

# KNOWLEDGE ARCANIA

## THE HUNT

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED

**NEW FEATURES!**

**BLAST FROM THE PAST**

**CREATURE FEATURE: THE STONEVINE!**











PACTS WERE MADE TO BE BROKEN.

GUILDPACT

**MAGIC**  
The Gathering®  
[magicthegathering.com](http://magicthegathering.com)

# ARCANE KNOWLEDGE

with **PENNY WILLIAMS**

**T**his issue marks *Knowledge Arcana's* return to publication after a long hiatus. We have a new staff, a new look, and lots of brand-new articles for your reading pleasure.

It took little effort for the publisher to convince me to step into the Editor-in-Chief position, since editing is what I enjoy most in the world (well, after gaming and snuggling with cats). I have been a Senior Editor in the RPG R&D Department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and prior to that, I worked for TSR, Inc. as RPGA™ Network Coordinator and editor of POLYHEDRON™ Newszine. And I still do freelance editing for Wizards of the Coast and other RPG companies as well. So I like to think that I bring something to this position besides good looks and a lot of dice.

I'd also like to introduce WizO Scion, our very talented Art Director, who has redesigned the look of the magazine and even contributed a piece or two of art for this issue. He's the one who'll soon be soliciting patron artwork for our upcoming issues, so get those pencils moving!

Also new to our staff is WizO Sinister, who serves as our chief whipping boy—er, I mean, as our Recruitment Manager, Content Manager, PR Director, and Person-in-Charge-of-Everything-Else. If you want to communicate with the KA staff, volunteer to write or draw for the magazine, or comment on the current issue, he's your man—write to him at [sinister@wizo.wizards.com](mailto:sinister@wizo.wizards.com).

We have also gained several new patron editors, each of whom is in charge of a particular content area, as noted below. These individuals are experts on the games they

work with, and they are the ones who gather the articles on those games for each issue. So if you want to write about your favorite game, contact WizO Sinister, who'll put you in touch with the appropriate content editor.

Ras Pechuel, our publisher, has the unenviable job of getting each issue out the door. Since his staff consists entirely of gamers, this task is more than a bit like herding cats. And Monica Shellman continues on as our invaluable Associate Editor—that is, the person who turns material from various sources into usable articles and helps with the copyediting process, allowing me to rest on my laurels.

This issue is the result of our efforts to give *Knowledge Arcana* a more professional look and expand its content to interest more of the website's patrons. You'll find articles relating to RPGs, TCGs, Hecatomb, and other games in upcoming issues, as well as short fiction, interviews with patrons and celebrities, puzzles, and comics. Several new and continuing columns appear in this issue, but others are planned for the upcoming issues as well, including regular reports on the on-site campaigns. Our publication schedule is still quarterly, so you can expect an issue every three months.

So enjoy the new and improved *Knowledge Arcana*, and let us know what you think. More than ever, KA is your magazine, so help us to shape it by contributing.

Keep those dice rolling!

**PENNY WILLIAMS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

---

## KNOWLEDGE ARCANA

ISSUE 4 | WINTER 2005

Publisher: -Ras Pechuel

Editor-in-Chief: Penny Williams

Associate Editor: Monica Shellman

Content Manager: Bryce Whitacre (WizO\_Sinister)

Art Director: Jose Boveda (WizO\_Scion)

Patron Editors: Anthony L. Baxter (Mtal muzicfan),  
Mrking, Jmatthew, Der Leiter, Christina Page, Patrickwr

Special thanks to: Melanie Creel

Knowledge Arcana is a publication for the Wizards Online Community by the Wizards Online Community.

We are always looking for contributions and we would like to hear from you! You may submit your work by going to **[WWW.WIZARDS.COM/KNOWLEDGEARCANA](http://WWW.WIZARDS.COM/KNOWLEDGEARCANA)**, or email at **[KNOWLEDGEARCANA@WIZO.WIZARDS.COM](mailto:KNOWLEDGEARCANA@WIZO.WIZARDS.COM)**

©2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Dungeons & Dragons, D&D, Dungeon Master, d20 system, the d20 system logo, Wizards of the Coast, Duelmasters, Axis & Allies, A&A Minis, and the Wizards of the Coast logo are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. Star Wars is a trademark owned by Lucasfilm, Ltd. All Rights Reserved. d20 is a trademark of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Distributed worldwide by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and regional distributors. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America.



## INSIDE KNOWLEDGE ARCANA...



### THE HUNT PAGE 18



### BLAST FROM THE PAST PAGE 26



### CREATURE FEATURE PAGE 12

## OTHER FEATURES

20

A WALK IN THE PARK  
by John Peterson

## COLUMNS

QUICK & DIRTY DM  
by WizO Paradox

6

CELEBRITY INTERVIEW: WIZO KAYN

32

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: IDDIG  
by Mrs. WizO Kirin

33

NEWS FROM THE FRONT  
RULES VARIANTS IN AXIS & ALLIES  
by WizO Sinister

16

# QUICK & DIRTY DM

BY WIZO PARADOX

## what's the big idea?

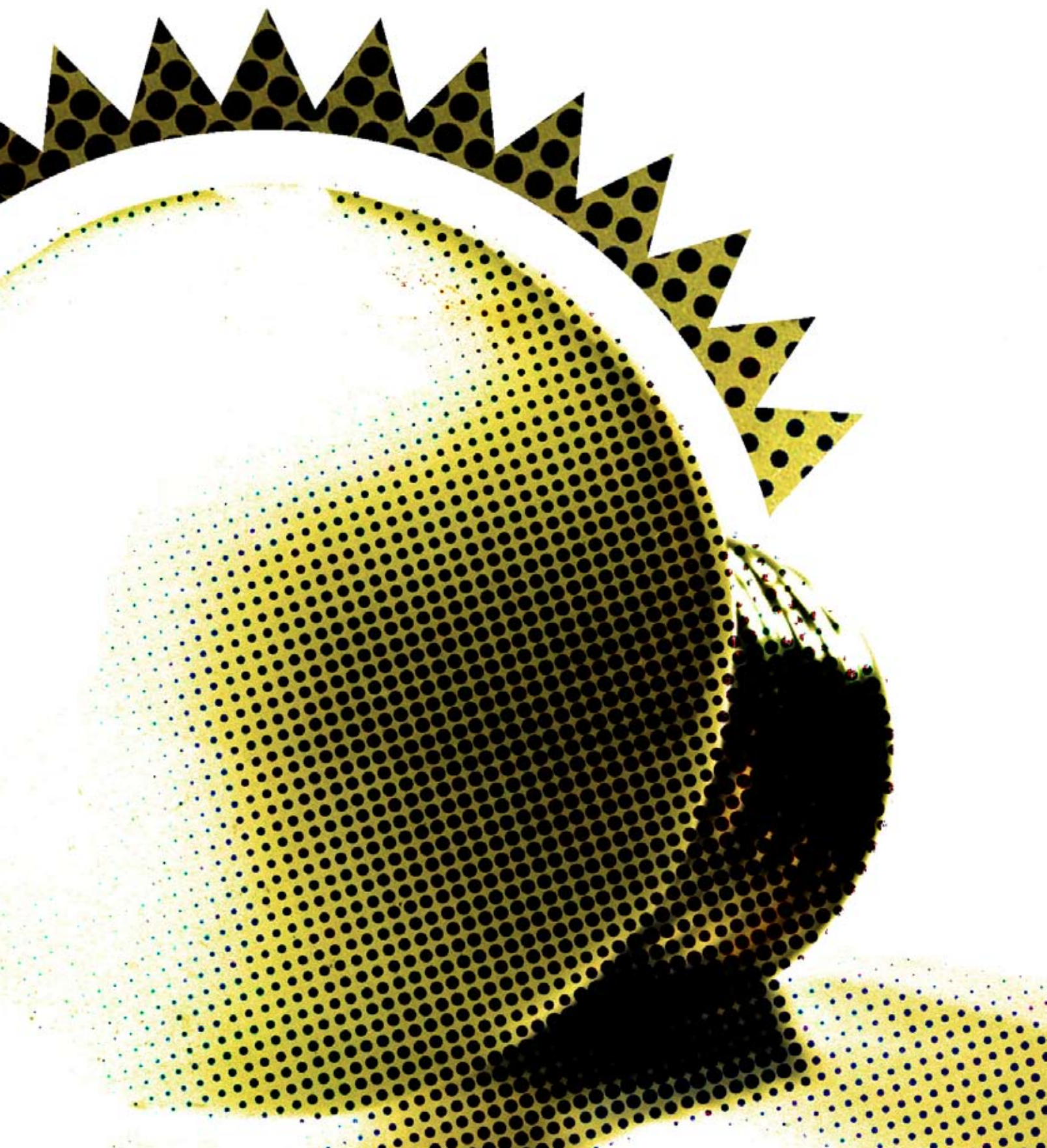
Not every game session is going to be an epic chase across the land, with the PCs fighting off hordes of orcs who want the party's *ring of invisibility*. But let's face it—sometimes you just sit there behind the screen with no idea what you're going to do for your next cool adventure.

Sadly, many DMs lock themselves in one-track mindsets that keep them from thinking outside the box. To get past that block, you first have to realize that the box actually has an outside. Once you have freed your mind from this restraint, you still have to do the work of sorting through the ideas, but this task gets easier the more you do it. Remember the following three caveats, and you should have no problem jump-starting your creativity.

### NO IDEA IS STUPID

Too many folks immediately dismiss any concept presented to them, calling it stupid without really examining its merits. Not liking an idea is not wrong, but establishing a habit of outright rejection is like putting up mental walls that prevent really cool ideas from getting through. Once you have dug yourself into such a mental rut, breaking out can be very difficult. Understanding why you don't like an idea is the first step in opening your mind to the possibilities it might offer.





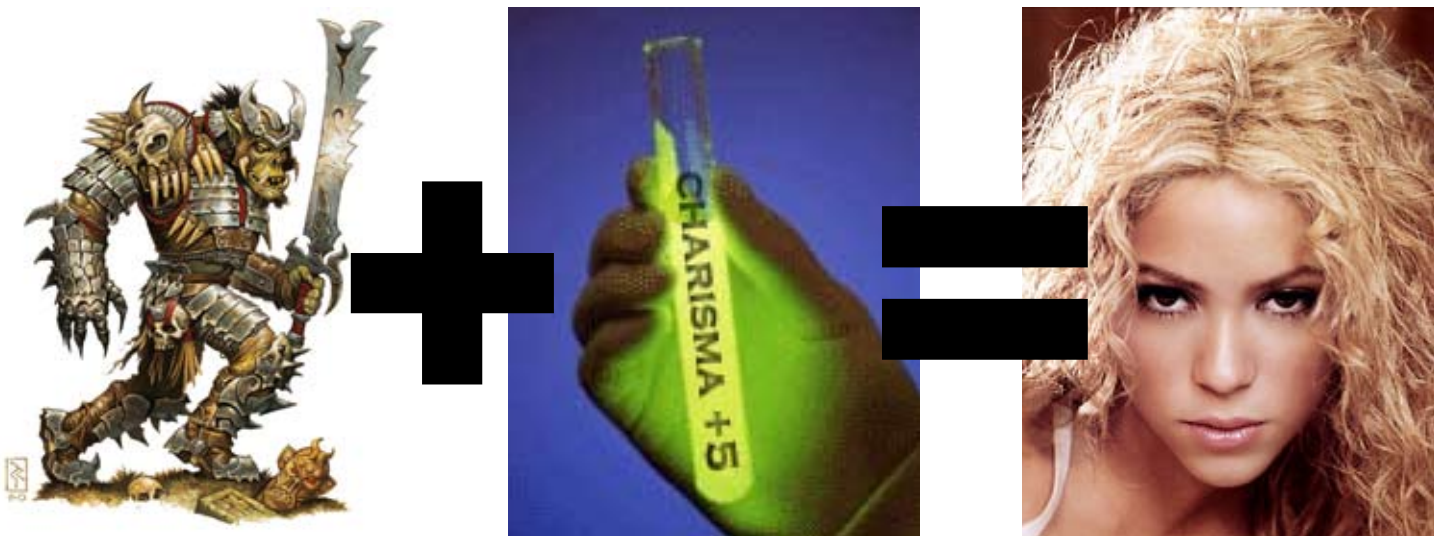
If you don't like an idea, admit that you don't like it, but don't just categorize it as stupid or wrong. Instead, try to understand why it doesn't appeal to you. Once you grasp the reason behind your dislike, you can think about how you might be able to make the idea workable. Understanding that the problem is not the idea but your perception of it is the first step in allowing new ideas to flow with ease. When you open your mind and realize that both the ideas and your perception of them can be changed to suit you, a vast source of adventure ideas becomes available to you.

*Example 1:* I personally dislike psionics because I feel that such a system would fit better in a science fiction setting than in a fantasy one.

*Example 2:* I do not like dinosaurs in the D&D game because I think they would fit better in a pre-historic setting than in one that features swords and sorcery.

