



ISSUE 9 / SUMMER 2011

irregular

TUTORIAL

DAVID
HEATHFIELD

A VERY BRITISH
CIVIL WAR
REDRUTH CAMPAIGN

TRIPLES 2011

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
COMPETITION

PLUS NEWS, REVIEWS
AND SHORT STORIES

THE
PULP
SPECIAL

CRIME! HORROR! MYSTERY! SCI-FI!

SECOND
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE!

11

Contents

Editorial	Nick Johnson & Jason Hubbard	3
IMP 2011 Show		4
Dungeons & Dragons Competition		5
Tablets in Wargaming	Alex Garbett	6
The Campaign for Redruth and Camborne	Jason Hubbard	8
On a Wing and a Prayer	Jason Hubbard	13
Tough Love	Joe Palumbo	17
Tuk Tuk	Will Kirkby	18
Pin Up	Will Kirkby	20
The Empty Mirror	Matthew Mella	21
Triples 2011	Alex Garbett	27
Artists Showcase	Brynn Metheney	30
A Means to an End	Alex Garbett	35
Oniwiban	David Heathfield	37
CD Base Terrain	David Barker	40
City Scum	Nick Palfrey	48
Action Dude	Guy Oxley	48
Exercises in Imagination & Scratchbuilding	Dave Barker	49
Force on Force	Dave Barker	50
Till Death Do We Part	Taylor Holloway	52



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Editorial

Nick

Welcome to the second anniversary issue of Irregular magazine. I know I said this last year, but I'm surprised at what we've managed to achieve in the two years we've been doing this. We've had covers from some amazing artists, we have our own popular comic strip in Tuk-Tuk, and we've interviewed some big names within the industry. Moving forwards we're going to look to improve on where we are now, so keep reading to see what we'll be doing.

So, what have I been up to since the last issue hit? Well, most of my hobby time has been tied up preparing for Irregular Miniature Paintfeast - or IMP - 2011. This will be the third year that Sheffield Irregulars have hosted the show, and we're looking for this one to be the biggest and best yet. Take a look at page 4 for more information.

My gaming has been mostly confined to our weekly roleplaying sessions, when the bank holidays that so liberally decorate the second quarter of the year haven't interfered. I'm getting to play a Mirumoto in a Legend of the Five Rings game run by a friend of mine, and the intrigue that arose is making for a tricky position for the group. Hopefully by the time you read this things will be running a bit more smoothly - and if the dice are with me, Mirumoto Ijiasu will be the Topaz Champion.

Having assisted at the Sheffield Kotei in April, I've started planning my entry for next year - even though a new edition of the Legend of the Five Rings collectible card game will have been released by then. However, I'm looking to put together a theme deck, rather than a competitive entry, and I'll be taking a look at my process next issue.

Jason

Hi folks, its been a busy last few months, what with the show season starting. We've been attending some local shows, which have included Triples in Sheffield and WAMP 2011 in Mansfield. Both shows were absolutely great, though Triples was hard work running the speed painting competitions.

So, what have I been up to? Well for starters, I've been busy setting in motion planning and development of a new business venture, a video production company called Dirty Goblin. On the gaming and painting front, things have slowed down due to a variety of issues. Recently I decided to start commission painting, and took as my first commission a 120mm Anime resin figure, a first for a me to paint such a large scale. In the next issue of Irregular I'll be letting you all know in an article how my first steps in to the world of commission painting are going.

I've also started writing a set of aerial combat rules with two friends, Rob Richmond and Alex Garbett, and hopefully you'll get to see an early version of these rules in the next issue. As Nick has mentioned, we're in full swing with regards to IMP 2011, and that's taking up quite a lot of time and effort by all those involved, and I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed so far.

What am I looking forward to over the next few months? Firstly, having played Wrath of Ashardalon by Wizards of the Coast, I'm looking forwards to playing the new board game Conquest of Nerath, a Risk-style strategy game set in the world of D&D. I've also got a copy of the new rules for A Very British Civil War, by Solway - I plan to run and play a Cornish Campaign with these, which I'll write up for Irregular - The Invasion of Devon.

That's all for now folks, enjoy this issue and we'll see you next time.



Irregular Miniature Paintfest 2011

Sunday July 17th,
10am - 4pm

Sheffield Irregulars, in association with Baccus 6mm and Patriot Games, is proud to present the Irregular Miniature Paintfest for it's third year. We've been working to improve the show each year, and this one is looking to be our biggest and best yet.

Having been based at Patriot Games for the last two years, we're moving to a bigger and better venue - The Workstation; an easy five minute walk from the train station and only five minutes from the bus station.

As in previous years, the main attraction (in our view), will be the third Golden IMP Awards, along with our infamous Speed Painting Challenge sponsored this year by West Wind Productions. The current category details are listed on the website and the range of categories is set to increase.

In addition to the painting competitions, we'll have participation and demonstration games, along with traders and two tournaments. The participation games look particularly interesting. They include the Battle of Towton - featuring 16,000 figures - and Gettysburg at a Gallop, where you can command one of the sides of the three-day battle in a mere 45 minutes.

We're also able to announce two seminar-cum-Q&A-sessions that we're going to be hosting on the day. After all, what's the use in having conference rooms if you're not going to use them?

The first is with the Polemos Design Team - these are the guys that write the 6mm rules systems sold by Baccus 6mm. They'll be fielding questions both about the games themselves, and the process used in developing them.

The second is with everyone's favourite Italian games designer, Alessio Calvatore, who I'm sure needs no further introduction. He'll be taking questions on his work over the last

fifteen years, be that with Games Workshop, Mantic, Warlord or even with his own games.

For more information, keep an eye on our website - <http://www.impevent.co.uk> - where we'll be making further announcements as we get closer to the event.





Dungeons & Dragons Competition

We have a copy of the D&D Red Box courtesy of Wizards of the Coast to give away. If you want the chance to win a copy of this game, then we'd like you to create a magical item.

Rules

The item can be absolutely anything from a weapon to potion, the choice is yours. For instance, you could create something as bizarre as a Panther arrow, whereby the arrow turns into a snarling panther just before it hits its target.

We need it in the same format as the item would be written in a D&D book or magazine article. The best of these will feature in an article in the next issue and the winner will receive a copy of the Red Box.

Get your thinking caps on and let your imagination go wild - the crazier the item the better.

All entries are to be submitted to irregularmagazine@gmail.com and if anyone wants to add an image please send us that in JPG format.

We look forward to receiving your entries.





Tablets in Wargaming

a device for the future

Tablets in Wargaming

a device for the future

Words & Images: Alex Garbett

In my professional life I work for a technology firm and the Blackberry Playbook came across my desk today to demonstrate and trial.

Similar to the Apple iPad which I think everyone has heard of, or has at least an idea of, the Playbook is a tablet device by which you use your fingers and the touch screen to interact with the operating system.

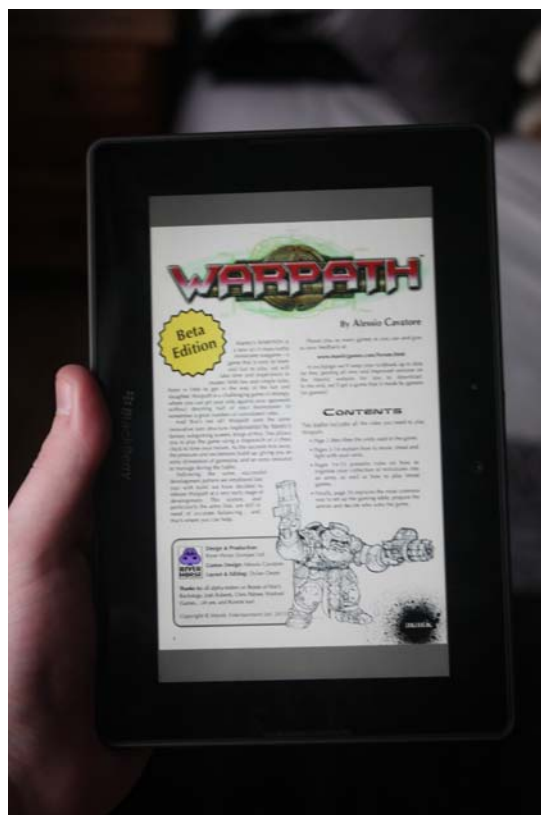
If you've never heard of a tablet device then, to quote Wikipedia:

"A tablet computer, or simply tablet, is a complete mobile computer, larger than a mobile phone or personal digital assistant, integrated into a flat touch screen and primarily operated by touching the screen. It often uses an onscreen virtual keyboard or a digital pen rather than a physical keyboard"

Unlike the iPad, in my opinion the Blackberry Playbook is full business platforms which can be integrated with my Blackberry Smartphone device and linked with Excel, Word, emails, Adobe software and more. This fits great into my work role and environment but I always try to get more out of something than just what it says on the tin!

Then it clicked – why not a tablet based solution for my and all our wargaming needs?

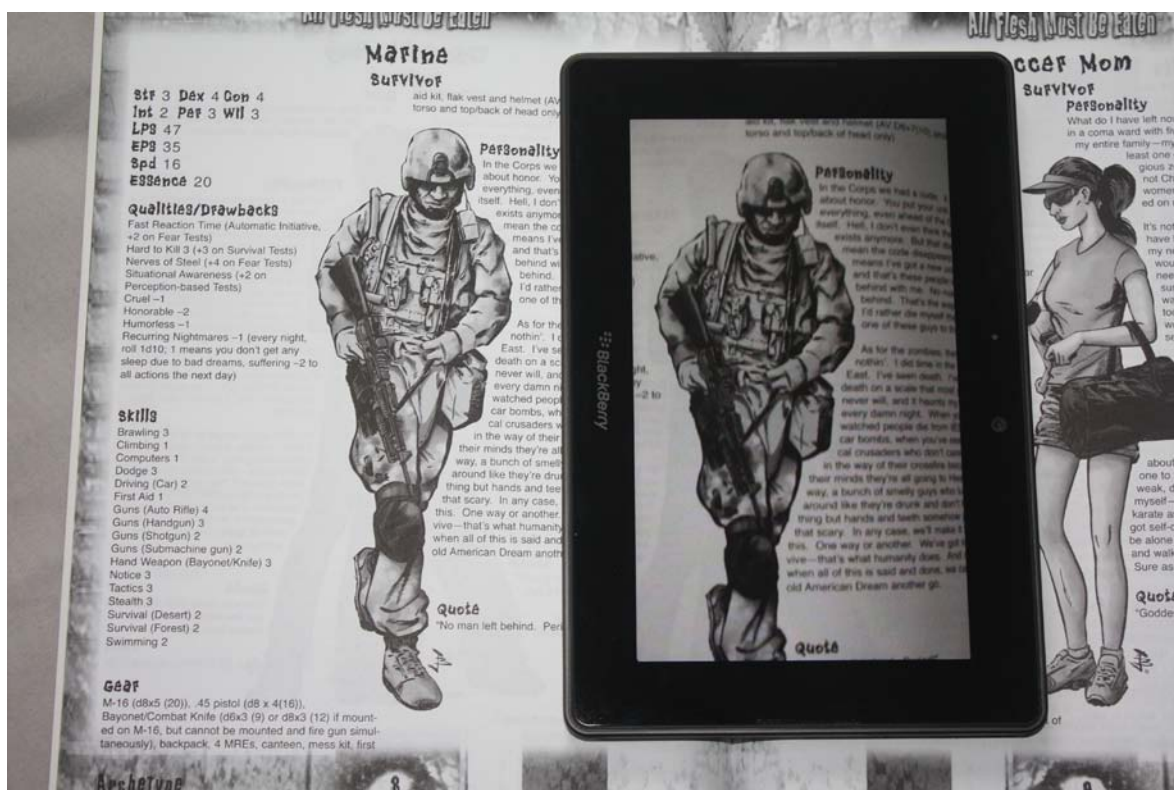
In my personal collection at home I must have over 30 rulebooks, some thick, some thin but the



one thing they have in common is that they take up space on the shelf, when travelling to gaming venues or worst of all table space (you know what I'm talking about!) and its very easy to spend a small fortune on them

I enjoy thumbing through a rulebook, codex or sourcebook. The sensation of a new book – I love the freshly printed smell and I really do appreciate the artwork, time, love, layout, background, painting, hobby and much much more that goes into them.

At work I'm very fortunate to have access to a large scale photocopier which can scan and convert



documents to PDFs. I'm very much against people ripping off rulebooks and publishing them online, a lot of hard work goes into these and are a labour of love, let alone very import for business and rule producers.

It is possible to find rulebooks in PDF formats all over the internet, heck some companies sell them as well as their hardback and softback counterparts.

I do believe though that, going forward, more companies should look to offer PDF and electronic downloads of rulebooks, army books and other expansions – they could be made as:

A single pay per copy, one time payment but you have access to it forever: a perpetual license

Subscription payment per year that covers all books released within that time along with the back catalogue

A download code included in the army book (possibly using the barcode on the book which goes through the till system or online website) which activates an electronic copy which you can download for free from the publisher's website

There is also the discussion of reduced overhead and printing costs would be negated with an electronic format and in turn one would hope cuts the

cost of rule and sourcebooks

Offering either the above or a similar solution to would negate the need or even reason for ripping a published book from the net, there also a way of engaging with the online community, a good way to offer updates and errata – just download the new version.

Perhaps even away offering a living rulebook with extra content and new missions added each quarter like Down Loadable Content for computer games?

For me I've ordered my BlackBerry Tablet which is released mid-June. I'll be getting the 64GB 3G version which gives me plenty of space for PDFs on the device, has a good battery life of up to 10 hours so will last most of the day/night when gaming and the 3G allows me to receive emails and stay updated on things while I'm out and about.

Tablets are here to stay!

The Campaign for Redruth & Camborne

A Very British Civil War

Words & Images: Jason Hubbard

Redruth

Redruth in Cornwall has become a stronghold for socialist factions but overall control has been sought by two factions, Redruth Redcoats and Redruth Socialist Brigade (Redshirts). Until now, this infighting has only been shown through political means, debates and rallies. Now its turned ugly with small skirmishes breaking out.

The Redshirts have made a direct challenge for over-all command of Redruth and all socialist factions in the surrounding area. This was been spurred on by the advice of the Russian military advisers attached to the Redshirts. They advised the command of the Redshirts that the socialist factions needed to be commanded by one group/commander if they were to make any significant advance towards a socialist-led Cornwall.

Early skirmishes have been nothing more than street fights after political rallies and speeches. These have been mainly led by younger members of opposing factions and have been nothing more than scuffles. That was until the skirmish following the speech made by a local right wing socialist, Alfred Penversey, who advocated direct military action against the Redshirts. He indicated they were merely puppets of their Russian masters. What happened has gone down in history as the battle for Penryn Street.

