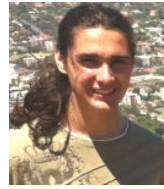




CLAW MARKS 48
Feb 2017

Letter from the CLAWthing



Welcome, honoured society, to CLAWs. We are the Cape Legion of Adventurers and Wargamers: the most powerful gaming and role-playing society that UCT has ever known. It is our hope that within our ranks you may find friendship, fun, and fuel for your fire, whatever you may burn for.

This year we hope to see much and more life flowing around within our society. To that end we shall be hosting, as is our tradition, weekly Boardgames Evenings as well as Friday Night Magic: The Gathering tournaments. We shall have several instances of organized KAOS, umpteen LARPS and modules, and tabletop campaigns. August will also see us rising up in force to create and enjoy Dragonfire: our annual gaming convention.

Our society has a history to it, one that I will not bore you with, but that I can assure you is something to be proud of. We shall continue to carve out our name boldly, and it is truly my pleasure to be able to stand alongside you all as we do so.

May we come to know each other throughout this year, as we step into the worlds of wonder that only we can create. And may each of us bring back a little bit of that shared wonder into ourselves.

And now, go forth, brave society! Now, for bravery! Now, for unity!

Now! For VICTORY!

*Your CLAWthing,
Rikus*

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Credits

Editing: Zera Day, Marita de Waal, Rikus Marais

Art, Photos and Crafts: Tabitha Thrash, Squid, Thomas MBewu, Breff Whitehead, Desilu Crossman

Layout: Rikus Marais

Warez: Scribus, the GIMP, Microsoft Word, notepad

How to teach a game

To people who want to learn

-Calvin Brazzi

So you've finally convinced your friends to come over to play boardgames, refused three separate offers by people who would be happy to bring Monopoly and/or Risk and explained that, yes, new boardgames have been released in the 21st century.

You email everyone a link to the rules, maybe a short video review with some basics and a cheat sheet that would take literally five minutes to read and save time in the evening. But who are you kidding? Maybe once you've shown them that games are awesome they'll start reading about that stuff, looking up games on BoardGameGeek. But for now, there is more chance that they'll hit their head on a low cupboard and magically become infused with understanding. (No, no matter how much they enjoy the games they won't spend their evenings reading rulebooks for games they don't own and will probably never get a chance to play. You weirdo.)

You took ages to figure out what to start them on. Carcassonne is usually a good one, but last time you tried no one else understood how farmers worked, even though you explained it eight times before the game and three during. Catan is no good either: you know that no matter how much you insist on calling the resources "Lumber" and "Wool", by the third round somebody will be asking if anybody has "wood for sheep" and then it'll just degenerate into a snickering chaos. Bang would never work since it has that "You're dead, you're out" mechanic that's infuriating, and your so called "friends" would find it hilarious to take you out in early game, no matter what their cards say. Maybe it's time to find new friends. But too late for that now. You need to get this evening over before embarking on the adventure of meeting new, better, people.

You settle on Ticket to Ride: the rule book is a flimsy three pages, two and a half if you remove the credits at the end, the theme is one people usually enjoy and understand and, most importantly: the actions a person can do are few, so you have none of the analysis paralysis that people get when faced with some of the more complicated games.

Finally the evening is here. You've prepared everything. People arrive, they chat, you finally coax them to sit around the table. They turn to you, a slight look of guilt in their eyes. You say "I'm just going to go over the rules before we start. In case anything wasn't clear." They relax, you know they didn't even know the name of the game they were going to play. They know you know. A travel Monopoly box peaks out of the corner of one the bags that they brought over, but everyone needs to start somewhere.

And you look at them blankly. You have no idea where to start! Don't worry, I'm here to help.

These steps are not universal and in some games it may be necessary to do them in a different order, but they are the steps I take when explaining games. Something I've been doing at least once a month for the past couple of years. And nobody has complained, yet.

Step 0

Know the rules. This is vitally important. Read through the rulebook, watch a couple of videos of people playing to see if you understand what's going on. Read the rules again, find a summary of the rules, read the FAQs online, watch more videos, call up the designer and ask questions. Fine. Not that last one, but you shouldn't be explaining the rules with the book open in front of you.

Finally: understand that you're going to have to repeat some of these rules a million times. Accept that now. Meditate a bit. Punch something for a while to pre-emptively reduce stress.

Step 1

Explain that the objective of the game is to win. They'll laugh at this. Don't laugh with them. Just sit there quietly as the laughter dies down. Explain that it is necessary for everyone to have this objective in mind, that if someone isn't playing to win other people can take advantage of this fact. Explain that not doing this ruins the fun, that someone spent hours developing the game, painstakingly balancing it and that that one person who suddenly decides that their objective is to have the prettiest hand of cards is totally going to mess up this balance. Explain that winning isn't everything, it's the only thing.

