recalled in an 1969 interview: “In every monthly story, Operator 5 had to save the United States from total destruction.”

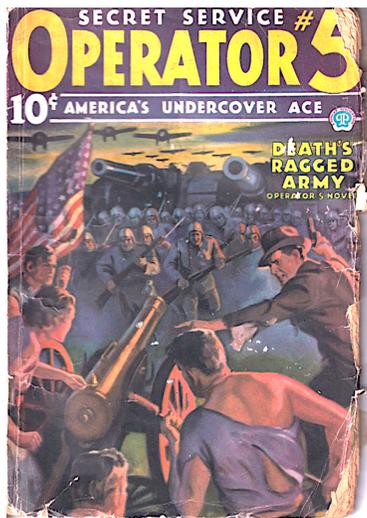
The Purple Invasion (May 1936–June 1938, Issues #25–#37)



This legendary 13-issue run of stories were written by a different author, Emile C. Tepperman, depicted a fictional fascist European power (a thinly disguised Nazi Germany) invading and occupying the U.S., installing puppet governments, and committing

mass executions. Jimmy Christopher led an underground resistance.

Key issues from this sequence some Pulp experts have called "The War & Peace of the Pulps" included:



- **"Death's Ragged Army" (#25, May 1936)** – The invasion begins with massive military strikes.
- **"Legions of Starvation" (#29, Sept 1936)** – U.S. citizens are rounded up into concentration camps.
- **"Patriots' Death March" (#32, Dec 1936)** – The U.S. government is exiled, and puppet rulers are installed.
- **"Armies of the Dead" (#37, May 1938)** – The final battle to liberate America.

Other notable Fascist Coup Stories in Op. #5:

- **"The Blood Reign of the Dictator" (#14, May 1935)** Ursus Young, an insane & ruthless fascist leader rises within the U.S., using mass propaganda, trickery, plague, fire, extortion, and terrorism to impose a police state.

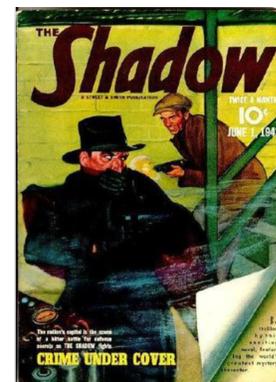
The Shadow (1931–1949)

Lamont Cranston, aka *The Shadow*, fought organized crime gangs, along with mad scientists, but occasionally battled fascist movements and internal attempts to destabilize the governments.

Notable Fascist coup Shadow stories

- **"The White Column" (#218 Jan 15, 1938)** A group of industrialists and war profiteers attempt to install a fascist regime, using military-style enforcement and propaganda. One of the few stories where both the Shadow/Lamont Cranston and Kent Allard appear together!
- **"Crime Under Cover" (#223 June 1, 1941)** Instead of gangsters, *The Shadow* and his team

faces off against a team of secret foreign agents working for a hostile government to destabilize the U.S. by stealing a device that neutralizes poison gas. It's quite interesting to see how such anxieties were prevalent even before the U.S. entered WWII and how the *Shadow* was essentially the head and chief trouble-shooter of a vigilante counterspy network.



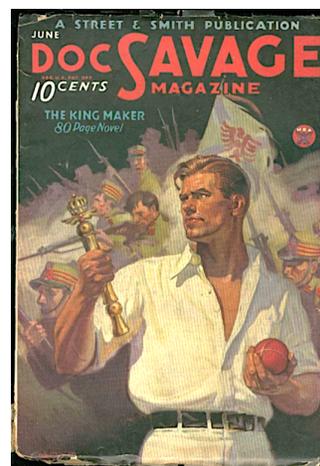
Doc Savage (1933–1949)

In the 186 pulp adventures featuring Dr. Clark Savage Jr., better known as **Doc Savage** or *the Man of Bronze*, written by Lester Dent and others, he and his five loyal aides typically battled mad scientists, criminal masterminds, and bizarre threats.

While many of these sagas took place across the United States, Doc often globetrotted to exotic locales in one of his advanced, high-tech vehicles. Only occasionally did he confront fascist-style dictators, who sought power through deception or cutting-edge technology.

