The Sword & The Quill
Volume 7 Issue #1
October 2006

The Lakeland Role Playing Guild
Founded September 2000
Welcome to the Lakeland Role Playing Guild

**Guild Contact Information**

Lakeland Role Playing Guild … www.lrpg.org

Guild Master Scott M. Presley … ScottPTFF@aol.com

Guild Seneschal (Secretary) Tad Kelson … tadkelson@excite.com

Guild Exchequer (Treasurer) Jeff Whealton … mullet@tampabay.rr.com

Guild Bard (Campaign Coordinator) Bryant Cable … dechevc4c@yahoo.com

Guild Sage (Dean of College of Game Masters) Aaron Tuftee … atuftee@yahoo.com

**S&Q Editorial Staff**

Guild Seneschal Tad Kelson … tadkelson@excite.com

Guildsman Laura Wamphler … riango@tampabay.rr.com

Guild Master Scott M. Presley … ScottPTFF@aol.com

On the cover: "The Heroes of the LRPG" by Svetlana Chmakova
**EDiTOuR'S NEOTES:**

As the newest in a line of excellent editors, I welcome to the October 2006 issue of *The Sword and the Quill*. I look forward to providing a useful and informative magazine for you, the LRPG members, that will well serve your gaming desires.

Issues of S&Q will be organized into the following general categories. Up first will be News and Information, containing articles devoted to the Lakeland Role Playing Guild, the local gaming community and the hobby industry. The next section will be Fluff, made of general gaming articles, original art and original fiction. The third department will be Crunch, which are more number-oriented materials like hard rules, new game mechanics, creatures, characters, modules and settings. And wrapping up each issue will be Announcements, a collection random tidbits of information. That is the rough format the newsletter will take from here on under my editorship.

As always, we are looking for articles and submissions to fill the magazine’s pages. Our next issue is scheduled for release in the beginning of January 2007 which will get us back to a quarterly publication cycle. If you have something you wish to contribute, please e-mail it to me at tadkelson@excite.com with “LRPG Article” in the subject line.

I am looking forward to serving the LRPG community via *The Sword and the Quill* and wish everyone Good Gaming.

Tad Kelson
Seneschal, Lakeland Role Playing Guild
Editor, *The Sword and the Quill*

**I N S I D E T H I S I S S U E**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News and Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter From the Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guild Master’s Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention Field Report: Hurricon 2007 (part 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Industry News &amp; New Releases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle at Ravenwing Ridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rites of Passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Huge Space Game: The Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity in a High Turn-Over Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gentle Art of Losing in Games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players Who Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming LRPG Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Shows You Should Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random Profound Quote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Sword and Quill* Volume 7, Issue 1
October 2006
NEWS AND INFORMATION

GUILD MASTER’S ADDRESS

Members of the Lakeland Role Playing Guild,

Greetings and respects to you all and welcome to our seventh year! I am Scott Presley and I am the new president of the LRPG. I want to thank those of you who nominated me for this post as well as all who elected me into office. Your votes are a sign of confidence in me and my ability to guide this organization into the future. I will try my best to continue earning that confidence during my tenure. I hope to instill an open and welcoming atmosphere where the membership feels involved and encouraged to participate. I also hope to reestablish a sense of fun to the Guild. After all, we’re just playing games and enjoyment is what the hobby is all about.

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge my predecessor, Nicholas Cardarelli. In the summer of 2000, he founded the LRPG with the goals of forging a community and improving the hobby. While the contributions of everyone who has been a Guild member have helped in achieving those goals, Nick’s drive and hard work deserve special recognition. Thank you, sir, for establishing this organization and providing us with a solid foundation upon which we can build an even better hobby community. (And I promise to take good care of the ship during my time at the helm. Peace and good health to you and the family, Nick.)

Now, let’s talk about year seven. In some ways, this a year of rebirth for the LRPG. We have a new board of officers, several new members, some new ideas and a new attitude. In other ways, this is a year of continuation and stability. We are carrying on with our in-house campaigns, bringing back our magazine, maintaining our convention presence and furthering our support of the gaming hobby and industry. Above all, however, this is a year of community as the Guild -- your Guild -- works and plays together in order to strengthen the local gaming culture as well as reinforce the bonds of friendship that are such an important part of our hobby.

The coming year features several great events. Of highest importance to many Guild members are gaming events and we have loads of them coming up. Our long-running modern horror campaign, Shadows Over Lakeland, draws to a close in October and November. Our traditional fantasy campaign, The World’s Largest Dungeon, continues its very popular run starting in January. Our fantasy/history hybrid campaign, Portentum Vectoris, comes back in a redesigned form in April. In addition to game playing opportunities, we have a selection of game instructional events from our College of Game Mastery scheduled throughout the late winter and spring. Topics to be covered will include character creation, adventure writing and campaign design. On top of that, a couple of Guild members will be giving seminars during the summer on modern and ancient weaponry.

Beyond these official and organized Guild meetings, there are additional events in which we can participate in a more relaxed and casual manner. Chief among these are conventions, both gaming-specific and multimedia. Hurricon and Recon, hosted by the Historical Miniatures Gaming Society South, are awesome shows and we always contribute a selection of RPGs and other games to each. There are also MegaCon and three anime-exclusive shows where we can share in non-gaming-related aspects of fandom. And there are any number of movies hitting theaters that appeal to our inner geek and just beg to be seen by a large, rowdy group.

All of these events -- games, seminars, conventions and movies -- are great ways to generate a sense of fellowship and community. The best way to achieve and maintain that spirit, though, is by working together, sharing ideas and being involved in Guild activities and programs. Every member has viable contributions to make and, as Guild Master, I want everyone to know that your comments, suggestions,
support and even criticisms are all welcome and encouraged. Without the presence and efforts of you, the members, there is no organization. Together, we can make the Guild’s seventh year the best one yet and lay the groundwork for many great years to come!

Peace and happy gaming to you all!

Scott M. Presley
Guild Master
Lakeland Role Playing Guild

CONVENTION FIELD REPORT:
HURRICON 2006
by Guild Master Scott M. Presley

Conventions embody everything good about the gaming hobby. Along with extended time away from the responsibilities of life, work and family, attendees get days’ worth of playing time, the chance to meet old friends and the opportunity to connect with fellow hobbyists. Hurricicon 2006, hosted by the Historical Miniatures Gaming Society South at the end of September, was no exception to this rule.

The gaming excitement started on Thursday with open gaming in the afternoon and evening with over a half-dozen tables in action. Things kicked into high gear on Friday morning and then went into overdrive Saturday with full gaming areas and jammed tables. Even Sunday, traditionally a slow day, had a solid showing of events and participants. The LRPG added some of its own games to this great selection and shared in the very enthusiastic turnout.

Our group went into Hurricicon with six registered games for the weekend. Three of them were D20 System role playing games run by me. Two of them were miniature wargames. One, by Guild Artisan William Harrison and Guild Officer Jeff Wheaton, was Babylon 5: A Call to Arms and the other, by Guildsmen Randy and Angie Nothdorf, was Star Wars Miniatures. The last of our six events was the card-based boardgame Dungeoneer, also run by Artisan Harrison. While this was a smaller amount of LRPG tables than I had hoped for, the resulting forty-seven occupied chairs made me very happy. Even better, all of our guests thoroughly enjoyed themselves and really appreciated our game mastering efforts.

Along with running our own games, we also took in some of the other activities available at the show, both work and fun. Thursday evening, Will and I helped set up the Largo Room where the RPGs and board games were located. Friday morning, I took a shift at the registration desk to help out the HMGS staff with the flood of early attendees. Also Friday morning, Jeff and
Will sat in on a game of *Memoir ’44*, a strategic-level WWII-era boardgame designed and run by the good folks at Borg Games. Saturday afternoon, Will played in an 18th-century-based historical miniatures wargame using home-brewed rules by game master Jay Stribling of HMGS. There were a few games that I wanted to try out but, as usual, I somehow ran out of time during the weekend. Hopefully sometime soon I’ll be able to sit in on Doc Gallagher’s *Pig Wars* and *Sword in Africa* from the Jacksonville Garrison’s Dwight Jones and Chip Coffey.

