



CLAWMARKS

DRAGONFIRE 2020 EDITION

ISSUE 64

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DRAGONFIRE
2020

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A LETTER FROM THE CLAWTHING

To quote last year's CLAWthing, Milagre Lang: *It has been one heck of a year. If I see one more ad that starts with a somber 'in these uncertain times' I might just scream. That being said, I'd like to sincerely thank every CLAWkin member for sticking around in one way or another.*

With the obligatory pandemic-lamentations out of the way, can I just say how great we've all done this year? Starting with our closing party last year, we have had some amazing times together. We upped the ante at the start of the year with an absolutely insane two-hundred and two (202) official sign-ups! That's more than my 3rd year CS course, what the hell? Our first games night saw us running out of space in RW James, and they do astrophysics there so you know there should be plenty of space. CLAWfolk were on the floors, spilling out into the halls, just going buck-wild for boardgames. It was wonderful to see faces both old and new and it was especially heartwarming to see all the wizened old boardgame mages help introduce our fresh new adventurers to our horde of games.

Then, of course, we had a party and it was *wild*. Who knew all that games night was missing was free wine and pizza? We had somewhere in the ballpark of 150 people show up, which was just phenomenal. I'm running out of fun adjectives to describe just how successful a start to the year we had, and that's not even counting all the other things we had lined up: UCON, ComicCon, LARPs, events, more parties probably, and Dragonfire!

While we didn't get to do even close to as much as we'd hoped, our community remained strong and connected. Plus, thanks to lockdown, we have a Discord server now! Playing RPGs online has also come with its own trials and rewards, and while I'm excited for the first ever online Dragonfire, I also hope it's the last.

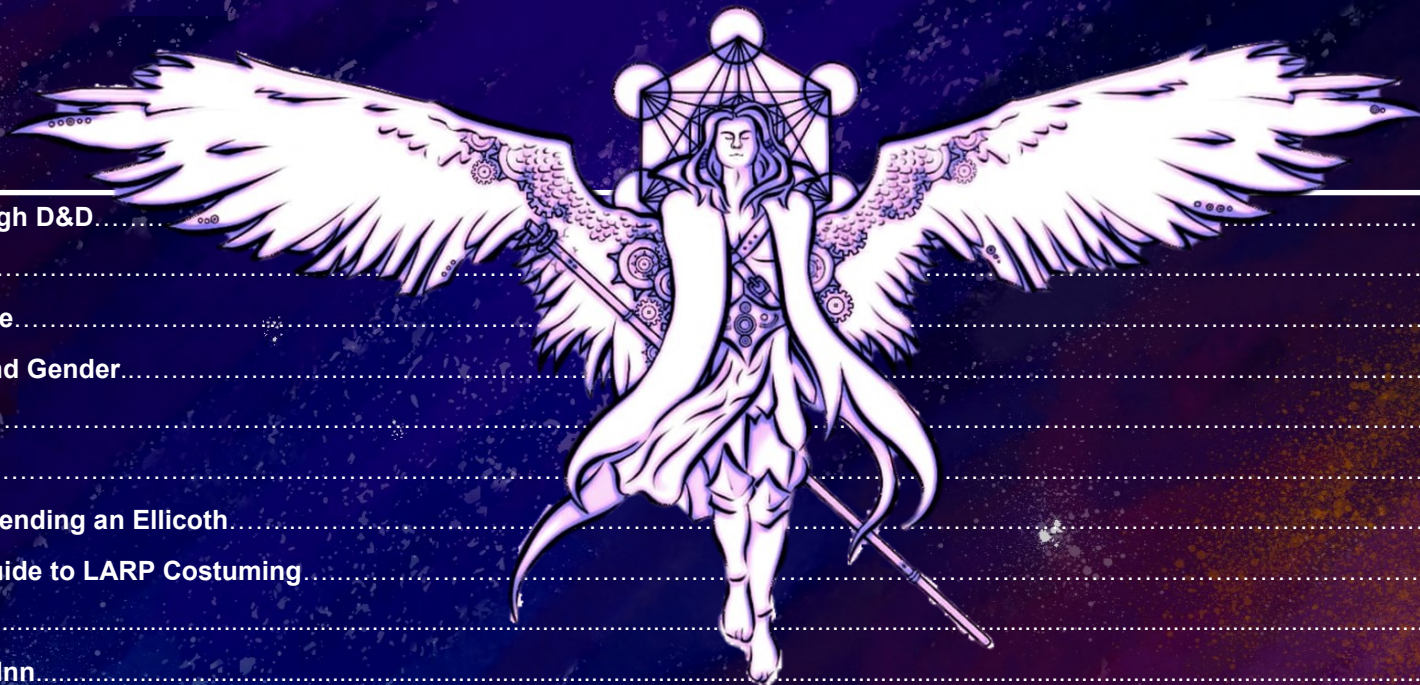
From myself, and the rest of the CLAWcouncil: we love you, stay strong, and hopefully we'll see you in The Net.

Humbly yours,
The CLAWthing
Liam

'For posterity, in case this is being read by a CLAWcouncil somewhere in the distant future at the end of the world, there was, like, a pandemic? It was a whole thing.



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ESCAPISM THROUGH D&D OR A LOVE LETTER TO RPGS

Written and Signed by Jay Murtagh Carter

There is rather a lot going on in the world right now. And a lot happening individually, too. Lockdown, the global pandemic. Political issues and of course the revolution, and there is plenty to weigh heavily on our minds.

And so, with everything going on, RPGs and games bring escapism, adventure, and community to the table. This, I've found, is helpful in a time of anxiety and isolation.

When there are such heavy topics and challenges on one's mind, it helps to have an escape. And one that I've been doing for quite a while, and have found incredibly useful, is RPGs, board games, games nights, and LARPs.

Similar to reading a book or watching a movie in the sense of immersion with the content, but with the appeal of creating something, like writing or art. The game, or rather, the rules, are comforting guidelines to fall back on and as the name implies, guide us back to the focus of the game.

I have also neglected to mention a very important aspect of any RPG: the Game Master (GM). Storyteller, guideline-knower, keeper of the keys. Someone actively running the game from the inside - from planning everything beforehand, to weaving plot and adventure together

during the session.

I find that RPGs are incredibly immersive, because you are listening to the GM, interacting with your fellow players both in and out of character, consulting your character sheet, making decisions, improvising and bullshitting on the spot.

I played an RPG back in Mystery March in May, and it was a wonderful few hours - there is nothing so immersive, so completely transformative as RPGs and LARPs. Storylines, characterization, decisions, and combat. I was lucky, because the RPG I'd signed up for was actually a short campaign! So each week, I looked forward to our session, when I'd get to use my anxious mind for something adventurous and lighthearted.

I've also been present at many an online games night, even if I wasn't doing too well, hearing friends voices and distracting myself with some online games made me feel less isolated.

All in all, escapism from real life is sometimes a very valuable tool. Especially now, when we are all isolated, we can take comfort in connecting online, and playing some games. Am I right, gamers?

