

The Outhouse Wall

Volume 4, Issue 3 - June 2009

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY: PRIVATEER PRESS BY A. DAVID PINILLA

Who are they?

Privateer Press is a groundbreaking company in the gaming industry which started its run with the d20 adventures of The Witchfire Trilogy. That trilogy was, in turn, the entry point for the Iron Kingdoms setting which then spawned the two well-known tabletop war games, Warmachine and Hordes. From there, this company of gamers has expanded its role-playing game empire, branching into the realms of both card games and other miniature games.

What's new and upcoming for Privateer Press?

Warmachine, Privateer Press's most popular product, is releasing its newest faction: Retribution of Scyrah. The Retribution are a radical group within the elven nation of Ios that believes that human magic is causing the extinction of their race. Accordingly, they actively hunt down and kill any human magic user they can find. Recently, the Retribution's message has gained popularity among some of the military houses in Ios and, backed by these new found allies, the Retribution is now poised to wage a full scale war on the nations of the Iron Kingdoms. This exciting new faction is slated to be unveiled in September of 2009.

In addition, Warmachine and Hordes both have major milestones coming up in their release cycles: Force Books and the Mk II rules. The Force books are compilation rule books that are intended to bring new players up to speed on the game by way of a compendium of all of the currently released units. Though there has been some confusion thus far as to what exactly these books are intended to do, Privateer Press clearly assures the gaming public and loyal fans that these books do not represent the new format for their future releases. Along with the Force books, Warmachine will be releasing their Mk II rules and Hordes are going to be releasing their 2.0 rule sets to update the rules originally released in 2003. The natural evolution of the game, errata, and various faction releases have created a situation where the rule set has become a little clumsy.

The 2.0 release will clean up the "field tested" issues that have come up in the last few years.

On the expansion front, Monsterpocalypse will have an all new expansion later in the summer. This collectible miniatures wargame features larger than life monsters waging war inside intricate maps, boasting a fast paced battles where entire cities are the battleground. The expansion, Series 3: All Your Base, will be introducing smaller units that combine to create one, large monster to wreak havoc on all enemies called morphers.

Last, but certainly not least, is an exciting new board game from the Bodgers game line, which is the same line of games that have already given us Infernal Contraption and Sabotage.

What sets Privateer Press apart?

Few gaming companies can boast the dedication both from fans and to fans as can Privateer Press. Their fan organization, The Press Gangsters, handles demos in cities all across the world. These volunteers take the time to liaise with gaming stores, local conventions, and individual gamers looking to get into the game. Dan Brandt, the Volunteer Coordinator at the home office in Washington, was

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CONFESSIONS OF AN ACHIEVEMENTAHOLIC BY JAMES ABENDROTH

Hi, my name is James and I'm an Achievementaholic. It's been about 3 hours since I last had an achievement and I'm already thinking about how to get my next one.

It wouldn't be so bad if the achievements I'm talking about were useful, worthwhile things like: getting a better job, finishing a project at the job I have, getting a PhD, curing cancer or winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Those are all respectable endeavors and things I could point to and say, "Look, this is good and I did it."



ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED
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No, I'm talking about Xbox Achievements. Those little messages that pop up when you do something remarkable (or not so remarkable) in an Xbox game. The ones that should all read "congratulations, you're a nerd who doesn't get enough sunlight. Keep this up and you'll either never get a girlfriend or your girlfriend/wife will leave you."

I've kept, and played, games long after I've gotten any enjoyment out of them just so I could pick up a few more achievements. I've played for hours and hours just to get 10 more points out of a game even after I've beaten it and after I wasn't really interested in it anymore.

Some people complain that some of the achievements in the game are too easy to get. "Congratulations, you managed to get the disk in the right place and turn on the console, here's 10 points." Granted, just going through many games is enough to rack up a decent number of achievements and I love it. I've never been the kind of gamer who was obsessed with finding every trick and secret level in a game or pressing up, up, down, down, A, B, start, and then doing the hokey-pokey. Even now, when the hunger for Gamer Points gnaws at the back of my brain like a tiny digital zombie, I mostly just want to shoot people and blow things up, but if there's an achievement for shooting lots of people or blowing things up in a stylish way, I'm all over it.

To make matters worse, I'm competitive about it. Fortunately, I don't have that many Xbox Live friends, so I don't have that many people to compete with. Which is a good thing, because I don't actually have that many points, despite my obsession. I'm not proud of it, but when one of my friends lost his job recently, one of the first things I thought was "great, now he's going to have even more time to extend his lead over me!" In my defense, he got a great severance package and makes about three times as much as I do, so he won't be hurting any time soon and, unlike me, he actually has marketable skills. Still, it wasn't my finest moment and all I can do is paraphrase the late, great Rick James here: "Achievements are a hell of a drug."

Even worse, I'm fairly sure that, like any other addiction, this isn't something that one talks about in polite conversation. Not because it makes people uncomfortable, but because I'm the only one who cares. Even other gamers' eyes start to glaze over if I mention my gamer score. At least one friend has asked why I bother if the points don't get me anything. My only answer is that I do it for the same reason that people climb Mt. Everest: because I've got nothing better to do.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to decide whether to finish the Great American Novel or kill 20,000 more enemy units in Dynasty Warriors: Gundam to get another 100 Gamer points...it ain't looking good for the Great American Novel.