Doc Savage Coup/takeover Stories:

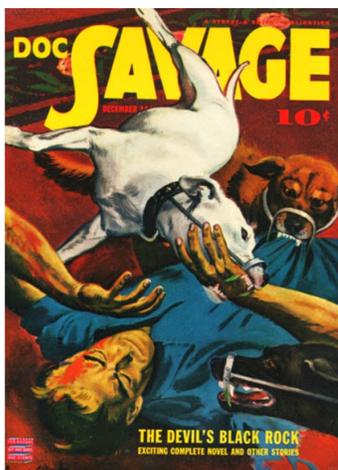
- **"The King Maker" (Nov 1934)** Doc and his crew travel to Calbia where two factions, King Dal Le Galbin vs revolutionaries led by a King Maker who want to install Doc Savage himself on the throne of this fictional Balkan nation!



- **"The Devil's Black Rock" (Nov 1942)** A mysterious geological discovery, one far more powerful and cheaper than dynamite, draws Doc Savage into action when attempts are made to sell this mysterious substance to Nazi agents. Doc grimly needs to stop them, as this substance resembles pitchblende and whose explosive nature is 'atomic' in nature...



An okay wartime thriller (the US had been at war now 11 months) where Doc appears to be almost operating pro bono as the lead of secretive, quasi-governmental task force dedicated to rooting out threats from within and defending America against subversion.



There are more hero pulp titles and examples of how pulp heroes fought back to overthrow tyranny and oppression, but these were all the titles I had to chance to read before the E&A deadline. I may write more on this topic later and describe how to use these in a pulp RPG setting.

COMMENTS: A&E Issue #593

LEE GOLD: Thank you, Lee, for all the wonderful years of *Alarums & Excursions*.

I only contributed *Age of Menace*, for ~40% of A&E's remarkable run, but I was lucky enough to receive 381 manila envelopes over the years, each one festooned with colourful U.S. stamps

and stuffed with those singular, stapled hard-copy issues assembled and mailed by you and Barry.

It's easy to overlook the best years of our lives while we're living them. Only in retrospect do we realize how much light and joy a steady presence like A&E brought into our creative role-gaming worlds.

I hope you'll find a quiet moment to browse this inaugural issue of *Ever and Anon*, even if only as a lurker. Whether or not you choose to participate, please know that you've left an indelible mark on my role-playing life, and on the lives of so many others.

With deep gratitude

::Brian::

Our daughter Lauren at her McMaster Convocation Ceremony



June 21st 2025. BCM

Traveller Play-By-Email

Plankwell Campaign, Ch 46: Temptation

GMing: Jim Vassilakos & Timothy Collinson, Playing Capt. Plankwell: Conrad Rader
The character of Capt. Plankwell was conceived by Phil Pugliese

“Well,” I said, breaking eye-contact with Reggie, “I must say this meal was better than the one I had a couple of days ago. Crew stew takes some getting used to. Canon, will you join me in my cabin for a drink? One that *I will make for you?*”

“I’d be delighted, Captain.”

«*What about me?*» Josefeen’s eyes bulged in outrage.

«*What about you?*»

I needed to talk to him in private, and preferably under the protection of the psi shields in the overhead bin. If I was going to wipe his memory, I could at least let him know why. I squelched the rising objection from Josefeen by pulling the drapes, as it were, shielding my mind from her telepathic verbal onslaught.

“Thank you for your company, Commander. Lieutenant. Canon? Shall we?”

“Of course, Captain.”

It was but a few steps to my quarters, and once inside, I offered him a zardocho as we sat beside the low kava table.

“What’s a zardocho?” he asked.

“You’ve never had one?”

“I don’t recall,” he said, thinking to himself that he’d had so many different drinks over the years, how could he possibly be expected to remember all their names?

“Jackie, bring me two zardochas.”

“To confirm,” a synthesized voice said in the androgynous tenor to which I was well-accustomed, “you want two medium zardochas, both ice-blended, each with thirty milliliters of Frangelico.”

“Correct.” Somewhere in the ship, probably not far away, an autoserve was grinding ice and pouring coffee. “I forgot to ask, how was your tour?”

“Of your ship? Very nice, although it got cut a little short,” the Canon replied.

“Oh?”

“We stopped at the theater. Brother William was telecasting the remembrance for those who couldn’t attend in person.”

Brother and sister were terms used among the clergy to refer to one another, even those of different chapters, so long as they were both under the umbrella of the Imperial Church. Hence, Brother William had to be Lieutenant Briggs. No doubt he’d stayed aboard to be here for all those who couldn’t be spared, not that there was much chance of the Zhodani attacking us while we were in orbit, surrounded as we were by the bulk of the 212th Fleet. Nonetheless, maintaining certain minimum crew requirements were demanded by Navy regulations.

