



ISSUE 8 / SPRING 2011

irregular

INTERVIEW

RODNEY
THOMPSON

GRUDGEBALL

BEASTS OF
MIDDLE EARTH

FARNHAM 894AD

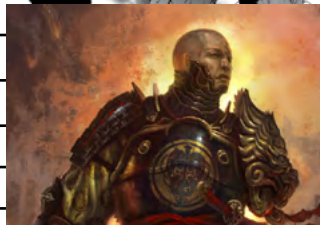
RURAL ENCOUNTERS
TRAVELLER RPG

BEASTS!

PLUS TUTORIALS, SHORT STORIES, NEWS AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

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Editors

Jason Hubbard

Nick Johnson

Layout

Jason Hubbard

Proof Readers

Nick Johnson

Mamie Shafi

Social Media Manager

Rebecca Hubbard

Cover Illustration

Brynn Metheney

Cover Layout

Matthew Mella

Comic Artwork

Will Kirkby

Contributors

Dave Barker

William Ford

Vyctoria Hart

Robert Hodder

David Hoekzema

Patrick Hopper

Jason Hubbard

Nick Johnson

David Kay

Diego Gisbert Llorens

Ian Pursey

Amy Wagstaff

John Wheldon

Artwork

Diego Gisbert Llorens

Brynn Metheney

Bradley K McDevitt

David Sonderquist

Matthew Mella

Andres Canals

Cerebus

Tamas Baranga

Mariana Viera

Mikolaj Ostapiuk

Wizards of the Coast

Osprey Publishing



Editorial

Jason Hubbard

We've got another bumper issue, and this time the theme is Beasts. It's been a funny old few months, and I've gotten back in to D&D, running my first campaign in years. You'll be able to follow my progress in a regular spot in the RPG section. In other news, Sheffield Irregulars have decided to expand their one day painting and gaming show this year, and there's more detail on the Irregular site when more news becomes available.

Over the last month I came to a decision regarding painting armies - I've finally decided to stop playing large scale wargames, and concentrate on skirmish and role-playing games. This would allow me to spend more time painting individual models, rather than painting units on a production line. I found I was losing the enjoyment of painting in having to paint such large numbers of miniatures, so I decided to stop.

This will also mean I have more time for other aspects of the hobby, like developing some RPG material for a planned D&D 4th ed campaign set in Ancient Rome, which will be released through the magazine or as a campaign setting later on this year, entitled All Roads Lead to Rome (Ed - Actually, they all lead away from Rome, but some people walk down them the wrong way).

So what do we have in this issue? Well, there's the usual painting tutorials, reviews, a plethora of RPG articles and several wargaming pieces. This issue is jam packed with goodness as always. Plus if you're interested in contributing give us a bell on the following email - irregularmagazine@gmail.com.

Well, that's all folks....

Nick: This has been a busy quarter for me, when it comes to painting. Until the end of February I'd been feverishly working on entries for the WAMPed! painting competition on the WAMP forum - I'd been trying to complete eight entries for the Army Challenge, though I only ended up completing four of them. However, I did finish another eleven entries for other categories, and that total netted me the "Most Entries" award for the competition.

Outside of a lot of frantic painting, I've started to learn to play Heroclix - as a comic fan, being able to play a game featuring a team of my choice from the two biggest comic universes certainly has an appeal. I've not been playing long, but I'll see how it goes. My Monday night roleplaying game has moved from the zombie-filled neo-Victoriana of Unhallowed Metropolis to one of my other favourite settings, Legend of the Five Rings. I reviewed the 4th edition core rulebook in the last issue, along with the first supplement in this issue, and I'm relishing the opportunity to play a Mirumoto once more.

Jason has already talked a bit about this issue, so I'm going to talk a little about the next one. Issue 9 will mark our second anniversary, which will be quite an achievement. We're theming the issue around the world of pulp fiction - the books, not the film, I hasten to add - and I've been assured that it will be a very special issue indeed. If you're interested in contributing, Jason gave our email address earlier. Even if you don't contribute, I hope to see you next time.

Sci-Fi Hero Painting Competition Results



1st Place Winner; Stéphane Renaut

Our challenge to you last issue was to paint up a science-fiction hero in order to win yourself a limited edition 54mm Exorcist from Hitech Miniatures.

The judge has taken a look through the entries we received, and has picked the above ...entry by Stéphane Renaut as our winner - congratulations, Stéphane



Runner up; Kryštof Drnek



R.P.G.

On a wing and prayer

Confessions of a GM who should know better



Wildlands of Palm's Crossing

Rural Encounters for Traveller RPG

Beast Mounts for D&D 4th



On a wing and prayer

Words: Jason Hubbard
Illustrations: Wizards of the Coast

Confessions of a GM who should know better

I hadn't been involved with D&D for some time, either as a player or as a GM, when a sudden urge came over me to run a campaign. I had been talking about the possibility of running one for some time, but never really getting around to it. So when the new Red Box hit the shelves, I decided to take the plunge.

I've been a gamer for over 25 years, and in that time I have played numerous roleplaying games (RPGs) and tabletop wargames. I've even been a playtester and demonstrator, so I was fairly confident that I'd have no trouble picking up D&D 4th edition and running a campaign. I finally got around to organising a campaign at my local gaming club. The victims - I mean players - who decided to join the game were a mixed bunch, some of whom hadn't played D&D for over 10 years, while a couple of players had some roleplaying experience and I even had a couple of guys who had never played an RPG before, let alone D&D.

I'm big on rules being simple and easy to use; I really hate it when a game slows down due to the rule issue. Checking numerous charts, statistics and various other types of lists just to perform an action really bugs me, because it gets in the way of gaming and having fun. Fun being the primarily reason why we game, so if rules are so complicated that you need a PhD to play them, then they end up getting ditched. When I checked out the new rules for 4th ed I was pleasantly surprised, they were like a nod to old school gaming for me, reasonably simple and uncomplicated.



My first observation after the Red Box arrived from Amazon was that I liked the way Wizards of the Coast (WotC) had gone back to the 80's with the use of the original cover art. I've always liked that artwork, and I think it would make a good miniature diorama. I suspect you're wondering what my impression of the contents were on opening it. Well, I was presently surprised with the quality of the two books. They were nicely laid out, with excellent use of artwork and the paper quality was superb. I was a little disappointed with the content of the book, as they were very limited in regards to information, especially as it states that the Red Box would cover players first steps from level 1-3. I didn't think there was enough adequate information on character design, the types of classes you could create and play.

The Dungeon Master's Guide was a little better with more information on running a game, and an introductory adventure. I really liked the tokens, they were very well made with some nice artwork. I was disappointed that there weren't any dungeon tiles made to the same quality as the tokens. The battle map was very nice, but to be honest I'd have preferred tiles. My overall impression was it was OK and reasonably adequate to get started, but having played with the original Red Box in my youth. I remember that the original books had more gaming information.

The Essentials range of D&D 4th was my choice for the rule system I was going to use to run the campaign with. Essentials has sparked some controversy among gamers since its release, but I have to say I quite like the range, it has a feel of old school gaming to it, which I like. I also like 4th edition as a whole - for me it does play like a skirmish game crossed with an RPG, which is perfect for my players as most of them predominantly play tabletop wargames more than they do RPG's. The Essentials line of products is designed to help make the first steps into D&D much easier for new players, which was another reason for choosing it. What it does is make the rule





system much more approachable as a new player or, in my case, someone who hasn't played in a while. The product line will cover levels 1-30, which is fine as getting up to level 30 for most players will take some time to do, so these should be my go-to rulebooks for the foreseeable future.

I also decided that I wanted to make use of all my old D&D books from past editions, and to get around this I came up with the idea of the players sliding from one dimension to another, sort of like the Sliders TV show, which would allow me to use the numerous campaign settings I have. In the first adventure the players would come across a rare magical item, that would explode and embed a small piece in to each of them. This would mean that any time they came in proximity of a portal, they be sucked into it.

The group consists of a couple of fighters, an Elf, a slightly evil cleric, a gold-obsessed dwarf thief and a rather inept magic user. When I say inept I really mean he's inept - he has a habit of failing to cast any magic, much to the amusement of the group. In fact, it was his fault that they set off the trap attached to the rare magical portal dimension necklace, that has landed them all in this predicament.

I will also be using from the Essentials line the Dungeon Master's kit and the Players Handbook - Heroes of the Fallen Land. I really liked the DM's kit from the minute I opened it up. It contains a ton of useful items, which include the DM book, two adventures, battle mats, counters and a very nice DM screen. The DM's book is a great handy sized tome, which will at a squeeze fit into one of coat pockets. This means it's a lot easier to carry around to sessions, and much more convenient to use

The DM book is split into six sections, which are Playing the game, the D&D world, Running the game, Combat encounters, Building adventures and Rewards. It basically covers all you need to know to run a game, including the majority of combat rules. There are a lot of sections that are in the Fallen Lands, so as a DM its not essential to have a copy of Heroes of the Fallen Lands. I've also been told that there is some overlap with the Rules Compendium as well, but as I do not have a copy I can't confirm this. The DM's kit will be a much needed buy for anyone new to Dungeon Mastering, along with the Monster Vault.

For players the new book Heroes of the Fallen Lands is an essential book to pick up especially if you intend to play one of the following classes - Cleric, Fighter, Rogue or Wizard. The book presents some new exciting builds

for these iconic classes. Each class comes with new powers, class features, paragon paths and epic destinies. There is also expanded information and some racial traits for a number of the other popular races such as dwarves, elves, halflings, eladrin and, of course, humans. It is very well laid out and easy to read, especially for new players.

There are nine sections in the book; Introduction, Game overview, Making characters, Understanding powers, Character classes, Character races, Skills, Feats, and finally Gear and weapons. Rituals have been removed from the Essentials line, this was due to it being considered slightly complicated for the Essentials line and will be only in the classic line. Whether or not we will see rituals in the Essentials line at a later date is currently unknown. I like this book, not only for its compact size just like the DM book, but because its so straight forward. It is an easy read, and makes building a character really simple. Should you pick up a copy? I would say yes, definitely.

So on the first adventure whilst clearing out an abandoned castle, which was being used by a gang of thieves, they managed to get propelled to another world. They landed near a city, which is quite conservative, where everyone is expected to be a member of a guild. Whilst in the city they came under the scrutiny of the Magician's Guild, because of the magic user trying to use magic. They are taken to the guild, where upon the Magician's Guild order them to work for the guild on a permanent basis. Their first job is to help a local merchant who had acquired some real estate outside of the

city, an island in the middle of the local river. It had been taken over by the undead and the merchant couldn't develop the land. So the characters were hired to clear the place of the walking dead.

I wanted to do an undead adventure because I was inspired by the TV show Walking Dead, and plus I'd just painted some skeletons and zombies from Mantic. So the hapless adventurers would square off against some zombies, skeletons and a vampire, making a few bob in the process to boot. The first two adventures had been run on a wing and a prayer, as I had basically made them up as I went along. This was something I should have known better than to do, but what the hell - I managed to get through it by the skin of my teeth.

I'm now planning more, as you can only make it up as you go for a short while before it all goes horribly wrong. I'm now roughing everything out, the adventures and encounters are being well planned, but the campaign structure is a lot looser still. I'm making rough maps, which will be used, but I'm allowing myself room to be flexible, as the players could easily move the game in a totally different direction than I had planned, so as a result flexibility is being built into the campaign.

Currently my players are enjoying just running around murdering creatures and people, stealing loot and generally having a Viking time of their lives. I'm expecting as the campaign moves along, they'll want to spend more time role playing, especially as I know most of them quite well, and one very well - or at least I should, as I'm married to her.





Whenever I come up with ideas for a game or campaign I do tend to look at TV, fiction and history for ideas - the undead came from a TV show, for instance, as did the basic idea for the campaign. Future ideas include undead pirates - yes, you guessed it, a Pirates of the Caribbean influence; having the party stuck on a spaceship fighting aliens - not Aliens 2 but the game Space Hulk; and a possible adventure or two in a historical period on Earth, possibly in Roman times. Yes, I know going from The Walking Dead to science fiction and back to a historical period, does sound absolutely insane, but there is some sane reasoning behind the madness.

What I have I got planned next for my hapless bunch of players? They'll be being dropped into a ruined city on the other side of the world surrounded by a desert and

full of some really nasty beasties that will suck all of the moisture out of a creatures body, for starters. The city was devastated by a magical catastrophe that caused the land to turn to desert and allowed some rather unpleasant creatures to appear. As a result the inhabitants left in a hurry leaving their possessions behind, which has become rather attractive for adventurers and treasure seekers travelling there in the hope of looting the ruins. I took inspiration from ghost cities such as Chernobyl, where people left in a hurry leaving their possessions behind.

Next issue I'll be taking a closer look at this location, and the rather nasty critters who inhabits the ruins.

Rural Encounters for Traveller RPG

This article is intended to run alongside the Palm Crossing setting that I wrote about in the last issue of Irregular Magazine. It is the wilderness encounter table that can be used by Traveller GMs running a game in or around the Palm Crossing setting, for those adventurers who are either careless, or just plain reckless enough to venture out into the wild hills inland from the relative safety of the town.

The encounter table details some of the different animals and events that might be encountered by adventurers that do stray - or are sent - into to the hills that lie inland from the settlement of Palm Crossing. The animals detailed are also some of the most common wildlife that the residents and workers who mine or forage in the hills will have to deal with on a regular basis!

When creating all of the Palm Crossing pieces I had the Mongoose version of the Traveller RPG in mind, but I hope that it will be of use to any Traveller Referee who needs a encounter table for use in a hilly environment!

The creatures that inhabit Flathead Romance's second continent, Silvan, are for the most part rather distinct biologically from their counterparts on the main continent, having evolved separately for millions of years before the planet was discovered and settled.

Almost every creature on Silvan today that has evolved to fit one of the ecological niches on the continent belong to the same phylum. The phylum was named Flatheadhexapoda by a particularly uninspired Imperial Biologist over two thousand years ago. Animals in the phylum Flatheadhexapoda are usually distinguished primarily by the fact that they are six-limbed egg-layers that dig burrows of one kind or another. These burrows are usually used by all but the largest of Flatheadhexapoda as locations where they can sleep with a modicum of safety and in all cases where their eggs are laid and incubated. The mouths of these animals are invariably packed with teeth and look somewhat reptile-like to someone familiar with Terran fauna, although Flatheadhexapoda are all warm-blooded and usually have leathery hides.

Land-based Flatheadhexapoda usually have six locomotive limbs although a few examples have the two forelimbs adapted to manipulators which are more tentacle-like than arm-like as it is usual for the bones of these forelimbs to have been lost to evolution. Avian forms of Flatheadhexapoda have for the most part evolved to have the two central limbs evolved into large wings, with two strong hind legs and two tentacle manipulators, having come from the same order of Flatheadhexapoda as the land-based animals with manipulating forelimbs. Avians also usually have fine, interlocking

hairs covering their leathery hides, that perform a similar function to features. There are no known examples of aquatic Flatheadhexapoda.

Below is a sample encounter table designed for use in the hills around the town of Palm Crossing, but could be used for any hilly region of the continent of Silvan. Most encounters will be with animals, as the area is very sparsely populated. The other main danger in the hills is exposure to the Spotted Flux, which is a short-lived bacterial infection. Further details on the Spotted Flux are given after the animal descriptions.

Encounter Table : Hills on Silvan.

2d6	Creature(s)
2	3d6 Rainbow Glugs
3	3d6 Tippi Hedrenadons
4	2d6 Griffones
5	3d6 Pample Moose
6	4d6 Luftkaniners
7	4d6 Yordenkaniners
8	3d6 Meef
9	3d6 Sorkar
10	Disease Exposure (Spotted Flux). 25% chance each character, to contract.
11	1d6 VizziBobs
12	1d6 Dododlas

Animals of the Silvan Hills

Rainbow Glug

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Reducer (Scavenger)	Hills Flyer	10+	7-	3kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
2	5	2	1	9	9
Melee 1,	Recon 1,	Survival 1,	Athletics 0	Number Encountered	3d6
Teeth (d6), Claws (d6+1),	Tough Hide (3)				

The Rainbow Glug is a flying scavenger, in the usual avian form for the environment about the size of a large chicken, with an iridescent hide which gives them their name. They use the three hard claws at the end of each of their manipulators, together with their teeth to both rend and consume their food, which is usually the kills of

other animals, and to attack, when necessary. However, they usually are happy enough to leave others to their own business so long as they offer no threat.

Tippi Hedrenadon

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Hunter (Omnivore)	Hills Flyer	10+	5-	1kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
1	4	1	1	7	10
Melee 2,	Recon 1,	Survival 1,	Athletics 2	Number Encountered	3d6
Claws (d6+1),	Leathery Hide (1)				

The Tippi Hedrenadon is a pack predator that roams the sky in flocks, seeking out weak looking victims. The whole pack of Tippiis will attack one target at a time if they feel they are stronger than the victim, attacking with the very sharp barbed claws that they have on the ends of their manipulators. Tippiis will withdraw from a fight and flee if it looks like it is turning against them. Being a dull brown in colour and relatively small, they are not particularly easy to pick out against the landscape when they are not moving.

Griffone

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Gatherer (Omnivore)	Hills Walker	9+	7-	400kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
8	11	5	1	5	6
Melee 2,	Recon 1,	Survival 1,	Athletics 2	Number Encountered	3d6
Teeth (d6), Claws (d6+1),	Iron Hard Hide (4)				

The Griffone is one of the more dangerous animals that can be encountered in the hills. Individually, Griffones are not that large, but since they roam and attack in packs, stealing other animal's kills with confidence as well as occasionally killing their own prey, they are certainly one of the most confident animals in the region. Whilst they can fly short distances, their wings are not really large enough, or strong enough, for sustained flight and are usually used for short hops and attacking prey from above. Their manipulators are also more adapted than other flyers for use for extended periods of walking.

Pample Moose

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Hijacker (Scavenger)	Hills Flyer	7+	6-	25kg	

Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
17	6	17	1	6	10
Stealth 2,	Melee 1,	Survival 1,	Athletics 1	Number Encountered	3d6
Thrasher (2d6+2),	Tough Hide (3)				

Pample Moose roam the hills in herds, lumbering slowly along and eating whatever they come across in their wanderings. They rely mostly on their size for defence, but will thrash out with any and all of their powerful legs if attacked, and can flee at some speed over a relatively short distance. With a distinctive tan coloured flesh, they are quite easy to spot from a distance and are the main prey of the VizziBob.

Luftkaniner

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Intermittent (Herbivore)	Hills Flyer	10+	4-	50kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
9	11	8	0	7	12
Recon 1		Survival 1,		Number Encountered	4d6
No Attacks	Leathery Hide (2)				

The Luftkaniner is a simple herbivore in the typical mould of the local avian. Feeding mostly on leaves and fruit, flocks of Luftkaniners are of little to no threat to most anything except flora.

Yordenkaniner

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Intermittent (Herbivore)	Hills walker	10+	5-	50kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
6	14	12	0	8	14
Melee 2,	Recon 1,	Survival 1,	Athletics 1	Number Encountered	4d6
No attacks	Tough Hide (3)				

The Yordenkaniner is a very similar herbivore to the Luftkaniner (above), with the main difference being that the Yordenkaniner has four locomotive limbs and cannot fly. It is, however, equally dangerous to the local flora.

Meef

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Grazer (Herbivore)	Hills walker	8+	6-	12kg	



Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
5	8	4	1	8	9
	Recon 1,	Survival 2	Athletics 2	Number Encountered	3d6
No attacks	Tough Hide (1)				

The Meef is perhaps one of the most interesting animals that you might encounter in the Silvan hills, at least if you are an ecologist. Meef are actually a non-native invasive species to Flathead's Romance, although even after close examination you wouldn't necessarily realise they were that different from most of the Flatheadhexapoda that they exist amongst. With six legs and breeding in burrows they look the part, although they're they only wildlife on the continent that gives birth to live young. Meef are also commonly kept as pets by humans all across the planet.

