

# संगत presents

May 2009

Issue 2



# OUT OF CHARACTER

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# GAMEATHON

Robert Urquhart

The date of the Big Night In has been changed by the organisers. The telethon, and therefore the Gameathon is now Sat 8th - Sun 9th of August

## What:

Gameathon is a project to raise money for the "Big Night In" - a telethon which will be fund raising for the KidsCan Charitable Trust. As the name suggests the idea is to get a whole lot of people to play games and contribute money to the cause, not necessarily in that order.

## When:

8th-9th August, 2009

## Where:

Currently one event is planned to be run on-the-night in Christchurch. See the Gameathon website for address and details. More events are welcome.

## Why be involved?

1. It's for a good cause
2. It's a day or weekend of gaming
3. Three weeks out from the expected date of Buckets of Dice, it's a great opportunity to playtest your scenario (or play in an extra)

To find out more about Gameathon and how you can be involved please visit the website: <http://gameathon.ning.com> or ask for Robert Urquhart at a SAGA night.

# GOING COMMANDO

Jan-Yves Ruzicka

What happens when you take dice out of your RPG? That's what we found out last year in Alan's diceless horror campaign, *Folie a Deux*. The premise was pretty simple: a bored, underpaid data entry assistant with a penchant for the supernatural decides to set up his own paranormal investigation company. Sort of like *Ghostbusters*, but without the proton packs or Sigourney Weaver. Much like *Ghostbusters*, it was only a matter of time before some supernatural entity attempted to destroy the world, and sent the hapless protagonists on a quest across the world to acquire a mythical serpent's egg, split open the Temple of Solomon, best Lucifer in a contest of rhetoric, and restart the universe.

But I'm not here to talk about that. You get that in any old campaign. Instead I want to talk about how I got through an entire campaign without once consulting my character sheet, rolling for initiative, or calculating my THAC0.

To be fair, it wasn't completely diceless – we had two props to keep us from going completely mad. First, the GM had a tarot deck, and whenever he felt like it, he'd draw the next card and interpret it as he saw fit. Second, each player had a number of fate points, which they used up by narrowly avoiding death. However, only the GM knew how many fate points each player had, and how many each started with. Everything else was dealt with by the GM considering the character's skills, backstory, and so forth. Or for us players, we'd say "I want to do X", and the GM would announce the results, without rolling dice or anything.

As a player, it was slightly disconcerting. In a system-heavy game, you can always fall back on rolling dice when you can't think of anything witty to say (that's what having a Charisma of 15 is all about, right?). Take away the dice, and suddenly everything depends on you thinking things up. This, combined with a small group size (three players for most of the campaign), meant that if you were having a bad day, that got reflected on your character.

In addition, you lost a lot of the tension you used to get in uncertain situations. You knew that whether or not your frenzied pummeling took out your opponent was based merely on what the GM thought, instead of by the roll of the dice. Talking to Alan after the campaign, he commented on this: "I will admit that there were times when I wished that dice were being used...I felt that I was over involved in the action and almost like I was forcing the PCs to be spectators in their own game."

There's a payoff for this, though. The GM has a lot more control of the situation. Ever done something amazingly cool and in-character, and then rolled a 5 on your d20? No problem of this happening in the diceless game. Your actions will succeed if the GM thinks they should. Additionally, this means the GM can control exactly how powerful you are, and from that the mood of the game and how you'll act.

One of the factors here was the power level of the game. As every-day folk with no special training, we (the players) knew what we (the characters) were capable of. Maybe one of us could fire a gun *without* doing something stupid, but it's not like we'd be able to raid Fort Knox or anything.

So it's a trade-off. Not every game is suitable for diceless play, but those that are, will benefit. Your average cinematic game probably wouldn't fly without dice, simply because giant fist-fights are the norm. But for everyday games, it's brilliant. There's a feeling of vulnerability you get when facing down zombies with a gun you don't really know how to use - you don't know the odds, you just know you aren't a soldier or anything.

As a player, you no longer have the reassuring feel of stats and dice, and you have to actually judge what chance you have. As a GM, you have to keep the game interesting without those dice, keep a sense of urgency and uncertainty in it, and keep the players interested. If you're able to pull this off, diceless games are definitely worth a look.

