

CRAW MARKS

AUGUST 2014



A WORD FROM THE CLAWTHING

Greetings one and all! It is my pleasure, and that of the CLAWs committee to welcome you to the 2014 Annual Dragonfire issue of Clawmarks. This year's theme is a bit of a return to our fantasy roots, and we hope that the theme remains prevalent throughout the various modules, and artwork.

Thank you to all those who contributed to this issue of Clawmarks, your artwork, and articles are always appreciated.

I'd also like to thank this year's Committee for all of their hard work, and effort in scheduling and running the event, and mostly for putting up with me.

And finally a big thank you to all of the sponsors, vendors, and people that make this event possible each year, as well as the Genshiken anime society who's help and events have been invaluable.

We hope that this Dragonfire remains a happy memory throughout the rest of the year, and has you all excited for the next Dragonfire run by the new committee.

-Fortune Dederen



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Character Creation 3000M

By Simon Cross, Mike Dewar and Adrianna Pińska

Your character creation skills have progressed far beyond writing numbers on paper. Your characters have deftly crafted mannerisms and epic length backgrounds. They breathe emotion and seem more life-like than many of your friends.

Yet, somehow, when you sit down at a table to play your beautiful creations, things don't quite work out.

Perhaps the story heads in an unexpected direction, leaving your creation out of place and struggling to fit in? Or maybe they're fun to play initially but their actions begin to feel repetitive and uninteresting?

If any of this sounds familiar, read on.

Reacting to failure

It's easy to spend all your time imagining a character's successes -- their victories and their crowning moments -- but what happens when they fail? How do they respond to minor setbacks? And big ones?

Maybe they're stoic about it? Perhaps it's likely to cause a crisis of faith? Maybe they react by doubling down and upping the stakes? Maybe they see failure as an opportunity to learn and grow? Perhaps they're accustomed to failure? Perhaps they see failure as a sign that they're challenging themselves and pushing their abilities?

The dice and the DM are going to screw you. Make sure you have a plan for how to roleplay your character when they do.

Philosophy

A character's goals are things strongly tied to specific events. A philosophy colours every situation. The two are often aligned, but a philosophy is more broadly useful. It gives you a handle on how your character might behave in circumstances where it is not otherwise obvious what they would do.

To take a hackneyed example: your backstory might involve punishing an old partner who screwed you. This goal could feed a number of rather different

philosophies:

- "I always keep my word, and I promised Jimmy I'd get him back."
- "Any situation can be solved with enough violence."
- "Karma controls the universe. What goes around comes around."

The goal is the same, but each philosophy implies very different day-to-day behaviour.

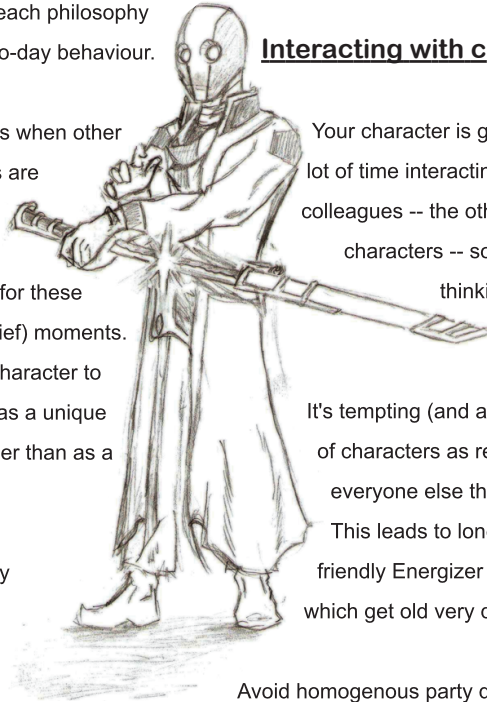
There are going to be times when other characters' plots and goals are centre-stage, and it behooves us as roleplayers to have a plan for these awkward (and hopefully brief) moments. A philosophy allows your character to participate in others' plots as a unique and distinct individual, rather than as a bored bystander.

Your character's philosophy becomes vitally important when paradigm shifts occur in-game. Setting changes erode the importance of lesser goals and past history and create a strong need for a philosophy that guides your character's immediate responses and further development.

It may be interesting to construct characters with goals that contradict their philosophy. For example, a pacifist might wish to exact revenge on the person who killed their brother. This creates an interesting conflict that will need to be resolved.

Randomly fucking with people is not a philosophy.

Interacting with colleagues



Your character is going to spend a lot of time interacting with their colleagues -- the other player characters -- so it's worthwhile thinking about how they do that.

It's tempting (and a bit lazy) to think of characters as relating to everyone else the same way.

This leads to loners and overly friendly Energizer bunnies, both of which get old very quickly.

Avoid homogenous party dynamics.

If your character's interactions with the other player characters are all the same, you have failed.

Varied interactions also help make party disagreements more interesting. Without varied interactions, you have to resolve all disagreements by beating each other over the head with the logic stick until consensus (or boredom) is reached. Unique relationships and loose factions make disagreements more interesting to roleplay and help the party find plausible lines along which to unite for a given scenario.

If your character is part of a command structure, spend some time thinking about how they respond to orders they disagree with. Remember that the orders are likely issued by someone your character knows and has an existing relationship with. What is that relationship?

Also keep in mind that your character has likely been given such orders before, and since they appear to still be part of the command structure, they've probably come to terms with this in some way that both they and their immediate superiors can live with.

Obviously everyone has their limits, though -- where are your character's? How much does it take for other player characters or NPCs to cross the line?

Development

Sometimes even if you do everything right you find yourself in a situation where your character is no longer fun to play. Maybe the campaign took an unexpected turn or you've just run out of ideas for them as they are. It's time for your character to change — to embark on a new personal story arc.

Great characters aren't static. They grow and react to events around them. Perhaps a crushing defeat has made them re-consider their philosophy -- or made them more committed to it? Or maybe frustration with their current situation has made them reconsider their options?



It helps to think broadly about how your character might develop while you're creating them. Make sure you'd still find the character interesting to play even if their stance on some important issues shifted. Don't become too invested in your character remaining as they are. Be flexible — don't have only one plan for character development.

Your character's philosophy and general outlook can be one of the most interesting things to tweak. Small changes can often have big ramifications for how they interact with others.

Don't feel you have to leave character development for later in the campaign! The start of a campaign is often when character changes are most needed to make a character work well and it sets the stage for further character development later on.

Sharing

Think about how you convey who your character is to the other players. They're probably not going to get to read your epic backstory, so they're going to have to learn about who your character is in other ways. Likely the first thing people will hear about your character is his or her name -- so make it a good one. It's going to be repeated a lot so make sure it conveys something about

who your character is. If they're an Italian mobster, make sure their name sounds like they're an Italian mobster. That way whenever the DM or another player says your character's name, it reminds everyone who your character is.

The second thing people hear will probably be a description of your character. Take some time to write one. Don't rely on dry statistics and descriptions. Stick to what people would see and remember about your character if they met him or her for a few minutes. Don't mention hair colour unless hair is an important feature.

After introductions are done, you probably won't get another invitation to monologue about your character. So do it in character instead. Tell the NPC about that time in 'Nam. Regale the party with tales from your epic backstory. As in real life, try not to ramble on, but equally, don't shy away from putting your character in the spotlight for a few moments. Continually remind the others at the table who your character is.

Last but not least, remember that the most epic backstory is pointless if no one finds out about it. The point of dark secrets is for

them to be uncovered and for your character to confront them.

Epilogue

Don't fear failure. Have a philosophy. Have varied interactions with others. Embrace change. Share who you are.

Thanks

- Kululaa dot COMMM!
- Mefridus von Utrecht (for a philosophy that involves others)
- Attelat Vool (for starting life after failure)



KNIGHT HOSPITALIER

A short story

by the great Slee

So, yeah. Here I am, sitting in a train. It's an old train, I can tell from the ancient oak panelling and the cracked leather of the furniture. The locomotive shudders and rumbles with well-aged strength, coughing pressurised steam at regular intervals. Outside the window, a forest gallops by, the trees whistling past my sight in a huge green blur.

In the seat next to me, there sits a long-bearded man, wearing a many-coloured turban and scarves. He is sleeping, but he blinks back into half-consciousness with every ten or twelve tremor of the train, and then falls asleep again. It smells as if I opened a spice cabinet; cinnamon most strongly, but also of ginger, nutmeg and

peppers. In front of me, there is a woman, dressed in plaid. Her auburn hair is braided into many locks, and her bare arms are adorned with gold and silver torcs. Ominously enough, her face is covered in woad war paint, and a long knife hangs from her belt. She folds the French newspaper she's been reading, and lets out a yawn. For the person sitting next to her, I admit that I might sound a bit silly in describing him as, for a lack of better words, a goblin. He is a short, greenish-skinned man with long, pointed ears and a mouthful of sharp teeth. He is busy typing on his laptop, the keys rattling rapidly. Every hundred words or so, he stops and takes a sip from his bottle of energy drink.

On the compartment opposite of ours, there is a quartet of little green men and women. They are about half-a-metre tall, and have long, pointed ears and moss-like hair. A couple of them are having a fencing match, cutting, thrusting, parrying against each other with a fork and a chopstick. Down the corridor, there is a commotion, of chittering voices and tinkling noises. I crane my neck, poking my head out to take a look down. There is a tall man with a cart. He is wearing some sort of long leather coat, and his face is covered with a beaked mask that you might find at a carnival. His cart is full of bottles, boxes, and small pouches. There is even a small stove on the top of the cart. A small retort sat on the sizzling tiny flame, and a ribbed rubber tube connected it to a smouldering incense-burner. From the whole setup, the man looks like a chemist of some sort. He is arguing with his customer, a red-haired lady druid clad in a white gown. Their bickering gets worse and worse as onlookers take sides, until I get a little worried that a brawl might break out.

Oh. Never mind. One of the train attendants come along and calm things down. He warns the chemist that the stove is a fire hazard, and he should turn it off right away. As the attendant turns to leave, I get a better look at him. As it turns out, he isn't really

a man at all. He is some sort of a wind-up clockwork; a very sophisticated one though, since he can think and talk like a human being. The automaton is dressed in the black, crisp-looking railroad uniform with a peaked cap. As he walks past me, I can hear the whirr-and-click of his gears and cranks. He must have noticed me staring; he gave me a quick salute as he passed me by. As he disappeared down the corridor, I could hear him whistling, sounding like a tune from an old radio.