Sork

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Chaser (Carnivore)	Hills Flyer	If out-number	-5	1kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
1	9	1	1	8	10
Recon 1	Melee 3			Number Encountered	3d6
Thrasher (d6+2)	Leathery Hide (1)				

The Sork is a small insectivore that only occasionally attacks larger creatures. Sorkar have vivid pelts that vary quite significantly from individual to individual and their hides are highly collectable, if undamaged.

VizziBob

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Killer (Carnivore)	Hills Walker	6+	-53	5000kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
22	10	26	2	8	3
Recon 1	Melee 3			Number Encountered	d6
Teeth (3d6+2)	Iron Hard Hide (4)				

The VizziBob is the largest and probably most terrifying land-creature on the planet. A brutal, aggressive carnivore, a VizziBob looks just like a four-legged Tyrannosaurus Rex with a dark orange-brown hide. If it wasn't for the fact that they are a great tourist draw, they may have been hunted to extinction a long time ago, and most VizziBobs are tagged and tracked so that what hunting

goes on can be done in a sustainable manner.

Dododla

Type	Habitat	Attack	Flee	Weight	
Chaser (Carnivore)	Hills Walker	If out-number	-5	800kg	
Strength	Dexterity	Endurance	Intelligence	Instinct	Pack
18	9	15	2	14	4
	Melee 32	Survival 2	Athletics 2	Number Encountered	d6
Teeth (2d6+2)	Touch Hide (3)				

The Dododla is a smaller relative of the VizziBob. Smaller in size, but very similar in form, they hunt similar prey and often come into conflict in the wild. Almost as popular with tourists, Dododlas have more attractive yellow and blue hide. Their population is managed in the same way as that of the VizziBobs.

Spotted Flux (Disease)

The Spotted Flux is a bacterial infection that can be contracted when trekking in the Silvan hills on Flathead's Romance. The bacteria are present in the soil and lives on the bark and stems of many of the plants in the region and avoiding contact is very difficult indeed. However, the bacteria are not particularly aggressive and it takes a reasonably large exposure to risk contracting Spotted Flux. Most of the native fauna are unaffected by this disease.

Other than as a result of a random rural encounter, as described above, characters may be at risk from contracting Spotted Flux if they are immersed in untreated plant material, for example as the result of a fall into native bushes.

If a character does succumb to the disease, the Spotted Flux manifests itself as random purple spots over the whole body, a pain or ache develops in the kidneys and liver and the victim begins to feel rather listless and suffers a -2 penalty to all skill rolls. Note this -2 modifier does not affect their Endurance check to resist the disease.

Disease	DM	Damage	Interval
Spotted Flux	+0	1d6-3	2d6 hours

The Spotted Flux is rarely fatal to anyone except the elderly or infirm, but is mildly contagious and anyone in close contact with a victim during the interval of the disease has a 10% chance of also contracting the flux, unless appropriate precautions are taken.





Sabre Cat

Sabre Cats, whilst not common, are frequently employed as prestige combat mounts by the richest and most powerful leaders of kingdoms, and generals across all of the known lands. Difficult to capture and even more difficult to train, keeping a Sabre Cat as a combat mount is a real sign of wealth and prestige.

Sabre Cat Tactics

Sabre Cats, as combat mounts, follow the direction of their riders, attacking with Bite and Trample attacks, as directed. If no direction is given and there are adjacent enemies, a Sabre Cat will attempt to Bite them. If their rider is killed or disabled in some other manner, then a Sabre Cat is likely to frenzy – attacking all targets nearby, except for other Sabre Cats, who it will leave alone.

Game Stats

Sabre Cat Level 4 Brute
Large natural beast XP 175
Initiative +6 Senses Perception +5; low-light-vision
HP 67; Bloodied 33
AC 17; Fortitude 12, Reflex 16, Will 13
Speed 15
Melee Bite (standard; at will)
+10 vs AC; 1d10+3 damage

Melee Trample (standard; at will)
The Sabre Cat can move up to its speed and enter enemies' spaces. This movement provokes opportunity attacks, and the Sabre Cat must end its move in an unoccupied space. When it enters an enemy's space, the Sabre Cat makes a trample attack: +6 vs Reflex: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target it knocked prone.

Alignment Unaligned	Languages -
Str 22 (+6)	Dex 19 (+4) Wis 7 (-2)
Con 16 (+3)	Int 3 (-4) Cha 10 (+0)



Rhino Rider

If Sabre Cats are considered rare and elite, only the most dedicated - or the most foolhardy - will attempt to ride a rhino into combat! However, for those rare few who can tame and train such a beast as a mount the rewards and notoriety are great indeed!

Rhino Tactics

Rhinos, as combat mounts, follow the direction of their riders. If no direction is given and there are adjacent enemies, a Rhino will attempt to attack them with their Horn. If their rider is killed or disabled in some other manner, then the Rhino is likely to frenzy – attacking all targets nearby without concern as to whether its master might have considered them friendly. A rhino in such a state will not be stopped until it is either killed, or it is killed all its enemies in sight.

Game Stats

Rhino	Level 9 Brute
Large natural beast	XP 400
Initiative +3	Senses low-light-vision
HP 120; Bloodied 60	
AC 24; Fortitude 20, Reflex 14, Will 18	

Speed 10
Melee Horn (standard; at will)
+10 vs AC; 2d10 damage

Melee Trample (standard; at will)
The Rhino can move up to its speed and enter enemies' spaces. This movement provokes opportunity attacks, and the Rhino must end its move in an unoccupied space. When it enters an enemy's space, the Rhino makes a trample attack: +10 vs Reflex: 2d8 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Combat Advantage
If a rhino gains combat advantage against a target, the target is also both Bull Rushed and then knocked prone on a hit.

Alignment Unaligned	Languages -	
Str 28 (+17)	Dex 10 (+0)	Wis 6 (-2)
Con 26 (+16)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10 (+0)



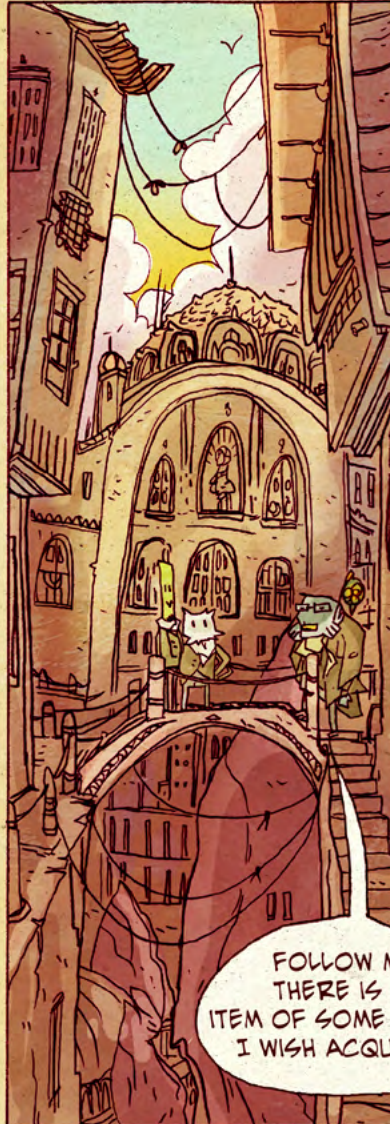
SO LADS,
THIS IS YOUR STANDARD,
FREEDOM IN EXCHANGE
FOR A FAVOUR, DEAL...



YEAH
WE GET IT.
THIS ISN'T OUR
FIRST DOG AND
PONY SHOW.



SO WHAT'S
THE GIG,
GOV'NER?



FOLLOW ME,
THERE IS AN
ITEM OF SOME IMPORT
I WISH ACQUIRING.



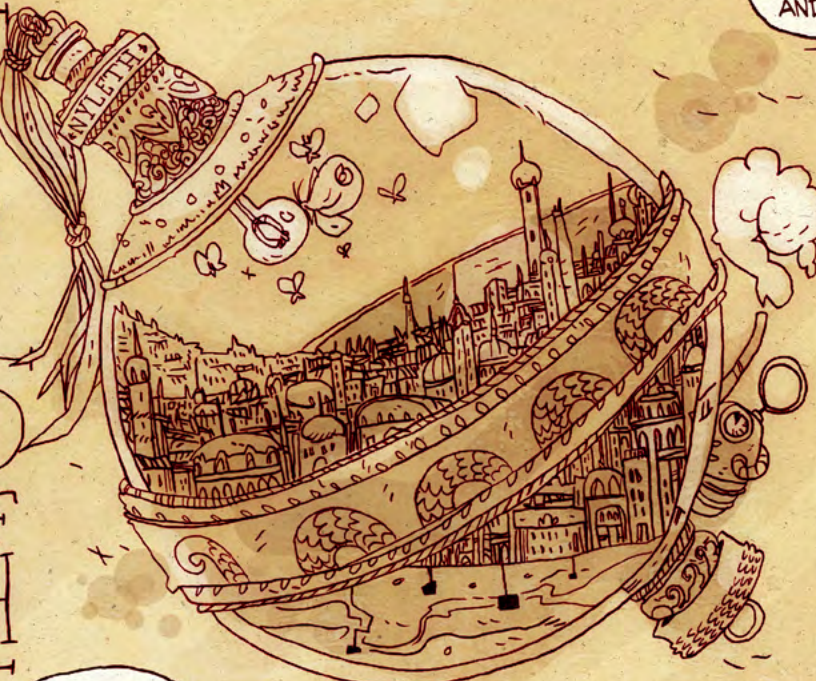
SO IMPORTANT IT'S IN
FACT ONE OF THE GREAT
FIVE HIDDEN TREASURES OF
THE GOLDEN AGE.



NUMBER FOUR OF FIVE
OF THE GREAT TREASURE
OF THE GOLDEN AGE



THE BOTTLED CITY OF NYLETH



Not much is known about the Bottled City of Nyleth except that it is terribly mysterious. Some claim it is the last bastion of a doomed world.

Though some say those scholars should move out of their parent's houses and get a life.

All that is known is that a nimbus of occult powers follow those who attain the bottle...

Many have died or fallen to insanity in the fools pursuit. Though all agree it's wonders are worth the price...

May the Queen have mercy on their souls.





The Battle of Farnham, 894AD

(A Saxon vs Dane Wargame Scenario)

Grudgeball

The Battle of Workop, December 1460

A Wars of the Roses Wargame Scenario

Beasts of Middle Earth



The Battle of Farnham, 894AD

(A Saxon vs Dane Wargame Scenario)

Words: John Wheldon
Illustration: Tamas Baranya

By 894AD after years of Danish incursions, Alfred the Saxon king, had established the basis of the Burh defense system across Wessex. The basic principal of this was that every Saxon could access a walled town or fort in times of danger. We know this because of the Burghal Hidage, a unique document listing Wessex's fortified burhs, giving us a detailed glimpse of the system Alfred designed for the defence of his kingdom. There are 33 burhs on the list, most of which would have been founded during Alfred's reign, and the distribution of these fortified centres meant that no one in Alfred's kingdom was more than 20 miles from a place of refuge.

The burhs varied in size and versatility. The larger ones were already established centres of population often using old roman walled towns; the smaller ones were little more than forts with earth banks, ditches and wooden palisades. Each burh had a garrison and was a rallying point for the Saxon forces in its area.

The use of the Burh defence system was an important factor in the build up to the battle that took place at Farnham, now a genteel market town in Surrey, in 894 AD.

The following extract is from The Anglo Saxon Chronicle, translated by the Rev. James Ingram (London, 1823)

A.D. 894. This year, that was about twelve months after they had wrought a work in the eastern district, the Northumbrians and East-Angles had given oaths to King Alfred, and the East-Angles six hostages; nevertheless, contrary to the truce, as oft as the other plunderers went out with all their army, then went they also, either with them, or in a separate division. Upon this King Alfred gathered his army, and advanced, so that he encamped between the two armies at the highest point he could find defended by wood and by water, that he might reach either, if they would seek any field. Then went they forth in quest of the wealds, in troops and companies, wheresoever the country was defenceless. But they were also sought after most days by other companies, either by day or by night, both from the army and also from the towns. The king had divided his army into two parts; so that they were always half at home, half out; besides the men that should maintain the towns. The army came not all out of their stations more than twice; once, when they first came to land, ere the forces were collected, and again, when they wished to depart from their stations. They had now seized much booty, and would ferry it northward over Thames into Essex, to meet their ships. But the army rode before them, fought with them at Farnham, routed their forces, and there arrested the booty.

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle tells us that the Danes, probably under a leader called Earl Harald, were raiding through Wessex and being harried by Saxon troops from either the field army, commanded by Alfred, or

troops from the Burhs. The Danes tended not to commit their forces to siege warfare, as they had neither the equipment nor the skills or mindset to do this and Alfred had taken this into account when establishing his defensive system. So the Danes harried the land, amassing loot as they swept through Wessex while avoiding the larger towns and hoping for battle on an open field where they could defeat the Saxon army.

The Armies

Alfred had split his forces according to the Chronicle; 'The king had divided his army into two parts; so that they were always half at home, half out; besides the men that should maintain the towns.' This probably gave him a field army of roughly 2000 men and of this only 500 would have been Thegns, semi-professional soldiers. The rest would have been the Fryd, a peasant levy armed with agricultural tools, spears, bows and for a lucky few, the occasional helmet.

The Danes on the other hand were far more seasoned combatants and would have fancied their chances in open battle. The size of the raiding force was probably slightly greater than Alfred's field army, numbering some 2500 troops of whom probably 1000 would have been well equipped Hirdmen. The other 1500 would have been Bondi, not armoured but certainly well equipped, with swords, axes, spears and shields. They would have been much more experienced at warfare than the Saxon Fryd.

This might therefore seem rather unbalanced but remember, Alfred could raise more troops quickly, within 20 miles would be several town garrisons and the call could go out to raise more of the Fryd at very short notice, so the Danes always risked being trapped between two forces.

Saxon Farnham

In the charter of AD801-805 Farnham was held by the bishops of Winchester. The church and associated settlement occupied the nearest high ground to the best crossing point of the River Wey. This was a ford where the road from Godalming, which lies to the south-east of Farnham, crossed the Wey and joined the Winchester to London road that ran through the village. In Saxon times the river was a much more formidable obstacle than it is today and the ford at Farnham would have had strategic importance. The area around the settlement would have consisted of open fields with marshy water meadows along the riverbanks. To the north-west and south-east were hill ridges of roughly equal elevation.

The Battle

While there are no records as to how the actual battle was fought or the strategies involved, the Chronicle tells us that Alfred won and captured the Danes booty. Saxon arrowheads have been found on the slopes of the hill to the north-west of the Saxon settlement, but that is the only firm archaeological evidence that points to possible conflict.

In his novel *The Burning Land* author Bernard Cornwell gives a vivid description of his interpretation of the Battle of Farnham in which the Danes are caught between two Saxon armies. One of the forces is on the hill ridge above Farnham to the north-east, while another that comes from the south-west. The Danish force is split while fording the river and this proves to be the pivotal moment of the battle.

This idea also fits in with what the Chronicle tells us - Alfred positions his field army on the hill while the summoned Fryd and garrisons from the burhs, possibly under the command of his son Edward, arrive at Farnham from the South. The Danes were on their way to Essex, probably heading north for a crossing of the Thames somewhere in the region of Reading, so they would have needed to cross the Wey at Farnham. The sight of the Saxons offering battle would have been hard to resist, particularly as they would have outnumbered the force facing them.



The Wargame

Using Warhammer Ancient Battles rules and army lists I suggest the following armies, but please feel free to expand, reduce or even balance the forces.

Saxon

Alfred's Field Army 750pts - This force must all be on foot and must include archers

Edwards Army 1000pts - The Thegns can be mounted

Danes

1500pts - This force must all be on foot

Alfred's army starts the battle on the hill to the north of the village.

The Danish army starts the game with half of its force on the North bank of the Wey at the ford. The other half of the army is on the South bank by the ford and is disorganized as it waits to cross. The Danish commander must start the game north of the river along with his best units.

To decide at the start of which turn Prince Edward's army arrives roll 1D6 but do not let the Danish player know the result:

1 or 2 turn 2

3 or 4 turn 3

5 or 6 turn 4

Alfred knows the reinforcements are coming, but he can't be sure exactly where they will enter the fray, so at the start of the turn that Edward's army arrives on the table roll 1D6;

1= on the road from Winchester

2-5= on the road from Godalming

6= on the road from London

Both sides have the same objective, the total destruction of the enemy.

Grudgeball

Words: John Wheldon
Photography: Dave Barker

Played in many small towns and villages throughout the Empire, Grudgeball or 'Sevens' as it is also known, provides the locals with a game that allows inter-community rivalry to be honoured without too much bloodshed. The game is usually played on a village green or in a market square and it teaches useful skills like ducking, dodging, diving and jumping. Which are always handy in a place as dangerous as the Old Empire. The Orks play as well, although they use rocks instead of balls.

The aim of the game is to knock your opponents off the pitch by throwing balls at them until only your team is left in play. Two teams of seven line up to face each other with seven balls placed in the centre of the pitch.



The teams all rush at once to grab the balls, but you are not allowed to enter your opponents half. Then they throw the balls at each other. If hit by a ball a player must leave the field. But if a ball is caught the player who threw it must leave the field and the catching team can bring a player back on. Once all the players from one team are off the pitch the game is over.

These rules will cover the phases of play, player's skills and movement, pickup, throwing, catching, dodging, ducking, diving and jumping.

Phases of Play

1: The Rush

At the start of the game both teams rush to grab the balls placed in the middle of the pitch. So the first phase covers the initial movement, the balls being picked up and any fumbles worked out.

2: Prepare

Both teams are allowed to move any of their players they want to up to their movement allowance to prepare for the throwing phase. Players who fell over in the Rush phase can now get up.

3: Throw

All players with balls now throw them at their chosen

target. The team with the most balls starts first and you then alternate between the teams until all the balls are thrown. As each ball is thrown the intended target dodges, ducks, dives, jumps or catches depending upon their ability factored by the distance the ball travels, strength of thrower and the part of the body targeted. Any players that are hit or caught are removed from the field.

4: Pickup/Movement

Once all the balls are thrown players can pickup any balls in their half of the pitch that are within their movement distance. Any players who fell over in the Throw phase can get up. Any team that is allowed to bring players back on due to catching an opponent's throw does so in this phase, the returning players can be placed anywhere in the teams dead ball zone. Then you continue with phases 3 & 4 until one side wins.

The Players

All players have a set of values that reflect their skills.

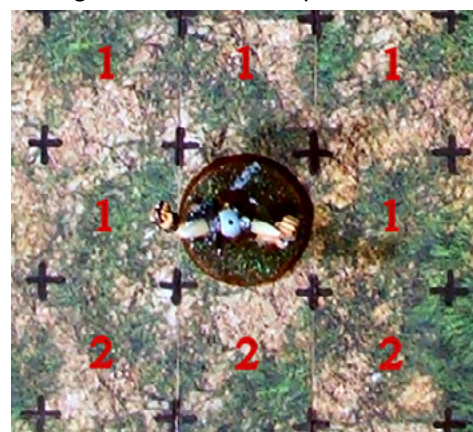
Race	Move	Throw	Dodge	Dive	Jump	Pick up / Catch/ Bash
Ork	6	4	4	4	3	3/4/4
Dwarf	4	4	4	3	5	3/4/4
Human	6	4	4	4	4	4/4/4
Elf	6	4	4	4	3	2/4/4

NB: For Goblin and Halflings use the same stats as Dwarf

Movement

The move number is the number of movement actions a player can make in any of the Movement or Pickup/ Movement phases. The cost of each movement action is shown below.