As an interesting aside, "Xbox" doesn't trigger Word's spellchecker, in fact, if you capitalize the first two letters, it will correct it for you. "Playstation" on the other hand ends up with a squiggly red line under it every time. Way to go Microsoft!

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Publisher

A. David Pinilla

Lead Editor

Sarah Horton

Editors

A. David Pinilla

Luke Meyer

Layout & Design Services

Silverback Creative

<http://www.silverbackcreative.net>

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originally just a Press Ganger who ended up taking a job and moving across the country to work with Privateer Press. That's just one example among many of the community mindset and dedication behind Privateer Press.

For instance, in the past I've mentioned my desire to get into Warmachine as well as my lack of a good introduction to the game. It didn't take very long at all before Press Gangers sprang out of the woodwork and into action: While some offered to run me through the game, others went so far as offering to purchase my very own introductory army! It is this

commitment and enthusiasm at work behind Privateer Press that certainly sets it apart in a sea of gaming companies.

In a Nutshell

How would one sum up Privateer Press? There is no better way to describe the company's overall philosophy, enthusiastic drive, and commitment to quality than a quote from Chief Creative Office Matt Wilson: "So, we set out to please ourselves, and my theory is, that because we are a lot like you, then lot of you are going to be pleased as well. That's how we approach everything, and so far, I think it's working."

"TOGETHER THROUGH LIFE" HAS DYLAN CHANGING YET AGAIN BY TONY#2

I did not intend to review new albums for the Lava Lamp. The point of the Lava Lamp is to rekindle interest in albums from a bygone era, yet I couldn't help but delay the review of a Pink Floyd album for the new Bob Dylan album that hit stores on Tuesday.

I justify this to myself by explaining that Bob Dylan, more than any single artist, emerged as the greatest figure of the psychedelic era, even though his music ultimately had little or nothing to do with psychedelia. Truth is, Bob Dylan always consciously rejected any cultural "movement," the psychedelic movement included. But that didn't stop them from trying to make him their God, prophet, poster-child, or what-have-you.

True to his instincts, Dylan is more restless than ever on this his 33rd solo effort. It, like so many of his records after 1966, *seems* to have nothing to do with the albums that made him world famous. But the continuity of Dylan's work never was in his so-called 'message' perpetuated and perpetrated by movement politics; it instead lies in the neverending search for truth in a barren world of deception and distrust.

Whatever the folks in the hippie movement thought they saw in Dylan's music up until 1966, it seemed that they were placing *their* perceptions of the world on his work, not that his work was influencing their perceptions. Indeed, there seems to be no contradiction between the "*Times they are a-Changin'*" and "*Things Have Changed*" forty years later. Yet, Dylan broke the hearts of his protesting faithful when he went electric, then broke the hearts of his psychedelic faithful when he went country, then broke the hearts of who ever was left when he turned into a Christian fundamentalist. And is he still Christian now? Perhaps the answer lies in *Modern Times*, which supposedly is an anagram for "*Meens Timrod*," in which he quotes the poet Henry Timrod AND the Bible, and seems to either be referencing judgment day, but one song says, "There's no one here... the gardener is gone..." wait, the Christian music audience's eyes have just collectively glazed over...

But, seriously, taken in a big stew, all together, his work has great continuity. All of it always asks the big questions, ends on a note of rather irreverent ambiguity, and leaves the listener--as only an honest work of art can--searching still.

"Together Through Life" adds to this 45 year monolith of truth-searching and sooth-selling. This time, Bob Dylan finds himself obsessed with East Texas blues, rather than the Delta blues styles he was imitating on his last four records.

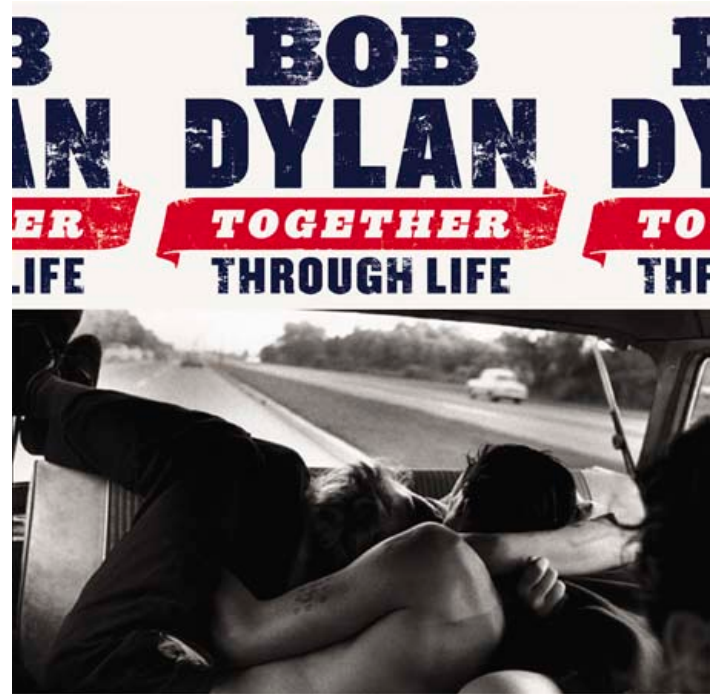
To some people, blues is blues, but the tex-mex arrangements of three or four songs, the punctuations of zydeco instruments like the brass and accordions featured on the album, and Dylan's lighter, more free-form touch, gives this 10 song masterpiece roots more in New Orleans and Nagadoches than Memphis or Indianola, Mississippi.