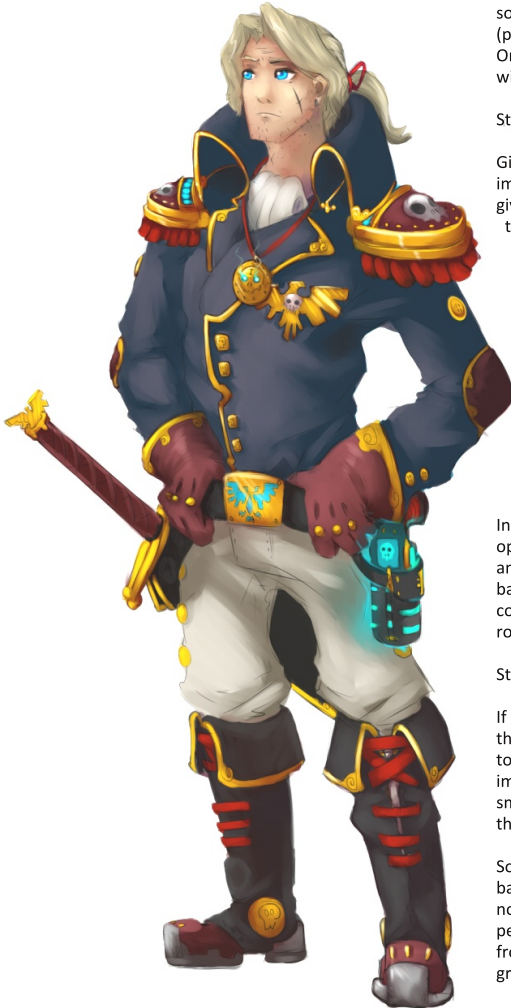
Now lean back, take a couple of deep breaths, let your pulse slow down, wipe the foam off the sides of your mouth and calmly explain that winning is not that important. As long as everyone is trying to win.

Give them a general introduction to the game, a quick back-of-the-box summary of the setting, in the example of Ticket to Ride: "You are all pioneer rail barons at the beginning of the era of the Train, trying to create a railway network that will prosper and out-compete your competition." Say whatever you think might interest them. You're going to need their full attention for the next ten minutes or so. And they will make you fight for it. Every single second.

Step 2

Give them a brief overview of the components and what each game-piece is called. No matter how well you explain, if the people sitting in front of you have no idea what you mean by "Draw two cards from the Destiny deck," they'll have no idea what to do later on in the game.

At this point they may laugh at you because you've sleeved every single card in the game. They're right, you weirdo. I have a really legitimate reason to sleeve mine, so don't look at me that way. I'll tell you the reason some other time.



Tell them how to win, tell them how to win again. Make sure that everyone is aware of the winning conditions. This is also usually a good time to explain how and when the game ends. It's not important that they know how to get to that point in the game yet, it's a piece of information that you'll repeat later. Because trust me, you'll have to say everything twice. At least.

For Ticket to Ride: "Each player has 45 trains (picks up a train), will receive a certain number of destinations (shows a destination card), and will use train cards (shows a train card) to claim routes (points at a route). These markers keep track of points (indicates the markers on the 0). The person with the most points at the end of the game wins. When at the end of someone's turn he or she has less than three trains (picks up a train) the next person starts the final round. Once that round is over, the points are tallied and the winner is declared."

Step 3

Give them the meat. These are the main rules: the important mechanics. The easiest way to do this is to give them examples of all the things they can do. Tell them how to accumulate points. Give them some info on how much everything is worth. Do a couple of mock turns to show them. This will be the longest part of the explanation and you'll get interrupted continuously. They will ask you questions about things that you simply haven't gotten to yet.

Relax, smile and say: "That's a very good question," and give them a golden star. Once you've exposed all the rules: take questions.

Tell them that no question is stupid. They will take this as a challenge; they will amaze you with the stupidest questions ever. Give them more golden stars, more smiles and answer their questions.

In Ticket to Ride: "During your turn you have three options: draw train cards (explain), claim routes (explain) and draw destination cards (explain). You get points based on the length of the routes, the destinations you complete and the player with the longest continuous route gets a bonus 10 points."

Step 4

If you followed the steps up to now, you could theoretically start the game. But the next hour would be torture. People will instantly adapt the worst strategy imaginable, making you cringe as you can't help but smash them to a pulp. I mean, going easy in them is one thing. Being bad at something purposefully? Never.

So step four is a quick discussion of strategy, just some basic pointers, something that everybody would normally pick up in their first game. How many points do people usually total, where most of those points come from and where the most points are lost. Also, this is a great time to repeat rules people forget.

"So, it's usually a good idea to know where you want to go and make sure you claim the important routes as

soon as possible. Drawing wild cards face-up slows down your game, but may be necessary. Games usually end up at around 100 points with half coming from routes and half from destinations. Remember: incomplete destinations are negative points.”

Step 5

Play with them. Get things started. Repeat the rules a million times as they come up. When asked for best strategy give a list of all options. Include bad ones. Include ones that would really make your life miserable. And let them make some mistakes. Laugh at them when they do.

Now, the ethical question is this: Do you try and win it? So, unless you're playing something completely luck-based (*shudders* Munchkin), you should be able to smash the opposition in their first game. So what you must do is try to win, but with a strategy you've never

tried before. Playing Catan? Get to a wood lumber port early and build colonies only on lumber. Playing Carcassonne? Base your strategy entirely on having one, really long, road. Experiment. Do something out of the box. Nine times out of ten you'll lose, without it being too obvious, the other time you'll find a strategy that works. Well.

Now, with this guide in your hand, go forth! And spread the names of Uwe Rosenberg, Alan Moon, Klaus-Jürgen Wrede and Klaus Teuber far and wide.

You are now ready.