# GAMING ETIQUETTE

Robert Urquhart

*This article continues from Robert's article in Issue 1 of Out of Character.*

If you are new to this gaming thing you will soon discover that there are certain negative stereotypes, which exist within gaming circles. Experienced gamers will not only know the stereotypes, but probably know someone who fits each one. These tips are intended to provide a guide to some common behaviours which are generally appreciated (or not) around a role playing group. For the most part they apply equally to players and GMs.

## Tip #4: Make a character which fits

Again, roleplaying games are usually group activities. Characters who are fanatical loners with no reason or desire to interact with the rest of the group are either going to become spotlight hogs or more likely end up receiving far less attention than the others. Characters with extreme personality traits which are going to cause the rest of the group to hate them also have a short play expectancy. This isn't to say that everyone must get along perfectly, some friction within a party often makes for a better story, but the group usually does need a reason to stay together beyond "we're the PCs".

The second part to this is make a character which fits with the game the GM is running. Introducing a Superhero who has fallen through a time portal into a Fantasy game is rarely going to work. Playing an Orc isn't going to be acceptable in most games set in Tolkien's Middle Earth. Captain Bloodbeard the notorious pirate is going to find it challenging to survive if the game is centred around the politics at the court of the Holy Emperor.

## Tip #5: Keep to your own character

Often a problem arises as a "more experienced" player well intentionally tries to give advice to a newer player. In this situation there can be a fine line between giving advice and dictating actions. The newer player can start to feel that they are not allowed to make independent decisions for the character. A similar situation can appear when a player often expects that the others will go along with a plan without asking them first.

## 6. Don't argue with the GM

This should not be misinterpreted as don't disagree with the GM. It is usually OK to query a happening or ruling by the GM once when it happens. GMs make mistakes too, and usually don't mind them being pointed out. After a second ruling has been made however any further discussion should wait until after the game otherwise it becomes a distraction.

The GM is the authority on what is happening around the characters even if this appears to contradict the rules or anything else you may have been told. Unusual events may even be good reason for further investigation in-character.

The GM should reduce the chances of this happening by making sure the players are aware of any common differences between his game and "standard" games well ahead of time. These include "house rules" and common descriptions ("yes, all orcs in this world are about 8' tall and bright pink").

# CHARACTER: ELIO PAZZI

Michael Hunter

Report to Master Adrian Lucit, keeper of the records, Grand library of Aldara

My lord, my recent attempts to catalogue our third wing have lead me to a particular tome I believe to be mis-shelved. A small notebook entitled "The Temple of Terror" was found in the fiction section, between "Burning Isle of Nok'teleht, Beast of Ten Thousand Adjectives" and "Henry the Happy Hippo". While it at first seems to be a rather unimaginative fiction peppered with crude drawings and colourful swear words, my researches into both the author and subject material lead me to believe it to be true.

The notebook is monogrammed as belonging to Elio Pazzi, the eldest son of the famed Pazzi family of merchants. Elio was well known as an intelligent, intrepid and insatiably curious young man who dazzled his tutors with his lust for knowledge, absorbing knowledge about the world akin to a sponge that absorbed knowledge about the world in place of water. However, shortly after his nineteenth birthday, his lineage was bought into question by his younger brother, Elias. You may remember the scandal where letters detailing the relationships between his mother, the Lady Lucretia Pazzi and her gardener, kitchen hand, head butler, junior butler, assistant junior butler, junior assistant butler, locksmith, stable boy, at least one of the horses, the captain of the house guard, her brother-in-law, the executor of her grandfathers estate, and a bemused haggler called Ivan Chesterpot who had become lost in the great city of Aldara and merely wished to ask directions.