*Example 1:* Psionics have a science fiction feel primarily because of the names assigned to the various powers. After all, *psycholuminescence*, *biocurrent*, and *psychofeedback* all sound very modern and pseudo-scientific. Perhaps if the names had more of a fantasy sound, they would fit the D&D world better. Now I know how to fix the problem—just change the names to fit the effects! *Psycholuminescence* makes objects glow with a silver light, *biocurrent* deals electricity damage to other creatures, and *psychofeedback* uses psionic power to boost a character's Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity modifiers. So if I call them moonlight's glow, shocking touch, and mystic boost, they sound like they belong in a D&D game.

*Example 2:* Dinosaurs have always been part of the D&D game, especially on the *Isle of Dread* (an old D&D module from 1st edition). They're really similar to dragons, except that they don't have the cool breath weapons and color schemes. Perhaps if dinosaurs were



## MAKE THE UNLIKABLE LIKEABLE

Once you have pinpointed why you dislike like an idea, try the following simple exercise. Take this concept that you don't care for and try to make it into an idea you do like—or at the very least, fix whatever it is that you don't like. This exercise will help you realize that your imagination has no limits. If you can take what you think is a bad idea and turn it into a good one, then surely finding a good idea in the first place is not so difficult.

If you still don't have much faith in the idea after working it into a less objectionable form, you're free to reject it. But doing this exercise proves that the problem is not the idea itself—it's your perception of it.

more than just large lizards, they might be more appealing. Since halflings in Eberron, my new favorite setting, use dinosaurs as mounts, they must train the creatures in some way, and perhaps even equip them with magic items. What if some of their dinosaur mounts are abused? Or what if a few escape wearing enchanted harnesses that give them bonuses to AC, or on their attack rolls? Now I have some interesting adventure hooks relating to dinosaurs.



## IDEAS CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE

The trick to coming up with adventure ideas is to think in terms of adventure possibilities all the time. Once you have the hang of turning ideas you don't like into ideas you do like, you'll be able to adapt concepts from all sorts of sources. In this mindset, you'll find yourself coming up with ideas for adventures in all kinds of places—and in some cases, in unexpected situations. Here are a few sources I have used.

### MINIATURES

When I got into the *D&D Miniatures* game, I noticed right away that I really wanted certain miniatures, but I wanted nothing to do with others, such as the tyrannosaurus. Naturally, I got one of those right away in one of the randomized packs. Then I noticed that the miniature was actually called Fiendish Tyrannosaurus, so it was obviously more than just a stupid lizard. Then I thought, what if that was just the start? What if a fiendish tyrannosaurus on the loose was mistaken for, say, the tarrasque? Or what if its fiendish nature could spread like a plague, turning every living being it contaminated into a fiendish version of itself? I got all those ideas from just looking at the miniature, and now I actually like the little fellow. Roooooaaaarrrrr!

### DRAGON MAGAZINE

Okay, so you don't need me to tell you that DRAGON Magazine is a great source for ideas. But a lot of folks criticize the magazine for not being absolutely everything they want. I, on the other hand, have been able to pull at least one good idea from every issue that I've ever read.

For example, one letter from a recent Letters section popped out at me, just begging to be turned into an adventure. The person writes as if he were a member of an organization that takes issue with the treatment of elementals in the world of Eberron. Though the letter was intended to be humorous, I started to wonder. What if such an organization did exist? It wouldn't have the same name as this person used, but surely the world of Eberron must have some groups actively trying to free the elementals. What would happen if the party were riding a lightning rail when such a liberation occurred, and instead of just stopping the rail cold, the incident sped it up out of control? What if someone has an elemental bound to a weapon? How would such organizations feel about flame burst swords?

Furthermore, the images in the magazine—yes, even the ads—could be used to represent characters, places, or situations. I personally would not cut any-

thing out of DRAGON Magazine, since I'm a collector, but I often bring an issue to a game to show the pictures to other players. Randomly flipping through #327, for example, I found an ad for another magazine on page 69 that depicted a fellow with a large hole in the seat of his pants. Not only is the image humorous, but it could also be turned into an adventure with a little creative thought. What if the situation were the result of a local—perhaps even a friend of the PCs—trying to take on a dragon? His humiliation could affect the characters if merchants refused to trade with friends of that “incompetent fool.” Perhaps the PCs could help to redeem him in the eyes of the town by taking him along when they go to fight the dragon.

Even when the magazine focuses on subjects that have nothing to do with your campaign, you can still mine ideas from it for future games. When the *Dark Sun* Campaign Setting was released, I wasn't really interested in it, but the magazine's preview of the world did give me a few ideas. Though I didn't care for the setting as presented, the cannibal halflings conjured interesting images. If you combined them with the dinosaur mounts of Eberron, you'd have carnivorous halflings who ride dinosaurs—and perhaps compete with them to be first to the food source.

### REAL LIFE

Sometimes you come across a situation in real life that you think would fit rather nicely into your D&D game. Here are a couple of examples from my personal experience.

**Clerics:** A couple of nicely dressed people rang my doorbell one morning. I was still abed, so I didn't answer, but they left a religious pamphlet for me. It was not the infamous anti-D&D one, but it did get me to thinking about D&D. Surely, with all the clerics in the game world, some of them must go around the countryside spreading the word of their gods to the masses.

The D&D game has plenty of temples and clerics, but do they really push their religion the way they should? When was the last time a PC or NPC cleric refused to help out party members unless they joined his church? Do your campaign's clerics just collect money for healing, or do they demand active participation in spreading the Word? Does your cleric call out his patron deity's name every time he swings at the monster? Does he say a prayer for the fallen foes at the end of every combat? Does he insist that everyone who has died (enemies included) get a decent burial? And does he try to subdue and convert opponents rather than just kill them all outright? Does your cleric follow a prayer

schedule, or does he just read off his list of spells for the day? Such questions bring up interesting ideas for an adventure focusing on clerics. For example, rival priests competing with your party cleric for church members might go so far as to get rid of potential recruiters of the opposing church late in the night.

**Wine:** This past holiday season, one of my brothers gave me two bottles of wine. While enjoying it, I started thinking that wine is not particularly rare in this mass-produced world, but since large-scale production does not exist in a fantasy world, wine may not be as common there. And yet, every fantasy tavern seems to be well stocked all the time. A crowd could get ugly very quickly if the bartender suddenly announced that the shipment of ale didn't come in this week. Or perhaps a rival tavern has sabotaged another tavern's supply. Making ale, wines, and beer takes a great deal of time and work. The PCs could be asked to guard shipments, or even to gather ingredients for the latest batch of their favorite watering hole's specialty brew. The barkeep could even offer them the first tap out of a fresh barrel in return for their assistance in making the beer.

**Other:** News programs offer no end of fodder for adventures. Big world news stories such as a war or a tsunami can certainly provide ideas, but don't neglect the smaller stories either. An armed robber holds up a local store. A hometown hero dies. A town decides to build a new bridge across a river. Some people are arrested for fighting in the streets. Local law enforcement gets rid of a troublesome gang. A new shop opens in town. The local library is in need of books. A home burns to the ground, leaving three families homeless. Any of these stories could be used as sources of adventure.

#### TV AND MOVIES

A typical, run-of-the-mill vampire who's been terrorizing the local populace. Or perhaps he remains in hiding and hires the adventurers to find the cure for him.

*The Stand*, a TV movie about a plague that almost wipes out the entire population, could make for interesting adventures if you didn't copy the exact characters. And the fact that D&D characters can travel to other worlds—perhaps even taking the plague with them—could add considerable depth to such a plot.

The old D&D cartoon can also be a great source of ideas for plots or characters. Rather than having one *ring of invisibility* that the entire orc population wants, your PCs could have a set of magic weapons that the Forces of Evil need.

When you adapt a plot from the media, don't forget to change the characters just enough to fit your campaign. You could have Arnold Schwarzenegger as the NPC fighter in every game session, but it would be funnier if a character from a smaller race, such as a halfling or a gnome, were trying to ham it up in one of Arnold's famous roles. Imagine a quiet halfling, or a gnome standing at near-attention all the time—emotionless and almost robotic.

#### OTHER EDITIONS

I've been playing D&D for years, and I've accumulated quite a collection of books from all editions of the game. It seems like a terrible waste to throw out books from older editions, even though I'm playing only the current one. But converting modules is not difficult at all—I just need to update the statistics blocks for the NPCs and make sure I'm using the current versions of the monsters. So if a module calls for eight ghouls, I just use the current rules for ghouls. The story and background information do not need to change at all. For example, Bargle (known later as Bargle the Infamous) is my favorite bad-guy wizard. I try to give him a special appearance in every game I run, though he tends to stay in the background—either sitting in a tavern or visiting the same shop as the characters.

Maps from the various older game worlds also come in very handy. One of my favorites is the hex map from the Basic D&D game. I still enjoy poring over old maps, just imagining adventures and wilderness encounters.

Puzzles are also readily recyclable. For example, one classic puzzle goes, "OTTFSS, what's next in line?" The game's old-timers would probably know exactly where that puzzle is from and what the answer is. (The answer is at the end of the article, for you newbies.) You shouldn't recycle puzzles too frequently, however, since they wouldn't present much of a challenge for players who have seen them before.

The 1st edition was a time for exploration of all that D&D offered. *Manual of the Planes* was one of my favorite books from that period, and two others of note were *Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* and *Wilderness Survival Guide*. And again, maps, artwork, and NPCs from this era can be used to enhance your current games. Famous NPCs from this time include Strongheart and Warduke (who was updated for 3rd edition in a recent DUNGEON Magazine).

The 2nd edition of the game produced the greatest number of worlds and accessories of any edition so far, and it's easy to mine them for ideas. In my opinion, the most useful accessory for D&D—regardless



of edition—is the *Campaign Sourcebook and Campaign Guide*. The title is long, but the book is a great reference. The *Decks of Encounters* were made just to provide ideas for adventures. I also have *Encyclopedia Magica*, which contains thousands of magic items that characters can go on quests to find. And *Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue* offers many mundane items that can form the basis for adventures—especially if the characters work for Aurora to collect items for the catalogue.

Adapting adventures from one edition to another is fairly easy. “If you’ve got the fluff, you’ve got the stuff,” as it were. Descriptions, events, and character names do not need to be converted. If a module calls for a red dragon, then just use the statistics from the edition you’re using. Yes, this kind of preparation does require work, but using any module requires work, since you have to read it and adapt it to match your particular group and its play style. After all, the D&D game does not play by itself, nor has it ever been played right from the books without some modification along the way. Players of the older editions may enjoy the *EBERRON Campaign Setting*, though they would have to make some special house rules for the various races and classes that are unique to that world. For example, any warforged character would probably have a Strength score of 18/XX (randomly rolled on d%) in a 1st-edition game. The conversion can be done, but you do have to put some effort into it.

## SUMMARY

Ideas are all around us. While this article series generally focuses on shortcuts, the DM still has to do a certain amount of work to prepare. But thinking about ideas outside the game allows more time for regular prep work, such as drawing the maps, assembling the monsters, and creating the flavor text.

A good DM is one who can see the possibilities rather than the limitations of the game rules or system.

Keeping your mind open to new ideas allows your game to grow, sometimes in unexpected directions. Be sure to check out the d20 message board “Playing with Everything” (<http://boards1.wizards.com/forumdisplay.php?f=422>) for more ideas on combining various sources into one game.

“OTTFSS” is a puzzle that appears in the featured solo adventure in the old red D&D boxed set. You can double your character’s gold if you guess correctly, or lose it all if you guess wrong. The answer is “E” (One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, and Eight).

WizO Paradox lives on the East Coast with his wife and her cat. He has played D&D since 1983 and likes all editions of the game. His favorite setting is Planescape, and he collects speckled dice.





# Creature Feature

## the Stonevine

BY MONICA SHELLMAN, WITH PENNY WILLIAMS  
AND THE WIZARDS ONLINE COMMUNITY

The band of four heroes was not in good spirits. It was Miale's fault—the icy elf wizard had been especially touchy during this trip to the once-magnificent city that was still sacred to her people. Every time Lidda, the little halfling rogue, had wanted to loot an interesting-looking building, or climb up to the mostly collapsed rooftops, the wizard had glowered at her mercilessly. And Tordek, the sturdy dwarf fighter, had figured out days ago that he had better not comment on the shoddy construction of the stone edifices. Only the cleric, a human by the name of Jozan, had had enough foresight to keep silent from the beginning so as not to end up on the wrong end of one of Miale's spells.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when the elf looked up from her scrap of map and said icily, "This is the place." She pointed to a wild, overgrown area that must once have been a tasteful garden. But despite the years of neglect, the flowers and vines that filled the ancient garden made it seem somewhat more inviting than the rest of the ruined city.

A crumbled stone wall was all that remained of the small building on Miale's map. The plants had taken over the entire site, choking out all other growth and even twisting in and out of the stone walls in spots. The wall, nearly intact in a few places and almost gone in others, varied in height from 5 to 20 feet.

"Well, lass, I hope your zarathustra is in there," Tordek rumbled. Miale gave him a haughty glare. "It is called a *zarangan*," she said, "and I assure you, it is quite valuable to us."