It's a huge musical shift for Dylan, especially at his age. Of course, it shouldn't be a surprise to anyone that Dylan continues to be restless in his pursuit of new sounds to explore his equally restless vision of America. But at age 67, it still surprises, and sometimes even awes, his most faithful listeners. Though I must admit, Dylan has shocked his audience so many times, it's difficult to fully shock them anymore.

The stand out track, aside from the first one that surprises you with its horn section and new blues arrangements, is "*I Feel A Change Comin' On*". There's that theme of "change" again. Only this time, it seems that the change his character is feeling is not that of the world (*Times they are a-Changin'*) or from idealism to cynicism (*Things have Changed*) but of the promise of a type of change that hasn't happened yet, and according to the song, honestly probably never will.

Only Bob Dylan can write a song of despair laced in the language of hope and change in the Obama era. Needless to say, it is the characters that own the songs on each Bob Dylan album, and this one is no different.

Dylan may never change, in spite of his many chameleon pursuits and exorcisms of his past demons. Indeed the overwhelming message of his songs, career and life are, that the more things (or an artist) change, the more they stay the same. We are in an era of hope equivalent to that of the promise felt by Americans in the early 60's. But Bob Dylan all too keenly pointed out, even then, through his characters how little human nature changes, regardless of the mood of the times. In spite of the author's many skins and disguises over the years, the world-weary characters of Bob Dylan in "*Together Through Life*" are not all that different from the ones on his first albums. They are, like his listeners, searching still.



DUSTING OFF THE DICE: MY RETURN TO D&D

BY CHRIS AMELUNG

I still remember the day in fourth grade that my friend Brad brought his Player's Handbook to school. It was 1981 and a group of about five of us were enthralled with this amazing book.

"It's a game," he said. "I thought we could play after school; it'll be fun." All of us attended the after-school program, which gave us about 2 hours a day, 5 days a week to play. Brad ran us through several modules over the next two years before we all ended up going to different schools. I had no idea then how much those afternoons would shape the rest of my life.

Little did I know that it would be 28 years before I was involved in an ongoing D&D campaign again. In the intervening years, I was still a fan of the game and I even purchased a 3rd edition Player's Handbook with the intent of trying to get back into the game. It didn't happen. A close friend offered to run an Eberron campaign for my wife and I and another couple about four and a half years ago. We got through character creation and individual prologues before our youngest son was born. The promise to return to the campaign "after the first of the year" never came to fruition.

I had become a very frustrated gamer.

When one of my brother-in-law's friends announced on Twitter that he was looking for one more player for a group he was going to put through "Keep on the Shadowfell" I jumped at the chance to play again. I excitedly rushed out and bought the 4E Player's Handbook and began to run through ideas for character concepts. I dug out my bag of dice, got lead for my mechanical pencil and settled down to build a character who's epic awesomeness would strike fear in the hearts of every monster we encountered. I ended up with a very capable dwarven paladin who over time became very difficult for our DM to hit.

I began to look forward all week to our Sunday sessions and I am sure my wife wished I would shut up about our adventures. She's a gamer too, but I had a tendency to ramble on about it. I had missed the sound of the dice rolling across the table, the slight racing of my pulse when the DM said "I need everyone to roll for initiative", and most of all the camaraderie of my fellow players around the table.

I'm now involved in an ongoing, homebrew campaign with the same group and I have to say that I am one happy gamer. Other games have been part of my life over the years, and I enjoyed each one for its own reasons, but D&D still holds a special place in my heart. It was my first, and it will always be the game I come back to.

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more..."

I WEAR MY CITY ON MY SKIN: PALIMPSEST & QUARTERED

BY SARAH HORTON

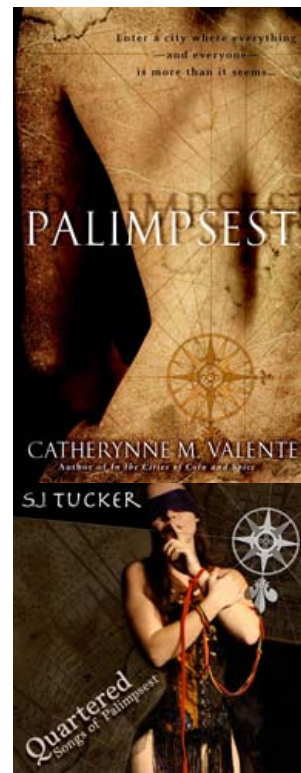
In the past, Catherynne M. Valente has admitted her love for taking classic faery tales and retelling them with a twist. In *Palimpsest*, she has created one of her very own.

Palimpsest follows four travelers who find their way to a city reachable only by sex and dreams and others who have been there. Each awake one morning after a night of bliss or stolen moment of passion, and find themselves marked. Marked with part of a map of a city that all had visited in their dreams. Each of them seek out others with the same marks, different pieces of the same map, so that they may return. Each foursome that enters the city together are bound together in unforgettable ways; what one feels, they all do. Every quartet that enters yearns to become more than immigrants. They want to be Citizens of *Palimpsest*.

Valente uses the same rich language and depth of characters she has shown us before in her novels. She writes with bold strokes that invoke the images of the kanji that she uses as we follow her characters down into what seems to be either madness or ecstasy. Sinners and saints, both and neither, the people we follow seem real and profoundly drawn.