Redruth Redshirts (Socialist Brigade)

This faction has backing from Russia and as a result they have been able to equip themselves very quickly with modern weapons and equipment. Their uniform is brown with a red shirt or jacket, hence the name Redshirts. They have suddenly become a potent force within the South West, which is troubling the Kernow faction and the Royalists in Cornwall.

They have developed links in South Wales and further north. It is believed by Royalist agents that members from the Free Liverpool state, along with two former Russian officers, are training them in urban warfare. They have also built a smuggling operation between Redruth and Ireland. So far they have set up operations in Redruth taking control of the town and have implemented defences. They also send out patrols on a regular basis in the countryside around Redruth, clashing in small skirmishes with Royalist and British Union of Fascists (BUF) supporters.

The Battle of Penryn Street

A small group of Redshirt supporters attended the speech by Alfred Penversey. During the speech they jeered and shouted abuse at Mr. Penversey and this provoked some of the younger members attending to engage in scuffles. It was when Alfred accused the Redshirts of being Russian puppets that a shot

rang out. No one was injured, but following this a group of teenage supporters charged the area where the shot had sounded from.

As the teenagers charged into a group of Redshirt supporters two further gun shots were heard. Suddenly the scuffle broke apart as two teenagers were shot - one was on the floor dead with a bullet hole in his head, while the other had been hit in the shoulder. After the initial shock and pandemonium had broken out, there were shouts for the murderer to be hung. The Redshirts crowded around the shooter, but as the lynch mob moved closer to them the shooter fired in their general direction. Slowly they backed down the street as more supporters came to aid both sides.

It seemed that the incident might end there as the two sides didn't seem to want to clash. Then a petrol bomb was thrown towards the Redshirts from the socialists side. It was at this point that fighting broke out. The local socialists have always claimed that they didn't throw the petrol bomb and suspicions have always been that the Redshirts had engineered the situation to topple over into a full-blown military conflict.

Once the news had spread across the town that the Redshirts had killed a boy, socialists and non-socialists flocked to the side of the local faction. Soon fully armed faction members on both sides were arriving. Gunshots could be heard across the town as the battle for Penryn Street began. It raged for roughly three hours with several people killed and injured. The better armed Redshirts gained control of the situation and this gave them sufficient excuse to declare the commanders of the opposition criminals.

They quickly acted on the victory of Penryn, by declaring martial law in Redruth and taking command of the town. Other local factions either sided with the Redshirts or declared against them.

After Penryn Street

With the town now under martial law, the Redshirts slowly locked Redruth down looking for various faction commanders and those who they knew would give them trouble.

The Thresweld Siege

One such person was a local former military officer and current police sergeant William Thresweld. He had been informed that some Redshirts were on

their way to arrest him, so armed with a rifle and pistol, he holed himself up at his house waiting for them. As one of the Redshirts approached the building, William killed him with a head shot. He then fired four shots from his pistol at the group of Redshirts standing in the street hitting a further two. The remaining members quickly took cover and sent for assistance. William held them off for several hours until a well-armed group of Redshirts, under the command of Arthur Garrity, stormed the house under the cover of machine gun fire. Once inside the house Garrity was killed at close range by William before William himself succumbed to a hail of small arms fire.

Portreath

In Portreath, an unauthorised smuggling operation was being carried out, supplying arms to the socialist factions in Redruth and Camborne area. The authorities and BUF got wind of the operation. A Royalist infantry company, along with a section of BUF were sent in to shut the smugglers down.

A small unit of socialists had been stationed in Portreath to aid the smugglers. They intercepted the Royalists. The socialists managed to capture an officer and senior member of the BUF. Falling back to a small public house with the captured personnel, a stand-off ensued between the Royalists and socialists around the pub. This gave the smugglers time to disappear along the coast and avoid capture.

Whilst this was going on, some of the Portreath locals had armed themselves and organised a small attack on the BUF, who had taken it upon themselves to set up base in the local police station. A small skirmish broke out between the locals and BUF resulting in several deaths, mainly among the locals.

The Royalists decided to try and storm the Public House. The initial attack was unsuccessful and one of the hostages was killed in the process. The Socialists then tried to force their way through the besieging royalists using the surviving BUF hostage. This tactic worked until the BUF commander shot his own man who was being used by the socialists as a human shield. Then all hell broke loose and all sides opened fire. The intense fire fight lasted no more than 30 minutes and resulted in numerous deaths.

The Royalists had failed to shut the smuggling operation down, but they were now in control of Portreath. The smugglers moved their operation to Porthtown.



Camborne

With Redruth in the hands of the Redshirt Brigade, a core element of other local socialist factions relocated to Camborne, setting up a headquarters there. This leaves a stand-off between the Redshirts and rival socialist factions. The area between Redruth and Camborne has become a no man's land being fought over in small skirmishes.

This has allowed elements of the BUF to slowly move into the area setting up small bases of operation. Their prime task is to infiltrate the local population and create more chaos. Their prime goal is the destruction of all socialist factions without becoming embroiled in the local conflict. The hope is that the socialists will destroy themselves without the BUF having to do much and not be seen as the hand that wielded the axe. The intention will be to move into the area in the aftermath and restore order and stability.

Methodists Faction

During this period another faction rose within the borders of Cornwall, the Methodists. No longer able to tolerate the rise of the BUF and the Druid-led

Kernow factions, they decided to act against this intolerance and paganism. They also wanted to bring about prohibition within Cornwall, banning the demon drink and closing down all public houses. This, their prime goal, is something they've managed to do around the area of Helston and Hayle. They have modelled themselves along similar lines as the Anglican League, mobilising several small units within the southern area of Cornwall.

A leading figure within the faction, Thomas Trevelian, saw the incident at Redruth as an opportunity for the Methodists to make their mark on the political landscape of Cornwall. He has led a large group of fighters up to the area around Praze-An-Beebie establishing a base camp there. His aims and strategy are unknown at this point but it seems like they plan to make a impact on the situation that will make everyone sit up and take notice of the Methodists.



R.P.G.

On a wing and prayer

Confessions of a GM who should know better



On a Wing and a Prayer

Confessions of a GM who should know better

Words: Jason Hubbard

Images: Wizards of the Coast, Tamas Baranya, Peter Szabo Gabor & Maciej Zagorski



Well, another issue has come around, and it's been busy on all fronts since the Beasts of War issue. I've been looking at developing an abandoned city, where the inhabitants had to leave in a hurry, leaving most of their belongings behind. This would then attract thieves, treasure seekers and manner of adventurers and scum to scavenge the city. There would be just one minor issue, in the form of a beast which hunts in packs and has the ability to fly. These creatures prefer the dark, and so do most of their hunting at night. There are thousands of them living under the city, and they will happily feed on any dumb idiot brave - or foolish - enough to venture underground.

I decided to check out various cities around the globe that have been abandoned for a variety of reasons. This research was to gain some inspiration and generate some concrete ideas. These included the city of Agdam, Azerbaijan, which was once a thriving city of 150,000 people; the Kowloon Walled City was located just outside Hong Kong, China during British rule; and the medieval village of Craco, Italy which was built on a very steep summit for defensive reasons, in a dry and mostly vegetation-free area in the south of the country.

The aim was to develop a location that could be dropped into any campaign and which I could use in my campaign, but would be different from the usual dungeon and city locations. It would have the possibility of treasure seeking, gang fights and the usual



city encounters, along with monster hunts – more than enough possibilities to keep my adventurers interested for quite a number of sessions.

To help put together this location I decided I'd need to make use of the Monster Vault from the Dungeons and Dragons Essentials line. It comes packaged in a box, containing a 320 page book of monsters in a handy pocket size, a 32 page adventure, a double-sided battle map and 10 sheets of monster tokens.



I have to say the huge amount of monster tokens were really impressive, and are produced in the usual quality one would expect from Wizards of the Coast.

Personally, I prefer to use miniatures, which I can paint, but if you don't want to go to the effort of painting and don't have the pre-painted ones, then these are a great alternative. The map and adventure are a nice addition to the set, yet it's the book that interested me the most. The book is the usual compact pocket sized affair, with minimal fuss, and it's excellent to carry around to gaming sessions. The book features monsters from the first two Monster Manual books, so it has a nice collection of monsters suitable for all, newcomers and veterans alike. I personally would say this is a must have for any aspiring Dungeon Master, and it is well worth the money.

I needed to make use of this to populate the abandoned city with a selection of monsters. It was very useful in getting together a selection of creatures that may now dwell among the ruins, preying on unsuspecting adventurers (Ed: And probably those who suspect something, if they're not careful...).

The ruined abandoned city would have a very apocalyptic feel to it, very much in the vein of the abandoned city of Famagusta, Cyprus. It was fenced

off by the Turkish army after the 1974 invasion of the island. Prior to the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus, it was a modern tourist city. For the last three decades, it has been left as a ghost town, with many of the belongings of its former inhabitants left abandoned. This was the type of image I wanted to present within my location - the image that citizens fled in the wake of disaster, leaving behind them everything of value.

I also wanted some darker NPC's within the city and so I utilised the Heroes of the Shadow sourcebook. Having read through the book, I decided that a Vampire brothel owner would be an interesting character - with the brothel as a useful location - especially for potential encounters. So I created Niamah, a madam of the night with a taste for blood, who would be exquisitely beautiful and deadly all at the same time. Though I didn't want her to be evil, more a vampire with a conscience (Ed: Oh joy, another Angel wannabe). One of her pastimes would be to hunt the Cravken, a new type of beast who hunt in packs at night or in the dark places of the city, a race of creatures that arrived in the city in the wake of the disaster.

The Heroes of Shadow is in hardback and at 159 pages is a reasonable sized tome. It allows players to play anti-heroes - those who use the dark

powers against the fiends of darkness. For some this will allow them to explore a darker side, making role-play all that much more fun, as they can play an adventurer with an edgier feel. Let's face it, who hasn't toyed with the idea of playing a blood sucker, roaming the night and darkness looking for victims (Ed: Me?).

Now we've looked at my thought process behind this project, and the products that helped me build it, let's take a look at my new location.....

The Ruined City of Kasra Introduction

Kasra was once a bustling and thriving city, ruled by a council of mages. It was a city of experimental magic, and it was one of these experiments that caused the disaster that befell the city. The magical disaster reduced the city and the land around for 15 miles to a desert wasteland. The inhabitants were forced to leave the city, in the wake of a horde of bloodthirsty creatures, called Cravken, arrived.

The inhabitants left the city in a hurry, leaving many of their belongings and valuables. This has meant that the abandoned city of Kasra, has been a beacon to all those wandering the globe seeking treasure, along with some of the criminal scum from neighbouring cities. They scour the city for anything of value, whilst trying to stay out of the darkness where the Cravken hunt. Safety at night is being barricaded within a building, hoping that the Cravken won't be able to penetrate the defences constructed by those within.

Locations within the city Thorin's Tavern of Steel

Thorin arrived at the city in the wake of the disaster, when the first of the adventurers and scum started to descend on the city. He saw a need for a tavern. So he made use of the most central tavern left abandoned - the first thing he did was to reinforce the windows and exterior doors with steel, hence the name of his establishment. This was all done to prevent the Cravken from breaking in. Thorin charges a rather steep price for an overnight stay in the tavern, safe from the Cravken.



Deep Red Delight (Niamah's Brothel)

Niamah set up the brothel to cover up some of her vices. She took advice from Thorin and also utilised steel or iron on all exterior windows and walls. Niamah charges extortionate prices for her girls, especially for the comfort and safety of staying overnight. She also dabbles in various other criminal activities, such as drug dealing and smuggling.

Next issue I'll take a closer look at the location along with providing NPC stats, creatures and more locales around the city.





JOE PENUMBRO



Big Red Tram Company.

Hydrabad
Route: 7b

Kingspire/
The Low Bazaar.

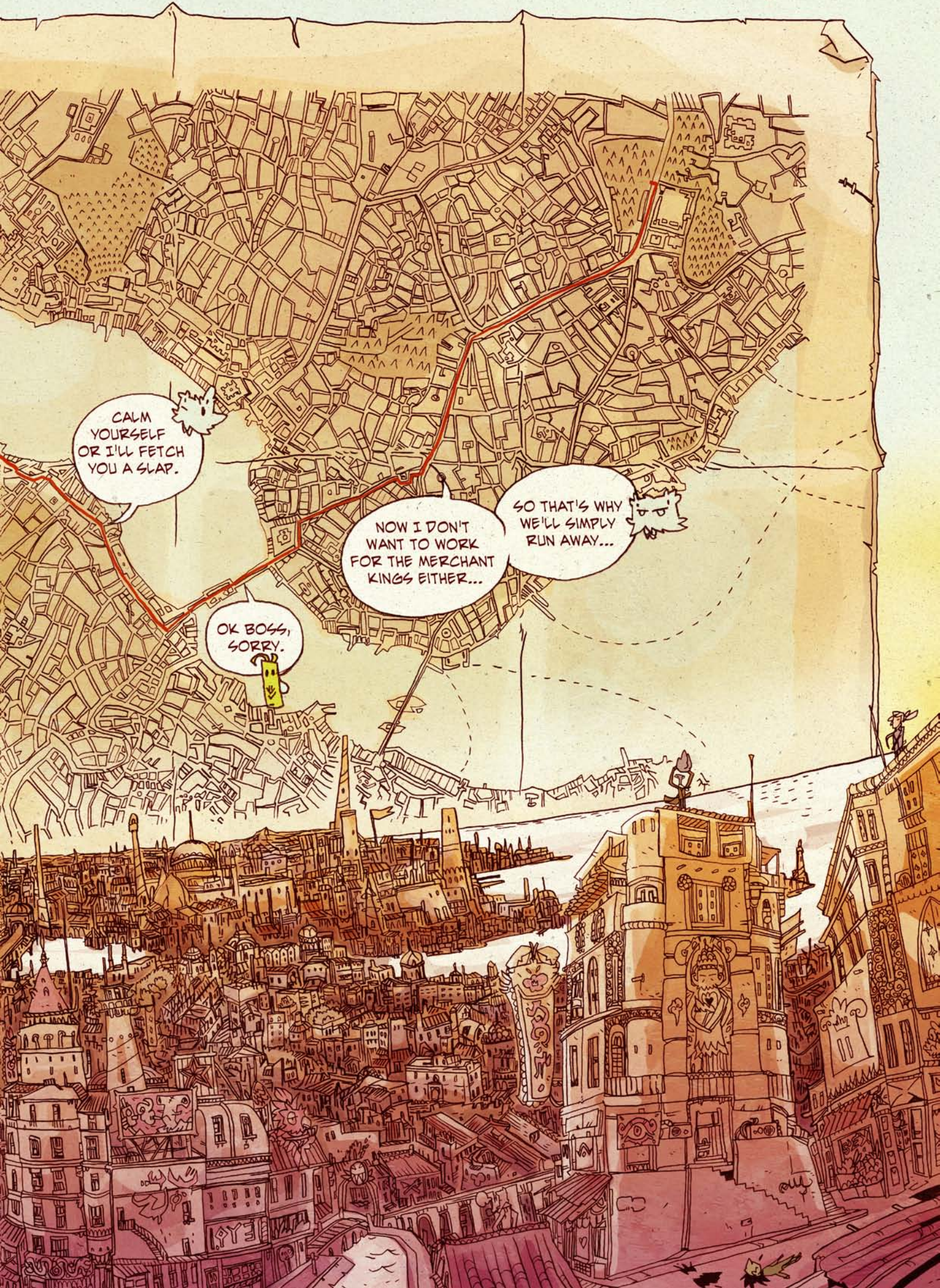
HE EVEN
BOUGHT THIS TRAM
SERVICE JUST TO
SHUT IT DOWN SO
HE CAN KEEP IT IN
"MINT CONDITION."