“Of course, we ended up talking theology,” the Canon continued. “Our respective observances are quite different, but there are certain congruities to our beliefs.”

“Faith is actually something I want to discuss with you.”

“Oh?”

The door swooshed open, and Gopher, the modified 476-INLAV, floated in. That was quick. A small hatch on its round surface opened, revealing our drinks, and two retractable arms extended themselves, taking the glasses and quickly setting them on the table, all without spilling a drop. Then it floated back out, the door swooshing shut in its wake.

“Let us then toast *faith*, Captain, and tell me what is it about faith you wish to discuss?”

“You want something,” I said.

I could sense the thoughts forming in his mind, something about the psionic orb, but I held up a finger before he could put them to words.

“I know you want something,” I continued. “The question, as always, is the price.”

I sat back and sipped my drink, taking comfort in the familiar taste.

“What would you be willing to pay, to do the one thing you want?” I continued further. “And you know I am not talking about money. This is the whole of your pleasure-versus-innocence debate. Do you want to know and by knowing lose faith, or keep your faith and have the knowledge of what you gave up?” I paused, swirling my drink. “You should have some. It’s at the perfect temperature.”

He took a sip, thinking it a glorified, hazelnut frappé, which was actually a fair description.

“You’re saying the knowledge contained within the Eye of God will destroy my faith? You know this for a fact?”

“I don’t just know it,” I said. “I feel it. And so do you.”

I stood and walked away a little and then turned on the holographic console, selecting a feed from one of our cameras pointing out into the depths of space. Up here, in orbit, the stars didn’t twinkle. They looked brighter, unblemished, purer somehow, and the great clouds enshrouding the galactic core resembled a storm frozen in mid-swirl, its chaotic beauty the common backdrop to all of known civilization.

“You feel it?” He sought clarification.

I contemplated the evidence of all my fears and said, over my shoulder, “I have given you my word that what you want is real and true. Even doing that may cost you, and for

that I am sorry. But if you want more, if my word is not enough, then the cost will be higher.”

“Meaning?”

“You once gave someone a choice about what they needed to do, a binary, do this or do that. This is not quite as stark, but it could quickly become so.” I turned and met his gaze. “I am a man who has sent people into battle to die. I have killed in the defense of the Imperium. I stand ever on the edge of the great night and carry the light of the Emperor against our enemies. If you tell me that you will accept death to learn a truth at your very core, I am in a position to grant it. In the short time I have known you, I have come to like and respect you. My line of work calls on me to make these kinds of judgments quickly. But this goes beyond mere fondness. This approaches something far more fundamental.”

“I am ready,” he said.

“No.” I shook my head. “No, you’re not. Please, don’t answer so quickly. Enjoy the drink. Think about this. You will come to an answer, and I will know what it is and how you came to it, and then I will make my decision. And then, well, then we will see if our worlds change.”

He contemplated for a long moment, thinking here was his chance to know something revealed to very few, his last chance at true wisdom, and he wasn’t going to let it go. If he did, if were to shy away from this opportunity the universe had so unexpectedly granted, then his whole life’s journey would have been in vain.

Yet, there was certainly a reason the Eye of God was not shared freely among the clergy. He’d asked about it, of course, but was told, quite simply, “It’s not for us.”

“Why not? Why do some have access and others don’t?”

“These things we do not discuss. It is like the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.”

“We’re priests. Shouldn’t we know all about good and evil?”

“It is better to think without knowing than to know without thinking.”

And that was the end of it. No more explanations, other than “patience is a virtue”, “be ready and be fearless,” and “if it will happen, then it already has,” all bits of bumper sticker wisdom albeit not without truth. Their expectation, in his final analysis, was that he would simply accept, and so he did, but only because there was no choice. But now there was a choice. Now, near the end of his life, he could choose to know whatever it was that had been forbidden. And whatever the risk, he was ready.

He looked at me, eyes unblinking beneath a furrowed brow.

“It might not accept you,” I warned. “It might not give you anything. Is it worth the cost of knowing there is nothing more for you, that they were right?”

“Perhaps that would be the best outcome.”

I couldn’t help but smile and nodded in agreement.

“Bear in mind, a lifetime of devotion has left your brain... well-used.”

“That’s a kind way of putting it.”

“The point being, it may not hold up.”

“Yes, I know all this.”

“I know you know.”