The show had other gaming events besides casual, sit-and-play tables. There also were a number of wargame tournaments for such game systems as *De Bellis Antiquitates*, *Warhammer Ancient Battles*, *Flames of War*, *Warhammer Fantasy Battles* and *Warhammer 40,000*. All of these events were held in their own area and featured some top-notch players in fierce competition. Even with the head-to-head aspect, though, these participants showed great sportsmanship whether they had superior tactics or incredibly deficient die rolls. And the craftsmanship in their army assembly and painting was among the best work at the show, which is not an easy feat when considering some of the amazing work to be seen in the main ballroom.

Awesome gaming, late nights, good friends and big laughs made for a very fun weekend. If you were unable to attend, you truly missed out on a wonderful time. If you don’t want to be left out next time, remember that Recon 2007 is coming up in May so start making plans to attend right away. In the meantime, here are some pictures from Hurricon that will give you a small taste of the gaming excitement.
LRPG Officer Jeff Whealton and LRPG Artisan William Harrison happily checking out Will’s newest purchase -- his millionth boardgame!

LRPG Artisan William Harrison running a group of adventurers through Dungeoneer.
GAME INDUSTRY NEWS & NEW RELEASES
Presented by The Fantasy Factory LRPG Sponsor

Welcome to our expanded snapshot of the hobby game industry! This space has always tried to provide up to date product release information to area gamers. Starting with this installment, there will also be news about publishing companies and the general health of our market. The following material has been discussed before in other venues so we’ll be brief here.

INDUSTRY NEWS

Probably the biggest news to hit our industry during the past year was that of Palladium’s financial hardships. After the announcement and public plea for help, speculation ran wild about the future of the company and many long-time fans and detractors debated the actual reasons for the crisis. At the same time, a large outpouring of support, from increased product sales to purchases of commemorative prints to cash donations, helped offer some stabilization to the company and a small flurry of books soon hit store shelves. Now, several months after the announcement, Palladium’s release schedule is off-track once again and many within the industry and the hobby are wondering what the coming year will hold.

Continuing the dark tidings from a difficult year, two publishers closed their doors and ceased operations. Eagle Games, a manufacturer of board games including Conquest of the Empire, called it a day in mid-summer. The good news for gamers, though, is that EG’s entire product line recently has been acquired by Fungain Games. In the role playing game segment, Guardians of Order’s closure was leaked shortly after Eagle’s announcement. As with most leaks, the news was a bit premature as GOO’s president revealed about a week later that a product transfer had been finalized. ArtHaus, a specialty imprint attached to White Wolf Publishing’s fantasy-focused Sword & Sorcery, now will be handling the publishing of the anime-based Big Eyes Small Mouth RPG.

In addition to these two companies, several other publishers (like Kenzer & Company and Steve Jackson Games) have scaled back the release schedules and/or have gone grossly off-schedule (like Fantasy Productions and, again, Steve Jackson Games). On top of this, the closing of a mid-sized regional game distributor and the rumored eminent death of another one clearly signal the toughest period of time the industry has faced in several years.

NEW RELEASES

Here is a listing of new products slated for release in October and November along with several late items with original street dates going back to last November. For a more thorough solicitation preview, please stop by the store and ask to see a copy of Game Trade Magazine.

*NOVEMBER*

Fantasy Productions --
Classic Battletech: Historicals --
Operation Klondike ($24.99) : sourcebook and reference detailing the campaign of the then-newly-formed Clans to conquer the Pentagon Worlds.

*DECEMBER*

Digital Alchemy --
Adventure Writer CD-ROM ($34.95) : mapping software for Windows-based computer systems; tile-based design functions and print options for maps or battle grids for miniatures play.

Cartoforge CD-ROM ($34.95) : adventure writing application for PDA devices; allows for encounter design and map creation; with the included Windows desktop software allows for printing of maps, creation of adventure website and more.

Fantasy Productions --
Classic Battletech: Technical Readout --
Vehicle Annex ($29.99) : supplement presenting information on every type of vehicle in the game’s universe from civilian
land and air vehicles to satellites and super-heavy water navy vessels.

*MARCH*

**Palladium --**

*Beyond the Supernatural: Tome Grotesque* ($18.95): sourcebook presenting a variety of predators, demons and other evils; also provides details on demonic powers, magic and cultists.

*APRIL*

**Morrigan Press --**


**Steve Jackson Games --**

*Chez Guevara* ($13.95): latest installment of card game series in which players take roles of guerrilla fighters struggling for survival, freedom and slack in the jungle; playable alone or combined with other sets in the series.

*MAY*

**Fantasy Flight Games --**

*Arkham Horror: Curse of the Dark Pharaoh* ($19.95): card-only expansion for board game featuring 166 new locations, events, spells, allies and more.

**Fantasy Productions --**

*Classic Battletech RPG* ($29.99): updated return of game system for long-running and well-detailed sci-fi setting featuring combat between three-story tall war machines and centuries-old political rivalries; pencil-and-paper companion to the miniature war game.

**Flying Buffalo Incorporated --**

*Grimtooth’s Traps Fore* ($14.95): reissue of classic game supplement filled with 101 lethal traps suitable for any game system and fantasy campaign.

*Maps v1: Book of Cities* ($14.95): reissue of classic game supplement containing over 20 city maps usable in any game system and fantasy campaign; includes brief histories and adventure ideas.

*Maps v2: Places of Legend* ($11.95): reissue of classic game supplement featuring detailed maps and brief backgrounds on places like the Bermuda Triangle, Camelot, King Solomon’s Mines, Lemuria and Oz and usable in any game system and setting.

**Steve Jackson Games --**

*GURPS Bio-Tech* ($34.95): updated and expanded for latest edition of rule system, sourcebook features information on magical- and technologically-based medicines, drugs, implants, transplants and scientific professions plus two original campaign settings.

*JUNE*

**Chaosium --**

*Call of Cthulhu: Secrets of Kenya* ($29.95): sourcebook and reference detailing cultures, geography and history of region through the 1930s; also includes an African bestiary, information on local secret societies and four adventures.

**Steve Jackson Games --**

*Super Munchkin 2: The Narrow S Cape* ($17.95): latest expansion for long-running card game series featuring new villains (like Gothzilla), secret origins (like Raised by Armadillos), items (like the Slide Rule) and a new class (the Brain).

*JULY*

**Fantasy Flight Games --**

*World of Warcraft: Shattered Kingdom* ($19.95): card-only expansion to massive board game featuring additional items, new abilities and powerful resources as well as brand-new concepts like bounties on independent creatures.

**Green Ronin Publishing --**

*True20: Worlds of Adventure* ($22.95): sourcebook for streamlined version of *D20/OGL* containing five original campaign settings drawn from company’s recent contest; presented themes include modern dark horror, swords and sorcery fantasy, semi-historical Eastern fantasy, and sci-fi/modern horror.
Palladium --

Rifts: Dimension Book #10 -- Hades ($18.95) : sourcebook and supplement detailing the home dimension of the demons and their plans for conquest of the Megaverse; sets stage for forthcoming “Minions of War” five-book series.

Wizards of the Coast --

D20 Spectaculars ($29.95) : D20/OGL setting, sourcebook and reference introducing super-powers to D20 Modern universe; includes new classes, feats, talent trees and equipment.

*AUGUST*

Fantasy Productions --

Classic Battletech: Historicals -- Brush Wars ($24.99) : campaign sourcebook detailing actions and units involved in the comparatively low-level and minor conflicts of the early 31ST century; contains maps, regiment listings and special unit and battle condition rules.

Classic Battletech: Starterbook -- Sword & Dragon ($19.99) : introductory set for the game providing an overview of the setting’s long-standing enemies House Kurita and House Davion; contains short synopses of the nations’ conflicts and over thirty record sheets.