BUT THAT
WAS THE
COLLECTOR KING,
THE GUY'S A
NUTTER.

WELL
FOR ONE
WE KEEP CALM
KINGSTON.

OH GODS,
WHAT DO
WE DO.





CALM
YOURSELF
OR I'LL FETCH
YOU A SLAP.

NOW I DON'T
WANT TO WORK
FOR THE MERCHANT
KINGS EITHER...

SO THAT'S WHY
WE'LL SIMPLY
RUN AWAY...

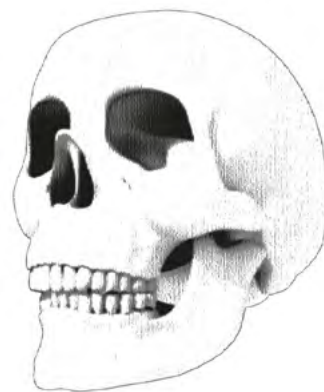
OK BOSS,
SORRY.



SHORT STORY

THE EMPTY MIRROR

A MACABRE TALE OF MURDER AND
SUPERNATURAL MYSTERY



THE EMPTY MIRROR

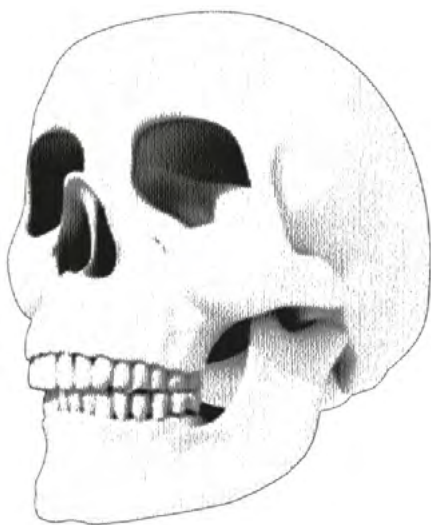
A MACABRE TALE OF MURDER AND
SUPERNATURAL MYSTERY

Words & Images; Matthew Mella

The old drunk struggles as I straddle his chest, my left hand tight around his throat. He thrashes against the cold cobbles of the alley, grasping for salvation. It does not come; This place is as far from the early morning bustle as I could find. I press against his stubbled neck with all my weight, losing my hat as I lean closer to the wretch. For a moment I worry that it may become sodden in the puddles, but then I smell the stink of spirits on the man's failing breath and my mind returns to my gruesome endeavour. Sweat drips from my brow. My teeth are tight and bare like a dog. The old wound in my left leg throbs, goading me as I take his life. His face greys as he gasps and rattles, lungs empty. It is dreadful. The thumb and forefinger on my right hand force his eyelids open – an awkward task that becomes easier as the fight subsides. He will see me – he has to see me, otherwise the risk of conducting this experiment in daylight hours will be in vain. He frees an arm that flails limply towards my face, but it is a token effort from a beaten man. The drunk's life evaporates. I stare him in the eye as his fear gives way to peaceful vacuity.

Only silence follows. The anticlimax stalls me in horror, but I need to work quickly on the second part of my grim work. Although the morning fog conceals the alley and all is quiet, I am terrified of being disturbed while I perform the surgery. Besides, I wish to be away from this dead thing as soon as possible. I remove the tools from my bag: a silver spoon stolen from the kitchen of my landlady and my shaving razor. And it is with these primitive instruments that I carefully remove the man's eyes – first the left, then the right. I place them delicately in a small silk bag and slowly pull the thin drawstring shut. For a moment, I consider the bag and its fragile contents with reverence and almost triumph, but these are not trophies. They are worth far more to me.

I pull myself off the drunk and hastily grab my battered briefcase. My gut twists as my fear begins to rise, and I fumble as I store my things away. The drunk's head lolls to one side as I leave, a slow line of blood trickling from the pit where his left eye once was. I pray that the windows to his soul will become the mirrors to mine.



I developed my "affliction" six months ago following one of my dark moods. The monstrous clouds that fell heavily over my head and insides incapacitated me, and I spent their duration caged in my lodgings. One evening I raised myself to look in the small, cracked mirror above my bed, intending to curse myself and my maladies or some such self-punishment. And there it faced me – the void. That horrifying empty glass, hollow, forsaken and dark where my familiar features should be. I exclaimed, recoiling from the impossible absence. My reflection was no more. I panicked, looking frantically about myself and confirmed that I could still see my own body. It occurred to me in my confusion that I may be dead and perhaps this was the afterlife. I ran into the street and accosted some stranger – a stout lamplighter – to confirm that I could be seen by others. The man pushed me aside and frowned at my agitated state. It seemed that I was visible to the human eye and very much part of the physical world, however my reflection was absent. In mirrors, windows and even the puddles on the dark street all that stared back at me was emptiness.

At first, I denied my affliction. I turned my gaze rather than face the void, but my heart guarded hopes that I would at any moment

raise my head and see my image returned. Every nervous glance was received with the same nothingness. Through experiments, I ascertained that I could not be captured by photography. When the photographs developed I was nowhere to be seen, rejected by paper and glass. After months, my memories of my own features began to grow indistinct. The idea that they had in fact changed in some way began to disturb me, as did the idea that my recollections had become warped. I no longer knew for certain who I was to the world. It was shortly after this episode that I devised my experiment.

My father was a scientific man – something which I myself aspired to but never achieved. In a fit of despair caused by young and foolish heartbreak, I abandoned my studies and joined the army. I spent a short time in service until I received my leg injury – the injury that stabs at me as I go about my murderous business. I hope in some way Father would be proud of me now, that he would see the logic in my experiments, and that he would have some understanding and pity for what I am compelled to do. It was, after all, science that set me on this journey. I had read that during the Jack the Ripper case of last year the police photographed the eyes of the murderer's victims. A theory existed that the last image that a dying person sees is preserved on the corpse's retina and the police hoped the image of the killer was recorded there. I reasoned that if the human eye can detect my presence, then maybe at that moment of death my elusive form may be captured in the same way. I laughed so hard when the idea first occurred to me. It was crazed and perfect and the only hope I had. The hysteria gave way to a dark obsession, and I began to plan my first experiment.

This drunk was not the first, nor was he the second. I was interrupted during the first (a woman of low morals) and the second (another drunk) had looked away at the vital

moment. Those occasions met with crushing failure, but not this time. This time, all conditions were met.

As I leave the alley, two figures emerge from between the curtains of fog. I know instantly from their silhouettes that they are police officers and I avoid their gaze as I walk straight by. They pay me no attention but I know if they turn down the alley and find the cadaver they will realise my involvement and give pursuit. My leg still throbs from the struggle to subdue the drunk and I know my only chance of escape is to gain as much ground as possible – to try and lose them in the shrouded streets. Walking stiffly and slowly, I glance over my shoulder and see the two officers turn down the alley. My heart stops as I prepare to run. I must time my escape perfectly; run too soon and I will arouse suspicions, but too slowly and I will still be here when they find the body. Some other part of me takes

control as my nerve breaks, and I feel myself stumbling forward through the mist, not knowing if the police are in pursuit.

My legs feel like wheels spinning beneath me as I tumble across the damp streets. Pain stabs at my left thigh again, but I do not slow. I am a spectator to this scene. I enter the market area by the docks where florists and fruiterers are unpacking their wares in the dim morning glow. Throwing myself behind a flower cart in an attempt to stay hidden, I hear the whistle and cries of the policemen in pursuit. I stop for a moment and peer

through the slats of the cart. They see me. The whistle blows again as they push through traders. I resume my dash and instinct guides me through the maze of alleys and yards. A left, then a right, then a left, then another right. I hope to lose my hunters but still that whistle blows behind me. My lodgings are close. I pray I am undetected as I slip inside and fly up the stairs to my room. I shut the

door and listen. They have followed, and all I can do is wait.

The door swings open as the two policemen surge into the room. I stand rooted in the middle of the threadbare carpet with nowhere to run and no chance of overpowering them. I stare unblinkingly as the officers look under my bed and in my battered and split wardrobe. They ignore me, as if I am not here. They carefully scrutinise the things that lay on the top of my drawers and eventually locate my bag. They neither recognise nor try to open it. "He's not here." Says one, and they leave the room with the same whirlwind that brought them in.

Dizzy from the chase, I slump on my dilapidated mattress. A quiet, exhausted moment passes before I leap to my feet with shock, realising why the police officers let me be. A feeling of sickness consumes me as I examine myself and realise my disappearance is complete. Now not even the human eye can detect me. I look down at my hands, arms and body – all I see is the void. As I listen to the footsteps hurrying across the next landing, a movement catches my eye in the cracked mirror above my bed. With trepidation I edge toward it and there to greet me is the face of an old friend - hollow and troubled features that I had not seen in six months. I move closer until my nose touches that of my once-errant reflection. We laugh, tormented but reunited.

The End.

Community

Triples 2011

Artist's Showcase
Brynn Metheney



A Means to an End





Triples 2011

Words & Images: Alex Garbett

Each year the wargames show Triples is hosted in the city of Sheffield. The show lasts two days and celebrated its 30th birthday this year. Triples is organised and administered by the Sheffield Wargames Society (www.sheffieldwargames.co.uk/) In the past the show was located in the Sheffield University Octagon Centre but in recent years has outgrown this venue and transferred to the Sheffield Institute of Sport, which is a great improvement in the size of the show and accessibility for all. The event at its core is a huge trade show and has a host of stores, traders and activities including large participation games, a bring & buy stand and a speed-painting event.

This year the show was held on Saturday 21st & Sunday 22nd of May and featured many amazing gaming tables full of great painted miniatures; re-enactment groups; and over 50 different traders and stands specialising in miniatures and gaming from all eras in all different scales - with the terrain to match!

www.gzg.com
www.darkrealmminiatures.co.uk/
www.hasslefreeminiatures.co.uk/

The Sheffield Irregulars also had a stand at Triples showing off some of the work of our budding painters of all ages, and we also ran and administered the Triples 2011 speed painting competition. Jenni from Derbyshire won the speed painting

competition and was presented with her trophy by Jason on behalf of Triples and Sheffield Irregulars. I spent my two days photographing the painting competition, display tables and huge participation games. I also managed to have a good long chat with several different miniature companies and traders, in particular with Dark Realm Miniatures – their plans and projects, future releases and more – and more importantly treating myself to some miniatures and terrain, in the process spending a little too much money.

Triples 2012 is being planned as I type this article and next year will also be including a full professional painting competition with multiple categories so keep your eyes peeled for more information.







Brynn Metheney

Concept Art & Illustration

<http://about.me/brynnmetheney>



How did you get interested in Illustration?

I started drawing when I was a kid and knew I'd always be into it. I didn't know that I'd be doing it for a living though. When I saw Star Wars for the first time I knew I wanted to work in the film industry. When I got into high school I really started to focus on drawing and painting as a career. Animals were always at the centre of everything though. I love drawing animals and creatures! They are what has kept me interested on my journey as an artist.

What are the most important parts of any image?

Composition and lighting. It can really make a difference to the image. It's always a learning process though. I know I'm learning more about both with every image I produce. Of course after that is drawing. You have to have a solid drawing.

What methods do you use in your work?

I was originally trained in pencil and watercolor. I work digitally now but I follow the same principles. I usually begin with a pencil drawing. Now, I start and finish everything on the computer. Once I have my pencil in I'll add in color and textures underneath the pencil layer. Then I'll add in opaque highlights and atmosphere on top.

What size/scale do you prefer to work at?

Even though I work digitally, I usually keep my canvas around 9 x 12 and larger. I like to make prints of my work so reproduction size is very important, especially because there isn't a physical copy outside of the computer.

Tell us about the character on the cover of issue 8 Beasts

I went through quite a few versions for this cover. I had originally thought I'd create a caravan of enormous beasts of burden heading out to war. After sketching it out, I realised I really wanted to focus on one figure. I wanted to make it more solemn and desolate with destruction behind the figure, perhaps hinting at a battle that had been fought. The figure on top started out as human but I ended up making her into some sort of beast too. I wanted the mount to be mammalian and for it to be as formidable a foe as its handler.

Who and what influences you and your work?

Like I mentioned earlier animals and nature are big influences in my work. I have a great support group of people that I went to college with and know online. They always encourage me and keep me pushing forward. Some of my favorite artists include Frank Frazetta, Joseph Clement Cole, Terry Whitlatch, Mark "Crash" McCreery, Arthur Rackham,





Sabrina Ward Harrison, Chuck Close, Beth Cavener Stichter and Winslow Homer to name a few. It's kind of an "all over the place" list but they all appeal to me.

Do you have a preferred genre - fantasy/historical etc?

I really enjoy sci-fi and fantasy. I've always loved creating things that don't exist, especially creatures and monsters.

Are you a gamer?

I suppose I'm a casual gamer only because I'm too busy to be really hardcore. I played lots of games through high school, video games mostly. I've only recently got into card games and role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. I like puzzle games a lot too.

Is there anyone you would like to work with/for in the future?

I'd really like to do more creature work in film. I've only recently been able to work in it a bit. I've always wanted to work in a studio of some kind. I'd like to work for games as well. Wizards of the Coast has always been a goal. It would be nice to publish my own book at some point too!









Given the global financial crisis in recent months, money just isn't what it used to be!