And that's just a handful among the myriad of odd personalities filling this train.

Apart from me. Mind you, I'm a perfectly ordinary university student: second year, liberal arts. Simple Earthling through and through.

The train slowly decelerates, as it enters the station. The passengers all gather up their belongings, from small satchels like mine, to huge, iron-plated luggage. The shuffling tidal wave of people pushes me out of the train

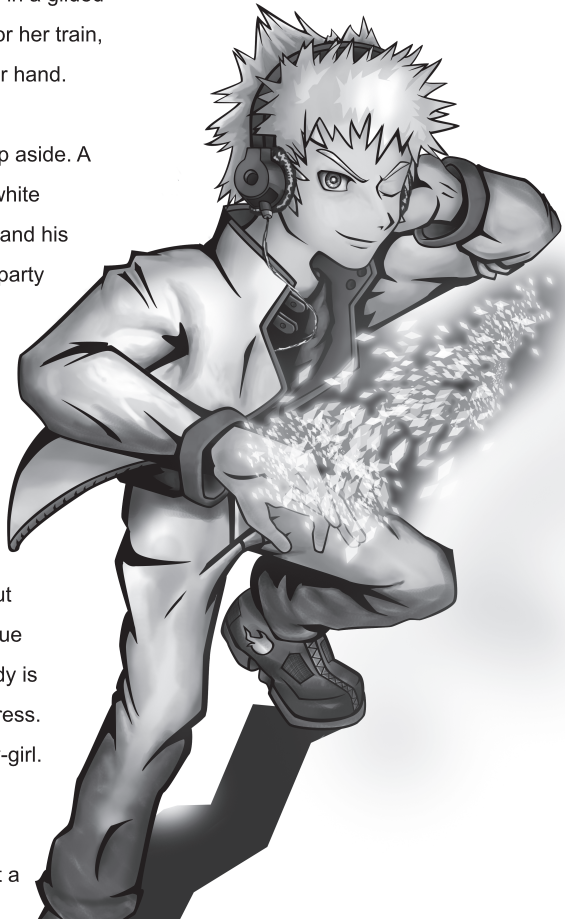


and onto the platform. The high, vaulted ceiling of the station is made of thousands of small glass panes weaved into a crisscrossing iron frames. Great arching beams punctuate this spiderweb, joining at the apex like a giant ribcage. A veritable orchestra of noise fill the space beneath. Great clockwork trains slide into the platforms, clicking, ticking. A trio of horned demons saunter along, chattering about legal matters. A bespectacled owl, wearing a bow tie and a tophat, pass me by in a gilded palanquin. A sphinx sits waiting for her train, with a rubik's cube clutched in her hand. "Make way!"

At the sudden yell, I hurriedly leap aside. A knight in shining armour, atop a white stallion, rides down the platform, and his squires follow suit. This chivalric party is chased by elfin men and women, who were dressed in leaf-green capes and crowns of antlers. They brandish their spears as they pursue the knights on.

A tap on my shoulder pull my attention. I turn to see a girl, about five inches tall. She has indigo-blue butterfly wings, and her small body is clad in a translucent gossamer dress. "Hi there, traveller," says the fairy-girl. She tips her hat, made out of a cream-soda bottle cap. "You look really really confused. How about a

guide? Five bucks and you have a deal! Ask me anything about the neighbourhood. I know all the fun places." I open my mouth to say something, but after two, three attempts at coherence, I give up. I raise one finger to silently ask for a moment of contemplation. Despite my confusion, I can see very well that there is only one question that really matters at this moment. "Where on earth am I?"



Dissecting High Valyrian

by Rolf Weimar

High Valyrian is a language spoken by people in Essos in the world of “Game of Thrones” (or “A Song of Ice and Fire” for you book readers out there). It was the language spoken by the people of the Valyrian Freehold. The Freehold was governed by the Lords Freeholder, who were members of powerful families of the Freehold. Families that controlled and rode dragons in battle were known as dragonlords.



Sigil of House Targaryen

When the Doom fell on Old Valyria (as it is now known), one prominent family of the Freehold, the Targaryens, took their dragons west to the continent of Westeros to conquer the Seven Kingdoms and take control. The people of Westeros speak the Common Tongue, so the Targaryens used this language to communicate with their new people.

While the first Targaryens in Westeros came from a place where everyone spoke High Valyrian, as the generations wore on, High Valyrian became more of an academic language (similar to the current status of Latin in our world). It was something that was taught to Targaryen children by scholars, but over time, the Common Tongue probably eventually replaced High Valyrian as the language they used in every day situations, and maybe even within the family.

High Valyrian did, however, continue to be taught to the Targaryen children until the time of the books. Daenerys Targaryen speaks High Valyrian fluently. High Valyrian is referenced in the books and does appear in small phrases here and there (“Valar morghulis” is the most famous example), but it was never full fleshed out by George R. R. Martin.

Enter David J. Peterson, a linguist, who was tasked by the creators of the Game of Thrones TV show, to create the Dothraki and High Valyrian languages for use on the show. David Peterson (from here on in, shortened to DJP) took words that had appeared in the books, like arakh and Vaes Dothrak, and used those as the basis of Dothraki and fleshed it out from there.



David J. Peterson –

Creator of High Valyrian



“Valar morghulis” means “All men must die”

DJP used this as a starting point. He decided that valar meant “all men”, and became the basis of the noun system. In High Valyrian, there is a singular form of a word, and three types of plural: paucal (relating to a small group), plural (relating to many), and collective (relating to all).

Here they are in use:

Notes: The u is actually a long vowel, which is marked with a macron, and High Valyrian doesn't use articles

Vala morghūljās

The man dies

Vali morghūlis

The men die

Valun morghūlis

A few men die

Valar morghūlis

All men die

Now here's something interesting. I just translated that as “All men die” not “All men must die”. Why is that? Enter the aorist, a form of the verb used to make general statements about the nature of things. Example of these types of statements are “Men eat food”. This is a general statement, and not specifically pointing out that there are men near the speaker that are eating food.

High Valyrian conjugates verbs for the aorist, so you can tell from the verb form if it's in the aorist or not. The aorist form for “to die” is the same as the normal present form which means that “Valar morghulis” can also take on the sense of something that is inevitable. In other words, a statement about the nature of the world. In the books, this sense is translated as “All men must die”.

Conjugation

What is conjugation you might ask? Conjugation is the term given to the variation in a verb according to the mood, tense and person. High Valyrian has a complex conjugation system based on person (first person, second person, third person) and on whether the verb stem ends on a consonant or a vowel.

Here is the conjugation table for “morphūljagon” (to die)

First Person Singular (I)	morphūljan
Second Person Singular (You)	morphūljā
Third Person Singular (He/She/It)	morphūljas
First Person Plural (We)	morphūli
Second Person Plural (You All)	morphūljāt
Third Person Plural (They)	morphūlis

Case

To those not linguistically inclined, case does not refer to upper or lower case letters, but rather grammatical case, which marks the roles of words in a sentence. High Valyrian has a complex set of cases, 8 in all. We will first look at the subject case, called nominative.

Nominative

Vala gerpe ipradas

The man eats fruit (or "a man," and/or "a fruit," since High Valyrian doesn't use articles, leaving it to us as translators to decide)

“Vala” is in the nominative, which means the word is marked as the subject of the sentence.

This is also the form of the word you would look for if you were looking for it in the dictionary.

Let's use the same words, but change the meaning.

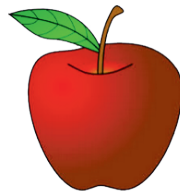
Gerpa vale ipradas

(A/the) fruit eats (a/the) man

Yes, this is a silly sentence, but here we can see how the endings of the words change as we change the case.



ala-a man



Gerpa - fruit

Accusative

Enter, the accusative, or the object case. We take off the -a from the end of vala, and add -e to form the accusative.

The accusative marks the object of the sentence. Since the accusative is marked, we could conceivably put the object at any point in the sentence, since we can tell from the ending what function it serves in the sentence. Changing the position in the sentence would only alter the emphasis.

Vale gerpa ipradas

It is the man that the fruit is eating

To change the emphasis in English requires a bit more words, since English does not mark subjects or objects, so we have to change the phrasing in English to get the same effect.

Genitive

The next case to discuss is the genitive. The genitive, or the possessive case, marks nouns as belonging to, or relating to something else.

Kesa gerpa valo issa.

This fruit is the man's.

We have taken the word “vala”, taken off the -a at the end, and added -o to it.

Dative

The next case we will discuss is called the dative, or the indirect object case. It is used to mark the indirect object (something that receives or has something done to it by the direct object).

Gerpe valot tepan

I give the fruit to the man

Direct translation

Fruit (accusative) man (dative) I give

High Valyrian is a pronoun dropping language (like Spanish or Italian) where pronouns are optional since who performed the action is marked on the verb itself, unlike in English where it is never clear who did what if we only have the verb.

Locative

The next case to discuss is the locative, which marks the noun as being the location of something

Gerpe valot Qelbrīā tepan

I give the fruit to the man in the Riverlands

Qelbria means Riverlands. If we lengthen the last a, it becomes Qelbrīā, which is the locative marker.

Instrumental

The next case we will cover is the instrumental case, which marks the noun as being used by or with (with in the sense of “by means of”) something.

Vala gerpe zȳhos ondosō ipradas

The man eats the fruit with his hand

ondos – hand

We add -oso to the end of word to form the instrumental (or just -o if it ends in -os).

Comitative

The second last case we will cover (we are almost there!) is the comitative case, which indicates accompaniment, and can be translated as “along with”.

It is formed by adding -om to the end of the noun.

Vocative

The last case to cover is called the vocative case, which is used when addressing someone.



Grey Worm (*Turgo Nudho in Astapori Valyrian*) : Leader of the Unsullied

Dovaogēdys!
Unsullied!