Valente has paired, for the third time, with artist S. J. Tucker who gives musical voice to Valente's world in print. While the album at first seems to be a collection of Electronica done by a woman with a beautiful voice, as you begin to pair the story with the music, a whole new layer is there to be discovered. Tucker's haunting lyrics give voice to Casimira, the owner of *The House* in *Palimpsest* and a character who's intentions lay behind a mask of her own making. *We Are Shangri La*, a song written originally after her experiences at Burning Man, makes an amazing entrance to this city of dreams. It makes the city seem even more sensuous even beyond the fact that it is truly a sexually transmitted dream. Where Tucker and Valente blend seamlessly, though, is on *The Train Suite I: Viscous Oil & Persimmon Tea*. Tucker wraps a series of music, sounds and ethereal voices around Valente as she reads an excerpt of her own story, describing the *Train Culture* in Japan. She speaks of *The Floor of Heaven* and the ceremonies of bringing new engineers into the fold, and with her own voice makes us believe that these fables are more than true. That they have become *Myth and Legend*.

Both the book *Palimpsest* and the music from *Quartered* are fine projects that stand on their own and that I would recommend without hesitation, but I do believe that the two together become something more. I enjoyed their pairings on both of the *Orphan's Tales* books, but I find myself drawn over and over again to the voices these women weave together with words and music. They make me think that they really have kept a room for me, and that I am welcome as a Citizen and not an Immigrant into their world. Tucker and Valente have made me wish to be part of a hidden world, again. I would wear my City proudly on my skin.



FINDING THE MEDIUM: GETTING ALONG IN A NON-GEEK ENVIRONMENT

BY FRANCIS HORTON

You may, from time to time, find yourself surrounded by people who aren't geeks. They haven't watched *Battlestar Galactica*, they don't know the difference between *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Burning Wheel* (and will probably think less of you if you try to explain it) and they don't understand how good it can feel to sit on the couch or at the computer and game all day. Should you find yourself in this situation, I have prepared a handy primer for you. These are tips and tricks to get you through the talks about *American Idol* until you can get back to your computer and order stuff from Think Geek.

Sports

Even geeks will have a basic understanding of how all the major sports are played, but when someone asks about the most recent baseball game, or a three pointer from one of the players of *The Wizards* (a team with much less magic use than I hoped for) what can you do? Sure, you can say that you don't really watch sports, but the smart geeks know about politicking. You have to be one of the guys to get ahead, but you don't want to waste four hours that could be better spent (?) grinding in *World of Warcraft*. Luckily for you, there's the evening news. At the end of any half hour local news broadcast, some anchorman with a noticeably louder voice comes on and talks highlights. Just watch these. In any given sports game, only three minutes of excitement happens. The rest is arguing and slapping each other on the ass.

Reality Shows

This one is easy. Using your powers of the internet, you can condense any amount of a reality show into roughly three minutes of reading articles on CNN or MSNBC. This will give you a feel for how the general populace views different contestants, and will keep you up to date on fights, tears, sex and all the other things that happen on TV, but not in real life. I wouldn't suggest watching video recaps, as you may want to wrap a CAT-5 cable around your neck to save yourself from killing everyone else in the world.

Celebrities

You can use the internet to keep up with celebrity news, but most gossip writers fill up the pages with inane drivel which will hurt your brain and various other parts. Stick with things that are easy, such as, who is too fat/thin, who has a baby on the way or who has a drug addiction. Alternatively, many celebrities are turning to things of a geek nature. Oprah on twitter can meld both geek and non-geek, and your knowledge on twitter may help you sway conversations to your advantage. The safest bet is to listen to others talk about a specific celebrity, and then go from there. You can make educated guesses and pipe in your own comments about possible future downfalls or reconciliations. It is imperative that you don't always agree though. Doing so may result in people thinking you are a suck up, and will end conversations early, closing down avenues of approach and talk.



Non-Geek TV

Not every show on is *Lost* or *Heroes*, and while quite a few people watch those shows, you may get roped into a conversation about *Grey's Anatomy* or *24*. Do not refute any medical procedure or governmental knowledge they may bring up with actual information, as this may alienate you as a know-it-all. If you don't keep track with other shows, and they come up in conversation, simply tell them you have it on your DVR. This way, it can end an annoying TV conversation to move to another topic covered previously, as well as prepare you if it comes up again. I have no idea what day 24 is on, but if someone asks, I can simply say I'm going to watch it tonight and then look up the plot points later that evening. Even non geeks aren't stupid enough to throw out spoilers.

I hope this helps you out in your day to day lives. We don't have to like them, but we do have to live with them.

THE DEEP DARK WOODS AND BEING TWELVE BY STEPHEN JARJOURA (~RUNESTER~)

*This was a
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What did it feel like to read and play RPGs when I was twelve? There was a sense of mystery, and some foreboding, and the knowledge that this was not something that my teachers or parents knew about. This was a “private” universe, and it was big and dark and dangerous, like the woods behind my house.

As a child, nearly every aspect of my life had come through, or along side of, adults. I went to church with my parents, I learned and read with my teachers, and my Mom kept an eye on what I was watching on TV. The only place of truly private thought experience were those books that I read on my own. So, while I read Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke - I was exploring worlds, characters, settings, and ideas that I did not share with any adult in my life. The only problem with this, was that it was very private. This was years before I had access to the internet or the means to attend a sci-fi convention; even if I was inclined to do so. Therefore, this private world was not only private from adults but also from my peers.

