
Filler

Ugh. I've had a terrible case of writer's block. I get into these modes where I can write *in my head*, but once I sit down to write or type it out, it comes out as garble.¹ It may be due in part to a busy August which included GenCon, followed by a week of traveling, and capping off with ConQuest over the Labor Day weekend. Terri also says I get exceptionally moody just before my birthday (something I never knew) and that might have played a part. This writing funk means that you won't read anything useful,² such as a convention report, but will instead be subjected to a page of rambling.

How I spent my summer vacation

On August 9th, my step-daughter Linda was married. They had a small, informal ceremony on the beach at Half Moon Bay at which I couldn't hear a damn thing over the waves. The reception that evening was in San Jose and all went well, which is to say the cops didn't show up... anyway... it helps to invite your neighbors when you are going to have a large, loud outdoor party in your back yard. Her new husband is in the Navy³ and in March or so will be transferring somewhere in the continental U.S.

We arrived for GenCon on Wednesday afternoon, got settled in and then dropped by the New Hampshire mob headquarters before calling it a night. In addition to playing with the N.H. mob (as detailed by Peter last issue), I also played in games of Demon Hunter (which I had pre-ordered months ago and just received a few weeks ago), Arcadia (which not a bit too *narrative* and *indie* for my tastes, but I had fun despite a brief nosebleed), Monsters and Other Childish Things (I got to play a monster, so was very happy, even if I still don't like the system), and something else I'm forgetting.

I also played in a few boardgames demos: Tomb (fell completely flat for me), MotoGrandPrix (seemed to come down to whoever rolled best won), and the new edition of Cosmic Encounter from FFG (I think I'm burned out on CE, but I've already pre-ordered it). Overall, it was a good con, but I can't say it was really worth all the added travel time and expense, and if it weren't for Peter, Avis, et al, I probably would not bother going.

Immediately following GenCon, we drove from Indianapolis, IN to Charlotte, NC to visit some of

Terri's online friends. We stayed Monday night as our host's home, but unfortunately, we failed to notice our host's fresh roses, which is Terri's kryptonite.⁴ (It took her a week for her sinuses to get back to normal.) We made a hasty retreat the next morning and checked into a hotel to allow her to get some sleep. Tuesday evening, we had a potluck dinner with her friends, though far fewer showed up than had promised.

On Wednesday, we drove to Louisville, KY, Terri's hometown. On Thursday, we drove to Rough River Lake where her mother lives. We also had dinner with her niece's family. The next day, we drove back to Louisville to have dinner with her sister and spent time with her grandmother on Saturday. We flew back to San Jose, CA on Sunday.

As usual, ConQuest was a casual affair; I played games during the day Saturday and Sunday and went home in the evenings. Because I was running my game (partially based on the 80's D&D cartoon) on Monday, I chose to play in a D&D3.5 game that was based on the same. The D&D DVD came with character sheets of all the lead characters and a scenario to run them through; this is what we played. I can't say I was impressed, as the adventure was just a series of fights and felt nothing like the cartoon. I kept thinking how differently Cartoon Action Hour would handle the same premise. I can't say I didn't enjoy myself, however. I also played in a lackluster CoC game, in which we missed some obscure clues and leaps of faith that would have prevented the world from ending. Oh well.

On Monday, I ran my adventure and had a blast. We had issues with one player who was having a really difficult time getting into the retro-toon mindset. At one point, it was clear his 8-year old son was in the right mode, but he wasn't. I will be reviewing CAH:S2 for RPG.net (as soon as I get out of my funk), so look for more details there.

Comments on Issue #396

Myles Corcoran

Since your Tudor Talents write-ups are only half-way through the campaign, did you expect us to address the questions you posed regarding Pringle at the end of Behind the Curtain? What did you actually do for the remaining 2+ years in the campaign?

Robert A. Dushay

Sorry to hear about Jorune being a bust. As a player, I tend to avoid games with unfamiliar or intimidating settings (Glorantha and Tekumel being at

4 Yeah, I get off easy on Valentine's Day.

1 Which isn't a noun, but I'm going for it!

2 The Good People of A&E: "In other words, the same as usual."

3 More than one person has wondered how an Army girl ended up with a Navy guy.

the top of the list). The game description really has to be inviting and encourage beginning players.