Due to the mistakes of some in specific places it's much tighter for us all across the globe. With ever increasing costs in the world – oil, metals, foodstuffs – we're all seeing an increase in the price of goods we buy and wages aren't rising to meet this demand.

Historically during recessions, for example – and Jason will back me up on this one - more people attend the cinema as a form of cheap easily accessible entertainment.

I went out to the cinema recently for what was supposed to be a cheap night out with friends; this was a very good night and X-men First Class is a work of brilliance in my opinion but all in all it was a very expensive one!

- Cinema ticket £7.60
- Regular popcorn and a regular Coke £7.20
- Bottle of water £2.60
- Travel costs £3.70
- Food at a restaurant before the film £5.50

As you can see from the above at the end of the night I couldn't believe that I'd blown £50 – and this is just for myself, it is scary to think of how much it would be if I was paying for my friends or kids or other family members!

Looking back on the above it does seem a scary

A means to an end

Words & Images: Alex Garbett

thought to blow £50 on a single night out. Another side of me - possibly most of you - however would spend £50 on miniatures in a heartbeat and as we all know £50 doesn't get what it used to!

As price rises within the hobby come more into effect I'm considering re-visiting several strategies to help my hobby fund itself, by selling on eBay some of my collection but also taking up my 3 colour brush again and turning out pre-painted miniatures, to a high table top standard, to sell back into the community.

I know the above doesn't appeal to everyone, and I have some friends which own every miniature they have ever brought, but given the aforementioned price rises I feel I also need to consider my spending and gaming habits going forward too.

For me now, long gone are the days of building massive hundred plus miniature and tank armies. Partially due to the increased cost of buying, in my eyes, the same item again and again - but at a higher cost - but mainly due to the financial commitment needed to construct, model, paint, collect and build an army.

Recently on forums people have been calculating the cost of producing armies in the price rises from different miniature companies across the globe and the costs are staggering to consider!

Some rises aren't as big as others, and it does beg the question why there is such a difference between

different companies, but at the end of everything and not to devalue the hobby it's the cost of plastic/metal/resin toy soldiers – let's be realistic!

I'm hoping that the reselling market is strong at this time – my thoughts being that there must be people in my position wanting to buy and collect new miniatures and play new games but struggling to accommodate the cost of buying new, so they're looking to find a middle ground and buy some brand new and some second hand from the likes of eBay and other independent stores which sell second-, third- or even fourth-hand goods

This also then brings me onto another idea to cut costs – proxy models. Like it, love it or hate it, some people don't even know what to make of it!

Over the last few years more and more companies have been coming online showing some fantastic new miniature ranges in plastic.

A few which come to mind are the likes of Mantic, Plastic Solider, Perry Miniatures, Victrix, and Warlord. These companies and others are throwing out kits, which are packed with miniatures and not just accessories bits out at great price and incredible prices: ratios of like £20 for anything up to 40 figures – jaw-dropping, isn't it?

This then brings me nicely back to alternatives and proxying models.

Last week - having seen Wings of War being played many times - a group of us got out Wings of War at our local gaming club (www.sheffieldwargames.co.uk). We didn't have full access at the time to all the pre painted planes produced so just used the cards from the set. There were lots of laughs and we had a great time playing.

After the game and over a pint and some crisps we discussed the ideas of getting into it and buying some planes to go with Wings of War, making it part of the core games we play on a regular basis – “Do we go WW1 or do we go WW2?”

It was from this point that we evolved a new idea, so stay tuned for more information!

Back to the planes and miniatures for Wings of War - Jason remembered a trader at Triples by the name of Tumbling Dice (www.tumblingdiceuk.com) who offer 1/600 Historical metal planes for practically



nothing, and after a greater look into their range which is huge we all decided to purchase from them.

Instead of shelling out roughly £10 per plane (Which are really nice and I will own some of them one day – they're on my “to buy” list) on the official miniatures we got away with £1.80 for 6 model planes which means with a little tweaking we can have bigger games for a greatly reduced costs!

With all the above examples I hope everyone isn't too put off by the prices rises we're seeing come in, or which have done already, which have increased the cost of entry. I hope you've also seen that with a little creativity you can make the hobby, and cost of entry to games, cheaper or make money by selling your older stuff so you have more cash available in your wallet for other things - like buying more toy soldiers.....





Oniwiban Tutorial



CD Base Terrain



Oniwiban Tutorial

Words & Images: David Heathfield

Stage 1



First off undercoat the model - don't spray too many times and keep the can at a distance. You are looking for a dusting rather than a thick layer of paint. Any other areas can be got at after the spray has dried with some black paint.

I used blue-tac to cover the areas that would be glued later.

Stage 2



Next apply your base coat, in this case a bright pale green as we need to paint up almost to white - this would be more difficult to do, and give a poorer result, if we painted up from a dark colour.

You can see the paint on my palette and how thin it is. I used around three to four coats to get a nice flat finish. Don't be tempted to apply too much paint at once, keep it thin and even.

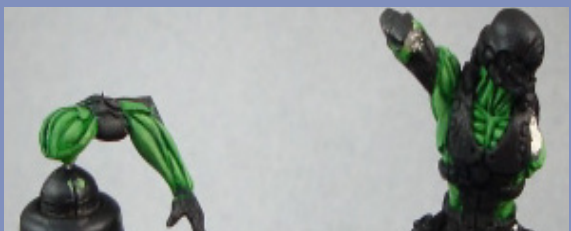
Stage 3



Next we need to shade this green. It may seem stupid to go back to a dark colour rather than painting up from one but it will give a superior finish and make blending easier.

I shaded down with a few washes of Dark Angels Green seen here on the palette. Apply this slightly thinner but in larger amounts and let it flow into the details.

Stage 5



Also a bit of colour theory can help but is not essential. For example here I know that green is slightly recessive to yellow and so yellow works well as a highlight.

Now we can begin adding white.

Stage 4



From here, using the opacity of the watered down paint we work back to the first colour with thin coats, aiming to draw the paint toward the brightest areas which will give us a natural blend. This is basically the technique that will be used for most layers from here on in to blend up to the highlights.

When highlighting aim to use colours in between your darkest and brightest colour instead of just adding white. It adds so much and tricks the eye when looking at the mini. It's also smoother than just adding white or one lighter colour to another. Aim for slightly different hues.

Here I start by adding yellow to the green.

Stage 6



Try to learn to be able to go from one colour to another as quickly as possible while keeping it smooth as possible, you don't want to spend all day mixing highlights little by little but then you don't want a chalky finish either.

With areas like this (larger areas or skin) you usually need to break them up slightly which is done with glazes of other colours. On this miniature, however, it has been kept to a pretty even colour all over (yellow/green) so I am going to use a glaze of yellow to soften the highlights and homogenise the colours beneath before re-highlighting the lightest points.

Stage 6 Continued

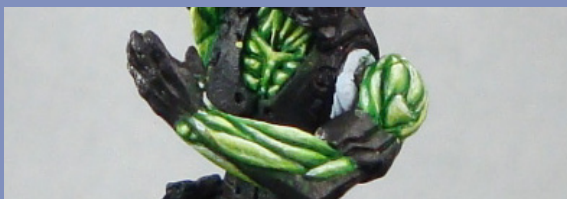


Hopefully you can see how this evens out the whole area. Sadly I was working in bad light at this point and kept fussing over the model - never fuss, just move on, as you will only make it worse!

I took on the next big area, the trousers. Usually I would use a dark blue/grey in the mix on black but I wanted to keep the model free of other colours and stick to yellow + black as much as possible.

By slowly adding grey to your black and working up through two or three greys you need to draw thin lines toward the edges of the cloth where the light would hit. You can then blend back afterwards and smooth out any mistakes.

Stage 7



The freehand is just a case of being careful and neat. No tricks here I'm afraid :P

At this point I began working a bit sporadically here and there - this is not a good idea, as you should tackle areas as they need to be done not as you feel like. So anyway it skips a bit here but I still get to explain the other areas.

Non-Metallic Metal (NMM): There are lots of ways to paint NMM, I suggest trying them all and seeing what you like best. Rackham's Cry Havoc magazines had some great articles concerning NMM and I advise to try and get hold of or download some.

Stage 7 Continued



I'll show you an easy way I use that's foolproof. I start with Dark Seagreen (VMC). To this I add very thin layers of light grey (VMC), slowly drawing it to the edge to create a smooth blend. Then I add a fine line of thinned white to the edge before going to almost a dot of pure white to make it look crisp and tidy. Now its a case of working in the same way but in the opposite direction using black.

And there you go - simple NMM. This can be glazed with blues or other recessive colours toward the shaded areas to create effects. I quite like adding dark blue glazes to mine.

Remember that most of these stages are fussed over, painting isn't a science and I didn't get these results first time around.

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By slowly adding grey to your black and working up through two or three greys you need to draw thin lines toward the edges of the cloth where the light would hit. You can then blend back afterwards and smooth out any mistakes.

Stage 8



Lastly I'll show you how I painted the sword. It's the same technique as the elbow but I used the first few coats to find an area I was comfortable with being hit by the light. Once again I fussed over it for a bit but there were essentially only these steps involved.

At the end you see it goes green where the reflection is, this is just a glaze of green over that area and the tone of the colours underneath the glaze give us an instant light and dark which I picked out just a touch more using black and white. The glazing over light/dark tones is known as under painting and is a whole technique of painting on its own. There is a good step by step of an under painted lion somewhere on the net.



Make yourself an imaginative base or plinth (or steal one of Angels ;) and you're done.

Mr_Scream

CD Base Terrain

Over the last few years I have been trying to find different ways in which to easily make cheap and effective looking scenery for my tabletop miniatures games. For me, such games are usually either wargames or role-playing games, or something that sits somewhere in between these two.

It has been a couple of years since I first saw the idea of using an old, unwanted CD as the base for tabletop terrain and I spent quite some time itching to make some for myself, until finally I had cleared enough of the other pressing gaming and modelling projects from my painting desk that I was able to have a go. I was instantly impressed, both by the speed at which you can build the scenery and with how good they look when they're done, and when the Editors asked me to write this article on making them, I was more than happy to make some more!

I should probably note at this point that using a CD as the basis for terrain will likely ruin it (at least in terms of its original use!) and you'll not be able to play it again – so don't use your favourite CDs for this, or worse, the favourite CDs of your loved ones. When I was asked by my wife, who is invariably very tolerant of my gaming and painting hobby, what I was doing with old CDs, I foolishly joked about using her old A-Ha CDs for making terrain and I ended up making my own tea that evening!

For the CD terrain piece that I made for this article, I wanted a piece of terrain that I could use to represent either rough ground, or a small patch of woods. This meant I'd need some trees on the base, but not too many, so that there would still be space to fit miniatures in between them on the surface of the CD base.

Words & Images: David Barker

Stage 1



So, the first thing I needed was an old CD that wasn't needed any longer. I have a whole pile of these that used to come with computer magazines, or were even put through your door as junk mail for a time. If you're not as old as me, or not as much of a hoarder, you can buy packs of CDs quite cheaply from the supermarket that will do the job just as well.

Following the recommendations of others, I have always glued my scenery on the label side of the CD. This is because glues are supposed to stick better this side - although I've never personally tried sticking things on the shiny side of CDs.

The final problem to overcome with the basic CD in front of me, at least as far as it becoming a scenic item is concerned, is that it has a hole in the middle. I tackled this problem with a small off-cut of thin card, glued over the hole. One thing I did learn here, however, was that even though I was covering up the hole, the contact adhesive glue that I used to stick the card in place can leak through to whatever is underneath – fortunately for me, this was my modelling desk, but I probably should have had something disposable underneath the CD as it was drying!

Stage 2



For this project, I raided my spares box for some old jungle trees that I think originally came from everyone's favourite high street wargames shop, but that I had picked up second hand in a trade. They had already been put together - fairly badly, I have to say - by someone else, but I selected the three most likely of these, and glued these in place in an attractive pattern around the CD with the same contact adhesive that I used to stick the card to the CD.

When you're making your own, however, you don't need to limit yourself to second-hand trees. Large stones from the garden, sections of twigs, bits of plasticard and scrap from your bits box, resin scenery or even baking accessories are all things that can make for good looking CD terrain. It's a very cheesy thing to say, but the only limit is your imagination!

Once I had my trees glued place, I left it overnight for the glue to dry and make a full strength bond, before coming back the next day to break it off my painting desk, where the glue had seeped through the hole in the CD.

Stage 3



The next phase was adding the sand and stones that would cover the rest of the base. Originally I had been planning to use just fine sand over the whole of the CD to make an earthy effect. However, whilst thinking about it overnight, I decided to use some of the fine smooth stones I have in my small collection of basing materials - they were originally intended for a fish tank somewhere, until I 'liberated' them! I added these in three distinct patches, to represent stony areas of ground that would break up the CD terrain a little more.

In gluing these in place, I used regular white PVA glue, rather than the contact adhesive that I had used for the larger features. I chose PVA glue because it is easier to spread over the surface of the CD than contact adhesive would have been and it also has a faster drying time, just a couple of hours, meaning I could get on and prime the CD in the same evening that I glued the stones in place.

There can be a bit of a drawback when using PVA glue on a CD base, though. If you've cut the surface of the CD base in any way with a craft knife or tried scoring the CD in order to create a better surface to glue onto, this really does backfire when you use PVA glue as well. I'm not really sure of the physics or chemistry of it, but it causes the CD to bend and warp as it dries, leaving you with a decidedly wobbly and not very useful terrain CD.

Stage 4



Once the PVA glue for the sand and stones had dried, I undercoated the CD and all of the things now stuck to it, with a black spray primer. I chose black primer for this piece because I knew that in painting the stones and the sand I would be using a lot of drybrushing and the black could be left in the deepest recesses without it looking odd when it was all finished.

Because I wanted to make sure I had this overall cover, I was a little heavier with the primer that I would normally be and the following day I also touched up any little patches that I had missed with a brush.

Stage 5



Next, I was onto what I find to be perhaps the most boring part of the process, which is drybrushing the whole base, first with dark brown, then with a brown mid-tone and finally with a yellow ochre colour.

Rather than using miniature paints for this, which can add up to being quite expensive for the amounts that are needed for a terrain CD, I decided to use craft paints, which are substantially cheaper. Typically I find that 500ml of craft paint is about the same price as a small pot of acrylic paint for miniatures and I use these craft paints quite a lot when I'm making terrain and scenery.

As I was drybrushing these colours on, I didn't really wait to ensure that each colour was fully dry before applying the next coat. This ended up working pretty well to help each of the layers of colour blend together a little and I was rather happy with the final earthy effect of it all.