Global Game Jam

– *Bee Sharwood*

If a frenetic weekend of coding, drawing, fiddling with soundy things or tweaking playability on your new game sounds fun, you should have been at Global Game Jam. Running from 25 to 27 Jan 2013, people across the world sat down and jammed games. Here at our Cape Town site, we had one board game and computer games churned out.

The theme this year was a soundclip of a heartbeat, which spawned many interesting interpretations. The overall best game in CT (as voted by participants and decided by judges) was a musical game called Dischord. I'd recommend checking out some of the games, local and international because it is impressive at what could be produced in 48 hours. (All games are downloadable from the GGJ website.)

The weekend was amazing, because working under time pressure in such a creative environment really pushes you. Coders, writers, artists and just creative and vaguely interested people were all shoved into one space to fight over pizza. I had a crazy lot of fun, despite being exhausted for the next three days, and I would definitely recommend it to anyone who loves games. Let's see more of you at Global Game Jam 2014!

Rolemaster

-Andrew Verridjt

Everyone involved in roleplaying games knows that Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) came originally from a Lord of the Rings (LOTR) tactical board game, and developed from there into a full-fledged RPG. What most people don't know is that the only official LOTR roleplaying game was Rolemaster/MERP. For those who wish to argue I would politely point out that "MERP" stands for "Middle Earth Role Playing".

Anyway, I've been gaming in many different forms for years and the evolution of the RPG has been very interesting for me. As far as I can tell no RPG has ever been as good as Rolemaster was, and in my opinion none ever will be. I will now explain why.

First here is a brief explanation of why Rolemaster died. See, the problem with Rolemaster was that in addition to being the best RPG in the whole world, ever, it was also the most complicated. Most RPGs have a 2 page character sheet. This is a piece of paper that holds all the relevant details of the character you are playing. Rolemaster had a total of six pages in its character

sheet. Unless you were a spellcaster, in which case it was 6 pages plus 10 or so pages of spells for you to cast (although that too is a point in Rolemaster's favour. A medium level D&D wizard can cast 10 spells. A medium level Rolemaster wizard had 10 whole pages of spells). So it was already pretty clunky right out the box.

Combat systems are the heart of any RPG because it is in combat that most of the action happens. Unfortunately for Rolemaster the combat system was the most complicated part. Check this out:

$AB+(1D100) - DB = \text{attack}$

That is the mathematical formula for calculating attacks in Rolemaster. It isn't THAT complicated, having only 3 elements AB, 1D100 and DB. Unfortunately AB and DB (attack bonus and defense bonus) are THEMSELVES calculated through mathematical formula. Let's just look at one shall we?

$DB = AB + [3x(QSB-AQP)] + 0.5x(ADB) + CB + IB + SHB + PB$



My god I wish I was making this up.

Looking back on this I still find it hard to believe. It is little wonder that all good Rolemaster players mastered the art of balancing a calculator on one knee, while holding large numbers in their head.

And once all that was done and you got your attack result you STILL had to check a table appropriate for your weapon, and the enemy's armour, to see if you had actually hit.

Then you still had to consult another table to see what the hit actually did. It was due to this incessant table reliance that Rolemaster got its nickname: "Chartmaster".

However it was there, in the combat that, well, that was where Rolemaster got good.

Despite the complexity, or rather BECAUSE of the massive complexity of the game, Rolemaster had the only RPG combat system that was even vaguely realistic.

Let's picture a hypothetical real-life battle between a knight in armour and a ninja. The ninja is only wearing his obligatory black ninja-pants. The knight however has come dressed in her best field plate. She is a walking tank. However, the ninja is so fast that almost all of his attacks hit the knight somewhere, but she is so heavily armoured that very few of them do more than cause bruising. On the other hand the ninja is quick and agile, but has no armour at all. It is almost impossible for the knight to hit him, but when she does her attacks hurt.

In Rolemaster this "likelihood of getting hit" vs "how much the hits actually hurt" was an inherent part of the system. Both of these fighters has an equal chance of surviving, but the way they do it is totally different. In D&D I can be naked and still have as good a defense as a knight in armour, if I'm quick enough. That's fine, it makes sense to me. But what doesn't make sense is that when both of those D&D characters takes a sword to the pancreas they both take equal damage. You'd think that armour would help, somehow, but it doesn't. This was one of many ways that the Rolemaster system was superior in its realism.

Back to the fight: After a few minutes of this battle both knight and ninja are bruised, bleeding and exhausted. Minor fractures dot their bodies. They move sluggishly, and

both know that if they don't do something soon, one of them is going to bleed to death.

Horrific! Exciting! And totally true.

Historians have proven that on ancient battlefields the most popular way to die was blood loss. What Rolemaster managed to do was create a combat system that fitted this realistic scenario exactly.

Remember those tables I mentioned? No, not those ones, the other ones, the one that told you what your attack actually did? Here is an excerpt:

"12CK, 11CK, 11BK.."

Whoops, sorry, I was still stuck on the maths tables. I meant to say:

"Magnificent strike drives bone through both foe's lungs! Foe takes 100 damage, falls in a coma, and dies in 18 rounds!" or

"Strike severs vast number of blood vessels in foe's arm. Foe takes 25 damage, is bleeding 5 damage per round and is unable to parry for 9 rounds."

You see the second part of the table search involved going to elaborate tables that told you, in inspiring detail exactly what your latest attack had done. And it was all in there: broken bones that affected your enemy's actions or movement, penalties that rapidly added up to an enemy who couldn't defend themselves, and of course the ever present spectre of organ damage, and the danger of bleeding to death.