Shadowrun: Arsenal ($34.99) : sourcebook and reference detailing wide variety of gear, equipment, vehicles, weapons, cybernetics and even drugs for the game setting.

Steve Jackson Games --

GURPS: Ultra-Tech ($34.95) : rule supplement and sourcebook exploring advanced technologies suitable for near- and far-future campaign settings.

Munchkin Impossible ($24.95) : newest offering in the long-running card game line focusing on the spy/espionage genre.

*SEPTEMBER*

Blue Devil Games --

Dawning Star: Operation Quick Launch ($29.95) : D20/OGL campaign setting based specifically on D20 Modern and D20 Future; contains broad overview and some detailed information on the planet Eos and its Helios star system and new occupations, skills, feats, talents, equipment, cybernetics, weapons, ships and alien races and xenomorphs.

Comstar Games --

Traveller: The New Era 1248 -- Bearers of the Flame ($29.99) : sourcebook detailing the Fourth Imperium and its efforts to rebuild and reunify Charted Space.

Traveller: The New Era 1248 -- Out of the Darkness ($29.99) : complete guide to Charted Space in the year 1248; details the setting immediately after the events from MegaTraveller Rebellion up through the early years of reconstruction under the Fourth Imperium.

Fantasy Productions --

Shadowrun: Emergence ($24.99) : campaign sourcebook focusing on technomancers, individuals capable of affecting the Matrix with their minds.

Goodman Games --

Dungeon Crawl Classics #35: Gazetteer of the Known Realms ($69.99) : D20/OGL campaign and reference collating all locations, items, NPCs, deities and more from the earlier thirty-four adventure modules; contains three full-color maps, two world books and two new adventure modules.

Dungeon Crawl Classics #36: Talons of the Horned King ($15.99) : D20/OGL adventure pitting the characters against a new race and the ruins of a spaceship; inspired by a classic 1ST Edition AD&D module.

Palladium --

Rifts: Sourcebook I ($18.95) : expanded reprint of classic supplement featuring forty-eight additional pages and previously unavailable information on the secret war between A.R.C.H.I.E. and the Republicans.

*OCTOBER*

Ape Games --

Order of the Stick Adventure Game: The Dungeon of Durokan ($39.95) : board game
based on the popular webcomic in which players relive the initial comical adventure

**Fantasy Flight Games --**

*StarCraft the Board Game* ($79.95): based on the popular computer game property, this board game depicts galactic struggle between Terrans, Protoss and Zerg and comes with over two hundred pieces representing dozens of different unit types.

**Fantasy Productions --**

*Classic Battletech: Technical Readout 3050 Upgrade* ($34.99): expanded and updated reprint of sourcebook presenting dozens of mech, aerospace and vehicle designs along with development and deployment background; also contains information from out-of-print reference on 2750.

**Goodman Games --**


**White Wolf Publishing --**

*Exalted: The Compass of Celestial Directions Volume 1 -- The Blessed Isle* ($24.99): sourcebook detailing the mass combat capabilities of the Imperial Army and featuring new domain traits and background characters.

*Exalted: Scroll of the Monk* ($24.99): rule supplement featuring over two dozen martial arts styles and a wide assortment of weapons plus their artifact-level equivalents.

*Mage the Awakening: Tome of Mysteries* ($29.99): *World of Darkness* sourcebook exploring the creation of unique spell effects and presenting many new pre-crafted spells and enchantments; also offers background on archmastery and the mythic Abyssal Watchtowers.

*Promethean the Created: Pandora’s Box* ($26.99): *World of Darkness* sourcebook explores the beliefs of the Created and offers details on the manifestations of Flux and Pyros.

*World of Darkness: Shadows of Mexico* ($29.99): sourcebook exploring the supernatural realms unique to Mexico including new vampire clan variations and werewolf brood traits.

**White Wolf Publishing / Sword & Sorcery Studios --**

*World of Warcraft: Horde Player’s Guide* ($34.99): *D20/OGL* campaign sourcebook detailing this faction’s history, structure and politics along with its unique races, classes, magic and technology.

**Wizards of the Coast --**

*Dungeons & Dragons: Complete Mage* ($29.95): *D20/OGL* rule supplement further expanding the options for arcane spell casters; features new prestige classes, a wide variety of new items and new “heritage” and “reserve” feat forms; also includes alternate class features allowing other classes to possess limited casting ability.

*Dungeons & Dragons: Expedition to Castle Ravenloft* ($34.95): *D20/OGL* mega-adventure revisiting the classic 1st Edition *AD&D* module.

*Magic the Gathering: Time Spiral* ($11.29 for decks, $3.69 for boosters): latest expansion of the original CCG focusing on the chaotic effects of the Phyrezian invasion and Karona’s war in post-apocalyptic Dominaria.

**WizKids --**

*Marvel Heroclix: Supernova* ($7.99 for boosters): newest expansion for game features intergalactic powers like the Kree, Skrulls, Shi’ar and Badoons along with additional teams like Squadron Supreme, Guardians of the Galaxy and New Warriors.

*Mechwarrior: Poseidon Battleforce Set* ($24.99): latest expansion for game introduces super-heavy mechs to the battlefield; each box comes with one huge figure, two infantry stands, three game cards and a rule sheet.

*Pirates of the Mysterious Islands* ($3.99 for boosters): newest expansion introduces Nautilaus-styled ironclad submersibles to the game; also new to the system are islands that affect exploring and sailing conditions.
Fantasy Flight Games --

_Runebound: The Sands of Al-Kalim_ ($39.95): new expansion for the board game series presenting a new region to explore with a new board overlay, six new heroes, new quests and challenges and new environmental effects.

_Twilight Imperium: Shattered Empire_ ($49.95): expansion set for the massive board game of galactic politics and warfare; introduces four new alien races and presents new technologies, spatial anomalies and new planets.

Hero Games --


Reaper Miniatures --

_Dark Heaven minis: Abyst, Demon Lord_ ($19.99); _Bailey Silverbell, Female Dwarf Scout_ ($3.99); _Ghoul Queen with Servant_ ($7.99); _Nightmare_ ($8.99); _Rafael, Vampire Noble_ ($3.99); _Thigra, Female Angel Archer_ ($5.99); _Townsfolk, Village Mob_ ($10.99 for three).

_Warlord minis: Bowsisters, Female Archers_ ($7.49 for three); _Callindra, Female Elf Archer_ ($4.49); _Cleric of Ishnar_ ($4.49); _Darkthrall Cultists_ ($7.49 for three); _Female Darkthrall Cultist Leader_ ($4.49); _Jos Gebblar, Mercenary Necromancer_ ($4.49).

_54mm Master Series minis: 2006 Christmas Sophie_ ($17.99); _Belladonna, Female Salvager_ ($24.99).

Wizards of the Coast --

_Dungeons & Dragons: Cityscape_ ($34.95): _D20/OGL_ sourcebook and reference presenting the adventure possibilities of the urban environment.


_Dungeons & Dragons CMG: Blood War_ ($12.95 for boosters): latest expansion for the collectible miniatures game focuses on the ages-long war between the hordes of the byss and the forces of Hell; includes figures from the core monster catalog as well as specific campaign settings.

_Dreamblade CMG: Baxar’s War_ ($14.99 for boosters): first expansion for miniatures game introducing new abilities “poison” and “terrify” along with the new Stitched faction.

_Star Wars Starship Battles CMG_ ($39.99 for starters, $19.99 for boosters): all-new miniatures game of space combat between fighter craft and capital ships; starter set comes with two non-random figures, Super Star Destroyer _Executor_ and Mon Calamari Star Defender _Viscount._
Battle of Ravenwing Ridge
By Guild Artisan William Harrison, Esq.

Note: This short story is based on the setting found in Your Move Games’ card-based war game Battleground. It focuses on the Men of Hawkshold and references some of the other cultural groups found in the game.