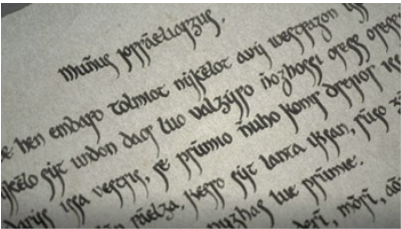
When we change the form of a noun depending on the case, we decline it. Some nouns decline differently to others. Nouns that decline in the same way are placed into groups. These groups are called declensions. There are 6 declensions in High Valyrian. Unfortunately, this is not where it ends. There are also 4 genders, lunar, solar, terrestrial and aquatic. These won't be covered here, but it is enough to

know that it has an effect on declension. Nouns in the dictionary will have their gender, and declension group listed, which helps in looking up their declension table.

Here is the declension table for vala (which is in the first declension, and is of the lunar gender)

	Singular	Plural	Paucal	Collective
Nominative	vala	vali	valun	valar
Accusative	vale	valī	valuni	valari
Genitive	valo	valoti	valuno	valaro
Dative	valot	valoti	valunta	valarta
Locative	valā	valoti	valunna	valarra
Instrumental	valosa	valossi	valussa	valarza
Comitative	valoma	valommi	valumma	valarma
Vocative	valus	valis	valussa	valarza

High Valyrian in Game of Thrones



A letter written in High Valyrian

Daenerys speaks High Valyrian, as does Thoros of Myr and Melisandre.

What follows is some dialogue that appears in the tv show. Maybe I am being overly careful, but if you haven't watched the show and don't want anything whatsoever revealed about what is said in them,

you should maybe avoid this section.

SPOILER ALERT!



Zaldrīzes buzdari iksos daor.

A dragon is not a slave

This line is said by Daenerys. An interesting thing to note here is that "it is" is "issa" in High Valyrian, but when you use the negative (daor – not), you have to use the subjunctive (used when imagining a hypothetical thing or situation).

Sagon (to be) is an irregular verb. The subjunctive for "it is" is "iksos".

Daenerys Targaryen - A fluent

High Valyrian speaker

Nyke Daenerys Jelmāzmo hen Targārio Lentro, hen Valyrio Uēpo ānogār iksan. Valyrio muño
ēngos ņuhys issa.

I am Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, of the blood of Old Valyria. Valyrian is my
mother tongue.

Dovaogēdys! Āeksia ossēnātās, menti ossēnātās, qilōni pilos lue vale tolvie ossēnātās, yn riñe
dōre ōdrikātās. Urnet luo buzdaro tolvio belma prjātās!

Unsullied! Slay the masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who holds a whip, but harm no
child. Strike the chains off every slave you see!

Phrases from the books translated into High Valyrian

Lannister va moriot zyha gēlŷnī addemmis

A Lannister always pays his debts

Ziry kivio dārilaros issa, se zŷhon suvio perzō vāedar issa.

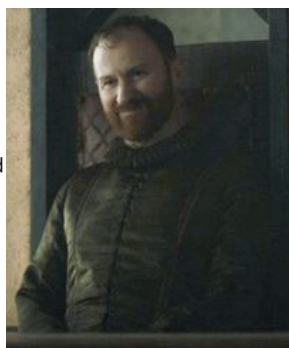
He is the prince that was promised, and his is the song of ice and
fire.

Skoriot ņuhys zaldrīzesse issi?

Where are my dragons?

Āegenkor Tistālīor jāhor gurotriri emilza.

The Iron Bank will have its due.



A clerk of the Iron Bank of

Braavos

Skorī dēmalyti tymptir tymis, ērinis iā morphūlis.
When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die.

Kesrio syt bantis zōbrie issa se ossyngnoti lēdys.
For the night is dark and full of terrors.

Daenerys Targarien, Jelmazmo, Dorzalty, Dāria Sikudo Dāryti Vestero, Muña Zaldrizoti.
Daenerys Targaryen, the Stormborn, the Unburnt, the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms of
Westeros, the Mother of Dragons.



John Snow - A member of the Night's Watch

The Night's Watch Pledge in High Valyrian
Bantis derēbas, sesīr urnēbion ņuhon
sikaks.

Va morphot ņuhot kelīlza daor.
Ābrazjromy dīniluks daor, dōrior tegori
emilun, dōre riñari sikīlun.

Dōre dārys keson se rijiluks daor.

Va urnebiot ņuhot glaesinna se
morphūlīnna.

Egros zōbrivē iksan.

Dōroti bē urnēbiros iksan

lōrvo hēdrj zālis ljs perzyssy,
tubis maghas ljs oños,

ēdrussossa narughis ljs molry iksan

Dāria ābraro sytivīlībīs ljs dōros iksan

Kesj bantī sepār bantirri mājīlarē ņuhon glaeson se ņuhe hoskāzme tepan.

Night gathers, and now my watch begins.

It shall not end until my death.

I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children.

I shall wear no crowns and win no glory.

I shall live and die at my post.

I am the sword in the darkness.

I am the watcher on the walls.

I am the fires that burns against the cold.

the light that brings the dawn
the horn that wakes the sleepers
I am the shield that guards the realms of men.
I pledge my life and honor to the Night's Watch, for this night and all the nights to come.
the horn that wakes the sleepers
I am the shield that guards the realms of men.
I pledge my life and honor to the Night's Watch, for this night and all the nights to come.

Useful phrases

Aōhys zaldrīzes yne vīlības!
Your dragon is attacking me!

Zaldrīzesse tolvī sýngis!
Dragons scare everyone!

Davido zaldrīzes aōhos zaldrīzose rōvyktys issa.
David's dragon is bigger than your dragon.

Dārys yno āeksion raqas.
My king loves gold.

Skoros ynot epilu?
What would you ask of me?

Quptenkos Ēngoso ūdrassis?
Do you speak the Common tongue?

Dialects of Valyrian

If you asked the people of Slaver's Bay or the Free Cities what language they spoke, many would simply answer Valyrian. The name High Valyrian was invented to distinguish the older form of the language from the language spoken by the common people of the Free Cities and Slaver's Bay. David Peterson actually developed 2 dialects of Valyrian, Astapori Valyrian, and Meereneese Valyrian, basing them off High Valyrian.

As an easter egg, the creators of Game of Thrones asked DJP if he would translate the French Taunt from The Quest for the Holy Grail into Valyrian for the Meerenese champion to shout at Daenerys and her army as they stand outside Meereen. While DJP did develop Meerenese Valyrian, he chose instead to translate the French Taunt into Astapori Valyrian, so that viewers who had been following Valyrian might be able to get the joke. Here is the French Taunt translated into Astapori Valyrian.



The French Taunter from The Quest for the Holy Grail

Byjan vavi demble eva o, trezy eme verdje espo
jimi!

I fart in your general direction, son of a window-
dresser!

Oa mysa iles me nýnyghi, si oa kiba tuziles
espo tomistos!

Your mother was a hamster, and your father
smelt of elderberries!

Já si hojgá oa gundja, trezy eme mero
dovodedha!

Go and boil your bottom, son of a silly person!

Kiman nya másina orvorta va oi sodjistos!

I wave my private parts at your aunties!

Do eban av kimívagho dombo, o doru-borto pame espo gruzi evi havor espo begistos!

I don't want to talk to you no more you empty-headed animal food trough wiper!

Ghorgan ji pungo va o, nynta Dare espo Zaldrizes, o si une oi dovodedhi, Vesterozi
azzzzzantys.

I blow my nose at you, so-called Dragon Queen, you and all your silly Westerosi kaniggets!

There is much more to learn about High Valyrian, Astapori Valyrian, Meerenese Valyrian and even Dothraki. Surf on over to http://wiki.dothraki.org/Main_Page to get more information, and join our little community. See you in Essos!

Upcoming RPGS

by Rolf Weimar

Dragon Age: Inquisition

The forthcoming third game in the Dragon Age series, Dragon Age: Inquisition, plans to take the best aspects of the two previous games as well as some new ideas. Players can, of course, customise their

character. All the races available in Origins will be available in Inquisition with the new addition of the Qunari.



The combat has been streamlined to focus more on tactics and high level strategy and less on monotonous and repetitive mouse clicking. Tactical view, which was removed for Dragon Age II, returns on all platforms the game will be available on.

A main criticism of Dragon Age II, that environments were reused too much, is being addressed in Inquisition, as the developers say they will no longer reuse environments. Player choice is going to feature a larger role in the game. Players will also be able to import their saves from previous games which will have effects on the player's game world.

The plot of Inquisition will be a lot more open ended, as opposed to the previous games which were much more linear. The story focuses on a civil war in Orlais between the Empress and the Empress's cousin, Grand Duke Espard. The traversable area in Inquisition is much larger than the area available for exploration in either two of the previous games.

The game is expected to release on the 21st of November 2014.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

The third game in the Witcher series, by polish developer CD Projekt RED, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt seeks to expand on every area of the RPG experience. The game is set in an open world, described by the developers as larger than any other modern RPG.

The world will react to the choices the player makes, with every quest having a multitude of options available to them. The combat system will be similar to the previous games, with a focus on Action RPG mechanics. The game is said to be about 100 hours long, with 50 of those hours devoted to the main story, and the rest filled up with side quests.

The game will feature a wide range of monsters and enemies to fight. It will have a realistic AI system, and responsive and dynamics environments. The Witcher 3 also has a great cast, including Doug Cockle returning as the voice of Geralt of Rivia, the eponymous hero of the game, and Charles Dance playing the Emperor (who also plays as Tywin Lannister on Game of Throne).

The game is expected to release on the 24th of February 2015.



So you want to write a LARP?

By Rolf Wiemar

I wrote my first LARP in 2003, and have written two more since then. Learning how to write LARPs can be tricky since there aren't tutorials or books written on how to do it. I basically picked it up just by first playing in a ton of LARPs, and then eventually writing my own.

My first LARP was quite rudimentary, but by my second LARP, I was already writing much more complex and interesting LARPs. In this article I want to articulate my process in creating LARPs so that it can hopefully help you to create your own.

That said, this is just my process. It is not the definitive way to do it. You could take bits and pieces from it, use the whole thing, or do it completely differently. Even then, maybe you will learn something from my

process. Ok, enough setup, let's get into the meat of it.

