

A close-up photograph of a variety of dice and a ball of numbers. The dice include a red 12-sided die, a white 10-sided die, a black 10-sided die, a white 6-sided die, a yellow 6-sided die, a black 6-sided die, a purple 4-sided die, a teal 10-sided die, and a black 10-sided die. The ball of numbers is a clear, spherical object with numbers printed on its surface. The background is a dark, textured surface.

# Out of Character

Issue 4  
2012

The Buckets of Dice  
Interview Edition

- > Live Action
- > Grand Strategy
- > A Brief History of Dice

This document was produced by the editor railing against the slings and arrows of misfortune and badly-paraphrased theatre, and helped considerably by alcohol. Document set in Futura and Museo 300, interior photography by Robert Urquhart, cover photography by the editor and yes, that is a D16 you can see, well spotted. No, he has never used it for any game ever. Yes, he'll totally play in a game if you give him cause to roll it.

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# Editorial

## Jan-Yves Ruzicka

Hello all, and welcome to yet another issue of **Out of Character**. This is our much-delayed post-Buckets of Dice issue, in which we look back on another exciting weekend of gaming goodness. I'd like to extend a big thank you to both our organising committee for making everything run to schedule and also to our GMs, both of the Grand Strategy and the Live Action, and the regular sessions that make up the backbone of Buckets of Dice.

We had a good turn-out for this year, but more importantly for me, we had several people attending from out of town. For the first time in several years, we had a considerable Dunedin contingent make their way up the coast on the Friday night - the Dunedin gaming scene is back on the mend thanks to the work of Carla Bayard and friends, and I encourage you to make the journey down to Dunedin for one of their many events as they get established.

One of the reasons that this issue has been late is my involvement with the upcoming "convention of many fandoms", SANCon 2012. By now you've probably been bombarded with enough information, but to remind you: on September 28-30, a number of University clubs (including SAGA Inc.) will be holding a weekend's worth of various forms of geeky entertainment for our eager attendees. SAGA will be holding down the tabletop gaming end of the fort with roleplaying, board gaming, werewolf, and a number of tournaments including the second annual Christchurch Sagefight Tournament (with prizes available in both Sagefight Melee and Masters Without Swords grades) and a tentative Polarity ladder. For more details on this, check out the Upcoming Events section of this booklet of information.

Anyway, that's enough from me. I'll leave the actual re-telling of Buckets of Dice up to the many people I've interviewed for this issue. I hope to catch you around our regular SAGA meetings or at one of our upcoming events.

Until Issue 5!

# The Live Action

## Interview with Philip Burge

While Phil has been a contributing member of SAGA for many years, Buckets of Dice 2012 was his first time in a live action roleplaying game. So, of course, we gave him the lead role.

This year's Live Action, You are Cordially Invited to..., was set at the wedding reception for two of Stillwater's greatest superheroes, Ultima and Thunderbird. All of their superhero friends were invited, of course, but so were a number of trickster chaos gods, who found the whole thing just a bit too boring for their tastes.

**Out of Character:** So, you're completely new to Live Action as of this year's Buckets of Dice, I hear. And then you got cast in the lead role for this year's Live Action. Would you be able to tell our avid readers a little bit about your character? How did you feel going into your first LARP as one of the lead roles?

**Phil:** My character - he was the Paragon Hero, the do-gooder of do-gooders, invulnerable, strong and about to marry his long time love, a heroine of equal power (actually slightly more powerful), but slightly darker around the edges. Like all paragon heroes he wants to believe the best about everyone (particularly his friends), save the day (and in this case his wedding!) and live happily ever after with the love of his life. Of course, my enemies were never going to let that happen, and like most paragon heroes, I never put a plan in motion to deal with the inevitable chaos my arch-nemesis was going to inflict upon me.

As for going into my first LARP in one of the lead roles... to be honest, I felt a little intimidated. Here was me, expecting to be able to "hide in the back" with the other bit-parts, and instead I was thrust into the limelight... actually, it's like getting married for real - you're front and centre and everyone's watching you, and you're both excited and hoping that you don't make a fool of yourself in front of everyone you know.