“And I know you know I know,” he said with a nod, “which I am sure you know as well.”

“I just want you to understand that it will be me that will be in your head trying to figure out how to fix the damage, which is not something I want to do or which I *should* be doing. I’m no anointed messenger for the divine. That’s your job. I’m just a man who has been placed in authority and given responsibilities, and I have my duty. Most people in my position wouldn’t offer you this choice. Most wouldn’t even consider it. Devotion to our duty is so overwhelming that anything that distracts from it is to be eliminated.” I turned back to the starscape. “It is because I am new to this and to my own abilities that I am taking the time to talk to you, but I too am looking for something. I am also weighing the costs, not just the costs to you but also the potential costs to myself.” I took another sip. “But I am used to this sort of balancing,” I added.

The Canon nodded, now realizing that I too would be taking a risk, and what was to be gained for me? The friendship of a man whose mind I’d destroyed? *Maybe I’m asking too much*, he thought to himself. He didn’t want to put me at risk, even though, in his heart, he felt an exponential increase in wisdom so temptingly close. If he could only reach out and touch it.

“I am sorry,” he said with a sigh. “I don’t want harm to come to you because of my ambition.”

Hearing those words escape his lips almost made him chuckle, albeit ruefully, as he was once the least ambitious person he’d ever known.

I nodded, feeling a sudden heaviness as he stared down at the low kava table sitting between us. I poured all my focus into my telepathic tendrils, hoping to strengthen the clarity of my peephole into his mind once he looked up at me again. If only I could touch his face, I sensed I could go deeper.

I pulled back my focus into the here and now and rolled my chair beside his.

“Close your eyes,” I whispered.

He looked up, the pensive, far away look in his eyes suddenly over-bright and almost feverish as he stared at me for a long moment. *Is this a test?* he wondered, hope suddenly rebuilding. *Trust the universe*, he said to himself. *Whatever will be will be*. He then closed his eyes and waited expectantly.

«*So do I get to help you skullfuck this dude or what?*»

I winced.

«*Where are you?*» I asked, not sure I really wanted to know.

«*On the other side of your front door.*»

I looked at the door, imaging Josefeen on the other side.

«*Yes, that door,*» Josefeen clarified. Indeed, I could now sense her quite clearly.

I went over and pushed the *Open* button, then stepped back to let her enter.

«*Were you out there long?*» I asked, glancing back at the Canon. He was still waiting, eyes shut, the very picture of obedient expectation.

«*Long enough to admire your efficiency,*» she replied. «*I see you've already got his ankles up over his ears, so to speak. Nicely done.*» She then mentally counted the number of empty chairs: one. «*Have you considered investing in additional furniture?*»

«*You can sit on the table,*» I suggested, though I wasn't sure it could withstand the weight of her mid-upper torso.

«*I'll stand.*»

I shrugged and sat back in the chair, the Canon directly in front of me. Though his eyes were closed, I tried reaching into his mind, and it again occurred to me to touch his face.

«*Go ahead.*» Josefeen thought, putting two fingers along my neck where not too long ago she'd injected the psi-enhancer. «*Touch is the best route for establishing a deep connection.*»

«*How do I do it?*» I asked, opening my hand in front of his face.

«*Whatever feels right. Your psychic body will tell you.*»

Indeed, my fingers seemed to know where they wanted to go. It was strange, to say the least, and no sooner had they made contact with his skin than I could once again sense the spider's web of aged threads that beckoned my favor. Despite the fact that he could feel my fingers on his face, he kept his eyes shut, still thinking this was all part of some elaborate test after which I would present him with the Eye of God. Meanwhile, various threads lit up in the vast recesses of his mind. The question was: which was the one connected to his memory of the green room?

«*Which one?*» I asked Josefeen.

«*For recent memories, always try the nearest.*»

I touched the nearest.

“You're saying the knowledge contained within the Eye of God will destroy my faith?” he'd asked. “You know this for a fact?”

“I don't just know it.” I could see the creases along my own forehead. “I feel it. And so do you.”

«*Now rip it out,*» Josefeen telepathically intoned.

«*How?*»

«*Just grab and yank like you're pulling a weed.*»

«*I don't want to leave him with lasting brain damage. One more thing to explain.*»

«*He's an old stoner. Who'll even notice?*»

A lot of people, quite possibly, but that's not what actually bothered me; nor could I exactly understand how this felt different from pulling a trigger in combat, although

it did. I reached out with my mind, somehow wrapping my psionic tentacle around the memory. It was almost like one snake latching onto another, and then I yanked. It was coming loose. I could feel its tether to his mind stretching and then snapping, as I dragged out its root, exposing every memory to which it was once connected. I could sense them all lined up on a moment-by-moment basis.