Jay Murtagh Carter



Artwork by Michelle Mouton



IPWA

By Taffy Lamba

Illustrated by Chloe Botha

Queenie Maluba is the jewel of Chambeshi. Her potions are perfect, meeting her customers' needs exactly while forgoing the unintended side effects of most other potions. Need a hair growth elixir? Queenie has one that tastes oddly like pomegranate and will only grow the hair on your head. Lost an arm in a duel? Go to Queenie; she will grow you one without the green scales. Indeed, purchasing a potion from Queenie means you get exactly what you pay for. At least, it used to.

I run my fingers along her recipe book. I can appreciate the beauty of it. No, not the book itself - that tattered and worn jumble of pages looks to be held together by a piece of string and willpower. However, the magic within the pages is intricately woven in the ink and the protective charm has been carefully crafted to counter any evil that would harm it. The book is indestructible. I consider it fortunate, therefore, that I'm not here to destroy it. After all, it would be a shame to waste a work of art such as this.

Instead, I trace my fingers along the spine, letting my own magic intertwine with hers, shifting and contorting it so that hers and mine are impossible to tell apart. Even I struggle to see where Queenie ends and I begin.

I suppose I could affect her ingredients directly. Like any good witch, she has her entire cottage stacked with madwort and gumroot and every other foul-smelling ingredient. However, I poison her ingredients and she'll just get new ones, might even borrow from a neighbour. It wouldn't be hard for the town darling. I guess I could also target her hands. It's terrifying how quickly that plan would fall apart. She'd notice in an hour at most, and then she'd be suspicious. She'll wonder who would curse her, she'll wonder who could, she'll connect the dots, make an accusation, call forth the entire town. Fire, stakes, burning flesh and screams of agony and-

Stop!

There will be no burning at the stakes of anyone because she will not notice. This is why I linger in the book. Used, but seldom. The spells she makes from

memory will be, as always, perfect. Those for which she consults the tome, well, her own fault, really. And the beauty of it is - and at this I might giggle - the more of her spells that fail, the more she'll consult her spell book, and so a vicious cycle emerges.

Not to stoke my own flame but this is the mark of a good curse. You do not go immediately to ruining their harvest or burning their home. No. Their reputation. You tear it apart, slowly, benignly. Make them appear untrustworthy, delusional even. Following that you can turn their spine brittle and massacre their children,



no problem. You can turn their life to misery. And when they accuse your caster of black magic and curses? Tell me, who would believe the disgraced witch whose spells come with exploding hiccups?

I leave once her book is corrupted. I won't go far, of course. I must be near her life to ruin it. But I have been gone a long time and I am missing my home. In a whirl of fluttering whispers, I leave Queenie Maluba's cottage and fly through the streets, returning to my beautiful Maria.

Maria Mwana-wa-Mfumumu. The people here call her Maria the Lovely. Those in

our last town called her Maria the Spiteful or Maria the Jealous or Maria the Horribly Vengeful and Not to be Trifled With. But to me? Maria is my whole world.

Maria is beauty. Her eyes are deep and shimmer with rage. Her skin, dark as onyx, crackles and sparks with the flame of her magic. Her hair hisses in the wind when she calls it to herself. And her voice. Her voice is the crack of thunder in a bitter storm. Her voice is the melody of a creaking door in the dead of night. Her voice is the sweet symphony of sadness, death and destruction dripping from her tongue. Her voice is my life, my purpose. For Maria, I will sink a hundred sailboats and burn a thousand orphanages and destroy a million Queenie Malubas. Everything I do, I do in joyful service of the woman who invokes my name.

Biding my time, I sit on her tongue, within the sweet embrace of her lilting voice. It is never long before one of these pestilent townsfolk offends my beloved and today is no different.

"I swear to you, Ingram," Maria sings, voice barely above a whisper. "You and your family will never know peace as long as I have breath." And just like that, her voice gives me life anew.



Dragon Artwork by Julie Whithers

AWAY FROM HOME

Written and Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

Fast as light, but out of time
The Zenith Fury streaks through time
On and on I search the stars
I cannot stop, I've come too far

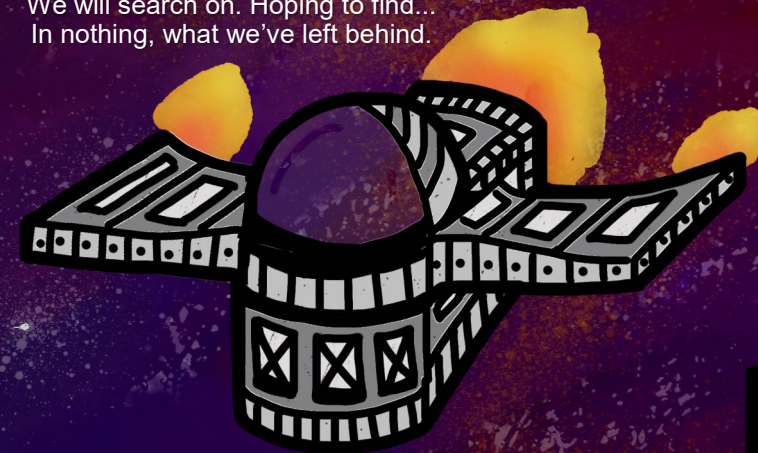
Deploy the drones, the hull is pressed
I'm dodging comets, right and left

Barrel roll, maneuver left
Save the cargo, dump the rest

FTL drive charging up
Brace— Prepare for hyper jump

I watch the gauges— fuel is low
One final push. We need to go.

My cargo: friends. I'll blast us on
Past stars and systems, on and on
Mankind— A shooting star entombed
Adrift— Stillborn in darkness' womb
We will search on. Hoping to find...
In nothing, what we've left behind.



GAMES GAYS AND GENDER

HOW TABLETOP GAMING HELPED ME TO DISCOVER MYSELF

By Anonymous

Illustrated by Michelle Mouton

I was 14 years old when Liara from Mass Effect gently eased me into the realisation that I was, despite my internal protestations, not quite as straight as I had once believed. For me, coming to terms with my attraction to women was something I had put off for several years, ever since becoming suspiciously fascinated by Shego from *Kim Possible*, or Chel from *The Road to El Dorado* (those HIPS!!!). I had managed to convince myself that such characters just appealed to my craving for strong female representation, and that I was definitely NOT jealous when they ended up with their boring male love interest, even though I felt tiny pangs of heartbreak when I realised they were decidedly not going to kiss any girls. These repressed crushes held a space in the back of my mind, not really appearing again until the fateful day that I decided to smooch Liara from Mass Effect.