The local lord sat upon a horse peering westward at the low hills before his small keep. Around him milled the men of his local militia; fear, impatience and anticipation seeming to flow out of them like waves of heat off of the baking fields in high summer. They were good men, as local farmers armed with old weapons and farm implements could be, but they were awaiting a foe they were ill-used to and they were alone.

The lord had his own personal troops, a small squadron of light cavalry and a unit of men-at-arms, to bolster the untrained militia. These were the tools he would need to do his liege’s work and to defend his demesne against the ravening orcs and goblins. He had hoped his liege, the Duke of Hawkshold, would have sent him more of his trained troops; a good body of knights would have given him more confidence, but this was what he had to work with. The same attack on his small hold was being replicated upon all of the Duke’s borders and he could disperse his strength only so much. No matter. It was his task and he would meet it as he had all others in his life -- directly and without shrinking from it.

Still, at least it was only the humanoids that were coming here with fire and sword. Worse rumors had come to him from the south. Tales of the dead walking, graveyards as uneasy as the far sea, dark men with dark spells, killing and wasting and bringing into their army those they brought low, a tide of diseased and foul corpses.

Strangely enough, the elves also had been seen again on the borders of their dark forest holds. No one had had contact with that strange elder race for many generations. There was even hopeful rumor amongst the Duke’s vassals that emissaries had been sent to the woods to seek alliance with the fair folk. So far that still seemed only a vain, baseless hope.

A sound now, from the west. A dog perhaps? No. It was too deep. It was a wolf howling in the distance. It was answered. It was a large pack, the baying of many wolves, wolves of great size by the sound of it. Now the hills to the west were smudged with the stain of the enemy force. Goblins appeared first, mounted upon their great wolfen steeds. Trolls lumbered over the rise, their stench coming to him with the wind, to mix with the smell of fear from his own men. Ranks upon ranks of orcs marched into view, their feet creating a rapidly approaching thunder, a sign of the storm’s approach. It was strange to see the orcs so orderly for such a beastly, chaotic folk.

The lord turned now to his men, sword unsheathed and raised high, flashing in the setting sun and the blue glare of lightning now present in the charged air.

“Men of Ravenwing Ridge! Stand fast! No man of Hawkshold should fear such vermin! You have the blood of you sires in you veins and the name of Hawkshold to your credit! Strike these swine in the name of our glorious Duke and in defense of your homes and kin! We will be victorious!”

A lie, but a necessary one. The militia must hold in order that the trained troops could attempt to flank the invading rabble, to take them in the sides where they might be weak, and to hopefully send them fleeing back to their dark lands. A hope, a vain hope, but the only hope there was.

The orc chieftain in the vanguard of this war host raised his great curved sword. The charge was on. The yowling, yammering mass was quick upon the defending men. Strangely, only one thought came to the lord, before all other thoughts were swept away by the red, howling inner beast of carnage and war took over his usually orderly mind:

“I would have liked to meet an elf.”
The Rites of Passage  
By Guildsman Laura Wampfler

Note: This story was written for a low-fantasy original world created for the MMORPG Adellion. It describes a coming of age ceremony practiced by the Dalmite culture, one of six cultures in the world.

“Calor, it is time to rise!”

The boy was awakened early by his mother. She stood over him, gently touching his cheek with her hand. It was the last day that he would be her little boy. They left the warmth and security of the small treehouse and ventured through the forest toward the river. A heavy mist crept through the valley; tendrils creeping outward like fingers. Calor could see the silent march of other children toward the river; all of them led by an adult, usually the child’s mother.

When they reached the river, Calor was instructed to remove his clothing. He shivered in the cool morning air and wrapped his thin arms around his body. Then, his mother walked him to the river and entered the cold water with him. His body shrieked in protest as the icy waves splashed against bare legs. His mother scooped up the river water in a small wooden cup and began pouring it over his head, washing away all the paint covering his small brown body. The colors fell into the river, surrounding him briefly before dissipating into the water. He could hear the others, most of them as silent as he, frightened and suddenly shy.

When she was finished, his mother led him out of the water and dried him with a soft piece of leather specially prepared for this day. She gave him no clothing to cover his naked body and began to lead him back through the forest, but not toward his home. Goosebumps rose on his skin and the damp mist surrounded him as he walked, swirling around his feet.

Other than the faint sounds of other children in the forest, he could hear only the morning songs of the birds as they sang of their exploits the day before. They entered a clearing at about the same time as half a dozen other children, boys and girls. All of them had reached their twelfth birthday during the last year and all of them were shivering in silence, their bodies bare. A few wore the smug looks of young children who try to hide their fear but most had large round eyes full of apprehension.

The children were led into the clearing and positioned in wavering lines. Calor’s mother took his face in her hands and he looked up at her, their eyes meeting together. Her face showed a mixture of pride and sadness, which confused him. He knew she was happy for him but he could not understand the tear that slowly fell down her brown cheek. Reaching up, he touched her damp skin with one finger and, in his own silent way, told her he loved her and that he would always love her. She kissed his forehead and released him, turned her back and began to walk away. The boy wanted to call out to her and beg her to take him with her but he did not. Even the most stoic of the children now looked afraid as their mothers left them alone in the clearing. They stood shivering, waiting for the sun to rise and warm their bodies. After a few silent moments, a rustling noise announced the arrival of the Da’lend, or the tribal shaman. He wore a magnificent cloak, covered with flowers and colorful beads. On his head, he wore a monstrous headdress, covered with the horns of various animals. Dark, almost black eyes stared out from a tattooed face, the designs warped by his wrinkles and faded from the years. Several apprentices followed the Da’lend, their dress much less terrifying and their heads bare.

The shaman began to recite ancient words, most of which meant little to Calor. He could see the sun beginning to rise over the trees and spill into the clearing. The mist, as if frightened by the might of the sun, fled downward, back toward the river, snaking its way through the trees. As the light touched his skin, he felt a small sensation of warmth. He began to relax slightly, his jaw unclenching and his toes losing their tight grip on the cool soil beneath his feet. The apprentices began to
chant along with the Da’lend, their voices blending as they rose and fell. The sound was almost enchanting, causing the children to sway slightly as if under a spell. Still chanting, the apprentices began to go to each child, gently helping them to the ground. Calor felt the soft touch of the dark-haired apprentice as her warm hand touched his bare arm. He allowed her to lower him to the ground where he sat cross-legged, along with the other children.

The shaman finished his liturgy and was handed a small vial by one of his helpers. He touched the vial to his lips and closed his eyes, his mouth silently shaping words too great for most to understand. They were undoubtedly words to Kianna, asking for her blessing. After warming the vial in his hands, the shaman approached the first of the children sitting quietly on the grass. He touched the open vial to the child’s lips, pouring some of the black substance down her throat. Lying a hand on the child’s head, he again mumbled strange words and rose, moving on to the next young Dalmite.

As the shaman approached Calor, the boy closed his eyes momentarily, reopening them to see the shaman’s hideous face near his own. The smooth glass of the vial brushed against his mouth and Calor felt the sticky substance flow down his throat. As it entered his stomach, he could feel heat rising, flowing through his entire body, and chasing the last of the chill out.

When the last child received the strange liquid, the chanting began again, this time it seemed louder and closer, as if the holy men and women were singing directly into his ear. The figures before him began to sway and blur, their bodies blending into the trees and grass behind them. His eyes grew heavy and he closed them, only for a second, he thought, but when he tried to open them again, he felt as if they were made of lead. The chanting began to swell and grow, joined by many other voices, hundreds, maybe more. He could not feel his body as he swayed and dipped with the music … floating and bobbing on a sea of sound.

When he finally could open his eyes, he was still in the clearing, but he was alone. The other children were gone, as were the shaman and his apprentices. The only sounds he heard were the rustling of the wind through the trees and the soft melodies of the birds. At first, he thought they had gone on without him but that did not seem possible. How could they leave him here alone? Had he failed the test already? He clambered to his feet, looking around to get his bearing. He was no longer naked but was wearing his regular clothing; his dagger fastened securely to his belt. He called out the names of his friends, “Aruk! Lavyna!” but they did not answer. The sun was high in the sky and it was obvious to him that much time had passed. Had he slept too long?