**OOC:** And to follow up on that, how did it turn out?

**Phil:** I thought it turned out pretty well - I never had time to worry about whether I was doing a good job; I was too busy playing the role of the frazzled (superhero) groom to think about it; I simply acted how I thought it was appropriate to act in the moment, keeping in mind that as the Paragon Hero, I wasn't about to smite that wedding planner for getting the wrong music but rather try to find a way to fix it.

**OOC:** Any particularly hilarious or memorable moments you'd like to tell the audience about?

**Phil:** A lot of the night is a blur. Thrust into the main role I found myself running from crisis to crisis trying to resolve everything while also making sure my new wife was having a good time. The most memorable moment has to come down to a conversation with my character's parents. It was both hilarious and oddly painful; it was one of those awkward conversations you have with your parents that you really don't want to have (which is why it was painful), yet in the context of the LARP it was fantastically funny; a superhero being lectured on the facts of life by his mundane father on his wedding night...

**OOC:** To you, what are the big differences between tabletop gaming and LARPing? How does costuming and acting out affect the game for you?

**Phil:** "Tabletop" is more laid back and casual, or at least how I run typically run it. My regular gaming group doesn't even use a table, we just sit around in armchairs and on beanbags in my lounge. The only time I typically use a table is when I run or play at SAGA (a rare event) or BoD. I also find there are more "out of character" conversations in tabletop, particularly when a scene is focusing on only part of the group; with all the NPCs covered by one GM it is easy for those characters not involved in the scene to slip out of character and have a conversation in the background while the GM is focused elsewhere.

LARPing is way more intense. The costuming and acting out in a LARP means you are constantly in-character and the larger player pool means that there aren't NPCs (in the same way that there is in Tabletop). Given that even when a GM isn't present there are always in-character interactions going on. There is less opportunity to 'socialise' outside of the character - which is great because it helps you maintain character.

**OOC:** Do you think you'll be LARPing again in the future? If so, are you still planning on grabbing all the big roles, or do you think maybe you're ready for something a little less involved this time?

**Phil:** I think so. I really enjoyed LARPing, it was great fun. Having said that, the intensity means it is not something I want to be doing every week, I'd rather save it for 'special occasions (like conventions). I use regular tabletop gaming as a way to keep in contact with friends that I don't otherwise have a reason to see on a regular basis and the more relaxed nature of a 'tabletop' game allows socialising as well as gaming as there isn't the same pressure to stay in character constantly.





# The Grand Strategy

## Dillon Burke

Dillon has been running his own brand of "massively-multiplayer board game" for as long as the editor has been attending Buckets of Dice. It's one of the more unique things about BoD, and every year it's been consistently engrossing and balanced.

This year's Grand Strategy, Sun and Starship, followed the fate of a solar empire as it slowly fell to bickering and external forces. By the end of the night, the once-great empire, with its warring princes and scheming houses, was destroyed from without by the pirate hordes that stalked its borders.

**Out of Character:** How long have you been running Grand Strategies at Buckets of Dice?

**Dillon:** I'm not sure how long - I think I started calling these games "Grand Strategy" at BoD in the late 1990s. The games evolved from LARPs, and the first game was at a Christchurch Wargaming Society weekend con in the early 1990s, which was a medieval civil war scenario. That was memorable for the players voluntarily dividing themselves into just two teams, except for one lone necromancer (who eventually died from his own plague). That is why I have fixed teams, and don't usually allow team changes mid-game. It was also memorable for Stephen Hoare, who parleyed a map notation of "Here Be Dragons" into convincing all the players in the game that he controlled some Dragons and would they like to bribe him?

**OOC:** How would you describe a Grand Strategy to a complete newcomer?

**Dillon:** Its about decision-making under time pressure. As a strategic level game, combat is often abstract, and victory often goes to the team that works well as a team and manages the tradeoffs between trade, diplomacy and battle. You don't have to be a military genius, just keep the big picture goals in mind as you make decisions, and try to make any in-game mistakes small, forgivable ones.