Fighting is not pretty. It is dangerous, and governed largely by luck. In the real world damage is not just numbers on a page, it is damage. It is parts of your body that are not going to work anymore, and this is something that most other RPGs have totally missed.

In Rolemaster long fights were dreaded because that "AB+(1D100)" stops looking good when everything you do is at minus 75, and the ground is slippery with your blood.

In Dungeons and Dragons you can lose all but 1 of your hit points and still be running around the battlefield, cackling madly, smacking people down. I know the game isn't meant to be realistic, but it isn't meant to be Cops 'n Robbers either.

In D&D if you hit a group of people with a 30 foot ball of fire they will take some damage, maybe lose some of their equipment to singeing, and then come over and kick your ass.

In Rolemaster if you hit someone in the chest with a dart of fire it would melt their skin off, set their clothes alight and possibly burn the castle down.

Rolemaster was bloody, dark and gritty. It made you fear for your character's lives, it held you at the edge of your seat and it also made you respect violence, and the ease with which blood can be shed, and lives lost.

Rolemaster was a masterpiece of quantifiability. Every aspect of the game was measured, in great detail, and turned

into numbers on tables. But it died because most people don't want to spend 6 hours on a weekend doing maths.

These days we have Dungeons and Dragons 4th Edition. It is a masterpiece of simplicity. Everything has been reduced to one formula: $1D20 + \text{Bonus} + \text{Other Stuff (if any)}$. It works beautifully, and it is largely keeping RPGs alive.

But I can't help but feel that something magical has been lost.



Battletech Aside



-Dominic Nunes

Here is a quick introduction to the five main factions in Battletech. It illustrates how each would ideally approach one of the great trials of existence – how to change a lightbulb.

To let you know who's who:

Kuritans are from the Draconis Combine, which is basically stereotypical feudal Japan in space.

Lyrans are from the Lyran Commonwealth, which is basically a massive mercantile state with lots of German overtones.

Capellans are from the Capellan Confederation, which has a strong mix of Cold War Communist States and stereotypical feudal China.

Fedsunners are from the Federated Suns, which is the 'best' mix of Colonial imperialism mixed with 'we're the good guys and will free you whether you want it or not'.

Free Worlders are from the Free Worlds League, which is ostensibly democratic because of its powerful parliament that controls the purse strings of the, nearly, all powerful Captain General.

Enjoy!

How many Kuritans does it take to change a lightbulb?

Eight
One to find out what wattage the Coordinator wants
One to find out what wattage the Kanrei wants
One to assist the first one in committing seppuku when the Coordinator comes

around to the Kanrei's way of thinking
One ISF agent to monitor the changeover for any seditious sentiments that might be expressed in the process

One, hand-picked from the ranks of the Genyosha, to have the honor of changing the light bulb

One from the 1st Sword of Light to challenge the Genyosha warrior to a duel for the right to change the light bulb

Another assistant for a ritual suicide

One to run the tea ceremony thanking everyone for keeping the casualties to two this time

How many Lyrans does it take to change a light bulb?

Nine

One to propose the use of an assault-class light bulb with as many heavy weapons as can be placed on it

One to argue that the light bulb should have some recon elements and perhaps some combined arms support

One Cincinnatus member to assassinate the second one for being a "Davionist spy"

Three social generals to spend four months politicking over who gets to command the operation to change the light bulb

One Archon to give the contract to the Kell Hounds, just so it will get done

One Kell Hounds member to actually change the light bulb, but not without an awkward sequence where the socket doesn't show up on scanners for a moment

One Skye noble to wonder loudly just what kind of light bulb requires weapons and armor and to threaten to secede

How many Capellans does it take to change a light bulb?

Four

One to plant a double in the Federated Suns' Ministry of Changing Light Bulbs (Internal Division) to find out how the FedRats do it

One to point out that the FedSuns has been very efficient when it comes to changing light bulbs and that perhaps the CapCon should try it that way once, after making sure that the new bulbs won't blow up when exposed to an obscure gas

One to argue that whatever success the Davions have in changing light bulbs must be despite, rather than because of, their decadent practices and that the Capellans should find out how the ancient Han changed light bulbs and do it that way. XIN SHENG!

One Maskirovka agent to kill both of the preceding for implying that the Capellan Confederation's current ability to change light bulbs is anything but satisfactory

How many FedSunners does it take to change a light bulb?

Six

One to marry another house's heir-presumptive in order to announce the change at the wedding, because just doing it wouldn't be flashy enough

One to come up with the most complex acronym possible for the new light bulb changing division

One to volunteer to have his hand cut off and be exiled after a show trial in order to infiltrate another house's light bulb changing organization and sabotage it from the inside, because again, easy is no fun

One to ineffectually sell out the secrets of the light bulb change to the Capellans, just so that the Davions can go, "See? We have black hats too!"

One to replace the dead light bulb with a Star-League era fluorescent bulb made at the NAIS using information extracted from the Helm Memory Core and single-handedly fight off the ComStar force sent to destroy the bulb

One to roll their eyes at the other houses and their antiquated, restrictive and overly-complex methods for changing light bulbs

How many Free Worlders does it take to change a light bulb?