"Hey, look! A chest," squealed Lidda excitedly. Sure enough, against the farthest wall, a small but ornate silver chest lay entangled in a mass of vine roots. The choking roots gave mute evidence that the chest must have been resting there for a very long time.

Lidda fidgeted in her excitement and tugged on Tordek's arm. "Come on! Let's go check out the chest," she begged. "It might even have your special rock thing in it," she added, grinning sweetly at Miale.



Mialee arched a brow at the over-eager halfling, but before she could say anything, Lidda had started toward the chest. The dwarf followed her, an avaricious gleam lighting his eyes as he regarded the shiny box.

The cleric, who had been carefully eyeing the area, suddenly shouted, "Wait! Something's not right here." The others turned toward him. "That plant looks really weird," he said. "I mean, vines aren't supposed to have bark patches and twigs."

A chill silence descended on the group for the space of a heartbeat. Then Lidda said, "Tordek, I think we'd better go back to the others." But before they could move a muscle, four barbed vines suddenly came to life and snapped toward the greedy pair. The two vines that hit the dwarf bounced harmlessly off his plate mail, but the little halfling was not so lucky. One vine wrapped around her ankle, cutting through her boot as it yanked her off her feet. She fell with an audible thud.

Tordek struck back with amazing swiftness. Roaring like a wounded bull, he swung his waraxe, slicing through a vine and severing it. Mialee immediately backed away to make sure she remained out of the plant's reach, then began to chant some arcane words. She flicked her finger, and three small bolts of blue energy sped toward the thick trunk from which the vines sprouted.

Glancing to the side, Mialee noticed the cleric grasping the symbol of his god and intoning a prayer. "What are you doing, Jozan?" she asked. "Can your spell get Lidda out of there?"

The cleric shook his head. "*Bull's strength*," was all he said before rushing toward the mass of tentacles that was attacking his friends.

While Tordek continued his vicious assault on the vines, Lidda struggled to get to her feet, but her movements were unusually clumsy. "Crud, I think this stupid thing poisoned me!" she whined, but the others were too busy to offer much sympathy. "Let's attack its trunk, Tordek," she said, drawing her short sword and following the dwarf, who was making his way toward the wall.

"Watch out," shouted Tordek. A moment later, the stone wall crumbled, sending a shower of falling rock onto the dwarf and the halfling. "By Moradin's cheek curls, the wall is alive!" exclaimed Tordek, glancing briefly at his bruised arm before raising his axe and shield again.

"It wasn't the wall," Mialee called from her position of safety. "The creature did that!" The elf drew a slim wand from her belt and pointed it at the trunk. "Die, monstrosity!" she cried, and once again bolts of energy sped toward the vine, leaving nasty-looking scorch marks in its pulpy flesh.

Meanwhile, Jozan steadily bashed at the plant's twitching vines while trying to plow his way toward the trunk. A vine wrapped itself around his arm and drew blood, but the cleric managed to stay on his feet when it tried to drag him to the ground.

Seemingly angered by the assaults, the trunk suddenly bent double and smacked Tordek in the head, eliciting a robust curse from the hardy dwarf. Lidda jumped forward unsteadily and stabbed at it with her short sword, but the little weapon harmlessly bounced off a patch of hard bark. "Plants aren't supposed to be this tough!" she pouted, giving the creature a petulant little kick. The impulsive action caused her to stumble, but she managed to regain her footing.

"Watch it," Tordek barked, cleaving a piece of wood from the trunk with his mighty axe. "Jozan, come and help me!"

The cleric waded forward. "These vines look like someone stitched them together out of scraps, like my granny's quilts," he mused aloud. "What is this thing?"

"Doesn't matter what it is," Mialee said, firing more energy bolts from her wand. "Just concentrate on killing it, will you?"

Tordek mouthed a bad word in the elf's general direction but continued his merciless assault. Jozan's heavy mace had crushed the vines in several places, but the effort was taking a heavy toll on the brave cleric. Blood was running down his face, and his movements had slowed considerably. "Pelor, give me the strength to strike this monstrosity down," he shouted, his voice as steady as always. A mighty blow of his mace sent a shower of splinters from the trunk, but the monstrous vine still lived.

Lidda stabbed downward in frustration, finally sinking her blade into the trunk. She laughed triumphantly as the creature ceased all movement. "Ha! That'll teach you to poison me," she crowed, waving her sword above her head and beginning a little victory dance. But the poison still coursing through her body had made her so sluggish that she tripped over her own feet and fell flat on the ground. Tordek and Mialee suppressed their chuckles, while the cleric tended to the wounded.

Breathing heavily, Tordek grunted as he reached for the silver chest. "This chest had better have some really nice treasure," he warned as he handed it to Lidda, who had regained her footing thanks to the ever-courteous Jozan. The halfling stretched her fingers, then went to work on the lock with her special tools. Finally, the chest popped open, and all four adventurers gasped in amazement at what they saw nestled inside.

But that's a story for another time.



## STONEVINE

CR 5

Neutral Large Construct

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +3, Spot +3

**AC** 22, touch 7, flat-footed 22

**hp** 74 (8 HD); fast healing 3; DR 5/adamantine

**Immune** ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, necromancy effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, stunning, and any other effects that require Fortitude save unless they also work on objects or are harmless

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +0, **Will** +7

**Speed** 10 ft. (2 squares)

**Melee** trunk slam +11 (1d8+6) or

**Melee** trunk slam +11 (1d8+6) and 4 tentacle rakes +6 (1d6+3 plus poison)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

**Base Atk** +6; **Grp** +16

**Atk Options** poison, trip

**Special Actions** collapse wall

**Abilities** Str 22, Dex 7, Con —, Int 7, Wis 16, Cha 13

**SQ** stone shape

**Feats** Improved InitiativeB, Iron WillB

**Skills** Craft (trapmaking) +4, Hide +5

## STONEVINE

The stonevine is a construct created from plants of various kinds. It is often used as a guardian by wizards, and sometime by druids.

**Collapse Wall (Su):** Once every 1d4 rounds, a stonevine can create a minor telekinetic tremor that causes a section of ceiling or wall about 10 feet square and 1 foot thick to collapse. To use this ability, the stonevine must first have used its stone shape 0ability to weaken the wall or ceiling. A given 10-foot section of wall can have only one slab ready to fall at a time.

The stonevine can use this ability to loosen a slab of stone a little less than 1 inch thick and weighing no more than 350 pounds. The creature can move the slab up to 10 feet horizontally while it falls. The falling slab covers a 10-foot-square area and deals 2d6 points of bludgeoning damage to each creature and object caught under it. If the slab falls more than 10 feet, each extra 10 feet of falling distance (rounded down) increases the damage by +1d6 points. For example, a slab that falls 20 feet deals 3d6 points of damage, and a slab that falls 30 feet deals 4d6 points of damage.

No matter how far a slab falls, a DC 15 Reflex save reduces the damage by half. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Poison (Ex):** Injury, Fortitude DC 15, initial damage 2d4 Dex, secondary damage 1d4 Dex. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Stone Shape (Su):** Once every 10 minutes, a stonevine can soften and shape up to 25 cubic feet of stone, as if using a *stone shape* spell (caster level 15th).

**Trip (Ex):** A stonevine that hits with a tentacle attack can attempt to trip its opponent (+11 check modifier) as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the stonevine.



## STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

A stonevine uses its stone shape ability to prepare its lair well in advance of any combat. It loosens stones in walls or ceilings at strategic points, so that it can later cause use its collapse wall ability to drop them on opponents.

When attacked, the stonevine first tries to drop loose stones from the ceiling or nearby walls onto opponents before they can close to melee. Once one or more opponents are within reach, the stonevine attacks with its barbed vines, using the poison they bear to its advantage. Tripping an opponent with its vines is even more effective when the stonevine can take advantage of its trunk slam.

Typically, a stonevine disposes of fallen foes by encasing the bodies in stone, along with all their possessions. Occasionally it decides to root itself in a new location if the presence of too many fallen foes interferes with the areas of stone available for shaping.

## ECOLOGY

Stonevines are typically used as guardians by wizards or druids. Because they are constructs, they need not eat or sleep—they simply exist to carry out orders. They have enough intelligence to create rudimentary strategies for carrying out their orders, however, and to choose the best locations in a given area to place themselves and their traps.

**Environment:** Though stonevines can be found anywhere, they are most often encountered in warm or temperate areas of ruins, or underground in dungeons, where they can use their stone shape ability to the fullest. The stonevine's preferred method of hiding is to use stone shape to alter the area around it, so that it looks like nothing more than a normal plant growing within the rubble.

**Typical Physical Characteristics:** At first glance, a stonevine looks like a stout, sturdy vine of some sort. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the plant has parts that it shouldn't, such as bits of bark and twigs instead of vines. In fact, the creature appears to have been stitched together from various bits of plant material, in a manner similar to the process used to create a flesh golem.

Furthermore, a successful DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that some of the stonevine's leaves are the wrong shape, and that at least a few of its roots extend down into rock, from which no plant could possibly draw sustenance.

## SOCIETY

Stonevines do not band together; each is created for a specific purpose. A stonevine has no morals or values—it exists only to follow orders in the most expedient way possible.

**Alignment:** A stonevine is usually neutral, but occasionally one that has had long exposure to its creator adopts that individual's alignment.

## TYPICAL TREASURE

Stonevines have only the treasures they guard. They do not collect valuables from fallen enemies.

## ADVANCED STONEVINES

Stonevines advance by Hit Dice (6–10 HD [Large], 11–15 HD [Huge]). The larger specimens are created by more powerful spellcasters.

## CONSTRUCTION

The pieces of a stonevine must come from normal, living plants, though they can be any kind. Assembly requires a minimum of ten different plants—one or two for the trunk, four for the vines, and the remainder for the foliage. In some cases, more plants may be necessary. Special essences and stitching fibers worth 5,000 gp are also required.

Assembling the body requires a DC 17 Craft (woodworking) check or a DC 17 Heal check.

CL 14th; Craft Construct (see page 303), *animate plants*, *bull's strength*, *geas/quest*, *limited wish*, *caster* must be at least 14th level. Price 90,000 gp; Cost 50,000 gp + 3,400 XP.

*Monica Shellman lives in southern California with all her gaming stuff and some kid who calls her "mom" and makes her feed him. She has been previously published in the prestigious Tsurlagol Herold. It is not her fault you are too uncool to have ever heard of it.*

*Penny Williams joined the roleplaying game industry as Game Questions Expert for TSR, Inc. in the 1980s. Since then, she has served as RPGA Network Coordinator, POLYHEDRON Newszine editor, and Senior Editor and Coordinating Editor for the RPG R&D Department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Now a busy freelancer, Penny edits for several game companies.*

*When not enhancing the cruelty of designers' creations, Penny puts up jam, works jigsaw puzzles, and works as a substitute teacher for all grade levels.*



# NEWS FROM THE

# FRONT

BY WIZO SINISTER

If you've checked out the Avalon Hill boards recently, you've probably read the posts of several intrepid amateur game designers who are trying their hands at making new rules and components to inject more realism into *Axis & Allies*. I'd like to take this opportunity to applaud their efforts. Throughout my 14-year love affair with this grand strategy game, my buddies and I have made nearly a dozen different variants. I would love to share them all with you, but I think it's probably better to share my ideas on the process and maybe provide some helpful suggestions for creating your very own variant.

First off, it's important to understand that variant isn't a dirty word. After you play your first two hundred or so games of *Axis & Allies*, it's natural to get interested in different rules that might make it even more fun and exciting. A great game by itself, *A&A* provides a solid base on which to build a plethora of new ideas.

So where do you start? Below are five simple rules for making *Axis & Allies* your own game while still keeping its basic systems intact.

## 1. KEEP IT SIMPLE

This rule forms the foundation of any variant game design. A variant runs off the basic system of its core game, so don't mess with the mechanics more than necessary. In *Axis & Allies*, for example, the IPC cost, dice mechanics, order of play, and territo-

ries on the map have all been sorted out for you, so those aren't good areas to change.

When you make up an *A&A* variant, concentrate on simple changes that can provide an interesting game. If you make radical sweeping changes, the game isn't *Axis & Allies* anymore—it's a whole new system that all the players have to learn. A new game isn't necessarily bad, but keep in mind that it took twenty years to bring about the near-balance between teams that keeps *Axis & Allies* interesting. If you make sweeping changes, you'll be trying to sort out all the bugs for the next twenty years.

## 2. OUTLINE YOUR GOALS

This point seems obvious, but the truth is that many people starting tinkering with game mechanics without any clear direction. But to make any sort of meaningful variant, you first need to know what you want to accomplish.

If you want more simulation and realism with the interplay of armor, then concentrate on that aspect of the game. Perhaps you disagree with how well tiger tank armor compares with Allied armor. If so, look at Rule #1, above, and keep your changes simple and to the point. You needn't change the tank IPC cost, its attack and defense capabilities, or its movement ratings when a simple new rule such as the following works just as well.

Example: Any German tank hit may make a d6 roll; on a 1 it ignores the hit.