This decision revealed all the parts of my identity that I had been trying to hide for as long as I could remember. This time, I held the power to create my own story, one that included not only a strong, independent woman as a lead, but also a gentle, loving relationship between two such women. Although the Mass Effect series has its flaws, I can honestly say that it changed my life. From this point on, all my video game characters were gay. In *Skyrim*, I played a lesbian orc just trying to find true

love. In *Fallout: New Vegas* (the best one, fight me), I was a lonely gay cowgirl looking to escape my troubled past, and also kiss every woman. The Sims, *Dragon Age*, and even games like *Borderlands* afforded me the opportunity to explore and embrace my sexuality without fear of rejection and hate. This gay freedom was further expanded by my introduction to tabletop RPGs in my first year of university. Joining CLAWs allowed me to join my first ever D&D game, and while my personal feelings about Wizards of the Coast have not been particularly positive in recent years, I still remember the absolute thrill and euphoria of being able to create a character that was wholly and entirely my own, and explore my own identity as a member of the LGBT+ community through their experiences. Tabletop roleplaying afforded me the same safety in embracing myself that videogames had gifted me previously, but with the added bonus of totally inclusive and limitless character creation.

While videogames have been trying to include more and more opportunities for open-ended stories and in-depth character creation, player-made characters are still limited by the constraints of the medium. Tabletop gaming allows for huge diversity in character creation, and allowed me to take the reins in my own character's story. One facet of character creation in tabletop

RPGs that videogames have yet to include fully is gender diversity. Inclusive gender options in videogames have only recently been adopted, and nonbinary genders are almost entirely absent, or only projected for future gaming projects. Most popular videogames have an entirely binary view on gender in character creation. Once you pick the traditionally "feminine" or "masculine" body type at startup, your pronouns, romance options, and voice pitch are usually all determined by this one choice. Roleplaying giants like Bethesda and Bioware are especially guilty of this, despite advertising diverse and realistic gaming experiences. However, tabletop RPGs are far more inclusive. Gender usually plays no role in how a TTRPG character performs in combat, ability checks, or normal conversation. It's completely up to player choice. It's in this environment that I began to interrogate my own gender identity. At first it was a subconscious choice – I created a character for a one-shot that just happened to be nonbinary, as I didn't see them as any particular gender once I had created them. They were just there to have a good time and fight vampires and also seduce fantasy Megan Fox (it was a great one-shot). However, from that point on, I began to make all my characters nonbinary.

I'd been questioning my own gender presentation for a while, but had once again pushed all that to the back of my mind to hang out with Chel and Shego. *Of course I'm cis*, I would tell myself, *because I love being feminine sometimes and like dresses and oh god none of this means I'm cis does it ohgodohfucklet'sjustforgetaboutall-thatandplaycyberpunk*. But having the space to create nonbinary characters

that were respected and treated just like everyone else really helped me come to terms with how I see myself and my own gender identity. While tabletop gaming spaces have often been seen as misogynistic and bigoted in the past, the diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community created by CLAWs has made me feel completely safe to explore this aspect of myself, and create characters that better represent myself and others who may have felt left out of the traditional gaming community. While I'm not entirely ready to come out with a label yet, I know that the taverns, space stations, futuristic cities and Lovecraftian horrors created within the CLAWs community will be ready to accept me when I do.



Michelle M



JOOF

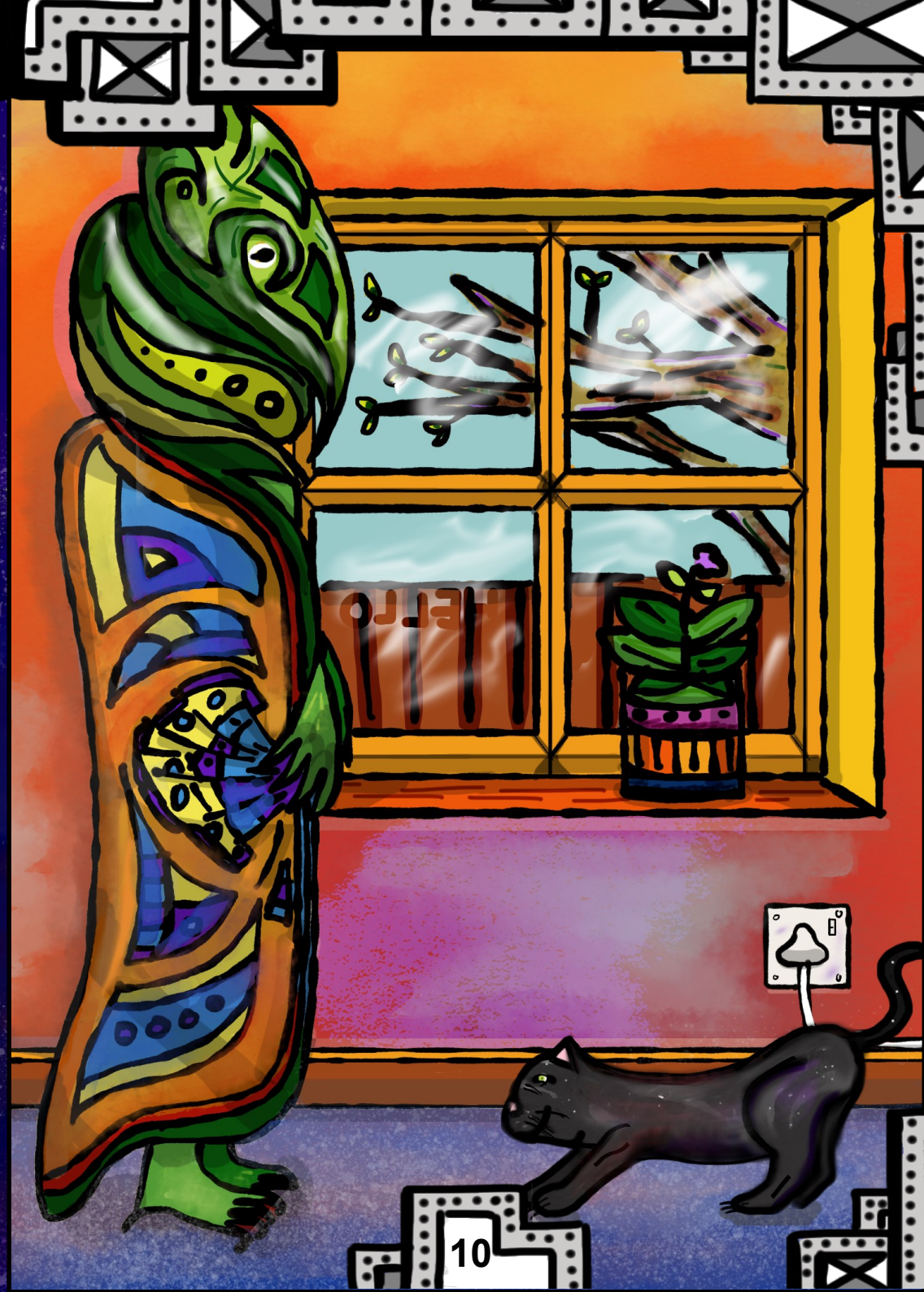
Written and Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

They tell me “Hi I’m John Long-John I works down at the pub
My wifie’s name is Sarah, Mac ‘n Cheese my favourite grub”

I tell them “Hi my name is Joof I’m’s comings from the train
I likes, too, macaroni with a bit of human brain
A mild-mannered every-man that’s me all night and day
Gets letters from the postman and I sends them the next day
I’m’s a citizen of merit and I follows all the rules
When human drops a tin can Joof will always do it too
I’ve 27 pistols as I’m told it is my right
And also my bazooka in case I gets in a fight
I buys me all the newspapers I puts them on my wall
I dunno what they used for but they livens up the hall
I buyed meself a tv box— makes speckles white and grey
Not sure what all the fuss is but I watch it anyway
The water bowl is down the hall if human wants a drink
I’ve never seen it empty, er— the chain fills it I think”

They do not stay for very long say “Sorry I must go”
They shakes my hand and says goodbye and then leave Joof alone
I thinks it’s very rude to leave before the visits end
I say “You shouldn’t be so rude if you want to make friend”

I sometimes wish before they run that they would tell me why
But off they go— Joof left behind— I close the door bye-bye!