Seven

One to bring up the issue of the light bulb change in Parliament

One to block the move to change the light bulb in order to wring a concession out of

the Captain-General

One random Shilohan to remind people that light bulbs are technology and therefore evil

One MP to propose that a committee be formed to discuss possible options for forming a light bulb task force to recon the dead bulb

One MP to chastise the previous MP for trying to ram the measure through Parliament so quickly and without at least having a preplanning committee first

One to throw up his hands in disgust, cross the border and change the light bulb without orders

One Blakist to smash the light bulb because the FWL was in danger of getting a chance to actually do something.



Don't Panic

-Rikus Marais

It's Saturday afternoon. You've just come back from the shop and you feel a little bit worried about that assignment that you still haven't started on. It's alright, since it's only due on Wednesday, right? Anyway: that doesn't matter right now, so you shake your head a bit, trying to clear it of all this clutter. The important thing is that you have the snacks. You put them on the table and have a look at the wall clock.

As you do so the doorbell rings. Alright, your gaming buddies are here. Excellent. You open up for them and warm greetings are exchanged as they relay their weeks' tidings. Pretty soon you're all arranged around your particular geometric flavour of table: a veritable council of champions, ready to finally take on the big bad of your current campaign... only the DM isn't here. Everyone takes a moment to frown at his chair. The frowns slowly make their way onto the table, eyes are narrowed, and creeping smiles start to appear on your friends' faces. Pretty soon everyone is looking directly at you.

Oh, right. He said he might not make it this week. And you, since it seemed like a good idea at the time, had jokingly said that that in that case you would think of something to run. It's not a very likely situation, all in all, but you've just been so distracted lately and you didn't really think this could happen. Your word is your word, though, and curiously: you find yourself standing up and

moving, then taking a seat on the DMs chair. You take out your trusty clutch pencil and dice, arrange them on the notepad in front of you and open your mouth to speak. It's not a very comfortable feeling, but you can actually feel your brain hiding in a little corner in your skull.

It's your first time DMing. You haven't even started speaking yet, and you've already started letting the players down. The ideas you've had for a setting suddenly seem so silly. Your NPCs refuse to give you any semblance of potential dialogue, rather standing quietly in the poses that you first imagined them in. You consider asking your friends if they wouldn't rather watch a movie, and you notice that your mouth is still open, and you opt to clear your throat rather noisily. A few moments pass.

Player One, the guy who introduced you to tabletop RP quite recently, sits up straighter in his chair. He looks straight into your eyes. A tiny smile curls the corners of his mouth and he gives you the barest hint of a nod. Player Two, the girl who's also pretty new to this kind of game, looks to you excitedly and you realise that no matter what you do, she's going to have fun. The rest of the Players look up at you expectantly, but... curiously, you feel alright. They've all been here. They're waiting on you. Wondering with great curiosity what manner of



adventure you have planned for them. They've given you the floor, and like hell you're going to let this chance pass you by. A moment ago you were terrified. You still might be, but you know... that's alright.

You smile, and you feel your panic passing you by. You have your players. You have your world. You have your mechanics. The only thing that was missing was you. But you're here now.

And you're going to give them the finest game they've ever had.

Well... that was the plan. Things were a little bit shaky around the get go, but you think that you pulled the tavern scene off okay. The players liked the innkeeper, and Player Three smiled happily when his paladin gave the street urchin a silver. Your wolves were utterly obliterated by Player Four's barbarian, but he seemed to enjoy boasting to Player Two's ranger about it. You're pretty sure everyone thinks that the helpful druid is actually the big bad, now that Player One's wizard tried to convince everyone that druids are generally crazy.

It goes up and down. There was a particularly nasty

combat where the party nearly wiped, and you realised that bringing out the -other- troll was probably not a good idea until the party had a chance to rest up. You look over at the wall clock and realise that more than five hours had already passed. Your players all seem a little tired, and the ranger emphatically declares that they shall set up camp in this little hollow. Everyone murmurs in agreement. The wizard, holding his battered ribcage, casts an alarm spell about the perimeter, and the barbarian sniffs the air warily before finally joining the others at the fire.

Player Four finishes up the last cookie, telling Player Three excitedly about what he thought was waiting for them inside the cave. Player Two punches the sky as you tell them that they have leveled up. Player One gives you a wide smile as he offers to put on some tea. You realise it wasn't perfect, but you never expected it to be. They had fun. You had fun. And that was enough for a first attempt. More importantly: your world feels a little more real, and ideas are running wild inside your head.

You sit back, sighing contentedly, and you grin as you hear someone saying that they cannot wait for the next session.

SIX 13 - The 5th Annual Cape Tattoo Convention

-Desilu Crossman

This year, the Southern Ink Xposure (SIX) team held the fifth Annual Cape Tattoo expo on the 25-27th of January at the Cape Town City Hall. The accompanying parties, which have been held in different locales in the past, were all onsite this time, making the weekend one rocking event from Friday afternoon all the way through to the early hours of Monday morning.

There were four rooms of tattoo artists from not only South Africa, but all over the world. 56 artists were confirmed on the convention's website and it felt like there were more! The theme this year was 'Homeward Bound' for the Art show, and for the music it was 'Sirens Call'. Both the art and the music at the event captured those themes to a T!