All of these movements are with the player facing forwards all the time. If the player wants to face left or right it costs 1 movement point. To turn around costs 2 movement points. To get up off the ground after falling over or diving costs 2 movement points.



The Rush

In the rush phase all players are in a one on one to get the ball in front of them before their opponent does. Each player rolls 1D6 and adds the result to their movement points (unless it's a trip). The player with the highest number that allows them to reach the ball gets the chance to pick it up first. The other player is placed 2 squares away from the ball in case the first player fumbles the pickup and the ball scatters.

Rush Rolls 1D6

- 1 = Trip up, the player falls over and ends up on the ground in the square they started in.
- 2 = Stumble, the player only moves forwards 3 squares
- 3 - 6 = Add the result to the players movement points.

Starting Positions

Both players roll 1D6. White rolls 3, Blue rolls 5 So Blue moves up to the ball and White moves to within 2 squares. Blue can now attempt to pickup the ball.



If both players end up with the same score they arrive at the ball at the same time and a tussle ensues. Each player rolls 1D6 and the highest score gets the ball. The winner does not have to roll for 'pickup', they get the ball. The loser rolls 1D6 and consults the 'Tussle Loser Table'

Tussle Loser Table

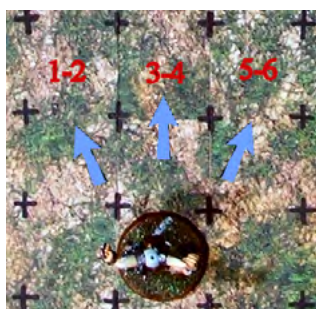
- 1 = Foul! The player crosses the line into the oppositions half and is banished for the rest of the game
- 2 = Falls over on the spot
- 3 = Staggers back 1 square and falls over
- 4 - 6 = Staggers back 1 square but stays on their feet.

Pick up

To pick up a ball during the game, including the rush phase, a player must roll equal or more than their pickup ability on 1D6. So a human must roll 3+. A player must be in an adjacent square and facing the ball to pick it up. A ball that is lying in the Dead Ball Zone is an automatic pickup, no roll is required.

If a player fails the roll the ball is fumbled and scatters 2 squares. Roll 1D6

Scatter diagram



A ball that would leave the pitch due to scatter does not. It stays in the first square next to the edge that it would reach as shown below.

If in the pick up a ball scatters to a square adjacent to another player who does not have a ball they can attempt to pick it up. A player may only make one attempt in the Rush phase to pick up a ball. But during the Pick up/ Movement Phase they can attempt to pick up a ball as often as their movement allows. A player can only carry one ball at a time.

Throwing

Any player can throw the ball at an opponent anywhere on the pitch. Distance is not an issue, but the greater the distance the less chance there is of a hit and the shorter the distance the greater the chance of success. To throw a ball at an opponent follow this sequence.

1: Name your target and which part of the target you wish to hit; head, body or legs.

2: Measure the distance to the target to work out range
0-5" = Short Range
10"+ = Long Range

3: Roll 1D6 and add/subtract any of these factors that apply

- 1 Head Shot
- 1 Legs Shot
- 1 Thrower had to avoid a ball being thrown at them in this phase
- 1 Target is side on.
- 1 The target is a Dwarf, Goblin or Halfling
- +1 Body Shot
- +1 Target has it's back to you
- +1 The target is in Short Range
- +1 The target is lying on the ground

If the final total is equal to or greater than your players throw value the ball is on target to hit your chosen victim in the spot you chose. They must now dodge, duck, jump, bash or catch the ball

A throw that misses ends up in the dead zone at the back of your opponents half where it remains for them to pick up in the next phase.

Dodge, Duck or Jump

What action you take may be influenced by which part of your player has been targeted.

Head Shot = Duck, Dive (if avoiding a short range throw) or Dodge

Body Shot = Dodge

Leg Shot = Jump or Dodge

When a ball is thrown at your player and it is on target to hit you must first of all declare which method of avoidance you will use. Each has a value and some races are better at jumping (elves) or ducking (dwarves)

Roll 1D6 and add/subtract any of these factors that apply.

- 1 Short Range Throw
- 2 Short Range Throw by an Ork
- 1 Leg Shot
- 1 If you've already had to avoid a ball in this phase
- +1 Long Range Throw (this does not apply if an Ork threw the ball)
- +1 Head Shot if facing thrower

If the final total is equal or greater than your players dodge, duck or jump action value then they have successfully avoided the ball. A player who jumps or ducks remains in the same square.

A player who dodges moves to an adjacent square of your choice.

Now roll 1D6 for the player who successfully avoided being hit

Action/Roll	1-2	3-4	5-6
Dodge	Fall Over	Stay on Feet	Stay on Feet
Jump	Fall Over	Fall Over *	Stay on Feet
Duck	Fall Over	Fall Over **	Stay on Feet

* Dwarves/Goblins/Halflings - Stay on their feet

** Elves - Stay on their feet

When a player has to dive to avoid a short range head throw, he automatically hits the deck (Fall over).

If the player who falls over was holding a ball they cannot throw the ball at an opponent in this phase.

If a player successfully avoids a ball and another player on their team is behind them in the line of fire then they must avoid it in turn. The Range is always Short. If that player is facing side on they receive an additional -1 factor to their dodge, duck, dive or jump roll.

Catch

A player must be facing the thrower to catch the ball and must not be holding a ball or be lying on the ground.

Roll 1D6 and add/subtract any of these factors that apply.

- 1 Short Range Throw
- 2 Short Range Throw by an Ork
- 1 Leg Shot
- 1 Head Shot
- 1 If you've already had to avoid a ball in this phase
- +1 Long Range Throw (this does not apply if an Ork threw the ball)
- +1 Body Shot

If the final total is equal to or greater than their catch action value they have successfully caught the ball and

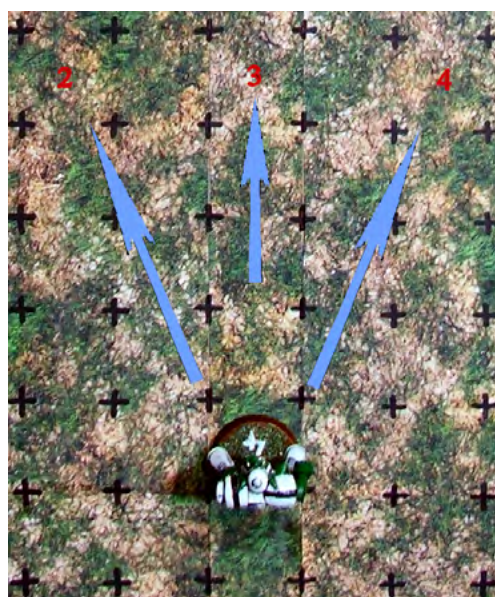
the player who threw the ball at them is removed. In the next phase one of the catchers team can return to the pitch.

Bash

A player who is already holding a ball may attempt to Bash a ball targeted at them. Work it out exactly as if it was a Catch. If the player is successful in bashing the ball away roll 1D6.

- 1 = The ball falls at their feet and remains there
- 2-4 = The ball scatters 4 squares

The ball ends up in either the square marked 2,3 or 4. If another player is in any of those squares they must now either avoid or catch the ball if they can. Otherwise they're out.

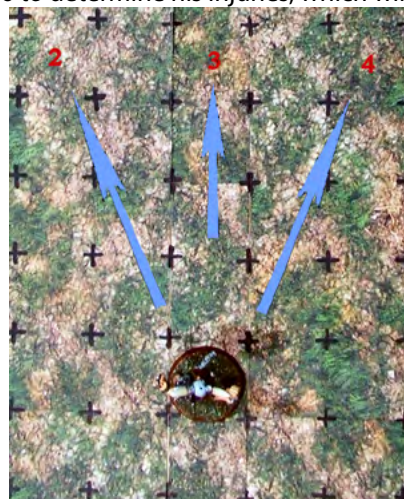


5 = The ball flies straight back at the thrower who must avoid or try to catch the ball.

6 = The ball flies back at the thrower so hard they don't have time to do anything but get hit by it. They're out.

Injuries

When one of your players has been hit by a ball you throw 1D6 to determine his injuries, which will effect



when they are capable of returning to the game if one of your players successfully catches a ball. The type of injury is related to the throws targeted area.

Area hit/ dice roll	1	2-3	4-6
Head	Unconscious for rest of the game	Stunned, seeing stars, must sit out the next 2 phases.	Black eye, ok to play
Body	Broken Ribs, cannot play again	Groin Shot, feeling sick, can't breathe or count up to two. Must sit out the next 3 phases	Bruised, ok to play
Legs	Knee capped, cannot play again	Dead leg, no feeling and can't walk, must sit out the next 2 phases	Stinging thigh, ok to play

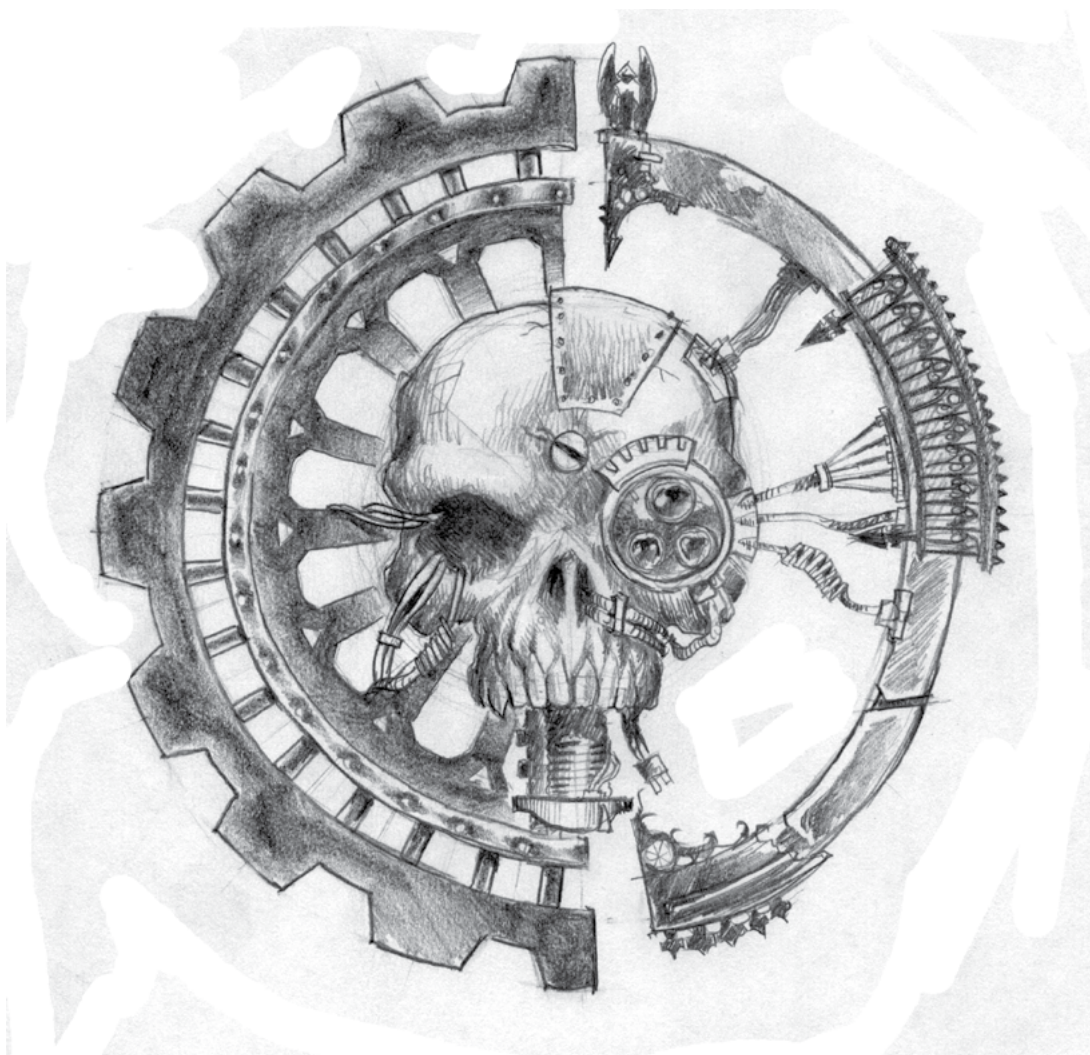
them.

If the player was hit with a throw aimed at the head use the 'Bash' scatter.

If the throw was aimed at the body or legs use the 'Pickup fumble' scatter.

Ricochets

When a player has been hit by a ball it will ricochet off of



The Battle of Worksop, December 1460

A Wars of the Roses Wargame Scenario

Words: John Wheldon
Illustration: David Soderquist

The local Worksop historian, Robert White, wrote in 1874; 'In this year, and a few days before the great battle of Wakefield, there was a fight or skirmish at Worksop, which appears to have been omitted by all the chroniclers, with the exception of William of Worcester. He states that "the Duke of York, with the Earl of Salisbury, and many thousand armed men, were going from London to York, in December, 1460, when a portion of his men, the van, as is supposed, or perhaps the scouts, to the number of * * * were cut off by the people of the Duke of Somerset, at Worksop.'

There are no detailed records of the fight that took place at Worksop in Nottinghamshire in December 1460, so this scenario is based upon what little sources there are and a whole lot of guesswork. If you find yourself thinking 'rubbish' or 'wholly inaccurate', please remember this is just a wargame scenario and feel free to adjust it to suit yourself. What I present here is merely a background to what I hope will prove an interesting game.

Potted History

On 9th December 1460, the Duke of York left London with an army of approximately 6,000 men, his aim to crush the Lancastrian uprising in the north. Accompanying him was his son Edmund of Rutland, the Earl of Salisbury and Sir Thomas Neville. They were heading for Sandal castle, York's power-base near Wakefield, but to get there they needed to avoid major Lancastrian towns. These towns were places where they would struggle to get forage for the army in winter.

With this in mind they headed for Newark, a Yorkist town with a safe crossing over the river Trent which also allowed them to avoid Nottingham, which supported the Lancastrian cause. After Newark a choice needed to be made, if they kept heading up the main north road towards Pontefract, a Yorkist castle, they would have to pass through Retford and Doncaster, both of which were firmly Lancastrian. Anywhere that wasn't sympathetic towards their cause would refuse vital supplies to the army, so at this point the Yorkist force decided to head north west towards Worksop, thus avoiding the Lancastrian forces gathering north of Doncaster and instead passing the priory at Worksop where hopefully winter grain supplies would be stored.

Worksop 1460

Worksop is a market town noted for Radford Priory, its mills and an old Norman Mott and Bailey castle, however the castle is in disrepair. The scholar John Leland traveled throughout England recording ancient monuments in the 1540's and when he visited Worksop Castle he described it as: "Cleane downe and scant knowen wher it was. The stones of the Castel were fetchid, as sum say, to make the fair lodge in Wyrkesoppe Parke." He

adds: "I am of the opinion that the Chanons (the monks of Radford Priory) had the ruins of the Castel stones to make the closure of their large waulles."

There were probably 3 mills in and around Worksop in medieval times, and the town was the centre to a substantial agricultural community due to the rich fertile soil of the area. The most important mill was next to the priory, where the waters of the river Rye were diverted to power it.

Buried in Radford Priory is John Talbot, the second Earl of Shrewsbury who was killed at the battle of Northampton on July 10th, 1460. Worksop was a firmly Lancastrian town.

Yorkist Force

Medieval European armies were typically divided into three sections called 'battles' or 'battalions', the vanguard or vaward, the centre or main-battle, and the rearguard or rearward. The vanguard was often composed of archers and infantry, while the center was composed of infantry and armoured cavalry, and the rearguard was often comprised of more agile cavalry. The usual order of march was vanguard, center, and rearguard.

Bearing this in mind the Yorkist troops that arrived in Worksop in December 1460 would probably have comprised of archers, billmen and some men at arms from the household of whoever was leading the van. As this would probably not have been the Duke of York or his son it leaves Neville or Salisbury, so please feel free to make your own choice.

Lancastrian Force

Some sources mention Sir Andrew Trollope as being the commander; Trollope switched allegiance to the Lancastrian cause just before the battle of Ludford Bridge so it is possible he was fighting as part of Somerset's army in this area. If you choose Trollope it is worth remembering he was the commander of the Calais contingent so the Lancastrian force could contain European mercenaries.

Wargame Scenario

All army sizes are based on the Warhammer Ancient Battles Rules, using the lists from the Armies of Chivalry supplement.

Yorkist army: 1500pts divided into 3 sections of 500pts each, selected from archers, billmen and men at arms on foot.

Lancastrian army: 1000pts selected from mounted men at arms, archers, crossbowmen, hand gunners and bill-

men

Setup

The first section of the vanguard of the Yorkist force (500pts) proceeds up road A from the south towards the market square in column. The Lancastrians will know they are coming this way as they will have observed their approach from the castle mound, the highest point of elevation in the area. The Yorkists must follow this route, unless they are attacked, until they reach the market square.

As the Lancastrian forces are hidden for ambush, the Lancastrian player should sketch out the disposition of his troops and only place them on the table, as per the sketch, when the Yorkist troops reach the market square, unless the Lancastrian force wants to spring the trap before then. In that case the Lancastrian player places his forces on the battlefield at the start of the turn in which they will engage the enemy.

At the start of the third turn the second part of the Yorkist van enters the battlefield, either on road A or B. Roll 1D6 to decide, even numbers mean road A, odds mean road B. At the beginning of the fourth turn the last section of the Yorkist van arrives - again, use 1D6 to decide on which route.

The Lancastrian player goes first, unless he's hiding!

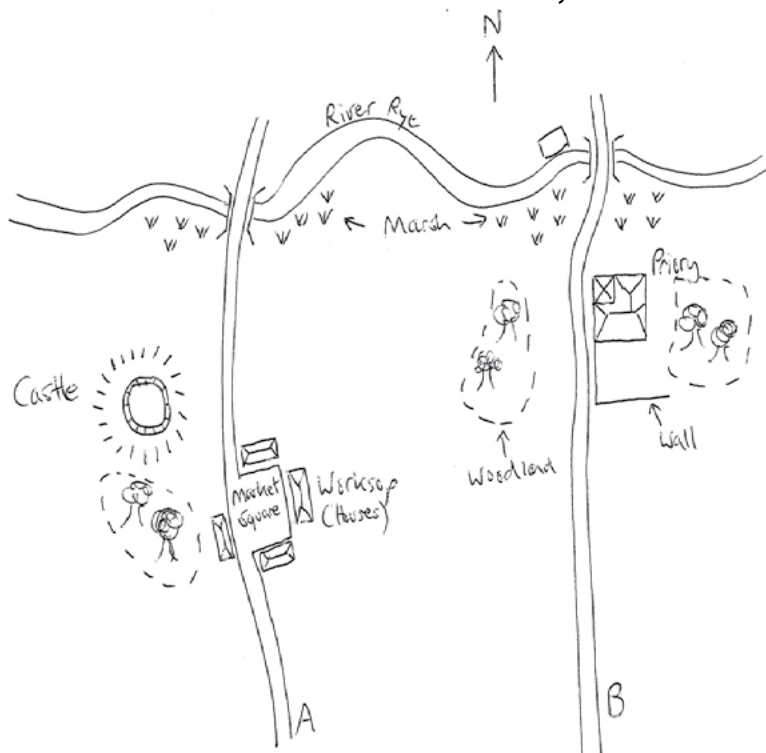
Objectives and Victory Conditions

The Yorkists must drive off the Lancastrian forces and seize control of the two river crossings. To achieve victory they must complete this by the end of their 8th turn.