GARAGEBARD

WHY YOU SHOULD LEAN INTO WHATEVER CREATIVE INSPIRATION STRIKES YOU

By *Nina Nathanson*

Illustrated by *Elizabeth Stevenson*

Fun fact about me: I can't draw. Occasionally I'll do sketches as sewing references and I doodle geometric shapes in the corners of my notebooks but that is the beginning, middle and end of my talents in the realm of visual art.

So when I started DMing a campaign in the middle of lockdown and felt creatively inspired, I didn't think I'd go anywhere with it. Making art for the game sounded appealing in theory but in practice I knew it wouldn't be something I'd get much enjoyment out of and I thought the whole thing was probably a dead end. Fortunately, creative itches are not so easily dismissed. It kept nagging me, and my mind turned to the forms of creative expression that I feel more comfortable with. The one I landed on was music. It's something that's always been a major part of my life and I love it, so I figured why not? I may as well try to write something. If I ended up hating whatever I composed, I could just delete it and file it away in my mind to be privately laughed at on a rainy day.

So, with GarageBand slowing my computer down and absolutely no idea what I was doing, I attempted to hammer out a theme song (using the "musical typing" function). I chose a key signature, messed around until I had a melody that didn't just sound like me hitting a bunch of keys with enthusiasm and layered on some harmonies. After writing lyrics that endeavored to mysteriously hint at plotlines I planned to explore, I recorded myself singing (while sitting on my bed at midnight) and listened to the final product. To my surprise, I found that I was actually pleased with what I had! Even better, I had greatly enjoyed myself while doing it and was keen to continue. I've written a couple more since my first effort and have ideas for several other pieces (though this unfortunate thing called "course work" has prevented me from working on them consistently).

Maybe, like me, art just isn't your thing. Or maybe it is, but you're not sure if you should bother following through on that idea you had. Maybe you're afraid you won't like the product of your idea – I sure was. My two cents is this: if you've been inspired by something in a game and are thinking of pursuing that inspiration, throw whatever hesitation you have to the wind and go wild.

Whether it's creating art, writing something, composing music, making maps, cosplaying your favorite PC, cooking thematic meals or literally anything else that I haven't listed – there are countless forms of creativity, and if that urge comes upon you, there is definitely a way to satisfy it. And though it's always slightly terrifying to share what you create, I guarantee that the people you're playing with are going to appreciate whatever effort you put in.



STARFINDER: BEFRIENDING AN ELlicOTH

By Milagre Lang

Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

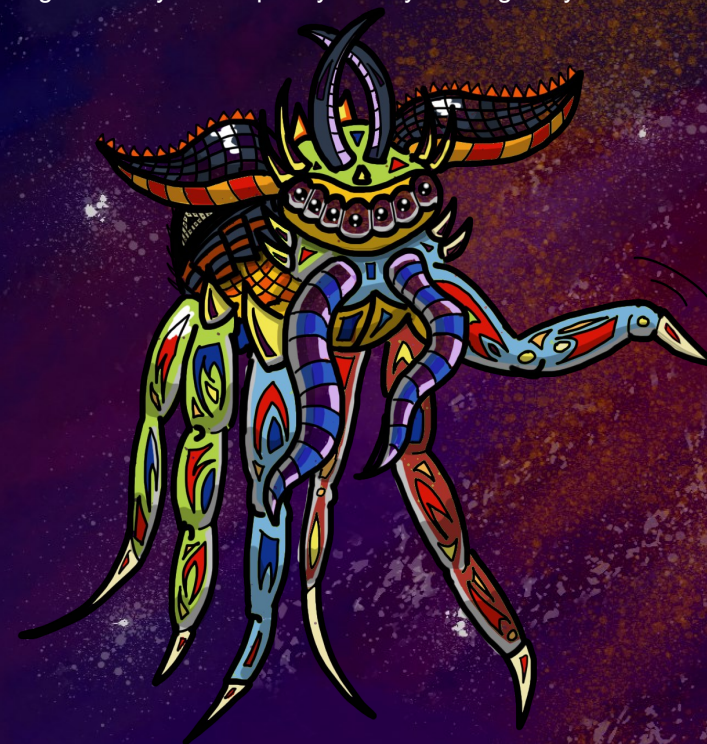
Natives to the undead planet Eox, Ellicoth's, are a tough breed to bond with. However, if you put in the effort they will make an ever-loyal companion. Whether you want to just hang out and cry about the devastation of your entire planet, or go on a rampage, razing the villages of people who annoy you, they'll have your back.

- Approaching Ellicoths is a tricky business because their radioactive 'soul-drain' aura saps the life force of any creature, living or undead, nearby. We suggest you invest in some kind of amplifying device with which to speak to your new friend (and stand at least 30ft away at all times)
 - a. If you are from one of the smaller species around, like an ysoki rat-person, a lashunta, or perhaps a human, the amplifying device will also come in handy, as the Ellicoths tend to come in at around 50ft tall.
- Once you are in place and ready to chat to your chosen Ellicoth, be careful, they're real drama queens and often burst into song (which of course you should never ever interrupt)
 - a. Their favourite tunes include heartbreaking threnody's of their lonely existence, and grand dirges lamenting the loss of a green world they can only imagine through the memories passed down the generations of their cursed race.
 - b. You can attempt to join in the songs if you are feeling confident in your ability to bellow hauntingly. However, if you are at all terrible, their rejection will be much worse than a no from Cymon Kow'aell, as you will be promptly stomped upon
- Singing aside, Ellicoths have been known to understand a language if they hear it often enough.
 - a. This means you will need to be chatting up a storm with your new bestie at least once a day in order to maintain communication abilities, lucky you!
- When following your friend as they travel the planet - they tend to wander aimlessly, avoiding the settlements protected by bone sages of course - be careful to note if they are feeling ill or are getting quite old.

a. If an Ellicoth suspects that they are going to die they will instinctively head to the biggest source of radiation, lie down, and disintegrate into a puddle of radioactive ooze, like some irradiated wicked witchwyrd of the wastes

b. For obvious reasons being near the largest source of radiation in the area would, in all likelihood, be bad for your health. Unless of course, you are one of the immune undead, in which case you should absolutely go with and comfort your friend through their final moments, perhaps saving a jar of their glowing entrail goop as a reminder of your beautiful friendship.