**OOC:** Have you had a favourite Grand Strategy that you've run? What set it apart from the others?

**Dillon:** Flower Power remains a favourite, the hippy costumes were good, the narrative flow strong, and a lot of laughter at the end at the big reveal of the Begonian menace. It was the most full colour of the games, with a huge (and expensive) map.

**OOC:** So if people have played in two consecutive Grand Strategies written by you, they'll probably notice that there's often a mechanical theme, that is, you reiterate over mechanics. What sort of things do you hope to improve in each iteration of a particular ruleset?

**Dillon:** One of the design goals is to get as many turns processed as possible before brains melt from exhaustion. As such I am always looking for ways that allow people to make interesting, meaningful decisions, but where the mechanical resolution can be done in 30-60 seconds. If a mechanic is similar to past mechanics, its easier to teach it to the players, so they can get on with playing the game rather than learning it. This year we went with a diceless combat system after GM feedback last year. Next year I plan to use a refined version of that, based on player feedback from Sun & Starship, but I will change the map initiative mechanic away from the queue system and go back to

one where each team has a fixed number of map table actions within each 20 minute game turn.

Sometimes I select particular elements of strategy (e.g. guerrilla warfare, industrial production, or assassins) and make them major elements of a game. In the next game I might not have them present at all.

**OOC:** Do you have any awesome plans for future Grand Strategies that you'd like to share with the audience?



**Dillon:** My current plan is go with Pax Victoria, another lost colony in the stars, with a mad Queen-Emperor who has kept technology to c.1900 levels. The map geography will emphasise naval operations and amphibious landings. As a stretch feature, I would like players to be able to select their victory objectives (ranging from a defensive "keep what you have" to an aggressive "unite the world") and to scale initial resources relative to ambitions (i.e. the aggressive teams will get more game resources, but have a significantly harder to get objective). Each team will also get to design the ideological framework of their ruling class, which may make their state more effective, but could also increase the chance of native revolt, or a rebellion by the colonists. Initial plan is for ten teams of three people with two land maps and one sea map.

**OOC:** Do you have any advice to anyone out there who thinks they have an awesome idea for a Grand Strat, but isn't sure how to start?

**Dillon:** Three main bits of advice:

1. Playtest mechanics to see if they work
2. Always assume players will deliberately break your game if the game mechanics let them do so
3. On the maps - aim for three significant combat units per player, if you have more than 10/player they will drown in a sea of indecision.



# The International Experience

## Hamish Cameron

UoC alumnus Hamish Cameron still comes back to Buckets of Dice every year. Now living in California, he visits a number of conventions in both countries.

This year, Hamish made his way back to New Zealand to run The Sprawl, a hack of the Apocalypse World engine to simulate the gritty cyberpunk feel of a William Gibson novel.

**Out of Character:** We'll start off nice and easy. Could you tell the nice folks in the audience what you do for a living these days? How does that align with your constant travel between the US and New Zealand?

**Hamish:** Well, I'm an ancient historian working on my Ph.D. in Classics at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. I'm mostly funded by the teaching work I do at USC, so I generally have to be in L.A. during USC's semesters. However, my Ph.D. supervisor spends a lot of time out of the city and I'd be corresponding with her by email and Skype anyway, so when I'm not required to be on campus to teach, it doesn't matter much where I am, so I come back to NZ a lot.

**OOC:** What makes you come back to Buckets of Dice, even when you're living in California? I know this year you were over here anyway, but you always coincidentally seem to be in NZ when it's on.

**Hamish:** The American summer holidays conveniently line up with the time Buckets is held, so I've been able to keep up my streak of attending every BoD (I think), since they started in 1995. The flip side of that is that I usually have to teach at the same time as Kapcon, so I don't often get to that.

**OOC:** How does BoD compare to conventions in the US?

**Hamish:** The main conventions I attend in the US are the three Strategicon conventions held at a hotel in L.A. Those are a lot bigger, a couple of thousand people, but they cover board gaming, multiple LARP streams, RPGA, miniatures gaming, CCGs and a very small amount of computer gaming as well as roleplaying. While in raw numbers they're massive by comparison, in terms of number of roleplaying games happening at a time they're not so different: probably 10-14 per slot. Those cons are always on holiday weekends and have three four-hour slots per day (morning, afternoon, evening) adding up to nine slots total with plenty of time in lunch and dinner breaks to browse the dealer room or leave the hotel for better food.