As I'd led him into my quarters, he was suddenly afraid, as if a part of him knew he would not exit the same person. He did not think I would mind-rape him — he'd heard of such things — but he also didn't really care if I did, as it would be the will of the Universe and perhaps a just punishment for reaching for the divine. If nothing else, it might force the inner circle of Supreme Stoners to finally invite him to join them. But he didn't really believe I would do it.

This is a kind man, he'd told himself. A man who is appreciative, kind, and gentle to those beneath him is a man worthy of his authority. He imagined me as being highly self-controlled, which was true, but also merciful, which wasn't. *He will do as he must, and if that means killing me, then I am dead already, so there is nothing to contemplate. I am on his ship, and I am at his mercy, just as I am a part of the Universe and at its mercy, so long as I am suffered to exist.*

Needless to say, he'd ascertained and accepted that I was a psion. I'd effectively told him so. But I had the Eye of God, and if he wanted to touch it, he'd have to go through me, even if that meant following a path through the disassembly of his mind.

Whatever the cost.

Why did he want to become a Supreme? And was it a sinful thing to want? No, no, it couldn't be sinful to become one with the divine! *If and when the invitation comes, it will come without warning, he was told. There will be no time to think, and it may even appear in disguise, but you will know it for what it is, and that moment must be seized. Be ready and be fearless. That is all you need to know.*

This is that moment, he'd thought to himself. He'd waited so long, even fearing he might die before the moment came. That thought, in particular, had been slowly filling him with a silent melancholy. He, after all, was old enough to drop dead at any moment. Even his mind felt old, sluggish, and whenever he got high, he felt the sorrow of not being good enough, not being chosen.

“I forgot to ask, how was your tour?” I'd asked, interrupting his inner thoughts.

“We stopped at the theater,” he explained after getting his bearings. “Brother William was telecasting the remembrance for those who couldn't attend in person.”

He liked Chaplain Briggs well enough. They'd met a few times and engaged in interfaith dialogue on each occasion, the Canon eventually offering my Religious Affairs Officer a little pouch of mushrooms for assistance in

future meditation. This was at my reception, actually. And Briggs was apparently not religiously prohibited from saying yes, as he didn't make any religious protest, but as a Navy Officer he understood that accepting such a gift, at an official Navy function, no less, might be problematic and began to explain that it would probably violate Navy regulations in some way.

"Oh, surely not. The Navy makes exceptions for religious exploration, does it not?"

"Oh, yes, of course, but I'd have to get it approved through my chain of command."

"Who needs to approve it?" Reggie asked. "The Captain?" It felt weird to hear him refer to me from even before we'd met. Dwelling within him as I was now, experiencing the memory from his point of view, it felt, at least in part, like the question was coming from me.

"At the very least, I need *her* approval," Briggs said, pointing at Nizlich.

"Well, let us go ask."

"No, no," he shook his head. "She'll say no. Trust me."

"What about when you're off duty?" Reggie asked.

"You see that Vargr over there?" Briggs pointed at Lt. Shepherd. Manda looked nervous and awkward, standing by herself with a glass of wine, looking around at all the high society types. "She just lost her shore leave over some off-duty *chocolates*," Briggs said.

"Isn't chocolate poisonous to Vargr?"

"Exactly."

"I see," the Canon said, smiling as he decided who he'd talk to next. A few minutes later, he intercepted her at the hors d'oeuvres, offering his condolences over the whole *Chocolate Incident*.

"How do you know about that?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"Oh, I saw it on Channel One."

"*What?! It made the news?*"

"Actually, he told me," Reggie admitted, gesturing in Briggs's general direction.

"Oh! Oh, thank Cleon. You just about gave me a heart attack."

"My apologies. But speaking of increasing your heart rate, would you be interested in some magic mushrooms?"

"Magic mushrooms?"

"You can put them to use at a later date. Here, take the whole bag. There's plenty more where these came from."

Lt. Shepherd wrinkled her snout in confusion.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm evangelizing," Reggie explained. "It's my job. I'm with the Sodality of the Silver Chalice."

"The what?"

"We're more popularly known as the Deacons of Drugs."