Besides these few simple guidelines, Ellicoths are wonderful easy-going compatriots for life. If you are immortal and/or undead they live for centuries and so will be partners you can really count on for a not-insignificant amount of time. And if you aren't, fear not, as they will keep you and your descendants company. Carrying the stories of your existence for many years to come, and thereby ensuring that you are not completely forgotten as you fall quickly off of your laughably mortal coil!



A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO LARP COSTUMING

By Chloe Botha

Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

Come one, come all, from beginner's to experienced veterans alike (you never know if you may learn something new) as I present to you my guide on how to create a costume for your next LARP character. Dressing your character can be a daunting task, especially if this is your first LARP. With a bit of prep, creative thinking and help from others, however, this need not be the case, and you'll soon be on your way to creating the perfect look.

Section A: Research and Design

Step 1: Understand your character's look.

This means reading through your character sheet and trying to understand what your character's dress sense is. If you're lucky, your character sheet may even include a dress style on it. If not, you'll have to use your *imagination*.

Is the LARP set in space? Medieval times? Victorian Era? Or is it something completely fantastical? It is important to know and understand the theme of the LARP if you want your character to look like they are a part of the world. Once you've established the theme, the next step is...

Step 2: Research:

One of the easiest ways to get a feel for what you'd like your character to wear is to do some good ol' fashioned research. This is especially helpful if the LARP is a period piece, and some good research can really help you un-

derstand what people wore during that era. Obviously if the LARP isn't set in a real-world period (Such as a completely fantastical space opera LARP) research becomes less necessary. Regardless though, it's still worth doing at least some sort of visual research for inspiration.

Because this is a beginner's guide, I won't be getting into the nitty gritty of really historically accurate costumes. One of the biggest advantages of LARP (over say, historical reenactments) is that our costumes can really be whatever we want them to be. As with regular tabletop gaming, we can decide on all sorts of crazy looks for our characters. Unlike tabletop gaming, however, we are limited by what is available in the real world, as well as other factors like comfort, practicality, time and budget. Keep this in mind when you come across some crazy steampunk mech-suit on Pinterest that you think you can recreate 3 days before the LARP.

Tips:

Museum sites and sewing blogs are a great place to conduct research if you want something historically accurate. When looking at costuming like this, try to get a feel for the era and the attire, rather than getting bogged down by nitty gritty details and specifics. Realistically, you won't be able to (nor have any desire to) recreate some beautiful 1700's ballgown covered in embroidery and crystals, nor are you likely to find something like this ready-made at your local party store.

Sites like Instagram, Pinterest and DeviantArt are also great places to find inspiration. Many people post their own LARP or cosplay outfits to these platforms, and these can really aid your inspiration. It's not good to plagiarize though, so try to get a feel for the outfit rather than straight up copying everything. Again, be realistic with how much time and money you have to spend on your outfit, as well what resources are available in your area.

Now that you've done some basic research and established a feel for your outfit, it's time to start putting it together.

If you're someone who likes to sew, has a lot of time on their hands and wants to create something from scratch, then you absolutely can! Just don't look to me for advice. Since this is a beginner's guide, I won't be covering creating clothing from scratch. CLAWs does, however, co-host sewing and costuming workshops throughout the year, so keep your eyes and ears out for those....

Section B: Putting Together an Outfit

Step 3: Work with what you have:

I consider this to be the first and most important step when putting together a LARP costume. It saves you time, money and stress if you can work with existing items of clothing that you already own.

Start by going through your closet and figuring out whether anything you have fits the style you're going for. Try layering things together to see what they look like.

Sometimes, turning a piece of clothing inside out can completely transform it, so use this where you can.

I find that an effective way to work with existing clothing is to add temporary modifications to it. This could include:

Pinning things open or closed to create a specific look.

Pinning badges, brooches, buttons, patches and all sorts of weird and wonderful finds onto outfits to add a lil' somethin' somethin' to the piece.

Using ribbon or other trim to create frills, bows or other details and pinning these to existing outfits.

Removing/adding belts and buckles. Covering existing shoes in old socks/stockings to change their colour. (just be sure to cut a hole around the sole so that you don't slip). This is also useful in creating fake boots.

If you have some sewing skills, things like

sleeves, trains, capes, hoods and sashes are fairly easy to make, and can be pinned to existing clothing items to completely transform them.

Just make sure that any modification that you make won't damage the clothing, and will still be comfortable to wear.

With a bit of luck, you'll find at least part of your costume within your own wardrobe. Otherwise, on to the next step:

Step 4: Work with what others have:

Don't be afraid to borrow from others! The CLAWs (and broader LARPing) community is filled with nice people who may be prepared to help you out. I've seldom attended a LARP without borrowing at least something from someone else. Use this as an opportunity to chat to people in the community and maybe make some new friends.

Family and friends are also great places to look. Sometimes grandma has some weird vintage article of clothing lying around that she's more than happy to lend you. Sometimes a friend has the perfect pair of shoes in your size.

The important bit here is to communicate with others. You may get a chance to explain what LARPing is, or you may default to the 'oh, it's for a costume party' excuse.

Just make sure that you are extra careful with whatever you borrow, and I wouldn't recommend trying to modify other people's stuff. And, if you have something you're willing to lend, let people know. You may just have something that doesn't

work for your costume, but is the perfect piece for someone else.

Step 5: Shopping:

If you still can't find what you're looking for from either your own wardrobe or from others', and you're prepared to invest a bit into your costume, this is generally the next step.

This step usually takes really long and I wouldn't recommend it if you don't have much time before the LARP. If you are prepared to spend money, but don't have much time, skip ahead to step 6.

Time to go shopping. Maybe you're shopping for your whole outfit, or maybe just that finishing piece to add some flair. Regardless, there are a few places I can recommend that are more likely to have what you're looking for at an affordable price.

Thrift Stores: My absolute favourite place to find weird and wonderful things for LARPs. These do take time though, but are usually priced so well that it's worth it. It's best to take a friend with you to help scour the racks (and to tell you how good you look in that vintage coat). This is also a much more eco-friendly solution to buying new, just make sure you wash whatever you buy before wearing it. Don't be afraid to modify thrift store clothing to get your desired looks (such as chopping off sleeves, creating holes and rips and distressing or aging newer garments).

Cape Town has a few thrift stores worth checking out...

(Disclaimer: I've only passed many of these stores, but from what I can tell they are all worth checking out)

Nevernew: Located in observatory, within walking distance of the Obz Square Jammie stop. Specialising in some really funky vintage and retro stuff. They post deals to their Facebook almost daily, so that's a great place to start.

Once Again at Wendy's Store: Also located in observatory, within walking distance of the Obz Square Jammie stop. They sell all sorts of secondhand clothing.