Stage 6



The next thing I did was to pick out the fine smooth stones that I had glued onto the base. I wanted these to be more stone-like than their current earth colours, so I chose two different greys, a mid grey and a light grey (old Citadel paints, if you really want to know – Codex Grey and Ash Waste Grey). Again, I drybrushed these two colours onto the stones, leaving just a little bit of the browns and black showing through underneath.

Stage 7



Now I had to tackle the trees. Up until now, I had been using either my ½" or 1" flat brushes for all of that drybrushing and applying PVA glue, but now it was time to find one of my proper detail brushes – although not to give up completely on the drybrushing quite yet!

The old Games Workshop jungle trees have quite a pronounced ball of roots at the base, so to emphasise this, I lightly drybrushed them with a little Bleached Bone, just to make them distinct from the earth colour of the rest of the base.

For the trunks of the trees, I felt that brown was still a sensible colour (because I didn't want this terrain CD to be used only for sci-fi!) but I wanted to have a different colour brown from the ones I've used already. So I painted them first with a tan colour, Games Workshop Desert Yellow, which I had thinned just a little bit with water. I didn't worry too much about neatness and there were little patches and streaks of black visible when I'd done, but that just gave the trunks some nice variation, but to bring the colour of them back to what I really wanted, I applied a thin wash of Burnt Umber acrylic ink which gave them all the final tree-trunk colour that I wanted.

This just left the leaves to be painted. I went back to the flat brushes and drybrushing for this task and drybrushed first with Games Workshop Dark Angels Green which is a nice dark green over the black undercoat and then finished them off with Revell Leaf Green which, as you might expect, is a great colour for foliage!

Stage 8



I left the paint on the trees to dry thoroughly before the final step of applying some patches of flock, because loose flock has a tendency to stick to anything at all that is damp on a model and I wanted all of the flock on the base, not on the trees.

This was just a simple matter of applying some random patches of PVA glue and applying a couple of types of flock to these patches – a grass flock and a railway modelling static grass were what I chose this time. In applying the PVA glue, I paid particular attention to hiding some of the straight lines that were still visible from the card I used to cover the whole in the middle of the CD.

Finally, I've included here some pictures of a couple of different terrain CD pieces that I have made. Whether you want to use them as rough ground for your Space Marines to cross, patches of jungle to be explored by colonial adventurers or an alien death trap ready to eat Starfleet's finest redshirts, I hope you'll consider having a go at this really quite straightforward technique for making small, versatile terrain pieces!





Reviews

City Scum

East Riding Miniatures



Action Dude (GG26)

East Riding Miniatures

Exercises in
Imagination &
Scratchbuilding

Force on Force



City Scum

East Riding Miniatures

Words & Images: Nick Palfrey

At first glance I thought that these miniatures were ok, though nothing special - the sculpting was good, and I liked the poses. They were well cast for metal miniatures, just the odd mould line to clean up. They didn't come with bases, just the little moulded one that came attached to help it stand up, so I decided to mount them on some two pence pieces, and mould them in with some Milliput, and then put sand over the top.

When it came to painting they were a blast and nice and simple to paint. I went for quite a generic palette for all of them, and they took a couple of sessions of 10 minutes each to finish.

In conclusion, they were great as gaming pieces, not up to scratch to display standard, but nice nonetheless, and for £5.00 they're great value for money!



Action Dude (GG26)

East Riding Miniatures

Words & Images: Guy Oxley



This is a collection of four figures all based around a well-known actor who has been playing heroes since 1968.

When I first received these figures I found the sculpting a little blocky in places especially the forearms and hands of those figures without a shirt or jacket. Casting was reasonable, although all the figures did have a mould line, and it looks like a bubble in the casting of the Texas Ranger. The mould line went right through the right eye of the one carrying the machine gun, and it was impossible to remove without losing some of the detail of the face.

However, overall proportions of all the figures are good, especially like the beards, and the figures do look like the actor in their unpainted state. They are very reminiscent of the old Ral Partha or Grenadier figures of the 1980's.

Once I started to add paint to the figures I found they almost painted themselves. The sculpts lead to natural shadows and highlights and copying the clothing from the numerous pictures on line was a breeze. If you're into action heroes or have a specific game in mind these would make a great addition to your collection, also great experience of painting chest hair on the martial arts dude. Surprisingly, the proportions of the arms and hands seem to fit the figures when painted.

Exercises in Imagination & Scratchbuilding

Words: Dave Barker

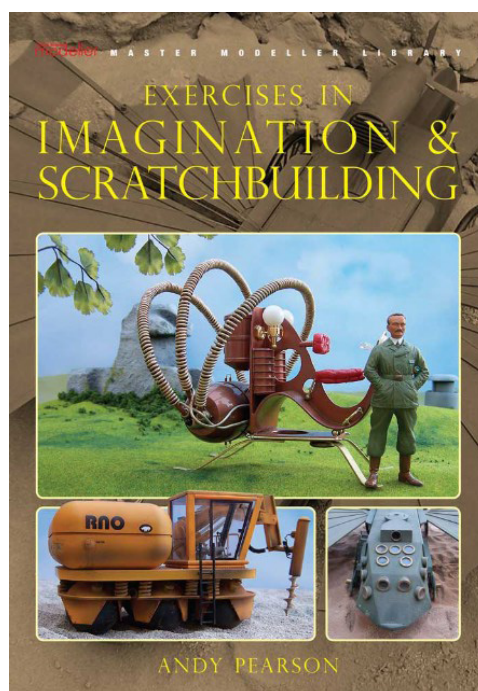
Exercises In Imagination and Scratchbuilding is a great title from the pen (and creative hands) of Andy Pearson that should be of interest to anyone who makes models, especially anyone who even occasionally find themselves adding custom scratchbuilt elements to their models.

I really like the size and feel of this 128 page soft-back from Sci Fi & Fantasy Modeller, which is the size of a comic book and is really comfortable to read. More than this, however, I was enthralled with the content of the book. Andy Pearson has presented eleven different scratchbuilt models that he created and documented in detail, especially for this book

Each of the projects are centred on one of the themes of time, space, earth, water, fire or air and in each case the thoughts, construction process, changes of mind and final result are all well documented in both photographs and writing.

The book is rich throughout with clear and well-presented photographs of either the finished results of the projects themselves, or with the work-in-progress photographs that document the construction process and phases of the build. I was rather heartened to see that in many cases, the items in the background of these work-in-progress photos are the same things that grace my own painting and modelling desk, which gives me a very small amount of hope that one day I might be able to create such fantastic looking models as the Lunar Base or the scratchbuilt Zombie that I was reading about [Ed: You wish!]

As great and as engaging as the photographs are, the writing is no less enthralling and I was so absorbed in reading the first time I picked up this book, consuming all of the little details of how Andy created this or that, what problems he faced and how he overcame them, or what his thought processes were in designing such lovely pieces (which range from barmaids to the national anthem of



Wales, by the way) that I did not even notice that my in-laws had arrived unexpectedly and were in the same room!

Andy Pearson has a warm and friendly turn of phrase which I found to be very inclusive, highlighting that even great modellers such as he have very similar trials and tribulations to modelling mortals such as myself, whether that is broken drill bits, carefully placing and holding together components long enough for even superglue to set, or just making that important cut the wrong way around!

If you really don't have any interest in scratchbuilding any parts of your models or doing bits of conversion work in your miniature hobby, then I suppose I can't really recommend this book to you. But if, on the other hand, you do scratchbuild models or components, or even if you just want a modelling book engaging enough that you won't notice that you're in the same room as your mother-in-law, then I can highly recommend Exercises In Imagination & Scratchbuilding!

I'm off now to see if I can reproduce a version of the super-small scale Lunar Base for my own shelf!

Exercises In Imagination & Scratchbuilding, Andy Pearson, Happy Medium Press, ISBN 978-0-9564306-2-5

<http://www.scifantasymodeller.co.uk/>

Force on Force

<http://www.ospreypublishing.com/>

Words: Dave Barker



When the Force-on-Force book first dropped through my letterbox I thought there had been a mistake. I knew that this was the upcoming modern wargames rulebook to be published by Osprey but I also knew that it wasn't due out until April 2011. It took a brief email exchange with our editor to establish that he'd asked me to review it; except that he'd asked Osprey and forgotten to ask me! Oh well, nice to be wanted. [Ed. I wouldn't assume too much!]

Like the other wargaming rulebooks from Osprey, Force on Force is a nice, solid hardback book with just over 200 pages and full colour throughout. Alongside the high quality illustrations that you almost expect from Osprey, there are also photographs of real soldiers and hardware in action together with high quality photographs of miniatures in action on the tabletop.

As with any set of wargaming rules, I approached reading Force on Force in my usual piecemeal manner i.e. taking in a number of the rules and understanding them. I played out little scenarios on bits of paper before moving on and understanding more of the rules. I did this until I'd read the whole book. This didn't take very long at all. Unlike other modern rulesets I've played before (which shall remain nameless!) the rules are coherent, flow together well and can be picked up very quickly. At relevant points in the rules, there are also test scenarios that you can play out to ensure you've understood the rules so far. I certainly found that they helped me

get the rules working together properly in my head. It was at these points when I wanted to play the test scenarios that I dug out the scissors, paper and dice! [Ed. Did you forget about your miniature collection?]

The basic rules that cover kinetic operations between regular forces of infantry and armour mesh together nicely because of a nearly universal mechanic that occurs throughout the game. The Force on Force rules also deal very well with asymmetric operations in an equally integrated way. This means that a wider set of scenarios can be played with these rules that more accurately reflects some of the engagements we have seen in the real world in modern times.

Beyond these basics there are also advanced rules covering air mobile troop insertions, close air support and on- and off-table artillery. Together with the core rules, these allow you to play pretty much any scenario that you can devise. However, Force on Force doesn't stop there. It provides some rich appendices. One allows you to give your unit attributes to make your troops and vehicles more specialised. Another is a campaign system that permits players to play a series of linked engagements between two forces that builds on the results of the previous engagements. It also provides sample organisations and vehicles for a number of different forces around the world.



Force on Force aims, and succeeds in my opinion, in covering all kinds of engagements from post-WWII to the modern day. It does this with a balanced emphasis on combined arms that doesn't make either infantry or armoured vehicle operations more prominent than one another. It seamlessly combines off-table support and asymmetric warfare into one smooth set of rules. From my own experience, the sample scenarios given are played in an hour or two and do make you both want to replay them as well as encourage you to develop your own.

In fact, that is exactly what I found myself doing, creating and playing out my own scenarios. For example, SWAT versus terrorist hostage takers, WWII commando raids and small cold war tank battles which are pretty much what these rules are intended to cover. I tried even more fanciful games involving Stargate-type scenarios of British Paratroopers versus aliens and sci-fi mechanised infantry battles with some of my 15mm miniature collection (which, until I started reviewing Force on Force, never saw enough table time). Finally, I tried games set in an alternate 1938 where Britain has fallen into a civil war.

What has perhaps surprised me the most about Force on Force is that its core mechanic is sufficiently generic and flexible that it is able to cope with this wide range of tabletop game scenarios without at any time compromising the different flavours of each.

After some thought, I think that the reason Force on Force is able to do this is because of a very strong combination of mechanics that run like a spine throughout all of the rules. These are: the basic premise that a dice roll of 4+ is a success; and that the different attributes of your squads or vehicles are represented by using dice with different numbers of sides, depending on how good (or bad) your unit is in that attribute. Used along with the other usual mechanics you expect from a wargame, such as die modifiers and a small number of tables (all of which are related to vehicle damage or off-table activities), a rich variety of force types can be represented and played 'in character' within the scope of the rules.

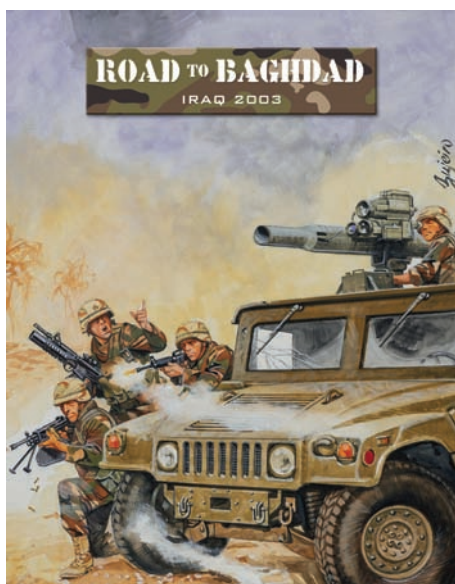
A further element of the Force on Force rules that I found particularly appealing and useful in creating my own custom scenarios, are the Fog of War cards. These add flavour and confusion to the tabletop, making games much more interesting and dynamic by reflecting the confusion of warfare in a way that doesn't always seem to happen with other rule sets. The rules that cause Fog of War cards to be drawn are also nicely balanced. Green and untrained units are more likely to see the game moving away from their original battle plans, through more Fog of War cards being drawn, than will happen for veteran or elite units. And since the deck of Fog of War cards that you use is dependent on the scenario, it is a simple matter to choose the most appropriate cards

for the deck, drop the irrelevant cards and even add your own, custom-made cards particular to the engagement you are fighting on the tabletop.

Finally I wanted to highlight the summary sheet at the back of the book. I really like this; it's well laid out, concise and easy to use if you have the book open to that page next to the tabletop as you're playing the game.

Of course, if you don't like the idea of playing modern wargames this set of rules isn't for you. That is fair enough and there are many other good wargames rules that cover other periods. But if you have been looking for modern wargaming rules where the mechanics fit together well, that include good support for combined arms and can be used for anything from the Korean war, the hypothetical Russian invasion of Germany in the 60's, the Falklands War, through to any of the current range of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, then I would definitely recommend that you pick up a copy of Force on Force.

Osprey sent me a copy of Road to Baghdad in the same package as Force on Force. This is the first supplement that has been made for use with Force on Force and covers the 2003 Allied invasion of Iraq and includes all of the information that you need to re-fight the campaign. Although this is a softback book, unlike Force on Force, it is equally well laid out with a similar style and an equally impressive collection of illustrations and photographs of real events as well as photographs of miniatures in action mid-game.



As well as a section detailing the background to the campaign, the 19 different scenarios detailed in the book each include background for the encounter together with example force lists, special rules and mission objectives. They can be played either straight or modified as required to suit the player's available miniatures and terrain. From fire-fights between Special Forces and Iraqi Fedayeen to tank ambushes and combined arms operations, Road to Baghdad contains a bit of everything from the campaign.

Also included are sample force lists for British, US and Iraqi forces in the theatre which help take your games further than the basic scenarios listed in the book.