This simple variation doesn't violate Rule #1 by adding all sorts of abilities, changing the IPC cost, or messing with the overall balance of the game. In fact, only one in six tanks can be saved by this rule. The new rule works just fine and doesn't require me to change the force setup card of every nation or print new unit costs. You want it even more armored? Change the rule so that 1s and 2s negate the hit. Just don't fall into the trap exemplified by the next rule.

### 3. DON'T OVERPOWER

Players make up variants because they want to add some particular nuance to the game. Often, the change concerns an issue about which the player has particularly strong opinions. All too often, however, such players succumb to the temptation to overdo the change. For instance, perhaps you feel that subs should be more effective with their secret shots, so you allow them to hit at 4. Normally, such a change might not be too big an issue, but adding the tech super subs on top of it makes subs much more valuable than a battleship. Clearly, this rule is overpowered.

If you don't want to get caught in this kind of trap, do a reality check on your proposed new rule by asking your fellow players their opinions. Other players can help you judge how powerful a given rule or ability is likely to be. If you can't get a conclusive opinion from your fellow players, then it's time to playtest the rule and see how it affects the balance between the side that benefits from it and the side that doesn't.

### 4. AVOID CHANGING THE BASICS

"If it ain't broken, don't fix it," goes the old saying. Changing the force setup, sequence of play, IPC start costs, and the like means you'll have to playtest your variant over and over. So before you delve too deeply into "fixing" the mechanics, think about how the revised game was made. If the designers couldn't get it perfect in the playtesting they performed, what makes you think you can? They've done the legwork in putting together the system. The basic game may have flaws, but all in all, it's pretty well balanced.

When creating your own variant, consider the Larry Harris tournament rules as an example of how to go about it. While these rules change many aspects of the game, they are far from a complete rules overhaul. So make your own variants complementary to the game—don't try to generate brand-new systems from scratch.



### 5. FIT NEW COMPONENTS INTO THE CONTEXT OF THE SYSTEM

If a few simple new rules can accomplish your purpose, you don't need to add cards and units and charts. But what happens if you need more than just a simple rule? Introducing components to the game can be very exciting, but it can be more time-consuming than it's really worth. Crafting or buying a new component to add to the game is difficult, and the result is even more difficult to share with friends than a simple rulebook is. So when adding components to the game, find the logical place where they should go, and then create them as simply as you can.

The above rules apply to new components just as they do to new rules. Suppose you design an atomic bomb card that destroys ten units and an IC, costs you 10 IPCs to play, and can be played anytime you choose. Such a component is not only unbalancing but also overpowered. An atomic bomb card that kills d6 units once, is discarded, and can be played only on your turn is not only simpler, but it also avoids changing the basics of the game and most likely isn't overpowered.

### SUMMARY

Let's face it, very few players want to learn a whole new game, but most are in favor of a few simple rules that can spice things up from time to time. If you keep your changes simple, outline your idea before starting, don't overpower it, and avoid altering the basic game, you're likely to end up with a highly playable variant. Now go grab your buddies and make your own game of A&A!

*Wizo Sinister resides in Fort Wayne, Indiana with his wife and two cats. He is an inventory manager for a local gaming store, the founder of the Friends of Gen Con (a fan-based gaming club), a playtester for Gorilla Games, a demoer for Your Move Games, and a Moderator for Avalon Hill. He is planning a trip to Catan where he intends to introduce "seize and control" war tactics to one group of settlers while the rest cope with the limitations of resource management.*

^ MORE POWER IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD.

# THE HUNT

BY -RAS PECHUEL  
AND MONICA SHELMAN



-Ras



A flash of light bright enough to hurt the eyes tore through the dark clouds, briefly bathing the barren landscape in a golden glow. Three hooded figures, their bodies masked by voluminous red robes, stood motionless where only lifeless wasteland had been before. Only their heads moved, swiveling slowly as though scanning the horizon. Patient and methodical, the relentless hunters took their time searching, their cold, glowing eyes missing no detail.

Arithos wondered whether he was really hidden from their view as the witch had told him. Maybe they couldn't see him, but he was certain that they sensed his presence in some manner. As dread crept down his spine, he once more regretted leading his friends into the stern Kyallundan Mountains. Securing the Kingfisher Scepter had cost them too much already, and they really had no guarantee that it could actually reunite the kingdom.

The knight's hand went to his belt, where he had kept the scepter ever since his little group had fought its way out of the cursed temple and left the Kyallundan Mountains. As his fingers brushed the scepter's golden tip, he noticed that it was as cold as ice. Did the red hunters have anything to do with that unearthly chill?

Arithos stared at the red-robed creatures again. Their glowing eyes were fixed on him—he could feel it. A chill spread slowly through his body. What was happening to him? The cold was gripping him like an iron fist now. Or was it fear? The eyes, he thought. They clutched at his soul like the hands of undead creatures, sucking the very spark of life out of him.

Arithos gripped the golden symbol that hung from a chain about his neck. Drawing upon the blessings of his patron, the holy warrior at last managed to tear his gaze away from those glowing eyes, breaking their deathgrip upon his soul.

The knight's gaze came to rest on his companions. Of the seven who had entered the temple, only three remained. Kazandre was a spirit witch, one of those spellcasters who claimed they could control and exploit the wild Discordia. Creycathos, the clever elf sorcerer, was studying an arcane chart that supposedly revealed the path to a different plane. And Edwick, the grim and laconic dwarven ranger, lounged nearby, always alert for trouble. The stories held that his ancestors had wielded the golden scepter centuries before the wraiths had obtained it—the very same creatures that now stalked the small band through the barren wasteland.

"We need to get away from here," Arithos muttered, his voice pitched low so that only his companions might hear him. "Can't you feel it? Somehow they can sense us."

Creycathos held up a slim hand. "I need a little more time to open the gate. Keep watching them and let me know if they go anywhere."

"You said they couldn't find us here." Arithos's gray eyes narrowed accusingly at the witch, but she was having none of it.

"No. I said it was the safest place in all the planes." Kazandre gazed sternly upon the usually unflappable knight. "We all knew this would be the price for recovering the scepter," she said. "We also agreed it was worth it. Have you changed your mind?"

Arithos shook his head without hesitation. "No, it was worth it. I just—I have a family now. My wife and children. . . ."

". . . can never see you again, lest you bring the wrath of the hunters upon them as well," she finished for him, not unkindly.

Edwick spoke for the first time in hours. "You two should be quiet and let the elf concentrate on his work," he said, his eyes still fixed on the three figures on the sand. They had not moved from the place where they had appeared—they just stood and turned their cowed heads back and forth. To Edwick, they looked much like hunting creatures sampling the air for the scent of their prey.

The three unearthly figures seemed almost triumphant as their heads swiveled simultaneously toward Arithos. Their burning eyes stabbed into him like needles once again, and he could feel the coldness seep back.

A shimmering dagger appeared in the hands of the first robed hunter. The gleaming blade somehow looked thirsty, as if it had a life of its own. The sight of the dagger slowly rising and pointing directly at him caused Arithos to stumble back involuntarily. In unison, the three hunters took a step toward the knight.

Suddenly, a velvet blackness smothered his vision of the creatures. Kazandre had dropped a thick silk cloth over the viewing orb and was hastily wrapping it up. He could see his own fear mirrored on her face. Her eyes held no glimmer of hope—only death.

Arithos numbly turned toward the elf sorcerer. "They are coming," he said.

*-Ras Pechuel, the publisher of Knowledge Arcana, is a freelance game designer who is involved in more projects than could be reasonably accomplished in a single human lifetime. (No one has had the guts to tell him he's not an elf.) When not engaging in psychological warfare against his gaming group, he likes to pretend to be an artist or a writer.*





# A WALK IN THE PARK

BY JOHN PETERSON

Marak had never been out of Kargam's religious district before, but he had familiarized himself with the layout of the city by talking to the porters and servants at the temples. With its long avenues and ringlike cross streets, the street plan wasn't difficult to learn. But the causeway leading to the merchant district turned out to be a sight worth seeing in its own right.

At one point in his journey, Marak passed through a market and paused for a moment in front of a cloth vendor's stall. The lengths of silk, cotton, and gold-accented brocade were displayed to advantage in the light from dozens of brass lamps. But next to the bolts of expensive cloth stood a frazzled woman selling simple figurines carved from wood and stone. Marak was fascinated with the plain toys. He almost wanted to buy them for his master, though for a foreign servant to give a gift to his lord was unthinkable. But then, he was not a servant anymore. "*You don't have the money anyway*," he reminded himself, and kept moving.

Walking down the broad, paved road in the cool, damp, night air, Marak passed between two rows of stone giants, each more than 15 feet tall. In the light of the torches mounted between them, he could see that some appeared benevolent, while others were grotesque, two-headed monsters. In another place, he would have thought they were meant to represent gods, but in Kargam, who could tell? If he remembered, he would ask Shamuss when he returned to the temple.

Marak received the package from a well-dressed servant at the noble's stoop. The bundle was large, flat, and heavy even for his brawny arms, and Marak had to shift it around often to avoid getting a cramp. He headed straight to the temple with his load, making the return trip in much better time than the initial foray.

Marak handed Shamuss a cup of tea and sat down while the young sage paced. At last, Shamuss sat down and sipped at the hot liquid, careful not to let it scorch his tongue. The shades had been drawn at the sage's request;



he said the dimness helped when he was scrying the ether between worlds. Marak knew of the yearly Conhenci rite performed by the cult of Lorleena, an ancient demigoddess of beauty and riches. The cultists sought to bring her back to the material world, but her return, according to Shamuss and the others, would result in a perversion of reality so terrible that it would destroy the whole city.

Setting down his cup, Shamuss opened the oval package that Marak had brought. He strained to angle the heavy mirror toward him, but he could not get the focus right. Seeing his distress, Marak lifted the mirror into his own lap. The sage stared at himself for a moment, then murmured a few arcane words that caused his image to dissolve, replaced by a rolling gray fog. Eventually, the mist parted, revealing a view of the barren, lifeless ethereal landscape.

“What are you looking for?” asked Marak. “What can you see in a mirror that will stop the cultists?”

Shamuss sighed impatiently. “If the heathens get far enough along in their ritual,” he replied, “we will see the first signs of Lorleena’s form in the Ethereal Plane. That’s where I come in—my task is to sever the demigoddess’s link and close her gate into the Ethereal Plane.”

Marak was puzzled. “If she’s in the ethereal, why should it matter? She can’t hurt us from there, can she?”

Shamuss sat down next to the foreigner. “It’s like crossing a river,” he explained. “The first step in bringing Lorleena to our world is to pull her into the Ethereal Plane. From there, she can be brought across to our world, like someone riding a ferryboat from shore to shore.”

“Ah, and when that happens, we’re all dead,” Marak observed. “Why do they want to do it?”

Shamuss paused a moment, then replied, “The cultists think that if they perform certain rituals at precise times, they can remake the demigoddess into her former self and live out the rest of their days in a fat and blissful state. And some of them probably think they can use her to smite their foes, outwit their rivals, bolster their political standing, or achieve other selfish goals.” He picked up his cup, leaned back farther, and closed his eyes.

“So the others are probably there already, disrupting the ceremony,” said Marak. “And with Jessa leading them, they won’t have any trouble. You said there were only a dozen of these cultists, right?”

“Yes,” said Shamuss, taking another sip of his tea.

“And should the others fail to stop the ritual,” continued Marak, “you will stop the cultists with mag-

ic. And they have no idea that you’ll be there to stop them—magically that is—and send Lorleena back to her dimension. And we all know you’re the best at this plane stuff, right?”

“Right,” said Shamuss, sinking deeper into the comfortable chair.

“Ah,” Marak said one last time. The ex-servant waited for the sage to drift into sleep before slipping the nearly full mug from his hands. He shook his head, only now recalling that he had forgotten to ask about the stone statues.

Shamuss woke late in the morning. The drawn shades diffused the sunlight, and the dim room was empty. The mirror, now hanging on the opposite wall, still showed the same dull ethereal scenery as it had before. Shamuss cursed himself for falling asleep on one of the more important nights of the year and ardently hoped that Jessa had succeeded in stopping the Conhenci ritual.

The young sage crossed the floor and used the magic oval mirror to scan the Ethereal Plane. He examined the seamless gray fabric of the plane for stretches and tears—signs that the ritual had begun. So far he saw no such signs, at least not near the city. He would take a moment later and scan as much as he could, but now he was weak with hunger, so he scrounged some food from the kitchen onto a clay plate.

An hour later, Shamuss once again perused the Ethereal Plane via the mirror. As he scanned the gray landscape, he idly wondered where Marak had gone. Perhaps Jessa had succeeded already, and the two were off celebrating at Hook’s Tavern. “*It figures that they would leave me behind,*” he thought.

Thoughts of Jessa and Marak together bounced in his head as he gazed into the magic mirror. Suddenly, the young sage realized that the gray fabric showed no stretches or tears at all—not even those he would have expected from the normal traffic into and out of the Material Plane. Surely someone or something had to have entered the ether recently, and such passage would have left signs. The sage zoomed in to view a spot favored by the Magisters’ Guild and saw no traces of entry at all. What a fool he had been! He had just assumed that the mirror was working properly—especially for the price he had paid—so he hadn’t bothered to look closely until now. Obviously, they had been duped—and that could mean Jessa was in trouble. Alarmed, Shamuss paused to grab his small bag, then darted out the door into the bright noonday sun.