"Oh! I've heard of you guys," Manda nodded, still distracted by the mushrooms.

"I don't want to get you in trouble," the Canon said, holding the pouch out to her again, "so you'll need to be

careful with this, especially considering the fact that you are not a careful person as evidenced by the aforementioned *Chocolate Incident*, but I trust you will take that into account."

She looked at the pouch, then she looked to both sides, locating me talking to the Admiral.

"I have a new captain who I really can't afford to... *knousogho fue kith zari.*"¹

Reggie had no idea what she'd said, even though I did, but from the context, he could guess easily enough.

"He'll understand," he said, "especially if you don't get caught. Here, take them. If you change your mind later, you can flush them down the toilet."

«*Gus, this is pointless. You need to come back.*»

I heard but ignored Josefeen. This was intoxicating, a side of Reggie I hadn't suspected: subversive, cajoling, preying on instincts. I'd never needed to do that. I followed orders until I was in a position to give them, and I always had an objective. This was different, and I needed to see what happened. If he suborned my crew, it would relieve my conscience somewhat.

But just as she reached for the pouch, he withdrew it, tucking it into a pocket in the green folds of his robe. Josefeen, meanwhile, faded into the distance as I settled into the moment, watching as Manda's ears stood on end.

"These mushrooms are poisonous to your kind," the Canon rebuked her. "The smallest nibble would make you sick. Eat a whole one, and you could die."

"Then why were you offering..."

"To illustrate how easy it is to make a terrible decision, a decision that could alter the course of your life... or even end it."

"For the record, I was going to flush them down the toilet."

"Excellent choice, but you can flush these instead." He handed her another bag, this one containing a dozen little, bite-sized biscuits. They were laced with a drug specifically formulated for Vargr physiology.

"Are these...?"

"Skuubi snacks," he said, nodding. "One should last you about five deplars — just under an Imperial hour — but it will take as long for their effects to even begin, and make sure you're in a safe place with people you trust, as they're plenty strong, enough so that I'd caution against doubling the dosage."

"Wait. How do I know these aren't poisonous too?"

"You don't, and you are well-advised to be skeptical."

"So I can't even trust a man of the cloth?"

"Good heavens, no!" The whole scene went left and right as he vigorously shook his head back and forth. "Terrible deeds have been done by religious figures throughout history, too many to enumerate. I'd tell you all about it, but it would only offend your canine sensibilities

1 ...to sit down on his tail.

and probably kill any spiritual wonder that might lurking within you.”

“I’m very spiritual,” she said, tucking the bag of skuubi snacks into her vest. “I even do yoga.”

“Good for you. I trust my gift will make your meditations more meaningful.”

Her ears flattened as she mulled over how to respond.

“I don’t trust you,” she finally said, staring at him for a long moment. “Maybe I *will* flush these down the toilet.”

“As you wish.”

“Are they really safe?”

“No drug is ever entirely safe,” he replied, “but these should help with the formation of ideas and memories that will hopefully be of benefit to you, even if only as confusion-inducing mind-expansion.” He smiled. “They may also increase local entropy, possibly coaxing our Divine Mistress to put her finger on the scales of fate, which is sometimes amusing but, of course, not without potentially unpleasant ramifications. One must take the sour with the sweet, after all.”

“Who’s this Divine Mistress?”

“Eris. The Sodality of the Silver Chalice originated within the College of Discordia.”

“College of Discordia?”

“The Erisian Mysteries,” he said, as if that explained everything. “We even have ties to the Cult of the Flying Spaghetti Monster.”

“I thought that was a joke.”

“College, cult, joke... what’s the difference?”

«Gus, you need to come back to the surface before it’s too late.»

This time I pulled myself toward the source of Josefeen’s voice.

«Well, one more mystery solved.»

Back in the cobwebs of his mind, the neatly lined-up array of memories was now a free-flowing mess. They had disassociated and were presently all floating off in various directions.

I checked my wristcom to see how much time had passed, taking me out of his brain and back into the here and now. Wasn’t time supposed to compress when using psychic abilities? Popular dramas had a lot to be held accountable for. And what was this weird giddy feeling I was having?