After this scandal, Elio left the courtly scene. While his brother had benefited from his downfall, it is common knowledge his father, Andaros Pazzi retained a great fondness for the boy, and seems to continue sending him a stipend both to keep him in good health and also as incentive not to bring his embarrassing existence back into courtly life. With independent means and left with his great passion for the world and it's history, Elio Pazzi seems to have become something of an explorer, and the Magisters of Aldara college report receiving several cases of bizarre relics and, on one memorable occasion, a novel and quite amazingly venomous snake, from a mysterious correspondent called EP. Exactly how this notebook came to be in our library is unclear, although the inside of the cover reads "To JD, thanks for all the Anisat". Anisat is either a obscure spirit brewed by the Uighur from scorpion venom inside the skulls of their foes, or a type of padded sock, it is unclear from the context. In either case, the notebook seems to deal with his explorations in the Kingdom of Nox.

Nox was a small kingdom during the Age of Kings, which never showed great aggression, but also was seemingly unassailable. The few surviving records speak of invading armies being set upon by their own shadows, and fanatic thaumaturges calling down storms of burning blackness. In any case, the kingdom disappeared in it's entirety, every man, woman, child, building, road and recognisable piece of artifice over the course of a one month long eclipse.

Much of the notebook is in great disrepair, the ink has run from various unimaginable liquids, several pages are entirely torn out, there are several burns and three of what my colleagues assure me are crocodile teeth are firmly jamming pages 34-42 together. However, some of the more legible excerpts are transcribed here.

*Excerpt begins*

...for hardly three ducats. While it pains me to rejoice in this noble houses poor fortunes, it did yield me what I wanted for only a meagre price. If I read this right, this exquisite shard of stone is not only one of the few remaining relics of the Nox, it is also a key to one of their lost temples. However, the journey will not be an easy one, I will need guides, arms-men, and many hands to carry the fine relics we shall uncover. I have availed myself of a man who seems trustworthy, by which I mean he has the best spelt tattoos and at doesn't use his hook hand to scratch himself while anyone is around. I maintain there is only a one in four chance he will attempt to rob and murder me, and he has gone forth to recruit more stout men to assist...

...rob and murder me. He got one of my travel bags before I got his remaining eye. In any case, we were nearly up to the delta before we lost the second boat with all hands. The bottom was torn out by a

hidden rock, and they beached to repair while we anchored in the river. Orlaf, a man with arms the size of a pig and a brain the functionality of a pig's, attempted to chop some lumber for the repairs. He would've had more luck had he picked a tree, rather than a six foot wide snake with an unusual bark like scale pattern. Fortunately, one of our oarsmen maintained the presence of mind to cut the anchor line while wetting himself, and we escaped downstream. If only our rations were on this boat...

...arrived at the borders of Nox. I say borders, as I believe Nox was a walled kingdom, but the wall itself is of course, long gone. Oddly, the shadow of the wall is not. As far as I can judge from the architecture, it seems reminiscent of the Orothi ziggurats I have read of, but rather... spikier. Incidentally, Maven attempted to rob and murder me last night. My habit of sleeping with my rapier inside my pillow and a large tripwire strung across the entrance of my tent has again paid dividends...

...up to the light of the moon on the equinox. I cast the shadow of the key over the shadow of the door, and the ground shifted. The blackness moved as if hinged, opening the way into the Temple we sought! With some trepidation, I girded my loins, mustered my courage, and summoned the will to order Atkinson to go in first. That'll teach him to try to rob and...

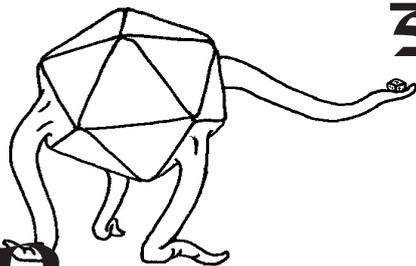
We are now down to nine. Simmons was torn into three roughly equally sized pieces by one of the scorpion statues that activated when he entered the room. I managed to dispatch it, despite its extremely unsporting attempts to strike me with the edge of its claw. Shortly afterwards Zerick stopped drooling vacantly and started battling his own shadow while screaming something about his soul being eaten by ten thousand blind stars. Unfortunately, before he could expand on this evocative image, one of his particularly wild backswings cut his own stomach open. The remaining men are following me primarily because they don't know the way out and I seem to have some idea as to where we are going. Seem...