The young sage’s mind raced. The first step was to find Marak, and the second was to see whether Jessa had succeeded. The large foreigner was likely at the temple,

waiting patiently like a lap dog for Jessa to return. Shamuss had known the man for more than a decade—half of his young life. As a servant, Marak had rarely left the house, and when he did, he could generally be found praying to Pelor at the temple. Shamuss ran there, hoping both to find Marak and to use the temple's holy water as a weak scrying device.

Bursting into the temple, Shamuss looked about frantically for Marak, but gave up quickly. Taking up a golden bowl, the sage filled it with holy water, then retreated to a private antechamber, sat down, and placed it in his lap. When he finally managed to clear his thoughts—a process that took longer than he would have liked—he peered down calmly into the water. In its subtle ripples, he saw the steps to the building where the cult of Lorleena met, then traced his way through the front doors. What he saw beyond pushed the air from his lungs, and he nearly lost the vision.

Inside the building was a bloodbath. The slaughtered bodies of the thirty or so men who had gone with Jessa were strewn about, and no cultists' corpses lay with them. Shamuss bent closer to the surface of the water and examined the warriors' wounds. Evidently they had been trapped inside the large foyer and cut to ribbons by wicked longswords that emerged from moveable side panels. He had not noticed that trap in his magical spying, and his incompetence had gotten these men killed. He looked around for Jessa's body but found only those of her troops. Tears cascaded down his cheeks and fell into the water, causing the image to fade. He shouted and threw the bowl across the small antechamber, where it broke into pieces. He saw the last of the bloody picture fade from the water as it coated the wall.

Shamuss knew he did not have time to visit the Magisters' Guild and borrow a *crystal ball*. He would just have to make the jump into the Ethereal Plane and conduct his own investigation. The young sage ran to Hook's Tavern and rented a private room, paying for two nights in advance and demanding privacy. The innkeeper was only too glad to comply, since Shamuss was a generous customer, but the man was surprised that the sage would not permit even Marak to disrupt him.

Inside his locked room, Shamuss sat on his folded legs and gathered his strength for the upcoming journey, which was always rough on his health. With a moment's concentration, he pierced through the barrier of the Material Plane and found the ether on the other side. Pushing his consciousness into the adjacent plane, he felt the usual sensation of his skin being stripped from his flesh. Despite all of his planar travels, Shamuss had never grown comfortable with the physical sensations involved in jumping from one plane to the next.

Shamuss had never considered the Ethereal Plane a safe place—in fact, his first ghostly encounter had nearly killed him. Only monsters and ghosts could call such a place home, and precious little existed there to provoke territorial instincts. He likened the Ethereal Plane to an ocean whose shore was the closest point to the Material Plane. To date, he had wandered only in the shallows of the Ethereal Plane—he had never attempted to delve into its darker depths. Jaunting there had always been unnecessary after he had learned how to use magic devices effectively, but now he wished he had spent more time becoming comfortable with “walking the fog.”

Shamuss moved slowly through the ether, feeling it suck at his feet while the ethereal wind whipped around him. First he climbed upward to gain his bearings, then he walked in the direction of the building used by the





cult of Lorleena, keeping his eyes open through the blur for any signs of the Conhenci rite. He stopped in front of the familiar doors behind which he had seen such massive carnage. Shamuss hoped none of the deceased had crossed into the undead world as ghosts to take their revenge on him.

After taking a moment to center himself, the young sage glided through the doors and into the dark foyer. Seeing nothing, he continued onward to the main ritual chamber. He knew the Conhenci rite should have started by now, so he walked swiftly down the building's narrow corridors. Pausing at one of the columns, which looked fuzzy in the ethereal realm, he peered beyond it into the main chamber.

There he saw a circle of cultists surrounded by candles. But like him, the twelve supplicants were actually in the Ethereal Plane, not the Material. He blinked to make sure that the vision wasn't an illusion, or that the fog of ether hadn't clouded his spectacles or his mind. Sure enough, it was real, and the ritual was happening right here on the Ethereal Plane. Shamuss watched each of the twelve cultists add a piece to the spell working and step back to rejoin the circle. Just as his mind had begun to weigh the options before him, a heavy hand came to rest on his shoulder, causing him to turn with a start.

"Marak!" he whispered. "What are you doing here?" Shamuss could hardly believe that his old servant was also in the Ethereal Plane, or that he had let his guard down enough to allow someone to approach him undetected. The sage reminded himself sternly that footsteps were inaudible here, and that he should always keep watch around him.

Marak's face was stoic. "I've just come to make sure you do what you're supposed to," he said.

Shamuss nodded and adjusted his spectacles. "Good," he said. "Give me a minute to come up with something." Both of them watched and waited. Shortly, they saw the fabric of the plane begin to stretch and deform, until it was on the brink of tearing.

Shamuss said, "Let's try a distraction. If you can disrupt the ritual by dragging one of the heathens from that circle, I'll stop the rest of the rite with magic. It won't take me long, so we have a pretty good chance."

"No, we don't," Marak replied.

Shamuss squinted at his old servant. "Sure we do! Don't be so. . . ." He stopped in mid sentence when his eyes fell on Marak's face. The large man's expression



spoke volumes, but Shamuss could not wrap his mind around the implications of what he saw there. "We have to stop those heathens!" Shamuss hissed.

"I am a foreigner. I have been a servant to you for a long time, and I have listened," said Marak. "I have understood what you mean by heathen. Am I not a heathen too?"

Shamuss looked up at the large man. In his mind, he knew that Marak was right—that by his own definition Marak was a heathen and therefore would always be subject to his suspicion. With an effort, Shamuss focused on the larger picture once again. He had to convince the jaded man that this was no time to argue. "I. . . We. . . . But the rite . . . we have to stop it!"

Marak's face took on a sterner expression. "No," he said firmly. "I am no longer a servant to you. I have a new master now, and she knows I am not a heathen. But I don't want to see you hurt, so please be still and don't fight."

Shamuss sprinted toward the ceremony, but his movement through the ether was sluggish at best. He sensed rather than heard Marak chasing him, moving just as slowly. Reaching a good position, he stopped and began his spell, but Marak tackled him from behind before he could complete it, and they both spun through the fog. Wrapping his legs around Shamuss, Marak landed three solid blows, finally knocking the sage unconscious.

Shamuss awoke on his side, his hands bound with the straps from Marak's sandals. The taste of blood was fresh in his mouth. In front of him lay Jessa, also bound with leather straps. Her eyes were closed, and she was missing most of her gear. Even with her auburn hair stained with blood, she still looked beautiful to him.

Then Shamuss became aware of the Conhenci rite continuing behind him, and he struggled to turn enough to see how far along the cultists had come. The sight that met his eyes was horrifying.

The great head of the demigoddess had pushed through the tear in the Ethereal Plane. It looked strangely like the head of a ghostly rabbit, but it had terrible, gnashing jaws and sharp spines along the back. Shamuss knew that the form Lorleena took in the Ethereal Plane would be pleasant compared with how she might appear in the Material, and he tried to stay calm, but the Conhenci rite was gathering speed, and the chants had become feverish. Shamuss knew that time was running out.

Turning his head, the young sage saw his bag in Marak's large hands. "Did you look through all of my things just like you did hers?" he asked. "Inside that bag is something that you and your new mistress might want to see."

"Ah," said Marak, but he didn't move.

"You see, like Jessa, I always have a backup plan. The beast Lorleena will be destroyed in the Ethereal Plane before she can get to our world. The only problem with the plan is that it will obliterate every nearby creature in the Ethereal Plane—including us." Shamuss was bluffing, but he did know that one last backup plan existed.

Marak swiveled to look at the sage. "So you would kill us all rather than allow the rite to be completed?" he asked incredulously.

"If it's completed, we'll all be doomed anyway, so we may as well die protecting the city," Shamuss replied.

Marak eased his hand into the bag. He pulled out several scrolls and set them aside, then added Shamuss's journal to the pile. Finally, he drew forth three small figurines and gazed down at them wonderingly, letting the bag slowly slip from his hands. Marak and Shamuss looked each other in the eye.

Shamuss spoke each word slowly and deliberately. "I couldn't help but spy on you last night, Marak," he said. "I know how limited your experience is with the city, and I wanted to make sure that you would arrive back safely. I saw you looking at the little figures that woman was selling and decided to get them for you. I know how much I take you for granted sometimes, and I just wanted to thank you for all of the things you do for me. I was going to give you those figurines after we had stopped the rite.



"I didn't mean that to imply that you are a heathen, Marak. I know I'm confusing sometimes, but I called those cultists heathens because of their cruelty and selfishness. You're different from them—you care about us, and about the welfare of others."

A rush of emotion overcame the big man, and tears began to stream down his cheeks. Clenching the figures in his large hand, he pressed them to his chest and wept. Finally, he wiped his eyes and glanced at the unmoving Jessa, then at Shamuss, and then at the ongoing rite. He was ashamed of his choice now—of allowing strangers to trick him into undermining Shamuss. He didn't want Jessa to know—all he wanted right now was to run far away to another land to escape his errors once more. "*But not this time,*" thought the strong man. "*This time I will pay for my mistakes—with my blood if need be.*" Marak stood resolutely, put the figures in his pocket, and reached over to loosen the straps that bound Shamuss, though he would not look the young sage in the eye.

"Look, don't worry about Jessa, or me, or anything else right now," said Shamuss kindly. "We've got to stop them."

Marak snuffled several more times, then looked up. "Ah," he said.

"Remember the time when Jessa kissed you long enough for me to sneak by the high priest at the tem-



ple?” asked Shamuss. “Let’s try that again.”

“You want me to kiss her? Now?” said Marak, blinking in confusion. “She’s not even awake, and somehow I think that’s wrong.”

“Yes, of course it’s wrong,” said Shamuss. “But I want you to kiss the head priestess there, not Jessa.” The sage nodded toward the rite.

Marak gazed at his old master. “Ah, all right. Will that break up the ritual?” he asked.

“No, but it’s a start,” said Shamuss. “I will do the rest.”

Marak leaped into motion. Moving as swiftly as he could, he surprised the high priestess as effectively as he had Shamuss. Wasting no time, Marak seized the woman by the waist and planted his lips solidly on hers. Her scream surprised the other priests, and the volume of their chant dropped as they glanced in her direction and tried to decide whether to go to her aid or maintain their concentration. All chose the latter option, and Marak continued to hold the priestess tightly, forcing their faces together.

Jessa stirred and felt her head pound with pain. Her eyes focused first on Marak and the high priestess, then on the huge rabbit head with its white spines. She thought she must be dreaming and let the pain overtake her once more.

The high priestess clawed at Marak’s eyes and spun away from him, but he clung to her silken robes and tried to reel her back toward him. She had managed to put enough space between them to cast a spell, and a moment later, a heavy force slammed Marak in the face, sending him sailing in the direction of Lorleena’s head. But he took the priestess with him, having maintained his hold on her robes, and the two tumbled recklessly toward the demigoddess’s open maw.

The high priestess, her body no larger than one of Lorleena’s nostrils, struck the nose of the titanic creature. Marak let go of her and sought a handhold on the monster’s face. After a moment, he found one of the beast’s whiskers and clasped it with both hands. No longer in danger of falling, Marak watched in horror as the priestess, only the second woman he had ever kissed, screamed desperately and fought for a grip on the white fur. Then he saw a huge, pink tongue flick out, wrap itself around the priestess’s head, and pull her down into the mouth. Then he could hear only the chanting of the other cultists. He closed his eyes and waited for the end to come.

Shamuss hovered above the gigantic head of the demigoddess and focused on weaving the magic that would seal the tear in the Ethereal Plane. Marak’s distraction had given him a foothold against the cultists,

but he had his work cut out for him now, as they redoubled their efforts. His attempts to push the immense head back through the void met with some success, and several of the priests broke their concentration to target him with hexes. Shamuss grinned when their spells failed to function as they had hoped, because he knew that the rules for magic were different on the Ethereal Plane. When their hold on the demigoddess weakened, the sage pulled the tear shut.

Marak, his eyes still closed, held onto the large whisker with all his might. He felt something pulling at him, trying to yank him loose, but he held fast. Eventually something gave, and he was thrown backward. Opening his eyes, he saw the horrid whisker lying next to him on the gray soil of the Ethereal Plane. Marak looked up and saw Shamuss giggling with glee while the other cultists fled back into the material world.

Jessa awoke to an empty room. A fire was burning in the fireplace, and she recognized the hooked pokers. She was in a private room of Hook’s Tavern. She recalled the ambush and her strange but realistic dreams. It all seemed bizarre to her now, and she pivoted to put her feet on the floor.

“Glad to see you’re finally awake,” said Shamuss. “And I’ll bet you’re hungry too.”

“Yes,” she said, and paused a moment. “I had the dreams.”