The Burlesque dancers and the art show were both amazing exhibitions of fine South African work. The wealth of merchandise for sale (most of which would appeal to all us CLAWs members) was top-notch with some quirky designs for not only adults but babies too - a baby's onesie that reads 'Zombie Snack!' - what CLAWs parent/auntie/uncle wouldn't buy that? Hopefully Dragonfire will have Blaise and Cader of the Lovecraft Experiment paying us a visit and we can relieve them of



some of their stock. ;)

One of the more interesting merchandisers at the event was Bismoggi. Based on the creator's Yorkshire puppy who had rather large fluffy ears, Bismoggi creations are a resin-based figurine standing about 10-15cm tall, that you can either buy pre-styled, or you can buy a DIY Bismoggi and design the figurine yourself. For more info go to their website or search for Bismoggi on Facebook.

As for me, I got a wicked tattoo by a super talented Norwegian artist named Kari from Memento Tattoo in Oslo. This lady has been called 'The Queen of Dotwork' by Tattoo Revolution Magazine, and I will agree with that assessment. I gave Kari six different images and in my original plan they weren't all in one tattoo. However, the vision that came about for Kari has left me with possibly the single most beautiful piece of skin art I will ever have, with not a single speck of black ink, just the way I wanted it!

For reference:
www.capetattooconvention.co.za
www.bismoggi.com
www.memento-tattoo.com

The Assassin

-Colin Barton

colindbarton@gmail.com

Lady Maiyani Kraise was the daughter and sole heir of the great Lord Kraise, a successful businessman and politician, who was not above the regular corruption of the aristocracy. Lady Maiyani, sixteen years old and almost as innocent as her father would like, was enjoying the end of the day. Alone in her chambers, she sat sipping a cup of warm tea reading a thrilling fantasy. Given her experience of the world and upbringing, she could do nothing but be confused at first, and then altogether frightened, when a commanding hand clamped across her mouth and the weight of a large pistol, barely visible at the edge of her peripheral, pressed against her temple.

The man's voice was warm and gentle—almost fatherly in its affection. Its practiced words and implications immediately quelled her panic, which made little sense given her state, and what he was saying. "Lady Maiyani, I request your cooperation. I will tell you your situation, and then I will allow you to act as you see fit. Please do not attempt to struggle or scream until I have finished my explanation."

Maiyani could deduce her situation but found herself oddly calm. She resisted the urge to panic recognizing that she was more likely to survive with her wits about her. She considered the hand over her mouth and thought of biting it. But even in the room's half darkness, she could see that it was well armored. He would be impervious to her assault. And there was the gun: black, ornate and trimmed with gold. For lack of a better option, she nodded her head very slightly in compliance with her captor's request.

"Please maintain your calmness, Maiyani, and try to focus. As you have no doubt guessed, you are in a bad situation. It is my desire to have it be no worse than it must."

Again, Maiyani nodded. She was not afraid. The whole situation seemed surreal. It was more like something from the book that still lay open in her lap.

The man continued, "Your father has many enemies: some for the right reasons, and many for the wrong. One of them has sent me here tonight to punish him by taking the life of his daughter and only heir. I regret to inform you that you will die tonight, but, as you are innocent, I am giving you the option to choose the

circumstances of your death."

Fear began to prickle down Maiyani's spine. The assassin's purpose was exactly as she had feared. Still, his manner was strange. He was respectful, almost peaceful. The feeling of surrealism continued and kept her from descending into panic.

"When I am done speaking, I will remove my hand from your mouth. You will have two options. First, you can scream. The guards outside your quarters will hear you and will come to investigate. However, it will take them time to get inside as I have taken the precaution of locking your doors from within. There will be ample time for me to shoot you through the head and make my escape. And make no mistake, Maiyani, if I fire this gun, your death will be quick and messy. Your funeral will be a closed casket affair."

The man paused allowing his words to sink in. Tears began to form in her eyes as she nodded again.

"The second option is to cooperate and not squander your last moments. I have with me a recorder that can be used to take your last words and statements. Additionally, I can offer you several methods of departure that are significantly less violent. Now, make your choice."

Slowly, the man removed his hand. Trying to maintain her composure while battling fear, Maiyani took a deep, shuddering breath. The gun stayed pressed against her temple awaiting her decision.

Softly, struggling to match the man's professional tone, she spoke, "I will cooperate. If I am to die, I will die like a Lady."

Immediately, the gun was removed from her temple. The dark form of the assassin crossed in front of her, momentarily blocking her reading light, as he took the seat facing her. She could see him now: dressed in dull black making him almost invisible in the shadows. And she could see the gun still pointed at her. But his face was outside the halo of her small lamp.

Maiyani's composure was defeating her panic. Somehow, facing him gave her power. She still felt dread gnawing at her gut, but she had hope.

The assassin was not a terrifying monster. Now that he was seated facing her, she felt less of a prisoner. She allowed herself to cling to the hope that this could end well for her.

She considered that the most prudent thing to do would be to stall him. Secondly, she would attempt to discover who he was, and who had sent him. "I wish to know who would have me dead and the name of his agent."

She thought the man smiled but could not be sure with the shadow over his face.

"You are a brave child Maiyani, but I will not answer either question. Your father will be able to figure out my client, but both that name and my name would be meaningless to you. They would not be meaningless to the authorities. As I am recording this whole incident for their benefit, I will not utter either."

The assassin held up his other hand displaying a small black recording device. He set it on the side table next to Maiyani's reading lamp.