I think a LARP has three core components

Setting

Characters

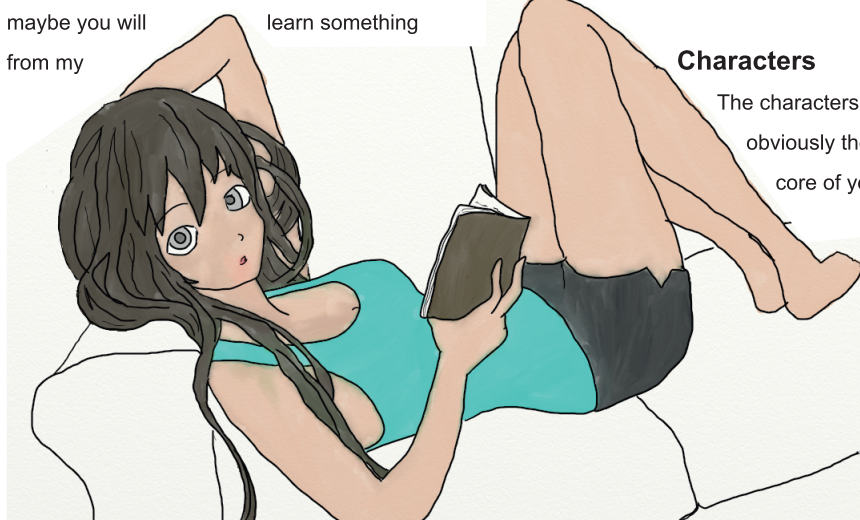
Mechanics

Setting

The setting defines in broad terms what players can do and how the world around them operates. Such things as magic, teleportation or guns, for example, will be allowed or disallowed because of the setting. Your setting could be a land full of magic and prophecy. It could be a stark and realistic setting with players only able to do what they could do in real life, or it could be anywhere in between.

Characters

The characters are obviously the core of your



LARP. This is where you should put the most effort. A LARP with poor setting but great characters will probably be more interesting than a LARP set in Game of Thrones (which is a well realised world) but with poorly thought out characters.

Mechanics

Mechanics define what players can and can't do in specific terms. The setting defines the world, the mechanics define what players can do in that world. Magic is one example of a system of mechanics present in manyLARPs.

Now that we have looked at these three areas in overview, let's cover them in more detail

Setting

When coming up with a setting, think about what your LARP is really about. I have written threeLARPs, a sci-fi LARP revolving around a space ship on its way to a world on the edge of its territory, a banquet celebrating a general's victory set in a medieval fantasy world, and a sci-fi LARP set in a space station where 4 races are meeting to discuss politics.

These are all the overviews of theLARPs, but not what the LARP is really about, that would be telling ;) but you can see here the wide range of settings you could set in your

LARP in. What I find is a useful way to writeLARPs is to come up with a strong central concept, and all three components will flow from that.

Here are some core ideas that could be used to make a LARP:

Old war hero returns disguised as a servant to a meeting of veterans who hopes to learn what they really think of him and his leadership

A new alien race is discovered but it is messing with people's minds, and changing reality around them. But as reality continues to change, people begin to question their old reality and start accepting the new one is the real one.

A medieval kingdom is founded on an ancient alien grave site and the alien have started returning, disguised as humans, to try get the humans off their land
Now these don't work as an overview or LARP blurb (the thing you give out to attract players to your LARP) as they give away the whole LARP. But it does show the core concept of the LARP.

Take the first example: the old war hero. This could be used in a number of settings. It also provides a lot of interesting possibilities. What do people really think of the old war hero? Maybe everyone thinks the same thing about him, or maybe there are wildly differing opinions. Perhaps he did

terrible but necessary things that some people just can't understand. You can probably leave the reveal of the old man up to the character playing him. It could be quite interesting to see how it will play out.

Characters

Characters are a very important part of a LARP. Once you have your core concept, think about what the character's motivations are and why they are in the LARP. I try to come up with characters that have interlocking motivations, which encourages interaction. You don't want to write a LARP where a group of characters only has stuff to do within their own subgroup of characters (such as only people from their kingdom, platoon, or race). They will then have very little reason to branch out and interact with the other characters in the LARP. When writing characters, ask yourself the following questions, which can help you get a feeling for what kind of characters you want in your LARP:

What do they want?

What do they share in common?

Where and how do they differ?

What do they like?

What do they hate?

A great thing to do to create some interesting conflict is to have some object or thing in the LARP (could be something abstract like a marriage) wanted (or not wanted) by different players for very different reasons. One character could really want the marriage because besides their betrothed being beautiful, he would become a part of a powerful family.

The other would detest the idea, not because she dislikes the guy, but because her mother was forced into a marriage and she hates the idea of women being forced to do a man's bidding. This is interesting because it doesn't provide an easy solution. She might even love the man, but it would be very hard for her to consent to a marriage because of the connotation marriage has for her.

Mechanics

The last important component of a LARP are its Mechanics. They are often not given as much focus as the other two aspects, which I feel is a pity.LARPs are an interesting medium, so I feel one should try to take full advantage of this by augmenting it with interesting mechanics. Magic is one obvious example of a mechanic that is present in many fantasy LARPs.

Mechanics are the mechanism through which players have an effect on the world outside out of physical action. You could have a cellphone mechanic, which allows a character to contact someone else in the LARP world that is not present in the LARP as a player character. The LARP could be set in a space station which gives you lots of opportunities to set up interesting mechanics, such as configuring space station systems such as shields or weapons.

In one LARP I ran, the host of the event arrested one character and put him in the brig. He however failed to relieve the arrested man of his communicator, which allowed him to contact his associates and shut down vital computer systems needed

by those in another part of the world. Needless to say, he got his revenge :)

Mechanics should not be used as a game in themselves, that is, we are not trying to make a video or board game here that people in the LARP play to the exclusion of the LARP itself. But as a LARP writer, you should be trying to think up interesting way to provide extra ways for players to act in this world that would not be obvious to the player, but might be obvious to the character. For instance, when people in our world want to find something out, they head to google.

Perhaps there is some obvious thing people would do, or try in this new world you as a LARP writer have written. Make that explicit and mention it on the character under skills. It is all about giving people options.

I think that about wraps up this discussion on LARP writing. If you have any questions, or comments, please email me at rolfweimar@gmail.com. I am always interested to hear from fellow LARP writers or those who want to start out in it. Have a great Dragonfire!



FINAL KNIGHTS: A CLASSIC WORLD OF DARKNESS GAMES

From the journals of

by kelvin millington

Mordred Le Fay Lach Pendragon,

Black Dragon of Albion,

King of Camelot

What a year it has been. 1991 will not be forgotten easily.

My name is Mordred La Fey of House Pendragon. I never get tired of seeing the reaction on peoples' faces when I tell them that. "Surely not!" they exclaim, yet it is true. I am one and the same, the original dark prince of legends and storytelling, setting the archetype for so many others to follow. My mistakes in life cannot be undone, and I earned the eternal scorn of many. I did many terrible things, and upon my demise I found myself in hell, languishing amidst the ninth layer, reserved only for the wicked of men. I think the stories written of me are sometimes worse than what I saw in hell though. I despise Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the less said of David Hemmings portrayal of me the better.

For fifteen hundred years I endured dreadful and unspeakable suffering at the hands of Satariel, the Prosecutor of Man, whom men call Satan, and his multitudes of thralls, sycophants and flunkies. Even now my memories gnaw at me, but I force myself to not remember the details, fighting that which

has taken root in my very soul. I fully admit to great misdeeds, yet no-one can deny me that I have endured my punishment duly. Yet in that lies the most disturbing truth of it all: Hell does not exist to punish the wicked; it exists to trap souls to feed itself. It is a machine gone berserk, and I have vowed to break it.

In centuries past a relatively small number of highly capable trapped souls managed to escape Hell and return to the living world. There they live as Revenants, each following a Path, a kind of religious code, which staves off the madness that dwells within. An insidious side effect of being subjected to the Abyss is that it becomes a part of you. To give in is to become a monster in truth, but to walk a Path; there is a hope for some kind of redemption.

Over time these first Revenants returned to lead breakouts of more souls, of which I was one of the lucky few. I gained thee chance to have study under the creator of the Path of the Demon Knight; Alexandros Megaera called The Great, Shashahan, King of Kings, who taught me ways of utilizing the infernal

power within as a sword against the darkness. We found we have much in common, especially when it comes to manipulative mothers.

If there truly was a person who deserved his title, it was my mentor: Alexander the Great. I still regret not being able to save him during the December attack. I did my best, yet as usual, I was too focused on my own survival to properly aid him as well as my companions. I will miss our late hour drunken talks most, I think. We never seemed to run out of stories to complain about our respective mothers. I have seldom had such a good friend, or a better mentor I think sometimes perhaps we were brothers, separated by time. I would trade both of my real brothers for Alexander in a heartbeat. Your sword still rests in a place of honor, my friend.

It certainly is not easy being a dead man in Los Angeles, the so-called 'City of Angels'. I

would think it a pretentious moniker if I had not met three different fallen angels within its boundaries. Also being the wrong sort of dead person seems to have added to my difficulties.

All these Cainites, the so-called Kindred, and their thrashing about. They act like they rule the world from the shadows, with their intrigues and wars. Until the werewolves show up of course, or someone mentions "those who watch from on high". At least Gabriel Benedict, the unspoken leader, seems a balanced sort of person, if sadly overwhelmed by his position. It takes a great deal of will to rule, a fact I know all too well...

I have made friends with a handful of kindred, mostly to do with our Shadow Pact. (What is the Shadowpact? Call it a fraternity of the Night, dedicated to policing our kind, those who possess supernatural power) Mister William Pratt, the Artful Dodger, has



proven most reliable and resourceful in his position as broker and expert in occult matters. He plays the vizier role well, perhaps too well. Almost no-one seems to have any information on him or his mentor, Balthazar of Carthage.

Mr. Pratt's cohort, Selena Onas, has proven to be an adept thief and combatant, and is adjusting well to her role as leader of her own coterie of misfits, including the Malkavian vampire Bela Lugosi, who is most entertaining. He believes himself to be the actual vampire Dracula, and regards Selena as his steward. How quaint.

The Shadowpact contains not only vampires though. A more perplexing individual is Alieda Schmitt, who claims to be a Tzimisce vampire, yet is something much more... arachnine. Her human appearance is pleasant enough to look at, though until recently she has proven utterly devoid of emotion. When there is need for violence, however, then she becomes positively monstrous. She has proven resourceful, crafty, well connected, and deadly. I cannot help but remember my own younger, living self, and I truly hope she does make the same mistakes. She did prove instrumental in preventing an all out war between the werewolves and the vampires of Los Angeles, so I may yet be proven wrong on that count.