“I’m sure you did. We had a pretty tough time without you, didn’t we?” Shamuss asked as Marak entered.

“You bet,” Marak answered.

Jessa saw the scabs around Marak’s eyes from where the priestess had scratched him and gasped. “But . . . it was a dream . . . I was so sure. . . .”

Marak smiled. “Nah, it was real,” he said. “Hey boss, you want some tea?”

“You know I don’t, and stop calling me boss. You’re a free man, and you’ve earned my respect as an equal, so do us both a favor,” Shamuss scolded.

“Ah, what’s the matter, are you afraid I’m going to try to drug you again?” Marak chided.

Jessa looked from one to the other. “What’s he talking about?”

“Nothing,” replied both men simultaneously.

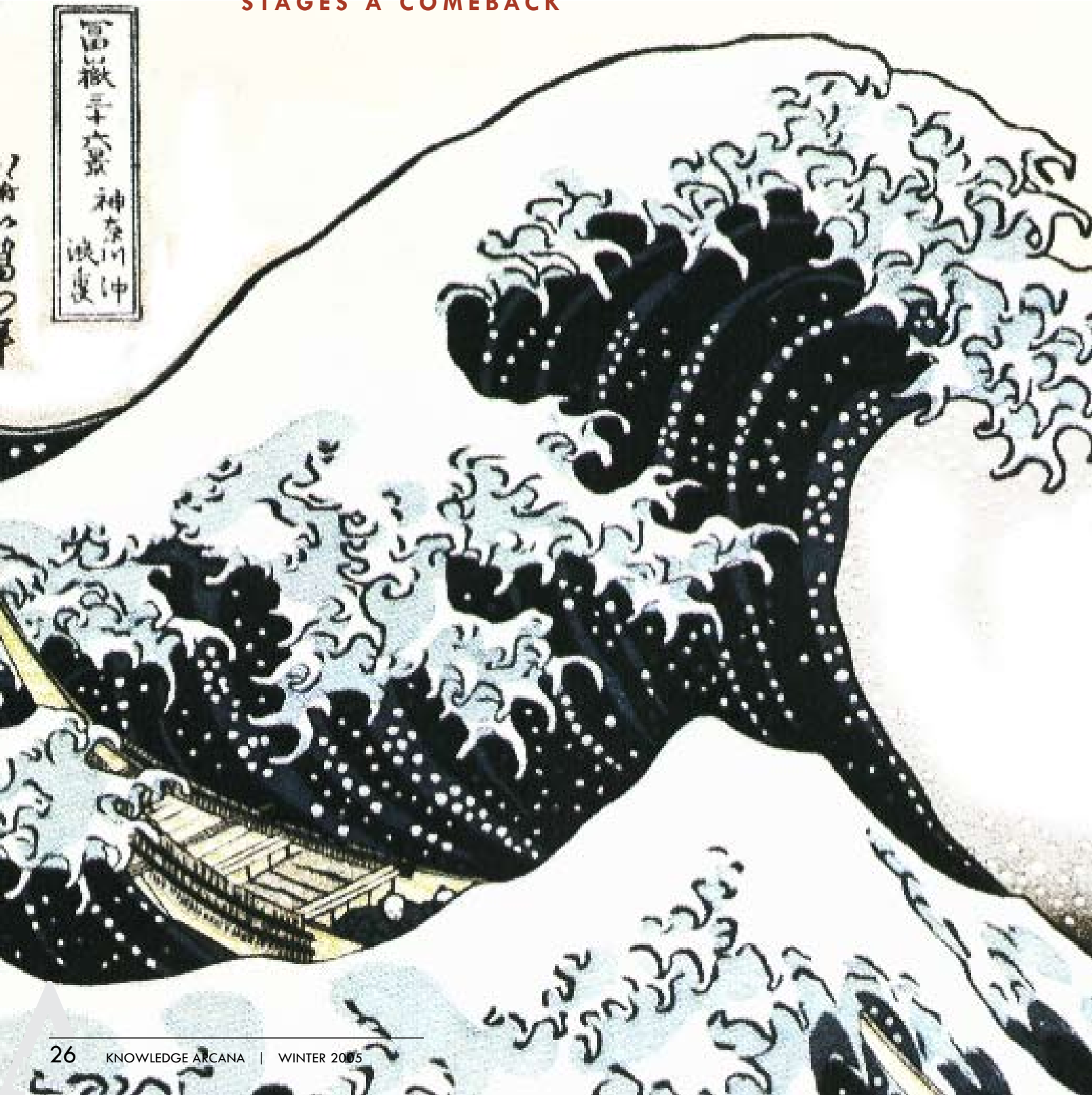
After finishing his stew, Marak pointed out the window, beyond the figures on the windowsill. “So I never got to ask you—what are those stone statues down the street for? I noticed them on my way to the nobles’ district.”

Shamuss looked to Jessa for the answer. “Those were the final backup plan,” she answered. “I’m glad it didn’t come to that.”

# BLAST FROM THE PAST



DARKNESS/WATER CONTROL  
STAGES A COMEBACK





## BY CHRISTINA PAGE

Changes in the DUEL MASTERS environment introduced by recent sets have caused several older cards and tactics to become eminently playable as counters to both new and established deck strategies. In particular, some duelists who have turned to revamping older strategies have made them more resilient to a metagame largely dominated by decks that incorporate Water, Darkness, and Fire cards.

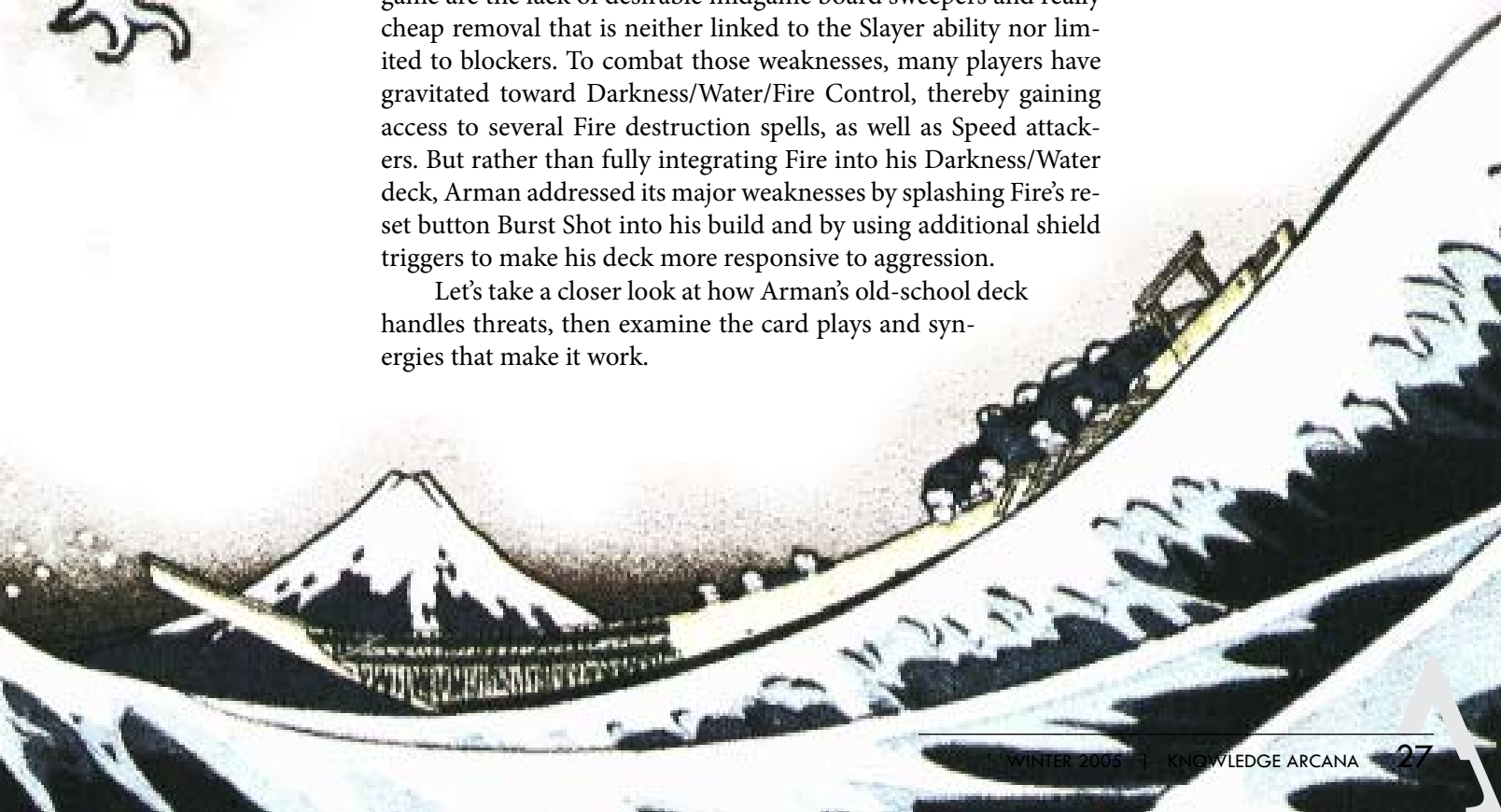
### A MODEL DECK

Arman Niggam was able to pilot his rendition of Darkness/Water Control—one of the oldest control strategies in the game—to a second-place finish in the younger division at the 2005 North American Continental Championship. In so doing, he proved that one doesn't have to abandon all the old-school strategies to remain competitive. They just need to be properly adapted for the current metagame.

One way to tackle the task of keeping an older deck strategy competitive is to zero in on the factors that make it weak in relation to the current top decks, then address those shortcomings so that the deck can have better matchups. Not every old deck strategy can be kept viable, but if the core of an old-school deck was very potent to begin with, the possibility is certainly worth exploring.

The major weaknesses of Darkness/Water decks in today's game are the lack of desirable midgame board sweepers and really cheap removal that is neither linked to the Slayer ability nor limited to blockers. To combat those weaknesses, many players have gravitated toward Darkness/Water/Fire Control, thereby gaining access to several Fire destruction spells, as well as Speed attackers. But rather than fully integrating Fire into his Darkness/Water deck, Arman addressed its major weaknesses by splashing Fire's reset button Burst Shot into his build and by using additional shield triggers to make his deck more responsive to aggression.


Let's take a closer look at how Arman's old-school deck handles threats, then examine the card plays and synergies that make it work.



# THE DECK

ARMAN NIGGAM'S  
2ND-PLACE 2005 NACC DECK

3x Locomotiver  
3x Aqua Jolter  
3x Horrid Worm  
2x Vampire Silphy  
3x Aqua Guard  
3x Illusionary Merfolk  
4x Aqua Hulcus  
3x Emerald  
4x Corile  
2x Crystal Paladin  
1x Crystal Lancer  
3x Ghost Touch  
3x Burst Shot  
4x Brain Serum  
2x Proclamation of Death  
4x Terror Pit  
2x Lost Soul  
4x Energy Stream  
2x Hopeless Vortex



SMALL  
MAN'S  
WATER  
DARK  
DECK  
BEAT  
MUCH  
FACE!

## PLAYING THE DECK

Arman's deck aims to win by controlling each player's access to resources, then transforming its resource advantage into a crushing blow. To play the deck correctly, you need to monitor each player's options carefully and consider how each move you make affects your ability to maintain control of the duel until you can start pressing for the win.

### BEGINNING

Start the duel by setting up some defense. You can stave off an attack by summoning Aqua Guard, but don't play out all your copies—you might want to hold some for evolving. You can also set destruction shield triggers such as Burst Shot with Emerald to slow down speedy decks until your bigger hitters come online.

If your opponent is very aggressive, you could also set Aqua Jolter or Locomotiver for a chance to get a hitter out sooner to attack tapped threats. If nothing else, you can set Brain Serum to improve your ability to reach options sooner.

Once Emerald is out, you can use it to attack small creatures. You can also play defensively by discarding potential attackers with Ghost Touch. If your opponent's field isn't too threatening, you can set up your field with Horrid Worm, or draw cards with Aqua Hulcus or Energy Stream.

### MIDGAME

The midgame period offers a wealth of options that can mirror your earlier plays and increase the resource advantage you have over your opponent. For example, if you don't need to destroy one of your opponent's creatures, you can draw additional cards with Brain Serum or discard a card with Locomotiver. But if you need to force a creature off the field, you can drop Proclamation of Death instead. Plan to launch retaliatory attacks with creatures such as Horrid Worm to get rid of tapped threats whenever possible.

By turn five, you have even more removal options at your disposal. Hopeless Vortex is one possibility, but Corile is usually the ideal play. With Corile, you can buy yourself some time to set up a field that can benefit from a Crystal Paladin drop, then play Illusionary Merfolk to help you gather more creatures. Depending on the field conditions and how many cards each opponent has in hand, you can also go for shield breaks, especially with Horrid Worm, since its effect helps keep your opponent from gaining too many advantages from his shield zone.