So, if you want to play your Force on Force games in the Allied invasion of Iraq or just want some background information on the campaign to help inspire other Force on Force scenarios, then this supplement is a must-buy.

Force on Force, Ambush Alley Games, Osprey Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84908-516-8

Road to Baghdad: Iraq 2003, Ambush Alley Games, Osprey Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84908-517-5



TIL DEATH DO WE PART

An Irregular Story by Taylor Holloway

Artwork by David North, Georgio Iannotti,
Lucilla Lischetti, Pamela McBride, and Gülümhan "Roselyn" Eraslan.

"The movement in her hips

Strikes the hour the poison sets in.

How do you wake?

How do you sleep at Night?"

- A Skylit Drive, *Those Cannons could Sink a Ship.*

1.

Westhaven.

Most people think of it as the centre of the world – the people that live here anyway. Granted, it's a big place – but bigger isn't always better as far as I'm concerned.

My name is Gregir Tailenson, and I was a wanted man. Wanted for what? That's what I'm going to tell you, but be warned – I have a natural tendency to piss off a lot of people in my line of work. I'm a professional adventurer; I guess pissing people off is part of the territory.

Maybe I should start my story where most of these kinds of stories start – and that's in a tavern. The Crooked Cockatrice, it was called – or some shit like that. Why these places are all named after strange creatures, I don't know – and most of them have some sort of an alliteration game going on which the owner thinks that will make it a happening place.

Now, I was talking about Westhaven. I hate this city – the streets smell like a two-shilling whore after a profitable night of work. There are too many people, and crime runs rampant... And this city had this horrible inn that I had the misfortune of staying at.

Bren picked it – and Bren's an asshole.

Normally Bren and I do a lot of travelling together – he's my business partner. A big southlunder with a bad attitude and two of the biggest swords you've ever seen a man use in one hand. He's good at what he does – and that's killing shit.

He had some business back home in Aitrua and we came here so he could take a boat, as it's a helluva walk otherwise. He asked me if I wanted to go with him – but the only thing worse than Westhaven is the Southlunds. It's too hot, too crowded, and the people act like you've spent too much time with their sister. Since I probably would end up spending too much time with someone's sister, I thought it might be easier if I just stayed in Elysia – as though I could get in less trouble here.

Anyway, I was going to meet him here in three weeks time, so we could hook up with Questyer and Vlend to check out some rumours about a job up in Khenmoor. So I had to spend three weeks in this dump.

So, there I was – spending the first night of my long wait drinking by myself and reading a book on the stupidity of Cicerellians, when this broad comes up to my table and takes a seat – uninvited. Normally, I don't like to drink with people I don't know, but it took me less than two solid moments of ogling to realize that this was a lady that I would definitely like to know – hopefully several times this evening.

She smiled, and motioned for the serving girl to bring two drinks of whatever swill I was drinking before she started talking.

"Sir Gregir Tailenson?"

I should have spotted it right away. No one had called me *Sir* in a long time – and anyone who knew me knew better than to bring that debacle up in casual conversation. I let it slide – maybe being a knight would better my chances of making this three week stay something I could brag about later when Bren returned from wherever the hell he was again.

"Just Gregir." I stated abruptly.

She gave me a coy smile, and I felt my legs melt. "Well, Just Gregir, I'm looking for a man who can help me."

I nodded, and hoped it involved hiding out in my room for a few days.

"My husband has gone missing, and I need to find out if he's just left me, or if he is dead."

I reached into my tobacco poke and pulled out a smoke. I lit it off of a candle smouldering on our table and inhaled deep. "You don't sound too concerned."

I took the chance to glance at her left hand. A gold band was wrapped around her third finger. All hope of this being an interesting distraction from my three weeks of boredom turned to ash – much like the end of my cigarette. Married women, in my experience, were bad for business.

"I'm not. He is quite capable." She replied, pulling out a cigarette of her own.

I nodded. "I never caught your name."

Smoke wafted over her ruby red lips. "I never gave it."

"I don't work for free. It's thirty shillings a day – and I'll require three days pay upfront."

She reached into her purse and produced a gold coin – worth at least three days pay and then some. I took it from her, bit it to make sure she wasn't stupid enough to try to give me a fake, and put it in my pocket.

She gave me a smile, and already found myself wondering if making a move on her would categorize me as a whore – and



quickly pushed those thoughts aside. I didn't want to come off as an amateur.

"You can call me Fiona Caulder."

I butted out my smoke. "You can call me anything you want as long as the gold keeps coming."

If I wanted to avoid sounding like a whore, I failed miserably. Luckily, she laughed and wrote down the address where I could find her should I turn anything up. We said our good-byes, and I suddenly knew that not everything was as it seemed.

2.

I got the name of a place that Fiona's husband used to hang out – a tavern called The Plush Peach. Again, the alliteration – but at least they kept the scary monsters out of the name. I kind of like peaches.

Before I went searching, though, there was someone who I had to look up. A long time ago I met an actual wizard from the Sethe Desert – not that I haven't met wizards before, but this guy was good.

Really good.

He is also the smartest guy I know. Back when we were young and dumb, we used to go on adventures together, along with some sword named Rath. He isn't an *actual* sword, but he might as well have been. Dumb as a rock, and good at killing things.

The wizard's name was Mehekari Aker. Again, the best damn mage you could ever meet. He also had a bodyguard, some orc named Redluk. I have no problems with orcs – some of my best friends are orcs – but this guy was *almost* as bad as Rath. When I say almost, at least Redluk would listen to reason. He never purposely pissed off a pack of dragons just so he could fight them.

Anyway, back on track. After we all retired, and most of us went our separate ways, Mehekari got a sweet gig as an advisor to some merchant prince and settled down in Westhaven. I always told Kari that he should go into business for himself, but I don't think he was really interested in the money.

I hadn't been to his estate in years, so I thought I would check it out. My thoughts were that if he could do some divination for me, I could probably solve this case by nightfall and pretend to work for the next week before bringing the esteemed Mr. Caulder back home to his loving wife.

So, I walked up to the front gates of the Aker Estate. There was a half-sleeping guard at the small guard house.

"I'm here to see the wizard."

Usually these kinds of cute lines piss off the stoic guard types. I could see by the way he looked at me, it was working.

"Going to have to wait a month – Mr. Aker isn't in."

I frowned – so much for my week off.

"Any chance of finding out where he is gone?"

The guard rolled his eyes. "Please wait one moment – I'll check. Your name please?"

"Tailenson. Gregir Tailenson."

I could tell the guard didn't appreciate the dramatic flair. He simply turned around and walked into the estate.

Waiting is the worst part of these kinds of situations. I was beginning to think he just went on an extended break when a huge orc came out the front door accompanying the guardsman.

"Gregir!" the orc bellowed. His voice was like two rocks grinding against each other. Big rocks.

I smiled around the cigarette I had just lit. "Red! You're looking good."

Orcs love flattery, but in truth, he looked as good as he did the last time I had seen him. He was about two heads taller than me, and green as a cedar. He looked in shape, though – his arms were still about as wide as my waist, and his hands were the size of my head. He smiled, and revealed a mouth full of white teeth. He'd also taken the time to have the tips of his tusks capped in silver – it was a nice touch.

"What brings you to Westhaven?" he said, while unlocking the gate. I was beginning to wonder why they had a guardsman posted at all with this *thing* living inside of the house.

"Bren went to the Southlunds to handle some family issues, so I'm waiting here for him."

Redluk nodded. I noticed that he was wearing some finely tailored wool pants, and a white silk shirt that was undone to his navel. "Same thing with Kari. He went to Sethe to meet some girl. I didn't catch the whole story – I was trying to sleep off a hangover when he left."

I couldn't help but smile. You could dress him up, but Redluk was still as much of an orc as he always had been. "Well, it was good to see you, Red."

The orc frowned. "What? You're leaving already? Don't you want to come in and have a drink?"

I thought about it for a moment. A long moment. "Actually, yes I do. I'm working."

"What kind of work?" asked the orc, as he pushed open the door to the mansion.

"The kind you'd like."

3.

Within an hour I managed to fill Red in on the case. As it turned out, being a bodyguard to a man who wasn't there to guard was driving him to the point where he was learning how to play chess. Not to say that orcs aren't good at chess, but strategy and tactics aren't exactly the strong suit of most orcs. In this case, Redluk was no exception.

After a few drinks, I let Red suit up and we headed out to The Plush Peach. I told him that he was dressed just fine, but he insisted. After an hour of helping the aging orc squeeze into his old partial plate suit, he grabbed his war axe and bastard sword off the mantle and strapped them to his back.

I had to admit, he did look pretty fearsome. There had been a few times back in the day where we had almost come to blows. Looking at Red's giant hands and bulging arms, I started to wonder if I really did have some sort of undiagnosed mental deficiency.

On our way to the Peach, I quickly noticed that the more civilized people of the upper district had taken to walking on the opposite side of the street than ourselves. Even guards stiffened slightly as we passed. I wondered if this was why Mehekari had kept the orc in his employ even after we retired. Thinking of the stick-thin wizard strutting down High Street and watching the softer folk scuttle out of his way caused me to chuckle silently to myself. Red just gave me a weird look, but kept quiet the entire time.

The Plush Peach was a lot more upscale than I originally had imagined. It was located in the market district, but closer to the estate district.

The place went dead as we walked in. The regulars sat close to bar, as expected. We quickly made our way over and I slapped a handful of silver on the bar.

"We're looking for a Mr. Aldred Caulder. Know where I can find him?"

The bartender was a dwarf. He barely came up to my shoulder, and had a short blond beard and a bald head. He looked casually at the coins, and then back up to me.

"I hope that's for drinks. I ain't sellin' out Lord Caulder for a paltry handful of coins, even if I knew where he was at."

I pushed the money towards him, and took a stool at the bar. Red just stood behind me, arms crossed. "Then get me two ale, and keep the change."

The dwarf nodded, and filled two tankards. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a man get up and start making his way casually towards the door. I didn't like the look of him, with this aging tweed jacket and frayed wool pants. He just screamed of larceny. I nudged Red and motioned with my chin. The orc smiled knowingly and started backing up towards the door himself.

The dwarf returned the tankards. "I thought one of these was fer yer friend there."

I shook my head. "You mean the orc? No. No friend of mine – I've never met the man."

The dwarf cocked an inquisitive eyebrow.

"They're both for me... now you were saying something about *Lord Caulder*?"

I heard the door close behind me, and then moments afterwards, the door closed again. The dwarf began wiping the bar down with a dirty rag.

"Yep. You heard me – Lord Caulder. His family had some old money when they came down to Westhaven from Khenmoor about thirty odd years ago. He married some fancy young lady, though I can't remember her name for the life o' me."

I simply nodded for him to go on; taking a haul from the tankard so deep that Bren would have cheered. The cold ale felt good on my parched throat, though I knew that if I kept up at this pace, Red would have to carry me out of here. It was barely even the start of the evening, and I was already starting to get wasted.

"If it's any help, I ain't seen our esteemed Lord Caulder in a couple o' weeks."

I nodded again, finishing off the tankard. Even the dwarf looked impressed as I pushed it towards him.

"Well, thank you for your help – I appreciate your honesty."

The dwarf took the empty tankard away. "I appreciate your patronage, Mister..."

I knew how to finish this sentence. "Tailenson. Gregir Tailenson."

"Well then, Mr. Tailenson – I'm glad to help. Come back anytime."

I nodded again, and eased myself off the stool. I had a feeling the real help I needed was already outside.

4.

As I went outside, the sun was already beginning to set. I didn't need to look very hard to find Red and our scurrying informant. He was in the alley beside the tavern, quietly sobbing on the cobblestone at the rather large feet of the orc.

"Awww... come on. I didn't even hit you."

The man covered his face. If he had heard him, he didn't show it. "Please don't kill me. I don't know where he is... I really don't."

I walked over to the sobbing man and leaned over. I noticed he'd wet himself.

"Tell us what we need to know, and I'll make sure my orc friend here doesn't turn you into a cripple."

Red knew his part. He simply chuckled and cracked his knuckles.

The informant threw himself against the wall of the tavern. "Oh please! I don't know anything... I was just trying to find out where he went. Master Kebalt wants his money."

"Master Kebalt?" I leaned back and looked at Red. "Who's that?"

Red took a step back. "He runs the guild here in town."

"Thieves' Guild, eh?" I looked down at the informant and offered him a hand. The Guilder took it and pulled himself up.

"What's your name?"

"Auster. Auster Franklin."

I nodded. "What's the chance of us meeting with your boss?"

Auster took a few steps back. Red closed in just as many steps. Damn he was good.

"I'll take you there right now." Auster stammered. "Just don't let him hurt me."

Red chuckled.

"Yeah, sure." I reached into my pocket and tossed the thief a silver coin. "For the pants."

5.

The Guild Headquarters was in the warehouse district, just off the docks. It was a run-down place, with two thugs standing watch outside the large doors. They stiffened up as they saw us approach. Again, I'm going to credit Red with that one.

Their hands went to their swords, though they didn't draw steel. I can only assume that they were sane enough to realize the consequences of drawing a weapon on the fully decked out orc.

Auster led the way. The guards looked down at the stain on the front of his pants, and curled their lips almost in unison. I almost laughed.

"What's this, Auster?" The one to my left asked. He had a wiry black beard that was a weak attempt to hide a complexion that most hobgoblins wouldn't want.

Auster quickly countered. I'd underestimated him.

"A misunderstanding... everything is fine now. These fine gentlemen want to meet with the boss."

The guard on the right looked to the orc. "Unlikely. Sorry."

I kind of saw this coming. Red had been cooped up for too long. They say you can take an orc and put him in a city, but you can't take a city, and put it into an orc. I don't know who said it, but that person probably had witnessed something along the lines of what I was about to experience.

Red nodded, as if understanding the guard's plight, and then landed probably the most casual haymaker I've ever

seen in my life. There was this crunch, and the guard's eyes crossed and his tongue actually stuck out of his mouth as he bounced off of the wall behind him and then crumpled to his feet. It was apparent that if he did manage to wake up from such a blow, he would probably be limping and talking with a stutter for the rest of his life.

All three of us stood, dumb-founded. Luckily, the guardsman to my left wasn't very quick with his sword. I landed a blow of my own to his throat, and then brought his head down against my knee. It was enough to stagger him, but not to punch his clock. He was on all fours, gasping for breath when I wound up and kicked him in the head.

With both of the guards getting some much needed shut-eye, we both looked to Auster for his



Giorgio Iannotti

reaction. As if on cue, he managed to piss himself, again. There had to be a nick-name for him somewhere – I just couldn't nail it down.