If the Lancastrian forces are still on the table at the end of their 8th turn and have any unit between the Yorkists and either bridge then victory is theirs - they have succeeded in delaying the Yorkist advance while the good burghers of Worksop ship the winter grain off on carts to safer locations leaving the Yorkists tired, bloody and hungry.

Battlefield Layout



Beasts of Middle Earth

Words: David Kay
Illustrations: Bradley K McDevitt.

At first glance Middle Earth might not look like the best setting for an army of beasts. Men of Rohan and Gondor ride to war on horses. The men of Harad and Khand oppose them, also on horseback. Even the Elves of Lothlorien and the terrifying Nazgul ride out on a plain old boring horse. Shadowfax is about as exciting as things get, mount-wise.

Take a closer look, however, and all is not as bland as it seems. Wargs prowl the Misty Mountains, while spiders ranging in size from huge to unbelievably huge prowl the dark forests. Underground provides no respite, thanks to cave trolls and cave drakes. Dragons and Fell Beasts haunt the skies, while the men of Far Harad goad their gigantic Mumakil to war.

While talking about beasts I have deliberately avoided any mention of spirit formations as I feel these fit best into a different theme - a spirit theme. This article is about building an army with a beast theme so there are no werewolves or Balrog, no spectres, nothing with the spirit type. There are no half-trolls either since in this game they are considered to be men, not trolls.

There are many beasts to choose from in War of the Ring, but how to blend them into a usable army? Oh, there are ways...

Not all Good for Good

The forces of good are limited to Ents and Eagles for their beastly companions, and while that's not a bad limitation to have, building a pure 'beast' army is not going to happen outside of the Last March of the Ents scenario. So for the armies of good, beasts are something that will be seen in low numbers as useful allies. Also Ents and Eagles have such intelligence that many would balk at referring to them as mere 'beasts'. Especially if they were standing in front of one...

Evil Beasts

The forces of evil are more accommodating. If you want to build an army of beasts for Middle Earth gaming, this is the side for you! Among the evil lists, the Misty Mountains list has common and rare beasts available. If you are determined to build a beast army, then this is the list to choose.

Common Forces

Wild Wargs are the cheapest of your formation options as well as being effective. Indeed, many might argue that the lack of an Orc riding on top gives the Warg a distinct advantage in smell if nothing else. Wargs allow you to put large formations on the table without breaking the points budget. They are fast-moving and have the prowler ability, an excellent combination as anyone who has ever been flank-charged by Wargs can tell you. While Wargs lack banner and musician options they can take

a Warg chieftain, which gives the unit some Might and the ability to move At the Double, as well as avoid those terrible stalled charge results when charging.

Giant Spiders are without doubt one of the most effective common formations in the game. Faster even than the Wargs, they rival the Galadhrim cavalry of the elves for speed. The Spiders are also very strong and have both prowler and poison special abilities. It's like a cake with cream and two layers of icing I tell you. Formations of infantry and cavalry disappear rapidly when engaged in the flank or rear by these beasts.

The Cloud of Bats is the final common beast formation. They are neither as lethal as the Spiders nor as useful as the Wargs. The Bats' speed and terror are not to be ignored, but these will never be the mainstay of your army, more a specialised support unit.

Rare Opportunities

The Misty Mountains list does not disappoint in the rare department either. The Spider Queen gives you a high courage model who also boosts the courage of any nearby spider units. This is an important consideration especially when facing a terror-causing enemy such as the elves. Like other spiders she excels at striking from the flanks and rear of your enemy and moves quickly, though not so fast as the giant spiders.



Keeping with the spider theme, Broodling Swarms are another rare option. These little beasties are very hard to damage with shooting - though beware magic! They ambush and can be used to distract your opponent and keep potentially dangerous static shooters, like cross-bows and war machines, occupied while your lighter formations advance.

The Cave Troll is more associated with goblins than other beasts, but provides a cheap monster that can cause headaches, especially for lightly-armed infantry or cavalry formations. The Cave Troll can also provide valuable flank support for your Warg and Giant Spider formations.

The Stone Giant and Dragon are both extremely hard to kill as anyone who has tried can attest to. The Dragon can additionally be made into a strong magic user, while the Stone Giant has high strength and fight but cannot be duelled, making him perfect to take on formations with duel hungry Epic Heroes lurking within. The dragon can move quickly and rain magical death as well as fiery breath on your foes. The giant keeps a fair pace himself and can take on any other model in the game in combat with ease, even enemy dragons and Mumakil.

The Cave Drake represents something of a wild card. A low number of attacks make it appear unimpressive for its points, but it has a secret weapon. As a non-heroic monster it can't be challenged in a Heroic Duel, but it will occasionally call one itself when charging. If it wins, the enemy hero is dead automatically, gone into the drake's gullet. I've yet to see a Cave Drake swallow an enemy Dragon whole, but I eagerly await the day it happens!

Leadership

Building the beast army around the Misty Mountains list gives you precisely two Epic Heroes and no Legendary Formations to choose from. Fortunately, Druzag the Summoner is purpose-built for leading a beast army and is a very good choice. Spider, Bat and Warg formations will all benefit from being near him. Durburz the Goblin King's Overlord ability works not just on goblins but on any Misty Mountains formation. This makes him a useful and potent addition even without a horde of goblins nearby.

Allied Options

From the other evil lists, two Legendary Formations stand out as great additions to any beast army. From Mordor you have Shelob, the deadliest of spiders, who is able to spring from behind to devour enemy formations. The Angmar list provides Buhrdur, an ambushing troll with the all-important Epic Strike ability. As both these formations ambush, they can give your Broodling Swarms a real kick and seriously disrupt your opponent's army and game plan. All the more reason to take them!

Isenguard and Mordor each have their own trolls which you may like to use. Mordor's troll captains give inspiring leader for yet another creature type, helping the cave trolls improve their reliability. The troll drummer gives all your formations that lack musicians a movement boost. All your formations lack musicians.

The War Mumak of Harad makes for an imposing model, dwarfing any dragon, Cave Drake, or Stone Giant you might choose to bring. No, I've never heard of a gigantic elephant roaming the Misty Mountains either...

On the Epic Hero front, The Dark Marshal makes a very useful ally, even if he is a spirit. His Inspiring Leader



(Master) ability is especially useful for a beast army where almost every formation is of a different type. He's worth breaking the 'no spirits' rule for.

On the Field

With your army assembled it's now time to test them in battle! Mobility is the key to any beast army. Your formations have low to medium armour values. You need to use terrain to your advantage and stay out of the way of enemy archer formations. Having ambusher formations helps immensely with this, as they can harass enemy who would rather remain stationary and shoot.

If you lack ambushers, then at a pinch a heroic move will place a formation of Giant Spiders right up at your opponent's face. Likewise, a glide move by the dragon will give your opponent far more to worry about than your advancing horde of Wargs and monsters.

Working your way to the flanks and rear of enemy formations will be your key to victory. With so many formations using the prowler ability, your army simply performs so much better. You will find this harder when using the Battle for the Pass deployment, where a canny opponent will simply form a solid line across the width of the board, and easier in a Maelstrom deployment where your own formations will find the prowling so much easier. It is in a Maelstrom situation where your beast army is at its most dangerous as lone enemy formations are often forced to expose their flanks or rear.

One weakness of your formations is that they lack the option of taking banners or musicians. No banners means no ability to re-roll stalled charge results, and so you will have to either use Might or accept the charge won't happen this turn. This makes it all the more important that you have a suitable Epic Hero in a charging formation ready to use Might if the need arises. The other option is to have multiple formations ready to charge each vulnerable enemy, so if one charge stalls, all is not lost.

Courage is something else to be mindful of, especially when facing terror-causing enemies. Keep the right formations close to each other to make the best use of their special rules. Don't let the Spider Queen wander away from your Giant Spiders, for example, as they will gain much from her higher courage value.

Painting and Modelling the Tooth and Claw

I must confess, the number one aspect that drew me towards a beast army was the painting and modelling opportunities it offered. There is a great selection of models available to choose from. This is unusual for War of the Ring armies, where you aren't likely to find suitable models to replace Uruk-Hai or Soldiers of Gondor, but finding suitable alternative models for wild Wargs or Giant Spiders is somewhat easier. More choice means more opportunities to personalise your army. No two beast armies will look the same, even where they make similar formation choices. Along with your choice of models, basing gives another opportunity for

personalisation. You can use basing to really emphasise where your army comes from. The windswept wastes of Angmar, the icy north, long-forgotten ruins, rocky mountain slopes, spider-haunted forests, or even an underground cave system are all themes you can bring to the fore through your basing.

Hear Them Roar

Whatever you decide, the dark places of Middle Earth hold many fearsome beasts who can play a memorable part in your games. Let the unstoppable hordes come forth!



Community

Artist's Showcase
Diego Gisbert Llorens



An Interview with Rodney Thompson



Artist's Showcase - Diego Gisbert Llorens

How did you get interested in Illustration?

I've been drawing as long as I can remember, and my mum has kept some of my first seven-fingered vikings. Blame my first pen and paper roleplaying game books for my true interest on the field.

What are the most important parts of any image?

Composition, color and light. No matter if you're painting a fine art portrait, an abstract painting or a D&D illustration, if these elements do not work together then the image is not going to work.

What methods do you use in your work?

Until 2006, I mainly used traditional media of all kinds, and I still miss the feeling of working on canvas or paper. For the last 4 years or so, though, I have only worked with my computer, mostly using Photoshop and a Wacom tablet.

What size/scale do you prefer to work at?

I typically start with an A4 image at 300 dpi, but I resize the work a lot depending on the needs of the composition. If I'm using traditional media, then the bigger the canvas, the better. My biggest work was almost 3 meters tall.

Tell us about the character on the cover of issue 7 - Frontiers

I wanted to provide a portrait of someone vulnerable, someone who tries to protect and separate herself from the outside world, like a person who is falling into a depression or some other mental illness. Thus the absence of color on the figure and the strong, dramatic light contrast.

Who and what influences you and your work?

My mates at the studio, my teachers, my fellow alumni. All I see and all I do influences my work, but most of all I love to walk around and observe the world's little details. Reality is the only true source, you can't rely on books or pictures.





Do you have a preferred genre - fantasy/historical etc?

I love history, but I do prefer to improvise and to add my two cents to the scene, character or world I'm trying to depict, so I'd choose some low-fantasy setting.

Are you a gamer?

I was, when I had time to play. I played pen & paper RPGs for years and I loved them all; also video games, especially real time strategy and some first person shooters. Oh, and I still dedicate some time to wargaming ;)

Is there anyone you would like to work with/for in the future?

Yes, lots of companies I have yet to work with, such as Wizards of the Coast, Sony Online Entertainment or Games Workshop.

Which artists do you find exciting at the moment?

That's a difficult question, there are so many of them out there, and I do know them mostly by the nicknames they use in the net. Vinodrams, Alexander Ovchinnikov, Whit Brachna and Jeon JongUk, just to name a few.



An Interview with Rodney Thompson

In the latest of our series of interviews with top names from our hobby, we have been talking to Rodney Thompson. Having started as a freelancer writer of game books and online supplements for a variety of different games systems, Rodney now works as a designer and writer for Wizards of the Coast. Most notable perhaps for his involvement in the Star Wars Roleplaying Game line, Rodney now largely works on Dungeons and Dragons, but has created titles for many other RPGs, including d20 and even Stargate SG-1!

*** What has the change to the Dungeons and Dragons line been like for you, is it very different?**

Well, the game is always changing. The game never sits still, and we're always exploring new ways of doing things. One lesson I think we've learned over the last few years is that there isn't just one way to play Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), so we want to look at ways to give lots of different people with varied tastes a way to sit at the same table and play the same game. That's why you always see an effort to make new stuff play alongside old stuff. I ran a Dark Sun game last year that had a Player's Handbook rogue, a psion from Player's Handbook 3, and a slayer fighter from Heroes of the Fallen Lands all in the same game playing alongside one another. They are three very different classes with three different play-

styles, but all of the players were able to take part in the same adventure. I think that's always the big goal - to find new ways to get people to sit down at the same gaming table and enjoy the game we all love.

*** Do you get time to play RPGs as well as design them?**

Absolutely! I both play in a weekly D&D game (DMed by Chris Perkins) and run a weekly Forgotten Realms game. Beyond that, we always have playtest games going on during normal work hours, plus lunchtime games and so forth. Very few people in RPG R&D are in fewer than two D&D games at any given time. That doesn't include the RPGs other than D&D that we play. It's not unusual for me to play another RPG on weekends. All in all, I'd say I get an average of 12 hours a week of RPGs in, which is more than I have ever played in my entire life!

*** If yes, what are you playing at the moment and is it an RPG or a different type of game?**

As I mentioned, I play in Chris's Iomandra campaign which is a treat. We always joke that playing in a Chris Perkins game is like taking a Masters course in being a DM. My Monday night game is set in the Forgotten





Realms, though for the last few sessions I've been running them through a 4th Edition conversion of the Lich Queen's Beloved adventure from Dungeon #100.

*** What is your favourite element of the Essentials line?**

The variety. I like the fact that there's a lot of variety in how the classes play. That means that more players with different tastes can enjoy themselves in my game. I'm also very proud of the Monster Vault. We not only produced some solid mechanics in that book, but our designers produced some of the best and most useful story material that's come out of 4th Edition.



*** Is there a game or supplement from anywhere that you wish you'd been involved with but weren't?**

That's tough, because it's like saying, "I could have done that better." I would have liked to have been on the design team for The Al-Qadim campaign setting back in 2nd Edition, but only because I love it so much. Of course, since I was in high school at the time, that would have been pretty tough...

*** What is your most favourite game supplement that you've been involved in designing, and why is it your most favourite?**

I'm really proud of the Monster Vault, as I said, but I don't know that I'd pick it as a favourite. I think I'd have to say it's a tie between Star Wars Saga Edition and the new 4th edition Dark Sun Campaign Setting. Both were true labours of love for me, and with both I got to bring the settings and game experiences to a new generation of gamers.



*** Do you have a top tip that could help someone get the most fun from a Dungeons and Dragons game?**

Don't struggle against the game when you try to have fun. I kind of feel like there's no wrong way to enjoy D&D, and you should play it how you want to play it. If you don't like a rule, change it. This isn't like a computer game where everything is hard coded. Feel free to change anything that you want if it will make you enjoy the game more.

*** Dungeons and Dragons has a huge history and pedigree behind it. Do you find this intimidating or enabling when writing new material, and why?**

Well, I come from a background of working on Star Wars, which, though younger than D&D, has vastly larger amounts of lore built up around it. I feel like after working on the Star Wars RPG for three years I can handle anything that a brand has to throw at me. Honestly, though, I love continuity and history. I like saying, "Yes, and..." when it comes to designing things or running games; I like taking what someone else has done and

adding to it in a way that feels like it all fits together seamlessly. I don't like it when people throw around "legacy" and "the past" like they're dirty words, but I also think that there will always be progress, and that if you can maintain continuity with what has come before and still benefit from that progress, then you should endeavour to do so.

*** If you're running a game as a DM, do you prefer the use miniatures for combat situations? Do you feel the same as a player?**

It depends. I like miniatures for climactic encounters where tactics should really matter. Yet I prefer a more narrative style for anything else. I want the option to do it either way based on the situation. I've recently started running more fights in a narrative space to keep from interrupting the flow of the game, and it works pretty well most of the time. Any time we bump into a situation where I'm having to make a ruling on something that would be clearer with miniatures, I always rule in favour of the players, so that we can keep the action going without having to pause for a lengthy discussion.

*** What's next for the D&D line and Wizards of the Coast?**

Obviously I can't speak about specifics, but I think what I want to see for D&D is more things that interest and excite; more things you haven't necessarily seen before. At the same time, I want to see more people sitting down to enjoy D&D their way, so I hope that the future of D&D includes more ways for both players and DMs to customise their D&D experience to suit their needs. I also think we've got some very interesting things brewing on the board game front, and I hope that we can serve a portion of the D&D audience - that is D&D fans that may not have the time for the RPG - and again bring them under the tent of D&D fandom in some way.





Colour Theory

Step by step - Orcnar Unmann



Friendly Plastic



Non-Human Skin
(Alien or Orc)



Colour Theory

Words: Jason Hubbard
Illustration: Mikolaj Ostapiuk

Colour theory is a complicated topic, but once understood it will help improve your artwork, miniature painting and graphic design. This article will touch on the subject and will give you a good grasp of the basics on the subject.

How Do We Create Colour

All colours are created from a combination of primary colours. Primary colours can't be created by mixing other colours.

Secondary Colours

Secondary colours are created by mixing primary colours together.

Red + Yellow = Orange

Red + Blue = Purple

Blue + Yellow = Green

Tertiary Colours

Mix primary colours with neighbouring secondary colours, there are six tertiary colours, two from each primary colour. Colours are generally placed into a spectrum known as a colour wheel.

Complimentary Colours

These are colours that are opposite each other on the colour wheel. These will create a high level of contrast when used in combination. For instance purple makes a good shade colour for yellow.

Split Complimentary Colours

This uses a variation of complementary colours, using a colour and two adjacent colours. Using the colours left and right of the complimentary colour, this will provide high contrast without the strong pull of the complimentary scheme. This particular style is harder to balance and get right, its normally best to work on the principle of one warm colour and two cold colours.

Hot Colours

Red is generally considered a hot colour, and it is normally associated with fire and danger. They are colours that attract attention, which are aggressive and strong.

Cold Colours

Blue tones are considered to be cold, as they remind us of winter, when it is icy and snowing. When you place hot and cold together they vibrate.

Warm Colours

Colours that contain red are warm colours, such as orange and yellow. These are comfortable and remind us of Autumn.

Cool Colours

Blue is the basic tone of cool, though you can add yellow to create green which is a naturally cool colour which gives a sense of relaxation and being refreshed.

Light Colours

Light colours have a lot of white and are generally called pastels. They have a sense of transparency and the more light the colour is, then the smaller the combination of colours they can be used with.

Dark Colours

We associate dark colours as those mixed with black, they are associated with Autumn and winter. When combined with light colours, they can give a sense of drama.

Bright Colours

A bright colour is measured by the amount of pure colour. Bright colours will attract attention, which is why they're used in graphic design a lot for advertising.

This article only touches on the basics of colour theory, but hopefully this will act as a jumping off point and help improve your painting skills.



Step by step - Orcnar Unmann

Words & Photography: William Ford

My first job with these miniatures was to remove the mould lines from the main pieces and their left arms. The mould lines were far from excessive but were noticeable and they took a few minutes to clean up with a micro chisel and a hobby knife. The most difficult areas were where the lines cross over the scales and lumps on the model's back.

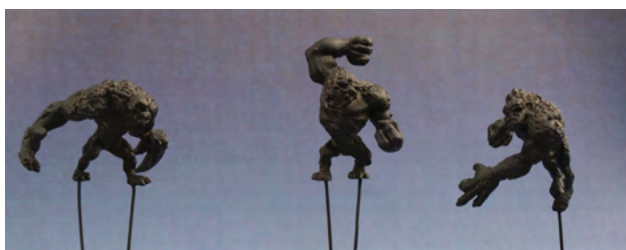
The left arms of the models fit into a recess under the shoulder and for extra security I decided to drill and pin these, after which I filled the join with a little green stuff to smooth the transition between shoulder and arm. You can see from the first photo that the amount of green stuff used was minimal.