Another dead man I've made acquaintance with is Rene La Fayette, who is apparently a wraith. I am told they are like myself; only they are limited to the 'morbid' spectrum of spirituality. He is a capable soldier, a former "Navy SEAL" whatever that is, and spends almost his entire existence on the job, ready for any threat that many appear. He is reportedly a former member of Ghost Protocol, a top-secret military project run by Dr Alison Munroe during the Vietnam War. (Where is Vietnam? Damned if I know)

And then there's our fallen angel, Andriel. She goes by the common name of Dr Ella Cassidy, and works as a trauma surgeon at Sunset Boulevard Hospital. I find her quite fascinating, as she is an angel, yet fallen like so many others. She displays none of the twisted and demented qualities demonstrated by the ones I was subjected to in my time in Hell. Her mentor Baumiel, Devourer of the Bull Host, helped her to learn the modern ways that help her survive. She is far from trouble-free, however, and there have been some issues in the past. Once a powerful sorcerer learnt her true name and we had to fight her. Things got messy, and mistakes were made, yet luckily it all worked out in the end. Those responsible for her enslavement paid a blood price.

As for myself, I continue to walk the Path,

and perform my work against Hell, and the Abyss in general. Attempting to combat the Abyss serving Pentex corporation from the inside (foolishly, some might say); I have purchased an enormous amount of “stock” in one its subsidiaries, and begun working my way to the “Board of Directors”. Cleaving to the Path of the Demon Knight in these circumstances has become more difficult but I will hold faith with Alexander’s teachings. I will continue to wield the powers of darkness that reside in my soul against the Abyss and its forces and try to help as many mortals as possible. Every soul is worth saving.

So much has happened in our adventures in Los Angeles. We first started working together when we were asked to perform a service in our mentors’ stead. The grandson of the werewolf local leader, Don Alonso Castellano, had gone missing, and the vampire Gabriel’s own investigator had gone missing. Our search led us to Chase Lamont, the newest member of Pentex’s board of directors, and we concluded that vastly nefarious schemes were afoot. Supernaturals of each of the species had disappeared, and others were investigating the mysterious and baffling case. We were aided by agents of the High King of the Changelingkin, as well as the Werewolf Garou, and the Vampires in the city. We found the werewolf boy being tortured slowly to death as part of a ritual to create a

Hellmouth, allowing free flowing corruption to spew into the world from the Abyss. We put a stop to it, yet could only do so with a combined assault of vampires, werewolves and changelings on the location, Griffith Park. We succeeded in saving the boy, yet the Hellmouth had already opened, though at a reduced capacity. We also slew Chase Lamont in the battle, yet sadly discovered that he cannot be dispatched so easily. He was able to come back from death a few days afterwards seemingly no worse for wear.

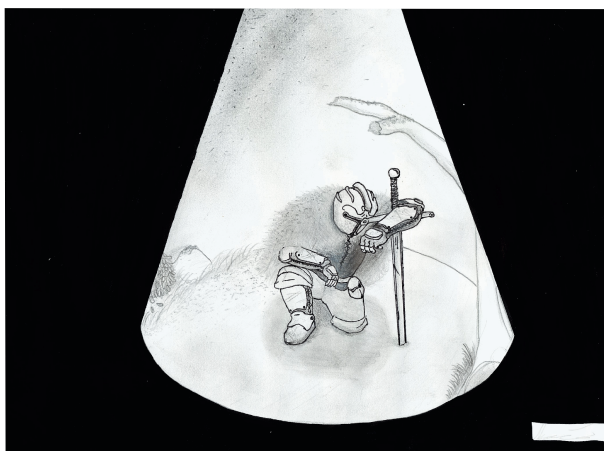
Lamont seemed to not hold a grudge, surprisingly. He remains in the city serving his Abyssal masters. He is a dangerous but surprisingly likeable foe. His amity at being thwarted, temporarily as he puts it, proved a relief as we were soon embroiled in further incidents with other individuals. Andriel came under attack from a gang of vampire criminals working for someone called the Red Death, an ancient, mysterious and malign entity who had allied himself with “the Sheddim”. These sheddim were described as strange malevolent entities resembling demons, from ‘beyond our reality’. They work towards unraveling our version of reality and returning it to what is was allegedly before ours was molded. We narrowly escaped being destroyed by one that was summoned just before the vampire criminals were defeated.

This was not the last we saw of the sheddin.

Soon after we had recovered, Alieda was approached by her longtime business partner the Vampire Crime Lord, Mohammed X. He revealed himself to be working for the Sabbat, and was planning a hostile takeover of LA. Alieda was being offered a seat on his new council after the coup, in exchange for helping X take out our primary ally, Gabriel Benedict. This was unfortunately detrimental to our long terms plans regarding certain doomsday prophecies we had been made privy to, and we took steps to prevent this. In our investigations, we discovered X had been performing sadistic necromancy rituals in his lair, leading to a hostile confrontation. He fled the battle and went into hiding, which necessitated calling a political council of the vampire leaders to draw him out. As a hero of the local vampires, he had considerable clout, and we were forced to duel to settle the matter.

Gabriel was forced to the sidelines so as not to endanger his own position. The duel was a close matter, yet I prevailed thanks to my blade, Clarent, who is always at my side. The matter was closed, and the Sabbat threat abated for the time being.

The defining feature of 1991 will of course be the December incident. The official story is that there were earthquakes and natural disasters that resulted in many casualties and much property damage. The truth is much more interesting, naturally. As part of the aforementioned doomsday prophecies, we had taken into our care a pair of expectant vampire parents. This is usually a biological impossibility, as you may expect, yet miraculously it happened. Many, many individuals became immensely interested with the ramifications of this potential child, most of them for selfish or hostile reasons. A good few knowledgeable scholars were quite convinced that this child could one day be some form of messiah, depending on who had control of it. Among those interested, is Lilith, the First Woman, who claims the child as her own, Lucifer, first of the Fallen as well as my old tormentor Satariel, Satan, himself. (Lucifer and Satan appear to be separate entities and bitter



foes). We seem to have acquired rarified foes.

We had to fight off our many aggressors, and rebuff the insidious offers of our foes that preferred to employ rather than destroy us. I suppose we should be flattered. Many supernatural obstacles plagued us and powerful magics were employed at the end to slay the child if it could not be taken. The last battle took place on the night of the Childs' birth, on 21 December 1991. Every hostile force that wanted the child, either for. I still don't like Pratt though. He is...far too subtle and devious itself or simply dead, came at us with everything they had. This resulted in a massive brawl in the streets of LA, eventually culminating in a last stand at the Sunset Boulevard Hospital. Our mentors did not survive sadly. Neither did the Childs' parents. But the child remains hale and in our care. We have taken it upon ourselves to raise the baby, and I know that I will endeavor to be a better father to the little girl than Arthur ever was to me.

My compatriots have made a similar vow, in honor of our mentors, and our commitment to Los Angeles and its myriad peoples, both mundane and supernatural. I have faith in their steadfastness and will strive to honor their commitment for my liking. But one works with the allies' one has I suppose. My reign as the King of Camelot taught me that.

These are I'm told, the Final Nights. And we, the knights of the Shadowpact.

Let the Abyss do its worse. We Are Ready....



RPG Review: Trail of Cthulhu

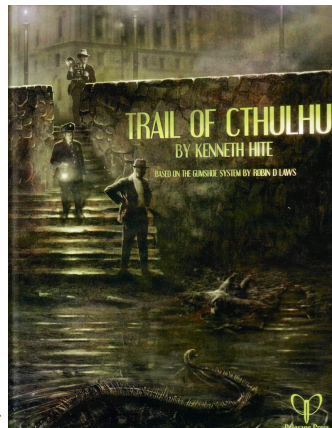
By Brendan Quinlivan

VERY SHORT VERSION

Where it's good, it's very, very good; where it's bad, it's horrid.

SHORT VERSION

Trail of Cthulhu has some really great bits, such as handling investigation, variations on the Mythos, Sanity/Stability, handling NPCs, and Purist/Pulp mode. These good bits are inspiring, and really make you eager to run the game. That's why the disappointing parts - the combat rules, skill ratings, and health/stability/sanity resources - are an even bigger let-down.



(VERY) LONG VERSION

I feel that a disclaimer of sorts is needed up-front: I am a big fan of games that are more focussed towards telling a specific type of story, with simple or intuitive rules (Unknown Armies, FATE, Sorcerer) that - better yet - mechanically facilitate that certain type of story (Apocalypse World, Lacuna, 7th Sea, Houses of the Blooded, etc.). If you read my Apocalypse World review a few CLAWmarks back, you'll see what I mean about the latter.

I also happen to like character archetypes, where each player character has their own unique arena in which they can shine. One combat monkey, one social monkey, one lore monkey, one magic monkey, one healer

monkey, one thief monkey, etc. Overlapping core character competencies irk me. If it's a story where there will be frequent combat, then sure, everyone needs to be combat-capable. There should only be one combat monkey, however, unless it's a dungeon hack, in which case I would be okay with a striker-defender-archer-backstabber differentiation between multiple combat monkeys.

So, why the lengthy exposition? It's because I will be making some value judgments about Trail of Cthulhu, and those will be based on the preferences I just outlined. You may disagree with my judgments, and that's

okay. It's there so that you can understand where I'm coming from.

Okay, on to the review proper.

The Good

Part the First: Handling investigations.

Mythos-based games are about investigating a mystery, revealing the layers of Mythos infestation beneath, uncovering how little you actually know about reality, and the searching for ways to keep the Mythos at bay. So, lots of investigating. Investigative games normal handle this by having you make rolls to see if you discover the clues/information you're looking for. The issue with this, however, is that once you fail a vital clue roll, the investigation grinds to a halt, or the GM has to scramble to shoehorn the clue in anyway, or fudge the roll somehow. Trail uses the Gumshoe system, which says no to all of that: when you're conducting an investigation, if you have an appropriate Skill and are at the right place to find a clue, you find a clue. Simple as that. No rolls, nothing. If Skill = yes, then Clue = yes. It's refreshingly simple and intuitive. I'm running Trail at the moment, and it's been an absolute joy to have 5 sessions of investigation go by without a single player reaching for the dice. Trail doesn't stop there, though. If you find a clue, you can also spend a point from the same Investigative Skill pool to gain an extra clue.