Then I discovered role-playing games. Here was a private world very similar to the books I was reading, except it was shareable. This was something I could do with friends, and that made it much more interesting, rewarding, and potentially risky.

First, a digression. I’m the older brother, but my “little” brother (three years younger) and I always operated as a team. A squabbling, fighting, arguing team.

So, I didn’t buy an RPG ... ‘we’ bought an RPG. It was ‘our’ game, along side ‘our’ comic books and ‘our’ toys. Even more importantly, it was ‘our’ money! I was twelve and he was only nine, so we never had a lot of money. We may have saved for several months in order to have enough money to buy even one supplement. You could be sure we poured over the books and chose as carefully as we could. And later, when I got my drivers permit at sixteen, one of the first places I drove my brother and I was the local hobby shop which maintained a shelf of RPG’s in the corner. Again, this reinforced the special status of this activity. My parents didn’t drive us down (any more), this was something we did for ourselves. It was books and authors, accouterments (dice!) and terminology that we knew and used that they had little or no access to. It felt like a very separate experience; even a maturing one.

So, what was it like? There was a sense of profound mystery. Of ideas and authors and words that had to be learned, and that always felt like a tiny island in a vast sea. I never felt like I ‘knew’ RPG’s. Partly this was caused by my strict Christian upbringing. My parents were very liberal and trusting about such things as books, music, and games; but the caveat was that they trusted us to not choose anything that violated our Christian conscious. So, my brother and I were careful to avoid RPG’s that included or were centered around magic. [This may seem foolish to many, especially now. But for two pre-adolescents from the Midwest - this was serious business!] Instead we chose science fiction games like Star Frontiers and Traveller, super hero games like Champions, and spy games like James Bond: 007. So, when I overheard kids at my middle school discussing a Dungeons and Dragons game, I was both intrigued, and more then a little repulsed by the amoral acts they described for their characters - and I knew that my RPG experience was very different, and in many ways more limited, then theirs.

Well, now I’m much older. Much, much older! I’ve been playing RPG’s for over a quarter of a century. Now I find myself with plenty of money to spend on RPG books, if I want. I also have access to the Internet and the plethora of new games, indie games, free games, and game reviews. Plus, RPG podcasts, RPG blogs, RPG forums, ad infinitum. If my source for role-playing games was a little trickle, restricted by my own unwritten rules and lack of experience and limited funds; then my current source is an enormous raging waterfall! I don’t have enough time in my week to read and study much less play all of the RPG’s I actually own - not just all those that are available.

But, how does this feel? Ironically, RPG’s have lost a lot of their panache for me. I don’t have the same sense of mystery or uncertainty or even that special sense of a ‘secret, shared’. Everyone of consequence in my life knows I play. I’ve read scores of games and see many of the same patterns and similar material, over and over again. And, for better or worse, I’m embedded in the RPG culture. This means I’m surrounded by players and GM’s and material discussing RPG’s ... endlessly. It’s no longer a private world shared with a few other fellow souls; it’s a “hobby” with massive conventions and hundreds of mini-conventions and more activities,

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ideas, trends, fads, and fights then any human could possibly keep up with. So, having more than I could ever want (RPG-wise) I feel that something vital and enthralling has been lost.

It's not just the volume of material, the hordes of fellow gamers, or the incessant Internet chatter. It's also the much great depth of experience I now have with stories. I've watched a lot more TV & movies, read a lot more books, and played many more games than that twelve year old version of myself that stumbled across a role-playing game for the first time. After a while, the story elements, themes, plots, recurring characters, and tropes begin to look like Lego bricks, manipulated in groups and used to build up a story. What was dark and mysterious becomes more and more mundane and banal. It's like the joke about prisoners who all know the same jokes. Instead of actually telling the joke, all you have to do is reference the number. One inmate calls out, "Number 112!" And the prison shakes with the uproar of laughter. Many RPG sessions are beginning to feel like this. The GM would simply have to call out, "ancient evil disguised as an innocent child!" for the players to answer back, "trust the child but be wary; kill the evil as soon as it's revealed!" We've all been there and done that, and in multiple settings, multiple genres, and with multiple characters. Familiarity crushes mystery.

How could we get a little bit of that wonder back? [I have a couple of ideas, but I'd love to hear more from anyone reading this column.] I recommend starting with under powered PC's and a world full of things they don't know. Don't use the standard monsters out of the manual; mix things up. Use the stat block, but describe it totally differently. One suggestion I've heard, is a GM who used the Beholder as written, but described him to his players as a dark sorcerer. The fact that no one recognized the Beholder made the sudden appearance of a sorcerer with these powers all the more menacing. Another trick is to present monsters like they do in horror movies. Always operating in the background and the periphery. Just stories and legends, shadows and glimpses and signs - but no direct contact. Think about it this way, when the movie heroes finally get a good glimpse of the monster and understand what it is - that's when they kill it; movie over! So, this should be held off in games as well and revealed slowly. Let the players experience the dread and fear of their PCs facing something that's not easy to nail down or understand. In fact, if you can, leave out the stat block entirely. Maybe its minions have stats (and can be defeated, head on) but the source is more ambiguous and can only be gotten at indirectly.

Unfortunately there's no way to really erase experience, we can never taste ice cream for the first time - again.