He began to walk back toward his village. The smell of smoke was becoming increasingly stronger as he approached his home. It was unusual for Dalmites to use fire during the day other than for small cooking fires. This smelled like burning wood. He noticed for the first time that the birds had stopped their song and the forest was shrouded in an eerie silence. A gray haze hung over the treetops and made his eyes sting. He didn’t realize he was seeing the smoke of a smoldering fire until he approached his home. Panic clutched at his heart as he ran up the ramp which led to the village. He stopped in horror at the top of the ramp as his eyes took in a scene of complete devastation. The small wooden houses that stood nestled in the branches were all charred piles of wood, fingers of smoke curling upward, blanketing the remaining leaves in ash.

“Mother!” he screamed as he broke into a run, hurdling over piles of burning lumber and the still bodies of Dalmites which he chose, at this moment at least, to ignore. He found his mother lying near the remains of their home, along with the body of his youngest sister. Nearby lie another body, its skin pale and devoid of tattoos. A crimson shield was clutched tightly in the hand of the victim, identifying its owner.

“Noooo!” His voice echoed as it bounced off the trees and filled the silence. Tarians! But why would they be this far north? They had never made it past the more southern tribes, had never gotten this close
to Tilitha. They should have been safe from the barbaric cruelty of these savages. He bent over his mother’s body, sobbing as his heart broke. He was but a child and now one without a family. He slept among the ruins, afraid to leave but afraid to stay.

He did not remember night falling but when he awoke, he felt as if he had slept a long time. The fires were all but out now. He gently turned the bodies of his family over, laying them in a position as if they slept. He placed bouquets of flowers he had gathered in their hands and gently kissed their cold brows. He wanted to do the same for the others, his friends and extended family members, but he did not have the energy. There were other tribes nearby and if they still stood, he needed to warn them of the Tarian invasion.

Packing a small pouch with some meager provisions, he climbed out of the trees and headed off toward the nearest settlement. The forest was still eerily silent and he felt as if eyes were watching his every movement. Using all the skills he had been taught, he moved stealthily through the underbrush, his feet never making a sound. The silence was suddenly broken by a loud rustling sound not far away. He stopped, drawing his dagger from its sheath. He heard the loud laughter of a man, deep and evil. A flash of red revealed the Tarian’s movement. The Tarian moved even faster, gone in less time than it took to wink one’s eye.

Replacing the dagger in his belt, he hoisted himself up to the first branch. It was an easy climb upward, as if the tree were bending its branches to accommodate his small size. Reaching the top, he looked out at the forest, which was spread before his feet. He could see the smoke from his own smoldering village behind him. Ahead he saw the faint shimmering ribbon of a river.

Then he saw it again, the flash of red far in the distance … and he thought he heard laughter, but it was impossible. The man was too far away to be heard. He controlled both his urge to run after the man and his urge to run the other way. Carefully, he surveyed the landscape, calculating his next move. He could not fight a grown man alone so his only chance was to reach the next village. Sliding gracefully down the tree, he moved cautiously but less timidly forward. He could spot a broken branch here and there and, even once, a piece of red and black cloth ripped from a Tarians uniform. The man was heading toward the village also … both of them trying to reach the same place for different reasons. Anger rose in the Calor’s chest … not the anger of revenge, which had lingered only briefly when he first saw the man, but anger at the callousness of one that knew nothing of the people he hunted. It was if the boy grew several inches in that moment, his hand reaching toward his dagger. He would track the man down and kill him before he reached the village or die trying.

His tracking skills had been learned from an elder of the village, a man who was known for finding even the most elusive prey. Carefully scanning the forest floor before him, Calor could see signs of the man’s passing, signs that would elude even the most observant person. His senses were on full alert, his attention fully focused on the task at hand when suddenly, as if by the magic of some malevolent god, the red clothed man appeared directly in front of him. Large and sturdy compared to the slender boy, the man held a short heavy sword in his hand, which he twisted and turned casually. He turned his gaze to the boy slowly, and laughed again.

“Why, you are just a child!” The deep laughter followed as he appraised his enemy.

Calor stared at the man, this evil being who had slaughtered his family. “I am not a child, I am a man!” His voice filled the forest and was followed by a cacophony of sounds, birds and other wild beasts echoing in reply. The Tarian’s laughter subsided as the boy lunged with his dagger, feeling the
impact as it hit flesh and bone. Falling to the ground, darkness enveloped him as he mercilessly lost consciousness.

Gentle hands touched his face, brushing his dark hair from his forehead. Cool water washed across one cheek and fingers touched his own, removing the dagger from his grip. Opening his eyes, he saw a wavering figure standing before him, talking in hushed tones whose whispers sounded like the wind through the branches. Gradually, the figure came into focus, the dark cloak, long dark hair tinged with auburn highlights, the brownish-green eyes. It was one of the Da’lend’s apprentices and she held a small cup of cold clear water to his lips. He drank deeply and looked into her eyes, still confused and lost. Sitting up, he looked around, expecting to see the blood of the Tarian or his own on the dark soil. Instead, he saw the other children, all of them in similar positions on the ground. Some were still stretched out in the grass, others like him, were slowly rising, shaking the fog from their heads. He saw through their confusion and instead saw an expression he had never seen on their young faces before. Anuk sat near him, his face strong and determined. Lavyna rose to his left, still clutching a dagger in her small fingers. She turned toward him and their eyes met. She was not the young friend he had once chased through the forest but instead a woman, strong, defiant, and capable.

As the apprentices left them to attend to other children, Anuk and Lavyna moved closer to him. They did not speak of what had happened to them but instead they gestured to each other the signs of friendship and respect. Anuk nodded toward the edge of the clearing where another child lay huddled in the arms of one of the apprentices, sobbing and muttering words that made no sense. The apprentice gently stroked his hair and spoke to him as if he were an infant. The three friends reached out to each other, joining hands, not as three frightened children, but as adults, gathering strength from the touch of another human being. They had faced their fears and had passed the test. They were now women and men.

The apprentices handed out specially prepared clothing, sewn by the talented villagers. The doeskin was soft and bleached to a pure white, its surface decorated with red and gold beads. The youngsters donned the clothing in silence as they prepared to leave the clearing. When they were all dressed and seated, the shaman stood before them. His face looked younger somehow, as if he had transferred the youth of the children to his own body. They, in contrast, had aged years in a short amount of time. Raising his hands and turning his face to the sky, the shaman asked for the blessings of the deities on the young people before him.

The day was far from over though. The new adults would travel back to their village where they would participate in a huge feast in their honor. Later, while the entire village gathered around a fire, they would choose the personal deity that would guide them in their future lives. Calor would choose Elaen, for he knew she had sent the tree that suddenly appeared in his dream. Lavyna would choose Zaolla who would teach her the art of healing. And Anuk, who aspired to be a warrior, would choose Adralis, the god of death, whom he would soon face everyday. Tomorrow they would be marked with the designs of their clan and tribe, and their bodies would be permanently changed.

Rising from the ground, they turned and headed back to their village. The laughter of younger children could be heard as they approached and the smell of the food prepared for the celebration lingered in the air. Calor took long, strong strides as he walked forward, his head held high and his shoulders back. The little children, still too young to understand the significance of the day, ran to meet them, grabbing at their hair and clothing, laughing and shouting words of welcome. Reaching out, Calor tousled the hair of a young dark-haired boy and then strode onward to greet the people of his tribe.
My Huge Space Game: The Campaigns
By Guildsman Kevin A. Halleran

In an earlier article, I introduced my original and long-running science fiction campaign setting. That article was an examination of the setting’s overall thematic elements. In addition, it covered one specific adventure and its place in the greater campaign story. This latest installment presents a more detailed look at the different campaigns in the setting plus the table formats used in each.