Generally in big to mid-sized American cons there's no scoring or prizes, but if you GM a certain number of player hours you get free entry to the con (Strategicons cost about \$40 otherwise). I usually stay at the convention hotel these days because the commute to my apartment would take up a couple of hours of valuable gaming/sleeping/drinking time.

Most of the other cons I've attended have similarly sized roleplaying section, but I'll be going to GenCon this year for the first time, so that will be a much bigger and more full on experience.

**OOC:** So you've been running games at conventions for how long, now?

**Hamish:** I've been running games at conventions since the first Buckets in 1995, initially just at Buckets, then at a couple of the Dunedin cons as well, and recently at pretty much any con I can find the time and money to attend! I've won a lot of GMing prizes at Buckets over the years, I won Best Single Session at Kapcon this year, and I scored very highly at Big Bad Con in Oakland last year. Big Bad Con doesn't have prizes, but it is scored so that the organiser (Sean Nittner) can keep track of player satisfaction and maintain quality.

I've been meaning to write a blog post about this for a while, but I put my success down to encouraging the players to be awesome. My GMing philosopher is that there are five awesome creative people at the table and the game only fires if all five of us are contributing. I usually only bring a solid idea of the genre and the bare bones of a situation to the table and then flesh it out with what comes out of the interaction between the players, the characters and that situation. This is why I very seldom run games for more than four people; three or four is enough that you can riff off each other to get a good variety of ideas going, but small enough that, if I do my job properly, everyone else gets enough screen time.



# How did it come to this?

## Robert Urquhart

Robert Urquhart has been a member of the club since time immemorial. He's previously been a committee member and club president, and now the club's unofficial guardian angel, helping new committees find their feet. Of all our members, he's probably the best qualified to talk about the history of the club, and the Buckets of Dice event itself.

**Out of Character:** How long has Buckets of Dice been running now?

**Robert:** Delving back into my archive box the first Buckets of Dice was held in 1995 (the same year that Out of Character became the club magazine, replacing "Coke and Chips"). By the next year it was being promoted as an annual event. I still have a copy of the programme, the format has remained pretty much unchanged starting with the Friday night LARP. That year there was also a Magic: the Gathering tournament running in parallel with the roleplaying sessions.

So 17 years. I don't believe BoD has ever missed a year, although some have been ... quieter than others.

**OOC:** How involved were you when the event started? What about prior conventions?

**Robert:** I was a member of the club at that time but didn't get involved with committee for another couple of years. However even before BoD the club had run the occasional weekend tournament. I infer from OoC editorials that the first actual Buckets was such a success they just had to do it again.

**OOC:** What have you seen change in the years since?

**Robert:** Primarily venue. Originally in the "Gateway Training Centre" (above Science Alive in the old railway building) then at the Music Centre (now demolished) next to the Catholic Cathedral, over to the UCSA once you were allowed to do your own catering there, back to the the Music Centre at one stage and now of course at the College of Education.

As mentioned above the format has remained pretty much unchanged. It looks like the Grand Strategy made it's entrance in 1997 courtesy of Dillon and was probably some version of Housewar.

Attendance has fluctuated peaking at "84 attendees and hangers on" in 2003, still trailing KapCon but a very comparable event.

Also food - the early BoDs had access to a kitchen and so hot food available - "Sam's Super Soup" and Couplands pies, along with bready products. Cookietimes have remained a staple and the recent fruit initiative is an excellent addition.

**OOC:** What would you like to see in future years of Buckets of Dice? How do you think it will change in the near future?

**Robert:** Given the stability of the format to date I don't expect to see much change in the near future; what we have works. Numbers currently appear to be on the upswing and it would be good to see that continue - I was organising the event when it peaked and would actually like to see that number beaten.

Not so keen on the current date - clashes with just a few too many other events for people I know who would like to attend. I do understand the rationale for aligning it with a mondayised public holiday - it's just that NZ needs more public holidays.