Alternatively, you could spend a point from a related Investigative Skill to gain an extra clue linked to that other skill. It's pure genius, and a truly simple mechanic that rewards player involvement while also reducing GM prep overhead (by forcing the GM to think about the investigation in broad strokes, rather than plotting out the clues in a CSI-esque fashion). For this reason alone, I bought Trail.

Part the Second: handling the Mythos.

This is where Kenneth Hite, the author and generally-awesome idea-maker, really shines. In this chapter, he presents each off the Mythos entities as they normally are, and then presents a whole bunch of ways in which they can be interpreted. In many of them, the entities are reinvented in ways that make them fresh and interesting, while other ideas twist them into different-yet-similar versions of themselves. I can't express how amazing this chapter is, and will provide just one example to illustrate: "Cthulhu is an infra-dimensional entity that has only a conceptual existence within the human 'R-complex', the brain stem and limbic system left over from our primordial reptilian ancestors. This is why he appears only in dreams, high-stress encounters (such as shipwrecks), and artistic impulses. He is attempting to create a critical mass of believers so that he may 'emerge from R'lyeh' and open the eyes of all". That was

one of the 8 nuggets for Cthulhu, and I don't know about you, but it really made for a fresh and exciting take on Cthulhu to me!

Part the Third: the other great stuff

Sanity is a core element of the Cthulhu Mythos, because so many protagonists lose it. Trail of Cthulhu handles this in an

approach similar to Unknown Armies, by using two scales: Stability and Sanity. Stability is your general mental well-being, and is affected by both mundane mental stresses and Mythos-based stresses. It returns relatively quickly, but if it reaches -10 (more on this later), you go incurably insane.

Sanity is the more slow-burn version, and measures your character's (faltering) belief in science, religion and their general view of how the universe is meant to work. Stability and Sanity are tracked separately, thus creating a deeper portrait of your character's psychological state: with high Stability and low Sanity, you can remain a perfectly functional person, despite knowing the awful truth about the universe (much like

Professor Armitage from Lovecraft's The Dunwich Horror). With low Stability and high Sanity, you're more jumpy and paranoid, and quick to freak out, but still naive as to the true reality. I really like this method, and think it's another interesting way of representing the mental struggle the characters will face.



Another really wonderful stroke of genius is the Pulp and Purist modes of play. In short, Purist mode is closer to most of Lovecraft's work, while Pulp mode is more reminiscent of Arkham Horror in feel. Each mode imposes rules tweaks that better emphasize that style of Mythos story, with Pulp mode emphasizing tougher, more stable characters, two-guns blazing rules, and Purist mode focussing on uncertainty, hard limits for Health, Stability and

Sanity, rules for mitigating Stability loss by Fainting, and Sanity not replenishing ever. These tweaks really enhance the game's feel, and I think they're a great addition to the rule set.

Lastly, the advice for creating and running campaigns is amazing, and is telling of the vast GMing experience that Hite has. Also provided are a sufficiently-detailed synopsis

of the world during the 1930s (the default time period), casting Mythos magic, and - my personal favourite - cults, and how to create them.

Overall, there is a serious amount of well-written ideas and material available that should get any GM really excited to run a Cthulhu game. Trail is an amazing product, and it shows, right down to the very high production values, and the mood-inducing sludge-green colour scheme and murky, shadowy artwork.

The Bad

Part the First: Character Creation.

So in order to play this game, you naturally need to make a character. I like games where this is simple and intuitive, without much math or poring over Skills, Spells, Advantages, Disadvantages, Weapons, Armour, Equipments, working out remaining gold, and the whole optimization-of-my-character headache. Trail begins promisingly, with each player picking a unique Archetype. Like Call of Cthulhu, this means that you are your own unique snowflake, but each character can have Skills possessed by other characters. All well and good. Then, you must buy your Skills. This is where I got a bit irritated, because this is done using a point-buy system, with one big pool for General Skills, and another variable pool for Investigative

Skills, with different point-to-Skill ratios depending on the pool, Skill in question and your archetype. It got a bit much, and I was the Keeper (GM)! I dislike point-buy systems a lot, because it means I have to play Accounting: The Balancing, so Trail really didn't win any brownie points by using point-buy. This is particularly aggravating given how simple the system is during play (see my praise above).

Part the Second: Skill Ratings.

The point-buy thing is made worse by nebulous Skill ratings. For General Skills, a rating of 8 is considered very professional, while 3-4 is competent. For Investigative Skills, 3-4 is professional, while 1 is competent. So two different scales are in operation here. That's fine, since the two scales are clearly delineated (through different point-buy pools, and in-game mechanics). The problem comes in where Skills can go above 10, or even 12. Hell, there's even an example that discusses characters buying Skills of 30 (which means they also need a Skill of 15). Wait, what? I thought 8 was very professional. So what is 30? God of Library Use? On the other end of the scale, there's also no real distinction - mechanically or otherwise - between someone with Sense Trouble at 6 and someone with Sense Trouble at 8. This is why I say the Skill Ratings are nebulous.

Part the Third: Health and Stability.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with these Skills in theory, but in practice, Trail deals with them in a unintuitive way: each is a sliding scale from a maximum of your Rating to a minimum of -10, where your expire or lose your marbles. Once you go below 0 (called Hurt) you take +1 difficulty on everything, and start making Consciousness checks once you go past -5 (called Seriously Wounded). You can still spend (negative) points to add to these rolls though. First Aid attempts have different sets of rules and factors depending on whether your patient is Hurt or Seriously Wounded, and rules for making guns more deadly only complicate things further. My first thought was: "Guys, why not just make someone dead once they hit 0?" That automatically makes guns deadly, removes the First Aid jumble, and makes your Health rating intuitive. Stability works in an identical way to Health, just with fewer rules. Sanity operates completely differently, however, and has it's own set of much simpler rules. Overall, I was left with the impression that these character resources weren't particularly thought-through, and they just muddy the system's waters even more. On top of that, I don't have hours to spare to try and patch the rules together, or try to fill in the blanks by interpolating the rules. I want to read the rules, understand them quickly, and play. These rules sub-sets don't

facilitate this.

The Ugly

The rules break down when combat begins. It's really that simple. In a Cthulhu game, even in Purist mode, combat will occur. So having broken combat rules is a fairly serious issue. How are they broken? Well, when you're using a General Skill, you roll a d6 to beat a Difficulty, and can spend points from your Skill pool to boost the roll. Think about applying that in combat. Most of the time, your Difficulty is 3-4. So on a d6, you'd

need to spend 2 points to stand a strong chance of succeeding. That, however, means that a professional soldier (Firearms 8-10) will exhaust their skill in 4-6 rolls, or as many rounds of combat.

Once that's done, they're effectively as good as someone who's never picked up a gun in their lives (i.e. Skill 0). For the combat monkey, this means that their chance to shine is more like a chance to flicker and then die. For a one-on-one fight, it might be okay. For combat that lasts a few rounds, it might be okay.



For extended combat, it sucks. This suckage is compounded by the fact that up to 3 General Skills (which encompasses all the combat skills) refresh to full only: a) once a safe haven is found and 1 hour passes; or b) once 24 hours of game time has passed since the last expenditure.

This makes no sense whatsoever, and really makes me wonder if the combat rules were actually playtested (in all honesty). Sure, you could argue that Cthulhu is not a game where combat is a focus, and I'd completely agree with you. My counter would be "Then why have a Pulp mode that explicitly emphasizes two-fisted action and blowing up Cthulhu with dynamite?" If you don't want combat to be a focus in your Cthulhu game, run Cthulhu Dark where there is one rule for combat: if you get into a serious fight, you die. That says in a very undeniable way "No combat here, Jim". Add to this the wonky Health mechanics (discussed above) and the fact that you have all the traditional Armour, Cover, Rate of Fire, Range, Ammo Capacity, Two-Handed, Explosives, Massive Table of Gun Stats and Environmental Damage rules sections, combat become a thoroughly messy affair. In light of how hands-off and rules-light the investigative elements of Trail are, this combat mess makes me wonder whether there wasn't a second, uncredited author at work here. They are just that far apart from each other.

Except there wasn't, because Fear Itself (the base Gumshoe rules) and Night's Black Agents (a standalone Gumshoe game) have exactly the same rules. So this issue exists for all Gumshoe games, which boggles my mind even further.

THE WRAP

Despite all this belly-achin', I still find Trail of Cthulhu a worthwhile game, and one that I would recommend that people buy. Yes, that's how good the good bits are. Trail made me look at Cthulhu in a whole new way, and drove home that fact that the Mythos is alien and can be as beyond our comprehension as the Keeper wants. The idea of making Mythos entities be forces of nature, or changing up the 'hierarchy', also means that Cthulhu veterans will be kept on their toes, and their preconceptions challenged. Furthermore, the investigative component of the rules works so well that it really sets a benchmark for other investigative games to meet.

I would actually say that Trail - and all other Gumshoe games, for that matter - are setting books: use the setting and ideas with much enthusiasm, but use a different set of mechanics. That, or perform the labour of love and patch the rules.

BOARDGAMES IN YOUR POCKET

by schpat

We all love boardgames. In fact, over the last few years I've come to enjoy them more and more. I like that they are casual, convenient and a great way to avoid disaster when someone can't make the regularly scheduled role-playing session.

The only thing that I didn't particularly enjoy about boardgames was the setup and break down time. The worst part about playing something like dominion is that you have to stop playing while cards and counters are sorted, put back in the box, new random selections are made, cards are dealt and only then are you playing again. Now imagine a game like Small World and instead of a few cards you have about a million tokens. I'm not sure if you've met me, but I am not a patient person. I thought there just had to be a more efficient way.

That was how I discovered and really started playing electronic versions of my favourite board games, on tablet and smartphone. They are quick to set up, and there is no packing away required, but there are even more perks. Here are the top four that I can think of

1.

Scoring on some games can be complicated, with electronic versions this is a breeze. It's just a little bit of overhead that the machine takes care of. Games like Small World, Carcassonne and Gamers v Evil really benefit from this.