The miniatures were washed to remove any grease or other residue. As I was intending to use an airbrush for the base coats on these figures I removed the tabs attached to their feet and pinned them to a cork. The cork is glued to a piece of hardboard to provide a flat stable base. This arrangement gives a good amount of room to get the airbrush into the nooks and crannies of a miniature.

After undercoating the models with a black primer it was on to painting proper. I quite like the tonal contrast of the Orcnar figures on the Tor Gaming website but wanted to try a different colour. After considering several different schemes, I decided on a light blue, with a hint of green, for the main body with the scales being coloured in a chocolate brown to provide a stark tonal contrast and a nice colour compliment to the blues of the skin tones.

For applying the base coats I used a dual action, gravity fed airbrush applying the colour all over for the first coat and then increasing the angle of the brush to the model with successive highlight coats. I mainly use Vallejo Model Colour in my painting and particularly for the airbrush due to the finer pigment grain size.



Stage 1



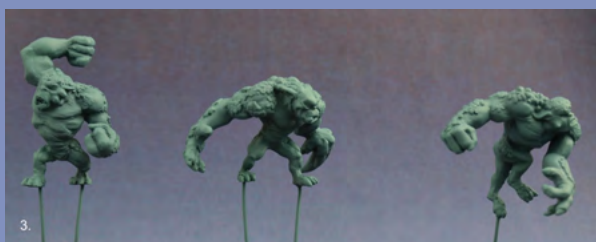
A basecoat colour was mixed from Ger. Dark Green (VMC 896) and Turquoise (VMC 966) at a ratio of 2:1 and diluted, at about a 50:50 ratio, with a mixture of Vallejo thinners and water. I find it easiest to mix up an amount of thinners and water in a spare dropper bottle for use throughout the base coating. The colours were mixed in the cup of the airbrush and stirred thoroughly with a brush.

Stage 2-4

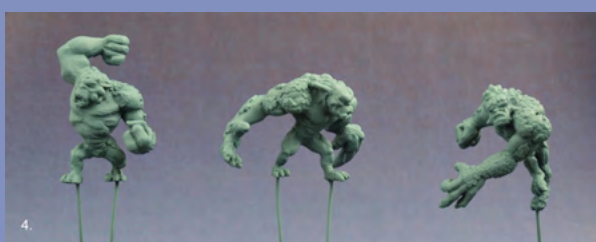


I decided to have a basic zenithal - or overhead - light source and for successive highlights I added Pale Sand (VMC 837) in increasing amounts to the basecoat mix, being careful to maintain the dilution with the thinner and water mix. Initially I used about the same amount of Pale Sand as I had of Turquoise and added the same amount to the mix on two more occasions.

Stage 2-4

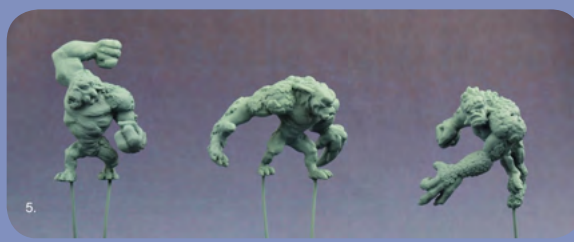


All these additions were made directly into the mix in the cup of the airbrush and mixed thoroughly. They were test sprayed onto a piece of scrap card to get rid of any of the previous colour and to check that the colour mixed was okay.



The addition of the lighter colour, along with the increased angle of the brush, provides a nice transition from the base colour through the highlights. The angle at which the paint for the highlight is sprayed can be used to mimic the direction of the light source being used on the models. The airbrush gives a very natural looking gradation from the shadows to the highlights.

Stage 5 & 6



For the final highlights I added Silver Grey (VMC 883) to the mix and lightly covered the very highest surfaces of the models.

The next steps would be the detailing of the models and so I put them aside to clean the airbrush. This might sound quite basic to those who are used to airbrushing but it is important to clean your brush immediately after use to prevent paint drying in the nozzle or on the needle. For cleaning I flush through with thinners and then with diluted airbrush cleaning fluid. I find an empty 2 liter plastic bottle, with a hole cut into the side, ideal to spray into to contain any water or cleaner.



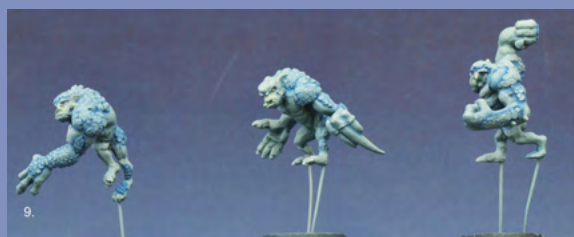
Stage 7



To draw attention to the face and hands I used diluted Silver Grey, with a brush, on the raised parts of these areas to increase the contrast.

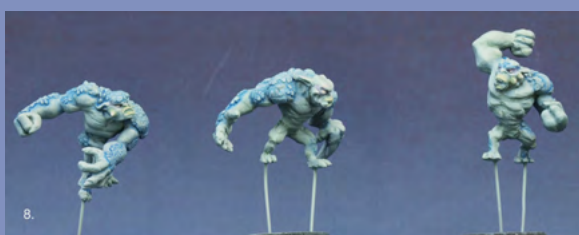
I wanted to darken the areas of skin around the scales without losing the blue tones of the model so I diluted some Transparent Azul (VMC 938) and added a touch of Violet (VMC 960) to remove a bit of the coldness of the wash. I took a damp brush and ran it over the flesh areas that I wanted to tone and then allowed the diluted wash to wick into the join between the skin and the scales. The capillary action on the damp surface

Stage 9



To further define the facial features I used a mix of Ger. Dark Green mixed equally with German Cam. Black Brown (VMC 822). This was heavily diluted and used to pick out the shadows in the face under the nostrils, the cheek lines and around the eye balls. It was also used to pick out the teeth by washing it into the mouth.

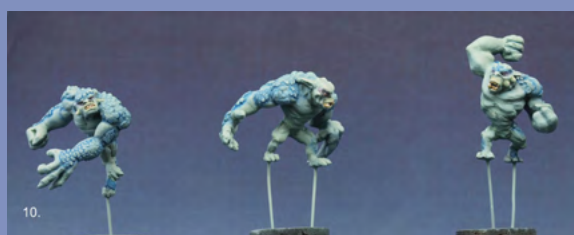
Stage 8



As the main focus on these models is the face I decided to add some colour to draw the viewer's eye. I started with a glaze of diluted Royal Purple (VMC 810) to the eye sockets to deepen the recesses and provide a contrast to the eyes themselves and glazed over the lips with a diluted wash of Deep Yellow (VMC 915) which I also used on the spikes on the face. A further wash of Deep Yellow mixed with Silver Grey was applied to the high points.

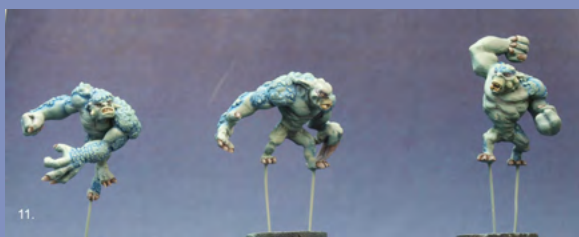
The eye balls were added with Silver Grey.

Stage 10



For the teeth I used a basecoat of Japan Uniform (VMC 923) which I progressively highlighted with additions of Silver Grey to a pure Silver Grey at the tips. The pupils were dotted with Black (VMC 950).

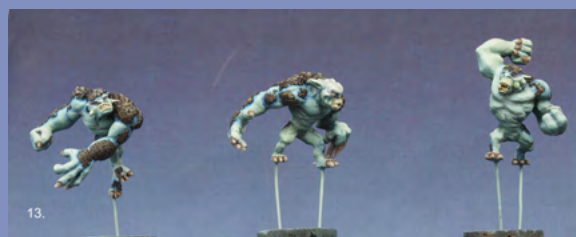
Stage 11



It was now time to start on the darker areas of the models so I base coated the claws/nails with Chocolate Brown (VMC 872). I added a little Silver Grey to this in successive steps and added lines towards the tips getting progressively lighter, allowing the Chocolate Brown to still be seen around the base of the claws/nails and on the insides of the nails. To ensure that I could achieve fine lines in these areas I added a little flow improver to the paint mix.

I felt the skin colours of the bodies were lacking a little life and so I heavily diluted some Violet Red (VMC 812) and glazed this into the shadow areas.

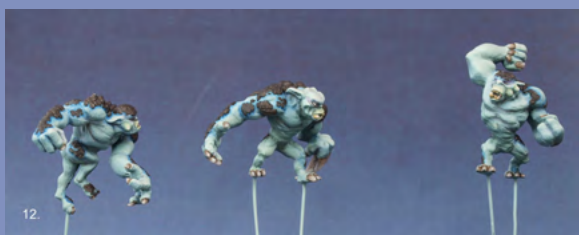
Stage 12-13



To delineate individual scales I applied a wash mixed from Woodgrain Transp. (VMC 828) and Transparent Azul with a little flow improver added. Woodgrain is a lovely red - brown colour and when mixed with blue produces a very characterful dark tone that is not quite black but has a lot of life. I used a 50:50 mix but the proportions can be varied to give warmth or coolness, or hints of either colour. This mix gave a lovely dark blue with a hint of purple which I also used a second time in the deepest recesses of the scaled areas such as in between the shoulder blades and where the top of the arms met the back.

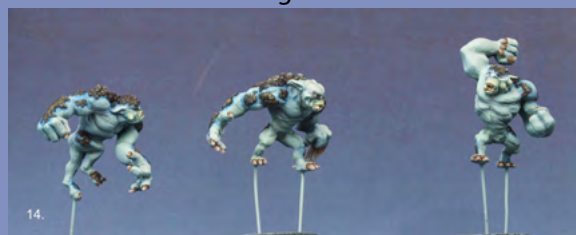
You can do this with most darkish browns and blues and such a mix can provide a good alternative to black, having more depth and life to it. The use of colour in making black also allows the colour to come out in the highlights, rather than just adding grey/white, which can give a lifeless, dusty look and often makes the area look dark grey rather than black.

Stage 12-13



German Cam. Black Brown was used to cover the scaled areas of the models, predominantly on the top of the shoulders, the back and the outside of the arms as well as small patches on the hips and legs. I wanted a different looking finish for these areas and decided to apply a dark tone first and highlight up, rather than a mid-tone followed by highlights and shadows. I therefore started to highlight these by adding Japanese Uniform to the base colour and also a little Silver Grey.

Stage 14



Some of the larger bumps and lumps on the top of the back received a further highlight of Pale Sand. On inspecting the model I was happy with the overall look but felt that claws were a little too cold and that the blending of the lines at their base could be improved. I therefore used a few coats of very diluted Gryphonnie Sepia - a Games Workshop wash - which I washed over the base of the nails/claws in progressively smaller areas.

The models were then coated with a matt varnish for protection with small additions of a gloss varnish for the eye balls and for the nails/claws. With that done it was time to work on the bases.

Stage 15-16



I decided to use the bases supplied with the models rather than make a larger display base and went with a simple dry rock/sand base. As the bases would be totally covered I marked on to the sides the positions of the slots. This would enable me to position the models so that the pins would go into the slots and give them maximum support. You can just make out the pencil marks on the accompanying photo.

The recesses in the bases were first filled with a little Milliput which was pushed into the edges with a sculpting tool and a textured effect created. Next the models were carefully clipped from their cork stands, leaving about 5mm of the pin sticking out to allow attachment to the base. I gave the pins and feet a coat of water, to prevent any Milliput sticking to them, and lowered the models into position on the bases to make holes where the pins will be glued and to get an idea of the composition of the models.

Following this I selected a few small pieces of rock - these are small bits of broken brick which crumble very easily and have a very fine texture - and pushed these into the Milliput on the bases.



Stage 17



When the Milliput had cured the base area was given a covering of a PVA/White/Woodworking adhesive and sand sprinkled around the larger stones. The gaps between these areas were covered with a coating of bicarbonate of soda which gives a finer texture than the sand and a nice variety of textures across the base.

The bases were lightly sprayed with water, which allows the adhesive to draw up around the individual grains and helps fix them to the base, and allowed to dry overnight.

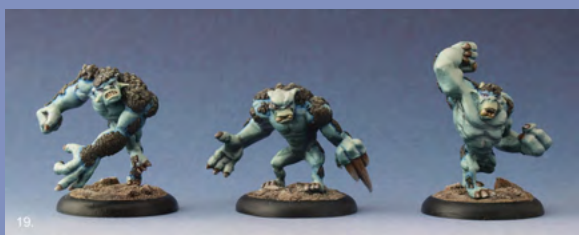
Stage 18



For unity across the whole model I like to use the same colours in the bases as I've used in the miniatures themselves. I therefore mixed a basecoat from Chocolate Brown that was lightened with Pale Sand and to which was added a little Deep Yellow for warmth. This was applied all over the bases and, being a brown based colour, it would also provide a nice contrast to the blue tones used in painting the figures.

I added more Pale Sand to the basecoat and drybrushed it over the bases, letting the texture work for me, followed by a further highlight on the higher areas with more Pale Sand added. Finally the highest points were touched with Silver Grey.

Stage 19



The next step was to add the models to the bases by gluing the pins into the holes already created.



Stage 20



To finish the pieces I decided to add a couple of grass tufts to add a little 'verticality' and life to the bases. They were placed into position first to make sure the composition was okay and they didn't detract from the miniatures before being glued permanently in place.

These miniatures were great fun to paint and hopefully my enjoyment comes through in the final pieces. I hope you have found this article useful and that you can take something from it, happy painting.



Friendly Plastic

Words & Photography: Amy Wagstaff

Recently there has been a thread on a new product called 'Instant Mould'; the cheaper variety is called Friendly Plastic, and can be bought at various places - in my case, eBay. Friendly Plastic is a material that melts at about 60 degrees and then can be used to create a cast of whatever you want, and then melted and re-used again and again and again.

The basics

Friendly plastic comes in two forms: Pellets, which are opaque white, and strips, which come in a variety of colours including metallic and pearlescent.

Friendly Plastic Pellets – A 30 gms (1 oz) Bag cost me £3.33 with 75p post and packaging from : gillianafone on Ebay. Strips are 17.78cm long, and cost between £1.38 and £1.44 each.

Melting:

The melting of the strips couldn't be easier, just simply dunk them into hot water. I used a cup of freshly boiled water out of the kettle, so mind your fingers.



Note: The seller suggests melting them with a heat gun instead of hot water, and the website suggests a non-stick tray in the oven which might preserve the colour better. However, I don't own a heat gun and my land-lady will be very mad if I set the kitchen on fire again... (Ed: Again?)

The colour didn't survive me rolling it, but you can still see the flecks of blue on the rolled up ball. I stored them in the water till I needed them so they wouldn't harden.

The pellets I also melted in the cup - however, I decided scooping them out would be difficult so I used an old jar lid with some holes and a piece of stiff wire as a handle to hold the pellets in as they were dunked.

The pellets, when they're ready to come out, turn from the opaque white colour (top right picture) to a beautiful clear colour (bottom left) and you can mould it into a ball ready for use.

The main problems I had at this stage were the pieces sticking either to the cup or to the can lid. They were both very malleable at this stage which was good!

From here I decided to use the clear friendly plastic to experiment with as they are both the same, aside from the original form.

Base

To make this base I used:

- A blank 40mm circular base
- Green stuff
- A small heart-shaped craft cutter
- Paint brush
- Flat file
- Friendly plastic pellets - enough to fill half the jar lid in a flat layer
- Deneb stone paint



I did this base quite fast because I didn't want the plastic to harden before I'd finished. If you want to take it slowly just place your piece on something like the jar lid I made and lower it into the hot water till it softens again. Carry on working on it on the jar lid though as otherwise it will distort as you pick it off.

First I took the melted pellets and rolled them into a smooth ball before flattening the ball with my hands and then onto my desk surface (Do not do this on paper – I will explain at the end why)



I wanted to make sure that the piece I was doing would fit comfortably onto a 40mm base so I pressed a 40mm base into the plastic to make a shallow impression. I then took up the heart shaped cutter and stamped a pattern into the centre of the plastic before it hardened.



When the plastic had fully hardened, you can watch the process via the colour change as the plastic goes from clear to opaque white, I mixed some green stuff and rolled it out thinly to fill the mould. I find wetting the desk helps you to roll a very thin layer without it sticking.

After the green stuff had hardened it came away very easily from the Friendly Plastic mould and I added it to the top of the 40mm base, filed the edges and gave it a basecoat.



One of the advantages to Friendly Plastic is that you can use things from around the house to make impression for use in our hobby! I had some green stuff spare so I went off in search of something to make an impression of and came back with a picture frame...

Corner piece

For this I used;

- A rose vine metal picture frame
- Green stuff
- A small amount of Friendly Plastic pellets
- 'Ard coat varnish
- Chaos black
- Dark angels green
- Scab red
- 1:12th scale roof tile (Grandad tile) Slate grey.
- Flat file
- Craft knife.



Firstly I melted some of the friendly plastic pellets and covered a corner of the picture frame I was using to make an impression. When the friendly plastic had set I peeled it off and checked the impression



I then added the left over green stuff and set it to dry out. After the green stuff had set I was pleasantly surprised at how easily it came away from the mould!

The picture to the lbelow shows the piece after it has been cleaned up with a craft knife, base coated black, highlighted with green and red and gloss varnish, shown with a gloss varnished tile.



Drawbacks:

- I found the plastic hardened very quickly when it came out of the hot water however, this may be due to me having very cold hands/work surface.
- It does stick to things such as the inside of tea cups, can lids, a roll of wire I tried to get an impression from, bases and yes, plain A4. In fact I now have a piece of Friendly Plastic with pieces of plain white paper forever stuck inside it.....

Positives:

- To my eyes Friendly Plastic is cheap for something you can use over and over again and represents very good value for money.
- It's easy to use, drop it in hot water and it turns malleable and can be reshaped – even I can use it!
- It is non-toxic, so you and your children can use it without worrying about being poisoned (just watch the water!)
- It's waterproof (non-porous) and can be stored in my bits box without worry.
- It can be painted!

Extra notes:

I found that for storing spare melted plastic or re-melted plastic, balls take a bit longer to soften so stretching it into strips worked best for quick re-melting next time.

Summary:

I really enjoyed using this medium which was a nice change, usually I'm so terrified of working with green stuff and air drying clay in case I make mistakes and don't realise until it's too late. As an alternate use I found that playing and stretching the ball of stuff was really relaxing.

Non-Human Skin (Alien or Orc)

Words & Photography: Patrick Hopper

When approaching any new miniature, I always make sure that I take the time to prepare the miniature for painting. I won't over-elaborate or go into too much detail on this process, as it is pretty much the same as most people's. I file down all mould lines, pin the joints together, wash and scrub the bare metal of the miniature, and use Milliput to cover the places where the parts mate together. Once that process is complete I will prime the model, usually with a white spray paint.

The miniature I will be painting for this tutorial is "Boss Mesaan (B)" by Hasslefree Miniatures.