Secondhand Rose: Located in Claremont, right next to Cavendish and walking distance from the Claremont Jammie stop. Specialising in more feminine vintage clothing, such as dresses and gowns.

There are also a couple pop-up thrift stores in Cape Town, but these are a bit harder to track. Greenmarket square is a great place to check. The Michaelis School of Fine Art (UCT's Arts faculty) has thrift markets on Hiddingh campus every second Thursday, and there are thrift markets on Upper Campus every now and then, too. Students also sell second hand clothing via Instagram, so be on the lookout for that.

Buying clothing new is sort of hit and miss (and completely down to preference) so I won't be recommending any stores for that. I will, however, recommend a few cheaper stores where you can find some interesting props and accessories.

The Crazy Store: There are a couple of these scattered throughout Cape Town, but the easiest ones to access are in Rondebosch (Rondebosch Main, walking dis-

tance from the Tugwell Jammie stop) and in Claremont (Walking distance from the Claremont Jammie stop). This is a great store to find things like cheap prop guns and swords, hats, headpieces and so on. It's super easy and cost effective to by a cheap toy prop, smack on a coat of paint and do some simple weathering to get a great looking prop for your costume.

The R5 Store: Also located in Claremont, right next to the Jammie stop, and really, *really cheap*. Not everything is R5, but still cheap. Just make sure to bring cash, because they don't accept card and the nearest ATM is pretty far way. Similar to The Crazy Store, they sell just about everything. They have a particularly nice range of hats and belts though, so if you're looking for those this is a great place to start.

ABC Wholesalers: Basically a giant party item warehouse. They're located near the Castle of Good Hope, so it's a bit of a walk if you plan on taking the Jammie. Be sure to bring a friend if you're walking. They also only take cash, and there are no ATMs for a good distance, so be prepared for this. They stock a wide range of party props and costumes, and this is a great place to pick up some cheap accessories that you could then customize. It's also located next door to two fabric stores, which is really convenient if you plan on picking up any fabrics for your costume.

King Cake Party City: Located in Gardens, walking distance from the Hiddingh Jammie stop (hop off at Gardens Centre). A pretty generic party store that stocks plenty of useful prop items. They take card, at least.

So, now that you have the pieces of your outfit, it's time to start putting them together.

I recommend doing this in advance so that you can see if anything doesn't fit right or is uncomfortable. Be aware that you'll be spending hours in this outfit, so if it is uncomfortable after 5 minutes of trying it on, it will be agony by the end of the LARP. Obviously if you're borrowing something from someone and only receiving it just before the LARP, you'll have to skip this step and hope for the best.

A few tips for putting together your outfit:

Colour scheme: Try to pick a coherent colour scheme. Stick to a few colours if you can (I would say 3 or so), and neutrals are always really easy to match together. Don't be afraid to bring in some colour with some added accessories.

Colour also helps set the mood for your character: Swathes of dark colour help a character feel mysterious, dark and rich colours (such as purple and navy blue) help a character feel regal and royal, whereas lighter pastel colours help a character feel more sensitive or pure.

Layering: The easiest way to make a simple costume look complex is by layering different pieces together to add depth. Layering things like belts, scarves, sashes, pouches, different shirts, many skirts, jackets and so on really help make a character look interesting. Just be sure you can still move about comfortably.

Statement piece: A simple and effective way to have a really memorable character is to use really simple base layers (simple

shirts, pants, jackets etc.) and wear a more complex statement piece over top. This could be anything from a crown, to a hat, to a cool bowtie, jacket or badge. This should really say something about your character, such as 'I am in charge around here', or 'I am prepared to fight you', for example.

Shoes: In my experience, finding shoes that fit a LARP costume is usually the hardest part. My advice with this is function over form. Yes, a pair of running shoes is not exactly Victorian formal wear, but it is far more important to be comfortable. You will likely be standing and walking around for several hours, and you don't want sore feet to be the thing that ruins your fun. If you still want your shoes to match, consider temporarily modifying them to match.

Temperature considerations: This is usually the last thing I consider, but should probably be taken into consideration much earlier. During winter months, Cape Town gets *cold. Really cold.* Make sure you will be warm enough during the LARP, even if this means bringing a jacket with that doesn't match your outfit. Similarly, summer, it can get really hot, particularly if you are moving around a lot. Try to make sure your outfit accommodates the current temperature, or else the event is less likely to be enjoyable.

Storage: This isn't for everyone, but I personally like having some sort of space in my outfit where I can store a few important things such as my phone, character sheet, props and anything that may acquire during gameplay. I try to make sure I have a pocket, pouch or small bag with me for this purpose, and I highly rec-

ommend the same to others.

Wow. Amazing. You did it. You made a LARP outfit. Go forth unto the LARP world and- what's that? You don't have time for any of this? You left it to the day before? You just don't want to have to put in too much effort because it's actually about the game and not the outfit and this is your first LARP and that's a completely valid reason? Have no fear. I have a few final recommendations for this scenario.

Step 6 (Optional): Renting a costume: Sometimes it may be more worth your time and money to simply rent a costume. This is a pretty common thing to do, and takes away a lot of the stress involved with making something from scratch. There are a few places in Cape Town that I can recommend for costume hire:

BKE Costume Rental: Located near Edgemead (which is fairly far out). They stock your basic costumes, such as pirates, fairytale and some period costumes. Their prices range from about R100 - R200 (excluding deposit)

TheatreLand: Located in Pinelands. They have a pretty large range of costumes, including medieval, western, fantasy, fairytale, pirates and vintage. Their average

Final comments

Well that's it. A long and convoluted explanation on how to put together a basic LARP outfit. If all else fails, just wear whatever you want and what makes you feel comfortable. LARPing is supposed to be fun, not stressful, and gameplay will be fun regardless of what you're wearing. If you do put in a little time each LARP though, pretty soon you'll have a whole arsenal of clothing to choose from. Don't be shy to communicate with others and ask for help where you need it. Everyone in the game wants you to have a great time, and don't bite (I think).

Happy costuming.

costume fee is about R125 – R250, with a R100 deposit.

Just be sure to take extra care of any costumes you rent (such as avoiding messy LARP food or being run through with a sword) to avoid losing any deposits.

Step 7: Final touches

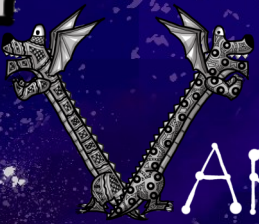
Hair and Makeup: This can be a really fun part of your outfit. Consider adding scars or bruises to really badass characters, or maybe some cool scales to an alien character. Make sure that whatever you do with your hair (I usually don't recommend wigs for LARPs because they will likely become dislodged or uncomfortable) is comfortable and will stay in place for multiple hours. Bobby pins are your friend.

Tips for during the LARP:

I usually take a few emergency supplies with me to a LARP, such as safety pins and tape, to make any emergency repairs if things start to fall apart. If you want to be especially extra, a small sewing kit can also be a great help in a pinch.