...just three now. I must say, the fact they are seemingly ignoring the robbing part entirely to fixate enthusiastically upon the murder speaks of my waning popularity. The youngest of the group, a city rat whose name escapes me, but I have taken to referring to as Jeeves, has shown an impressive skill in avoiding the various devious traps. He managed to collapse the altar upon that swarm of tiny clockwork wasps. They are really quite ingenious, a tiny flywheel powering razor sharp wings that provide both propulsion and an efficient flying action. Slightly disappointed not to have seen them in action.

...course! I have now deciphered the (black) runes running up the (black) columns lining the (black) chambers we have been moving through! It seems we have been walking through the "Path of Trials", a maze filled with thousands of ingenious and deadly traps, designed to test the reflexes of their warriors and the sadism of their engineers. The door to the "Chamber of Unknown wealth" was in fact behind that small wooden door to our left as we entered. When I assured them that any entrance so poorly guarded could not contain anything worthwhile. As I explained this, Gorrister, between tears, attempted to gouge out my eyeballs with his thumbs, till the inveterate Jeeves stabbed him. Cheating, strictly, since his guard was down, but I only mildly chastised him.

...written on what seems to be flayed skin. The tome appears to have only a few hundred pages, yet I have read at least a thousand different ones, and all the bookmarks I place have a strange habit of disappearing unaccountably. Odder still, the one page I can find reliably contains an incantation for summoning "The Mouth of the Night". I doubt I'll try reading it till I have some good reason - if nothing else, while I can read Noxian acceptably, my mastery of the spoken word leaves a great deal to be desired. How the civilisation managed to survive with only one past participle tense is quite beyond me. I gave the city rat, whom I shall dub Jeeves for brevity, a case of what I'm fairly sure are unimportant albeit shiny relics. Now, we just have to find a way out...

*Excerpt ends*



**SAGA INC PRESENTS**

# BUCKETS OF DICE 2009

30 hours of gaming mayhem spread over the weekend of 10–12 July, upstairs in the UCSA building! Featuring regular SAGA GMs, as well as Dillon Burke's **Reign of the Dark Lord**, and Naomi Guyer's **Southern Seas**.

*NB: The SAGA Committee makes no guarantee that the information supplied here will be fully accurate come the date of the convention.*

## LARP

### SOUTHERN SEAS

BY NAOMI GUYER

In the year of our Lord 1843 a ship named Mercy set sail from London, Britannia, on a course towards Oceania and the great Southern continent. It carried you, and hundreds of other passengers and crew towards a new life in a new world.

The first few weeks of your journey were uneventful. Pleasant even. You made the third floor of the ship your home, and settled in for the voyage. Your problems began just off the coast of Antarctica. On the evening of July 10th Robert Jameson, first mate of the Mercy gathered up all the souls on the third floor and herded you, like animals, into the Captain's mess hall. He told you that the ship's captain was missing and was last seen descending to your floor. You are to remain here until his disappearance has been investigated.

### DATES AND TIMES

#### Friday 10th July

LARP: 7pm–midnight

#### Saturday 11th July

Gaming Session 1: 9am–1pm

Gaming Session 2: 1:30pm–5:30pm

Grand Strategy: 6:30–midnight

#### Sunday 12th July

Gaming Session 3: 9am–1pm

Gaming Session 4: 1:30pm–5:30pm

Wrap-up/Awards: 6pm

## Grand Strategy

### REIGN OF THE DARK LORD

BY DILLON BURKE

As one of the Dark Lord's minions you have been entrusted with command of one of his armies as he unleashes his horde onto the world! Once the world has been conquered, you may be fortunate enough to earn the Dark Lord's trust, and a place on his council of nine. Of course, the other minions may conspire against you and arrange for your assassination or execution, so you better make sure your pile of tribute from oppressing the peasants is bigger than anyone else's pile of tribute. Now, what to do about those interfering heroes and peasant rebels? Well, perhaps your secret society brothers can help you out.

### OUR SUPER-CHEAP PRICES

Per session:	\$5
LARP:	\$10
Grand Strat:	\$10
Whole weekend:	\$20

SAGA Members, register before July 1st and get the whole weekend for just \$15!

GMs get \$5 off their fee if they pre-register. If you're a GM, a member, and pre-register, you could get the entire weekend for \$10!