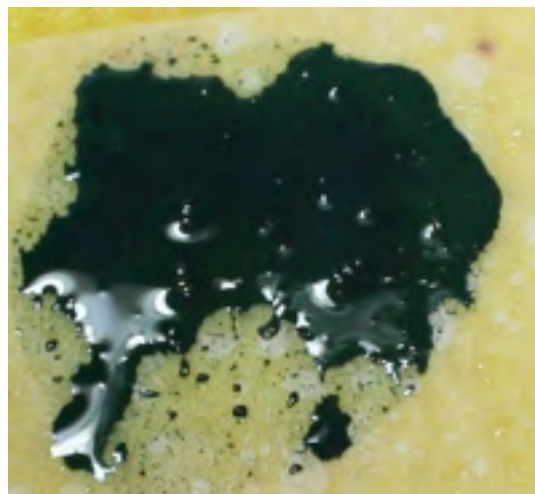


When approaching this model I asked myself what type of mood did I want to convey on the finished miniature? I am only painting the torso and upper arms for this tutorial, but I went with a green color scheme because I wanted to make the finished miniature a play off of the "little green men from mars" theme - seeing as how large he is I am planning on calling the finished model "The Not So Little Man From Mars". I also went with this scheme because can be easily converted over to any kind of orc or goblin for a quick and easy green-skin paint job. The lower arms I plan to be covered in gore and the lower legs covered in red dust from the terrain, so I left these objects untouched. I also did not paint the scabs/scars on the skin as I am really unsure what direction I want to take these at the moment. Now, let us get to the painting itself.

From the primed model I started with a basecoat of Citadel's Ork-Hide Shade Foundation paint. Once I got good coverage on the model I took a liberal wash of Thraka Green and washed it over the basecoat to help darken the shadowed areas.



Once the wash was dry, I started to work toward where I wanted my highlights. I did this by adding one part Knarloc Green to three parts Ork-Hide Shade and thinning it to layering consistency - it should look like green fat free milk.



At this point I cover most of the skin, leaving only the areas in deepest shade untouched. I add a few layers of this leaving a tiny bit of the previous layer showing each time.



Once this is dry I start a new highlight, with a mix of 2 parts Knarloc Green to 1 part Ork-Hide Shade. I start working toward areas that will be hit by more light, and using layering I build this color up over a few layers, with a tiny part of each previous layer showing each time. This is where you will really begin to see the color starting to get lighter.



Now I will be working with only pure Knarloc Green, working my way even higher toward the areas that will be hit by the light source. I continue to build the color up over a few layers, leaving a tiny portion of the previous layers visible each time. You should now start seeing the transition from your shadow to your highlight.



For the final highlight I add Reaper Master Series Aged Bone paint to Knarloc Green in a mixture of 1 part Aged Bone to 2 parts Knarloc Green - Aged Bone can easily be substituted for Games Workshop's Bleached Bone paint. I take this mix and work even more toward the highest areas that the light source would hit. I tend to apply this layer a little thicker hitting only the upper highlights.

Once the final layer is done I take a glaze of Knarloc Green and lightly brush it over the model to help smooth out and tie the blends together. There you have it, the skin is finished.



You could highlight further depending on the light source and environment you are trying to create, but I believe this is an easy way to accomplish a decent green skin for your non-human miniatures.



Reviews

War Elephants

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Enemies of the Empire

AEG

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War Elephants

Osprey Publishing

Words: Dave Barker

Illustration: Osprey Publishing

I was rather delighted to get the opportunity to review War Elephants from Osprey. It isn't their latest release, nor their best seller (as far as I know!), but I've always been rather fascinated - and not a little bit repulsed - by how these huge wild animals have been put to use as engines of war for centuries.

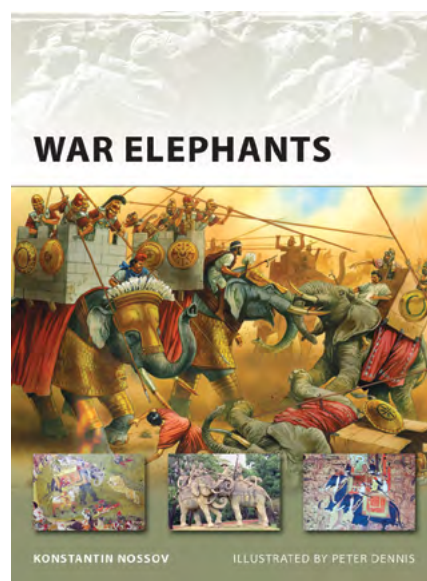
Being an Osprey book, I was expecting a lot of detail on the history and usage of these elegant beasts and I was not disappointed. From covering the rather horrible details about how such mighty and majestic creatures have been captured and trained from wild animals to semi-tame war engines, to how they have been armed and crewed over the centuries by the different cultures that have put them to use in their armies, War Elephants is quite a comprehensive introduction to the subject which seems much longer than its actual 48 pages.

The War Elephants of India, Southeast Asia, Carthage, Rome, the Alexandrian Successors and Pyrrhus of Epirus are covered in some detail with further sections covering others who have used elephants in war, the tactical and strategic application of elephants as well as the rather unpleasant details of how elephants are caught and trained for war.

As with every other book I've ever seen from Osprey, the text is supplemented well with a good number of wonderful illustrations and pictures that bring the subject to life, making it possible envisage how elephants have been used and why in enough detail that I am now pretty certain I don't ever want to see them put to use in this way again. However, it equally makes me wants to put together a wargaming army that contains some elephants so that I can paint some of these magnificent looking animals in all of their finery to deploy on the tabletop! I can be odd that way sometimes, I guess.

The book also goes into detail about how different nations in history put their elephants to use in battle, how they were armed and how they were sometimes armoured; what their roles in a battle were - yes, roles, as it turns out there are many different ways of deploying an elephant! - and methods which were developed to counter the threats that an elephant poses on a battlefield - threats to friend and foe alike! Even the simulated threat of an elephant on the battlefield is covered, including a tale of 9th century BC Assyrians who reportedly created fake elephants to take to battle, with mixed success I should say!

I really can't find anything negative to say about this title, except of course that people used to use these beautiful animals to fight wars. Even my Mum, who visited whilst I was reading War Elephants couldn't help reading this book - although she is already a fan of all things elephant anyway!



If you've got any interest in this subject, or indeed in the history of any of the armies that have used elephants as tools of war, then I cannot recommend this title highly enough!

War Elephants, Konstantin Nossov, Osprey Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84603-268-4

Enemies of the Empire

AEG

Enemies of the Empire is the first supplement for the fourth edition of the Legend of the Five Rings (L5R) role-playing game. I reviewed the core rulebook for this in the last issue. As the name suggests, it goes into detail about many of the adversaries that a group of samurai may face including natural creatures such as a boar or tiger, conspiracies such as the Bloodspeakers or Kolat, and the Oni of the Shadowlands.

As with the core rulebook, Enemies is a beautiful book. It is a 288 page, full-colour hardback, split into 14 chapters - and, in a rare move for a RPG, it even has a comprehensive index.

It is worth mentioning at this point that, unlike previous editions, the material in this book is not tied to a particular moment in the L5R timeline. While the weekly fictions on the L5R website as well as collectable card game releases and tournaments will continue to advance the story, it looks like the fourth edition will not be producing releases which directly tie in to what is happening in the ongoing story. Instead, Shawn Carman and his team will producing material which can be used whenever in Rokugan's history your campaign happens to be set.



Words & Photography: Nick Johnson



One area of concern for me with this release revolves around the editing. Given my work for Irregular, it should be understandable that I pick up on things like inconsistent formatting that most people would let slide, but there are a couple of things that go beyond that. On two occasions I noticed text saying that further material would be available later in the chapter, only to find that when I reached the next chapter that material wasn't there. I've raised the question on the AEG forums, so hopefully the missing material will appear in time.

This really is a book for the GM more than for the players. While the background is likely to be interesting for all parties, the majority of the mechanics are for adversaries, not allies. While you can field Naga and Nezumi as player characters, this is likely to cause disruption in most campaigns unless the GM puts in extra work to accommodate them. Expanded mechanics for Ronin are appreciated, especially with the appearance of Otokodate (Ronin Brotherhoods) in the fourth edition.

One question that should be looked at is whether it is worth getting the book if you own equivalent texts from earlier editions as it has normally been reasonably simple to update mechanics from one edition to the next. I would say yes to that, for two reasons. Firstly, given certain balance shifts in the fourth edition, I don't think that importing something from an earlier edition without some tweaking and play-testing would be viable - if you buy Enemies, then the work is done for you. Secondly, it provides the sole source of statistics and background for some additions, such as the infamous Nolsoc no Oni.

Overall then, I'd say that Enemies of the Empire is well worth buying if you plan on running L5R at some point in the near future - just reading through it for this review has left a whole host of ideas floating through my mind. Or maybe that's just the insidious influence of the Nothing corrupting me....

Price: Around £29.99 / \$39.99

ISBN: 978-1-59472-055-0

Published by Alderac Entertainment Group

Broken Blacktop Gaming Mat

Words & Photography: Ian Pursey

Zuzzy

So first up what are we actually looking at? Well this is a durable, latex rubber, textured surface mat for your miniatures, either for display or gaming. The product range is deemed to be suitable for 25-54mm wargaming, 1/76-1/35 scale modelling and HO-1 scale railroading - that's model trains to us Brits. It's thin and very flexible, and can be rolled for easy storage without damaging the paintwork applied. Sizes range from 6'x4' down to 14"x11".

The sample received is 'Broken blacktop' from the Wounded City range, an Americanism for tarmac coming away from it's under-surface. As you will see from the photo one end is fairly solid and this gradually deteriorates into cracked and disjointed areas with a section actually bare of tarmac to show the brick under-surface. Definitely brick and not cobbles which you would more likely find under tarmac in the UK.

Zuzzy's website has a tutorial on preparation and painting but this is very straightforward. Clean with a damp cloth – do NOT wash! – and when dry use acrylic paints with dry brush, wash and scumbling techniques.

Laid out the mat sits nice and flat; great for those rather lightweight miniatures that make up the bulk of so many armies. The texture is well represented, deep enough to show but not so much as to cause models to topple. I test painted a small area using drybrushing and the result was very pleasing, but my sample was a 14" x 11" piece and, to be perfectly honest, the thought of doing this on a 6' x 4' mat is daunting to say the least!

Even this small sample has some weight so the larger mats would be quite heavy – not the sort of thing I'd want to take outside the home even if they do roll up to a manageable size. However, that said, having a selection of these ready to choose from for your games without having numerous separate gaming boards/tables with different surfaces is very appealing – simply add to a plain surface and hey presto, instant good looking terrain. The smaller mats, like the sample, would be excellent if surrounded by other features to provide



a scenic focus; in this case buildings to make a town square or similar.

Cost? Well a 4' x 4' wounded city mat, like the sample, cost just over \$38 plus shipping which is 78% of the item cost. To be honest I think this will put the purchase of individual items by UK gamers into the minority so a UK stockist is needed, but orders over \$200 still incur a 40% charge. I spoke to my local gaming store and he had shown an interest until the shipping costs were added.

A 14" x 11" mat like the sample is only \$6.31 but with 85% shipping...

So, overall I have to say it is a very useful gaming and display accessory and if shipping was not such an issue I think it would do well in the UK.

Quality: 9/10

Cost: 6/10 – I have to consider the shipping costs

Aesthetics: 9/10

Overall: 8/10



Orcnar Unmann Tor Gaming

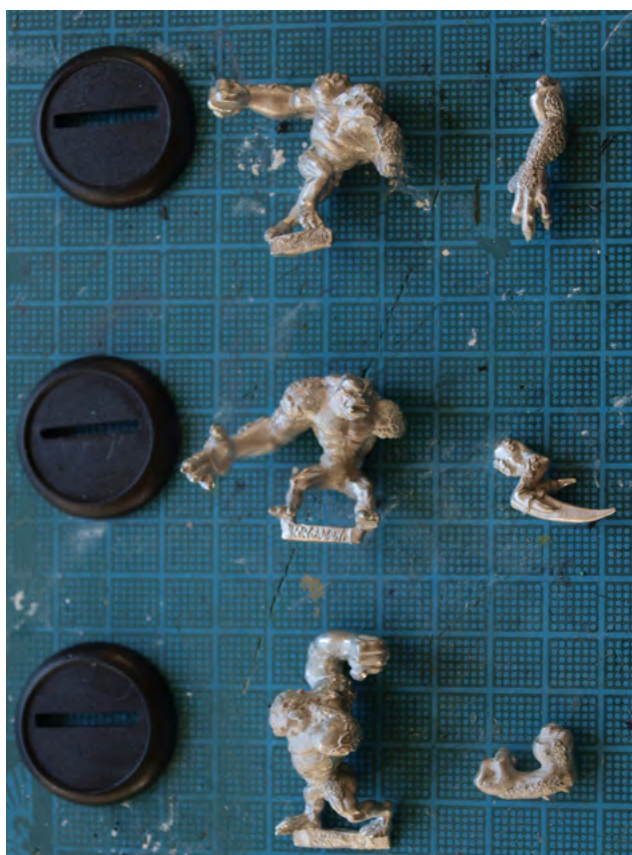
Words & Photography: William Ford

The Unmann models from Tor Gaming are made for the 'Relics' table top war-game. They are two part metal casts with separate left arms, and come with round 'slotta' type bases that are recessed to allow for the addition of basing materials. For scale the model with his arm raised (the bottom one in the photo) measures 23mm from ground to eye level and 27mm from ground to the top of his head, which ends up closer to 28mm and 32mm respectively when the models are based.

There was no flash on these models and they were smooth, clean casts with no pitting. The mould lines were very fine, requiring very little cleaning, however they could prove problematic where they run over the detailed scales on the model's back and shoulders.

The left arms have a 'nib' at the top which fits into a depression under the shoulder which can be easily pinned. I would recommend a filler or putty to fill the gap around the join.

All three of these figures have bucket loads of character and are each in action poses. The muscle definition is quite well sculpted, which adds to the feeling of raw power that the models have, and the scaly patches are very well detailed. They have good facial features giving each model an individual character.



These figures should be easy to paint using basic techniques for quick tabletop models, but also have lots of space and definition for more advanced techniques to bring the best out in their character.

Overall I found these to be three lovely figures, well sculpted and well cast, that could fit into a number of different game systems. Given their character they would also do well as individual display pieces or as part of a larger diorama.

Camera Obscura

Words: Vyctoria Hart

by Lavie Tidhar

Camera Obscura is the second book in the Les Lézards universe, a steampunk alternative history where the familiar Victorian era becomes very strange indeed. In a world where Britain's empire is ruled by giant lizards, Tidhar's Milady De Winter must untangle a web of lies and intrigue in order to save the world. As she is helped and hindered by a variety of appropriated fictional and genuine historical characters, the book takes the reader from automaton-ruled France to Vespuccia (a very different take on the U.S. of A.) via the wilds of Indo-China. Littered with exciting set pieces, clever locations and dashing battles, Camera Obscura is a roller-coaster of a read.

Part of a growing trend in steampunk to move away from the common Victorian England or Civil War-era America settings, the book takes advantage of the plethora of underused exotic locations elsewhere in the world. For example, the central character hails from the now defunct Kingdom of Dahomey (now part of Benin) and a good portion of the back-story takes place in the deserts and jungles of China.

Where the story does visit the more commonly used locations, they are changed so significantly by the alternate timeline that they still feel alien and uncomfortable. There is a sense throughout the book that every location has a deep and complex back-story in its own right, which offers the promise of greater depth in the rest of the series and will keep the reader wanting more.

Tidhar has successfully blended elements of more mainstream science fiction into this alternate history tale, a strategy that will make it much more accessible to those new to the steampunk genre. Whilst the book does deal with many of the stock steampunk themes – existing fictional characters, zombie-esque creatures, a strong female lead and extensive travel – it does so in a refreshingly individual way. These zombies are not quite the ones we're used to reading about, the female lead is blessedly unemotional and airships aren't the sole form of transportation. Whilst it isn't necessary for the reader to identify every literary and historical reference to follow the story, it adds an extra level of enjoyment for those familiar with the genre.

The only real issue with the book is that it does suffer from a writing style that is slightly stilted in places and lacking in clarity. At times it can be difficult to follow which portions of the book are flashbacks rather than part of the main chronology, so care must be taken when reading to keep the plot straight. Moreover, there is something of a confusion of languages. Whilst the initial action is set in France, some elements seem to slip between French and English, and the main character's affectation of the title "milady", which is both typically steampunk and very British, sits oddly in a French setting.

Despite this, Camera Obscura is still a fast-paced, action-filled tale which should appeal to steampunks and science fiction fans alike. Ultimately this is a series with a great deal of a promise and a solid universe in which to grow and develop, and definitely one to watch.

Flintloque 3rd Edition Alternative Armies

Words: William Ford
Photography: William Ford Jnr

Flintloque is a role-playing skirmish game that is based from the times of the Napoleonic wars. The difference is that the races, instead of being human, are fantasy races and animals - for instance, the French (or Ferach as they are known in the book) are elves. Also the name of places and people are different, and are often puns or plays on the historical source e.g. the great General Wheeling-Turn. This is a smaller scale version of the game Slaughterloo but with a role-playing aspect. This particular supplement is for fighting battles in the realm of Catalucia, which is loosely based on the Peninsular campaign.

I would like to say that, from my point of view, this is a fantastic rules set and background, more specifically the style of the role-play/skirmish game hybrid that these rules are for. It is the first time I have come across this kind of way of playing and I find it quite intriguing. It constantly adds background to any game, as well as allowing for greater reputation or stories for your forces.

The background at the front of the book is well written and contains a lot of detail. The names and characteristics - the skills, traits and flaws - for the different races and for the iconic place names are humorous, and help to differentiate each contingent, force or race.

I found the character creation system very useful in giving the figures a sense of personality. The Skills, Traits and Flaws add character very well with some, sometimes simple, but effective rules which gives the opportunity to create many different personae. However, some of the races do seem to be a bit too weak for the games system, but I think the points system works quite nicely to compensate, meaning that lesser races will be able to afford more men - or animals - and better guns.

I also like the three simple, yet in-depth, scenarios contained in the book which cover a nice range of ideas and objectives. These, coupled with the many ideas in the front of the book, provide a wealth of opportunities to re-enact old Napoleonic battles - albeit on a skirmish scale - or to combine different objectives and background to create a wealth of scenarios for yourself.

One slight drawback I found in the book is that, for a new player, the rules are slightly difficult to get to grips with quickly. I believe that this book needs to be read through thoroughly, and completely before starting any sort of character building or gaming. This is, however, the same for most rule sets I have seen and should not in any way be taken as a negative comment.

Once you start, the game runs smoothly and effectively, though I found the rules themselves a little complex and unclear in places. This is compensated for with good examples given in the text, as if taken from an actual game of Flintloque. I found these examples clear and



informative, and very helpful in clarifying some of the more complex rules. One problem with having a game of such small forces might be that games are decided on luck rather than any tactical nous. This may just have been in my experiences and might actually work for the game; meaning the best laid battle plans could fail due to a wild-card event. This may always keep you on your toes and keep you excited about the game.

The after-game work is slightly tedious but needs to be done to develop your characters for further games or linked scenarios and to keep the story going.

Flintloque may do well as a game for even more than two players because of its smooth game system. The game is so flowing, in fact, that anyone, however short their attention span, can play a full game in one go.

Overall, this game is fun to play and it is enjoyable to watch characters progress - or not, as the case may be - and form new stories over your battles about what really happened in Catalucia.

Solid State War

Dave Gaffham Models

Words & Photography: David Hoekzema

Solid State War is a fast paced and intense aircraft based scenario game. Within just minutes of starting you may find yourself deep in enemy territory, just praying that your opponents shot isn't a critical hit. Or, if you're lucky, you may find yourself in a position to unleash a barrage of lethal attacks that could set the tone of the entire mission in your favor.

With the ability to customize and upgrade the weapons and equipment carried by your aircraft, Solid State War is designed to allow for both quick instant action and prolonged campaigns. Points can be accumulated throughout the game and can be used to purchase additional aircraft, upgrade your crew, or outfit your units with additional devices or weapons that can help turn the tide of the battle at any moment.