2.

They are also way cheaper than the games they are based on, usually only a small fraction of the cost. With the cheapest board game being about R400, but most games being much more than that, electronic versions are a great way to increase your library on a budget. Boardgames are generally more expensive than the average mobile game, but when you consider that there is much more to them than navigating a flapping bird you will understand why. Some of these games have "lite" versions so that you can effectively try before you buy. The best of them give you a base game for free and then let you expand with In App Purchases for expansions.

3. Convenience. This is probably the best thing about mobile based boardgames.

Beyond the efficiency that led me seek them out, they have a convenience factor that is off the chart. Every day, almost all the time,

I carry 10+ boardgames and their expansions around in my pocket, try that with traditional boxes. And you can play anywhere, with or without friends, many of these games have very good AI.

4. The ability to play with friends across the world at the same time as people across the couch. This is actually, without a doubt, the best thing about mobile based boardgames. Asynchronous multiplayer means that you can start a game with a bunch of people that are not necessarily geographically with you at the time, and if for some reason you can't finish it now, you can finish it later. Some of the games are cross platform, so you can play with friends no matter what device they have.

There are however some disadvantages to electronic boardgames

1.

No new game smell. You know you like this, don't even try to deny it. Yes you have an awesome game, but it's not really tactile, you can't hold it and hug it and stroke it, there is a distinct lack of "thereness".

2.

They are not as social as hardcopy games. Without a doubt there are advantages to electronic versions, but when you are with friends (or enemies), there is no substitute

for playing the real thing. This may be directly due to the fact that they are more efficient, people concentrate on the game more and on the social aspect less, this can be avoided somewhat by all playing on one device in a pass and play mode.

But in my opinion the advantages hugely outweigh the disadvantages. And if you are not already playing boardgames on your gadgets then you should start. Perhaps try some of these out:

Neuroshima Hex, Carcassonne, Settlers of Catan, Penny Arcade: Games V Evil, Space Hulk, Blood Bowl, Hero Academy, Summoner Wars, Kingdom Builder, Small World, Ticket to Ride, Al Hambra, Elder Sign, ...



DUMMIES GUIDE TO THE SUPERNATURAL

New World of Darkness Edition

Vampires

Undead creatures created when a vampire drains a human dry of blood and then feeds the corpse a few drops of its own blood. This process is called the Embrace. This process can be quite draining for the sire (the vampire who gave their own blood) so they do not often procreate. They refer to themselves as Kindred.

They are nocturnal as the sun burns them. Prolonged exposure to the sun will kill a vampire. Thus they slumber during the day and rise at night.

They generally live in large cities, where they can remain inconspicuous, and find plenty of prey. Vampires do not need to kill to feed. Their prey enters into a trance state when they begin to feed on them and they do not remember the actual feeding. A vampire can erase the bite marks by simply licking them. Vampires do need to feed to avoid torpor (extended period of sleep), their bodies consume a portion of their vitae (stored blood) in order to rise from their daytime slumber; they will remain in this slumber if they do not have enough blood.

Kindred are brought into one of five clans on their embrace:

Daeva: Seductive, decadent, sexually transgressive predators that tend to blur the line between lust and hunger. The act of feeding becomes one of sensual pleasure. (These are very much like the Vampires found in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*.)

Gangrel: These vampires are more predatory: Feral demons. They place themselves on top of the food chain and have little to no interest in humans as anything other than food. Their form of vampirism is a crude predation and it evokes all their base instincts.

Mekhet: Mysterious conspiratorial occultists that are obsessed with knowledge and information. They tend to hide in the shadows and manipulate others from afar.

Nosferatu: These are the hideous, repulsive, yet fascinating monsters of legend (check out the movie with their namesake.)

Ventrue: Regal vampires that value power and dominion to the point of obsession. They like to call themselves "lords of the night" (look at Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.)

Within these main clans you can find some sub-clans known as bloodlines. There are far too many of these to delve deeper into for the sake of this being a 'dummies' guide.

Kindred can use a variety of supernatural abilities called Disciplines. These can be broken down into four categories. Common (commonplace amongst Kindred), uncommon (proprietary abilities of each clan), covenant (possessed only by specific covenants), and lastly bloodline (known only to members of a particular bloodline). A Kindred can learn extra disciplines not linked to their clan given a tutor and the proper amount of time.

Common Disciplines are: Celerity (superhuman speed), Resilience (superhuman toughness), Vigor (superhuman strength), Animalism (ability to commune with and command animals), and Obfuscate (ability to mask one's presence). Uncommon Disciplines include: Auspex (supernatural sensitivity and awareness, as well as the ability to foresee things), Dominate (the ability to command minds and break the will of others), Majesty (grants a commanding sway over emotions of others), Nightmare (ability to evoke terror), and Protean (grants the ability to assume a variety of forms – wolf, mist e.t.c). There are also various Covenant Disciplines and other rare ones.

Unfortunately there are also bad parts to being a Vampire. Each clan and bloodline has their own set of weaknesses. Things such as taking extra damage from fire or sunlight, or having a more difficulty not acting towards their vices, as well as various other horrible side effects of the curse. They aren't however affected by crucifixes, garlic or holy water. They can enter into any private domain without the need for an invitation; and a stake through the heart only paralyzes them.

Vampires tend to be quite political, and thus there are political and religious factions, known as Covenants:

Carthian Movement: Works towards finding the best form of government for the Kindred. They base their experiments on mortal systems like Democracy, Fascism e.t.c. They are the only Covenant that elects leaders and is the newest major Covenant.

Circle of the Crone: A collection of pagan and neopagan cults and religions within the vampire culture. These groups generally structure themselves around the belief in a generative cycle; although they often revere a particular representative goddess. They tend to celebrate major pagan holidays such as solstices and Yule. They practice a blood magic known as "Crúac".

The Invictus: An order of vampires that claim to be descendants of the ancient Roman sect known as the Camarilla. They are mostly concerned with material gain and power. They are generally heavily involved in city politics and business.

The Lancea Sanctum: An organization that grew parallel to Christianity. They claim the Roman Centurion Longinus as their founder. They believe that Kindred have a role in Divine Providence (the role of the ultimate predator). They believe that they should prey upon humans as a way of unleashing God's Wrath upon the unworthy.

Ordo Dracul: They are focused on understanding the vampiric condition. They want to improve upon it and transcend its limitations. They learn a collection of abilities known as "The Coils of the Dragon" which alter the practitioner, generally alleviating particular limitations of vampirism. They believe that the order was founded by the infamous Dracula himself.

The term The Unaligned is used as a term to describe any Vampire that does not belong to a Covenant.

Werewolves

Werewolves, also known as Uratha, are fierce territorial predators who feel the compulsion to hunt. They are said to have been created from a union between Luna and Father Wolf (two powerful spirits, Father Wolf who patrols the borders of the worlds, and Luna the spirit of the moon). The Uratha saw that Father Wolf had become weak and so rose up and killed him. This placed a barrier between the worlds making it impossible to cross except in a few locations. Luna stricken in her grief cursed the Uratha, and although they pledged to continue the work of Father Wolf which regained some of Luna's favour, they still became known as the Forsaken.

Many Uratha tend to have difficulty living normal human lives as they struggle to contain their aggression. They tend to form packs in order to hunt and guard their territory more efficiently.

The Uratha are spiritual creatures. They are able to channel spirit energy (Essence) in order to make use of supernatural powers (gifts) to aid them in their hunts. They also possess an instinctive understanding of the First Tongue (language spoken by their ancestors and spirits). They have a duty to protect the world from creatures of the spirit realms.

Any human with Uratha heritage can go through the First Change at some stage of their lives. This turns them into a Werewolf. What triggers the change to occur is unknown.

Each Uratha has a traditional role in the society tied to one of the phases of the moon (Auspice). These are based on their personality and abilities. An Uratha will also go through their First Change during the corresponding moon phase. The five auspices are:

Rahu (The Full Moon, The Warrior): warriors of all kinds; Brawlers to seasoned soldiers.

Cahalith (The Gibbous Moon, The Visionary): seers, storytellers and lorekeepers.

Elodoth (The Half Moon, The Walker Between): diplomats, judges and arbiters.

Ithaeur (The Crescent Moon, The Spirit Master): occultists and keepers of spirit lore.

Irraka (The New Moon, The Stalker): scouts, spies, and trackers.

Uratha may change at any time into various forms between man and wolf. They do find it easier to change when the phase of the moon matches their auspice. Every Uratha has five distinct forms that they can change into:

Hishu: Human form. An unconscious or dead werewolf will return to this form.

Dalu: Near-human form. They are slightly larger, hairier, and stronger.

Gauru: Wolf-man also known as war form. Half human and half wolf, generally 8 to 9ft tall, and much heavier and stronger than any human. Blood lust rises to the surface in this form and becomes more difficult to control. They can only channel the power of this form for a short time and generally only use it to kill.

Urshul: Near-wolf form. In this form they are a huge 3 to 5ft (to the shoulder) wolf.

Ughan: Wolf form. They are indistinguishable from any normal wolf in this form. Although different Uratha resemble different breeds or species.

Urathu can choose to follow the teachings of one of the totems (five powerful wolf spirits who were among the original children of the Father Wolf). These Urathu join groups called Tribes. Each tribe promotes a certain attitude to the hunt. There are five tribes:

Blood Talons (Suthar Anzuth): Promotes the warrior and wolf aspects of the Uratha.

Bone Shadows (Hirfathra Hissu): Occultist or shamanistic Uratha that seek to restore the relations with the spiritual world. They hope to gain a greater understanding and receive guidance.

Hunters in Darkness (Meninna): Animalistic scouts; they protect the spiritual centres of the world (loci).