**PLUS!** Bring proof of your registration to Comics Compulsion between the 6th and the 13th of July (inclusive) and get 10% off their already low, low prices!

For more information, email [bod@saga.org.nz](mailto:bod@saga.org.nz)  
To pre-register, visit <http://saga.org.nz/bodreg>

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TO  
**OCEANIA**

The Directors of the good ship MERCY, in partnership with the OCEANIA EMIGRATION COMPANY, do hereby give notice that they are ready to receive Applications for FREE PASSAGE to

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TOWN and COUNTRY SECTIONS of LAND on sale in OCEANIA, full particulars of which may be had on application as above.

<http://saga.org.nz/bod09>

# CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

Michael Couch

While computer gaming often focuses character development around stats, race and classes, in my experience the most important thing for a starting character to decide upon is their background. Not only does this mean that all involved get an idea of whom the character actually *is*, but provides an invaluable source of ideas to tie the campaign together. In my case, the layout of the region directly reflects the character's background, and their history will determine their future adventures. There are plenty of online resources for this, but I find the best way is for PCs just to sit down with the DM and talk, and build a shared idea (obviously the more experienced the DM the better!). Typically, the first few sessions of my campaigns are low-demand, to give people the chance to build their character's personality to reflect their background – and even change stats or class as appropriate. To sum up, I list below the backgrounds of the three characters in my campaign.

## Melvorke

Melvorke, the fourth and final child of Lond, a blacksmith, and Synd, the owner of the local and only tavern, grew up in the small village of Lyonsbane, named after the famous town where the God Kelemvor was born.

The town has a small but magnificent church devoted to Kelemvor in its grounds, and most people in the town are devout followers such that even many of the children are taught to not fear death from a young age, and when old enough are given very basic training in bearing arms. His siblings all work for his father or mother, and have limited education – spending few hours in the day-a-week school run by the church.

Melvorke's birth was seen as a blessing to the small town as he seemed to bear particular resemblance to Kelemvor the mortal; black raven hair and deep blue eyes. Soon after his birth, the local priest of Kelemvor requested that his upbringing and education be overseen by the church, to which his impoverished and poorly-educated parents agreed. When not at the church, Melvorke spent his time in his father's forge, helping him produce the various tools, and occasional weapon, that the local area needed, and he made very few friends. The few times he left the village was with the local priest, to visit those on their deathbed.

His upbringing meant that he both learnt the rites, rituals and teachings of Kelemvor, and, between helping to work the forge and the rigorous military training from the church, he became a much better fighter than his peers. He could regularly defeat them in festive competitions or just in casual encounters—which further did not help him to make friends!

On the eve of his 18th birthday, during a week dedicated to celebrating Kelemvor's achievements, Melvorke received a vision. In it, Kelemvor spoke to Melvorke, instructing him that he had a great task for him in his future – he was to bring to Judgement to a powerful necromancer who was planning to raise a great army of undead and sow death and destruction across the Heartlands. Upon waking and relaying his vision to the priest, he was given permission to venture out, spread the teaching of Kelemvor, and prepare for this quest.

When his parents were told of this, his father immediately spent days and nights in the forge, fashioning for him a sword that, he said, even Kelemvor would be proud to wield. Upon receiving the blessings of the church, the sword was re-presented to Melvorke as not only his holy symbol but also the tool on which to pass judgement to those perverting the course of nature.

Melvorke buckled on his sword, was gifted his father's old militia armour, tossed in the supplies from his mother, and put on his adventuring robes, setting out on his journey into the great unknown.

## Paden

Paden is unsure of his parentage - they were human as he is, but he knows very little more. His most obvious characteristic is his violet eyes, which almost seem to glimmer when he concentrates. He was abandoned as a very young child at the Ogmahian Sacred Quill monastery, dedicated to the perfection of

clear writing, where he grew up among the few acolytes. Much to the annoyance of the local monks, Paden was and remains a deep sleeper.

Paden was a quiet child, and remains a quiet man - a life of solitude has left him with a phobia of crowded spaces, and when placed on the spot he is left tongue-tied. He often resorts to just pointing at what he wants or means as a way to avoid verbal confrontation.