### ENDGAME

By the time the late game rolls around, another Burst Shot may let you hard cast the spell. But that's not a play you can reliably perform because of the deck's size and the fact that it contains only three Fire cards. However, you should be able to remove a troublesome creature with either Terror Pit or Hopeless Vortex, and you can crush weenie swarms with Vampire Silphy once you have 8 mana. And if your early hand discard wasn't enough to keep your



opponent starved for options, you can get rid of his entire hand with Lost Soul. Finally, if you can draw the lone copy of Crystal Lancer or take advantage of Crystal Paladin, you have a shot at wrapping up the duel.

## CARD ANALYSIS

Arman's deck employs many cards that are geared toward abusing the synergy between resource denial and card drawing to establish card advantage over an opponent. Not every card offers an immediate advantage, but no card is filler—each performs an important function in the deck. Let's examine them one by one.

### AQUA GUARD

Aqua Guard can come online your first turn to help prevent shield loss from quick hitters such as Sniper Mosquito, and it may even survive some battles. Although losing Aqua Guard to another 2000-power creature is a one-to-one trade, it costs only 1 mana, so you don't cut deep into your resources. It can also deter attacks from creatures such as Emerald, give you quicker access to evolving hitters such as Crystal Lancer, and provide some very cheap late-game defense.

### AQUA HULCUS

Aqua Hulus provides card advantage by replacing itself with a card draw and providing field presence. It can break shields or attack small tapped threats, and it also provides evolution material for Crystal Lancer and Crystal Paladin. Furthermore, 2000 power gives Aqua Hulus a bit of staying power against most early-game creatures.

### AQUA JOLTER

Aqua Jolter can provide evolution material for the Liquid People Evolutions, as well as mana advantage with its shield trigger ability. It basically offers a way to make your deck more resilient to decks focused on creature destruction. It also provides a means to punish faster decks, since it can help you field a creature unexpectedly and evolve your creatures more quickly. Also, its 2000 power can help you destroy other early-game creatures.

### BRAIN SERUM

The 4-mana Brain Serum helps you cycle through your deck faster, so that you can compile card plays and combat the depleting effects of hand discard. Instead of placing a body on the field like Aqua Hulus, Brain Serum lets you dig two cards deep in your deck so that you can rifle through a patch of less effective cards more quickly. Furthermore, placing Brain Serum in your shield zone with Emerald saves you 2 mana when it's triggered.



### BURST SHOT

This 6-mana reset button can come online sooner than Vampire Silphy to decimate weenie hordes—really early if triggered. Essentially, it gives you the chance to make your deck more resilient to strategies utilizing low-power creatures because it can unexpectedly wipe all of them off the board in a single stroke. And like all the other shield trigger spells, Burst Shot can be set by Emerald to save mana. However, because Burst Shot's effect is symmetrical, it has the potential to destroy all the cheap creatures in your deck. Thus, you must carefully weigh the benefits of using it if your field has any 2000-power or lower creatures.

### CORILE

Upon summoning the 5-mana Corile, you chose one of your opponent's creatures and bounce it to the top of his deck. Doing so unravels the time and mana your opponent has spent summoning a creature and slows down his ability to reach essential cards, making blockers such as Senatide Jade Tree and Evolutions excellent targets for Corile. In addition, you know the next option coming to his hand and how to prepare for it. Basically, Corile buys you time to make other devastating plays or to follow up with Illusionary Merfolk.

### CRYSTAL LANCER

Crystal Lancer can be a nightmare because it can slam 8000-power or lower creatures, or break two shields uncontested. Furthermore, with access to some hand discard and creature destruction, you can constrict your opponent's ability to answer Crystal Lancer's presence with retaliatory attacks or creature removal cards. And since Aqua Guard is so cheap, summoning Crystal Lancer has become an easier task in the late game.



### CRYSTAL PALADIN

Crystal Paladin is a win condition and minor board control rolled up into one 5000 body. It bounces all blockers when summoned, making each of your creatures that can attack functionally unblockable for a turn. In addition, Crystal Paladin removes your opponent's ability to prevent shield breaks, protect his creatures, and evolve his blocker creatures for a turn. You can time its drop for a moment when you have enough mana to resummon a cheap blocker such as Aqua Guard, so that you don't leave yourself wide open to attacks.

### EMERAL

On its own, Emerald lays down the foundation for future plays oriented toward card and mana advantage and gives you the chance to obtain a more immediately play-

able option from your shield zone. Emerald also makes splashing Burst Shot more beneficial to the deck, since it provides a chance to use the spell without having Fire mana. In addition, Emerald is the most affordable creature to partner with Illusionary Merfolk, since it allows you to draw up to three cards.

### ENERGY STREAM

Energy Stream provides many of the same benefits as Brain Serum does, with two notable exceptions. First, it's 1 mana cheaper, so it allows you to gather playing options sooner without requiring your opponent to break shields. And since Energy Stream is only 3 mana, it's easier to hard cast it and then field a creature on the same turn in late game. Secondly, Energy Stream doesn't provide any mana advantage if it's a broken shield. Despite those differences, Energy Stream is still a great card-drawing tool and in some ways a more attractive option than Brain Serum.

### GHOST TOUCH

Ghost Touch lets you to slow your opponent down a bit by randomly discarding a card from his hand. While Ghost Touch doesn't provide card advantage, the spell offers mana advantage if it's broken as a shield trigger, could possibly discard an essential card, and is synergistic with the deck's shield manipulator (Emeral).

### HOPELESS VORTEX

Hopeless Vortex mirrors Terror Pit in its ability to remove just about any creature permanently. But it lacks the shield trigger ability and therefore can't instantly turn the tide of the duel if broken as a shield. While it can't offer mana advantage, Hopeless Vortex does provide a speedier "kill anything" play because of its 5-mana price tag.

### HORRID WORM

Each time Horrid Worm attacks, it forces your opponent to discard a card at random. Thus, it helps to ensure that pressing for shield advantage won't grant your opponent a towering card advantage. Furthermore, in certain attacking situations, Horrid Worm can even provide a two-for-one resource trade. For example, if you use it to attack a smaller threat such as Emerald, your opponent loses two resource options—a card from his hand and a creature on the field.

### ILLUSIONARY MERFOLK

When you have a Cyber Lord in your battle zone, Illusionary Merfolk provides up to three card draws from your deck and a rather sturdy 4000 power body in your



battle zone. Because you can refuel your hand with many cards, you can maintain your ability to drop threats such as Horrid Worm, play answers such as Vampire Silphy, and build your mana supply more efficiently. Having access to multiple cards at one time also allows you to make more informed plays and offers better resiliency against hand discard plays such as Lost Soul.

#### **LOCOMOTIVER**

When Locomotiver is summoned, it provides both a Ghost Touch effect and a battle zone presence. As a shield trigger creature, it can also provide mana advantage. Locomotiver is especially effective at punishing Weenie Rush decks by surprising opponents with a hitter that can suicide into their small guys and possibly discard the return-to-the-hand hitter, Pyrofighter Magnus. In addition, Locomotiver has wonderful synergy with Emeral.

#### **LOST SOUL**

Lost Soul can generate massive card advantage if it strips away two or more cards from your opponent's hand. After you cast this spell, your opponent must rely on any shields you break and on his next card draw to keep him in the game. Lost Soul is especially potent when it's timed to your opponent's deck manipulation plays, such as Illusionary Merfolk and Rumbling Terahorn, since it generally peels away many cards or a very important card. Lost Soul also helps to ensure that your opponent has difficulty drumming up answers to your swarm or countering a huge threat such as Crystal Lancer.

#### **PROCLAMATION OF DEATH**

The 4-mana Proclamation of Death forces your opponent to choose one of his creatures and destroy it. Essentially, therefore, it helps you gnaw at your opponent's forces. But since it doesn't let you pick which creature to nuke, it can hurt you if your opponent chooses a creature such as Propeller Mutant. Therefore, Proclamation of Death is a much more effective creature removal option if it's included along with other creature removal tools and shield manipulation cards.

#### **TERROR PIT**

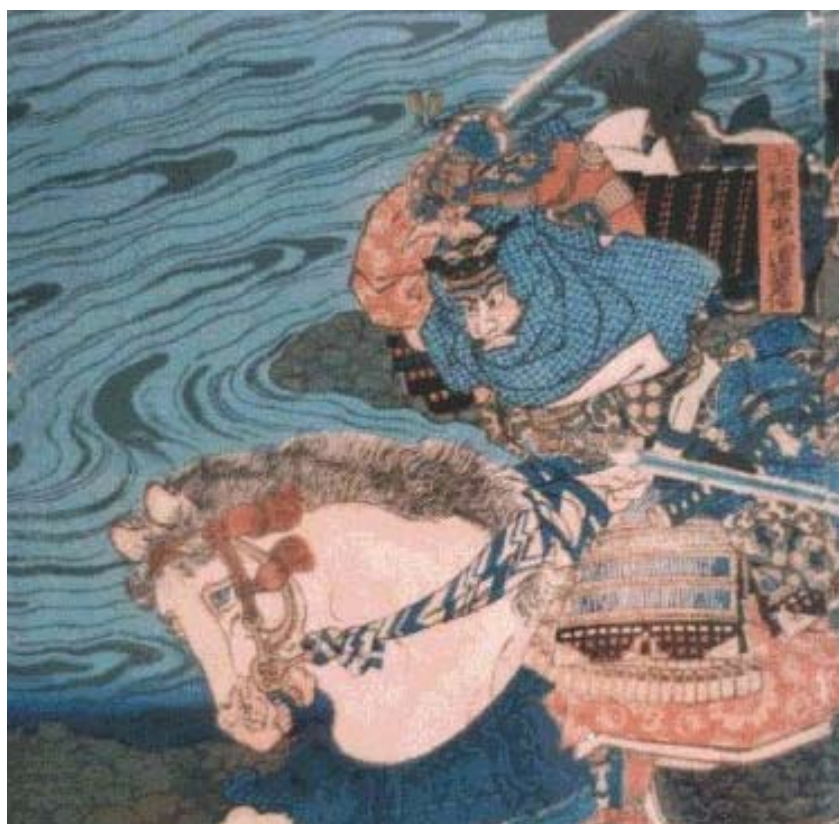
Terror Pit's high level of utility lies in its ability to destroy any creature without stipulations and in its shield trigger ability. When Terror Pit is broken as a shield, you can destroy a creature for free. That benefit, in turn, gives you more chances to invest your mana in plays that increase your battle presence or remove more of your opponent's creatures for less mana. And like the deck's other expensive shield trigger spells, setting this one with Emeral can save you mana.

#### **VAMPIRE SILPHY**

Sometimes, even after you've destroyed your opponent's smaller creatures with cards such as Burst Shot, he can recover and rebuild his field in late game. Vampire Silphy can ensure that a late-game swarm of small creatures can't overwhelm you. Its ability to nuke all creatures with 3000 power or lower in the battle zone can cripple your opponent's ability to evolve certain creatures, defend himself with cheap blockers, and implement his well-laid attack plans. Furthermore, Vampire Silphy can provide a lot of card advantage depending on how many of your opponent's creatures you manage to destroy without losing too many of your own in the process. As with Burst Shot, playing Vampire Silphy requires careful consideration when you have small creatures in the battle zone.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Through his keen understanding of the Darkness/Water strategy and the metagame, Arman Niggam fashioned a deck that was more resilient against many of the game's most popular and successful deck strategies. Other deck strategies from the past, such as Water/Nature Aggro-Control, are also beginning to dominate some metagames again because players have applied some exciting twists or utilized new tools to breathe life back into them. But regardless of how old or new your chosen deck strategy and the cards you employ are, it's very important to playtest your deck diligently, both to make it resilient against your metagame's top decks and to give it proper focus.





# CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

## WIZO KAYN

**T**his issue's celebrity interview is with WizO Kayn, formerly of the ISRP area, now working on the message boards on the Wizards of the Coast website.

**KA: Where are you from?**

**Kayn:** I was born in Miami, Florida, and raised in Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. Right now I live in Tuscaloosa, Alabama—home of the University of Alabama.

**KA: How did you come up with your WizO name?**

**Kayn:** I just make it up out of thin air, on the spot, when WizO Adele asked me for a name. It was originally Ka'yn (pronounced KAY-un), but I've since dropped that silly apostrophe.

**KA: What boards do you work on?**

**Kayn:** I'm on Avalon Hill and Legendology right now.

**KA: What do you like most about the wizards.com message boards?**

**Kayn:** The boards truly offer something for everyone. If you want to debate, you have a place to do it. If you're looking for information, you can search it out easily. If you want to read or publish stories, a board is available for discussing options. Or if you just want a place to hang out, the boards offer plenty of room.

**KA: What do you like the least about the message boards?**

**Kayn:** Least? Hmm . . . well, sometimes I get lost.

**KA: Who is your favorite author?**

**Kayn:** Anyone who knows me at all knows the answer to that one. My favorite is Robert Jordan, the guy who writes the Wheel of Time series. I cannot even tell you how much I love those books.