Another technique is for the players to play adolescents setting out into the world for the first time; Strangers in a strange land. The players will (hopefully) empathize with their characters and remember some of what they felt when they were first venturing into junior high school or the first time they traveled without their parents right beside them. Let the characters stand-in for the players younger, more naive selves. It can be surprising and rewarding when the players snap out of their rote reactions and actually experience the wonder and awe of seeing or experiencing something new. Unfortunately there's no way to really erase experience, we can never taste ice cream for the first time - again. But we can help put the players in a similar state, so that they recall those youthful feelings of wonder, mystery, and excitement.

Does this column remind you of your first foray into role-playing games? Do you have suggestions for recapturing the mystery? Let me know! Email me at runester+darkwoods@gmail.com and I'll compile and comment on what I receive for my next column. Thank you!

We've all been there and done that, and in multiple settings, multiple genres, and with multiple characters. Familiarity crushes mystery.



Come visit us at <http://www.spookyouthouse.com>
for podcasts, forums and more!

CARPOCALYPSE: PIXAR'S "CARS" & THE END OF THE WORLD

BY STINGRAY

All right, listen up. Before we start the movie, I need to set a few things straight. First off, we are not watching this for entertainment. This is not a kid's movie about a race car. It's a documentary about life after the end of the world.

Yes. It's animated.

Yes. It's from a couple of years ago.

No. I'm not crazy.

Look. Just sit down, and let me explain. I've seen this movie far more times than is healthy for the average human being. Through these viewings, the cracks in the story have resolved themselves, and what's underneath... Well, it ain't pretty.

How many of you have seen the movie? For those that haven't, I won't be spoiling anything by telling you it's about a young, hot shot race car, a crotchety old car with a hidden past and a bad-girl-turned-small-town-savior love interest. Yeah, at first I thought the cars just represented the folks driving them. The problem is, there are also kid cars and insect cars. I know I don't let small insects or children drive my vehicles. And if I ever see a cow driving a tractor, I'm leaving the state.

Yeah, yeah. It's a comedy and a kid's movie. If that's all there is to it, then riddle me this, smart guy: in Doc's garage, why are there wrenches tossed inside dusty trophies? Wrenches! Better, why are small tools tossed all over the place? How does a car toss small tools around? How does a car even use small tools? Never mind that, because I'm sure given time you can come up with answers. No, I have an ace up my sleeve that proves my point that something is terribly wrong in this world.

Early on, you'll see a minivan driving down the highway with a mattress strapped to its roof. No car, anywhere, has any use for a mattress! That, my friends, is the smoking gun! This world had to be occupied by humans at some point, but they're all gone now. Hey now, watch it with the name-calling. No, the movie doesn't show us what happened. How could it? You think They would let something like that through? Of course not! I have a theory, though. War? No. Look at the Cars world. The major cities are still standing. War that could wipe out humanity would have destroyed damn near everything else.

Clearly an alien ship crash-landed on Earth. The aliens inside died, and when the feds popped open the ship, some kind of freaky virus was released that killed all animal life, and did so fast. The ship's sentient AI became bored, sent out probes, discovered a Walmart, discovered DVDs and built an impression of what the world looked like prior to the crash. Taking a cue from Transformers, the AI gives vehicles sentience and ridiculous personalities. How did Pixar get hold of the story? Disgruntled cars, or maybe a few surviving humans sent it back in time. I don't know how. That question stretches past my area of expertise. Somehow, somehow, someone wanted us to know what happened, and the Pixar folks were entrusted with the information. They gave us what they could. Now we need to make use of it.

How? Hell if I know. I was hoping you might have some ideas.



Illustration by Katie Morrison

REHABILITATING THE PROBLEM PLAYER

BY ARON HEAD

Ideally, a player comes to the game table wanting to have fun. Role playing being a team sport, one hopes that the player cooperates with the other players to facilitate their fun as well. We're all fallible, though. Tempered by lives beyond the game table, we each have bad days affecting our performance. This is to be expected. On occasion, though, poor game behavior becomes chronic, mandating intervention. I've had some experience in this regard.

Recently I had a player in my group, we'll call him Eter-pay, who wanted very much to be with the guys on game night. He just didn't want to play. He wasn't overt about it – I'm not even sure he was consciously aware of it. He subordinated the fun – intentional or not – every chance he had. Eter-pay would recommend watching a DVD in the middle of game play. He'd pull the game dialogue off course by steering the conversation to out-of-game topics. He'd surf the web, he'd play video games. His efforts kept us mired in only the most shallow RPG experience. He was killing the game. I considered excluding him from the group, but Eter-pay's a good guy. Everybody loved Eter-pay! Who doesn't?

What to do?

Giving it some thought, I realized I had not engaged Eter-pay. I ran him through both World of Darkness and Star Trek games. While

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PODCAST SPOTLIGHT: THE IRON AGENDA BY LUKE MEYER

Iron Agenda? Is the podcast about fighting wrinkles? What's your deal?

Although the Iron Agenda primarily focuses on the starch vs. no starch debate the past few episodes have segued into a discussion of Warmachine and Hordes. Privateer Press's refers to their Iron Kingdoms setting where these games take place in as "Full-Metal Fantasy," a grittier mix of steampunk and fantasy.

Between Josh, Pat – my fellow hosts – and myself we have roughly a dozen years experience with Warmachine and Hordes. We try to break each of our weekly shows into two segments. In our first topic we discuss an aspect of the games' meta. Past meta topics have ranged from etiquette at the gaming table to alternative tournament formats to faction loyalty to role-playing in the Iron Kingdoms.