Try not to forget any of the specified props on your character sheet.

Don't be afraid to ask someone for help if you are struggling to get something on or off, or need help with hair, makeup, and so on.



VARALYS

By Elizabeth Stevenson

Illustration by Julie Whithers

I beheld a great beast in the ocean of stars.
His face was draconic. His eyes made of stars.
His wings wide and furled shone as dark as abyss,
His movement was careful, his words were a hiss.

Small spacecraft of humans, you've cometh too far.
My name is Varalys, my home is the stars.
My eyes have seen many, but also too few,
For none venture out here, there's no one but you.

I've seen many suns, many moons spark and rise,
I've seen how their light from ten thousand years dies.
I've watched from the days fore your home was called earth.
I witnessed the moment the cosmos was birthed.

I am the perpetual, all life, and all time.
My wings cover ages— my age is your time.
I watched your soft light, when it first went to glow.
Poor vessel of man— You're now fading to go.

And then did Varalys, a tear on his face
Unfurl his wings to hold me in embrace.



THE

RAINY REST INN

Written and Illustrated by Shane Liou

A blanket of warmth washes over you as the smell of smoked pine and fresh ale greets your nose. Entering the tavern, the small and cosy space is illuminated by warm and bright candlelight. A crackling fireplace in the corner whispers to you the promise of a soft bed and hot food.

You can see more of Shane's tabletop artworks at @ambyr.tabletop on Instagram!



BERMINA BROOK'S DUSTY PELLBOOK

By Liam Fieggen

Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

This book it's... old. We believe the spells contained herein are from a time before ours. Here, in the 5th Era of our world (also known as 5E), we know that many spells both wondrous and terrible were once known in the forgone Eras. However, something seems wrong about this book. It's from the 3rd Era (specifically, these spells seem to be dated back to the Halvening of the 3rd Era, known to many as the 3.5E), but somehow these spells are legible, readable in the language of our Era. It's almost as if someone took these spells from the 3.5E and updated them for 5E. Again, that's the 5th Era, 'E' definitely doesn't stand for anything else.

- Sartherian Orûm, a renowned author and "competent sorcerer"



Chaos Hammer

4th level evocation (sorcerer)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You unleash chaotic power on your foes in the form of a multicoloured explosion of leaping, ricocheting energy. Each creature within a 20-foot square centred on yourself must make a Charisma saving throw. A target takes 5d10 damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. For each 10 that you

roll on the damage dice, each target that failed their saving throw is *slowed* (as per the *slow* spell) for a round, up to a maximum of 3 rounds.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 4th.



Death Knell

2nd level necromancy (cleric, warlock)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You draw forth the ebbing life force of a creature, using it to fuel your own power. When you cast the spell, you touch a creature within range who is at 0 hit points but is not dead. The target makes a Constitution saving throw, and on a failed save it dies. If it dies, you gain 1d8+4 temporary hit points. While you still have these temporary hit points, you add 1d4 to all Strength attack rolls, saving throws and ability checks, as well as to spell attack rolls.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you gain 5 additional temporary hit points for each slot level above 2nd.



Dimensional Anchor

4th level abjuration (sorcerer/wizard, warlock)

Casting Time: 1 action

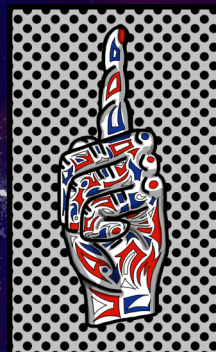
Range: 120ft

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 minute (concentration)

A green ray springs from your out-stretched hand. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. A creature or object struck by the ray is covered with a shimmering emerald field that completely blocks extradimensional travel.

Forms of movement barred by a dimensional anchor include *dimension door*, *misty step*, *teleport* or *plane shift*.



Discern Lies

2nd level divination (paladin)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30ft

Components: V, S, M (a small needle)

Duration: 1 minute (concentration)

Choose a creature within range to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, you immediately know when the target deliberately and knowingly speaks a lie. The spell does not reveal the truth or uncover unintentional inaccuracies or attempts to evade a question.



Mind Fog

3rd level enchantment (bard, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120ft

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 hour

You create a bank of thin mist that weakens the mental resistance of those caught in it. Choose a point within range. Each creature in a 20ft radius must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a target has disadvantage on Wisdom and Intelligence saving throws.



Ventriloquism

1st level illusion (bard/sorcerer)

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: 120ft

Components: S, M (a glass of water)

Duration: 10 minutes

For the duration of the spell, you can make your voice (or any sound that you can make vocally) seem to issue from anywhere in range, such as behind a door or from a different person. You can speak in any language you know.



Tree Shape

2nd level transmutation (druid/ranger)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a branch of a bonsai tree)

Duration: 1 hour

You transform into the form of a Large living tree or shrub, or a Large dead tree trunk with a small number of limbs. The closest inspection cannot reveal that the tree in question is actually a magically concealed creature. To all normal tests, you are, in fact, a tree or shrub, although a *detect magic spell* reveals a faint transmutation on the tree.

While in tree form, you can observe all that transpires around you just as if you were in

your normal form, and your hit points and ability scores remain unaffected. You are considered restrained, and you are immune to critical hits while in tree form. All clothing and gear carried or worn changes with you. You can dismiss tree shape as a bonus action.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a 4th- or 5th-level spell slot, the duration is 2 hours. When you use a 6th- or 7th-level spell slot, the duration is 4 hours. When you use an 8th-level spell slot, the duration is 8 hours. When you use a 9th-level spell slot, the duration is 24 hours.



Word of Recall

7th level conjuration (cleric/druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Unlimited

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

You speak the word of recall and are instantly teleported back to your sanctuary. When you prepare this spell you must designate a location as your sanctuary, which must be a place you are very familiar with. You cannot teleport between planes, and when you teleport you can bring up to six willing creatures with you. All creatures to be transported must be in contact with one another, and at least one of those creatures must be in contact with you.

IN THE PILOT'S SEAT: AN INTRODUCTION TO LANCER

By Gerhard Serton Illustrated by Elizabeth Stevenson

Have you ever wanted to pilot a 13-metre tall siege-walker with a cannon so big it's usually found on a battlecruiser? How about a literal cowboy-bot with a giant revolver in its chest? Or a walking me-metic-hazard that causes permanent blindness to anything that just looks at it? In *Lancer*, players will find themselves with access to all these and more, as they take on the role of ace mech pilots in a far, far future.

Lancer is a "mud-and-lasers" RPG centered around incredibly talented pilots, known as "Lancers". The brainchild of Tom Parkinson Morgan (Author of *Kill Six Billion Demons*) and Miguel Lopez, it was successfully Kickstarted and released in November 2019. However, it has existed for much longer than that, with free "beta rules" floating around as far back as 2017. Despite this relatively short period of existence, *Lancer* has attracted much interest and attention due to two features: it's uniquely structured ruleset, and the ridiculously crazy mechs that are available to players.