This setting draws on the themes of (if not steals whole elements from) Aliens, Star Wars, Traveller and Warhammer 40,000. I started this game universe when I was in college circa-1988 and I have run several campaigns within it since then. From its inception, this setting has been an experiment in campaign development. Each campaign has focused on unique parts of the setting’s story in an effort to tell a greater narrative. These different campaigns have been played in a variety of ways from the traditional long-running group format to short and concentrated bursts to a shared-world approach.

The first campaign was typical in that it was an on-going series of game sessions with a stable group of players. It was a pretty standard space game in which a party of low-life characters joins together, acquires a ship and runs loose. This crew featured two interesting player characters. One was the ship’s Artificial Intelligence, which was a fun twist. The other was a clone of a galactic power broker. (Future campaigns were indexed by the inclusion of subsequent clones.) In the beginning, the party romped around my galactic playground engaging in basic FedEx-type assignments until I was ready to start the setting’s true story. The basic plot of this first “real” adventure appeared to be another generic courier mission. The party had to escort a young woman from point A to point B for a wedding. The hook was this girl was to marry the Emperor, who had conned her father, a political rival, into accepting the proposal. During this assignment, the players got a glimpse of the Emperor and found him to be a young, charismatic and likable guy rather than the Darth Sideous-like monster they had expected. This first campaign ended in grand fashion with the heroes assisting Imperial Marines in capturing and pacifying a riotous space station.

The next block of the setting’s story was played as a 55-hour campaign. This format requires the group to play twelve 4-hour sessions in one weekend. (Yes, that should be only 48 hours. The system has extra time built in to account for running over and character advancement tasks.) It is brutal but also a lot fun and very productive in regard to plot development. In a way, it feels more like a campaign than a series of weekly game sessions. This particular campaign was centered on super soldiers grown by one of the galactic powers for some nefarious purpose. The players ran a squad of these super soldiers in this pre-generated game, a format that became immensely popular and quite useful as play in the setting continued. As these were genetically engineered beings, each of the six players had identical character sheets. The characters emerged from their gestation chambers and quickly determined that the men in white lab coats were bad. A small revolt was staged and the team blasted its way off the space station, encountering the heroes of the last campaign on the way. Upon gaining their freedom, the super soldiers became space pirates and explored who they were and the meaning of life. Unfortunately, this campaign had no real plot beyond establishing the super soldiers in the setting so it simply tapered off instead of reaching a satisfying and climactic ending.

The next campaign was a return to the on-going series format, although I used a different group of players. This series of adventures focused on two new initiates of the Church of Man. This humanist religion formed as a racial self-defense mechanism against the diluting influence of alien races. The Church also serves as a self-policing repository of humanity’s psychic talent. The Church identified the psychic potential in two characters and shanghaied them for
initiation. On the way to the Church’s primary monastery, the star liner transporting the characters was attacked by a band of super soldier space pirates. At this point, the campaign took on a strong flavor of *Star Frontiers* and *Volturnus*, two favorite games from the early 1980s. I ran two more campaigns focusing on the Church. The first of these story blocks introduced an alien race that attacked, invaded and fed on planets. This campaign section served as a direct prologue to the next installment.

This subsequent part of the narrative was played by the first group as a 55-hour game block. Each player was given two sets of pre-generated characters. The first set was made of slightly weak, normal people while the second set was composed of Special Forces soldiers. The plan was to use the first 4-hour block as a new attack by the planet-eating aliens from the earlier campaign. In this adventure, the first set of characters fought a futile resistance against the invaders and, ultimately, died horribly. This worked really well as an exercise in doing fairly stupid things just to keep playing. This session was not a complete failure, though, as now both groups of players were aware of the “Big Threat” in the setting.

The next campaign block was another 55-hour marathon. In this, the original group of players ran a second installment of the super soldier theme. This section of the setting’s story had clear start and stop points and ran very smoothly as a result. The main point was the super soldiers, and their non-pirate brethren, became the high-caliber cure for the alien invasion. The secondary point, which had even more impact on the setting, was the rapid loss of psychic talent in humans. This development made the Church of Man very nervous and led right into the next campaign.

In this story block, the second group of players returned to the church initiate theme. This traditional-format campaign focused on the Church’s exodus from the galaxy. The older members and the hierarchy expended their life essences in a great working of gestalt psychic energy to shunt the escape ark into another galaxy. The younger and low-ranking members found themselves in a strange new realm that all hoped would be humanity’s salvation. As the Church of Man began exploring and settling this new galaxy, it quickly was discovered that the invading planet-devouring aliens called this star cluster home. The campaign then developed into the early stages of a crusade to make this new galaxy safe for humanity.

The setting’s next campaign installment was a return to the 55-hour format. The original players were back, this time playing a group of humans struggling in a reborn, post-apocalyptic galaxy. The fall of humanity and the disappearance of the Church of Man gut-punched the race. Their entire societal structure had fallen apart and their once-subjugated client races had taken over. The important element of this story block was the ending. The party fell through a stable worm hole and ran into a massive fleet of the planet-hungry alien race, poised for an apparent all-out invasion. What these players did not know was this alien fleet was being driven out of its home galaxy by the church crusade underway at the other table.

After that episode, one of my long-time players began handling some game mastering duties for me. He has been a member of all the campaigns except for those dealing with the Church of Man so he has a solid understanding of the setting. He has been running games in my universe for a while now and doing a good job of maintaining the integrity of the overall story. His campaign has focused on the struggles within the still-rebuilding galaxy. As this shared-world approach seemed to be working well, we started to plan two interwoven games for the next marathon session. We had four
weekly hour-long planning sessions and supplemental e-mail communication to work out the details. The idea was we would each take alternating 4-hour blocks to tell our parts of the story. His sections of the campaign would involve agents of the shattered human empire. In my sections, the players would take the roles of the invading aliens. The advanced planning was beneficial as the resulting campaign block ran very smoothly. The stories blended perfectly and the characters accomplished all of their objectives on time and in dramatic ways.

Future articles on my campaign setting will have more detailed analyses of each game. These installments will also discuss the lessons drawn from them. For now, though, here are some of the general bits of wisdom I have learned from these different campaigns. First, have a goal in mind, if not an overall plan, for short game sessions and one-shot adventures. Second, it is okay not to have a solid plan for longer adventures since playing is frequently all about the journey. Third, a 4-hour block is quite possibly the perfect game session length. Fourth, shared campaign settings work well with the proper planning and can improve the skills of the participating game masters.

Now get gaming!

Continuity in a High Turn-Over Campaign
By Artisan Doug Fordham

In a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, many things may happen and the good, well-prepared DM will be ready for each and every one of them. Since I have had the (literally) life changing experience of running a long-term campaign, and because I am only in the meanest sense of the term good and well-prepared, I have learned many things. I would like to share some of those things with you.

In a previous writing, I talked about personalizing a prepackaged campaign setting by adding unique details and modifications to serve your own style. In that article, I described how I altered the World of Greyhawk setting to better suit my storyline, which included the Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil. That giant module kept my table occupied for over three years; certainly during that time it was no surprise that characters died or were otherwise eliminated. My challenge as a DM was to maintain the continuity of the campaign with an ever-changing roster of characters.

The problem presented by the constant shuffling was twofold: how to bring the new characters in and how to have it make sense to the campaign. The solutions I came up with were designed to fit my play style, which admittedly is less regulated; I didn’t fear that there weren’t rules for what I wanted to do. Those Dungeon Masters for whom this approach would be an issue almost certainly would have taken a different tack. Let me give you a few examples of what I did.

In one instance, a player character destroyed a small statuette dedicated to some demonic entity, the identity of which the group was (and still is) unsure. The character in question would not be moved by logic and maintained firmly that he was going to destroy the object, the consequences be damned. Giving the rest of the group only just enough time to run, this character, a
neutral good cleric of Pelor, brought his mace crashing down upon the statuette, destroying it utterly. However, in the flash and huge explosion, the character disappeared as well.