With easy to follow rules, the game play flows smoothly. At it's most basic, each player rolls for initiative, takes their movement, and performs their actions - including adjusting throttle, performing repairs, using devices and attacking - but having the initiative is the key! If you can get into range and line up your shot, you may be able to take out your opponent before they know what hit 'em, but with special equipment and actions such as smoke emitters, over thrusters and full throttle loops your attack may not be a sure thing.

Solid State War is a "print-and-play", turned-based scenario game. Everything needed to play can be printed at home either on paper or card-stock. The game includes the complete rules and all the parts needed to play, from the dice to the aircraft. The expansion set - Solid State War Interceptor - also includes highly-detailed 3D models which not only add to the realism of the game, but are an enjoyable challenge to build. These printable models come in two different scales, both of which work well with the game, but if paper is not your thing you could easily substitute them with your favorite aircraft models or figures.

The only component that I found lacking in Solid State War was rules for altitude. While the battles were intense the game itself is currently two dimensional. The use of the 3D models just beg for the ability to have a



more three dimensional game. The core rules and Interceptor expansion rules do not currently have any rules for altitude, but the players guide does hint at a possibility of aircraft with the ability to quickly change altitude, so it very well could be on the horizon for future expansions. The players guide did mention the addition of ground units such as characters and vehicles planned for future expansions, so this is something to watch for. I believe the addition of ground based units along with rules for altitude would seriously add a very interesting dynamic to the game and make it unique to its genre.

Even without altitude, the game was exciting. We had

a good time dog-fighting and smash talking. The story line is well written, and the guide includes some interesting background around the forces. The players guide includes its own scenarios which work great for single use play or full campaigns, and the rules could easily be adapted for custom scenarios. I plan on stocking up with some fun steampunk-esque aircraft which should go very well with the game's story line.

I will say that I came into the game a little skeptical about a paper/card-stock based game. This was a new experience for me, but I am very glad that I tried it. Not only did I get to build some pretty cool card-stock models, but I had some fun playing a game that appears to be well thought out and created by someone who has a lot of passion in their games.



Katana: The Samurai Sword

Osprey Publishing

Words: Robert Hodder

For anyone who professes an interest in swords, their construction and the way of the Samurai, this book isn't a bad place to start. It examines the origin of the katana, how its design was influenced, the way it is constructed to be an effective weapon, and its importance in history and culture of Japan. Providing a solid stable of information, it dispels with some of the myths that blockbuster films would have us believe, but without losing the appreciation and wonder attached to the sword, and the warrior class that wielded it in combat.

The information is well presented, with in-depth knowledge explained over details such as how the sword would be handled during forging, and how a samurai would typically hold it in battle. Clear translations are given for Japanese terms, and a glossary is present for clarification. There is a good mixture of historical battles along with some more personal tales of the more legendary swordsmen. All of which helps give a clearer picture of the evolution of the blades' use, as well as how deadly it can be. Some stories, such as the 'Ikedaya Incident', are embellished with accompanying art, which serves to highlight the lethality of the weapon, and the nature of the samurai.

The book's artist, Johnny Shumate, only provides a limited number of personal illustrations, like the one mentioned above. The majority of images are historical drawings and art pieces depicting famous warriors and battles, or showing the sword-smith at work. The illustrations that Shumate provides are of good quality and are clearly designed to provide an accurate representation of their subject. The other images and photographs provided in the book are of exceptional quality, and help support the written text well without being overly distracting.

Stephen Turnbull is noted on the inside of the cover of being an enthusiast and expert on Japan, and this title is a testament to the range of his knowledge. With the wealth of detail and range of information contained inside it's pages, this book really proves to be worth its price tag. Turnbull keeps everything interesting, guiding the reader to wanting to learn more, to further explore the lives and legends of the samurai.

And that appears to me, to be the book's chief aim. While it provides a great amount of background and detail concerning the samurai and the history of the iconic weapon, there is plenty left unsaid on the culture of ancient Japan, and the on the warriors themselves. Other sources such as the famous treatise 'Hagakure' and 'The Book of Five Rings' are cited and subtly noted as a means for a deeper understanding into the mindset of the Zen warrior.

Clearly this book is intended for those interest in ancient weapons and in the samurai. For those who display such

an interest, this is a very good place to start. Overall I found the book easy to read and highly informative. The subject has been well researched, and helps to expand the understanding of what the weapons purpose was. The art and images are well presented and great effort has been made for accurate representation. Definitely well worth a read.

Steampunk Modeller

Words: David Barker

Steampunk Modeller is one of those wonderful titles that are half-book and half-magazine. It is a little larger than A5 in size and contains a number of articles, each of which is a description of the build of a steampunk model or diorama of one kind or another.

Each article discusses a model build in quite considerable detail: the inspiration for the piece, how the planning was approached, the materials used in each construct - i.e. whether kits were cannibalised or the 'raw materials' that were used to constructing different parts of the piece. But this is not just simply a modelling title. The painting of each of the builds is also covered in some detail too - apart from for the couple of builds which weren't painted, of course - all the way through to showing the finished models. This isn't a showcase book, though, and the emphasis of each article is very much on describing the build rather than the finished item.

One of the things that strikes you as you read - or even just flick - through this book is the sheer number of work-in-progress images that are used to illustrate the process as it is being described in the text. On occasion, the images are a little bit displaced from the text in the articles by a page or two, but this is sometimes inevitable in a work such as this. However, in every case the photographs are of excellent quality and I did not see a single dodgy photograph in the whole book.

Sometimes with books like these, the text that goes along with the photos describing the model or diorama being constructed is very dry and takes itself incredibly seriously, as though building the item in question is the single most important thing in the world [Ed: You mean it isn't?], but I'm pleased to say that this simply isn't the case with Steampunk Modeller. The text is well written and engaging and each of the six different authors has injected their own sense of humour, personality and style into their articles, without ever losing the thread of what is being described or going off at a tangent.

I have to say that I didn't find this book just a little bit engaging either, but really quite compelling. Usually when reviewing a book I find I read it in several sittings, but with Steampunk Modeller I read all 128 pages in one sitting, front to back, all twelve builds and dioramas without putting the book down! I came away with a list of techniques and materials that I wanted to find out more about and a massive amount of inspiration to get on with my own modelling projects, even though I am not attempting to do anything even half as complex as some of the dioramas and projects covered by the articles in the book.

I can't really recommend this title highly enough, and after reviewing How To Build Better Dioramas as well [Ed: Reviewed elsewhere in this issue] I shall have to see if I can get a subscription to Happy Medium Press' quarterly publication Sci-fi and Fantasy Modeller past my wife!

How To Build Better Dioramas

Words: David Barker

Having just finished reading the Steampunk Modeller book - also from Happy Medium Press - I couldn't wait to get into reading this title, and I'm quite pleased to say that I was just as impressed with How To Build Better Dioramas as I had been with Steampunk Modeller.

Although this book is the same size and the same length, it is a slower-paced title than Steampunk Modeller. It covers just five dioramas in its 128 pages and all of these builds are by the author, which make it interesting to see how one man tackles a variety of different dioramas - although two of them do contain Batman, but then we all have our favourite subjects!

Just as in Steampunk Modeller, Barry Ford goes into great detail from the very beginning to the very end of each diorama detailed in the book. Starting with the initial concepts and inspirations for each diorama he wanted to build. He covers how these ideas were moulded and modified based on the materials and components that he had available. Attention is also given as to why certain things are being done in a certain order on the diorama as well. Importantly, and what I found quite interesting, was the advice on things that you could get away with not doing on a diorama and what parts should be given more attention based on where you want the attention of the person looking at the finished diorama to be drawn.

Construction and painting of the different parts of the dioramas are also detailed, together with discussion of how the pieces are going to come together to form the end diorama and why the different parts come together to tell the story of the piece. The painting of the pieces of the diorama is given as much treatment and detail as the construction aspects with considerable discussion about what colours and painting techniques were chosen and why.

All of the stages of construction and painting are well supplemented with a lot of excellent quality photographs that do an superb job of really bringing the creation process of these models to life.

Barry's prose style is quite engaging and his sense of humour comes through in the text which gives a warm feeling that you're actually reading about something someone enjoyed doing and has spent a lot of time thinking about, rather than the dull story that the write-up of such builds can sometimes end up being.

I really very much enjoyed reading this book, and if the editor lets me get away with it, it will be hidden away on my bookshelves to be pulled out and read again and again in the future!

How To Build Better Dioramas, Barry Ford, Happy Medium Press, ISBN 978-0-9564306-0-1



ONE DARK NIGHT

An Irregular Story by Taylor Holloway

Artwork by David North, Chrissy Underwood,
Lucilla Lischetti, and Giordano Pranzoni.

"All my friends are murderers."

- The Distillers, *Drain the Blood*.

"The Ragged they come, and the Ragged they kill,

You pray so hard on bloody knees.

The Ragged they come and the Ragged they kill,

Down in the cool air I can see... "

- Rob Zombie, *Superbeast*.

The clouds in the night sky peeled apart to reveal nothing but flashing lightning and rain. Four figures rode along the night road, their clothes soaked through and stained with mud, and something else much darker. Yet, though the night was filled with tears from the heavens and flashes of angry white light, their eyes reflected something hard and driving - like pieces of onyx against parchment.

These were cold, hard killers' eyes.

"Up ahead" grunted the largest one amongst them. He was a monster of a man, not so much in height or girth, but something about his stance, and his dark skin, his braided hair, his scars - all of these made him far more imposing than the rest.

They pushed their horses forward. They had been travelling for days, it seemed, searching for this one clue that might lead them to their next drink, or into the hands of a lady who might love them for a single night.

These men dealt only with cold coins, and sharpened steel.

They came upon the dead horse, and stood around it in a semi circle. The youngest, by the looks of him, looked to the dark man.

"What could have done this, Bren? It looks as though it's been half eaten, but those bite marks are far too big to be any of the scavengers we'd find around here."

Bren, the dark man, nodded and wiped the dripping rain from his forehead. "You're right, Questyer. Whatever ate this horse had to be the size of us, maybe bigger."

Questyer then dismounted, and looked to the ground. Digging around with his foot, he bent over and picked up a silver necklace, and pointed to the sigil dangling on the end. "Whatever it is - it's what we are looking for."

1.

The Day's Rest Inn and Tavern was fit to burst. Every table sat at least six to seven patrons, and some were even lucky enough to be sharing a seat.

Every table aside from one –which sat only four men. This table was unlike the other tables for many reasons – some would say it was because the fellows looked out of sorts, dressed in armour, with their weapons leaning against their chairs. Others would say because they flashed their money openly, leaving coins on the table to pay for their next drink. It would only be the most astute observers that noticed the table was different because of the smell of blood and the look of the worn leather on the grips of their weapons.

It was for these reasons that others avoided the table, and their only disturbance was the silent exchange of tankards as the barmaid fetched them round after round.

The youngest amongst them seemed to be the most talkative while the others listened passively. The largest of the four, a Southlunder by the look of him, simply sat and listened while alternating between drinking his ale and sharpening one of his bastard swords. The oldest, a grizzled man in his mid-thirties, cleaned his nails casually with a dagger. The odd man out seemed to be deep in thought, and was busy writing something in a leather bound book.

"Your story is bullshit, Questyer." The Odd-Man-Out spat, taking a chance to light a pre-rolled cigarette with a match. "There is no way that you, Vlend, and Garren managed to kill every last one of the White Owls and lived to tell about it."

Questyer, the youngest, pursed his lips and shook a finger. "You wouldn't smell bullshit if you stepped in it, Gregir. I've never met anyone who bathed in it like you do."

The big one snorted, "You'd think he's only known you for as long as I have, eh?"

"Shut up, Bren." Gregir spat. "If I bathe in bullshit, you're the one that collects it for me."

Bren snorted again into his ale.

"You're all full of shit. The White Owls are all dead – that's true - but I did it – and it was before you were even old enough to lift a sword." The oldest of the group muttered into his beard.

Gregir rolled his eyes. "See – now Rath is going to start telling tales... and we all know how this is going to turn out."

Questyer nodded. "Yeah – usually on some sort of drunken quest for women whose backgrounds are suspect at best."

Bren snorted for a third time, and finished his tankard of ale.

"Want another?" Gregir asked. As he started to get up, he almost ran into a white-bearded man who was standing

behind him. The young man curled his lip in distaste. "Can I help you?"

The man looked quite nervous. "Uhm... perhaps... maybe..."

Bren scowled, and sheathed his sword. "Out with it, man."

"Uhm... yes... actually. You all look like quite capable fellows... perhaps I can enlist your help."

It was Questyer's turn to scowl. "Capable of what, might I ask?"

Gregir held up a silencing hand. "How much are you paying?"

The Old Man pulled on his white beard in thought for a moment, and then sputtered. "You haven't even heard my story. How can you ask for my good coin before even hearing what I'm enlisting you for?!"

Gregir sat back down, and motioned for the Old Man to take a seat. "I don't need to – it's a talent of mine. You have a sob story. You want us to help you. It is going to be mundane as it gets, and it just so happens that monotony makes us thirsty. Last time we went sailing, we noticed that ale doesn't flow in the River Khen, so we have to pay for it like everyone else."

"Damn shame that." Bren piped in, tapping on his own empty tankard.

Gregir nodded in assent. "So, again – how much are you paying?"

The Old Man nodded and Rath grabbed a seat from the next table over. The man who was standing and telling a story of his own looked as though he was going to say something about his now commandeered chair, but one quick glance at who had taken the seat quickly changed his mind. The Old Man sat down, and motioned for the serving girl to bring them all a round of ale.

"It's my daughter. We had a fight this afternoon, and she's fled. Normally I wouldn't worry – she is an experienced rider and old enough to take care of herself – but it is late now, and she still hasn't returned. It's not like her to stay out past



dark, and a storm is rolling in. I'm beginning to fear the worst... there are bad men out at night in these parts, so I am looking to hire some capable folk to see if they could set out and find her, and bring her home."

Questyer took a haul of his newly minted ale. "If stories and beer paid for our services, we'd all be drunk and as full of shit as Gregir over there."

Gregir laughed. "That's true enough. Say we find this daughter of yours and she doesn't want to come home – do we just leave her?"

The Old Man stroked his beard for a moment, and then took a drink from his own tankard. "No. Bring her regardless of what she wants."

"That's going to cost extra."

"I'll pay you half up front – if she struggles, inform me upon your return and I'll see your price."

"Sure. We want three-quarters up front, and you double it if we have to give her a black eye." Rath said while fishing in Gregir's tobacco poke for a smoke.

"Agreed. What's your price then?"

"Forty silvers a day," Gregir looked to Bren, nodded, and then looked to Rath. "And we want a fifty percent bonus if we return her by noon tomorrow."

2.

Gregir nodded. "That looks like it belonged to the girl."

"It has the same crest on it as the old man had on his ring." Rath took a minute to light a smoke. "You think she's still alive?"

Questyer got low to the ground and motioned for Bren to light his lantern. With the light hovering over his shoulder, he could make out the prints of a booted foot.

"This looks like a girl's foot. You can tell by how small it is compared to ours."

Bren backed up, and handed Questyer the lantern. "Can you follow them?"

"No need." Gregir held one hand over his eyes and pointed to the horizon. "Look."

Lightning flashed in the sky, and it cast a pall light over what looked like a wall, and several houses within.

Rath shouldered his bag, and tossed the remaining bit of his cigarette. "Seems logical – if I was a scared girl, I'd head to the nearest town too – and I bet it wasn't dark out when she spotted it."

Gregir wrapped his hands tightly with his horses' reins. "Good enough. Let's move."

3.

The stone walls were slick with rain and moss. The gates, made of thick oak and rusted iron, stood open. The four pushed their mounts across the threshold, and onto the dirt streets of the village. Cobblestone buildings lined the road, though judging by the state of the thatched roofs, they had been abandoned for some time.

Gregir stopped his horse, and reached into his tobacco poke. Producing a cigarette, he rolled it around with his fingers before placing it on his lips.

"Looks like nobody's home."

Rath nodded, and produced a smoke of his own. He lit it with a match, and then offered it to Gregir, who gladly accepted the light.

Help me...

Questyer stopped his horse, and cocked his head. "Did you hear that?"

"I didn't hear anything." Bren retorted pushing his mount past Questyer.

"Wait." Gregir held up a hand.

Oh please help me I don't want to die here...

They all heard it that time. Questyer was the first to react, sending his horse forward into a gallop. The three men kept close behind, drawing their swords as they rode. Questyer stopped his horse in front of a collapsing barn, and tied it off.

"Careful, Quest... it could be a trap." Gregir tossed Questyer his sword and unhooked his crossbow, loaded it and pulled back a bolt. Questyer snatched the sword out of the air and nodded. Carefully, he stepped forward and pushed the door open with the tip of the sword.

"Hello?" Questyer whispered into the darkness.

Something stirred in the darkness of the corner, beneath a beam – struggling as if trying to get out.

"Who's there?"

A soft voice floated up from the fallen mess. "Oh please oh please oh please..."

"Is it safe?" Bren shouted outside of the barn.

Questyer peeked his head out, "Yeah. It is. I think we found her."

Lightning crashed overhead. The three mercenaries dismounted and piled into the barn. Inside, Questyer was crouched over a whimpering figure in the darkness.

"Rath, give me a hand with this – her legs are pinned." Questyer leaned over and grabbed the beam pinning her legs. Rath grabbed the other end of the beam, and they pulled it off of her. She whimpered softly, and Gregir lit his lantern.



Artwork by Giordano Pranzoni

She was young, but pretty enough. Her dirty hair was long, and the colour of toasted bread. She was clad in a pair of tattered riding breeches, and a red woolen shift. In the light, her honey-coloured eyes skipped back and forth between her saviours. Gregir tossed aside the cigarette he was smoking, and leaned against the wall.

"So, I guess you're the girl that's causing all this trouble, eh?"

Bren chuckled.

"My name is Kystren Kearns – I'm the daughter of a wealthy merchant in Westhaven. If you see me home safely, I'll see you well rewarded for your trouble."

They all started to laugh at that. Gregir smirked. "We know. We've been hired by your father to bring you back home. But, before we do that – what happened to your horse. Were you attacked by wolves? They're hungry in these parts."

The girl blanched. "No – not wolves. They were men, I think. They were feral – I was thrown from my horse, and they attacked it. I ran – that's how I ended up here. I was hiding in the barn, and I leaned up against a support, and it gave way. The beam fell on me, and I've been stuck here ever since."

Questyer pulled off his cloak and offered it to the girl, ignoring the disapproving look Gregir gave him. She took it thankfully and wrapped it around herself.

Rath walked to the door. "The rain has stopped."

"We should find somewhere to rest for the night. We'll leave at first light – that should give us plenty of time to get back to town by noon." Bren stepped forward beside his companion.

"What about that inn across the street?" Questyer piped in.

"I can't think of a better idea – beats sleeping in the barn."

Rath nodded. "I can't agree more – we should move though. That mist is setting in, and we won't be able to find our way across the street if we wait any longer."

4.

The door was jammed, but it didn't take long for Rath and Bren to smash it down. Inside, the inn was dusty but undamaged. It was as though it hadn't been entered in years. There were still tankards sitting on tables, and ashtrays brimming with smoked tobacco and paper leavings.

"I wonder what happened here." Questyer walked to a table and ran his finger, tracing a line in the dust. "If you dusted a bit, it would be like the people weren't missing."

Gregir hopped the bar, and checked the drawers. In one were a few dozen silvers, and some copper. "Whatever happened, they left in a hurry – they forgot their money."

"Or they're dead." Questyer motioned for Gregir to toss him one of the bottles lining the back wall. Gregir obliged the man, and then tossed another to Rath.

Questyer caught the bottle, and unscrewed the top. Examining the label, he smiled and took a swig. "30 year old scotch? Nice." He offered the bottle to Kystren, who took a long pull of her own.