Lancer takes place in the far future, where mankind has already collapsed into (and subsequently recovered from) a dark age spanning thousands of years. Just before the collapse, 10 colony ships

were sent out as one final, desperate attempt to preserve the human race. Now, millennia later, humans from Cradle (formerly known as Earth) have reignited efforts to colonize and explore space, expanding out as a governance known as Union. Life on Union worlds is largely idyllic, with currency generally being abolished and every citizen afforded all they need to live a comfortable life. However, when Union began expanding to additional worlds, they made an unexpected discovery: space was already largely inhabited by those sent out all those years ago, now split into hundreds of diverse cultures and communities. Furthermore, not everyone welcomes Union in with open arms. In this setting, players take on the role "Lancers": ace mech-pilots that run the gamut from desperate space-pirates, to star graduates from a Barony's officer school, to members of a machine-god worshipping cult. The setting itself is rich in thematic subtext, exploring such themes as colonialism, anthropocentrism, and whether utopia ultimately justifies the means.

Lancer is unique in that its ruleset is split into 2 parts: Narrative Play, and Mech Combat. Narrative Play is what it sounds like: whenever players are out of their mechs and are controlling their pilots on-

ly, the rules that apply are a set of light, malleable guidelines meant to facilitate roleplay-heavy, "theatre-of-the-mind" gameplay. Rolls are incredibly simplified, with a global roll-target for any action, and player characters gain "Triggers" instead of more-traditional proficiencies. These are designed to apply more to general scenarios than to specific actions (for example, the trigger *Get Somewhere Fast* applies whenever a character is trying to go somewhere, whether it be on foot or in a vehicle), and add either a +2, +4, or +6 to any rolls where they are applicable. Other than these, pilots have no other intrinsic stats for use in narrative play.

Step inside your mech, however, and the rules change drastically. Mech combat is turn-based, tactical, and requires a grid. Pilot "Triggers" are no longer used, with intrinsic mech-stats being used to roll any saves (Hull, Agility, Systems, and Engineering). However, the biggest influence on play are ultimately the mechs chosen by each pilot. For every level gained, pilots can acquire licenses for new mech weapons, systems, and frames. These parts can then be mixed and mashed together, allowing you to build a truly unique war machine. *Lancer*'s setting takes place in a largely post-scarcity galaxy, with giant 3D printers commonplace. What this means in game is that there are no costs to printing new parts: as long as you have the relevant license, you can make it. Players are encouraged to tailor their mech's loadout on a mission-by-mission basis, and to treat said mechs as ultimately disposable: as long as the pilot themselves survives, they are always free to print another as soon as they get to a

printer.

Additionally, *Lancer* is supported by an official web app by the name of *Comp/Con*. Designed exclusively for the system, it allows for the easy creation, maintenance, and sharing of character/mech sheets, contains a compendium of all items included in the core book, and includes some helpful GM-specific tools such as an encounter designer and runner. Completely open source and freely-available, *Comp/Con* makes running a game easier than ever, whether you're the GM or a player.

Lancer is available at [https://massif-press.itch.io/](https://massif-press itch.io/), and comes in both free and paid varieties. The free corebook contains everything a player needs to participate in a campaign, while the \$25 version is aimed at GMs and contains a GMing section, as well as an additional Lore section. Ultimately, this means that each group will only need a single non-free copy. However, it is also possible to run a short one-shot with only the free version, and so curious DM's should consider this if they want to get a feel for the system before dropping money on it.



THAT'S JUST A CAT

By Taffy Lamba

Illustrated by Miss Spacemuncher

"I have a cat," I say, and invariably I am hounded for details.

"Is it a fire-breathing cat?" they ask.

"No. Just a cat."

"Does it shoot lasers out of its eyes?"

No again.

"Is it eight feet tall and towering? Does it have claws that can rend a human body? Can it summon the dead?"

"No, she's just a cat."

But that isn't explanation enough for most people, who are certain there must be something special about my cat. Surely she must have the souls of the wicked trapped in her litter box. Or perhaps she's a shapeshifter. Am I not simply in possession of a werecat?

"She's just a fluffball I found in a gutter and took home."

"Ah," they'll nod sagely. "She mind-controlled you to save her."

And there are only so many ways you can say there's nothing supernatural about your cat.

So instead, I tell them what is special about her.

"Sometimes she'll be in the room with me and I'll blink and she's gone."

"She will break any glass I leave on the table but somehow has never touched my dad's fine china."

"I'll leave a pile of laundry out and she'll only leave her fur on the clothes I want to wear that day."

"Every once in a while I look into her eyes and see a thousand shrieking ghosts floating in the abyss."

And they'll look at me, puzzled, and say, "But that's just a cat."

And finally they understand.





CLASSIFIEDS

PERSONAL

In Memoriam:

Yesterday morning, after losing a bet with the ocean god Poseidon, Greg the Phoenix was extinguished. He is survived by his brother Peter.

Unrest in the Town Square:

Faerun Man Found Under Fallen Rocks After Insisting That World Was Invented And Run by Eldritch Entity Known as Game Master.

EMPLOYMENT

Open Artificer Position:

We're the council of the nearby town New Praford, looking to hire a resident artificer. Our town lamplighter, Ess'Quom, has been neglecting their duties after a decree from their Yuan Ti-king told them to start losing their scales. Something about lord shedding?

Looking for Rogue:

No, we're not hiring. Has anyone seen our rogue? Dorian Darkness, if you're reading this, please give us our share of the gold back. Not cool.

Painter Wanted:

Hi. I'm looking for a skilled painter. I'm the proud owner of 672.3 tabletop and wargaming miniatures. I've painted six, and I'm looking for someone to come and do the rest. Will supply free Sprite.

FOR SALE

Harmless Household Plant:

Small homely plant for recreational use. Some war-scarring but otherwise in good condition. Price negotiable. For more information please contact Taran Treska at pod number 675 New Dusken. Make sure you don't have any food on you.

Excess Shrapnel:

Recent explosion left me with excess and I'm willing to negotiate a reasonable price. Excellent for last minute scrap projects as well as for themed children's parties. Contact Lewie Richards at Apollo Circuit for more details.

Arcane Foci:

Check out these six new arcane foci from Fuzzbeed the Furious! Number 3 will shock you.

NOTICES

Incredible:

Local Phoenix family amazed after successful GoFundMe page lets them build a fireproof house, just in time to welcome their new baby Greg.

WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Front Cover: Chloe Botha

Kraken beside The Letter from the Clawthing: Ms Spacemuncher A.K.A
Heather Ann

Angel on Table of Contents: York Froom

Excelsior Cover (right): Chloe Botha

Back Cover Dragon: Julie Withers

CLAWmarks Editor: Elizabeth Stevenson

A huge thank-you from the bottom of my heart to all the illustrators—
Chloe, Julie, Ann, Michelle, York— For lending your brushes, your time,
and your infectious passion to this publication.

May Dragonfire burn eternally bright.

EXCELSIOR





Jello