Of course, the group was unsure as to his fate, and could do nothing but wonder for the time being. Once they exited the dungeon on a run back to the city of Verbobonc, they enlisted the aid of a sage in determining what had happened to their companion. While the group did their normal “I sell this stuff to buy that stuff” routine, I knew that they would have some down time, thus giving the sage a chance to come up with an answer to their dilemma. True to his word, the learned scholar was able to confirm that the cleric was not dead but had been relocated to the Gray Waste of Hades. To the group, this seemed nearly as bad as death, and perhaps worse, since if he had been only dead, a raise dead or resurrection spell might have been sufficient. Further research by the sage produced the means whereby the character could be saved and brought back to the Material Plane, but it would not be easy.

Understand that this entire course of action was unplanned: who knew the cleric would be so stubborn as to pay absolutely no attention to anyone else in the group when it came to the statuette. Not even the wisdom of the group’s paladin was able to stay his hand from the destruction of the idol. We now go back to my earlier statement about not being prepared. The group had lost an integral member of its structure and I had no plan for bringing him back. The point is that not only is a good DM prepared, they can also create on the fly, and so the adventure was detoured into an off-the-cuff side trek to bring the cleric back to the group.

I took a week to plan the mission: how would they get there and what would they find when they did? I did some research on the Gray Waste and generated an encounter that would attempt to thwart the group’s efforts. They could not rely upon divine intervention, since I had laid a veil of limbo between the gods and their subjects as part of another campaign subplot. No, the best they could hope for was to go to Hades and do the work for themselves. To make a long story shorter, they succeeded in their quest, learned some things, and gained some wisdom as players as a result of that success. I learned as well, that flexibility is key and being able to adapt is at least as useful a trait as preparedness.

Another occurrence involved the aforementioned paladin, an eladrin that had joined the group and that selfsame, star-crossed cleric mentioned previously, all caught on the short end of an encounter with a Deck of Many Things. One thing I learned from this scenario was that randomness is just that, random. Who knew that three of the seven characters in the group would draw cards which ripped their souls from their bodies and placed them on another plane, far, far away. The players of these unfortunates all loved their characters and, being more inclined to beneficence as a DM, I endeavored to find a way to bring them back. Unfortunately, it involved another side trek away from the main campaign storyline, which was bad, since I had been trying to impose a sense of impending danger, leaving little time for errors.

A thought occurred to me as I pondered on how to solve this most recent debacle. I remembered that on several planes of existence, time behaves abnormally when compared to that of the Material Plane. I thought that if I placed the souls onto one of those planes, I could still maintain the illusion of urgency, since the group really would not know how much time had transpired. I chose the Astral Plane and placed the souls in a prison crafted upon the massive corpse of a dead deity floating in the silvery mists of that dimension. This prison was run by mind flayers and served as an inter-dimensional holding place for souls and essences of all types. All the group had to do was travel to the Astral Plane, find the prison, break into it, defeat the mind flayer captors, recover the crystal skull which held the souls of their friends, break back out of the prison, and find their way home. It wouldn’t have been much of a story if they had not succeeded, but I can tell you it wasn’t easy. Again they learned,
and so did I. My personal lesson from that was to be willing to do what it takes to allow a person to continue playing a character they love.

Finally, in my last example, there was a player that was moving out of the area. To that point, this character, a dwarven cleric, had been a key part of the storyline, as at the time the group was exploring the ruined dwarven city of Khundrukar. I really don’t like characters just disappearing in the middle of a plot line and had wondered for some time on how I was going to work him out of the campaign. To this point in the story, he had been the liaison between the dwarves that had hired the group and the group itself. He spoke and read Dwarven, understood stonework, and was knowledgeable in the lore of Dwarfdom, including its history and pantheon of gods, all things that would be lost when the player left. Fortunately (at least from a continuity standpoint), an encounter with a cockatrice left him petrified and the dwarf king ruled that, until a means of restoring his form was found, the character would occupy a place of honor and dignity in the newly recovered city of Khundrukar. In addition, so impressed with the group’s proficiency was the king that he allowed his son to follow his long-time dream of becoming an adventurer and that worthy joined the group himself, filling the gap created by the loss of the dwarven cleric, as well as another character. My lesson learned: the story will lend itself to you if you just have the wherewithal to take advantage of it.

For the record, my group lost between sixteen and twenty-two characters throughout the course of the campaign, which included the preamble adventures I ran to get the party to the recommended 4th level of experience before starting the *Temple* module itself. The actual figure is really difficult to tally, as people’s memories fade after a time; only a sadistic DM would keep a running total anyway, right?

Our *Temple* group has long-since finished that adventure and, through all that time, only one character did not die, become petrified, paralyzed, soul-bound or disintegrated. This character served in the group from day one until the conclusion of things. I tried on many occasions to bring balance to the group’s losses, because most of the character deaths were distributed between two unlucky players. It only seemed right that everyone should have at least one death on their plates to deal with. But through all my efforts, I was not able to bring this character low. Understand that while I tried, I secretly rooted for the players to succeed, and was happy that at least one person was able to go start-to-finish. The final lesson I learned from the *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* was that, to insure success, have the entire party comprised of halfling rogues.

Thank you for reading, and I wish you healthy and happy adventuring.
The Gentle Art of Losing in Games (or The Garden of Victory is Watered by the Rain of Loss)  
By Artisan William Harrison, Esq.

There are many books, articles and other forms of literature dedicated to helping one win. Not just win in the gaming hobby but other hobbies as well and, indeed, many walks of life. One of the things that these works of knowledge fail to address, however, is how to lose and, more importantly, how to utilize that loss. This article will help to address this issue and hopefully make clear to all our gentle readers that losing in a game does not make one a loser, but failing to accept and benefit from that loss can.

This topic at first may seem a little juvenile and, frankly, a little patronizing, but this author has noted with alarm the growing lack of, for lack of a better term, sportsmanship amongst players. This prevalence seems to manifest itself to a large degree among the younger players, although the older players are not immune. The “munchkin phenomenon” may be amusing, and the games surely are, but it bespeaks of a problem at the core of gaming which sometimes makes the hobby we indulge in for fun much less than fun.

One thing that all true gamers must keep in mind is that we are gamers because we like to game. Gaming is our hobby so, therefore, we intend to game an awful lot. Because of this, the law of averages (especially in games that use random generators for actions) dictates that you will sometimes not win. What does this mean? Well, for one thing, remember why one plays to begin with: to play. I enjoy winning as much as the next gamer, but if I have a good time with my friends, the game is interesting and engaging, and I’ve enjoyed the mechanics and production of the game, I have really won. I’ve taken part in my hobby and have socialized with my friends and compatriots. Bliss!

One of the useful things about losing is learning how to utilize the loss. Once again, we gamers intend to play games a lot. So, most likely, if the game was a good one, we’ll want to play it again, likely many times, and probably with and against the very same people. Therefore, pay attention to your loss. Why did you lose? What did you do that you could correct? What did your opponent or opponents do that allowed him or her to win? If it was a multi-player game, what did the non-winning players do in common which allowed the winner to win? Losing is part of the learning process. A novice player in any style of game is at a disadvantage simply because of his or her lack of experience with the game in question. (And remember, in a multi-player game several players may be in the same boat.) You have to play and therefore sometimes lose in order to get better. This experience will help not only in playing the game better, but appreciating it more fully.

A rather interesting facet of multi-player games, and here I’m talking about those which are not designed as being cooperative, is that sometimes if there is no way for you to “win” the game as an individual, you potentially can be in a position to pick the winner. The board game Diplomacy is a fine example of this. Based upon the military and diplomatic relationships of the European powers just before World War One, it allows players to react cooperatively, competitively or in a combination of both. The game may end with England in charge, but without Germany, they wouldn’t be there.