It inverted as the Canon opened his eyes. They bulged from their sockets, terror-filled. Last he remembered, I’d invited him into my quarters, and he’d thought to himself that this was his moment of truth, and then, quite suddenly, his eyes were closed and my hand was on his face. He was missing time, he realized with unsettling surprise. Where was the Eye of God? He looked around, feeling suddenly ill. *What’s going on? What’s happening to me?!*

And then I made it even worse — much worse — projectile vomiting my recent dinner all over his nice green robes.²

“I am so terribly sorry, Your Grace.” My mouth tasted like a combination of zardocho and dinner but marinated in stomach acid. “I’m terribly sorry...”

«I should have warned you, sir. Brain rapes often result in convulsive vomiting, but usually more for the subject than the psion. It’s probably due to your lack of training. Uh-oh, I think he’s gonna...»

“Blarrngh!”

The funny thing about vomiting is that it’s a bit like yawning. I’d just gone blowy all over him, and now it was apparently his turn to go blowy all over me. I couldn’t tell if it was his reaction to me mucking around in his head or simply a vomit reflex caused by my own reaction to what I’d learned having just spent some time there.

“I don’t know what sort of drink you made me, young man,” he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve, “but whatever it was, I want the recipe.”

I winced at his sincerity. He really did want the recipe, as he assumed the interruption in his short term memory had been caused by whatever intoxicant I’d given him, but then he touched his face, remembering my hand there when he’d opened his eyes, and he remembered I was a psion.

“Would you like to visit Medical, Your Grace?”

“Medical? Is that what you advise?”

I shrugged. I certainly wasn’t going to go myself. I was probably leaking psi traces all over the place. I noticed a cleaning bot roll in and tried to remember if they automatically logged a report to Medical in case there was the possibility of a pathogen becoming communicable. That sounded like the Navy.

«Josefeen! Help!»

I gave in. I was hopelessly out of my depth and needed to take an entirely different plot here. It was too new, too powerful, and I did not understand what I was doing. I admitted, possibly, I had made things worse for myself.

“One question before I forget,” the Canon said. “Why were you touching my face?”

“He was picking your nose,” Josefeen replied.

“Picking my nose?”

“Well, you picked his.”

“I did?”

“The Captain tried telling you that you can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose, but you can’t pick your friend’s nose, but *you* begged to differ.”

² It was Conrad who decided his character needed to spew his dinner all over the Canon, and needless to say, I was a bit surprised, but I decided to roll with it and give him a little tit-for-tat. I think it’s the first time a player in one of my games decided his character needed to puke. I hope it was just good roleplaying and not in-game commentary on the quality of the campaign.

“Ah,” the Canon nodded, trying to mask his befuddlement.

“I didn’t want to interrupt,” Josefeen continued. “You two were having one of those male-bonding moments. It was actually quite beautiful.”

The Canon smiled, and I was in awe.

«*You are the absolute Queen of Crap.*»

«*Thank you, sir.*» “I think we’ll need to wash your robes, Your Grace.”

She stepped around to the back of his chair, took the hypo-gun out of her pocket, and pressed it to the back of his neck. *Nighty-night, Your Grace*, she thought to herself as she pulled the trigger. A moment later, he was slumping over into my arms.

There was glint in her eyes as she leaned in, hand on one knee.

«*Ready to learn the ways of the succubus?*»

Download the consolidated Plankwell write-up:

<https://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/plank.html>

Past A&E zines available at: <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>

Jim’s Comments on A&E #593:

Lee Gold: I remember seeing an early issue of A&E back in my youth when I first started playing D&D (I believe it was one that included the outline of a calendar of some D&D world, completely with festival days), and I’d remembered it well enough that I contacted you many years later, sometime prior to issue #297, which was when I began contributing. The very existence of A&E has been quite a contribution to the roleplaying hobby, and it’s been a creative outlet for so many people who otherwise might have let their imaginations dissipate into this consumerist, TV-addicted culture we inhabit.

In any case, whatever the future holds, I wish you luck on the remainder of your journey. May you and Barry be well, and may you forever be content with all that you accomplished for so many and for so long a time. You are a legend, you know. Never forget that.

Mark Nemeth: Congratulations on your retirement, even if the process was a little bit stressful. I have a close friend who retired early, and he says it’s the best decision he ever made.

Pum: Curious to learn how the purple fungus mystery is solved.

Gabriel Roark re the PCs using the sleep spell and then slitting throats: Well, they are in the Temple of Elemental Evil. Maybe the place is rubbing off on them.