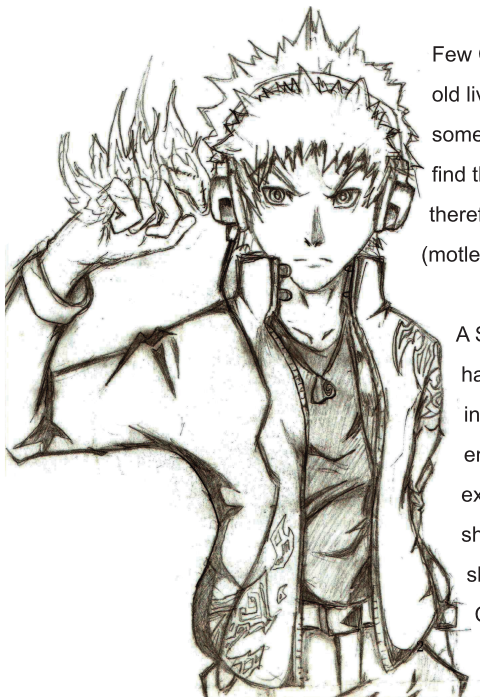
Iron Masters (Farsil Luhul): This tribe embraces the change and new ideas. They feel a stronger bond with humanity and try keep up with the latest in human technology and advances. They prefer to claim territory in cities.

Storm Lords (Iminir): They feel that it is their personal responsibility to lead all their Uratha brethren. They seek to do this through strength of will, force of personality, and a higher sense of nobility.

You also get Pure Tribes. These are made up of those that chose not to rise up against Father Wolf. They blame their Forsaken cousins and view their extermination as a holy crusade. They are superior in number to the Forsaken and so are formidable enemies. They have contempt for humanity and feel no duty to defend them from spirits. This makes spirits far friendlier to them. They however did not gain favour from Luna which means they are more susceptible to silver.

Changelings

Changelings (also known as the Lost) are humans that were taken by the Fae. Unlike a lot of people who suffer this fate; the Lost manage to find their way back to the mortal world. Their time spent in Faerie however does irrevocably change their bodies, minds and souls. This inhuman quality is hidden by the Mask (the aspect of Faerie magic that makes things from Faerie seem mundane).



Few Changelings are ever able to reclaim their old lives, or make new ones, without retaining some ties to the Fae realm. They therefore often find themselves alienated from the mortals. They therefore often congregate into small groups (motleys).

A Seeming is a label given to changelings who have undergone similar transformations while in Faerie. It is mostly a reflection on the kind of environment they were held in and the experiences that they had. Changelings who share a seeming can look different but often share psychological and emotional traits. Changelings who share very specific similarities beyond that of their Seeming are

often said to be of the same Kith (subgroup of a Seeming). Recognised Seemings amongst the Changelings are:

Beasts: Changelings who were used or treated like animals during their captivity. They take on animal characteristics (nature and appearance). Instinct is in a constant battle with human thought and reason.

Darkling: Changelings that have been imbued with the darkness of Faerie. They embody shadow, stealth, fear and deception. Their magic weakens in the light of day.

Elementals: Changelings who were used as inanimate objects or forces of nature during their captivity. On returning to the mortal realm they retain power over the elements they once belonged to, but they find that humanity has become alien to them.

Fairest: These Changelings embody grace, power, beauty, and cruelty. They are able to enchant and beguile those around them.

Ogres: Changelings of great strength and prowess. They are hardened by the torture and the abuses they endured during captivity.

Wizened: Changelings that have lost something of themselves in Faerie. They are reduced in body and/or mind. They are made smaller; turned into something bitter and spiteful. They have a withered appearance which masks their inhuman agility and dexterity.

They keep their connection to Fae by making use of ancient pacts made by the Fae with the seasons (at least in Europe; other things of similar symbolic power are used in other places). They align themselves to these seasonal courts and this offers them a measure of protection from the True Fae. Each of these courts has an influence over strong emotions and the physical aspects associated with their season.

A Changeling can also choose to align themselves with other noble orders or societies. These groups have narrower agendas bound by pledges. This can offer the Changeling an Entitlement (a title and responsibility which carries some weight amongst supernatural's) which marks them as a member of an exclusive group. This does however risk attracting the notice of the True Fae.

The magic of the True Fae is based on the contracts that they make with elements, living things and concepts. This gives them power in their realm, where they can have complete control over such things, and a little less so in the mortal realm. Changelings have been touched by Faerie and been made a part of it. This allows them to learn clauses of these contracts. This gives them access to supernatural powers. These powers do come with catches (loopholes

in the Contract) which allow them to use the power without using Glamour (the magical essence you get from Faerie). Changelings are also able to use the Fae's connection to fate. This allows them to bind humans and Changelings into Pledges (agreements infused with Glamour that are reinforced by the rules of Faerie). Both sides of such agreements must uphold their end of the bargain. Changelings often become very adept at making agreements which favour themselves.

Notice

Please don't feed the Were-Spider.

Really.

Or tell her you find her attractive

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

Caine, Lucifer AND Lilith all in one session!? WHO THOUGHT THAT WAS A GOOD IDEA!!!!???

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

Morganna WAS NOT ARTHURS SISTER

On Behalf Of

Mordred Le Fay Lach Pendragon,
Black Dragon of Albion,
King of Camelot

Notice

WereMummies!? Who thought THAT

Was a good idea!??

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

Kevin 'O'Brien, loves Alieda Schmidt. At least she keeps telling him that.

Good boy Kevin, roll over and play dead.

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

River loves Selena Onas. Please love her back Selena...Pretty please...

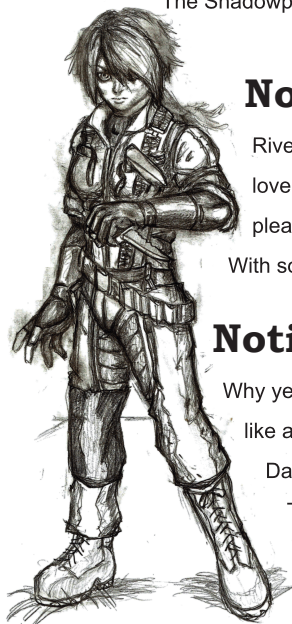
With sooo much Love, River.

Notice

Why yes William Pratt, you do look like a creepier version of Willem Dafoe. This is Not a Good Thing!!

Regards

The Shadowpact



Notice

FUCKING TRUE FAITH!!

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

Oh god, why is Lilith so crazy!?

What did we do to deserve this?!

Regards

The Shadowpact

Notice

For the Last time, My callsign

is "Dirty"

Alex

"Dirty"Rovnovka

NCPD

Notice

Call Geisha for a good time

555-IMADIRTYWHORE

c/o

NCPD

Notice

CCD! That WAS your last chance to

surrender

C/o

NCPD

Notice

Frosty Loves Her Dirty Snake

Notice

Who uses Fucking Presence 10 for a Booty

Call!!!!???

Regards

Alieda Schimdt, Anazasi Werespider and

Booty Call

Notice

TANGO DOWN!

Sincerely

Alex "Dirty Snake"Rovnovka

NCPD

Notice

No, its "Dirty Snake"

Sincerely,

Night City

Notice

Kid Stealth Was

Never Here.

Notice

Fernando Was Always

Here

c/o

DEA

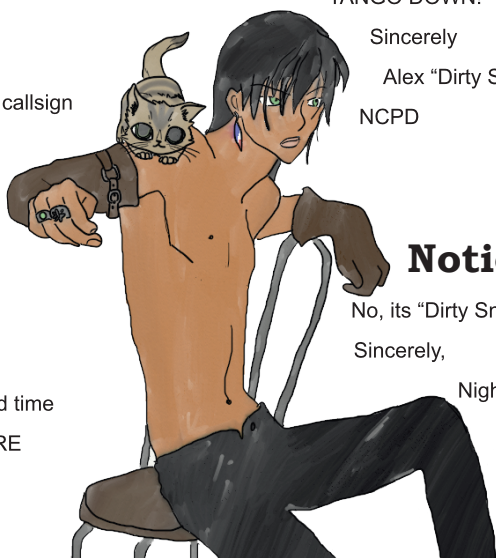
Notice

Catherine RHOOOOOOODES!!!!

Sincerely

CCD Team One

NCPD



RIP

Chase Lamont

Shot, stabbed, detonated, set on fire, drawn,
quartered and pureed.

WHY WONT YOU DIE!!?? Fucking Mummies!

Regards

The Shadowpact

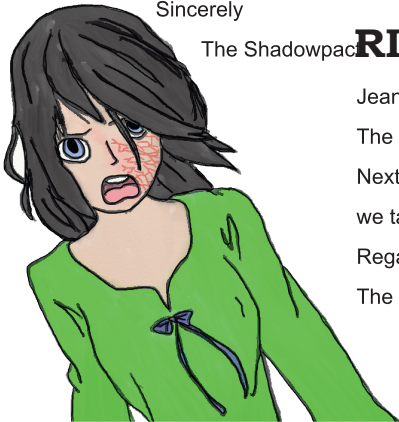
RIP

The Red Death

Overpowered DMPC

Sincerely

The Shadowpact



RIP

Every poor bastard that goes up against Dirty

Snake and the CCD

Your poor wretches, you didn't surrender

TANGO. DOOOOOOOOOOOWN!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sincerely

CCD Team One

Night City Police Dept.



RIP

The Circle Of Lilith

Low rent copies of us. Good Riddance

Regards

The Shadowpact

RIP

Mohammed X

Backstabbing Sabbat son of a bitch.

Thank God Clarent worked on you,

Gratefully,

Mordred Le Fay

RIP

Jean Paul De Villiers, Maurice Le Clair and Andre Baptiste

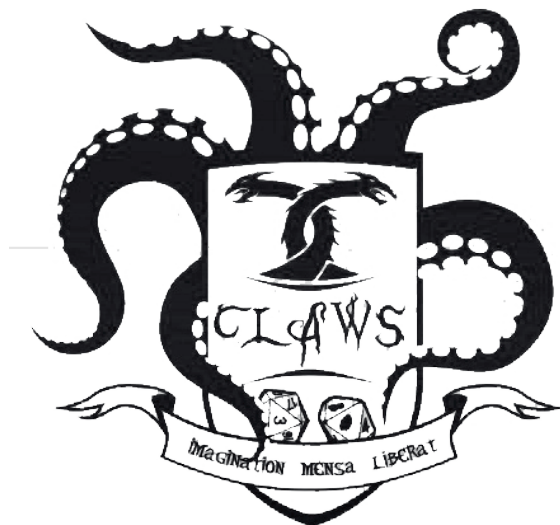
The Unholy Three.

Next time don't torture our Fallen Angel,

we takes it personally

Regards

The Shadowpact



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