An interesting thing to remember about other multi-player games, and this refers to those which are designed for cooperative play such as role playing games, is that they are intended to take place over long periods of time, both in the game and in the mundane world. You may lose a combat, or not get the treasure at the end of the dungeon, but your character may stay alive most of the time (or at least be resurrected). The character will soldier on to fight and win another day. And, just like the player, the character hopefully will learn from his or her mistakes, not repeat them.
Finally, there is a positive return for losing with good grace. No one likes to play with a poor loser. The more those in your circle or gaming organization see that you continue to play with a positive attitude, the more often you will be invited to play.

Always play to win. Remember, however, that the play is, indeed, the thing. If you lose a game, fret not and keep playing and, eventually, you’ll win one. Then, in the long run, you really are a winner.
DISCOVER THE Nexus

The Ironwood Nexus.com is the online source for all information about Ironwood Omnimedia. At the Nexus all things come together, with our online product descriptions, news and upcoming releases, corporate info, and our public user community. The Nexus is the crossroads to set you on the path to finding whatever interests you in the Ironwood Omnimedia family.

The Ironwood Nexus Community is where our customers, users, and developers can meet and discuss their favorite Ironwood Omnimedia products. Registered users get first hand information on news, events, and products currently under development, as well as being able to coordinate games and gatherings.

It all comes together on the Nexus.
Players Who Play
By Guildsman Laura Wampfler

Millions of people around the world play multi-player online role-play games. The most successful games are those that cater to the masses, such as World of Warcraft, the leading MMORPG to date. However, the games that tend to build the most loyalty among customers are those that support socializing and role-play, such as Ultima Online and Asheron's Call. Studies show that the average player engages in over 20 hours of gameplay a week! Who are these people who play these games and why do they play them?

There have been a number of studies seeking to categorize players of multi-player games. The most famous of these is Player Types created by Richard Bartles, the creator of the MUD, a text based virtual world that still exists in a myriad of forms. Bartles is also the author of Designing Virtual Worlds, published in 2003 and one of the bibles for game designers. In his article, “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs,” Bartles looked at action versus interaction and world-oriented versus player-oriented as it relates to the MUD players.

Bartles identified four basic types of players: Achievers, Explorers, Socializers and Killers. The four types represent the four major reasons people play online games: to achieve goals in the game; to find out whatever they can about the virtual world; to interact or role play with other players; or to use the tools of the game to cause distress on other players.

Most games tend to be designed to appeal to the masses and various types of players, so they provide plenty of achievement within the game, the ability to ‘level’ your character, earn experience, make money and buy better equipment. They also include areas of vast terrain, for the Explorers, with hidden dungeons and rare treasures to be found. Socializers are drawn by the ability to communicate with other players, and by how easily one is immersed in the world. Killers are encouraged by the ability to impose their will on other players, stealing their kills, looting their corpses, and the potential to overpower those of lesser ability in the game.

Unfortunately, however, sometimes the player types clash and trying to appeal to all creates problems. Games that attract too many killers tend to lose the Socializers and the Achievers. Interestingly, games that attract a large number of Socializers and Achievers also attract more killers. Therefore, many games try to strike a balance between the groups and succeed to some extent.

One game that tried to strike this balance was Star Wars Galaxies. I had the pleasure of beta testing SWG and I remember the designers describing the game on the beta forums as ‘one that would immerse the players in the Star Wars Universe and appeal to role-players.’ Indeed, SWG had many interesting aspects not common in other games. They included non-combat roles such as an Image Designer, basically a virtual cosmetologist. They also created cantinas, a Socializer’s dream along with a Dancer profession, which depended on socializing to achieve. All players needed to congregate in the cantina to ‘buff’ their characters, therefore creating social centers in the game.

While SWG did not create role-player servers, a trend that was becoming more common in MMORPGs at that time, groups of players did advertise ‘unofficial role-play servers’ before the game launched. At launch time, these servers were the first to reach capacity and left many role players scrambling for space, even creating new ones. It is interesting to note that many of the people who signed up for these servers could be categorized as Killers. Large guilds were organized on the SWG forums calling for ‘those who want to make life difficult for the role players’ to create characters on the ‘unofficial role-play servers.’

As a role-player, I found great satisfaction with SWG as a game, probably one of the best for role players and Socializers since Ultima Online. It also had extensive crafting, including crafting of non-combat items such as houses, furniture and food. It
was possible to play SWG and not be engaged in combat at all, a rather new concept for many MMORPGs. SWG also had a more mature player base than other games and a very loyal following. People stayed with the game longer than other online games.

Unfortunately, gamers were used to combat as the most important aspect in MMORPGs and soon after launch the forums were crowded with players complaining about a lack of interesting combat. While player versus player combat was available if you elected to participate, many Achievers felt the player versus environment aspects of the game were lacking, including the low quantity of valuable loot, uninteresting and unchallenging quests, and various other issues.

The game creators responded with a series of changes to the game, including requiring players to grind through the top of several professions to reach the coveted goal of Jedi Knight. This was wildly popular with the Achievers but many role-players and Socializers left the game as players felt forced to use game-sanctioned macros to reach the top of the ladders, leaving behind unresponsive robots rather than interactive players. Since then, SWG has gone through some drastic changes, culminating with the introduction of the NGE, or new game enhancements, that have changed the game immensely. The game has become less achievement oriented and less role-play oriented, and been made to appeal more to the new younger players and casual players. At this time, the extent of the backlash is unknown, but many canceled their subscriptions. The influx of new players has kept the subscription base for SWG fairly level but it will be interesting to see what happens in the long run. Studies have shown that games that appeal to casual gamers and younger crowds often do not retain subscription numbers as long as games like Ultima Online and Asheron’s Call, games which have strong, long-lived communities. In fact, the number one reason players stay with a game is the friends they have accumulated.

One trend in upcoming games is to attract smaller player bases by creating a game that appeals to a particular subgroup, or a niche, in the player market. Games such as The Tales in the Desert and The Saga of Ryzom attract small but loyal followings. Games in development such as Seeds are being created around a storyline and will attract role-players. Adellion is being created for hardcore role-players, with features such as perma-death and a player-based economy. Another popular idea now is to appeal to the casual gamer, creating games that are action packed, easy to learn, and easy to master. Games like City of Heroes and City of Villains are popular forms of this type of game and can be especially fun for those with less time to play MMORPGs. Of course we still have companies that choose to follow the popular formula, creating games for the masses. These games include Dungeons & Dragons Online and the upcoming Lord of the Rings Online. These games will use their names to market to large numbers of players, especially young players who might be new to MMORPGs. Some researchers are saying the MMORPG market is saturated, so it will be interesting to see how well these games do compared to World of Warcraft and Lineage II.

The good news is there are games out there for everyone of all play styles and new ones are being developed every day. So go find your game and have fun!

References for my article that might interest you:


ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming LRPG Events

October 13TH at Carlton Arms South
Shadows Over Lakeland Campaign Game Night
(Part one of the finale!)

October 27TH at Carlton Arms North
Halloween Party with Horror-Themed Open Gaming

November 10TH at Carlton Arms South
Shadows Over Lakeland Campaign Game Night
(Part two of the finale! Will Lakeland be saved or will it fall to apocalyptic ruin?)

December 8TH at Carlton Arms South
Christmas Party

January 12TH at Carlton Arms South
World’s Largest Dungeon Campaign Game Night

TV Shows You Should Watch

*Heroes* on NBC
*Vanished* on Fox
*Smallville* on CW
*Supernatural* on CW
*Ghost Whisperer* on CBS
*Battlestar Galactica* on Sci-Fi

Random Profound Quote

“Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear.”  -- Harry S. Truman

Coming Next Issue!

Convention Field Report from GenCon 2006
*Babylon 5: Call to Arms* Battle Report
*D20 System* character sheet and background
*D20 System* campaign setting summary

… and even more!!!
The Fantasy Factory

The Best In

Comics, Gaming,

Fantasy, Science Fiction,

Horror and Animation

Since 1987

The Fantasy Factory
Merchants' Walk Shopping Center
3615 South Florida Avenue, Suite 300
Lakeland, Florida 33813
(863) 646 - 3813
TFF6463813@aol.com