She forced a smile. "It was worth a try."

"I do not wish to rush you Maiyani, but I refuse to be delayed. Please voice any further questions or statements you wish to be on record."

Inwardly, Maiyani sighed. The assassin obviously knew what he was doing. This seemed to be an excellent subject for her next query. "Why are you doing this? This is not what I would have expected from an assassin."

Again, she thought he was smiling.

"It is very unusual Maiyani, and so I will explain. Assassins do not take risks. The completion of the contract is, generally, all that matters. What I am doing is extremely dangerous to my own well-being. Nevertheless, I have chosen to conduct my business this way. You see Maiyani, I am very good at what I do. I am skilled to the point of arrogance. But more than this, I am a creature of dignity and honor. I come to you with no hatred in my heart and no fear. I am human and a man—the 'real man' so often bemoaned as missing from society in these troubled times. Because of this, I am able to participate in unsavory behavior without being ruled by it. I am not a vile murderous thug. I am a gentleman. And I would rather take a calculated risk to my safety than lower myself and compromise my beliefs."

His words were chilling. She had feared that a villainous monster would victimize her, but this reality was more frightening. She had no doubt that he spoke the truth. His words seemed contradictory, yet she could feel the conviction in his voice. His deadly calmness reinforced his statements. It would have been easier if he had



been a villainous thug. Then she could have hated him, and, even in death, would have felt somewhat vindicated. She could have gone out as a martyr—a proof against the evil that men do. But his actions were not brutish. If anything, his manner and demeanor were chivalrous.

The small flame of hope Maiyani clung to flickered and dimmed. Again, she felt the pressure of tears building behind her eyes, but she forced them back. Even if she could not fight directly, she would not just submit. She lashed out at his logic attacking the apparent contradiction, "You claim to have honor, and yet you are an assassin? An assassin who kills people who are, by your own confession, innocent?"

She tried to speak forcefully, scornfully, like a Lady, but her voice wavered. She knew her verbal attack was logical, and yet it seemed to lack strength. She knew immediately that it was a question he had heard before. She despairingly waited for the rebuttal. Deep in the shadows, he was smiling again.

"The world is not a fair place, Maiyani. It is the innocent who suffer. Justice is found in small measures; fairness in tiny grains. I am many things, have been many things and will be many more. The answer to your question is simple: today I am an assassin because, if I were not, somebody else would have this contract, and by now you would be yet another gruesome murder."

The last glimmer of hope she'd been clinging to vanished. This man, this assassin, was everything he'd claimed and more. The sheer weight of his simple words, his honesty and conviction, crashed down upon her. She was engulfed by the power of the personality she faced. She felt like a child, lost and hopeless. Struggling to stay quiet, she burst into tears.

Even more frightening than his power was his compassion. Before her first tears could land in her lap, he was upon her—a shadow flowing out of the surrounding darkness. The gun returned to its holster with an alarming speed, and his powerful arms encircled her. She nearly screamed, but at the last second, stopped. He



wasn't hurting her. He gently cradled her in his arms like the lover she'd always dreamed of, but her position had denied. He wiped away her tears. The shock of it stopped her sobs. The sight of his face, bathed in the glow of her lamp, started them again.

His face was young. Young like her. Too young. And he was beautiful. So beautiful it hurt: the perfect mix of refinement and ruggedness decorated by well-earned scars. But his eyes were old—frighteningly old. Yet they showed none of the withdrawn aloofness of an elder. They were full of warmth, kindness, and peace—like the lover she'd never had. She clutched him and sobbed brokenly into his chest.

"Peace now, Maiyani." His voice was softer than before—more empathetic. And now, she was not afraid.

She raised her eyes to meet his again, and she smiled. "Thank you. Tell my father I do not hate him for this."

He nodded and leaned close. She closed her eyes, at peace with herself, and he gently kissed her forehead. He laid her down then, her pulse fading, the strife of life leaving her. He picked up the recording device. "Lady Maiyani Kraise. Time of death, eleven thirty-seven, the twenty-second day of the sixteenth year of her life."

He stopped the recording and stood for exactly one minute with head bowed in reverence for the dead. He placed the recorder in the center of the table and strode to the phone in the chamber's corner. He lifted the receiver and quickly dialed. "Hello emergency. I would like to report a murder..."

SALUTATIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

Rikus Marais - CLAWthing

Ho there, friend. Might I ask a moment of your time? Ah, my thanks, good sir. You see, I'm afraid I am rather lost. I was supposed to lead my army into yon village by sunrise. But after taking a walk to clear my head and prepare myself for the coming battle last evening I found that I had been too preoccupied to refill my lantern. I was stuck, you see, in the forest behind that hill. Without a light to guide my way I ended up stumbling out into an area I had not seen before. What's that? That's your village over there? Oh, a thousand pardons, good sir, for asking you to assist your would-be conqueror. I am afraid that without your assistance, I will be unable to lead my army anywhere, so I fear I must insist that you aid me. Oh? Follow this road to the East, you say? Pardon me, sir, but I believe that my forces lie to the West from our current position, though I may have lost my bearings, having wandered about through the night. You're quite sure it's to the East? Hm, very well. I thank you kindly for your assistance sir, and wish you a pleasant day. Please do not try to flee the village with your valuables for a while, and I shall be there shortly to relieve you of them. You are... absolutely certain it's to the East, yes? No, no, sir, I do believe that you know this land like the back of your hand. No, sir, I do not doubt that you could even find your way around in the dark. I must be off, then, as my forces must surely be wondering about my condition, and I have no wish to cause them any panic. Yes, sir, farewell to you too. Oh dear, oh dear, I do hope I may still be in time for breakfast. - Rumour has it that Rikus Marais is now enjoying a quiet life amongst his one-time forces, having found that they had eventually given up on pillaging the village, opting rather to settle into the small farming community.