Red chuckled, and then kicked the large door to the warehouse. I can only assume by the cries of dismay that not only was the door locked, but there was also an unfortunate individual on the opposite side.

We strode into the thieves' hideout casually. None of us had drawn weapons, which not could not be said for the fine folks on the other-side of the door – at least two dozen swords, crossbows, knives, and maces were waiting for us when we walked in.

Red and I put our backs together. At least none of them were behind us, I quickly noted. Auster took a step forward and started waving his hands.

"Whoa... let's take this down a notch!"

I held my hands up and well and stood beside Auster. "I just want to speak to a Master Kebalt about a person of mutual interest. We don't want to fight."

I heard Red mutter in derision, but I ignored it. A large man at the back of the warehouse (if it could be called that – it looked as though it had been made into a makeshift club-house) put his crossbow down on a table and took a step forward. "I'm Kebalt."

"My name is Gregir Tailenson, and I'm looking for a Lord Caulder. I believe you have an interest in the man."

I heard weapons slide back into sheaths all around me. Kebalt motioned for us to follow him into a back room. It was an office, with a desk, chair and two couches. He held up a hand for Auster to stay where he was. Once Auster turned and walked away (presumably to fetch another pair of pants), Kebalt closed the door behind him.

I spoke first, figuring that Red didn't have much to say anyway. "I'm sorry for all the confusion."

The crime lord shook his head. "We can start over. Your name, Tailenson... I recall it. You once belonged to a guild in Khenmoor."

I could feel my eyes narrow. "That was a long time ago."

"Yes, but still – we protect our own." Kebalt reached into his desk and produced three large cigars. I refused and lit a smoke of my own, but Redluk happily took one and used my match to light it. "How can I help you? Obviously you know that I am also looking for Lord Caulder as well. He owes me quite a bit of money."

I nodded. This much I knew already. "I was hired by his wife to find him."

"His wife?" Kebalt leaned back into his chair. "I didn't think the beautiful Lady Caulder would be so concerned about her husband after she caught him sleeping with half of the maids in their service. Although she is the prime suspect in his disappearance, so that might create a sense of urgency in finding his whereabouts."

I looked to Redluk, who was happily puffing away on his cigar. "How long ago was this?"

"It couldn't have been more than a month ago. It was quite the blow up, from what I understand. His personal guard had to get involved – it was really a choice piece of gossip."

It was my turn to lean back. I needed to speak to Fiona – and ask her why she didn't inform me of this to begin with.

"Thank you again, Master Kebalt. Your help was greatly appreciated."

Kebalt stood up and extended a hand, and shook mine vigorously. "No – thank you, Mister Tailenson. Sorry again for the misunderstanding."

I shook my head. "It was understandable given the circumstances."

Redluk opened the door, while I was quick on his heels. Just as he was about to leave, I heard Kebalt clear his voice behind me. "One more thing, if you don't mind."

I cocked an eyebrow, indicating for him to continue.

"There is a large bounty on Caulder's head. If you do find him, and bring him to me – dead or alive, I will reward you handsomely for your efforts. Otherwise, I'm half tempted to give it to Lady Caulder."

Apparently I went from Investigator, to thief, to now bounty-hunter. I looked to Red, who smiled dangerously.

"I'll take it into consideration." I countered, and quickly stalked away as fast as I could. I didn't want to hear any more – I needed to speak to Fiona.

6.

After we left the guild-house, the full moon hung high in the horizon. I said my good-byes to Redluk and promised to visit again before I left town. I swear, if his armour didn't have spikes on it, he would have hugged me.

Weird-ass orc.

I quickly made my way back to the Caulder's residence. Luckily, the estate wasn't too far of a walk from the Plush Peach. As I headed up the walk, I noticed that there weren't any guards on duty – which was strange for homes in this area of town. Sure, the streets were well patrolled by the local militia, but nothing said money like a handful of paid swords.

I reached up and grabbed the wrought-iron knocker. I noticed my hands were sweating. I pounded on the door three times, and then wiped them off on my pants.

Within moments, a tired looking servant answered the door. He looked me up and down, and I quickly suppressed an urge to ask him if he liked what he saw – to which I'm sure I could have guessed his answer.

"Can I help you?" He could barely disguise the distain in his voice, and why not? I had been walking all day, I probably smelt like a combination of ale and freshly-spilt blood, and a more astute nose would have detected Auster's urine.

"Yeah. I'm here to see Fiona – tell her it's Gregir Tailenson."

The servant frowned. "I'm sorry. The Lady has retired for the evening."

"The hell she has!" I said, probably a little more loudly than I intended. It had been a long day, and I was sick of playing hide and seek with her philandering husband.

The servant looked as though he was about to slam the door in my face when a voice echoed down the stairs behind him.

"It's quite alright, Gilbert. I've been expecting him."

I looked over Gilbert's shoulder to see Fiona dressed in a lace night-shirt and a silk housecoat. My heart started pounding, I couldn't help it.

With a final look of disgust, the servant opened the door, then spun and stalked angrily into the kitchen. My bet was that ol' Gil was used to having his way.

"Fiona, I'm sorry that I came here so late, but I have news of your husband, and some questions to ask you before I continue with my investigation."

"No need to apologize." Fiona motioned for me to come in. I did so, closing the door behind me.

"It turns out that your husband is a popular man."

Fiona nodded. "That he is. Please come upstairs – we'll talk in the study."

I wiped my sweaty palms off on my pants again, and followed Fiona up the spiral staircase to the second floor. She stopped at a door to a small room with two couches, and walls lined with books. There was a fireplace in here, though it wasn't lit.

"Please, take a seat."

I did as I was told. Fiona walked to a liquor cabinet and produced a bottle of scotch. "Would you like a drink?"

As she produced two glasses, I couldn't refuse. She handed one off, and then took her own and sat on the couch opposite of me. "So, tell me about my husband's *friends*."

I went to speak, and my throat went dry. I took a sip of the scotch, and tried again. "It turns out that your husband had quite a gambling debt, and owed money to the wrong people – namely a man named Kebalt, who runs the thieves' guild in this fair city."

Fiona smirked, "Oh my."

"He also informed me that there was a fight about a month ago. Apparently you caught your husband in an intimate act with one the paid members of your household."

As soon as I had said that, I immediately regretted it. Fiona's devil-may-care smile quickly faded to one of hurt dismay. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she sniffed. "How did you find out about *that*?"

One thing I hate is watching a lady cry. For a moment, I thought she might have been faking it, but I've never been really good at distinguishing between real and fake lady tears.

"I'm sorry to bring it up. It was described as quite vicious."

She nodded, and used her housecoat to wipe her eyes. "I know. It was. One of the guards hit me. He dismissed them all afterwards. He was so upset."

I smiled sympathetically. "So what happened afterwards?"

"After the guard had hit me, I told him that I was leaving and all of our household *sluts* were his business now. He told me that he was sorry and wasn't going to do it again, and he was going to dismiss them all."

The story was now beginning to make sense. I knew there was something she wasn't telling me from the beginning.

"I was so angry; I went and slept in the guest bedroom. I woke up the next morning, and he was gone – and that was two weeks ago."

I leaned back into the couch and slugged back the remaining scotch. "So, you came and hired me to find him, because you love him and you want him back."

Fiona stood up and took my glass. "No. I want him back because the money he left in the treasury here is running out, and the bank won't give me more unless he withdraws it, or he's *dead*. That, and the local constabulary thinks that I might have had something to do with his sudden disappearance."

"Well, did you?"

She looked at me for a moment, and I knew what a mouse must feel like when discovered by a cat. "Why would I hire you to simply find out that I murdered my husband? I heard you're the best, so I hired the best."

I went to stand up as well, but she firmly placed a hand on my chest, and pushed me back down on the couch. I was powerless to resist her. She put a knee on either side of my lap and looked me in the eyes. I could smell jasmine as her hair dangled in my face, and the scotch on her breath.

It was then that I did the only thing I could do – I placed one hand firmly on her hip, and kissed her. She pushed firmly against me, and I wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her closer.

I suppose I could go into more detail, but there are some things that a gentleman doesn't disclose, regardless of how much he wants to brag about it. Let's just say that this was the second mistake that I had made that day, and I was about to pay for it.

7.

When you spend most of your life sleeping on the road in the most dangerous of places, you learn to be a light sleeper.

I wasn't really sleeping mind you, I was thinking with my eyes closed. I had really screwed this up – you aren't supposed to be intimate with your clients. It was bad business. It was during this thought (and I'll admit, half-patting myself on the back as well) that I heard the door creak open, and some shuffling foot-steps. I jerked awake to see a figure standing in the door way – slightly slouched and shambling towards us. Fiona was sound asleep, and it took everything ounce of willpower I possessed to look away from her perfect, resting form.

It was then the figure spoke, and I had heard the gravelly sound of death plenty of times before to know what was now descending upon us.

"Feeeeee-ooooowwwwwnnnnnn-ahhhhh"

I leapt out of bed and reached for my sword – then quickly realized that I had disrobed in the study down the hall. Speaking of disrobed, I noticed then that I was completely naked as well. I yelled for Fiona to wake up as I ran forward and kicked the shambling horror in the chest. Luckily, zombies don't have the greatest balance, and it crashed onto its back – all the while clawing at the air near my junk. I hopped backwards, and yelled at Fiona again to wake up. She shot up, and cowered in the corner of the room, trying to cover herself. I didn't blame her – though the zombie looked pretty well preserved, it was still a horrifying sight. I kicked the zombie in the head for good measure, and sprinted off down the hallway. I grabbed my sword, and ran back to the room just as the undead bastard was getting to his feet. I noticed he was much taller than me, and was about twenty years older when it was alive. He was dressed in a flannel housecoat, and wore a dapper set of black satin pyjamas.

Fashion savvy or not, I stepped forward and brought my blade against his neck in a chopping fashion. It held up his arms to grab the sword from me, but it keenly sliced through his fingers and separated its head from its body.

Fiona watched the head bounce onto the ground, and the body crumple to the floor. I went to go and comfort her, when she looked right into my eyes. To my disbelief, she winked at me, and then started screaming.

"YOU KILLED MY HUSBAND!!"

I stood there, stunned for a moment. I had saved her life, hadn't I? Then it dawned on me – *that winking bitch had set me up!*

I thought about giving her a repeat performance of her experience with the guard a few weeks ago, but as lights began to turn on in the mansion, I realized that I had about three seconds to grab my clothes and get the hell out or have to explain this mess to the militia.

Where would I start? I was naked, covered in blood, holding a sword, with a naked beautiful woman in her chambers, along with her dead husband. This situation was compromising at best.



David North

To hell with it – I ran. Down the stairs, I shoved Gilbert out of the way, and launched myself naked into the streets, holding my bloody sword in one hand, and my clothing in the other. Luckily it was really late, so the only people I had to expose myself to were drunks and beggars. Neither were offended, it would seem, though I have to admit I heard more than one giggle that I was none too happy about.

I had to find somewhere to lay low for a little bit – and I had a good idea where I could find such a place.

8.

I told Kebalt everything, and I can't say I was overly pleased with his response. Between the snide comments and bouts of laughter, I managed to dress myself. When I was done, Kebalt dispatched a runner to fetch Redluk. I figured that if there was anyone who I'd want at my side if the militia turned up, it was him.

I took a seat and began to think about the events that had transpired this evening – mainly the unexpected appearance of her dead husband. Even if her husband had been raised from the dead, how the hell did he get in? The door was securely barred – that I was sure of when I exited the property in such a hurry. My foot still ached from kicking the damn thing off its hooks.

So, by such logic, her husband must have been in the house the whole time. Now, considering a shambling, moaning corpse is particularly hard to hide in most urban environments, this meant that Fiona *must* have known that her husband was dead and that he was most certainly in her house – probably looking for revenge – because *she* killed him!

Suddenly it all made sense. Well, kind of – I needed to search the Caulder estate to be sure, before I jumped to any conclusions.

Redluk arrived a few hours after I had sent for him. I decided to catch a few winks on the couch in Kebalt's office. When he woke me up, I shared my findings with him. Again, his response was very similar to the response the story received the first time I had told it. I repeated the part that I had managed to sleep with the most beautiful women either of us had set eyes on – but that only resulted in Red calling me a whore, and then he said something about how human women look like shaved apes.

I asked how it was out there, and Red confirmed that they were looking for me, and that I was definitely wanted in connection with the death of Lord Caulder. I was hoping someone might have noticed that his remains looked slightly off – as if he had been dead for a while, but I knew that was grasping at straws. Any scape-goat is a good scape-goat, I suppose.

So, I did what any wanted man would do – I laid low for a few days and waited to see what would happen. In the meantime, I did some sorting of paperwork for Kebalt, and showed a few of his younger recruits how to handle a sword properly. Each day Redluk would visit for a few hours, and gave me an update – it wasn't until the fourth day that Redluk came to the guild-house and informed me that they were holding a funeral for Lord Caulder at his estate.

I knew then that we had found our opportunity.

9.

It was common knowledge that there was going to be a very large service held in the Westhaven Cemetery. Word has spread like wildfire throughout the city that the villain, Gregir Tailenson, had slain Lord Caulder in cold blood in his own bedroom in front of his wife – and this would be a chance for good people all through the city to pay their respects to a man who had given his life to protect his spouse.

This also meant that I had about an hour to break into the Caulder estate, and find some sort of evidence to expose Fiona for the necromancer bitch that she was, make a dramatic impression on all of her guests at her home – and hopefully clear my name.

Before I hit the street, though, I knew that I had to do something drastic to change my appearance. I considered all my options, and then I realized that I must do the unthinkable.

I needed a dress – preferably one with a high neck-line.

Surprisingly, Red is a pretty astute shopper. He came back to the guild hall with a nice blue number that cost less than it actually looked. He found a great pair of boots that matched too – truth be told, these would make a great gift once I was done with them – assuming that Fiona didn't go do something stupid and hire back all of those guards that were let go.

The process was easy; the thieves had everything I needed as far as disguises go – wigs, make up, and even some water skins to use as a smokin' pair of tits. Shaving was a bitch – I hated every second of it. Especially my face, but even more my legs and arm pits. How broads keep this crap up, I'll never know – though I promise that I'll never make fun of another chick with a bit of stubble on her legs – what a pain in the ass.

Red and I waited until the procession left for the graveyard. I thought to myself how at home she must feel being around all of her dead buddies, but pushed it to the back of my mind. I had a job to do.

The front door was open, and servants were scurrying around – it looked as though she was expecting quite a few guests after the ceremony. Red and I moved around the mansion with little difficulty. Basically just look like you're on a mission, I've learned, and very few people will stop and ask questions. That was until I ran into Gilbert, who was frantically waving his arms and directing the lesser servants to their duties.