For our tactical discussion we typically choose an army list and discuss its pros and cons and how different factions would face off against it. That doesn't mean we're all about the competitive format though – we also talk about friendly lists so there's plenty for the casual player as well.

St. Louis has a very active gaming community; do you tap into that with the show?

We tap that like a keg in a frat house!

Early on when the show was still in the planning stages we knew we wanted to invite members of our community to guest host with us on a rotating basis. In addition to letting us give voices to the in-game factions that we regular hosts don't play the rotating guests allow us to keep the show fresh and to bring different perspectives to the microphones.



But St. Louis isn't the only city with strong Warmachine and Hordes communities. We've had players from across the country record with us to share their thoughts and experiences. These guests have brought some great tips and tricks from their own communities to share with us and our listeners.

Tell me about what events you've put on.

In January we ran an event locally called Pirates of the Meredius. Pirates was a boat-themed event that featured to-scale player-built vessels in a race for a buried treasure. St. Louis has a fairly competitive community but Pirates was designed as a casual, friendly event where the overall champion wasn't even necessarily the person with the most wins on the day.

Any upcoming events?

With the local success of Pirates of the Meredius we're developing a story-driven event series called Iron Agenda Presents. We hosts are all role-players as well as wargamers and IAP lets us bring more of that aspect to the game by creating events linked by a common narrative. We plan to release these events online then compile results from any group that runs one to use to write the next installment.

Any plans on expanding to other miniature games?

We've branched out into other games in a few episodes but for the most part our listeners prefer Warmachine and Hordes content. While we won't rule out talking about other miniature games from time to time, that's where Iron Agenda will primarily focus.

Find out more about Iron Agenda at <http://www.ironagenda.com/>

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he's a fan of horror and Trek, neither seemed to peel his banana. Chewing on this gristly conundrum, Eter-pay took us off-game once again. His conversation revealed that he was geeking hard on Max Brooks' World War Z. Inspiration struck. I launched the group into the zombie apocalypse. Eter-pay came alive here. His eyes sparkled with excitement. He was engaged in the game to such an extent, he expressed ire when other players took the conversation to out-of-game topics. I was thrilled. This turn-around presented a problem, though. Would I have to always run a zombie game to get him engaged?

I then discovered the sandbox.

Sandbox games, games where the players have input into the setting design and system, are perfect for this type of player. They get to help build exactly the kind of game they want to play achieving buy-in. Sweet, sweet buy-in. It worked beautifully with Eter-pay. He's been tuned into gaming ever since.

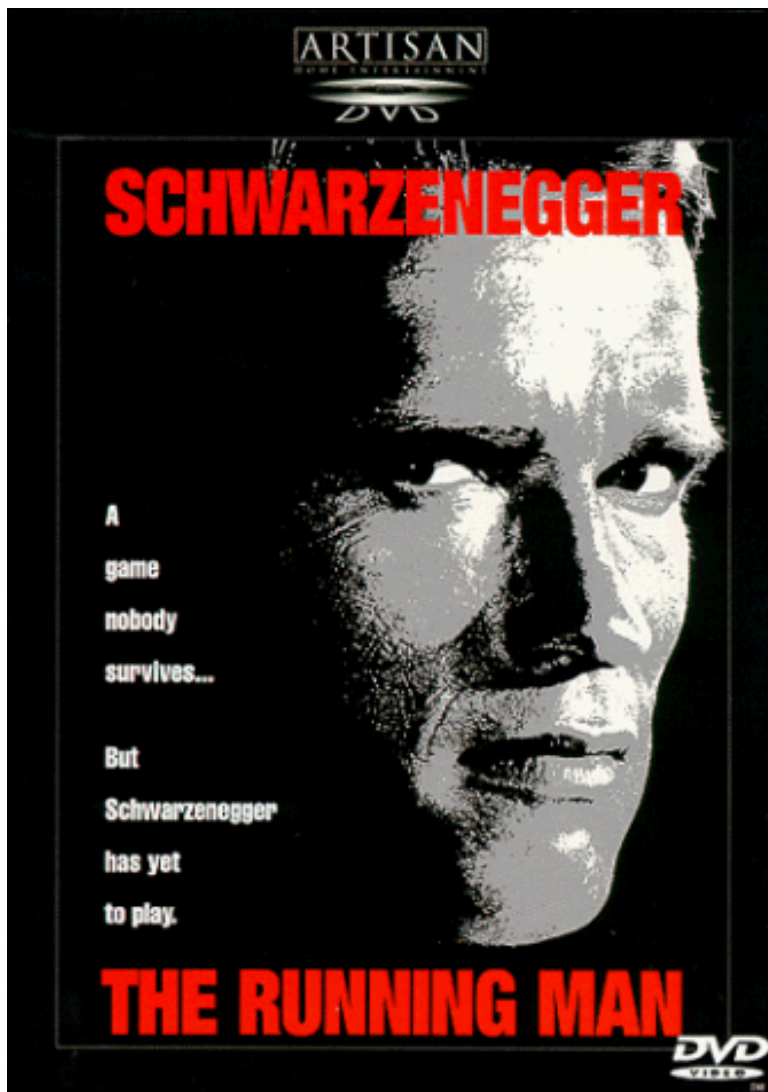
Sometimes it isn't possible to rehabilitate a player, though. Some folks won't be helped. There are people in this world who are fundamentally unhappy and are not satisfied unless they can drag everyone else down into their funk. Sooner or later, enough is enough. These people have to be exited from the group before it is destroyed. Doesn't mean you're not their friend anymore. Just means that you're not wasting anymore game-time on someone who's behavior is harmful to your table.