For a small inn, the common room was a vast area evenly distributed with long, rectangular tables. On either side of the inn, two sets of stairs travelled up to a second level, presumably where the rooms were located. Behind the bar, a pair of swing doors presumably led to a back kitchen area, while a set of stairs could be seen leading to the cellar.

Gregir placed a lantern on the bar. "So, I guess we stay here the night, and get moving in the morning, eh?"

Rath nodded. "That's the plan – I don't think I want to stay here any longer than I have to."

"I'm going upstairs to check out the rooms – Gregir, want to see if there is any ale coming out of those taps, and see if it smells alright." Bren started walking towards the stairs, "I'll be back in a minute."

Gregir looked under the bar and found that the ale keg hadn't even been tapped. Taking a few moments, he quickly secured the tap and poured a tankard of ale for himself and Bren.

Lighting a smoke off his lantern, he offered one to Rath and Questyer. Both quickly accepted and lit their own off of the lantern as well.

"So, what do you think happened to all these people?" Questyer asked again, this time sitting down. "There aren't any real signs of violence or any bodies. It is almost like they all just decided to get up and walk – to get the hell out of here and strike for greener grasses."

Rath nodded. "It is weird. I'll tell you, it gives me the creeps."

"Oh please – this isn't that out of the ordinary." Gregir tapped some ashes onto the floor. "It's plague. One family gets sick, another family gets sick, the original family dies – and the rest decide they'd be better off somewhere else."

"How do you explain the lack of bodies, or empty tankards and half-full ashtrays on the tables?"

Gregir snorted. "Easy, someone up and died in the inn – and everyone takes off, just like that. Chances are they already had it if they were going to get it, and spread it elsewhere. That's how these things happen."

"Well, looks like you have it all figured out then." Rath grabbed Bren's ale and took a swig.

Questyer made a face and looked as though he was about to say something – and that's when the shouting started.

5.

Bren tested the door to the room facing north – the way they came. The door opened easily, though a deafening creak accompanied the swing of the door. Cursing himself for a coward, he regained his composure and looked around the room. It was that of a standard wayfarer inn – a single bed with a simple wool blanket, a small fur area rug on the floor, a nightstand, and a chest at the foot of the bed.

He moved to the bed and lay down. The simple feather mattress was exquisite compared to his long hard nights of sleeping outdoors. Resisting the urge to sleep, Bren swung himself off the bed, and moved towards the window.

The white mist seemed to pulsate against the pane of glass, as if it was trying to push its way into his room. In all his life, fog worried Bren the most. It was an old superstition from the Southlunds, that when the mist rolled in, along with it came the spirits of the dead.

While thinking about this, Bren quickly sensed movement in the fog. Squinting, he tried to push himself closer to the window. There was definitely something out there, but he couldn't make it out for the life of him. He needed eyes – Questyer's eyes.

"Questyer! Gregir!! Get up here!" Bren shouted as loud as his voice would allow him. He heard movement downstairs and thumping up the stairs. Questyer, Gregir and Kystren entered the room shortly afterward.

Bren looked to Questyer, "I need your eyes. What can you see out there?"

Gregir squinted in the direction where Bren was pointing. "I'm not sure where you're pointing."

"Oh no. Oh no no no no..." Questyer paled and took a step back.

Gregir frowned. "What the hell is it?"

Bren shook his head. He knew exactly what Questyer was seeing - and it wasn't just superstition this time.

6.

"We have to get out of here! We have to get out of here!!" Kystren started chanting, almost as though it was a mantra.

"We have to get out of here!"

"Shut up, woman! Let me think!!" Gregir grabbed her arm.

With surprising strength, she broke away from Gregir's grasp and ran down the stairs. Questyer moved to grab her, but missed and bumped into the wall.

"Shit!" Shouted Gregir, "Bren - I need you to go downstairs and protect the door. Don't let those damned things get in here."

"Right on." Muttered Bren as he drew both of his bastard swords.

Gregir started to trot down the stairs at double pace. "Questyer, I need you to get Kystren - she is the reason we are out here in the first place - and I'll be damned if we aren't getting paid for all this."

As the three came down the stairs, Rath was standing up, looking expectantly at the trio. "Kystren - she just ran out the door."

"Dammit!" Gregir slammed his fist down on the banister. "Why didn't you grab her?"

"I didn't think... er... well... I didn't know." Rath sputtered.

Gregir frowned. "Right. Not thinking."

Questyer drew his own sword. "I'll go after her."

"Good. Rath - I need you to go to the basement and get as many bottles of spirits you can find - we're going to lure them in here, and burn this place to the ground."

It was Rath's turn to frown. "Burn who?"

Bren glanced at the door, and then back to the burly warrior. "Zombies."

Rath's face hardened. "Right."

"I'm going to go upstairs and back up Bren from a distance. When you get back upstairs, start yelling and I'll get down here," Gregir pulled out his crossbow. "And Bren - you start luring them through the front door. We'll light the place up and run out the back and brace it shut."

Questyer nodded. "I'm to find the girl then, and get the hell out of town?"

The three warriors looked at each other for a moment.

"Alright - let's get this over with."

7.

The creatures shambled forward silently. Bren quickly assessed his enemies, trying to identify what they were before they were subject to this perversion of both flesh and soul. Most seemed to be dressed in simple garments typical of

commoners. None were clad in anything heavier than leather, and like most zombies, they wielded no weapons as they shambled forth.

Bren gritted his teeth and levelled his bastard swords. As they closed in, Bren met the creature head-on with an upward slash. It caught the creature in the jaw and cleaved its head clean in half. His right arm, acting almost without thought shot out and punched through another's face.

Within a heartbeat, two more moved forward to take the place of the fallen. He knew this was how it was to be – he just needed to make sure he didn't get surrounded. Placing his faith in Gregir's crossbow was still hard after all this time. He had never let him down, but he'd learned long ago that the only thing you can trust in battle is your own reflexes and a good sharp blade.

Each swing of his blades took another to the ground – what was at first a whirlwind of glittering death, now was slick geysers of black ichor. The more he destroyed, more took up to take their place. It truly was an endless tide of rotting flesh and blacked teeth.

Then there it was – the first tinge of pain in his shoulders. There was only one thing more dangerous in combat than a mortal wound, and that was exhaustion. Once you started to tire, you were more inclined to get sloppy, and against a foe such as this – overwhelmed. That was the danger of zombies – they were slow and weak, with little ability to inflict harm against an armoured foe. Their biggest strength was numbers – their infectious bite could quickly bring a man to his knees, and within moments, he would rise as a zombie to join their ranks. Thus, villages that were beset upon by even a few zombies would quickly become over-run. This is obviously what happened to the residents of this village – not a plague or some sort of economic ruin.

Headless bodies and countless legs were strewn across the courtyard of the inn. More moved in, and Bren, breathing heavily, took a minute to catch his breath before moving in for another kill. His shoulders and biceps ached and his wrist felt as though they were on fire.

Cursing his ill-luck, he dropped the bastard sword from his left hand and gripped the right with two hands and renewed vigour. Bren waded into the oncoming horde, hacking away at grasping limbs and gnashing teeth. He felt his arms and legs bitten over and over again, but instinctively knew that



Artwork by David North

they were simply superficial – they lacked the strength to punch through his chain and plate.

Then it happened – a sharp cramp in his lower back.

He tried to push the pain away, but it was slowing him down. Each time his blade rose and fell, it did so with less momentum than the previous swing. He heard a growl behind him, and knew the end was coming – a bite to the neck or head would be fatal.

Then something hit him in the back. The zombie growled, and he could hear rotted teeth gnashing inches from his ear. Bren lunged forward, decapitating two more before falling to his knees.

The zombie's head snapped forward. He waited for the final bite, when the undead creature on his back went limp, and fell. Bren reached down and grabbed his sword, backing up rather than looking behind him. Passing past the zombie that was on his back, he saw that it had a crossbow bolt sticking right through the back of its head.

Bren glanced quickly behind him to see Gregir leaning out a second-story window with a loaded crossbow.

"Eyes ahead – I'll watch your back!" Gregir shouted, putting one of the creatures down before quickly snatching up another bolt.

Bren nodded, and pressed forward into the fray once again.

8.

Gregir watched Rath head down into the basement before heading up the stairs. He pulled out his crossbow, and pulled back the slide mechanism to put the bolt in place. The steps were steep, and they creaked as he carefully ascended.

Reaching the landing, he went into the room Bren previously had staked out, but quickly realized that the window didn't give a great vantage point. Bren was confidently hacking and slashing away, and didn't look like he was in any particular danger. Taking a moment to light a smoke, he stepped into the hallway and tried the adjacent room. The door was soundly locked. Gregir considered picking the lock for a moment, shrugged, and figured brute force was his best plan of action in this situation. Lifting his leg, he brought his hobnailed boot down on the lock, and smashed it. The door banged against the wall, and fell off one of its hinges.

It was then Gregir realized that this door had been locked for a reason.

The lithe creature giggled maniacally as it sat up from its crouched position on the bed, over the body of what Gregir could only assume was some sort of deceased loved-one. The flesh of the creature's face was taut and stretched, and it peeled its lips back to reveal pearl white teeth that had been chipped into points.

It levelled a clawed hand at him and chuckled, hauling its weight off the bed and advancing slowly on Gregir. The young warrior pulled his broadsword and held it at arm's length between him and the monster.

The monster hissed and swatted at the blade, but Gregir yelled and advanced on it. He smirked and pulled back his blade when he was hit from the back.

Gregir swore as he went sprawling across the floor, though he managed to keep his hand on his blade. Rolling, he thrust his blade forward, into one of the two ghouls advancing on him. The creature screeched, and rolled backwards, but the other ghoul leaned forward, pressing down on his chest while opening its mouth wider than any creature had

business being able, and bore its maw down. Gregir, thinking quickly, plucked his cigarette from his mouth and jammed it into the creature's glowing red eye.

The ghoul shrieked and Gregir took the opportunity to kick the beast off him. The first ghoul lunged again as Gregir rolled to his feet – only to have Gregir grab the hilt of his sword and swing the creature off of the blade.

A hiss cut the air behind him. Gregir brought the blade in a fluid motion around his head, and decapitated the creature. The other ghoul, still chuckling, leapt from the ground. Gregir fell backwards, blade extended, and watched as the creature took the sword into his mouth and it exited out the back of its head.

Panting heavily, Gregir lay on the ground. Slowly, he rose to his feet. He wrapped his hand around the grip, and with a grunt, he yanked the blade out of the creature's face.

Shaking the ichor off of his weapon, he sheathed it and picked up his crossbow. Running to the window, Gregir smashed out the glass with his elbow, and levelled a bolt. Bren was hacking away at the zombies, with one clinging tenaciously at his back, attempting to chew through his chipped and dented plate armour.

Gregir pulled the trigger – and the force of the bolt almost snapped the creature's head clean off. Grabbing another bolt, he pumped the slide to set the crook once again.

Bren turned to look at Gregir, and he put another bolt into a zombie coming towards the burly warrior's back.

"Eyes ahead," Gregir shouted. "I've got your back."

He nodded, took his sword in both hands, and charged back into the fray.



Artwork by Lucilla Lischetti

The old wooden steps groaned as Rath navigated his way to the basement. With Gregir's lantern held aloft, and his sword in the other hand, he surveyed the stone cellar. It was a warehouse filled with wooden casks and crates – piled up to the ceiling. The rough-hewn floor was cold, and the entire place smelled of rot.

Cursing, he rose his guard and cautiously moved towards the first few casks. They were filled mainly with rum and rye – perfect for burning. With a quick glance, he quickly realized that almost all of the casks were sealed and full with some sort of flammable spirit. Moving to the crates, he used his sword as a pry-bar and popped the top off of the box. Inside were tin casks that were weld shut. Curiosity taking over, Rath punctured one of their tops and smelled the contents.

It was oil. Lantern oil – probably stored here so they didn't freeze to death in the winter months. *Don't have to worry about that anymore*, thought Rath to himself grimly. Something moved behind him. Cursing, he spun on his heels. A soft giggling could be heard – though with the limited light of the lantern, he couldn't pinpoint its location. Rath placed the lantern on the ground and levelled his long sword in both hands. Something skittered to his right – giggling like a child. The smell of death permeated throughout.

Without warning, Rath was hit from his left. Something heavy slammed him into the wall, jarring his arm and making him drop his blade. The creature against him began chuckling as it began throwing clawed blows at his unprotected face.

Rath lifted up his arms so his bracers could absorb most of the damage, and simultaneously lifted a defensive knee. The strike landed clean to the groin, though if it had any effect, the creature didn't show it.

The ghoulish drew back its claws, and threw a blow directly at Rath's chest. He countered by grabbing it by the wrist and yanking the elbow against the grain. There was a satisfying snap as the elbow was torn out of place and the forearm shattered.

With his foe only being able to wield one arm effectively, he now had the advantage. It threw its body up against the seasoned warrior, its jaws snapping at Rath's neck. He grabbed the ghoulish by the throat and held it back, while raising his other fist. He brought the studded



Artwork by David North

leather glove smashing into the creature's teeth. There was a crunch as the enamel cracked under the force of the blow. Smirking, he pulled back and landed another series of blows into the monster's face.

The creature pulled loose from his grasp and spun, but that only allowed Rath to grab the back of its head to start ramming it against the wall. With each strike, more gore splattered both Rath and the wall. After what seemed like minutes of senseless pummeling, the undead perversion finally ceased struggling.

Breathing heavily, Rath tossed the creature aside. There was a crash, as the corpse landed onto of the lantern, crushing it beneath its weight.

"Oh shit." Rath growled, watching the fire start to spread in a puddle and igniting the now deceased ghoul. He stared for a moment, almost in disbelief at what he was seeing, before cursing again and starting to run up the stairs.

"Gregir!!" Rath screamed, "Gregir! We have to get out of here!!"

Smoke billowed from the kitchen, and heat could be felt from the cellar door. Gregir came running down the stairs, sword in hand. "Is it time to draw them in?"

Rath shook his head. "The cellar... it's... filled with lantern oil and... rum..."

Gregir smiled. "Good. We can use it to light this place on fire. Let's give Bren the signal!"

Rath shook his head. "No... It's on fire... sealed casks – they're going to blow up!"

They both looked to the cellar door, and saw the flames starting to lick against the frame of the door and the stairs. Wasting no time, they both ran out the door. Bren was busy hacking apart zombies when the pair rushed past him.

Rath and Gregir started slicing their way through the horde. Gregir looked Bren's way.



Artwork by Lucilla Lischetti

"We have to get out of here – the inn is going to blow up!"

Bren looked at the pair, dumbfounded, and picked up his second bastard sword. Gregir side-stepped a grasping hand, and ducked under another. Rath slashed with his sword, and kicked and punched his way through, while Bren simply held up the rear.

With Rath taking the lead, they quickly made their way through the bulk of the horde past the town walls. Gregir put his hands on his knees, panting heavily. Bren held the gates with both swords drawn, daring anything to try and pass. Rath lit a smoke with a match.

"Where the hell is Questyer?"

Gregir looked up. "Oh no... He's still in the –"

The world suddenly blinded and deafened them at the same time.

10.

Questyer cut down a straggling zombie before it could alert the others. Leaning close to the ground, he tried to discern her footprints from those of the lumbering undead. Moving as quietly as he could, he had tracked her to the centre of town, a few hundred yards from the inn.

She has to be close, Questyer thought to himself. If I was scared, where would I hide...?

Something moved to his right. Questyer raised his sword to the ready, and waited for the next bout of movement.

Instead, a very quiet voice rose up from the shadows. "Questyer... is that you?"

Questyer nodded. "Kystren - we have to get out of here... the streets are infested with the walking dead."

"I know," the girl whispered.

"Stay close. We'll get up on the town wall –and we can move along the edge together – the zombies can't get us up there."

Kystren frowned. "But if we fall, we're dead."

"Then don't fall." Questyer retorted as he made his way to the stone perimeter wall.

The wall was roughly cut, with crumbling mortar between the stones. It was only slightly taller than the scout himself, so he took a running jump and caught the lip of the wall. With a grunt, he pulled himself up and twisted so he was sitting on the top of the wall. He quickly observed that the wall wasn't anymore than a few feet thick. He lowered his arms to Kystren.

"Run and jump – I'll help you up."

The young woman looked uncertain for a moment. Behind her, she could hear the zombies shuffling along. She backed up and took a run at the wall, jumping and catching Questyer's arms. He quickly pulled her up so they were both sitting on the wall. Getting up, he helped Kystren stand as well and surveyed the town from a heightened perspective.

"They can't get us from up here?"

Questyer looked to Kystren, drew his sword and handed it to her. "If it makes you feel better, you can hold onto this – but I don't think we'll run into any trouble. The only two access points to the wall are the guard towers to the north and

south." He pointed for emphasis, "Even if they got up here, I doubt they have the coordination to walk along the ledge. If they do – it should be easy enough to knock them off."

Kystren nodded. "What now then?"

Questyer considered for a moment. "We find Gregir, Rath, and Bren. They told me to get you and get the hell out of town – but I'm not going to leave them high and dry."

The pair walked down the wall, single file, safely out of the grasp of the zombies below.

It was Kystren which spotted them first. "There! That looks like them!!"

Questyer strained his eyes. Gregir, Bren, and Rath seemed to be making a break for the northern gate – though it seemed as though they were in quite the hurry. Frowning, he was wondering why they would deviate from the plan, when Kystren pointed at the inn.

"Is the inn on fire?"

Then the air filled with thunder. The entire town flashed before their eyes, and the smell of smoke and flames overwhelmed their senses. A wave of heat hit him, and suddenly he was falling.

Then it all went black.

11.

The smell of smoke.

Questyer saw Kystren lying prone beside him. He crawled over to her, coughing. He grabbed her by the arm and started to drag her towards the edge of the forest surrounding the village.

He tried to get up, and hot pain shot through his chest.

A scream of pain.

He realized it was himself – he must have blacked out. He grabbed Kystren's arm and pulled her into a ditch. Reaching around them, he held her close and covered the both of them with leaves. Hopefully it would keep them safe from the zombies.

The world faded around Questyer again as he fell into unconsciousness.

12.

Questyer woke up to the sun shining in his eyes, and three silhouettes standing over him on horseback. Across his chest – sleeping – was Kystren; the girl whom he had been hired to track down.

The young scout coughed, and felt a stab of pain jab his chest. He lifted his hands above his eyes to block out the sunlight, and saw that it was his companions, and his horse.

"Morning, Sunshine." Gregir quipped, leaning back in his saddle.

A wide smile crossed Bren's face. "Do you know how long it took us to find you? We must have walked past this ditch half a hundred times."

Questyer sat up, pushing the pain aside momentarily to gain his bearings. "Zombies... they're...?"

Bren crossed his arms. "Dead. Really dead this time."

"Explosion?" Questyer coughed.

It was Gregir's turn to chime in. "Yeah... Rath blew up the inn. The fire and explosion wiped most of them out. We decided to go look for your sorry ass in the town, and we killed every one of the bastards we came across. It took us all night, and most of the morning to find you."

Questyer got to his feet, and Kystren woke up and started to do the same. He coughed a few more times. "So much for our bonus."

Gregir shrugged. "I told the old man that monotony makes us thirsty – I'd say we had a pretty eventful night, wouldn't you say."

Questyer looked to Kystren and back to his companions. "Yeah, I've had enough action for at least a few days. Let's get back – if we ride hard, we might make it back in time for our bonus."

Mounting his horse, he looked to Kystren and extended a hand to help her up so they could ride double, and thought to himself that maybe taking their time getting her back to her father wasn't such a bad idea after all.

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