Zera Day - Scrivener

Subject 042

Name - Zera Day

Rank - Scrivener

Gender - Female

Age - 23

Subject 042 displays a keen interest in the Classical and Gender studies at the institution where she is stationed. Duties within the organization known only as "Cape Legion of Adventurers and Wargamers" consist of holding the bureaucracy of the institution at bay, and organizing the weekly 'boardgame' events. Efforts to crack their code have been futile. Subject is suspected of cult like behaviour, nerdery, geekery, and lollygagging. Recommend for further surveillance.

*Marita de Waal - Guildm*st**

Salutations CLAWfolk. I will be serving as your Guildm*st* for the duration of this year, but if you are unsure of the exact pronunciation of asterisks, you may call me Mistress Marita. BDSM wear is encouraged, but optional. After being lured to the dank depths of CLAWs by Dread Cthulhu, I successfully resisted the title Guildmaster, and was Guildmistress to CLAWthing Chris. The following year I took up the CLAWthing mantle, and ruled with an iron fist before dissolving into madness. Those were heady days. The next year is somewhat blurry, but the people at the institution were very nice, and the firm but gentle embrace of my "special jacket" became comforting. I still wear it sometimes. But, CLAWs was not done with me, and but a year after my return to the world I find myself once more donning my 'Mistressing boots.'

When not herding cats, I can be found holed up in my lab messing around with DNA until someone gives up and gives me my MSc, or holed up in my room messing around with fabric. I play VtES socially, and am a staunch supporter of indie RPGs, World of Darkness (old and new) and Unknown Armies. I am the right hand/power-behind-the-throne to my tall and dark significant other as he continues his quest to plunge the world into eternal darkness and kidnap Santa, so that we may stop getting sunburnt and get all the presents. I may be bribed with good coffee (soy milk, one sugar), backrubs, corsets, black eyeshadow, silver jewellery, chandelier earrings, whisky and almost anything with black and white stripes, octopuses or bats. I dislike sudden or repetitive noises, sneezing, bright lights and people being wrong on the internet. You have been warned.

Fortune Dederen - Hoarder of Monies

Not much is known of the elusive creature referred to, amongst experts, as the 'Lesser Spotted Fortune Dederen.' It is rumoured to possess the curious ability to mimic human speech impeccably. It is also said that, when approached, it may rearrange the bristles on its hide in such a way that they resemble human skin and even clothing. It is theorised that this ability was selected for due to its potential as a survival mechanism, following the species' near extinction due to poaching. This had occurred because of a rumour that had spread throughout the countryside: that the hide of the creature, if sprinkled with gold dust, would bring great wealth and good fortune to whoever possessed it. The only known population of the Dederen is currently under the ostensible protection of CLAWS. Some radical groups believe this to be a ruse, the true intention of the society being to secretly experiment on the Dederen in the hopes of realising its potential as a financial asset. Nothing was ever proven, though many have questioned the reasoning behind curious nickname of the Alpha Dederen: 'Hoarder of Monies.'

A hundred and forty-seven reasons why Archbigot hates Facebook debates

- By the Archbigot of the Necropolis



CLASSIFIEDS

Births

A 20 year old Manel van Hassel had reformed his dissolved body within the gut of an alien monstrosity through sheer force of willpower. Witnesses claim that he spoke his first words: "Like being born again," upon cutting himself free.

Deaths

The slightly rotting corpses of Sukasa the Skeletal Samurai and his Scorned Men, having finally committed Sudoku after bringing much dishonour to their names.

Something to Consider

You could have spent the time it took you to read this sentence doing something productive.

Lost

Waterstrider class cruiser in sector AH342. Logs will indicate that the vessel's designation is 'The Good Ship Not a Decoy.'

Fridge quotes

"I roll to seduce the paladin."

"Go ahead. You'll get +2 because her armour is really uncomfortable in this kind of weather."

"I don't think you understand. T-that sort of thing is frowned upon in this community."

"It's alright, I'm not from this community."

Seeking

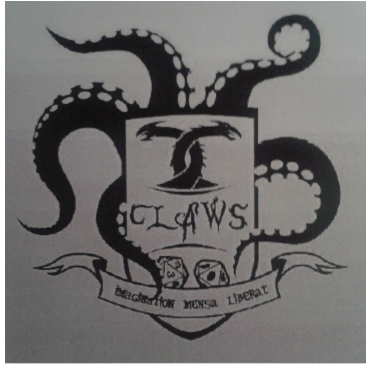
Followers willing to See the Light. Dehydration tolerance preferred. Contact Jericho.

For Sale

One pristine Waterstrider class cruiser. Very Cheap! Fully outfitted with everything your crew could need, from furniture to a food court. Some advanced equipment not included.

Actual Ads

For quality eldrich oddments and accessories, visit LoveCraft and Co. at www.etsy.com/shop/LoveCraftandCo



ISSN 1728-3221