Sometimes the GM has to go the extra mile to demonstrate how cool the game can be for just one player. Doing that effectively will rock the table ensuring many sessions of badass fun. It is also the role of the GM to put an end to destructive behavior at the table. If a player is blocking the fun of everyone else, it's the GM's responsibility to put that to a stop. Game Masters have a lot of responsibilities that aren't always fun. That's why they get the comfy chair with unlimited refills of their Mountain Dew.

THE RUNNING MAN (1987) BY MIKE SCHULZ

"Good artists copy. Great artists steal."

As a veteran GM who fancies himself a font of original ideas and creative adventure hooks I have to give this advice to everyone (including myself) sitting behind the GM's screen: steal often and steal shamelessly. After all, if you thought something was pretty cool, odds are some of your players did as well, and doing cool stuff is what our hobby is all about. So this column is a rough guide to theft-worthy things and how you can rip them off for fun and profit.



Today I'd like to bring to your attention a fine film from my childhood: *The Running Man* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. The premise is a variation of *The Most Dangerous Game* by way of Stephen King and the French film *Le Prix du Danger*. In a dystopian future dominated by a totalitarian government and obsessed with network TV, prisoners are forced to run for their lives on the game show "Running Man."

The meat of the film follows Arnold, a fairly bland love interest and a number of other prisoners as they make their way through the ruins of L.A. pursued by a posse of over-the-top, gadget equipped, 'stalkers.' The stalkers include appropriately themed villains as the ice-skating Sub-Zero, the fire spewing Fireball and the retired super-patriot (played by Jesse Ventura) Captain Freedom. Witty one-liners and violent deaths aplenty follow.

So why watch this film with an eye towards adapting elements of it for your campaign? Well, besides the gratuitous action and witnessing Arnie at the top of his game, the film offers many things for thieving GMs:

- An easily stolen hook, batch of NPCs and tone for running a 'deadly game show' adventure in your current game.
- Engaging and easily adaptable action set-pieces. The ice rink encounter with Sub-Zero, for example, would translate brilliantly into many games.
- The film's 'Stalkers' can be quickly lifted and used in both deadly game show and other roles (they would make excellent bounty hunters, for example).
- The other game shows like "Climbing for Dollars" are also solid fodder for the sadistic GM.

While it may seem that the *Running Man* is only suitable for adaptation to modern and future settings, I think the basic

premise can be used in a number of other genres. Some possibilities include:

- Drop the game show aspect and turn it into a straight gladiatorial competition enjoyed by decadent nobles.
- Turn the 'Stalkers' into well equipped aristocrats looking for the ultimate thrill.
- Change the game show into some sort of contest or ritual to determine the champion of a particular city or cult.
- Tone down the absurd elements and play up the scenario's basic horror ala *Saw*.

In the end, *The Running Man* is a violent but light-hearted flick that doesn't take itself too seriously. It's also chock full of adaptable material for sticky fingered GMs. Most importantly though, the film's premise and execution is fun. Even if your players know every twist and turn from the film they will almost certainly enjoy running through a deadly game show scenario using their wits and their PCs abilities to try to escape in one piece.

I think that running your players through the deadly gauntlet of a dangerous game show is a simple joy every GM should get to experience. So relax and steal from this 80s classic.

“PIMP, HOW DO I FILL THE MISSING INCHES?” BY TONY MAST, PIMP OF THE INTERNET

You people. Seriously, in this economy. When times are tough. You people don't need the advice of the Pimp? I am seriously disappointed in you people. Not asking for help. Don't you people know that the only stupid question is the Unasked Question (.com).

Alright, so all that aside, I finally get a question from the sweet little Miss S. H. She asks;

“Dear Pimp, I'm not happy with my boyfriend's newsletter. He tries so hard to get every little bit of it filled, but alas, he keeps coming up short. What's a girl to do? Pimp, what do you suggest I fill those missing inches with?”

Ms. Sweet Hotness. You have definitely come to the right place. Actually, you don't really need me to answer the question for you. By coming to me, you have lived the answer to your question. Everybody knows, if you need a few more inches to fill. The man you call is The Pimp of the Internet.

Now you may say, “Pimp, aren't you being a little self-serving by aggrandizing yourself in this way?”

To which, I would say, “I am very impressed that Hooked on Phonics has worked out so well that you appropriately used the word AGGRANDIZING.”

Wherein you would respond by tittering and saying, “Oh Pimp, you are so clever, but seriously. Can you really fill those missing inches? Is my boyfriend lacking, or is this just something extra special that you have?”

Wherefore I would elucidate, “Baby, your man isn't lacking when compared with the general populous, but there is a reason that there are catalogs that arrive to so many suburban homes in plain brown envelopes. Some people just need some help filling in those last few inches. And that's OK. What's important isn't that he can't fill those inches, is that he uses the proper implements to fill them and that everything he brings to the table is of the best quality. In simpler terms, it's not how many inches he's got, it's how he uses them, and that he knows to finish the job properly, he needs to call The Pimp.”

This said, Ms. S. H., I think we all know that your newsletter should be comfortably filled with the extra inches that The Pimp has provided.

And guys, if you ever feel weird about asking for help filling inches in your newsletter, I leave you all with one piece of wisdom from a great man who is a legend in his own mind. “It's not gay if the balls don't touch.”



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