Did you go through the entire SotC character creation from scratch? I ask because I've heard it can take hours when you have a moderate number of players. Gil once mentioned having wasted 2 hours in a 4-hour con game making characters.

Peter Hildreth

The game I ran was *Cartoon Action Hour: Season Two* (the 2nd edition).

I shot at the water elemental, but missed. And if you remember, I did manage to cast a protection spell from a scroll and I was planning to learn magic, eventually.

I will note to the good people of A&E that my dice were again making it difficult for me to be effective in the second *Runepunk* session. But given how pivotal my noble PC was in the investigation portion of the adventure, I didn't mind it so much. And he was too arrogant to worry about not being effective.

Spike Y Jones

How dare you suggest that the Bible is not the true, unaltered Word of God. Blasphemer! ;)

Counting squares tends to be more error-prone than a tape measure for me, especially when dealing with distances of 20+ squares.

Joshua Kronengold

The darkness was a Night Thing (or an agent of a Night Thing). It is there to be a nebulous malevolent presence and not meant to be understood or identified by the players or the GM. It could have been an Elder God. Or a Radioactive Horror. Or the physical manifestation of Man's Fears.

The setback points in the Tick game were, I believe, just a narrative device to make the final battle more exciting. You wouldn't want the fight to be a cakewalk for the heroes; you want them to be on the ropes at some point so that they can make a heroic comeback and save the day. That we would eventually win the fight was never in doubt.

You are far more in tune with the subtleties of the various powers and abilities of D&D 4e (and all other games for sure) than I am. My eyes tend to glaze over. I think I'm predisposed to make sub-optimal builds based on what looks cool or some less-than-kickass character concept than what is the best build. And besides, how/why would they integrate such obvious imbalance into their shiny new edition?

Lisa Padol

Miscommunication and misinterpretation of human motives and psychology are so common in real life and fiction that I am hesitant to work around them in a roleplaying game. If a PC says something

that upsets or alienates an NPC (or PC) and the GM (or player) gives too many clues as to why, it threatens the verisimilitude of the scene. The real problem in *Against the Night Things*, I believe, was the age-old conflict between game mechanics and role-playing (the two may indicate two completely different reactions) and the use of social skills on/against PCs. Astra wasn't arrogant, just freaked out.

Overall, I thought the game went well. I did feel the action-adventure elements overshadowed the horror I had hoped to invoke, but that was my fault. I'm better at conceptualizing than actualizing.

I never sensed a "the army is for losers only" vibe from *Buffy*. Riley and his cohorts in the Initiative and the college didn't seem like losers to me. Also, Xander was able to use his "army guy" knowledge he gained in the Halloween episode a few times to good effect.

Creating a socially acceptable monarchy is easy: make it competent. The romance of monarchy crossed with the efficiency of a "benevolent dictatorship" should be enough to make it palatable.

What is this 1st *Quest* game you mentioned?

I had trouble getting through the UA: Show Yourself write-up. Why would a billionaire work as an office manager for a detective agency? And if Kyle felt guilt about Kate's husband's death, wouldn't Kate also have pause working for them? Also, you introduced Jack with no explanation, leaving me confused. In some quotes, you use "GM" in others, you used "Lori," which also threw me. And was this summer intern known to the PCs before he was introduced to us? Because it seemed like a total cop-out. If this had been a novel, I would have thrown the book across the room and cursed the author (Lori, not you).

Brian Rogers

I think I would have chosen *The New Dawn* as well, though I was less than impressed with *Earth-dawn* when I read it. I foresee a problem with the lack of a cleric in *Gunner's Company*. Typical D&D PCs need regular access to magical healing (the paladin is just not up to the task), so you may have had to throw a lot of potions their way.

The lack of initiative wasn't a problem at the chaotic conclusion of *Against the Night Things*. We weren't in combat, but I made sure to give each player an opportunity to do something in turn. The chaos arose from the time pressure and disagreement among the PCs about what to do. They lacked any facts on what to do yet clearly had to do something. I see this kind of thing happen a lot in horror games. Since they stopped acting as a group did what they individually thought was best (or at least, in character), and changed their minds multiple times, I just can't remember the individual details.