**KA: Do you have a favorite game that Wizards of the Coast produces?**

**Kayn:** That would have to be the D&D game.

**KA: How did you get involved in gaming?**

**Kayn:** I got into the D&D game years ago, through my son. He was attracted to the dragon art in the D&D books, then fell in love with the game. His interest and the wonderful fiction drew me in (I read all the Dragonlance books and loved them!) Anyway, I became an online roleplayer and eventually came to the community looking for a place to play. My son couldn't believe it when I became a WizO. I think it still amazes him.

**KA: Who's your favorite roleplaying character?**

**Kayn:** That would be Alyysssa, Druid of the Grove.

**KA: Why is she your favorite?**

**Kayn:** I played Aly for years in the ISRP area of the Wizards website. She's the most developed character I have. She came into the CRT and the Grove back in the early days and made friends. The character evolved and went through a lot of changes, just like a person in real life would.

**KA: What do you like best about roleplaying?**

**Kayn:** I love the chance to step out of "my" skin and into that of the character I roleplay. It's just a very freeing experience.

**KA: When you aren't keeping the peace on the Wizards of the Coast message boards, what are you likely doing?**

**Kayn:** Playing in the mud!

**KA: Tell me all about the mud.**

**Kayn:** That would be WOTMUD, the Wheel of Time multi-user dungeon. It's a huge recreation of the world that Robert Jordan built in his series. I've just been made Sitter for the Blue Ajah there. It took me about two years of play to reach that goal!

**KA: Can you think of anything else you want the patrons to know about you?**

**Kayn:** That's a tough question. I just hope they know that we do what we do as WizOs because we want their experience here to be the best it can be. The Wizards website is a great place, with the potential to serve up fun and games for a long time to come.





# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## IDDIG

BY MRS. WIZO KI-RIN (FIONA)

**T**his issue's member spotlight is with Iddig, a longtime regular in RPG Live who hails from Wisconsin, the Dairy State. His maturity, wit, and game knowledge add immeasurably to the chatroom experience for others, and we're pleased to offer a little glimpse into his life and his experiences. Iddig shares his home with his wife and two cats.

**KA:** How did you first get into gaming?

**Iddig:** The mother of a good friend taught my 4th-grade class in 1980 and gave us all a chance to try D&D during class one day. Two years later, a neighbor lady bought my older brother a boxed set for his birthday, and we sat down and started making characters. Later, in 1985, my older brothers started getting out of it, so one of my younger brothers and I saved all our gift money and went in on a Red Basic Set together.

**KA:** Ah, you got in via the establishment. That was uncommon in those days.

**Iddig:** Definitely! Thankfully, the establishment was a bit lenient at times. The teacher's group played at her church, and the neighbor lady was a Quaker.

**KA:** And what made you decide to take up DMing?

**Iddig:** My family moved quite a bit, so I didn't have a lot of friends. But I did have lots of younger brothers (five at last count), and I didn't want to stop playing D&D just because my older brothers (twins) were tired of it. Since I was the next oldest, I took it upon myself to start

DMing. However, I did occasionally switch off with a couple of other brothers so that I could play sometimes as well. We also ran DMPCs. Those weren't the best games out there, but we had fun.

**KA:** Sounds like gaming has always been a family affair for you. Do you still have family members who play?

**Iddig:** Four of my younger brothers still play, and one of the older ones does as well. I've also gotten the wife into the game. We all play together whenever we can. Unfortunately, I don't get to play much these days because I have a very tight work schedule and an hour commute each way to work.

**KA:** Reality is a bitter pill to swallow, isn't it?

**Iddig:** It sucks! But I'm looking to cut the commute time if possible by getting a new job in Madison, where my wife works (making much more than I do), and moving there. Alternatively, both of us might get new jobs elsewhere.

**KA:** What makes a really great DM?

**Iddig:** I think a DM's most important characteristic has to be flexibility. Not only must he come up with solutions to the players' gamestopping ideas on the fly, but he must also be able to let the players do what they want and then let the pieces fall where they may. Also, a great DM must be willing to kill player characters if the dice indicate that outcome, and to ensure that the characters' foes truly are out to kill them, if that's what they're there for.



At the same time, a DM can't let the players walk all over him. He must be willing to put the smack down if the players start acting out—either in or out of the game. It's also the DM's function to jack with the characters (and, as needed, the players) in the course of advancing the evil agenda of the campaign's villains.

Personally, I like to feed PCs as much rope as they want, so that they can hang themselves in the end. Also, I have no problems with intraparty conflict, as long as it's character driven or a natural reaction to events going on around the group.

**KA:** And what's the mark of a great player?

**Iddig:** A great player must be willing to attempt to destroy the DM's adventure, but still work with the DM and the rest of the group to keep it going. Furthermore, the best players know that bribery works. "That last slice of pizza sure looks good! Oooh, look at that, we're almost to the main battle. . ."

**KA:** Give us one of your most embarrassing gaming moments.

**Iddig:** Okay, I was starting with this new group in which one of my friends had played while he was in college. The campaign was a brand-new one, using 2nd edition D&D and set very loosely in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*.

I had made a halfling cartographer using the thief kit from the *Complete Book of Gnomes and Halflings*. I decided that since he was pretty good at picking pockets, he should try to steal a gem that the priest had received. (We were all paid in gems for this mission.) Suffice it to say that he failed horribly and got caught. As punishment, they removed one of the fingers from each of his hands.

A couple of weeks later, I couldn't make it to the game for some reason, so I let my buddy play my halfling for me. Well, despite his +6 for sling use, he fumbled and got captured. When I got back to the game the following week, my halfling was being interrogated. Well, I couldn't give the right answers to the people who had captured him, so he lost his left hand. (Foolishly, the DM chose the left hand because he didn't want to handicap my character. Little did he know what was coming later!) Over the course of the next several weeks, my character lost more fingers for various reasons, but I still continued to play him. By the time the DM mercy-killed him, I think he was down to no left hand and only a pinky and a thumb on his right hand.

I'm now playing a gnome thief (soon to be an acrobat-thief, since it's a 1E game) with this group, and I'm bound and determined not to lose fingers or hands. The character has a move of 3 now, though, thanks to the wife.

**KA:** A move of 3? How did that come about?

**Iddig:** She was playing my character because I had to work, and he ended

up with *boots of half speed*. I'm not letting other people play my characters anymore!

**KA:** If you could be a character class or race from the *Player's Handbook* in real life, what would you choose, and why?

**Iddig:** Does it matter which edition? If it were 3.x, I'd go with sorcerer, but I'm not sure which race. Maybe I'd pick an elf or gnome—elves are much more “willowy” than I am currently, and gnomes are under-rated by everyone. I would have said halfling, but I'm not such a fan of the 3.x version. I want me hobbits back!

**KA:** The constantly eating sort?

**Iddig:** More the homebody sort—the kind of halflings who are content to hang out, have a couple dozen meals a day, and then get dragged off to a mountain with some dwarves. Tolkien's hobbits were pretty resilient—they kept surprising even Gandalf, who had an affinity for them to begin with. But the current edition took a kender and mated it with an Athasian halfling, toned down the penchants of the parent races for eating other beings and stealing things, and turned the resulting characters into gypsies.

**KA:** What's your alignment in real life?

**Iddig:** Probably close to Neutral Good, I would think.

**KA:** And what about your cats?

**Iddig:** They are the pure embodiment of Cuteotic Evil.

**KA:** How do your cats contribute to your gaming experience?

**Iddig:** They help roll the dice. Unfortunately, they usually roll them onto the floor, under the table, then back out from under the table, and eventually either into a floor vent or under some furniture that's just too darned heavy to move.

**KA:** Speaking of dice, sparkly or pearlescent? What's your preference?

**Iddig:** Yes! All kinds of dice! I like a rainbow.

**KA:** How about snacks? What is your number-one, must-have snack for the gaming table?

**Iddig:** I drink diet Mountain Dew, and until a couple of years ago, my favored snacks were Fritos and Bucky Badger brand cold pack.

**KA:** No more Bucky Badger?

**Iddig:** Oh, it's still around, but I can't have it now. And the Fritos have been replaced with fat-free whole wheat pretzel twists, which are tasty.

**KA:** What game accessory do you wish someone would write?

**Iddig:** Hmm, I'd like to see a really *good* book on gnomes—one that gets rid of the tinker gnome stereotype. (Actually, I'm working on that now!) I also wish someone would write up my setting for publication.

**KA:** Really? So what is your dream setting—either one that you're already running, or one that you wish you had time to create and perfect?

**Iddig:** I'd say it's the one I've been running since the late 1980s. It's generic high fantasy—or at least it started out that way—but I've now gotten it to the point where it has a little bit of everything. It still needs a bit of fine-tuning, and I would love to have another DM who's willing to run an adventure in it so that I could experience the setting from the perspective of a player. But I have a lot of work ahead of me to get the setting written down and into a usable format before someone else can take the reins. Right now, I have almost twenty years of it stored in my head.

**KA:** If you could game with anyone in the world, who would you choose?

**Iddig:** Anna Nicole Smith during one of her “thin” periods, for sure.



And then, so my head wouldn't explode from lack of intelligence, Patrick Stewart and French Stewart (Harry from *Third Rock from the Sun*). And I'd have James Earl Jones DMing—can you imagine what a DM he could be with that voice?

**KA:** Who's your favorite game designer?

**Iddig:** You know, I don't really know too many names of people "in the industry." But I like Zeb Cook's stuff for the most part, and Steve Jackson's as well.

**KA:** What's your favorite D&D spell?

**Iddig:** You gotta love *ray of enfeeblement* and the ever-popular *magic missile* (unless the party's in darkness, because you just *know* someone's going to get into *that* whole schtick).

**KA:** Give me an example of how you or a companion used a spell in an unusual way.

**Iddig:** Well, I had a couple of players who cast *grease* followed by *burning hands* on opponents—*grease* to cause slippage, and *burning hands* to light the grease—and the foe—on fire.

In my first 3E campaign, however, the players caught a goblin and a big guy robbing graves and taking body parts. When the PCs moved in to attack the nefarious pair, the goblin hit the dwarf with a *ray of enfeeblement*. That's not really an unusual use of the spell, but it caught the dwarf off guard and caused him to retreat. The player hasn't let me live that one down.

**KA:** How and when did you get started in the Wizards online community?

**Iddig:** Hmmm, I think I got started maybe around 1996 or 1997. While searching the web for AD&D resources and ideas on how to set up a web page for my setting, I found the old TSR site. After that, I began

to hang out there to kill time while writing papers in college—or avoiding writing papers in college. But I wasn't a constant presence—I took a couple of years off here and there when life interfered.

**KA:** So you knew the old TSROs as well as the current WizOs?

**Iddig:** Yeah, but I'll be darned if I remember any of the TSROs' names now. I'd forget mine if it weren't tattooed in the inside of my eyelids in glow-in-the-dark ink. But I think Kip was a TSRO, and so was Draco. I also chatted with Sean Reynolds, then manager of the community, a couple of times via email.

**KA:** What was it about the community that attracted you then?

**Iddig:** I was very quiet back then—a trait I'm sure a lot of people wish I still had. But I enjoyed the chance to talk about gaming, among other topics, and to bounce ideas off of other people.

**KA:** If you became head of the Wizards Community for a day, what would you do?

**Iddig:** Free root beer for all! Umm, seriously, I'm not sure. It all seems to work fine for my purposes. I don't get over to the forum side much, but I have no issues with the chat at all, so I'll stand by my free root beer response.

**KA:** Do you participate in any games here on the site?

**Iddig:** Not really. I'm usually on while I'm at work (as bad as that sounds), and it would probably be bad form to game while at work. Also, I periodically have to wander away from the screen for long periods of time to handle breaking news or a story about inclement weather or some special need that suddenly has to be taped for broadcast.

**KA:** You're a broadcast engineer then?

**Iddig:** Nope, I'm a newscast director (button monkey).

**KA:** How did you come up with your screen name?

**Iddig:** I needed a screen name to log into the site, and the only one I could think of was that of an NPC in one of my campaigns. I created my email address at the same time, so it's pretty similar.

**KA:** Did you go to Uncon? What was your favorite event there?

**Iddig:** Briefly. I sat in on the Getting Paid for GMing seminar. I was going to participate in Brigid's scavenger hunt too, but I wasn't able to get on when she scheduled it.

**KA:** What would you like to see at future Uncons?

**Iddig:** I would like to not work weekends so that I could try a couple of games at Uncon next year. I'd also love to see a seminar on being an evil DM, so that players won't walk all over the people who run games for them. I have no problems with it myself, but a lot of DMs come into the chatroom asking how to deal with problem players. It might be a popular event.

**KA:** You have no problem being an evil DM?

**Iddig:** I have no problems at all being an evil DM—it's fun and I enjoy it immensely. And my players keep coming back for more.

**KA:** Do you have any final remarks to share with the KA readership?

**Iddig:** When in doubt, bring in a herd of large, hooved mammals to keep those pesky characters in line. It's everyone's game, but the majority of the responsibility for making it fun rests on the DM's shoulders. Build your world and allow only material that fits the concept. If the players argue, large herds of hooved mammals suddenly stampeding will fix everything!

KNOWLEDGE  
ARCAN[A]