Brian Misiaszek: How lucky Lauren is to have seen her work performed. Hopefully, this experience inspires her to continue her creative journey. I was at friend’s house for Easter, and one of his daughters, presently in high school, asked if I liked my job, and I said something along the lines of, “Yeah, but it’s not what I live for.” So she asked the next obvious question, and rather than mentioning RPGs, I told her I like to write. “What do you write?” Oh, fiction and essays. “Essays?” She looked at me like I was batshit crazy, and though she may be perfectly justified in this assessment, it still seems to me somehow tragic that writing is taught in such a way that young people come away with the sense that it’s all just drudgery, something somebody might have to do as part of their profession or a school assignment but certainly not something anyone would ever do for fun. I’ll grant that people have different ways of amusing themselves, but if Lauren has a creative spirit (and from what you’ve written, it seems she does), it might benefit her if somebody were to encourage her to keep exercising it.

Also, I want to thank you for your encouragement and help with respect to reaching out to so many A&Ers and helping the APA make this transition to *Ever & Anon*. Without you, I doubt any of this would have happened.

Attronarch: Liked the letter from the Assassins’ Guild. Ah, Rashomon is apparently doomed. Did he decide keep the sword, or did he try tossing it?

Thank you for setting up <https://everanon.org/> and the everanon.org email addresses. Please let me know how I can send you some DTRPG store credit.

Heath Row re players wanting their PC to be “mysterious, intimidating, or impressive”: It’s the old adolescent power fantasy. As a GM, I typically cave in to it during F2F play, but in a 1st person PBEM, I find myself trying to unveil the PC’s humanity, and this sort of stuff just gets in the way.

Patrick Zoch: RAE your comment to Spike regarding group dynamics. It reminds me of how so often NPCs are inadequately roleplayed in TTRPGs, probably because it’s just too much for the GM to keep track of.

Michael Cule: Will let you know if I ever get a writers’ circle up and running. Speaking of which, **does anyone want to get a writers’ circle up and running?**

Timothy's Comments on A&E #593:

Lee Gold – Tantivy

RYCTM on indexing – that sounds like a good solution!

I was really sorry to hear about your deteriorating eyesight – “annoying” doesn’t begin to cover how frustrating it must be. But I understand the need then to bring A&E to an end, disappointing though that is. A great loss to the community but a terrific legacy to leave. Thank you for your labours across the years and all the best for those to come.

Pedro Panhoca da Silva – Back to Brazilian Gamebooks

“RYQT” – regarding your question. My apologies that wasn’t spelled out.

Joshua Kronengold – Random Access

RYCT to Jim V (et al) – glad you’re enjoying it! Jim and Conrad do work well together.

Dylan Capel – The Silent Temple

RYC about Kaz and what happened to her – I think we’re all dying to find out! She seems to have struck a chord; or something. :-)

Lisa Padol – This Isn’t the Zine

Thanks for the note on your indexing experience which was interesting to hear. The one thing I think any indexer needs is diligence.

Patrick Zoch – The Dragon’s Beard

I was intrigued by your description of Spring Break experience with *Hail Hydra*. Fascinating to hear how it captured the students’ imagination. Though I think I’m with your family on struggling with betrayal games – not so much because I don’t enjoy the game, but because I find them so *stressful*! One of the reasons that although I love *Diplomacy*, I’m not itching to play it again.

Mark Nemeth – The Seedling

Your “tortuous path” sounds awful, both as a personal experience and any kind of sane management. I’m glad you’ve been able to face it with such equanimity. But thank you for reporting on it. As my workplace goes through some difficult times and difficult processes that inevitably *always* seem to make things just a little less pleasant than previously, I shall remember your tale and consider that things could be worse. Though we may be headed that way too. My wife retires in a couple of months and can’t wait; I’ve probably still got three or four years more although I wonder if I can manage even that.

Michael Cule – Mundus Vult Decepi

RYCTM about the difference between our readings of Job – I think that’s a fair comment. It’s still a moment I’m looking forward to, however! If I’ve not bored you with the line before, my Mum thinks I’ll live a long life because God can’t face all the questions...

RYC about an infinitely powerful being’s existence automatically requiring obedience – I entirely agree there’s no such moral requirement if the being simply is. I guess the question is, could there be an infinitely powerful being that *wasn’t* God (as in creator of the universe/myself). I think the logic with the Christian concept of God is that if that infinitely powerful being is the creator of the universe and your creator (and has a plan/future for you) then perhaps obedience is just the most sane response. Although I think I’d argue that my obedience to God isn’t out of any moral duty or requirement but out of my (oh so feeble) response to the love shown me.