He took the temple's reflective code of behaviour to heart, to lead a life of simplicity and meditation. Paden spent as much time reading in the library as he did in his monk training, which was tolerated as the search for knowledge is dear to the heart of Oghma. His martial studies were around the Way of the Fox, a martial discipline of cunning.

Several months before he left the Monastery, he received a very vivid and disturbing dream where it seemed Oghma was telling him that one day he would 'rescue the temple', although from what and how remains very unclear. A quiet, stubborn pride has since developed, leading to the overestimation of his abilities. He quests in the world to build his own knowledge, to learn more of the way of the Fox, to practice his budding monkish abilities, and to prepare for the future task, if true, of saving the temple.

Recent foretellings by a priest of divinations gave advice as to what he would need to do to succeed, and Paden mulls over them still: seek the lost temple; find the Bird of fire at sunrise in the western lands of waste; seek out the hidden tome to find the staff of neutrality; and recover the dragon scroll and return it to the temple of the Jade Fox, wherein the final battle to become a master shall take place.

## Rannexor

Rannexor was brought up the eldest son of the Baron of Beren, Jorzan, and his wife, Alhandra. Until the age of 14 he was brought up to take over from his father; he was trained in the military arts, learnt some of the noble arts, and, at his father's request, spent some time mingling with the local peasantry and in particular the local dwarfish smiths, whom owed his father their lives way back in history. The primary smith, Eberk, and Jorzan even campaigned against kobolds for a few years together.

However, shortly after his 14th birthday, his Uncle Regdar returned. As his father's younger brother, he inherited nothing upon their father's death 30 years ago, and his jealousy and rage led to him leaving. Over the coming days, Rannexor was very sure he saw his uncle talking over several evenings secretly with kobolds outside the walls of the keep. Soon after, Rannexor's parents, still quite healthy, died suddenly and painfully under mysterious circumstances. Regdar immediately took the barony over, as the next male of age, and had the body of Rannexor's parents immediately sealed away in the family tomb.

Fearing for his life, Rannexor fled the keep. Not knowing where to go, and filled with rage, he went down to the local dwarves and demanded they give him a weapon to go avenge his father. They took him in, successfully calmed his rage and protected him over the next few years over from roving patrols. They completed Rannexor's military training, and secretly Rannexor helped them when he could. They persuaded Rannexor that if he sought revenge he needed to grow into a competent warrior, and only when he was powerful enough, with powerful allies, should he come back to take the barony back and reclaim his birth right.

Raised as a minor noble, Rannexor is somewhat proud and taciturn, although years living among the dwarves and the peasants has moderated that somewhat. He is still strongly driven by the need to get back what is rightfully his, and to continue his father's legacy of protecting the locals from the creatures beyond. He enjoys the company of dwarves, but hates kobolds with a great passion. He believes in the general good, and pays service to Torm, god of duty and service. He strives to do his duty by his station and his dead father, and in particular has strived to be a good negotiator, as he has had to settle disputes in the village while his father lived.

His brother Devis has apparently fallen into line with Regdar, perhaps as he too is the younger son. This is a great disappointment and concern, something that Rannexor knows he must deal with before taking on Regdar himself.

# SUBMISSIONS

I'm seeking submissions for the next issue of OOC. E-mail submissions to [publications@saga.org.nz](mailto:publications@saga.org.nz)

I am particularly interested in:

- articles about current campaigns
- cartoons
- reviews of new products

# WEBSITE

SAGA's website has had a make-over. The old granite block has gone, replaced with a burst clean, fresh, web-2.0y goodness. Go visit it at [www.saga.org.nz](http://www.saga.org.nz). Sign up and add your campaign, or comment on our latest events. The only thing limiting you is your imagination, and our bandwidth cap.

# COMICS COMPULSION

Check out their wide variety of products: these include comics, role playing games, war games and board games.

**Location:** 181 Manchester Street

**Website:** [www.comicscompulsion.co.nz](http://www.comicscompulsion.co.nz)

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# BOARD GAMING FUNDRAISER

**When:** Friday 12th of June

**Time:** 3-7:30pm

**Where:** LCR - UCSA

**Cost:** Gold coin donation

**What:** an afternoon of board games to help fundraise for new board games.