As we approached, he spotted us. My heart began to pound in my chest, and I could feel my hands getting sweaty again. Trotting briskly in our direction, he eyed me up and down, and then looked to Red, and then met my gaze. I was sure he recognized me.

Dammit.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" His tone was authoritative, but it was surprisingly smooth – I'm assuming that Red had something to do with sudden onset of manners.

I should mention at this point that Red was wearing a suit, and looked like someone dressed up a monster and was taking it to the ball. He was wearing woollen black breeches, buckled black boots, a white silk shirt, and a black wool dress-jacket. He was even wearing a damn tie – he really decided to look the part.

I was a little stunned. I guess the disguise was better than I thought. I looked at Gilbert right in the eyes, and raised my voice about a hundred octaves. It wasn't a falsetto, but it was damned close.

"My name is Rebehka Dandoullin. This is my bodyguard and assistant. His name isn't nearly as important as the tone you use when you're speaking to him. He has a short temper and big hands. Do you understand?"

If I said that I didn't find a lot of joy in watching Gilbert shrink two or three inches, I would be lying. That pompous ass was about two seconds for dropping a load of crap in his pressed silk pants.

"If I caused any offense, I'm sorry Ms. Dandoullin. You have to understand, there is a lot going on around here today."

I waved him off. "I'd have to be deaf not to hear you screaming from the minute I walked in here. I am the assistant to Lord Albrecht Kirkmire, who was a dear friend of your deceased employer. I am here to inspect the property for safety reasons."

"Safety reasons..." Gilbert trailed off, as if he was trying to process what I had just told him.

Red piped up, his voice sounded as though he'd bitten off and swallowed a piece of granite.

"Assassins, you asshole."

Gilbert stiffened at the insult. I waved it off with a manicured hand. "Yes. After the assassination of your employer, Lord Kirkmire is convinced that bastard Gregir Tailenson will be after him next. His reasons for thinking this are his own, but I would recommend that you allow us to make the inspection. You wouldn't want us to go back to Lord Kirkmire and have us tell him that you were uncooperative. That would be very upsetting to him."

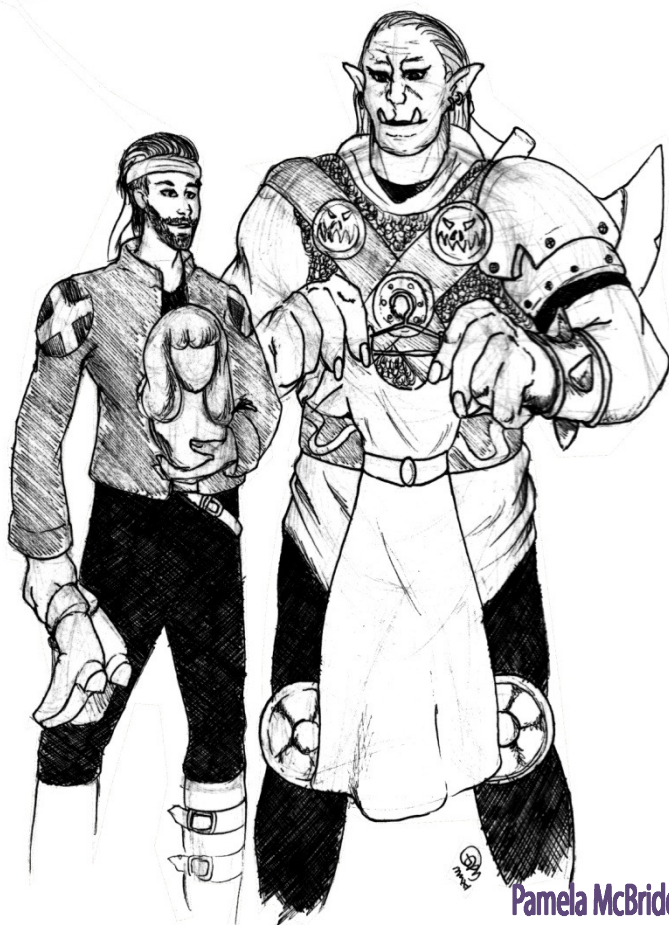
Gilbert smiled like a snake, "Of course not, Ms. Dandoullin. Please – take full account of the property at your leisure."

I nodded, and dismissed him with a tilt of my head. Inside, my guts were turning to liquid – I couldn't believe that Gilbert didn't recognize me. What a schmuck.

Watching the servant scurry off to harass someone else, I breathed a sigh of relief and made a bee-line for the basement door. I knew that if any dark dealings were at hand, they'd be in the basement – it just seemed to be where bad things happened.

Descending the stairs, Redluk pulled a lantern off the wall and lit it. I silently thanked him, and we crept down into the cellar.

Nothing seemed too out of the ordinary down here. Mainly it was just storage – with shelves lined with pickled preserves in jars. There were a bunch of chests down here, and barrels. It took every ounce of willpower I had not to start rifling through – old adventuring habits die hard it seems. We cased the entire basement without finding anything interesting, and we were about to leave when I felt a draft flow out from the western wall. Normally, I would ignore it – but something about it put me on edge.



I moved to the wall and saw that it was indeed barren where I was feeling the draft from between the mortar. I put my ear up to the wall, and I heard someone shuffling behind it. I looked to Red, who nodded silently, and pulled a pair of brass knuckles out of his inside coat pocket.

Carefully, I pressed against the wall. There was a clicking noise, and the door silently swung open via some sort of mechanism I still don't fully understand. What I did understand was that we weren't the only ones that heard movement in the basement.

The ghoul on the opposite side of the door was quick, but Red was quicker. As it made that horrible gasping-screaming noise that all undead make before they strike, it was quickly silenced by Red slamming his ham-sized fist into its face. There was a noise that sounded like a ripe melon being cracked, and the creature crumpled to the ground. Remember what I said about being glad that Red and I hadn't come to blows back in our old adventuring days? Yeah. I thought about that again too.

Inside the room was exactly what we were hoping to find. That evil bitch had everything your stereotypical necromancer could want at their disposal – and then some. Strange shit lined the walls in jars – I think one had a twitching claw-hand, and I recognized some other organ that seemed to be in a state of preservation. There was an altar on the furthest wall across from us; the statue was a leering demon that appeared to have the parts of both a man and a woman.

In the centre of the room was a large table which seemed to be made of ironwood. It had a finished black surface, and on it was dried blood, a variety of vicious looking instruments, and a book. I made my way to the table, and picked up the book only to feel my skin crawl. The cover was spongy and moist, and I could feel pores and hair underneath my fingers. I knew this would be all I need to convince the authorities of my innocence.

10.

We waited in the basement until we heard the crowds gathering upstairs. Suddenly I wished I had brought my sword – mages can be really nasty when they are caught by surprise. You'd think, being weedy little bookworms, that they'd run at the first sign of danger. In my experience, though, typically it's some sort of misdirection followed up by a blast of fire. Just thinking about it made my forehead twitch – my last encounter with a wizard left me without eyebrows for a month.

We could hear the chatter dying down as we walked up the stairs. I figured at this point that it would be best not to sneak around – people might get the wrong impression. With Red in tow, it was doubtful that anyone didn't hear us coming.

We opened up the basement door to see a mass of people gathered in the common area, all of them staring at us. I suddenly felt light-headed – this was definitely one of the less intelligent things I'd ever done.

Fiona, who was at the back of the room stared at us, obviously she didn't recognize me, but she did most definitely recognize the book I was clutching in both my hands.

"Excuse me! May I have your attention?!" I shouted in my normal voice. I almost forgot I was dressed as a woman, though the itching on my now hairless calves kept on pressing the issue.

Redluk crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, daring anyone to say anything.

I continued. "It has come to my attention that the man you are all mourning was murdered."

There was some murmurs of ascension – so I reached up and pulled off my brown wig, and shook out my damp hair. Damn did the cool air ever feel good on my head, "Murdered – *by his wife!*"

There were gasps. I couldn't tell if it was because my audience were reeling from the accusation, or if it was because they finally realized that I was a man. I think the only two people there that recognized me were Gilbert and Fiona – but I couldn't be sure. My face had probably been plastered over every quarter in the city.

Two city guards drew their swords, but I stood my ground and held up the book. "Fiona Caulder is not only a murderer, but a necromancer and a witch! I took this from her study hidden in the basement – I also found a vile undead creature, but my companion here quickly dispatched the beast so we could investigate her foul craft further!"

The militia looked confused as they looked from myself to a distinguished individual who was probably their boss. He frowned and stepped forward to Fiona.

"Is this accusation true, Lady Caulder?" The old man had his hand on his sword. The appearance of the book was enough to make him cautious – and I quickly realized I liked the cut of his jib.

Fiona looked to me, and then the guardsman. The jig was up. She had no way out – and I think she realized that she had nothing to lose.

Instead of answering, she simply raised a hand to me and began to chant. The air around her wavered and her hair began to flutter. Simply put, I knew there was a distinct possibility that I was going to be drawing my eyebrows on until Bren came back from the Southlunds.

I looked to Red, who looked about as nervous as myself. Cursing, I dove into the crowd of people and covered my head with the book. Not the most heroic thing I could have done, but hell, when was the truth ever heroic?

I felt a wave of pressure around me, and my legs momentarily lurched. Around me, I could hear bones snap and people scream. I looked to see a dozen men and women around me all contorted into agonizing angles – their bones broken in horrendous ways. I saw my opportunity in a screaming guardsman who's both legs had bent forward at the knee. I reached to his sheath and grabbed the grip on his sword.

To my surprise, Gilbert began making that terrible undead gasping-screaming noise I'd mentioned earlier and was on top of the distinguished guardsman – attempting to tear out his throat. The guardsman was holding him at bay with his own sheathed sword, but by the looks of it – he wasn't going to be keeping his throat much longer.

I spun to face Fiona, and in all her beauty, I could see black fire dancing behind her eyes. I lunged, but I was a second too late as she darted to my left and hit me with some unseen force from her extended hands. My shoulder crunched, and I saw stars dancing in my vision. I knew that my arm was broken – probably in a way that would leave me thinking of Fiona for the rest of my life. She was anticipating a swing from her left, but I surprised that bitch – I did something that every veteran soldier tells you not to do. I turned my back to the wizard, spun on my heels, and brought the sword in a devastating upward arc to her right.

I felt the sword connect momentarily, and then tear free. Something warm splattered against my face. Opening my eyes, I saw that the blade had torn her from the bottom of her chest, cleaving through her jaw, and exiting near the top of her ear. She tried to say something through her four demented lips, but I couldn't make it out. She teetered for a second, and then fell backwards.

The screams were still at an all-time high, though I could make one out in particular. I looked to the guardsman who was entangled with Gilbert only to see Red holding the creature's arms behind him and forcing his head down. The guardsman brought up his blade from its sheath and beheaded the monster.

Looking out at the vast amount of screaming nobles, I suddenly remembered my arm. It hung at my side, limp and swollen. The adrenaline was still pumping, so I couldn't feel a thing – though I knew that was going to change quickly. I looked to Red, and then pointed to the book lying on the ground.

"Burn it." I said, and then my vision swam completely into darkness.

11.

I woke up a few hours later in a bed. My arm immediately started to scream at me, and I noticed it had been put into a cast, and was in a sling. Red sat quietly in the corner of the room, and to his right was the distinguished guardsman.

The guardsman stood up and walked to the end of the bed. "That was damned fine work you did in there, Tailenson. Just think, if it wasn't for you – she would have gotten away with it!"

All I could do was nod.

Red smiled toothily at me. "You pussy – I've never seen anyone pass out from a broken arm."

I adjusted my view of the room by sitting up slightly. "Did you burn the book?"

The guardsman shook his head. "Damn thing wouldn't burn. We found the rest of her stuff, though – to think – she was able to hide her extra-curricular activities from him all that time."

Red rolled his eyes. I just smiled, "Yep – she sure was a crafty one."

I was pretty sure that Lord Caulder was just as dumb as they come – and didn't really notice much aside from all the hot tail that was trotting all over his mansion.

"Well, after discussing things with Redluk here, you're free to go whenever you want. You're in the infirmary ward of the guard barracks, in case you were wondering. Again, great work!"

I thanked the guardsman as he left, and got Red to help me up. He offered up his place for a few more days, but after all I'd put him through – I didn't feel right about it. I just asked him to help me get dressed and I'd go back to my room at the Crooked Cockatrice. He tried to convince me otherwise, but I wasn't having any of it – plus, the last thing I wanted him to see was me be all weepy for the next six weeks over my busted arm.

I borrowed a guard's uniform from the barracks and threw away the dress and boots. Nice as they were, I doubt any self-respecting broad would want it after she noticed the blood.

Like I said earlier, married women are always trouble – especially ones dabble with the dead. At least this chapter of my life was behind me now. I'd rather another ten years of adventuring than this shit.

At least I could get a few weeks of rest before the next job. If I was lucky.

12.

I wish I could say that was the end of the story, but something did happen a few days later that I figure I should mention – sort of an epilogue if you want to think of it like that.

I had taken my afternoons mainly in the common room of the inn, drinking myself into sorry oblivion. The arm was beginning to feel better, but the damn cast was itching like crazy. I'd found relief in taking my dagger and sticking it down there to scratch – at least I did until I got a visit from a healer, who informed me that if I did cut myself, it would definitely get infected and they'd have to take the entire arm off at the elbow.

The thought of leaving my shield behind if there was any kind of trouble quickly made me into more of a man – a man that would endure the itching by simply drinking more.

As mentioned, it was a few days after that initial conversation that Auster decided to pay me a visit. I still didn't entirely trust him, but he wasn't half-bad when he didn't stink like piss – so the company was definitely welcome. He sat down, ordered a drink, and pushed a coin-purse towards me. I frowned, picked it up and shook it. There were definitely enough coins in there, and by the weight of it – and I knew it wasn't silver.

"What the hell is this for?" I asked.

Auster smiled at me, "A thank-you from Master Kebalt."

I suddenly realized he was giving me the bounty for finding Lord Caulder – dead or alive. I groaned and went to push it back to him but he was already gone – making his way towards the door of the inn.

I opened up the purse and saw that it contained at least a dozen gold coins – and almost donated them to charity when I noticed that my own coin-purse was missing.

Cursing all thieves and women, I decided to make the best of the situation. I ordered another drink, and gave the barmaid a wink and told her to keep the change. Bren was wrong – I could get in more trouble here than in the Southlunds. I took a deep haul from the cold drink and lit a smoke.

I couldn't wait to tell him.



Gülümhan "Roselyn" Eraslan

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