# Behind the Scenes

## Rose Nichols

Rose Nichols is this year's SAGA Inc. president, has organised previous BoDs, and was a big part of this year's subcommittee. I talked to her about the recent few conventions, and how she sees it going in the future.

**Out of Character:** How long have you been involved with helping run SAGA and Buckets of Dice?

**Rose:** This is my 5<sup>th</sup> Buckets of Dice, and the 4<sup>th</sup> year of helping run the event. I hope to hand the reins to someone else soon to organise next year's BoD. If anyone is interested we will be forming a new subcommittee soon so let me know.

**OOC:** What's been your favourite moment at BoD so far?

**Rose:** My favourite moment at a BoD so far was probably getting my team in the Colossus of Atlantis Grand Strategy (BoD 2010) to team up with Mark [Berry]'s team and break the politics system. Between Rachel [Hanover-O'Connor] and Mark the other teams didn't stand a chance in getting anything done in the politics department. I think my team came second by a very small margin that year.

**OOC:** How did this year's Buckets compare to the previous years?

**Rose:** This year was great, we arranged for sponsorship from a number of companies which meant a greater variety of awesome prizes.

The last few years we have had a very small out of town presence this year we had a number of people from out-of-town, which means people got to experience different styles of role-playing and meant we had more variety of games.

**OOC:** What do you hope to see in future Buckets of Dice?

**Rose:** An actual bucket of dice as a prize. This could be possible by buying a pound of assorted dice and a small bucket.

I would also like to see more GMs organised in advance and a better system for signing up for each session. To keep it fair to people who don't attend the whole con we recently decided to only allow people to sign up in the break between sessions. I am hoping that next year we will be able to get people to rank game choices in the morning so that we can assign people to games and make sure everyone gets a chance of getting into the game they want.

**OOC:** Do you think there's a limit to how big BoD can get? There's only so many gamers in Christchurch, after all. Do you think it's hit that?

**Rose:** I think there is a limit, but we haven't reached it yet. True, there are only so many gamers in Christchurch but I don't believe we have reached them all.

This year we had 52 attendees, I think for my first BoD there were about 60 people (but I don't have actual numbers as I wasn't organising it) and last year after the earthquake we were down to 46 people. I would like to see us reach a few more people.

This year we also had a number of people from Wellington and Dunedin at BoD. If we keep in touch and promote early and often enough I believe we can get even more out-of-towners.



# Upcoming Events

## **ConFusion 2012**

**August 4**

<http://is.gd/PgBNsi>

**Brooklyn Community Centre, Wellington**

One day, three rounds, a whole bunch of fantastic games! A day's worth of gaming set in southern Wellington.

## **SAGA Inc. AGM**

**August 14**

**KH07, University of Canterbury**

If you don't come to this, we're constitutionally obliged to hit you over the head if you complain about the club any time in the next year. Come along, get your name written down, and put your name forward for a position of power. Meeting starts 6:15pm in KH07.

## **Minicon 2**

**August 18-19**

**KH07/08, University of Canterbury**

You know what you need? MORE GAMING. How much gaming? A WEEKEND'S WORTH OF GAMING. More details to come, but I should warn you: there will be gaming.

## **Chimera LARP Convention**

**August 24-26**

<http://www.nzlarps.org/chimera>

**Motu Moana Scout Camp, Auckland**

It's New Zealand's biggest Live Action convention and it's happening soon! The flagship LARP this year is a 2x80-player affair, and if that doesn't take your fancy, there's 33 other Live Action games over the weekend to keep you busy.

It looks like registration is closed for Chimera 2012, but now's the chance to check them out and get ready for next year's convention.

## **Journey to the End of the Night**

**September 28**

<http://www.sancon.org.nz/journey.html>

**Christchurch College of Education**

It's like orienteering, with over a hundred competitors, at night, across the whole city, with people chasing you. What could possibly go wrong? Pre-event for SANCon 2012.

## **SANCon 2012**

**September 28-30**

<http://www.sancon.org.nz>

**Christchurch College of Education**

Our own multi-fandom convention, with gaming, movies, workshops, events, prizes, competitions, demonstrations, panels...